

AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER COMPETENCE AND THE ATTRIBUTION OF LOW LEARNING QUALITY

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the principal's perceptions of teacher competence and the principal's attribution of the low quality of learning at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi, Penukul Abab Lematang Ilir Regency. The study focused on the principal's perceptions of four teacher competencies, namely pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies, as well as how the principal attributed the factors causing the low quality of learning originating from both internal and external school factors. This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal as the main informant, classroom observations, and documentation studies of learning devices and relevant school documents. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability tests by applying triangulation and member checking. The results showed that the principal generally had a positive perception of teacher competence in pedagogical, professional, personal, and social aspects. However, improvements were still required in terms of learning innovation and adaptation to evolving educational policies. The principal also attributed the low quality of learning relatively evenly to internal and external factors. Internal factors were related to teachers' readiness and adaptability in implementing learning processes, while external factors included student characteristics, parental involvement, and limitations in school facilities and educational regulations. These findings indicate that the principal has an objective and constructive perspective in addressing issues related to learning quality and in formulating improvement efforts.

Keywords: leadership perception, teacher competence, attribution, instructional quality

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis persepsi kepala sekolah terhadap kompetensi guru serta atribusi kepala sekolah terhadap rendahnya mutu pembelajaran di SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi, Kabupaten Penukul Abab Lematang Ilir. Fokus penelitian diarahkan pada persepsi kepala sekolah terhadap empat kompetensi guru, yaitu kompetensi pedagogik, profesional, kepribadian, dan sosial, serta bagaimana kepala sekolah mengatribusikan faktor-faktor penyebab rendahnya mutu pembelajaran yang berasal dari faktor internal maupun eksternal sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan

melalui wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah sebagai informan utama, observasi proses pembelajaran, serta studi dokumentasi terhadap perangkat pembelajaran dan dokumen sekolah yang relevan. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan dan verifikasi. Keabsahan data dijaga melalui uji kredibilitas, transferabilitas, dependabilitas, dan konfirmabilitas dengan penerapan triangulasi dan member check. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memiliki persepsi yang secara umum positif terhadap kompetensi guru pada aspek pedagogik, profesional, kepribadian, dan sosial. Meskipun demikian, masih diperlukan penguatan pada aspek inovasi pembelajaran dan kemampuan adaptasi terhadap kebijakan pendidikan yang terus berkembang. Kepala sekolah juga melakukan atribusi terhadap rendahnya mutu pembelajaran secara relatif seimbang antara faktor internal dan eksternal. Faktor internal berkaitan dengan kesiapan dan adaptasi guru dalam pembelajaran, sedangkan faktor eksternal meliputi karakteristik peserta didik, keterlibatan orang tua, serta keterbatasan sarana dan regulasi pendidikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memiliki perspektif yang objektif dan konstruktif dalam memandang permasalahan mutu pembelajaran serta dalam merumuskan upaya peningkatannya.

Kata kunci: persepsi kepala sekolah, kompetensi guru, atribusi, mutu pembelajaran

INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic tool for developing high-quality, competitive human resources. Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a vital role in improving the quality of learning, which serves as an indicator of the education system's success. High-quality learning reflects the synergy between school leadership, teacher competence, and support from the entire educational ecosystem. In this context, school principals and teachers occupy a central position in realizing an effective, innovative learning process focused on student learning outcomes (Sallis, 2014).

School principals have a dual role as both managers and instructional leaders. This role requires principals not only to manage school administration but also to lead the process of improving the quality of learning. Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 13 of 2007 stipulates that school principals must possess five core competencies: personal, managerial, supervisory, entrepreneurial, and social competencies. Through these competencies, school principals bear the responsibility of fostering and developing teachers' competencies to ensure the learning process runs optimally (Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2007).

Teachers, as the primary agents in the learning process, play a crucial role in determining the quality of education. Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers states that teachers must possess four core competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies (Indonesia, 2005). These four competencies complement one another in shaping teacher professionalism. When these competencies operate synergistically, the learning process can take place effectively and meaningfully. Conversely, weaknesses in any one dimension of competence can lead to a decline in the quality of learning (Aisyah et al., 2025).

Based on initial observations conducted at State High School 1 Talang Ubi in Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir District, the majority of teachers are civil servants with relatively good competency levels. Among the four dimensions of teacher competencies, the personal aspect stands out the most, reflected in discipline, responsibility, and strong professional ethics. Nevertheless, the school principal assesses that improvements are still needed in pedagogical and professional competencies, particularly in adapting to the new deep learning-based learning paradigm that forms part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

According to Broderick (2021), the shift in the learning paradigm within the Merdeka Curriculum demands that teachers be able to develop learning strategies that are more reflective, contextual, and learner-centered. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology emphasizes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to be prepared to internalize a learning philosophy oriented toward developing the Pancasila Student Profile. Therefore, teachers' ability to adapt to changes in educational policy is a critical factor in determining the quality of learning. (Kemdikbudristek, 2022)

In addition to internal factors related to teacher competencies, school principals also identified external factors influencing the quality of learning. One factor of concern is the low level of parental involvement in supporting their children's educational process. In some cases, parents pay insufficient attention to their children's discipline and academic progress at home. This situation indicates that the partnership between schools and families is not yet functioning optimally. Epstein emphasizes that family and community involvement has a direct impact on students' learning motivation and academic achievement (Epstein, 2018).

Furthermore, limited educational facilities and infrastructure also pose a significant obstacle to improving the quality of learning. In some cases, schools' efforts to optimize support from the community or alumni are often hindered by government administrative regulations. As a result, schools must rely on government assistance, a process that is relatively time-consuming. However, according to Sallis, high-quality education is demonstrated by an educational institution's ability to manage resources creatively and efficiently (Sallis, 2014).

Despite facing these challenges, State High School 1 Talang Ubi continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the quality of learning. The school has undertaken various initiatives, including academic supervision, *community of learning* activities, teacher professional development workshops, as well as literacy programs and extracurricular activities. Additionally, some teachers have pursued graduate-level education as part of their ongoing professional development.

In understanding the various factors influencing the quality of learning, the principal's perception of teacher competence is a crucial aspect to examine. These perceptions not only influence how the principal evaluates teacher performance but also shape the policies

adopted in efforts to improve the quality of learning. On the other hand, the principal also engages in an attribution process when interpreting the causes of low learning quality. According to Weiner's attribution theory, individuals tend to interpret the causes of an event based on internal or external factors (Weiner, 1986).

In the context of educational management, the principal's attribution process regarding learning quality is crucial because it influences the policies adopted to improve educational quality. If the principal attributes the problem to internal factors related to teachers, the policies adopted may involve enhancing competencies or professional development. Conversely, if the causes are perceived to stem from external factors, the policies adopted may involve strengthening partnerships with parents, developing infrastructure, or adjusting instructional strategies.

Previous studies have examined the role of school principals in improving educational quality, whether through school policies, academic supervision, or teacher professional development. However, most research still focuses on the principal's managerial policies or strategies. Research specifically examining school principals' perceptions of teacher competencies alongside the attribution process regarding low learning quality remains relatively limited, particularly in the context of high schools in rural areas. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze school principals' perceptions of teacher competencies as well as their attributions regarding low learning quality at State High School 1 Talang Ubi, Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir District. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of educational management studies, particularly those related to school leadership perceptions and the improvement of learning quality, as well as provide practical benefits for educational management at the school level.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of school principals' perceptions regarding teacher competencies and their attributions for the low quality of learning within the real-world context of the school environment. A case study is used to obtain a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation within a specific setting (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at State High School 1 Talang Ubi, Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir (PALI) Regency, South Sumatra Province. This school was selected because it is one of the state schools that has been accredited with grade A and has implemented various teacher professional development programs through academic supervision and the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy. Additionally, based on initial observations, it was found that the school principal has a strong focus on improving teacher competencies and the quality of learning, although there are still some challenges in implementing learning based on the new paradigm. The research was conducted over four months, from October 2025 to January 2026.

Data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the school principal as the main informant, who provided information regarding perceptions of teacher competencies and attributions regarding factors influencing the quality of learning. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various relevant school documents, such as academic supervision programs, student learning outcome reports, minutes of faculty meetings, and internal school policy documents. These documents were used to strengthen and verify the research findings (Sugiyono, 2021).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to deeply explore the school principal's perspectives on teacher competencies and factors influencing the quality of learning. Observations involved monitoring classroom learning processes and interactions between teachers and students to gain a realistic understanding of teaching practices at the school. Additionally, documentation involved collecting various documents related to school policies and academic supervision activities (Moleong, 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher simplifies and focuses the data from interviews, observations, and documentation in accordance with the research focus. Subsequently, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices so that the relationships between categories can be understood more clearly. The final stage involves drawing conclusions in a step-by-step manner while continuously verifying the obtained data (Miles, M. B., A. M. Huberman, 2014). Data validity in this study is ensured through the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data credibility is ensured through triangulation of sources and methods as well as member checks with informants. Transferability is achieved through the presentation of in-depth descriptions of the research context. Dependability is ensured through an audit trail to verify the consistency of the research process, while confirmability is maintained through the researcher's reflection and the systematic documentation of the entire research process (Lincoln, 1985)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. School Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Competence

The research findings indicate that the principal of State Senior High School 1 Talang Ubi holds a generally positive perception of teacher competence. This perception is shaped by the principal's professional experiences in conducting academic supervision, teacher development, and daily professional interactions within the school environment. Thus, the principal's perception is not formed based on assumptions but rather through a continuous process of observation, evaluation, and reflection on teachers' performance in

the learning process. From a perception theory perspective, Robbins and Judge explain that perception is a process through which individuals organize and interpret sensory impressions to assign meaning to their environment (Robbins, S. P., & Judge, 2017). In this study, the principal's perception of teachers' competencies is influenced by leadership experience, direct involvement in instructional supervision activities, and the organizational context of the school they lead. Therefore, the principal's perception reflects not only individual judgment but also the reality of ongoing instructional practices within the school.

1. Perception of Pedagogical Competence

Research findings indicate that the principal assessed teachers' pedagogical competencies at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi as "fairly good." Teachers were deemed capable of conducting the learning process in accordance with curriculum guidelines and managing classroom teaching and learning activities. However, the principal also noted that some teachers still face challenges in adapting to new learning approaches, particularly the implementation of deep learning, which is being introduced in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Theoretically, pedagogical competence encompasses a teacher's ability to understand student characteristics, design learning experiences, conduct educational teaching and learning processes, and conduct continuous learning evaluations. Mulyasa emphasizes that pedagogical competence is the core of teacher professionalism because it is directly related to the quality of the teaching and learning process (Mulyasa, 2013). The findings of this study indicate that teachers already possess a sufficient foundation of pedagogical competencies, yet still require strengthening in instructional innovation and adaptation to changes in educational policy. School principals in this study do not view teachers' pedagogical limitations as individual weaknesses but rather as a consequence of the relatively rapid shift in learning paradigms. This perception indicates a constructive leadership approach, in which the principal places greater emphasis on continuous efforts to mentor and develop teachers professionally (Alijonovna, 2024).

2. Perceptions of Professional Competence

Regarding professional competence, the principal holds a positive perception of teachers' ability to master instructional content. Teachers are assessed as having taught in accordance with their respective fields of expertise and educational backgrounds. This is supported by school documentation data indicating alignment between teachers' academic qualifications and the subjects they teach. According to Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, professional competence reflects a broad and deep mastery of subject matter. In the context of this study, the findings indicate that teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi have met the formal aspects of these professional competencies. However, the principal still believes that efforts to enhance professional competencies must continue through various professional development activities, such as training, workshops, and teacher learning communities. The principal's perception aligns with the concept of teacher professional development, which emphasizes that professional

competence is dynamic and must continue to evolve alongside curriculum changes, advancements in knowledge, and students' needs.

3. Perceptions of Personal Competence

Research findings indicate that personal competence is the aspect rated most highly by the principal. Teachers are assessed as possessing a disciplined attitude, a sense of responsibility, good work ethics, and the ability to serve as role models for students. This is reflected in teachers' behavior while performing their duties, their punctuality, and their commitment to professional responsibilities. In theoretical studies, personal competencies relate to moral integrity, emotional maturity, personality stability, and a teacher's ability to serve as a role model for students. Mulyasa explains that personal competencies are the primary foundation of the teaching profession because teachers do not merely act as instructors but also as educators who shape students' character (Mulyasa, 2013). The school principal's perception of personal competencies as the strongest aspect indicates that the professional culture at State High School 1 Talang Ubi has developed positively. This condition serves as a crucial asset in supporting the development of teachers' competencies in other areas, particularly pedagogical and professional competencies.

3. Perceptions of Social Competencies

Regarding social competencies, the principal assessed that teachers possess strong abilities in establishing communication and collaboration with various parties within the school environment. Teachers are able to foster harmonious relationships with fellow teachers, students, and other school community members. Theoretically, social competencies require teachers to adapt to the social environment, establish effective communication, and collaborate with various stakeholders. Research findings indicate that interpersonal relationships at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi are functioning well, thereby fostering a conducive learning environment.

The principal's perception of teachers' social competencies suggests that the school possesses a sufficiently strong social capital to support the implementation of learning. This social capital is one of the key factors that can support the continuous improvement of learning quality. Overall, the principal's perception of teachers' competencies at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi reflects a realistic and balanced pattern. The principal does not overlook existing limitations but also does not view teachers as the primary cause of learning quality issues. This objective perception serves as a crucial foundation for determining the direction of teacher development policies at the school.

B. The Principal's Attribution of Low Learning Quality

In addition to examining the principal's perceptions of teachers' competencies, this study also analyzes how the principal attributes the causes of low learning quality. The research findings indicate that the principal makes balanced attributions between internal and external school factors. In the attribution theory proposed by Weiner, individuals tend to explain the causes of an event through two main sources: internal factors and external

factors (Weiner, 1986). Internal factors relate to an individual's ability, effort, and motivation, while external factors relate to environmental conditions, social support, and situations beyond an individual's control.

1. Attribution to Teachers' Internal Factors

The research findings indicate that school principals attribute some of the challenges in learning quality to teachers' internal factors, particularly regarding adaptation to changes in educational policy. School principals assess that teachers fundamentally possess good competencies but are still in the process of adjusting to the new learning paradigm, especially the implementation of deep learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. From the perspective of Weiner's attribution theory, this assessment falls under unstable internal attribution, as it relates to an adaptation process that can change over time. School principals do not view these limitations as permanent incompetence but rather as part of teachers' professional learning process. These findings indicate that the school principal holds positive expectations regarding the development of teachers' competencies. Such an attribution approach can foster a more supportive work environment and encourage teachers to continuously enhance their competencies.

2. Attributions to External School Factors

In addition to internal teacher factors, school principals also attribute low learning quality to external factors, particularly parental involvement and limitations in learning facilities and infrastructure. School principals noted that parental support in accompanying students' learning processes has not yet been fully optimized, thereby impacting student discipline and learning motivation. Within the framework of attribution theory, these factors fall under external attribution, which lies beyond the direct control of both teachers and the school. This finding indicates that the principal views learning quality as the result of the interaction of various factors within the educational ecosystem. Additionally, the principal highlighted the school's limited flexibility in developing facilities and infrastructure due to administrative regulations. Although the school has achieved an A accreditation and meets national education standards, the process of developing learning facilities still faces bureaucratic obstacles. This perspective aligns with the theory of educational quality proposed by Sallis, who states that educational quality is influenced by an institution's ability to manage resources and adapt to environmental changes (Sallis, 2014).

C. Attribution Patterns and Their Implications for Leadership

The attribution patterns of school principals in this study indicate a reflective and constructive leadership style. School principals do not place teachers as the sole party responsible for low learning quality but view the issue as a shared responsibility involving various stakeholders (Amat et al., 2020). This balanced attribution pattern implies leadership strategies that emphasize coaching, mentoring, and strengthening collaboration. The principal follows through on this attribution through various programs, such as academic supervision, teacher learning communities, and the implementation of

learning workshops. Thus, the principal's attribution not only serves as an explanation for a problem but also forms the basis for formulating policies to improve learning quality at the school.

D. Implications of the Findings for Improving Learning Quality

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of educational leadership and the improvement of learning quality in schools. School principals' perceptions of teacher competencies and their attributions regarding the factors causing low learning quality form the basis for determining educational development strategies at the school level. First, the research findings highlight the importance of the school principal's role as an instructional leader. School principals' perceptions of teachers' competencies will influence the attitudes and policies adopted in the teacher development process. Objective and constructive perceptions can encourage school principals to place greater emphasis on developing teachers' capacities through various professional development programs. Second, the research findings confirm that improving the quality of learning cannot be separated from strengthening teachers' competencies. Therefore, schools need to develop a sustainable teacher professional development system through academic supervision, internal training, and teacher learning communities. Third, the research findings indicate that the quality of learning is also influenced by factors outside the school, such as parental support and the availability of facilities and infrastructure. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of learning must be undertaken through a holistic approach involving various stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. Theoretically, this study reinforces the relationship between perception theory, attribution theory, teacher competence, and the quality of learning within the context of educational leadership. The principal's perception of teacher competence influences how the principal attributes the causes of low learning quality, which ultimately impacts policies and strategies for improving educational quality at the school.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze school principals' perceptions of teachers' competencies as well as their attributions regarding the low quality of learning at State Senior High School 1 Talang Ubi in Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir (PALI) Regency. Based on the research findings and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, school principals generally hold a positive perception of teachers' competencies. This is evident from the principals' evaluations of four aspects of teacher competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies. Regarding pedagogical competencies, teachers were assessed as capable of conducting the learning process in accordance with curriculum requirements, although they still face challenges in adapting to new learning approaches, particularly deep learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Regarding professional competence, teachers are assessed as having a sufficiently good grasp of instructional content and a good alignment between their academic qualifications and the subjects they teach. Meanwhile, regarding personal competence, teachers are

assessed as possessing discipline, responsibility, and strong moral integrity, enabling them to serve as role models for students. Regarding social competencies, teachers are assessed as capable of establishing good communication and cooperation with fellow teachers, students, and other school staff. Overall, the school principal's perception indicates that teachers' competencies at SMA Negeri 1 Talang Ubi fall into the "fairly good" category; however, continuous development remains necessary to enable them to adapt to the dynamics of educational policy changes.

Second, the principal attributes the low quality of learning to a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors primarily relate to teachers' adaptation to shifts in learning paradigms and the need to continuously enhance pedagogical and professional competencies. However, the principal does not view these internal factors as permanent weaknesses of the teachers but rather as part of an ongoing professional development process. On the other hand, school principals also link the low quality of learning to external factors, such as the suboptimal involvement of students' parents in supporting the learning process, as well as limitations in learning facilities and infrastructure influenced by educational regulations and policies. Thus, school principals view the quality of learning as the result of the interaction of various factors within the educational ecosystem, not merely the responsibility of individual teachers. Third, the school principals' attribution patterns demonstrate a constructive and reflective leadership approach in managing learning quality at the school. School principals do not place teachers as the sole party responsible for low learning quality but view the issue as a shared responsibility requiring collaboration among teachers, the school, parents, and other stakeholders. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of learning are carried out through various coaching strategies, such as academic supervision, strengthening the teacher learning community, and conducting training and professional development activities for teachers. Thus, this study indicates that school principals' perceptions and attributions play a crucial role in determining the direction of policies and strategies for improving the quality of learning in schools. Objective perceptions and a balanced attribution between internal and external factors can foster more constructive educational leadership in developing teacher competencies and improving learning quality in a sustainable manner.

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