



## School Principals' Support for Teachers' Professional Development in Indonesia and Japan

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### ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi peran kepala sekolah dalam mendukung program pengembangan profesional (PD) guru di Indonesia dan Jepang. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah tinjauan literatur yang mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data sekunder terkait kebijakan, program, dan praktik kepala sekolah dalam pengembangan profesional guru di kedua negara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa di Jepang, kepala sekolah memiliki peran penting dalam memfasilitasi PD melalui pelatihan kepemimpinan yang berkelanjutan dan kolaborasi antara guru, sementara di Indonesia, meskipun ada program pengembangan kepala sekolah, fokusnya lebih pada keterampilan administratif dan kurang terkait dengan tantangan di lapangan. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar kepala sekolah di Indonesia mengadopsi pendekatan yang lebih holistik dalam pengembangan kepemimpinan sekolah dan PD guru, dengan memperkuat peran kepala sekolah dalam mendukung dan membimbing PD, serta memperkenalkan model PD yang lebih berkelanjutan dan terintegrasi dengan praktik pengajaran sehari-hari. Dengan demikian, diperlukan upaya terkoordinasi antara pengampu kebijakan daerah, kesadaran guru terhadap PD, dan keterlibatan masyarakat sekolah untuk bekerja sama meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran dan pendidikan di sekolah.

*This study aims to identify the role of school principals in supporting professional development (PD) programs in Indonesia and Japan. The method used is a literature review that collects and analyzes secondary data related to policies, programs, and practices of school principals in teacher professional development in both countries. The findings indicate that in Japan, school principals play a crucial role in facilitating PD through continuous leadership training and collaboration among teachers, while in Indonesia, although there are principal development programs, the focus is more on administrative skills and less on addressing real-world challenges in schools. This study suggests that Indonesia should adopt a more holistic approach to school leadership and teacher PD, strengthening the role of school principals in supporting and guiding PD, and introducing a more sustainable PD model that is integrated with daily teaching practices. Therefore, a coordinated effort between leadership development, teacher PD, and school community involvement is needed to enhance the quality of learning and education in Indonesia.*



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### INTRODUCTION

Learning continues to be a central and influential concept in education. The ability of schools to define and articulate the meaning of learning is often reflected in the implementation of teacher professional development (PD). As a result, learning outcomes can vary significantly across countries, as different nations—including high-performing ones in international assessments—

interpret learning in diverse ways. Consequently, numerous PD approaches have been developed to enhance teaching quality. Some of these approaches are more job-embedded, collaborative, and focused on continuous professional growth for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). To explore the impact of teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes on their teaching practices and students' learning outcomes, the results from the PISA 2018 assessment for 15-year-old students, particularly in a comparison between Indonesia and Japan, provide useful evidence for examining the quality of teacher PD (OECD, 2022), as shown below.

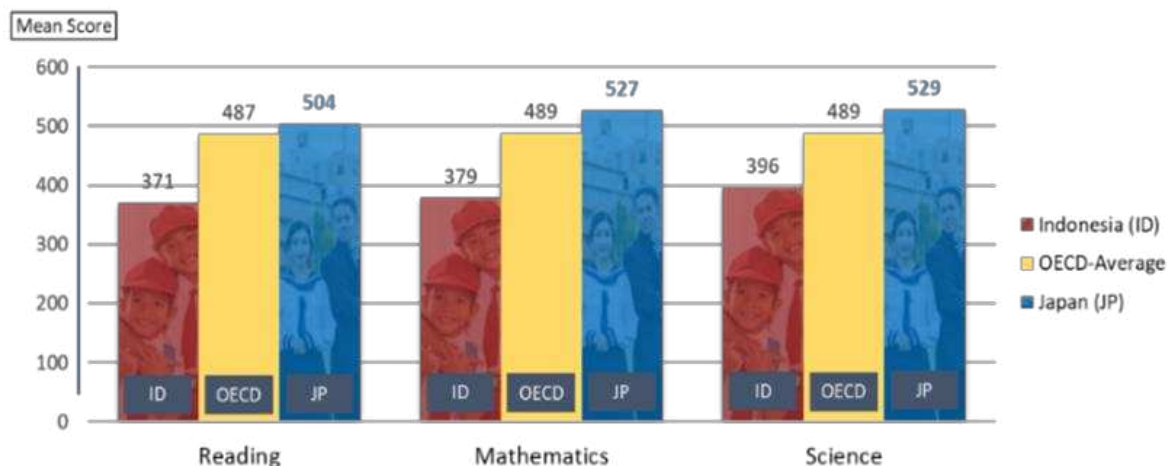


Figure 1. OECD Result 2018

As seen in the results above, there is a significant gap in performance across three domains—reading, mathematics, and science—between Indonesia and Japan. Indonesian basic education consistently performs below the Japanese mean score and remains ranked below the OECD average in all three domains. The primary factor contributing to Indonesia's stagnant position is the lack of continuous teacher training (Nugrahanto & Zuchdi, 2019).

In contrast, Japan has consistently ranked at the top in all domains, reflecting the sustained effort and dedication of its teachers in fostering effective learning methods, such as goal-setting and strategic planning. Interestingly, both Indonesia and Japan share the initial value of teacher professional development through lesson study. However, in the Indonesian context, lesson study is still a "piloting project" between universities and selected schools (Suratno, 2012). Nevertheless, it has proven to be an effective model for enhancing pedagogical transformation in lesson design and learning facilitation (Suratno, 2013). Therefore, for Indonesia to fully benefit from lesson study, it is essential to establish a support system within schools as part of a broader initiative for school improvement.

Given the critical importance of enhancing learning through teacher PD, this initiative requires substantial contributions from school principals, who play a vital role in supporting teacher development. However, research has shown that school principals in Indonesia often lack the necessary expertise and experience to manage the challenges and opportunities presented by educational autonomy (Jawas, 2014). This suggests that the professional preparation and training of school principals in Indonesia remain largely focused on routine management and administration, rather than on the processes of teaching and learning. In other words, the impact of school principal leadership training on student outcomes has yet to materialize. Importantly, studies indicate that support from school principals is essential in promoting teacher learning through PD (Akiba et al., 2015). Thus, it is crucial to examine how school principals' preparation and training shape their roles in supporting teacher PD. Furthermore, exploring the practices of principals in high-performing countries, such as Japan, can offer valuable insights for leadership practices and policy development in countries like Indonesia.

In Japan, opportunities for collaborative learning among teachers within and between schools are well-organized. Japanese teachers report high levels of participation in professional

development (OECD, 2014), highlighting the effectiveness of the school-based support system in improving teaching practices. In this regard, Chen et al. (2017) noted that school principals in Japan are more likely to intervene in facilitating teacher learning. In contrast, such interventions are often lacking in school management in Indonesia, where principals tend to focus more on administrative tasks than on instructional approaches for teachers (Jawas, 2017). This reflects the nature of leadership training, which is shaped by the recruitment, preparation, and in-service education of principals. Therefore, it is critical to conduct research that examines the quality of the school principal career pathway in Indonesia.

Further research should investigate which phase of school principals' development—recruitment, preparation, or in-service education—plays the most significant role in supporting teacher PD in Japan. Insights from school principals in Japan can provide valuable benchmarks for principals in Indonesia to assess their own performance in supporting teacher PD. Although a comparative analysis can be subjective, it still offers a valuable perspective for studying the roles of school principals in supporting teacher PD. To guide this study, it is important to explore how school principals' recruitment, preparation programs, and in-service education are organized in both Indonesia and Japan, as well as the significant role school principals play in supporting teacher professional development in these two countries.

## METHOD

This study adopts a literature review methodology, often referred to as library research, as its primary approach to gathering data and analyzing relevant studies, reports, and articles. Library research, as defined by George (2008), involves identifying, reviewing, and analyzing sources that provide factual information, expert opinions, and empirical evidence relevant to the research variables. For this study, the main research variable is the support provided by school principals for teachers' professional development (PD), particularly in the educational contexts of Indonesia and Japan.

The method is based on secondary data, which is collected from a variety of sources, including prior studies, reports, surveys, and existing academic literature. Secondary data is invaluable as it helps build a robust framework for understanding the variables under study, especially in terms of how a school principal supports teacher PD programs. The data gathered offer insights into both general practices and country-specific policies in Indonesia and Japan.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, this study examines detailed descriptions of school principal support in teacher PD by reviewing various electronic articles, hand-searched studies, and institutional reports. These are drawn from major educational databases and journals, including Emerald, ERIC, ProQuest, Sage, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis. The materials sourced from these reputable platforms provide rich, scholarly content that offers in-depth information on the roles school principals play in teacher PD, including the preparation and development of both teachers and school leaders. These sources are instrumental in constructing new perceptions and perspectives regarding the role of school principals in professional development.

Moreover, the analysis of the collected information is done systematically and thoroughly. The data is carefully synthesized and organized to identify key themes, patterns, and descriptions related to the role of school principals in preparing and supporting teacher PD initiatives. Special attention is paid to understanding how these leadership practices impact the professional growth of teachers, as well as how they contribute to the overall educational development in both Indonesia and Japan.

The information derived from the reviewed literature were compared and contrasted to draw meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of different leadership strategies in facilitating teacher PD. This comparative approach helps in identifying best practices and policy frameworks that could inform future educational leadership strategies, both in Indonesia and Japan. The research also aims to highlight any unique challenges or opportunities that arise in each context, providing a clearer understanding of the support mechanisms that school principals provide to enhance the professional capabilities of teachers. By synthesizing and analyzing these

sources, the study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how school principals contribute to the ongoing professional development of teachers, helping to bridge gaps in educational policies and practices in both countries.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This study investigates two major aspects: the definition of the preparation and development of school principals in Indonesia and Japan, as well as a comparison of principals' support for teacher professional development (PD) in both countries. The results from this study are presented below, detailing the roles of school principals in both countries, their recruitment and development processes, and the support school principals provide for teacher PD.

#### 1. School Principals' Recruitment and Development

In both Indonesia and Japan, school principals play a critical role in supporting teacher PD. The recruitment, training, and development of principals directly impact their ability to support teachers effectively. This section outlines the processes in both countries, emphasizing how school principals are prepared to take on leadership roles and support teachers' professional growth.

##### a. Indonesia

In Indonesia, the decentralization of education began in the early 2000s, marking the start of a comprehensive principal preparation program aimed at equipping prospective principals with the necessary skills. In 2010, the government introduced a new principal preparation program to serve as a reference for local governments across the nation in preparing school principals. The primary objective of this program is to produce professional school principals (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2011). The program consists of three key components: recruitment, training, and development. The recruitment process begins when the District Education Office (DEO) notifies schools of a principal vacancy. School principals or supervisors are then tasked with identifying and recommending teachers who are deemed to have the potential to become principals and who meet the administrative requirements set by the government. According to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 06/2018, the administrative requirements to become a school principal in Indonesia include: holding a bachelor's degree, having managerial experience, achieving a minimum grade of III/c, possessing at least five years of teaching experience, holding a teaching certification, and being no older than 56 years at the time of the first appointment.

Teachers who are recommended as potential principals must submit a paper and portfolio to the DEO. Based on the evaluation of these documents, the DEO selects candidates for further consideration (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2011). The recruitment process involves both administrative and academic selection. The administrative process includes reviewing the candidates' documents to ensure they meet the general and specific qualifications for the role. The academic selection process involves a written test, portfolio assessment, and paper presentation to assess whether candidates meet the minimum standards for training (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2011).

Qualified teachers who pass the administration and academic selection procedures are then trained by the authorized training agency, the Lembaga Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Kepala Sekolah (LPPKS), or the "Agency for School Principal Empowerment and Development" (Ministry of Education, 2018). This agency was initially established to manage the principal preparation training but has since been restructured and renamed to the "Professional Development Center for Educators" (Sekretaris Jenderal, 2022) as part of a broader policy change with the launch of the "Sekolah Penggerak" program.

As mandated by the Education Ministerial Regulation No. 06/2018, school principals training is a requirement for becoming a principal. Therefore, the Professional Development Center for Educators designs the curriculum for this training program, which focuses on "Development of Principals' Managerial Skills" (Sumintono, 2017). The curriculum includes topics such as 1)

student management, 2) human resource management, 3) curriculum development, 4) school development planning, 5) monitoring and evaluation, and 6) the use of information and communication technology in schools (Sumintono, Sheyoputri, Jiang, Misbach, & Jumintono, 2015). The goal of this training is to enhance the competencies of school principals, which are outlined in the ministerial regulation. The regulation specifies that principals must be competent in areas such as personality development, management, entrepreneurship, supervision, and social skills.

The training program is divided into three phases. The first phase is in-service learning 1, which involves a seven-day face-to-face workshop totaling 70 hours at the Professional Development Center for Educators. The second phase is on-the-job learning, which takes place over three months and totals 200 hours. During this phase, candidates implement their action plans at their workplace. The third phase, in-service learning 2, is a follow-up and assessment phase, held face-to-face for three days, totaling 30 hours of learning at the Professional Development Center for Educators. Upon successful completion of all training and assessments, candidates are awarded a principal registration number (Sumintono et al., 2015).

#### b. Japan

In Japan, the process of determining the requirements for becoming a school leader, developing school leaders, and nurturing their leadership abilities is largely managed at the prefectural level. Each prefecture is responsible for setting its own specific criteria for school leaders, with most of them offering leadership development programs as part of their prefecture-wide teacher training systems. These programs typically require a combination of age, teaching experience, and managerial potential for candidates to be considered for administrative roles. In many cases, the training systems are designed to ensure that school leaders possess both practical experience in the classroom and the necessary skills for effective school management.

A critical aspect of leadership development in Japan is the collaboration between local prefectures and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). In partnership with MEXT, the National Center for Teachers' Development (NCTD) offers national leadership development programs for experienced school administrators. These programs are designed to help school leaders enhance their organizational and management skills, as well as to prepare them for the increasingly complex demands of educational governance. School leaders are typically selected based on recommendations from their board of education, ensuring that only those with a demonstrated ability to lead are offered the opportunity to participate in these training programs (Kodama, 2017). Upon completion of the program, participants are expected to take on leadership roles within their regions, spearheading initiatives to improve school management and organizational effectiveness.

The NCTD provides two primary leadership training programs. The first focuses on general school administration, and the second targets aspiring trainers in school organizational management. These programs are designed to cater to school leaders at different stages of their careers, including principals, vice principals, and mid-level administrators. The training programs are comprehensive, covering a wide array of topics relevant to effective school leadership. For instance, in 2015, the training for school administrators centered on four key areas: organizational management, school compliance, risk management, and addressing other teaching-related challenges (Kim & Lee, 2020). These areas reflect the growing need for school leaders to manage not only academic content but also the broader administrative functions required for successful school governance.

The leadership and role of a principal in Japan are increasingly seen as integral to promoting school independence and autonomy. This autonomy is achieved through self-managed school governance, where principals play a crucial role in leading their schools and ensuring they operate efficiently (Pan & Chen, 2021). Historically, principals were regarded primarily as educational specialists focused on pedagogy and teaching quality. However, there has been a significant shift in the expectations for school principals in Japan. Today, principals are expected to be capable administrators who can effectively manage the educational business of their schools, including overseeing school management councils that operate under legal frameworks established

by the government. This change reflects the evolving needs of school leadership, where principals are required to balance educational expertise with strong management capabilities (Akiba, Wang, & Liang, 2015). Consequently, these new administrative responsibilities have led to a reevaluation of the training and preparation required for school principals, moving beyond traditional educational leadership roles to encompass a more business-oriented approach to school management.

School leaders in Japan generally consist of teachers who hold managerial positions at schools, such as principals, vice principals, committee heads, and department heads. In a narrower sense, the term "school leader" typically refers to principals and vice principals. However, in a broader context, it also includes guidance directors and education superintendents, who play pivotal roles in overseeing educational practices and school governance at the district level (Kim & Lee, 2020). While the central education committee defines a school leader broadly, it does not specify exact roles or positions, leaving room for interpretation based on local governance structures.

Leadership training at the national level is primarily offered to selected teachers, often those who are already in or have advanced to leadership roles. Local governments bear a significant responsibility for developing competent school leaders within their jurisdictions, including fostering the leadership abilities of aspiring principals and administrators. Prefectural education centers are central to this process, as they are responsible for planning and implementing prefecture-level teacher training, including specialized leadership programs. These centers work within the framework of the Teacher Training System, which outlines the professional competencies and standards required for teachers and school leaders, ensuring that they meet the evolving demands of the education system (Yokota, 2021).

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable shift in the role of school principals, which has directly influenced the content and structure of leadership training programs. As the expectations for school principals have expanded to include greater administrative and managerial responsibilities, the training programs have been updated to reflect these changes. New skills and competencies, such as financial management, human resources, and risk assessment, are now critical components of leadership training, ensuring that school leaders are well-prepared to manage not only educational processes but also the broader operational aspects of running a school. These modifications in training are a direct response to the changing educational landscape in Japan, where school leaders are expected to navigate increasingly complex school environments while maintaining a focus on student learning outcomes.

## 2. Teacher Professional Development

The success of a school organization is closely tied to the effectiveness of its management system, particularly in how it develops and implements a strategic plan for teacher professional development (PD). Teacher PD is widely understood as activities aimed at improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward their teaching practices (OECD, 2014). Research has consistently shown that teacher PD positively impacts teachers' knowledge, skills, and performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), as well as student learning outcomes (Jacob, Hill, & Corey, 2017). As a result, teacher participation in PD has become a central focus of school reform initiatives, as it plays a critical role in altering teachers' instructional practices and beliefs, enhancing student learning, and supporting the implementation of educational policies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In examining various definitions of professional development, it is clear that PD is not a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a comprehensive process. According to McCracken (2017), professional development is an ongoing process that helps acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for principals and educators to drive school improvement. This comprehensive approach is designed to align leadership practices with the overarching goals of the institution, ensuring that PD activities contribute directly to enhancing the quality of education.

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) further elaborated on professional development by focusing on its andragogical roots. They define PD as a process of sharing experiences and employing teaching strategies that are specifically tailored to adult learners. This perspective

emphasizes the importance of recognizing adult learners' unique needs and learning styles, which require more self-directed, practical, and problem-solving approaches to professional growth.

Additionally, for PD to be truly effective, it must be intensive, continuous, and directly related to teachers' professional practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This perspective highlights the importance of embedding PD into the daily activities of educators, ensuring that professional learning is not isolated or one-off but rather an ongoing, integrated process of improvement. Zepeda (2014a) defines PD as any approach that involves the process of conveying knowledge and refining skills to produce effective teachers and, by extension, effective school principals.

The literature also underscores the role of school principals in fostering an environment where PD is not only valued but also strategically embedded into the school culture. In Japan, the role of school principals in supporting PD is crucial, as they are often the ones who establish policies and allocate resources for PD initiatives. Similarly, in Indonesia, the role of school leadership in PD has been a significant factor in the success of various professional development programs, as principals are tasked with facilitating and sometimes directly leading PD activities for teachers.

Ultimately, the alignment between school principals and teacher PD is essential for creating a learning environment where teachers are supported and empowered to improve teachers practices continuously. The effectiveness of teacher PD, therefore, is contingent on the active involvement of school principals, who must ensure that PD opportunities are relevant, aligned with the needs of teachers, and reflective of the broader educational goals of the school.

## Discussion

The results of this study underscore the critical role that school principals plays in both shaping and sustaining effective teacher professional development (PD) programs. In both Indonesia and Japan, school principals are the key drivers in creating an environment conducive to ongoing professional learning for teachers. The strategic planning of PD at the school level requires not only an understanding of broader educational policies but also an intimate knowledge of how teachers learn and grow. The success of PD programs hinges on the ability of school leaders to foster a culture of continuous improvement, where teachers feel supported and motivated to enhance their skills and instructional practices.

Principals act as instructional leaders, directly influencing the design and delivery of PD programs, ensuring they align with teachers' needs (Bredeson, 2000). In doing so, they play a central role in shaping the direction of professional learning in schools. Moreover, effective school leaders establish a supportive atmosphere that encourages collaboration and open communication among teachers, which is vital for creating a conducive learning environment (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). This collaborative atmosphere helps teachers share best practices, learn from one another, and build a collective commitment to professional growth.

Furthermore, the importance of trust and positive relationships between teachers and administrators cannot be overstated. Strong relationships built on trust and mutual respect are essential for fostering professional growth. These relationships encourage teachers to take risks, share challenges, and engage in continuous learning, all of which are fundamental to the success of any PD program (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). The ability of school principals to nurture such relationships is a key factor in the effectiveness of PD initiatives, making school leadership a critical determinant in the overall success of teacher development.

In Japan, the prefectural government assumes significant responsibility for the recruitment and development of school leaders, directly influencing the quality of teacher professional development (PD) at the local level. Through the National Center for Teachers' Development (NCTD), Japan has established a structured and rigorous approach to leadership development. By offering specialized training for school administrators, the Japanese education system ensures that principals not only possess strong pedagogical knowledge but also the managerial expertise required to lead schools effectively. This dual focus on educational leadership and school management has proven essential in ensuring that principals can balance the demands of governance while maintaining a strong focus on teacher development.

Since the 1980s, Japan's educational reforms have emphasized local government autonomy, allowing for leadership development strategies that are tailored to meet the specific needs of different communities (Yamamoto et al., 2016). This decentralization has enabled regions to adapt their leadership programs according to local contexts, ensuring that school leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to address unique challenges.

Additionally, leadership development in regions like Akita combines both formal training programs and informal learning opportunities. This hybrid approach fosters a comprehensive skill set among school leaders, ensuring they are well-prepared to navigate both the administrative and instructional aspects of their roles (Yamamoto et al., 2016). By integrating formal and informal learning, Japan's leadership development system ensures that principals receive a holistic education that prepares them to effectively lead schools and support teacher PD initiatives.

Conversely, in Indonesia, the decentralization of education in the early 2000s led to the development of a national principal preparation program that set clear standards for leadership. While significant strides have been made in establishing professional development pathways for school principals, the training programs remain largely disconnected from the day-to-day realities of the classroom. As highlighted in the results, principals in Indonesia often experience a disconnect between their training and their actual responsibilities, with much of the focus being on administrative and management tasks rather than instructional leadership. This gap in principal preparation is a potential barrier to the effectiveness of professional development (PD) initiatives, as these programs require more direct involvement from school leaders in driving instructional improvements.

A major issue within the principal training programs in Indonesia is the emphasis on administrative tasks rather than on fostering instructional leadership. Training programs primarily focus on enhancing administrative and management skills, which leaves principals ill-prepared to lead and support educational improvements in the classroom (Sumintono et al., 2015). While these skills are certainly important for overall school management, they do not adequately prepare principals to effectively support teachers in their professional growth or to influence classroom practices. The lack of focus on instructional leadership hampers principals' ability to guide teachers through PD initiatives aimed at improving teaching quality.

Additionally, while the training programs have been standardized, the content often fails to align with the real-world challenges faced by principals in their schools. This misalignment results in a lack of practical application of the skills learned during training (Alladatin et al., 2023). Principals are often left with theoretical knowledge that does not translate well into actionable strategies for improving teaching and learning. This disconnect between training content and the practical demands of school principals leadership is a significant issue that needs to be addressed in order to improve the effectiveness of PD programs in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the development of school leadership and teacher professional development (PD) programs in Indonesia requires a more holistic and integrated approach, drawing from best practices in Japan. The study highlights the critical role of school principals in facilitating teacher PD through continuous leadership and collaborative learning. In Indonesia, although efforts have been made to develop principal training programs, these initiatives tend to focus more on administrative skills and are less connected to the real challenges in the classroom. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of PD, a shift towards a more continuous and relevant approach, closely tied to daily teaching practices, is needed. School principals need to be empowered to play a more active role in supporting and guiding teacher PD, creating a culture of continuous improvement within schools. The implications of these findings are the need to strengthen leadership development programs that emphasize transformational leadership, as well as to integrate PD programs focused on practical teaching skills. Additionally, involving the school community and fostering transparent communication can support continuous improvement efforts. To enhance the quality of education in Indonesia, a more coordinated effort

between school principals' leadership development, teacher PD, and community engagement is essential.

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