

Principal Strategies for Building a Quality-Oriented School Culture

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Abstract: This study examined the principal's strategies for building a school culture oriented toward educational quality in an Indonesian public elementary school. A descriptive qualitative design was used to explore strategic planning, implementation, obstacles, and improvement efforts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The principal, a school supervisor, a teacher, a school committee representative, and a student were selected purposively as key information sources. Data were analyzed through condensation, thematic display, conclusion drawing, and verification, while trustworthiness was strengthened through source and technique triangulation and member confirmation. The findings show that the principal developed quality culture through participatory planning, routine coordination, fair task distribution, academic supervision, teacher working groups, professional coaching, positive habituation, leadership by example, parental communication, and continuous evaluation. These practices strengthened discipline, collaboration, teacher responsibility, student character, and the learning environment. Implementation was constrained by differences in teacher readiness, limited digital and instructional facilities, inconsistent discipline, restricted time, uneven parental participation, and external influences on student behavior. The principal responded through persuasive guidance, peer support, educational discipline, resource optimization, stakeholder cooperation, and follow-up evaluation. The study offers an integrated view of principal strategy as a cultural improvement cycle and provides practical actions for elementary schools seeking quality development under limited-resource conditions.

Keywords: Educational Quality, Elementary School Leadership, Principal Strategy, School Collaboration, School Culture

A. Introduction

Educational quality at the elementary school level is determined not only by curriculum documents, facilities, and examination results, but also by the daily culture that shapes how teachers work, how students learn, and how the school community responds to problems (Ewulley et al., 2023; McChesney & Cross, 2023). A school may possess adequate formal plans while still experiencing inconsistency in discipline, collaboration, instructional improvement, and stakeholder participation. For this

reason, quality improvement needs to be understood as a continuous organizational practice rather than a temporary program. The values repeatedly demonstrated in meetings, classrooms, school routines, supervision, communication, and decision making gradually become a school culture (Moynihan & O'Donovan, 2022). When these values encourage responsibility, honesty, cooperation, reflection, and improvement, they can support more reliable educational services and better learning conditions.

The principal occupies a strategic position in this process. As the highest leader at the school level, the principal connects educational policy with classroom practice, coordinates human and material resources, and influences the attitudes of teachers, staff, students, parents, and the school committee. The principal's decisions determine whether the school vision remains a written statement or becomes a shared direction for action (Ainscow, 2020). Leadership is therefore not limited to administration. It includes communicating expectations, modeling appropriate behavior, organizing collaboration, developing teacher capacity, monitoring instruction, solving practical constraints, and maintaining trust among stakeholders. A quality-oriented school culture is more likely to develop when these leadership practices are consistent, visible, and understood by the school community.

In many elementary schools, the development of a quality culture faces complex conditions. Teachers differ in experience, technological confidence, working habits, and readiness to change. Administrative obligations may reduce the time available for professional discussion and instructional reflection. Facilities may be sufficient for routine learning but inadequate for digital innovation or varied learning activities. Student discipline and motivation may also vary, while parental participation can be affected by work schedules, distance, and different understandings of the school's role (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). These conditions mean that leadership strategies cannot rely on a single activity. They need to combine clear planning, shared responsibility, routine guidance, constructive supervision, positive habituation, stakeholder communication, and practical adaptation to local resources.

A collaborative orientation is especially important because culture cannot be imposed by one person (Barker Scott & Manning, 2024; Mincu, 2022). The principal may initiate and direct change, but the values of quality become sustainable only when teachers, staff, students, parents, and the school committee participate in their implementation. Collaboration allows the school to distribute tasks, exchange ideas, identify problems earlier, and build collective ownership of programs. It also reduces dependence on the principal by creating working teams and routines that can continue across different activities. In an elementary school, collaboration is visible in curriculum coordination, teacher working groups, cleanliness programs, religious and character-building activities, literacy routines, school meetings, communication with parents, and joint evaluation of learning.

The quality orientation discussed in this study includes academic, organizational, and character dimensions. Academic quality concerns the improvement of teaching practices, teacher competence, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Organizational quality concerns orderly administration, clear responsibilities, transparent communication, effective use of resources, and continuous evaluation. Character quality concerns discipline, honesty, responsibility, respect, cooperation, and care for the school environment. These dimensions are interdependent. Instructional improvement is difficult to sustain without discipline and coordination, while character development becomes more credible when adults in the school demonstrate the same values in their professional conduct (Tadege et al., 2022).

SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan provides a relevant context for examining this relationship between principal strategy, school culture, and educational quality. During the period from 2021 to 2025, the school experienced a gradual transition from post-pandemic adjustment toward more structured quality-oriented practices. Early efforts focused on maintaining learning continuity and restoring regular school routines. Subsequent developments included stronger discipline, character habituation, teacher participation in curriculum training, academic supervision, literacy activities, environmental organization, parent involvement, and the gradual use of simple digital learning media. These developments did not remove all limitations, but they created an observable pattern of cultural change driven by coordinated leadership and collective participation (Læg Reid & Rykkja, 2022; Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

The school serves approximately 350 students in 15 learning groups and is supported by 22 teachers and three educational staff members. Its facilities include classrooms, administrative rooms, a library, sanitation facilities, and a school yard for ceremonies and student activities. The overall environment is sufficiently supportive for daily learning, although the availability of digital devices, instructional media, and library resources remains limited (Keser Aschenberger et al., 2023; Ndibalema, 2022). This combination of positive organizational development and continuing constraints makes the school an informative case for understanding how a principal builds a quality-oriented culture within realistic public-school conditions.

Previous discussions of school leadership often emphasize formal leadership roles, management functions, or the measurable relationship between leadership and teacher performance. Such perspectives are useful, but they may not fully explain how a principal converts broad quality goals into repeated daily practices. Less attention is often given to the interaction between strategic planning, role modeling, teamwork, supervision, discipline, stakeholder partnership, and adaptive problem solving in one school context. A qualitative examination can reveal how these elements are connected, how school members experience them, and why certain practices are accepted or resisted (Damsa et al., 2021; Hayat et al., 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated description of the principal's strategy as a cultural process. Rather than treating planning, implementation, obstacles, and solutions as separate administrative topics, the study examines them as a continuous cycle for building shared values and practices (Möslinger et al., 2023). It shows how quality orientation is translated into routine coordination, team-based work, teacher development, positive student habituation, parent communication, and evaluation. It also identifies the practical mechanisms used to sustain the strategy when the school faces differences in teacher readiness, limited facilities, inconsistent discipline, restricted time, and uneven parental participation.

The study contributes practical knowledge for elementary school leaders working in comparable settings. It provides a structured account of actions that do not depend entirely on large budgets, such as regular coordination, fair task distribution, internal mentoring, use of teacher working groups, clear routines, role modeling, persuasive communication, and gradual optimization of available resources. It also illustrates that educational quality can be strengthened by connecting instructional supervision with organizational culture and character development rather than addressing them as unrelated programs (Koh et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study addresses four questions. First, what strategies did the principal use to build a school culture oriented toward educational quality at SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan? Second, how were these strategies implemented in school management, teacher development, learning, discipline, and stakeholder collaboration? Third, what internal and external obstacles affected implementation? Fourth, what solutions and continuing efforts were used to address the obstacles and maintain quality-oriented cultural development?

B. Methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to obtain a contextual and in-depth understanding of the principal's strategies for building a school culture oriented toward educational quality. The design was selected because the study focused on leadership processes, shared meanings, daily practices, participant experiences, and organizational conditions that could not be represented adequately through numerical measurement alone. The researcher examined the phenomenon in its natural setting and did not manipulate school programs, personnel, or learning activities (Rahiem, 2021). The study was conducted at SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan, Muara Enim Regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out during the 2025/2026 academic period as part of a broader research process scheduled from December 2025 to May 2026. The school was selected purposively because it had implemented several coordinated efforts to strengthen discipline, character development, teacher collaboration, instructional supervision, stakeholder involvement, and continuous school improvement. The location also presented practical constraints, including limited digital learning facilities and differences in the readiness of school members, which allowed the study to examine both implementation and adaptation (Ngoasong, 2022).

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge of, involvement in, and experience with school leadership and cultural development. Five principal sources of information were represented in the interview data: the principal, a school supervisor, a teacher, a school committee representative, and a student. These informants provided complementary perspectives. The principal explained the planning, coordination, supervision, decision making, and evaluation of school programs. The supervisor provided an external professional view of school management and instructional quality. The teacher described the implementation of leadership strategies in classroom and professional work. The committee representative explained school-community cooperation and accountability. The student described the experience of discipline, honesty, fairness, teacher example, and the school learning climate. School documents and direct observations were used to extend and verify the interview information (Chiu et al., 2024).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation (Yimam et al., 2022). Interviews explored the meaning of quality culture, the principal's role, participatory planning, supervision, teacher development, discipline, transparency, collaboration, parental involvement, obstacles, and improvement efforts. The semi-structured format ensured that the same central issues were addressed while allowing informants to provide examples and explanations from their own experience. Observation was used to examine the physical and social environment of the school, including school cleanliness, routine activities, punctuality, interaction among school members, learning conditions, character habituation, coordination, and the visible implementation of school values. Observational attention was also given to the use of facilities and learning media, the organization of the school environment, and evidence of collaboration in academic and nonacademic activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Warnaini et al., 2025). Documentation included the school vision and mission, work programs, organizational structure, records of meetings and supervision, school profiles, staffing and student data, photographs of activities, and other documents related to quality development. Documentary data helped establish the institutional context and supported comparison between planned programs and reported or observed implementation (Biondi & Russo, 2022).

Data analysis was conducted interactively through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were reviewed and organized according to the four research questions. Repeated statements and related observations were coded into categories such as shared planning, value internalization, coordination, teamwork, academic supervision, teacher development, positive habituation, stakeholder participation, implementation outcomes, internal barriers, external barriers, and adaptive solutions. Second, the coded data were displayed in narrative summaries and thematic matrices to compare information across informants and data collection techniques. Third, patterns were interpreted and verified by returning to the original evidence and examining whether

alternative explanations were present (Marwick & Partin, 2024). Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member confirmation, and persistent observation. Source triangulation compared the views of school leadership, professional supervision, teachers, the committee, and students. Technique triangulation compared interviews with observations and school documents. Member confirmation was used to ensure that important interpretations were consistent with the intended meaning of informants. Persistent observation allowed the researcher to distinguish routine practices from isolated events. The study-maintained confidentiality by presenting findings according to participant roles and by using the data only for academic analysis. The final themes were retained when they were supported by converging evidence and directly addressed the research questions (Younas et al., 2023).

Table 1. Research informants and primary contributions

Informant	Role in the study	Primary information
Principal	Key informant	Planning, coordination, supervision, evaluation, and improvement decisions
School supervisor	Professional supporting informant	External view of supervision, standards, objectivity, and school improvement
Teacher	Implementation informant	Classroom practice, teamwork, discipline, teacher development, and constraints
School committee representative	Stakeholder informant	School-community cooperation, transparency, support, and public trust
Student	Experience informant	Discipline, honesty, fairness, teacher example, and the learning climate

C. Results and Discussion

1. Result

School Context and the Development of Quality-Oriented Practices

The findings show that the development of a quality-oriented culture at SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan occurred gradually rather than through a single program. In 2021, the school was still adjusting learning after the disruption caused by the pandemic. The principal and teachers concentrated on maintaining learning continuity and adapting teaching methods to restricted conditions. This period created an initial awareness that school quality depended on the capacity of teachers and leaders to respond flexibly to changing circumstances (Gavin & Stacey, 2023).

In 2022, the school began to strengthen discipline and positive habituation. Teachers participated more actively in training related to the Independent Curriculum and student character development. Cleanliness, punctuality, respectful interaction, and responsibility were increasingly emphasized in everyday activities. The school environment was organized through collective work, and teachers began to connect classroom routines with broader character expectations (Jarl et al., 2021).

In 2023, academic supervision and instructional evaluation became more regular. Teachers were encouraged to design more active and creative learning, while reading before lessons was strengthened as a school literacy habit. One teacher explained that the school had become more orderly and that supervision encouraged teachers to improve classroom practice. Parental participation also began to grow through committee meetings, school cleanliness activities, and communication about student character. During 2024 and 2025, the school expanded routine activities such as morning assemblies, literacy, religious activities, collective cleaning, and character guidance. Teachers started to use simple digital media, although equipment remained limited. The principal described discipline, responsibility, and cooperation among teachers, students, and parents as the main focus of school improvement. Observation confirmed that the environment was more organized, interaction among school members was generally harmonious, and positive routines were visible in daily school life (Davis et al., 2020). The school's vision supported this direction by emphasizing faith, character, discipline, intelligence, skills, and environmental awareness. The vision was not treated only as a display. It was translated into programs and routines involving religious activity, honesty, responsibility, active learning, student talent development, cleanliness, safety, and cooperation with families and the community. The mission therefore functioned as a practical cultural guide for both academic and nonacademic activity (Rinaldi et al., 2022).

Strategic Planning and Shared Direction

Table 2. Principal strategies and observed contributions

Strategic area	Main practices	Observed contribution
Shared direction	Vision-based priorities and participatory program planning	Collective ownership and clearer improvement goals
Communication	Routine meetings, discussions, and open problem reporting	Stronger coordination and trust
Distributed work	Fair task allocation and program teams	Broader participation and program continuity
Instructional leadership	Classroom supervision, feedback, and assessment review	Teacher reflection and improved teaching responsibility
Professional development	Coaching, teacher working groups, peer support, and training	Greater collaboration and readiness to improve
Positive habituation	Discipline, literacy, religious activity, cleanliness, and respect	More consistent student and staff behavior
Stakeholder partnership	Parent meetings, committee involvement, and progress communication	Support for discipline, resources, and school trust
Continuous evaluation	Program review, administrative monitoring, and corrective follow-up	Gradual and evidence-based improvement

The principal's first major strategy was participatory planning. Teachers were involved in annual and periodic meetings to discuss work programs, instructional needs, student development, and school activities. The principal did not formulate all programs independently. Teachers were invited to express problems, propose activities, and contribute to decisions. This approach created a sense that quality

improvement was a shared obligation rather than a directive belonging only to school leadership (Håkansson & Adolfsson, 2022; Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022).

Planning was linked to clear school priorities: strengthening discipline, improving learning, developing student character, maintaining a clean and safe environment, and increasing cooperation with parents and the committee. These priorities were repeated in meetings and school activities so that they became recognizable expectations. The school did not rely on abstract quality terminology. Instead, quality was expressed through visible behaviors such as arriving on time, preparing lessons, conducting fair assessment, maintaining cleanliness, communicating respectfully, completing responsibilities, and supporting student learning.

The organizational structure also supported implementation. Responsibilities were distributed among the principal, teachers, educational staff, the school committee, and students. Teachers received academic and nonacademic assignments according to their abilities and roles. Team-based arrangements included curriculum work, student affairs, literacy, cleanliness, religious activities, and other school programs. Clear task distribution reduced ambiguity and made more school members directly responsible for program success (Choudhury et al., 2020).

Communication, Coordination, and Collaborative Work

Regular communication was the central mechanism connecting planning with implementation. The principal held coordination meetings, discussions, and evaluations to review programs, learning problems, administrative requirements, and student needs. Teachers were given opportunities to report difficulties and suggest solutions. The findings indicate that this open communication improved working relationships because teachers felt that their views were considered (Paju et al., 2022).

Collaboration was visible in daily work. Teachers supported one another in school programs, exchanged teaching experiences, and discussed learning problems through teacher working group activities. The principal encouraged teachers to avoid working in isolation and to use collective discussion when facing instructional or administrative challenges. This practice strengthened mutual support and reduced the assumption that improvement depended only on individual ability (Rotar, 2022).

The school committee served as a bridge between the school, parents, and the community. The committee was involved in discussions about school programs, evaluation, facility needs, and community support. The committee representative viewed the relationship with the principal as a partnership based on communication, transparency, and a common interest in educational quality. This partnership helped the school obtain moral and material support and strengthened public trust in school management (Beauchamp et al., 2021).

Academic Supervision and Teacher Development

The principal implemented academic supervision through classroom observation, review of instructional administration, discussion, feedback, and follow-up guidance. Supervision was used to identify teaching strengths and weaknesses and to encourage more active, creative, and student-centered learning. The principal also monitored assessment practices to promote fairness, objectivity, and consistency with learning objectives.

Teacher development was continued through coaching meetings, internal discussions, teacher working groups, seminars, and training (Bendtsen et al., 2022). Teachers were encouraged to share methods, discuss classroom difficulties, and learn from colleagues. The principal's role was not limited to checking performance; it also involved motivating teachers and providing practical direction. This combination of monitoring and support made supervision more closely connected to professional development.

The school supervisor's perspective reinforced this finding. Supervision was described as a process for ensuring that learning and school management followed educational standards while also providing guidance and evaluation. Objective supervision was considered necessary to avoid favoritism and to maintain teacher responsibility. The supervisor also emphasized that continuous communication and routine monitoring were useful when formal supervisory time was limited (OKeeffe et al., 2023). The results indicate that teacher development contributed to improved cooperation, greater awareness of professional responsibility, and increased use of varied learning approaches. Teachers became more willing to discuss problems and accept feedback. The adoption of digital media remained modest because of equipment and skill limitations, but the school had begun to encourage simple technology use and peer assistance.

Positive Habituation and Leadership by Example

The principal used positive habituation to make quality values part of daily behavior. Discipline was strengthened through punctual attendance, orderly participation in school activities, completion of duties, and consistent application of school rules. Cleanliness was maintained through routine collective work and student participation (Schmitt et al., 2021). Religious activities, literacy, respectful communication, and responsibility were incorporated into school routines. Leadership by example was important in this process. Informants described the principal as expected to demonstrate honesty, discipline, fairness, responsibility, and transparency. The principal's conduct influenced whether teachers and students viewed school rules as credible. When leaders followed the standards they communicated, the values were more easily accepted as common norms rather than commands.

Teachers also functioned as cultural models. Students reported that teachers frequently reminded them about honesty, prohibited cheating, supervised examinations, and provided educational consequences for rule violations. The student informant stated that fair assessment, teacher guidance, and encouragement to complete work independently supported a sense of safety and trust. Integrity was therefore connected with the quality culture through everyday classroom behavior, not only through formal character lessons. The school applied discipline through guidance rather than punishment alone. When students or teachers did not meet expectations, the preferred response was advice, clarification, monitoring, and follow-up. Firmness remained necessary, but the principal attempted to maintain respectful relationships. This persuasive approach helped prevent discipline from being interpreted only as control (Bosmans et al., 2022).

Stakeholder Involvement and Learning Environment

The principal strengthened cooperation with parents through meetings, communication about student progress, and involvement in school activities (Alinsunurin, 2020). Parents and the committee supported cleanliness programs, character development, discipline, and selected facility needs. The school recognized that student habits could not be maintained consistently if expectations at school and home were disconnected.

The learning environment was generally clean, orderly, safe, and sufficiently comfortable for routine instruction. Classrooms had basic furniture and teaching equipment, while the school also had administrative rooms, a library, toilets, and a yard for ceremonies and student activities. However, digital learning equipment, varied instructional media, and library collections were still limited. Teachers therefore used simple media and adapted available facilities. The school served approximately 350 students through 15 learning groups, supported by 22 teachers and three educational staff members. This staffing level allowed programs to be divided among personnel, although some teachers still carried additional assignments. The principal's strategy of distributing work according to ability helped the school manage its programs despite limited administrative support (Brauckmann et al., 2023).

Outcomes of the Strategy

The combined strategies produced several positive changes. First, communication among school members became more open and regular. Teachers were more involved in meetings, teams, and problem solving. Second, discipline among teachers and students improved, although it was not yet fully consistent. Third, the school environment became more organized and supportive of learning. Fourth, teachers showed greater willingness to participate in supervision, working groups, training, and instructional improvement. Fifth, positive student habits became more visible through punctuality, cleanliness, religious activities, reading routines, respectful

behavior, and honesty in learning. Sixth, parental and committee involvement increased compared with earlier periods. Seventh, the school developed a stronger sense of collective ownership because programs were carried out through teams and shared responsibilities (Niemi, 2021).

The results do not indicate that all educational quality problems were solved. Rather, they show that the school developed a more coherent cultural foundation for improvement. Quality became associated with repeated actions, accountability, cooperation, and evaluation. The principal's contribution was most visible in connecting these elements and maintaining their continuity (Rossato & Castellani, 2020).

Obstacles to Implementation

Table 3. Implementation obstacles and leadership responses

Obstacle	Effect on implementation	Principal's response
Different teacher readiness	Uneven participation, technology use, and acceptance of change	Coaching, peer assistance, supervision, and gradual targets
Limited facilities	Restricted digital and media-rich learning	Resource optimization, simple media, and stakeholder support
Inconsistent discipline	Weakens daily cultural routines	Clear rules, modeling, monitoring, and educational consequences
Uneven parental participation	Inconsistent support between school and home	Flexible communication, meetings, and student progress information
Limited time and workload	Reduces reflection, training, and follow-up	Clear task distribution, priority setting, and routine coordination
External and technological influences	Distraction and character risks for students	Character guidance, supervision, and cooperation with families

The first obstacle was variation in teacher character, ability, mindset, and readiness to change. Some teachers adapted quickly to collaboration, supervision, and technology, while others required repeated guidance. Differences in professional confidence sometimes affected participation in meetings, innovation, and the use of digital learning media. The second obstacle was limited facilities and infrastructure. Basic facilities were available, but technology, instructional media, and library resources were not sufficient for all planned innovations (Owolabi & Bekele, 2021). This limitation reduced the speed at which teachers could expand digital and media-rich learning.

The third obstacle was inconsistent discipline. Some students still arrived late, neglected cleanliness, or needed repeated reminders about school rules. Some teachers also required stronger consistency in instructional administration and task completion. Because culture depends on repetition, inconsistent behavior could weaken the effect of school routines. The fourth obstacle was uneven parental participation. Some parents were active, while others had limited time because of

work or did not fully understand the importance of school-family cooperation. As a result, support for student discipline, character, and school programs was not always uniform.

The fifth obstacle was limited time. Teachers managed classroom teaching, administration, student guidance, and additional school assignments. The principal also handled managerial and administrative responsibilities. These demands reduced the time available for training, reflection, collaboration, and follow-up. The sixth obstacle was the influence of the external environment and technology on student behavior. Technology provided learning opportunities but also exposed students to distractions and inappropriate influences. The school therefore needed stronger guidance and cooperation with families.

Solutions and Continuing Improvement Efforts

The principal addressed differences in teacher readiness through continuous coaching, motivation, supervision, peer discussion, and participation in teacher working groups and training. Teachers with stronger skills were encouraged to assist colleagues. The aim was gradual improvement rather than uniform change at the same speed.

Communication and coordination were intensified when problems occurred. Meetings and informal discussions were used to identify causes, distribute responsibilities, and agree on follow-up actions. This approach reduced misunderstanding and allowed practical solutions to be developed collectively. Discipline was strengthened through clear rules, consistent monitoring, educational consequences, and leadership by example. The principal combined firmness with persuasive guidance so that school members understood the reason for expectations. Evaluation was conducted through supervision, monthly meetings, review of teacher administration, and assessment of completed programs (Hookmani et al., 2021).

Facility limitations were addressed by maximizing existing resources and seeking support from the committee, parents, and community. Improvements were planned gradually according to priority. The school also encouraged the use of low-cost and simple learning media rather than postponing innovation until ideal facilities became available. Parental participation was improved through meetings, direct communication, information about student progress, and invitations to support school activities. Task distribution was clarified to manage limited time and prevent work from depending on a small number of individuals (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Finally, program evaluation was used to identify achievements, weaknesses, and the next improvement priorities. These solutions helped the school maintain progress while acknowledging that cultural development required continuous reinforcement.

2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that building a quality-oriented school culture is a strategic leadership process that combines direction, participation, professional development, daily habituation, and organizational learning. The principal's effectiveness did not arise from one dominant leadership action. It emerged from the alignment of several practices: communicating school priorities, involving teachers in planning, distributing responsibilities, supervising instruction, modeling expected values, strengthening routines, engaging families, and evaluating progress. This alignment is important because school culture is created through repeated and mutually reinforcing experiences. A message about quality has limited influence when meetings, task distribution, supervision, and daily behavior communicate different expectations (W.M. Verhoeven & Thøis Madsen, 2022).

Participatory planning functioned as the foundation of collective ownership. By involving teachers in program development and problem solving, the principal reduced the distance between policy formulation and implementation. Teachers were not merely recipients of instructions; they became contributors who understood the practical reasons for programs and accepted responsibility for their outcomes. This participation helped transform quality from a managerial target into a shared commitment. It also provided the principal with information from classrooms and operational activities that could improve the relevance of decisions (Chiu, 2024).

The findings suggest that participatory leadership was most effective when accompanied by clear direction. Participation did not mean that all decisions were left open or that standards became negotiable. The principal maintained priorities related to discipline, character, learning quality, cleanliness, and responsibility. Teachers were given space to contribute within a common framework. This balance between direction and participation prevented collaboration from becoming unfocused and enabled the school to coordinate diverse personnel around recognizable goals (Salonen-Hakomäki et al., 2024).

Communication served as the main infrastructure of collaboration. Regular meetings, informal discussions, and evaluation sessions allowed the school to identify problems before they became more serious. Open communication also strengthened psychological safety because teachers could explain obstacles and ask for support. In this context, communication had both managerial and cultural functions. Managerially, it coordinated tasks and schedules. Culturally, it demonstrated respect, transparency, and shared responsibility. These qualities increased trust and made corrective feedback easier to accept (Escalante et al., 2023).

The use of teams and fair task distribution translated collaboration into organizational practice. A school may promote teamwork rhetorically while still depending on a small number of individuals. At SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan, responsibility was

divided among curriculum, student, literacy, cleanliness, religious, and other activity teams. This structure broadened participation and created opportunities for teachers to develop leadership and problem-solving skills. It also made school programs more resilient because implementation did not depend solely on the principal.

Academic supervision was a critical link between culture and educational quality. A positive school atmosphere alone does not guarantee stronger learning. The principal connected cultural development with classroom practice through observation, review, feedback, coaching, and teacher working groups. Supervision encouraged teachers to reflect on lesson preparation, teaching methods, assessment, and student engagement. When supervision was followed by guidance rather than used only for inspection, it supported professional learning and reduced defensive responses.

The school's experience also shows that teacher development can be organized through accessible internal mechanisms. External training is valuable, but it may be limited by cost, time, or availability. Routine discussions, peer assistance, school-level working groups, and follow-up after supervision can provide continuous development within the school. These mechanisms are particularly relevant when teachers have different levels of confidence in technology and instructional innovation. Peer support allows knowledge to circulate and makes professional learning less dependent on occasional formal programs.

Positive habituation gave abstract quality values a visible form. Discipline, honesty, responsibility, cleanliness, literacy, religious practice, and respectful interaction were repeatedly reinforced through routines. This repetition helped students and adults understand what the school expected. Habituation was especially meaningful because it was connected with adult example. Students are unlikely to internalize punctuality and honesty when adults apply the rules inconsistently. The findings therefore emphasize the principal's and teachers' role as cultural models.

The school's approach to discipline combined consistency with guidance. This is significant because an overly punitive approach may produce compliance without commitment, while an overly permissive approach may weaken standards. The principal attempted to apply rules firmly while explaining their educational purpose and providing opportunities for improvement. Such an approach supports internalization because school members learn not only what rule applies but why the behavior matters for collective quality.

Stakeholder involvement expanded the boundaries of the school culture. Parents and the committee influenced whether student discipline, character, and learning habits were reinforced outside school. Their participation also supported transparency and resource mobilization. The committee's role as a communication bridge was particularly important in building public trust. When programs, needs, and

evaluations were communicated openly, community support became more likely and misunderstandings could be reduced (Rapanta et al., 2020).

However, the findings also show that stakeholder participation cannot be assumed. Work demands, limited understanding, and different priorities affected parental involvement. The principal's response was to maintain communication and create varied opportunities for participation rather than interpreting limited attendance as a lack of concern. This adaptive view is useful because family engagement may take different forms, including attending meetings, monitoring learning at home, supporting discipline, providing information, or contributing to selected activities. The identified obstacles reveal that cultural change is uneven. Differences in teacher readiness, inconsistent discipline, limited facilities, restricted time, and external influences created gaps between expectations and practice. These gaps should not be understood only as individual failure. They are also organizational conditions requiring differentiated support, realistic scheduling, resource prioritization, and repeated follow-up. The principal's gradual approach recognized that sustainable change often occurs through small consistent improvements rather than immediate uniform compliance (Crabolu et al., 2024).

Facility limitations affected the pace of digital and instructional innovation, but they did not eliminate the possibility of improvement. The school maximized existing resources, used simple media, and sought stakeholder support. This finding highlights the importance of resourcefulness. Quality-oriented leadership involves setting priorities and using available resources strategically, not waiting for ideal conditions. Nevertheless, continued facility development remains important because prolonged shortages can restrict teacher creativity and student access to varied learning experiences (Day et al., 2021).

Time limitation was another structural issue. Teachers carried instructional, administrative, and additional responsibilities, while the principal managed multiple leadership functions. Clear task distribution and routine coordination helped reduce duplication, but they could not fully remove workload pressure. Schools seeking to strengthen quality culture should therefore protect time for professional dialogue, supervision follow-up, and collaborative planning. Without dedicated time, these activities may be displaced by urgent administrative work (Bonomi Savignon et al., 2024).

The solutions used by the principal formed a cycle of continuous improvement. Problems were identified through observation, supervision, communication, and evaluation. Responses were developed through guidance, task adjustment, stakeholder cooperation, and resource optimization. Progress was then reviewed and revised. This cycle prevented evaluation from becoming a final administrative step. Instead, evaluation informed the next phase of planning and cultural reinforcement (Yusof et al., 2024). The practical implication is that principals in comparable

elementary schools can begin quality-culture development with actions that are organizationally feasible: clarify shared values, involve staff in planning, establish regular communication, distribute work fairly, connect supervision with mentoring, model expected behavior, strengthen a small number of consistent routines, engage parents through transparent communication, and review programs continuously. These actions require commitment and consistency more than complex technology.

The study also indicates that a quality-oriented culture should integrate academic quality, character, organizational accountability, and community trust. Treating these elements separately may produce fragmented programs. At SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan, discipline supported learning, supervision supported teacher responsibility, transparency supported community trust, and collaboration supported program continuity. Their interaction created the strongest evidence of cultural development. The findings are context-specific and do not claim statistical generalization. The study involved one elementary school and a limited number of purposively selected informants. Nevertheless, the detailed patterns provide transferable insights for schools with similar organizational conditions. Future studies could compare several schools, examine the relationship between cultural strategies and student outcomes over time, or focus specifically on digital leadership, teacher adaptation, parental engagement, and the sustainability of routines after leadership transitions.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the principal's strategy for building a quality-oriented school culture at SD Negeri 07 Sungai Rotan was implemented through participatory planning, clear communication, distributed responsibility, academic supervision, teacher development, positive habituation, leadership by example, stakeholder involvement, and continuous evaluation. These interconnected practices gradually changed quality from a formal school objective into daily behavior reflected in stronger discipline, cooperation, professional responsibility, literacy, cleanliness, character development, and a more conducive learning environment. The principal's role was especially important in connecting organizational management with classroom improvement and in ensuring that teachers, students, staff, parents, and the school committee understood their shared responsibility for educational quality. Implementation was supported by teacher openness, teamwork, a sufficiently organized school environment, and community cooperation, but it was constrained by differences in teacher readiness, limited digital and instructional facilities, inconsistent discipline, heavy workloads, restricted time, uneven parental participation, and external influences on student behavior. The principal addressed these constraints through persuasive coaching, regular coordination, fair task distribution, peer assistance, teacher working groups, firm but educational discipline, gradual resource optimization, stronger communication with families, and program evaluation followed by corrective action. Practically, the findings indicate that elementary school leaders can strengthen quality culture without waiting for ideal

resources by consistently aligning school values, routines, supervision, teamwork, and stakeholder communication. Schools should protect time for professional collaboration, expand technology-related mentoring, and develop measurable indicators for monitoring cultural and instructional progress. Future research should compare multiple schools, involve broader participant groups, and examine how leadership strategies influence teacher practice, student character, learning outcomes, and community trust over longer periods. Longitudinal studies are also needed to determine whether established routines remain sustainable during policy changes, staff turnover, and leadership transitions, and to identify which strategies produce the most durable improvement. Such evidence would strengthen context-sensitive school improvement decisions nationally.

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