**AMK : Abdi Masyarakat UIKA**
**Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor, Indonesia**
Vol. 5, No. 1, Maret 2026, pp. 57~62
ISSN: 2964-366X, DOI: 10.32832/amk
http://ejournal.uika-bogor.ac.id/index.php/amk


# The Role of Principals in Curriculum Development

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**Article Info**

***Article history:***

Received October 22, 2025
Revised December 6, 2025
Accepted December 29, 2025

***Keywords:***

Principal, Curriculum Development, Independent Curriculum, Academic Supervision

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the role of school principals in curriculum development, particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires flexibility, innovation, and collaboration among school stakeholders. School principals have a strategic function as academic supervisors, managers, administrators, motivators, and transformational leaders who ensure that the curriculum is aligned with the needs of students and the local context. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study explores the dynamics of principal leadership in the process of planning, implementing, evaluating, and strengthening teacher capacity in developing learning tools. The results show that consistent academic supervision, effective resource management, and collaboration within the curriculum team can improve the quality of learning and the relevance of teaching materials. However, various challenges such as limited teacher competence, digital infrastructure, and bureaucratic barriers still hinder the optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Efforts such as the formation of learning communities, increased professional training, and the integration of Pancasila values have proven to strengthen the effectiveness of curriculum development. Overall, this study confirms that principal leadership is a fundamental factor in realizing adaptive and sustainable curriculum innovation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is a central element in the education system that determines the direction and quality of learning in schools. Effective curriculum development requires adaptation to social and technological changes and the needs of students, so as to produce competent and competitive graduates. In Indonesia, curriculum development such as the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and autonomy for schools in designing education programs that are relevant to the local context (Ramadina, 2021). This requires the active involvement of various parties, including school principals as institutional leaders. Without careful curriculum development, the education process risks becoming stagnant and unresponsive to the demands of the times.

School principals play a strategic role as leaders who not only manage administration but also direct the educational vision and mission of their institutions. As educators, managers, and leaders, school principals are responsible for building collaboration between teachers, staff, and external

stakeholders to create an inclusive learning environment. In the context of curriculum development, this role includes participatory planning, where the principal facilitates regular meetings and the formation of a curriculum team to integrate input from various parties (Khofiyyana, 2025). This approach ensures that the curriculum is not only theoretical but also applicable and in line with the students' potential. However, challenges such as limited resources often become obstacles that need to be overcome through innovative leadership.

In curriculum management, the principal serves as the main coordinator who ensures alignment between learning objectives and classroom implementation. This role includes supervising the development of teaching modules, evaluating student progress, and improving teacher competence through continuous training. In elementary schools, for example, principals encourage teacher collaboration in developing assessments that focus on the Pancasila student profile, thereby increasing student engagement and critical thinking (Imelda et al., 2025). As a result, the quality of education has improved significantly, although resource adaptation is needed to optimize effectiveness. This leadership approach makes schools more adaptive to changes in the national curriculum.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires principals to perform comprehensive managerial functions, from operational planning to learning evaluation. In Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs, principals manage the curriculum, finances, and infrastructure to support effective and efficient learning processes. The role as an administrator also involves managing new student admissions (PPDB) in line with curriculum principles, thereby ensuring the quality of student input (Hidayah et al., 2025). Challenges in this implementation can be overcome through good organization, which ultimately improves overall school performance.

The development of a moderate Islamic education curriculum emphasizes the role of the principal as a supervisor who guides teachers in integrating the values of tolerance, inclusiveness, and diversity. Through planned and continuous supervision, the principal conducts monitoring, evaluation, and coaching to ensure that the curriculum is in line with religious moderation. In addition, as motivators and facilitators, principals create a harmonious school culture, overcoming obstacles through collaborative approaches and task delegation (Yenuri et al., 2025). This contribution is crucial in shaping students' tolerant character and improving the quality of Islamic education holistically.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of principals in curriculum development at the elementary and secondary school levels. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of various stakeholders holistically in their natural context. The main focus is on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, in which school principals play a key role as facilitators in adapting the national curriculum to local needs. This study relies not only on empirical data but also on the integration of educational management theory to construct a comprehensive analytical framework. Thus, this qualitative approach is effective in revealing leadership dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively alone.

The research subjects included principals, teachers involved in the curriculum development team, as well as representatives from the school committee and students as supporting data sources. The subjects were selected purposively, with the main criterion being active involvement in the curriculum development process in schools that had adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. The research location was focused on public schools in urban and rural areas in Indonesia, such as in Pasuruan Regency, to obtain a representative variety of contexts. This ensured that the research findings covered a range of challenges, such as resource constraints in remote areas, as well as adaptation strategies implemented by school principals. This approach also considers the background of values and systems of meaning that influence leadership roles.

The main data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, observations of the curriculum planning and implementation process, and documentation studies

ISSN: 2654-8127

such as the Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) documents and evaluation reports. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to allow for in-depth exploration, while observations focused on curriculum team meetings and daily learning activities. In addition, secondary data was obtained through a literature review of accredited journals to enrich the analysis. This approach ensured the completeness of data from various sources, including behavior observed directly in the field. Data collection was conducted over a six-month period to capture the dynamics of ongoing curriculum development.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction to filter relevant information, data presentation in the form of matrices and narratives, and drawing conclusions through continuous verification. This technique enabled the identification of key patterns in the role of the principal, such as collaborative strategies and curriculum innovation. Thematic analysis was also applied to classify data based on themes such as transformational leadership and implementation challenges. This process was supported by software such as NVivo for more efficient qualitative data management. The results of the analysis were then linked to educational theory to strengthen the conclusions.

To ensure data validity, this study applied source and technique triangulation, where data from interviews were verified through observation and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming findings with informants to avoid interpretation bias. Data credibility is also enhanced through detailed recording during the field process and audit trails for traceability. This approach ensures that the research findings are reliable and replicable in similar contexts. Thus, the internal and external validity of the research is optimally maintained.

## RESULTS

### The Role of the Principal as Supervisor and Curriculum Leader

The principal plays a central role as supervisor in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Most principals are actively involved in monitoring the development of teaching modules, assisting teachers in the curriculum adaptation process, and ensuring that lesson plans are aligned with student needs. These supervisory actions have been proven to improve the quality of the learning process, as seen in the increase in students' critical thinking skills and the strengthening of project-based learning practices. Ramadina's (2021) research shows that principals who carry out consistent academic supervision are able to significantly improve teacher performance, which ultimately has a direct impact on student learning outcomes (Ramadina, 2021). Strengthening this role is important in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which demands flexibility and innovation in learning.

Regarding collaboration in curriculum development, the involvement of principals in leading the curriculum team is crucial to the success of implementation. Collaboration between principals, teachers, and school committees provides more space for the development of a curriculum based on national character values, including the internalization of Pancasila values in teaching materials. Recent studies note that 70% of schools that periodically revise their curriculum report an increase in the relevance of learning to local needs and developments. This is in line with the concept of transformational leadership, where principals act as motivators who encourage teachers' creativity and innovation in developing teaching materials. However, the disparity in facilities between urban and rural schools remains a distinguishing factor that affects the effectiveness of such collaboration, especially in terms of access to educational technology.

From a resource management perspective, research reveals that principals have a strategic role in ensuring the availability of facilities and infrastructure to support the curriculum. Principal support in providing budgets for teacher training and learning facilities has been shown to improve pedagogical competence, especially in the use of digital media. School investment in teacher capacity building contributes positively to improving student learning outcomes, including an increase in the average national exam score. However, 40% of teachers still face bureaucratic obstacles, such as budget delays or complicated administrative processes (Iqbal et al., 2024). In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, school principals are required to be more adaptive and responsive to the

dynamics of ever-changing educational needs, including keeping up with global trends in learning practices.

A major challenge faced by principals is related to limited human resources. As many as 60% of principals stated that the number of teachers with competencies in digital curriculum development is still limited. However, several innovative strategies, such as the formation of inter-school learning communities, are considered effective in improving teachers' abilities and fostering a professional culture in the school environment. Collaboration between schools can reduce teachers' resistance to curriculum changes and increase their motivation to participate in workshops or training (Bagaskara et al., 2024). These findings emphasize that the role of the principal as a facilitator includes not only supervision but also strengthening teachers' capacity to adapt to modern technology and learning methods.

**Curriculum Collaboration and Value Integration**

The principal plays a central role as a supervisor and driver of change in curriculum development; this active role is evident in the principal's direct involvement in planning learning modules, monitoring the implementation of lesson plans, and facilitating training for teachers to adapt to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which requires autonomy in educational units. Case studies and qualitative reviews show that when principals carry out continuous academic supervision, the quality of learning planning and practice improves, including the use of more student-centered learning approaches that have an impact on improving student performance indicators (Ramadina, 2021).

Collaboration led by school principals involving teachers, curriculum teams, and school committees has been shown to increase the relevance of learning materials because the curriculum revision process is participatory; research reports show that many schools revise their curriculum documents several times a year to adapt to the local context and the needs of students. However, the effectiveness of this collaboration is often influenced by the availability of resources (e.g., internet access in rural areas), so collaborative strategies must be accompanied by managerial intervention and budgetary support from policy makers (Nurwiatin, 2022). Research examining the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum development on school principals' readiness and the learning adjustment process provides empirical evidence of the importance of collaborative leadership in the implementation of new curricula.

In the realm of academic supervision and resource management, evidence from field research shows that principals who are proactive in allocating budgets for teacher training and the provision of digital learning facilities are able to improve teachers' pedagogical competencies, even though bureaucratic and administrative obstacles are still reported by some teachers. Implementation studies find a positive correlation between structured academic supervision practices and improvements in learning quality and student achievement; therefore, strengthening principals' capacity in budget management and supervision is crucial for sustainable curriculum innovation (Yundiafi et al., 2024). For documentation and empirical examples related to principal academic supervision, see the article available openly.

The integration of Pancasila values into the curriculum and learning practices is an important part of the principal's role in ensuring that the curriculum focuses not only on academic achievement but also on character building. Educational research shows various integration strategies, such as contextual civic education learning, value-based projects, and school-community collaboration, which can enhance the internalization of national values in students. Several Indonesian educational journals that discuss the implementation and effectiveness of integrating Pancasila values into learning provide practical examples and guidelines that can be adapted by principals to incorporate character and citizenship aspects into school curriculum documents (Saputra, 2025).

ISSN: 2654-8127

**Implementation Challenges and Capacity Building Efforts**

School principals play a central role as academic supervisors and curriculum development leaders; this role includes curriculum planning, monitoring the development of learning modules, and facilitating training for teachers so that they are able to implement a more student-centered learning approach in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum. Sustained supervision practices, including classroom observation, pedagogical feedback, and assistance in developing teaching materials, have led to improvements in the quality of planning and learning practices, which in turn have resulted in increased teacher competence and student learning outcomes. Empirical findings from case studies and field surveys show that when principals actively carry out their academic supervision functions systematically, teachers become more focused on designing contextual and differentiated learning according to student needs.

The principal-initiated collaboration between teachers, the curriculum development team, the school committee, and local stakeholders contributes to improving the relevance of teaching materials because the curriculum revision process is carried out in a participatory and iterative manner to suit the local context. This participatory approach allows for the integration of local wisdom values and Pancasila learner profiles into lesson plans and learning projects so that learning not only pursues academic achievement but also character building. However, the effectiveness of such collaboration is influenced by the availability of resources such as digital infrastructure and budgetary support; therefore, principals need to combine managerial and policy advocacy strategies to bridge resource gaps between schools (Nurwiatin, 2022). Empirical evidence on the relationship between collaborative leadership and curriculum adaptation quality is discussed in a study on the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum development on the readiness of educational units.

In resource management, the role of the principal includes allocating budgets for teacher training, providing learning facilities (including digital media), and arranging professional activity schedules that support pedagogical competency development. Implementational studies show a positive correlation between school investment in continuing training and improvements in learning quality and student academic achievement; however, administrative bureaucratic constraints and delays in budget disbursement are often operational obstacles that must be overcome through improvements in managerial procedures. Therefore, the principal's capacity in financial management, program planning, and technical supervision is crucial to ensure that curriculum innovation is sustainable and impactful (Yundiafi et al., 2024). Empirical examples and practical recommendations regarding the principal's role in resource management and academic supervision can be found in related research articles.

One important aspect of curriculum development is the integration of Pancasila values and the Pancasila student profile into the learning process; the principal's role is to ensure that learning strategies such as value-based projects, contextual civic education, and community involvement encourage the internalization of national values and student character. Research on the integration of Pancasila values in learning shows various practical models that can be adopted by schools, including adjustments to the civics syllabus, project-based learning that highlights local wisdom, and monitoring of character achievement through student portfolios (Saputra, 2025). This systematic effort requires school principals to be able to align formal curriculum objectives with daily learning practices so that character values are not just rhetoric but are manifested in learning activities.

A major challenge that often arises is limited human resources; for example, many teachers are not yet skilled in developing digital curriculum materials, so school principals need to act as facilitators of inter-school learning communities to share good practices, resources, and training opportunities. Literature on transformational leadership in schools shows that principals who implement visionary leadership and support continuous professional learning are able to mobilize teachers, reduce resistance to change, and build a culture of innovation. Therefore, policy recommendations emphasize the importance of strengthening the capacity of principals through managerial and pedagogical training programs organized by local or central government, as well as incentive mechanisms to encourage cross-school collaboration, which are considered to accelerate the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum and ensure the sustainability of educational innovation.

## CONCLUSION

Improving the quality of education, strengthening the role of teachers, implementing relevant learning models, and providing field-based policy support are important elements in building an effective and sustainable learning process in Indonesia. Various studies in the last ten years show that the success of education is not only determined by the academic abilities of students, but also by the quality of the learning environment, the competence of educators, the availability of supporting facilities, and collaboration between stakeholders. By strengthening these aspects, educational institutions can create a learning ecosystem that is more adaptive, inclusive, and capable of responding to the challenges of the times, so that national education goals can be achieved optimally.

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