

# The Model of Principal's Instructional Leadership Realizing Meaningful Learning in Primary Schools

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore how a principal implements instructional leadership practices as the primary conceptual framework for realizing meaningful learning in an elementary school. The research employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants included the principal, four teachers, and four students. Data were analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis model developed by Naeem et al. (2023), which involves selecting relevant statements, coding, identifying themes, and constructing a conceptual framework. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation. The findings indicate that the principal's instructional leadership plays a significant role in fostering meaningful learning in elementary schools. The conceptual framework of instructional leadership identified in this study highlights the interconnection between formulating a clear learning vision, empowering teachers and educational staff, openness to instructional innovation, conducting continuous supervision, and creating a positive learning environment as key factors supporting meaningful learning. This study contributes to the development of instructional leadership scholarship, particularly within the context of elementary education, and offers a practical model that can be utilized to support the implementation of meaningful learning in schools.

## Keywords:

Teachers; Principals; Instructional Leadership; Meaningful Learning; Primary School

## Introduction

Instructional leadership of school principals is a key factor in improving the quality of education (Acton, 2021). Principals hold a strategic role in promoting positive social change (Acton, 2021; Kurniawan & Hasanah, 2021) managing and directing instructional programs (Bada et al., 2024) and creating a school environment that is conducive to teaching and learning processes (Rincon-Flores et al., 2024). Through appropriate policies, instructional supervision, and sustained support for teachers, principals can directly influence the quality of classroom instruction (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022). The primary focus of instructional leadership is to build a positive academic climate and strengthen teachers' confidence in implementing instruction (Yu et al., 2022; Ma



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& Marion, 2021). With such support, teachers are better positioned to deliver meaningful learning experiences that actively engage students, foster critical thinking skills, and connect subject matter to students' everyday lives (Mystakidis, 2021).

However, in practice, the implementation of instructional leadership in primary schools still faces various challenges. Weak communication and coordination between principals and teachers often hinder efforts to improve the quality of instruction and student learning outcomes (Hidayat et al., 2022). Several studies indicate that instructional leadership becomes less effective when it is not supported by strong synergy between principals and teachers (Datreni, 2022; Teguh et al., 2024). Moreover, in certain contexts, principals continue to prioritize administrative duties over the strengthening of instructional practices. This condition contributes to teachers' tendency to rely on rote-based teaching methods, which provide limited opportunities for students to experience meaningful learning (Kostianinen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2022).

Conceptually, the relationship between instructional leadership, instructional quality, and student learning outcomes has been widely examined in the international literature (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Berkovich & Hassan, 2024; Pietsch et al., 2025). However, most of these studies focus on educational contexts in Western countries, which differ from Indonesia in terms of educational systems, school organizational culture, and leadership dynamics. In-depth research examining how instructional leadership is effectively enacted within Indonesian primary schools characterized by distinctive cultural, social, and institutional complexities remains relatively limited. Therefore, contextual studies that portray the actual practice of instructional leadership are essential to enrich the current body of knowledge, which has largely been dominated by global perspectives.

This study was conducted at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham Kota Banjar as a qualitative case study representing what is considered a successful practice of instructional leadership. The school demonstrates consistent student achievement and positive character development, such as discipline, responsibility, and social awareness, amid the dynamics and challenges of primary education in Indonesia. The instructional leadership practices implemented at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham provide an empirical and contextual perspective on how school leadership can concretely support the realization of meaningful learning not only in terms of academic outcomes but also in strengthening character development and student engagement in the learning process. Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in presenting an in-depth and contextual case study of a principal's instructional leadership practices in fostering meaningful learning

within an Indonesian primary school. This research does not aim to propose a universal model; rather, it seeks to identify and formulate the key components of instructional leadership that are relevant to the local context and that may contribute to enriching the international literature, which has thus far provided limited representation of experiences from developing countries.

Based on this background, the present study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the principal's instructional leadership practices at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham Kota Banjar and to identify the key components that shape this leadership model in supporting meaningful learning. Specifically, this study addresses the following research question: How do the principal's instructional leadership practices at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham support the realization of meaningful learning in primary education, and what components constitute the instructional leadership model within this context?

## Literature Review

### *Instructional Leadership as a Key to Realizing Meaningful Learning*

Instructional leadership positions the school principal as a central actor in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Liu et al., 2021). Unlike administrative leadership, which emphasizes operational management, instructional leadership focuses on the principal's direct involvement in instructional processes, teacher development, and the creation of a supportive learning climate (Berkovich & Hassan, 2024; Guo et al., 2025). In this role, the principal acts as a leader of learning, bridging the school's vision with classroom instructional practices.

This study adopts the instructional leadership framework proposed by dari Hompashe (2024) which consists of three dimensions: 1) setting the direction for learning, 2) managing instructional programs, and 3) developing a positive school learning climate. At the primary school level, this framework is particularly relevant, as principals are responsible not only for academic achievement but also for establishing students' foundational pedagogical experiences and early learning development achievement but also for establishing students' foundational pedagogical experiences and early learning development (Pietsch et al., 2025).

In this study, instructional leadership is conceptualized as a set of leadership practices that influence how teachers design, implement, and reflect on instruction. Accordingly, instructional leadership is employed as the primary theoretical lens for interpreting principals' practices and their impact on learning processes within the school.

### Meaningful Learning as an Outcome of Instructional Leadership

Meaningful learning is a student-centered approach in which understanding is constructed through active engagement and authentic experiences, rather than through the passive reception of information (Tulak et al., 2024). Grounded in constructivist theory, meaningful learning emphasizes that knowledge is formed through students' interaction with their environment and learning context (Wibowo et al., 2025). Therefore, meaningful learning largely depends on teachers' pedagogical strategies and a classroom climate that supports participation and reflection.

At the primary school level, meaningful learning requires teachers to connect instructional content to students' everyday lives, provide opportunities for active participation, and foster the development of critical thinking skills and learning responsibility (Che Mat & Jamaludin, 2024; Conner et al., 2025; Kubsch et al., 2025). However, teachers' capacity to implement meaningful learning is strongly influenced by the support provided by the principal through instructional leadership practices. Accordingly, within the theoretical framework of this study, meaningful learning is positioned as an outcome of the principal's instructional leadership practices.

### Teacher Capacity Development as a Connecting Mechanism

To explain the relationship between instructional leadership and meaningful learning, this study positions teacher capacity development as the linking mechanism. One of the key concepts employed is that of teachers as adaptive learners or fast learners (Li et al., 2023). In this study, fast learner is not understood merely as an individual cognitive ability, but as a professional characteristic demonstrated through openness to innovation, adaptability to curriculum changes, and a willingness to engage in continuous reflection on meaningful instructional practices (Kostiainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2022). Teachers with these characteristics are better able to respond to the principal's guidance and translate the school's vision into meaningful classroom learning experiences.

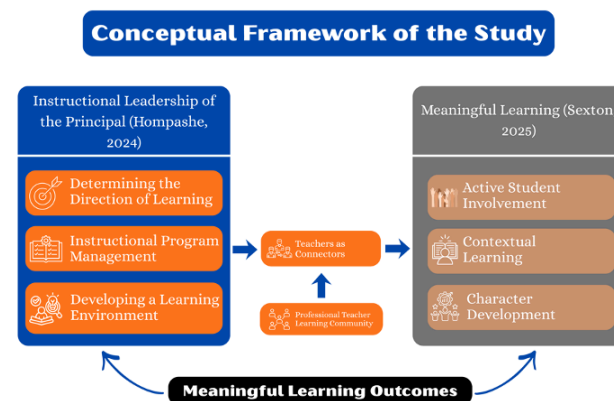
Instructional leadership plays a significant role in developing teachers' capacity as adaptive learners through professional learning communities, collaborative supervision, and a culture of shared reflection (Hassan et al., 2019). Thus, the concept of fast learner is positioned as part of teachers' professional development, explaining how instructional leadership contributes to the quality of meaningful learning.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the above discussion, this study is grounded in a conceptual framework that positions instructional

leadership as the primary factor influencing meaningful learning through the strengthening of teachers' capacity and adaptability. This framework serves as the theoretical foundation for analyzing and interpreting the research findings in a coherent and consistent manner.

**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual Framework of the Study



### Methods

#### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of the case (Hasanah, 2021; Lim, 2025) particularly concerning the model of instructional leadership in fostering meaningful learning based on real phenomena occurring in the field. Through this approach, the researcher was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the principal enacted their role in guiding and supporting instructional processes to ensure that learning was relevant and meaningful for students. The study emphasized depth of information rather than the quantity of data, thereby generating richer findings that are valuable for the development of educational practices in primary schools (Lim, 2025). Furthermore, the qualitative approach is inherently flexible, allowing the researcher to adjust the direction of the inquiry based on emerging findings during the data collection process. This flexibility makes the study more responsive to change and open to the emergence of new insights (Renjith et al., 2021).

#### Participant Selection

The research participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which informants are intentionally chosen based on their involvement in and experience with the phenomenon under investigation, ensuring that the data obtained are relevant and information rich (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The participants consisted of the principal, four teachers, and four students from SD Inspiratif Al-

Ilham Kota Banjar. The teachers were selected from Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6, as those grade levels are directly and continuously involved in the implementation of instructional policies, academic supervision activities, and instructional innovations directed by the principal. Including teachers from different grade levels enabled the study to obtain a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of instructional leadership practices within the school. Meanwhile, the student participants were specifically selected from Grade 5, based on the consideration that students at this level possess stronger communication and reflective abilities compared to those in lower grades. These abilities allowed them to articulate their learning experiences, interactions with teachers, and perceptions of meaningful learning more clearly. In addition, Grade 5 students have accumulated sufficient learning experience within the school but have not yet reached the final stage of primary education, making their perspectives representative of the sustained impact of instructional leadership practices.

**Table 1.**  
*Participant demographics*

No	Participant	Gender	Position
1	Participant 1 (P1)	Female	Principal of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
2	Participant 2 (P2)	Male	Grade 3 Teacher of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
3	Participant 3 (P3)	Male	Grade 4 Teacher of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
4	Participant 4 (P4)	Female	Grade 5 Teacher of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
5	Participant 5 (P5)	Female	Grade 6 Teacher of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
6	Participant 6 (P6)	Female	5th Grade Student of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
7	Participant 7 (P7)	Female	5th Grade Student of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
8	Participant 8 (P8)	Female	5th Grade Student of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City
9	Participant 9 (P9)	Female	5th Grade Student of Inspirational Elementary School Al-Ilham, Banjar City

**Data Collection**

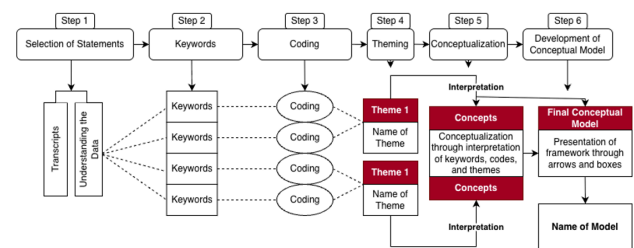
This study employed three data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives in depth using flexible open-ended questions guided by an interview protocol (Roberts, 2020). During the interviews, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, facilitating interaction and conducting preliminary interpretation of the data. Observation was carried out to obtain contextual and behavioral data directly from the field, enabling the researcher

to capture actual practices beyond participants' verbal accounts (Chand, 2025). In addition, document analysis, including institutional policies, instructional documents, and related records, was used to support and verify the findings (Bowen, 2009). The use of these three instruments enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Dahal, 2025).

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study employed a thematic analysis approach based on the model proposed by Naeem et al. (2023) supported by the use of Atlas.ti version 9 software. The analytical process was not conducted in a linear manner; rather, it was iterative and reflective in nature. The researcher continuously moved back and forth between the raw data, the coding process, and the development of themes to ensure analytical rigor and depth.

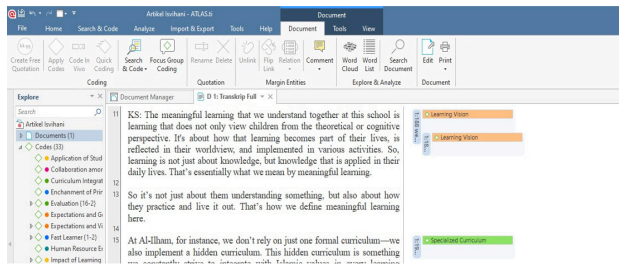
**Figure 2.**  
*Data Analysis Process Naem et al. (2023)*



Based on the information presented in Figure 1, the data analysis process could be presented as follows:

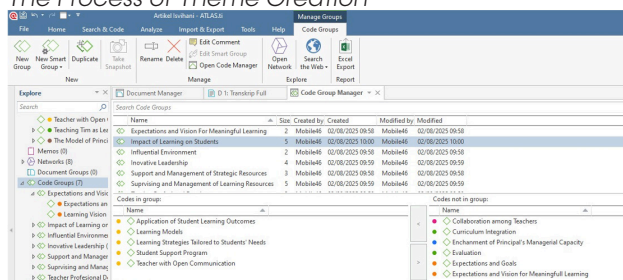
1. The initial stage of analysis began with the verbatim transcription of all interview recordings to preserve the integrity of the context and meaning of participants' statements. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences regarding the implementation of instructional leadership in fostering meaningful learning. At this stage, the researcher wrote initial analytical memos to document impressions, emerging patterns, and reflections on the data.
2. The coding process was conducted inductively by examining words, phrases, and sentences that represented participants' experiences and perspectives. The resulting codes were not treated as rigid categories; instead, they were continuously reviewed through a constant comparative process across transcripts. As the researcher's understanding evolved, several codes were revised, merged, or further refined. This process reflects an iterative movement between the raw data and the codes to ensure that each code was firmly grounded in the data.

**Figure 3.**  
Coding Process



- Through this iterative process, a total of 24 codes were generated, representing various aspects of instructional leadership roles in supporting meaningful learning in primary schools. These codes were then analyzed relationally by considering similarities in meaning, conceptual connections, and their relevance to the research objectives. The grouping of codes into themes was conducted interpretatively rather than mechanically, by continuously examining the alignment between the emerging themes and the original data.

**Figure 4.**  
The Process of Theme Creation



- The outcome of this process was the identification of six major themes: 1) expectations and vision for meaningful learning, 2) support and management of strategic resources, 3) supervision and management of instruction, 4) teacher professional development, 5) innovative leadership, and 6) the impact of learning on students. Each theme was constructed from several interrelated codes and supported by excerpts from multiple participants.
- To enhance the transparency and rigor of the analysis, the relationships between codes and themes were visualized in the form of a thematic map. This thematic map illustrates how individual codes are interconnected and collectively form the major themes, as well as how these themes interact in explaining instructional leadership practices that support meaningful learning.

The final stage of analysis involved interpreting the themes holistically to develop key concepts that describe the principal's role in directing, facilitating, and sustaining meaningful learning within the school's social and educational context. These concepts were subsequently organized into a box-and-arrow diagram as a conceptual framework illustrating the interconnections among instructional leadership,

teacher empowerment, contextual instructional strategies, school values, and student engagement.

**Results**

**Figure 5.**  
Conceptual Conclusions

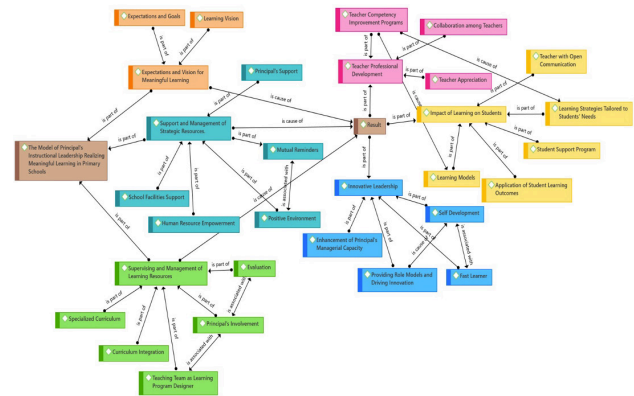


Figure 5 illustrates that the realization of meaningful learning in primary schools is the result of structured and interconnected instructional leadership enacted by the principal. The model explains that meaningful learning begins with the clarity of expectations and a shared vision for learning, which serve as the guiding direction for all school programs. This vision is subsequently supported by the strategic management of resources, including principal support, the provision of facilities, the empowerment of human resources, and the creation of a positive and collaborative learning environment. Furthermore, the successful implementation of instruction is reinforced through supervision and the effective management of learning resources, such as curriculum development and integration, the involvement of teacher teams as program designers, and ongoing evaluation. At the same time, teacher professional development through competence enhancement, teacher collaboration, and performance recognition emerges as a crucial factor that directly influences the quality of students' learning experiences. Collectively, these processes culminate in the development of innovative leadership that encourages the implementation of instructional strategies aligned with students' needs, the establishment of academic mentoring programs, and the optimization of learning outcomes. Thus, this model underscores that meaningful learning is created through the synergy of a clear vision, managerial support, academic supervision, and teacher professionalism oriented toward student development.

**Theme 1: Expectations and Vision for Meaningful Learning**

This theme was constructed from the grouping of several key codes, namely learning vision, expectations, and goals. These codes represent how

the principal formulates the direction of instruction and establishes standards for meaningful learning outcomes. The theme indicates that instructional leadership in fostering meaningful learning begins with the clarity of a shared vision and mutually agreed-upon expectations.

**Figure 6.**  
*Components of Meaningful Learning Vision*



Figure 6 illustrates that the vision for meaningful learning is constructed from two main components: expectations and goals, and learning vision. Expectations and goals represent the targets the school aims to achieve in the instructional process, while the learning vision reflects the long-term direction that guides the implementation of education. These two components complement one another and form an integral part of shaping expectations and vision for meaningful learning. The findings indicate that meaningful learning does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it begins with clearly defined objectives and a well-articulated vision that is collectively understood by all members of the school community.

**Subtheme 1.1: Learning Vision**

The findings indicate that the learning vision is understood by participants as a strategic foundation underlying all educational planning and implementation within the school. This vision functions as a shared reference point for the principal and teachers, ensuring that instructional practices remain aligned with the school’s long-term goals. The data reveal that the vision is not merely communicated verbally, but is also embodied in consistent policies and decision-making. The principal explained the essence of this vision as follows:

*“...learning that does not view children solely from a theoretical or cognitive perspective, but also how learning becomes something that is applied in their lives, in their perspectives, and in various activities.”*  
(P1, Interview Transcript, page 1, lines 16-18)

Conceptually, the learning vision reflects an instructional leadership orientation that emphasizes contextualized learning. This vision serves as a cognitive framework for teachers, guiding them to perceive students as individuals who need to be prepared for real-life challenges, rather than merely as recipients of academic content.

**Subtheme 1.2: Expectations and Goals**

In addition to the learning vision, the data reveal clearly articulated expectations and goals concerning the desired graduate profile. The code Expectations and Goals emerged from participants’ statements regarding the academic, moral, and spiritual standards that the school seeks to achieve. These expectations serve as benchmarks for instructional quality as well as criteria for evaluating educational success. The principal expressed these expectations as follows:

*“What we hope for is to have children who are aligned with our vision. Our vision is to produce scholars not only scholars, but also lovers of the Qur’an...”* (P1, Interview Transcript, page. 3, lines 15-16)

Conceptually, this subtheme suggests that meaningful learning is understood as a process of shaping students’ identities. The integration of intellectual development and spiritual values indicates that the school views learning outcomes as part of students’ character formation and life values, rather than merely as formal academic achievement.

**Theme 2: Support and Management of Strategic Resources**

This theme was developed from the grouping of several codes, namely principal support, school facility support, human resource empowerment, and a positive and mutually reinforcing environment. The theme indicates that meaningful learning does not rely solely on a clearly articulated vision, but also on the principal’s tangible support in managing resources in a systematic and strategic manner. The effective management of teachers, facilities, and sustained professional support creates enabling conditions that allow teachers to implement instruction optimally and consistently.

**Figure 7.**  
*Support and Management of Strategic Resources*

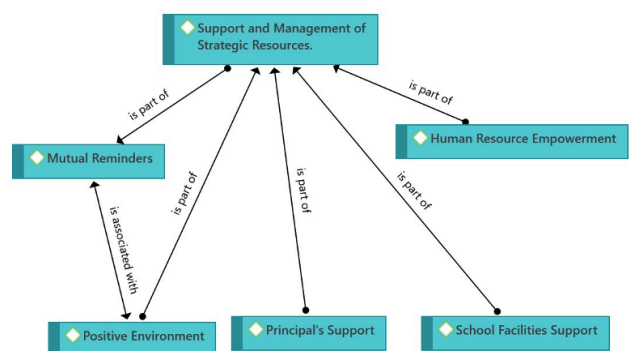


Figure 7 illustrates that support and the management of strategic resources for meaningful learning are constructed through several interrelated components: principal’s support, school facilities support, human resource empowerment, a positive environment, and

mutual reminders. The principal's support serves as the primary driving force in coordinating the provision of facilities and the empowerment of human resources within the school. In addition, the establishment of a positive environment and the presence of mechanisms for mutual reminders among members of the school community reinforce the sustainability of instructional program implementation. These findings affirm that the success of meaningful learning is determined not only by pedagogical aspects, but also by the effectiveness of strategic resource management that supports the teaching and learning process.

### **Subtheme 2.1: Principal's Support**

Participants emphasized that the principal's support serves as the driving force in maximizing instructional quality. This support is primarily directed toward fulfilling teachers' professional needs, enabling them to develop the confidence and skills necessary to innovate in the classroom. One participant stated:

*"...The principal also provided training several times as a form of support from the school, so that teachers could further improve their quality." (P5, Interview Transcript, page 2, lines 18-21)*

These findings demonstrate that the principal plays an active role as a facilitator of educational quality improvement. Conceptually, the provision of training reflects that instructional leadership does not merely demand outcomes, but also assumes responsibility for developing human resource capacity to ensure that meaningful learning processes can be implemented effectively and sustainably.

### **Subtheme 2.2: School Facilities Support**

In addition to personal support, the availability of physical facilities and information technology serves as an essential instrument that enables teachers to effectively perform their roles as instructional leaders. Adequate facilities allow teachers to explore various instructional media that are relevant to students' needs, both inside and outside the classroom. The principal explained the school's strategy in providing such facilities as follows:

*"In terms of support from the school, perhaps from the aspect of facilities or supporting resources. For example, when it relates to IT or technology, we also strive to facilitate teachers whenever they need it." (P1, Interview Transcript, page 3, lines 25-27)*

The benefits of this infrastructural support are directly experienced by teachers in supporting their daily activities and fostering collaboration:

*"Providing learning media such as projectors, facilitating Wi-Fi Alhamdulillah and a teachers' room for discussions in the administrative office, which allows sharing activities to take place." (P5, Interview Transcript, page 2, lines 22-23)*

Systematically, these findings indicate that school facilities function as enabling tools. With the availability of Wi-Fi, projectors, and collaborative spaces, the school transforms into a dynamic learning environment in which technology and physical spaces are utilized to enrich students' learning experiences and strengthen a culture of professional sharing among teachers.

### **Subtheme 2.3: Empowerment and Optimization of Human Resources**

The management of strategic resources also encompasses both the quantity and quality of teaching staff. Participants indicated that a proportional number of teachers relative to the curricular workload is crucial for sustaining meaningful learning, particularly in schools implementing a full-day system. The principal described the teacher-to-program ratio at the school as follows:

*"There are 41 teachers, because here, first, we implement a full-day system, and second, there are additional subjects that we also have to teach." (P1, Interview Transcript, page 4, lines 25-27)*

Conceptually, this finding suggests that human resource empowerment is a key factor in ensuring educational stability. By optimally managing the number of teachers, the school can maintain the quality of additional programs and the full-day system without imposing excessive workloads that might diminish teachers' creativity and instructional effectiveness.

### **Subtheme 2.4: A Positive Environment and Mutual Reminders**

Participants revealed that the positive atmosphere within the school emerges from structured programs designed to encourage self-reflection and mutual support among teachers. The principal does not allow the work culture to develop naturally without direction; rather, it is intentionally shaped through activities that strengthen both the spiritual bonds and professional commitment of teachers. The principal explained one of the school's flagship programs as follows:

*"To support one of the programs, teachers also participate in a group mentoring program, which we call Bina Pribadi Islami, and it is mandatory." (P1, Interview Transcript, page 5, lines 29-30)*

This positive culture extends beyond teachers and is translated into habits of mutual care and encouragement throughout the entire school community. One participant emphasized:

*"There needs to be mutual feedback and advice among peers. Teachers encourage students to remind one another, where students are expected to provide input and advice to each other." (P5, Interview Transcript, page 5, lines 37-39)*

Conceptually, these findings indicate that the school has cultivated a collective value based culture. Coaching practices for teachers and a culture of mutual advice among students create a safe and supportive environment for all members of the school community. The key implication of this finding is that an environment characterized by reciprocal support facilitates the internalization of learning values. When teachers feel emotionally and spiritually supported, they are better prepared to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere, enabling knowledge to be more effectively understood and applied by students in their daily lives.

**Theme 3: The Impact of Learning on Students**

This theme illustrates how meaningful learning has a direct impact on students' experiences and development. It was constructed from various codes demonstrating the relationship between classroom instructional practices and the outcomes perceived by students. These codes include open teacher communication, the use of varied instructional models, the implementation of strategies tailored to students' needs, the availability of support programs for students, and students' ability to apply what they have learned. The analysis indicates that the impact of meaningful learning is reflected not only in students' understanding of subject matter, but also in their sense of comfort during learning, their level of engagement, and their ability to apply knowledge in everyday life.

**Figure 8.**  
*The Impact of Learning on Students*

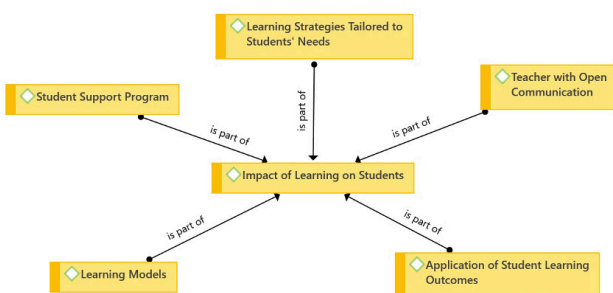


Figure 8 illustrates that the impact of learning on students is shaped by several key components: learning strategies tailored to students' needs, student support programs, teachers with open communication, learning models, and the application of student learning outcomes. Instructional strategies that are adapted to students' needs play a crucial role in ensuring that the learning process becomes more relevant and meaningful. Student mentoring programs and open teacher communication further strengthen student engagement and learning motivation. In addition, the implementation of appropriate learning models and students' ability to apply their learning outcomes serve as tangible indicators of successful meaningful learning. These

findings suggest that the impact of learning extends beyond cognitive achievement to include the quality of support, interaction, and the practical application of students' competencies in real life contexts.

**Subtheme 3.1: Teachers with Open Communication**

The first impact perceived by students concerns teachers' open and warm communication patterns. Students noted that teachers who are approachable and willing to engage in discussion not only create an enjoyable learning atmosphere, but also enhance students' confidence to participate actively and ask questions, particularly in subjects considered difficult. One participant described the comfort experienced as follows:

*"Learning feels easier because I use a different approach that I learned from my mother, especially in mathematics. The teacher accepts that approach, so the learning atmosphere becomes enjoyable and not angry. Also, during P5 activities or projects, the teacher especially the homeroom teacher is easy to discuss with and develop ideas." (P8, Interview Transcript, p. 5, lines 4-8)*

This sense of warmth also facilitates students' understanding of complex subject matter, as expressed by another participant:

*"Everyone is easy to communicate with, both the principal and the teachers, especially the mathematics teacher, because it is difficult. Many students ask questions, and they answer immediately." (P9, Interview Transcript, page 5, lines 14-16)*

Conceptually, these findings indicate that the psychological safety established by teachers serves as a primary gateway to meaningful learning. When the distance between teachers and students is reduced through empathetic communication, students' intrinsic motivation to engage in academic exploration increases significantly.

**Subtheme 3.2: Learning Models**

Meaningful learning is implemented through instructional models that position students as the center of learning activities (student-centered learning). The use of problem-based learning and project-based approaches not only creates a dynamic classroom atmosphere but also fosters students' collaborative skills through group discussions. This was explained by one participant:

*"...it is not only the teacher who is active, but also other models such as problem-based learning so that students can play a more active role. In addition, digital media are also facilitated." (P5, Interview Transcript, p. 6, lines 9-12)*

Discussion-based practices have become a common feature across various subjects, as expressed by another participant:

*"Group work or discussions, like deliberation, are commonly carried out in P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Program), Civics Education, and other projects." (P7, Interview Transcript, page 2, lines 8-9)*

In essence, these findings indicate that teachers have successfully transformed the classroom atmosphere from being monotonous to becoming more engaging and challenging. Conceptually, this reflects the development of learner autonomy. Students are no longer fully dependent on the teacher; instead, they are encouraged to think critically and seek answers independently. This demonstrates that the principal's strategy in promoting active teaching approaches has effectively empowered students within the classroom.

### **Subtheme 3.3: Learning Strategies Tailored to Students' Needs**

Meaningful learning strategies in this school do not confine students' learning experiences solely to the classroom. Teachers encourage students to explore the external environment so they can understand that learning resources are not limited to textbooks or classroom settings. This strategy begins with a personal, "heart-to-heart" approach before engaging in academic content. One participant emphasized:

*"Students are already accustomed to project-based learning because in our school, learning does not only take place inside the classroom, but also outside the classroom." (P2, Interview Transcript, page 7, lines 9-14)*

This approach is preceded by the development of emotional connection, as conveyed by another participant:

*"First, we do not immediately deliver the material. We speak heart-to-heart with them." (P4, Interview Transcript, page 8, lines 12-16)*

These findings indicate that the school utilizes the real world as an extended learning resource. By learning outside the classroom, theoretical concepts that previously felt difficult become easier to understand because students can directly observe concrete examples. Furthermore, the heart-to-heart approach reflects the school's strong concern for students' emotional well-being. When students feel emotionally secure and connected to their teachers, the learning process becomes smoother and is no longer perceived as a burden.

### **Subtheme 3.4: Student Support Programs**

The school provides various routine programs and diverse extracurricular activities to support students' interests and talents. Programs such as morning inspiration function as mental preparation before beginning academic activities, while extracurricular activities serve as platforms for self-development

beyond the formal curriculum. The principal explained this routine as follows:

*"...Routine activities from morning until afternoon... For example, in the morning we have morning inspiration from 7 to 8 a.m.; we do not immediately start formal lessons, right?" (P1, Interview Transcript, page 5, lines 19-24)*

Support for students' interests and talents is also extensive, covering sports, arts, and science, as mentioned by another participant:

*"...the school has many extracurricular activities, such as cooking class, futsal, volleyball, badminton, karate, calligraphy, coloring, science art there are so many." (P2, Interview Transcript, page 7, lines 25-28)*

Conceptually, these programs demonstrate that the school values the uniqueness of each child. Meaningful learning is not solely about report card grades, but also about the balanced development of students' character and talents. Routine activities such as morning inspiration help students build positive mental readiness, ensuring that they develop not only intellectually but also in terms of personal maturity and social competence.

### **Subtheme 3.5: Application of Student Learning Outcomes**

The ultimate impact of the entire learning process is reflected in students' ability to apply their knowledge in real-life contexts and achieve accomplishments at the global level. Meaningful learning has successfully transformed theoretical knowledge into practical life skills that are relevant to students' daily experiences. This application is evident in everyday subject practices:

*"Civics Education involves cooperation or group work through deliberation, while mathematics may involve shopping activities using money in daily life." (P7, Interview Transcript, page 3, lines 26-30)*

This success has even extended to the international level, as proudly shared by another participant:

*"...there is also the International Kangaroo Mathematics Contest (IKMC), an international mathematics competition... I once won a gold medal..." (P8, Interview Transcript, page 1, lines 28-35)*

Conceptually, this theme leads to the conclusion that meaningful learning, when effectively managed by instructional leadership, produces holistic outcomes. Students not only excel academically but also develop mature character, strong deliberation skills, and independence in solving practical problems in their everyday lives.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the principal's instructional leadership plays a crucial role in supporting the realization of meaningful learning in elementary schools. These results reinforce the perspective that the principal does not merely function as an administrative manager, but rather as a key actor who influences the quality of learning through policy direction, support for teachers, and the creation of a conducive learning climate. Thus, within the context of this study, instructional leadership operates indirectly yet systematically in enhancing the quality of students' learning processes.

### *Building a Shared Vision for Learning*

The findings of this study indicate that the success of meaningful learning at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham originates from a clear school vision that is collectively understood by all members of the school community. The vision does not remain merely a formal document, but is translated into daily instructional practices. This aligns with the literature emphasizing that setting a clear learning direction is a core dimension of instructional leadership (Hompashe, 2024). However, several studies have criticized that school visions often fail to influence instructional practices because they are not effectively communicated or internalized by teachers (McTigue et al., 2024; Yang & Xu, 2026). In contrast, the findings of this study demonstrate the opposite condition, where the principal consistently connects the school's vision with classroom learning objectives. This strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of instructional leadership lies not only in formulating a vision, but also in sustaining the processes of communication and guidance to ensure its implementation.

### *Principal Support for Teachers in Instructional Practices*

The second theme of the research findings indicates that the principal provides tangible support to teachers through the provision of facilities, professional development opportunities, and spaces for collective reflection. These findings confirm the view that the influence of instructional leadership on student learning is generally mediated through teachers (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022). When teachers feel professionally supported, they are more confident in developing contextual and student-centered instructional strategies. However, research by Cansoy et al. (2025) suggests that instructional leadership is often constrained by the principal's administrative workload, resulting in less optimal support for teachers. The findings of this study add a new nuance by demonstrating that principals can continue to perform their instructional roles effectively when teacher support is positioned as a strategic priority rather than as an additional task. The results

also show that the principal plays an active role in creating a safe, comfortable, and learning-supportive school environment. This environment not only impacts students but also enhances teachers' motivation and professional comfort in carrying out their duties. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting that school climate is one of the primary pathways through which instructional leadership influences the quality of learning (Mayer, 2002). Nevertheless, not all studies agree that instructional leadership consistently succeeds in fostering a positive learning climate. Some research indicates that overly top-down leadership approaches may reduce teacher participation and generate resistance (Kostiainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2022). In the context of this study, instructional leadership appears to be enacted collaboratively, thereby avoiding such negative consequences and instead strengthening the school's learning culture.

### *The Impact of Instructional Leadership on Student Learning*

The ultimate impact of the instructional leadership practices identified in this study is reflected in increased student engagement in learning, as well as improved academic and non-academic achievement. Learning that is designed to be more contextual and interactive encourages students to become more active, confident, and capable of connecting subject matter with their everyday lives. These findings support the argument that effective instructional leadership contributes to the enhancement of learning quality, particularly when principals focus on the learning process rather than solely on outcomes (Shu & Gu, 2023). On the other hand, the literature also notes that the relationship between instructional leadership and student learning outcomes is not always direct or consistent (Papadakis et al., 2024). Therefore, the findings of this study enrich the discourse by demonstrating how the elementary school context and an adaptive leadership approach can strengthen this relationship.

### *Implications for Understanding Instructional Leadership*

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that instructional leadership in elementary schools should be understood as a contextual and sustained practice. The findings not only confirm existing theories of instructional leadership, but also provide empirical insights into how such leadership can be enacted effectively to support meaningful learning. By focusing on a shared learning vision, providing continuous support for teachers, and fostering a conducive learning environment, principals can play a strategic role in enhancing the quality of learning in elementary schools.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the principal's instructional leadership plays a significant role in supporting the realization of meaningful learning in elementary schools. The findings at SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham, Banjar City, reveal that a principal who actively sets the direction for learning, supports teachers, and fosters a positive school climate can have a tangible impact on the quality of students' learning processes, particularly through strengthening teachers' roles and professionalism. Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted with caution. This research is a qualitative case study conducted in a single private school grounded in religious values; therefore, the results are contextual in nature and are not intended for broad generalization. Accordingly, the instructional leadership model proposed in this study is more appropriately positioned as a preliminary model that is relevant for schools with similar characteristics. From an educational policy perspective, these findings highlight the importance of reinforcing the instructional role of principals not merely as administrative managers, but as learning facilitators and drivers of teachers' professional development. Future research is recommended to examine this model in more diverse school contexts using quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Finally, longitudinal studies would also be valuable to determine whether this type of instructional leadership leaves a lasting impact on students' character formation and development into adulthood.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized ChatGPT and Grammarly to improve the grammar and writing style of the text. Following the use of these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the results as necessary and maintain full responsibility for the content of the manuscript. The authors declare that artificial intelligence was not employed in the data collection process, data analysis, the formulation of scientific conclusions, or the drafting of the article's core intellectual content.

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## Appendiks

### Research Interview Blueprint

No	Research Concept	Sub-Concept	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Techniques
1	Instructional Leadership	Expectations and Vision of Meaningful Learning	Principal's involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning	Principal	Interview
		Resource Support	Frequency and forms of supervision	Principal, Teachers	Interview
			Follow-up actions from supervision results		
		Supervision and Management of Learning Programs	Facilitation of training	Principal, Teachers	Interview
Provision of motivation					
		Provision of rewards			
		Positive Learning Environment	Intensity of communication	Principal, Teachers	Interview
			Teacher involvement in decision-making		
2	Meaningful Learning	Learning strategies used by teachers	Active and contextual learning methods	Teachers, Students	Interview, Observation
			Implementation of projects or group work		
		Student activities and engagement in learning	Student activeness, creativity, and understanding	Teachers, Students	Interview, Observation
		Supportive learning environment	Positive learning climate	Teachers, Principal, Students	Interview, Observation
			Emotional and social support		
3	Instructional Leadership Model	Best practices in reference schools (case study of SD Inspiratif Al-Ilham)	Unique strategies implemented	Principal, Teachers, Students	Interview, Documentation
			Impact on students and teachers		
		Potential replication of the model in other schools	Supporting and inhibiting factors	Principal	Interview
	Suitability with the characteristics of other elementary schools				

### Interview Guidelines

#### For Principals

No	Aspect Explored	Interview Questions	Notes on Responses
1	Shared Vision and Expectations	How do you define meaningful learning in this school?	
		What are your expectations for teachers in realizing meaningful learning?	
		Do you communicate these expectations to the teachers?	
		How do you communicate them?	
2	Strategic Resource Management	What forms of support does the school provide to help teachers implement meaningful learning?	
		What is your strategy for allocating resources to support meaningful learning?	
3	Learning Program Management	How do you monitor the implementation of meaningful learning by teachers?	
		Are there any special programs developed to ensure that learning is relevant and meaningful for students?	
4	Positive Learning Environment	How do you create an environment that supports teachers in developing meaningful learning?	
		Does the school foster a collaborative culture among teachers in designing learning?	
5	Self-Development and Innovative Leadership	What efforts do you make to develop yourself as an instructional leader?	
		How do you encourage teachers to continuously develop themselves as instructional leaders?	

**For Teachers**

No	Aspect Explored	Interview Questions	Notes on Responses
1	Expectations and Vision for Meaningful Learning	How do you understand the concept of meaningful learning in this school?	
		Has the principal ever conveyed expectations or a vision related to meaningful learning?	
		How was it delivered?	
2	Resource Support	What kinds of support have you received from the principal to develop meaningful learning?	
		Has this support met your needs in teaching?	
3	Supervision and Learning Program Management	Has the principal ever provided feedback on the teaching strategies you use?	
		How is the principal involved in the planning, implementation, or evaluation of learning?	
4	Positive Learning Environment	How is the work atmosphere in the school regarding the development of meaningful learning?	
		Do you feel supported and motivated by the principal to try new methods in teaching?	
5	Role Modeling and Teacher Professional Development	Does the principal provide inspiration or concrete examples in learning innovation?	
		Does the principal encourage teachers to keep learning and developing?	
		Have you ever implemented project-based or collaborative learning?	
		What were the results?	
		What learning strategies do you usually use to produce meaningful learning? Why did you choose those methods? What were the results?	

**For Students**

No	Aspect Explored	Interview Questions	Notes on Responses
1	Engagement in Learning	Do you often get invited by the teacher to have discussions or work in groups during lessons?	
		What is your favorite subject and why?	
		Do you feel you can relate what you learn to everyday life?	
2	Learning Environment	Do you feel comfortable and motivated to learn at this school?	
		Are the teachers and principal easy to talk to when you have ideas or questions?	
		How is the classroom learning atmosphere exciting, boring, or enjoyable?	
3	Impact of Learning on Yourself	What learning activity do you think has made you more confident?	
		Have you ever been given the opportunity to lead a group task or project?	
		Do you feel that this school helps you become more creative and independent?	