

From Vision to Impact: A Strategic Framework for Principal Leadership in Professional Learning Communities

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Abstract:

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have the potential to improve teacher competency and learning quality, yet little research examines the strategic role of principals in their management. This study examines how principals formulate, implement, and evaluate strategies to optimise PLCs. This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model and triangulation. The results indicate that during the formulation stage, principals conducted a needs analysis, established a shared vision and long-term goals, and conducted a SWOT analysis. The implementation stage emphasised direct leadership, empowering leading teachers, providing facilities and standard operating procedures (SOPs), and effective communication. Evaluation was conducted formally and informally with stakeholders using measurable indicators that support sustainability and quality improvement. This strategy fosters collaborative habits, enhances teacher professionalism, and improves learning quality. This study contributes theoretically by linking strategic management to PLC development and offers a practical, replicable model.

Keywords: *Learning Community, Principal Strategy, Formulation, Implementation, Evaluation*

Abstrak:

Komunitas Belajar Profesional (PLC) berpotensi meningkatkan kompetensi guru dan mutu pembelajaran, namun sedikit penelitian menelaah peran strategis kepala sekolah dalam pengelolaannya. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana kepala sekolah merumuskan, mengimplementasikan, dan mengevaluasi strategi untuk mengoptimalkan PLC. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman serta triangulasi. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa pada tahap perumusan kepala sekolah melakukan analisis kebutuhan, menetapkan visi bersama dan tujuan jangka panjang, serta analisis SWOT. Tahap implementasi menekankan kepemimpinan langsung, pemberdayaan guru penggerak, penyediaan fasilitas dan SOP, serta komunikasi yang efektif. Evaluasi dilakukan secara formal dan informal dengan pemangku kepentingan menggunakan indikator terukur yang mendukung keberlanjutan dan peningkatan mutu. Strategi ini menumbuhkan kebiasaan kolaborasi, meningkatkan profesionalisme guru, dan memperbaiki kualitas pembelajaran. Penelitian ini memberi kontribusi teoretis dengan mengaitkan manajemen strategis pada pengembangan PLC dan menawarkan model praktis yang dapat direplikasi.

Kata Kunci: *Komunitas Belajar, Strategi Kepala Sekolah, Formulasi, Implementasi, Evaluasi*

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is one of the fundamental pillars in improving education quality in Indonesia. According to Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, teacher competencies are divided into four types, Pedagogic, Personality, Social, and Professional. This is further elaborated in the Director General of GTK Regulation No.2626/B/HK 04.01/2023 which describes the teacher competency model including competencies, levels, descriptions, and indicators of perpetrators. The competency-based approach emphasizes that competent teachers not only have knowledge, but are also able to apply professional skills and actions in their entirety in the learning process (Biesta, 2015). Therefore, improving teacher competence is the key to raising the quality of education in Indonesia.

One of the strategic forums to develop teacher competence is the Learning Community (PLC). This community is a space for collaboration, discussion, and sharing of good practices between teachers, as stipulated in Circular Letter No. 426/B/HK.04.01/2023 and strengthened by the Teacher Learning Day policy (SE No. 5684/MDM.B1/HK.04.00/2025). In addition to being part of the implementation strategy of the Independent Curriculum, the learning community also plays an important role in building a culture of continuous learning among teachers (Geletu et al., 2023; BBGP Central Java, 2022).

A survey in Rembang Regency revealed that 95% of junior high schools already have a learning community, but their effectiveness is still low. The main challenges faced include: (1) activities that tend to be formalities without having a real impact on teacher competence, (2) low spirit of collaboration and a culture of independent learning, and (3) limited time and managerial support. Previous research confirms that school principals play a major role in determining the climate and success of learning communities (Titihalawa et al., n.d., 2023; Yuliaty et al., 2025), but the findings of Balyer et al. (2015) and Kundiaستuti & Soedjono (2024) show that this role is still not optimal.

Based on these conditions, this study focuses on analyzing the principal's strategy in three stages of strategy management, namely formulation, implementation, and evaluation, to optimize the learning community in schools. This approach is different from previous studies that generally only discussed the existence of learning communities as an institutional forum. This research focuses on strengthening processes, interaction dynamics, and sustainability of activities. The location of the research is SMP Negeri 2 Pancur, Rembang, which has an active "Kopi Dupa" learning community every week and is known as a pioneer of numeracy literacy in its area.

Many studies have discussed the importance of community learning (Wang & An, 2023) and the role of school principals (Obuba, 2022; Suharto, 2023). However, in-depth studies related to the principal's strategy in the three stages of strategy management in the context of optimizing the learning community in

junior high schools are still rarely carried out.

Based on this background, the objectives of this study are: (1) to describe and analyze the formulation of the principal's strategy in optimizing the learning community, (2) to examine its implementation, and (3) to examine the evaluation of the strategy. This research is expected to enrich educational leadership theory and provide practical guidance for principals and teachers to build a collaborative culture and sustainable professionalism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of how school principals manage and optimize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at the school level. The study aims to describe in detail the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies by the principal in managing PLCs, as well as its impact on teacher competence development and learning quality.

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur, Rembang Regency, Central Java, because the school demonstrates a strong commitment to developing PLCs to improve learning quality. The principal of this school is actively involved in implementing management strategies that support teacher development through collaboration and professional learning. The location was selected based on the consideration that it provides a representative example of PLC management strategies at the junior high school level.

Data were collected through three main techniques: non-participant observation of PLC activities at the school, semi-structured interviews with the principal, vice principal, five selected teachers, and the school supervisor, as well as document analysis (including the School Budget Plan, Standard Operating Procedures, activity records, reflection notes, and monitoring documents). The combination of these data collection techniques ensures a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of PLC management strategies applied in the school.

Data analysis in this study followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction refers to the process of organizing and focusing on relevant information by coding the data into themes such as formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the strategies used in managing PLCs. This step helps to distill the data into manageable chunks. Data display involves presenting the reduced data in a visual format, such as tables or matrices, to facilitate pattern recognition and comparisons. The conclusion drawing phase is where the researcher identifies emerging patterns, trends, and relationships, linking them back to the theoretical framework to draw meaningful insights about the principal's strategic management of PLCs. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was applied by cross-checking data from different sources (interviews, observations, documents) and techniques, enhancing the study's credibility and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

SMP Negeri 2 Pancur, established in 2003, is an A-accredited school that occupies an area of 6,449 m² with a beautiful environmental atmosphere, far from the hustle and bustle of the city, and supported by a rural culture that upholds harmony and concern for education, even though the majority of its students come from lower-middle economic families. The school's vision emphasises the quality of faith, morals, achievements, culture, and environmental concern. Meanwhile, its mission includes character building, improvement in academic and non-academic achievement, and 21st-century skill development.

In the 2024/2025 school year, the school has 216 students with various achievements at the district level, supported by adequate infrastructure and well-qualified educators, including one teacher with a master's degree. Since January 2024, the school's leadership has changed. The new principal, WWF, known for being communicative, visionary, and highly committed to building a collaborative learning culture, increased the Education Report Card's achievement and won the title of Provincial Adiwiyata School. The analysis of the Education Report Card shows the need for improvements in character indicators, learning quality, and numeracy skills, which then become the focus of school development.

One of the principal's strategic steps is to optimise the learning community "KOPI DUPA" (Collaborative of Innovative Learners SMP Negeri 2 Pancur), which previously existed but was not optimally organised. Since its re-initiation at the beginning of her leadership period, KOPI DUPA has developed into a pioneer community of literacy and numeracy at the junior high school level of Rembang Regency and successfully qualified as a participant in the GTK Hebat Jamboree 2024 in the Inspirational Learning Community category. This optimisation effort includes formulating strategies, structured implementation, and continuous evaluation, to make the learning community a driving force for improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as a means to realise the school's vision and mission.

Strategy Formulation

The stages of strategy formulation to optimise the learning community include the components of identifying the needs of the learning community, developing the school's vision and mission that supports the learning community, identifying opportunities and challenges about the learning community, analysing the school's internal weaknesses and strengths, and setting long-term goals for the learning community.

The formulation of strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur begins with identifying teacher needs through assessments and learning supervision results. The teacher needs analysis (Table 1) indicated that the learning community scored an average of 3.57, positioning it as a high priority compared to other needs such as teaching media (3.36) and varied instructional strategies (3.29). This highlights the urgency of strengthening collaborative forums as part of environmental scanning in strategic management.

Table 1. Results of Teacher Needs Analysis

Indicator	Average Score
Lesson Plan per semester	3.64
School learning community	3.57
Teaching media used	3.36
Varied models/strategies	3.29

Initially, the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur started informally during the pandemic to share technology skills (Google Classroom, Zoom, Canva). Then it became more structured after the official policy was issued. The decision to establish it was inaugurated through the Principal's Decree Number 014.31/002/2024 concerning the management of the KOPI DUPA Learning Community. Furthermore, the strategy formulation step involved formulating the school's vision and mission in line with the development of the learning community. In particular, the fifth mission, which emphasises the development of intellectual, social, and emotional skills and local culture, became the cornerstone of this strategy.

To respond to these findings, the principal conducted a SWOT analysis. The strengths included school readiness across content, process, and educator standards (>75%) and the presence of 5 driving teachers (29.5%) who acted as change agents. The weaknesses were the limited Time allocation and administrative workload that often reduced teachers' focus. Opportunities came from government support through literacy-numeracy programs and professional development policies, while threats included resistance to change and low motivation from some teachers. By mapping these factors, the principal was able to formulate strategies that integrated the learning community's mission into the School Activity Plan (RKS) and aligned it with National Education Standards (Yulianti, Soedjono, & Sudana, 2025). The School Activity Plan (RKS) for FY 2024/2025 thus included the development of learning communities aligned with three national education standards (Content Standards, Process Standards, Educator and Education Personnel Standards), with a target of 100% achievement.

The long-term proposal for the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur is outlined in the principal's Real Action Plan (RAN) document, which includes improving teacher performance in student-centred learning and strengthening the learning community's role as a forum for discussion to enhance the quality of learning.

The results of the school supervisor's assessment also confirmed that the success of the learning community at SMPN 2 Pancur was influenced by careful planning, including timing, material fillers, potential impacts on students, and evaluation plans. The consistency of implementation is strong evidence that the strategy formulation was effective.

As the supervisor emphasised, "We have been accompanying the school from the very beginning, when there was no learning community until it was established. At the start, the principal had already designed several programs, one of which was the learning community. We stressed that if a program was to be created, it had to be well planned. Fortunately, the principal responded

quickly to this challenge. Before the learning community was formally implemented, he had already arranged the timing, who would deliver the material, who would share experiences, whether it would interfere with students, and how the evaluation would be conducted. This initial planning was reflected in the consistent implementation we observed. SMPN 2 Pancur is one of the schools with a well-sustained learning community, and this consistency is the result of mature planning. Many schools hold learning communities just for formality, without clear programs, and the results are minimal. In contrast, SMPN 2 Pancur has shown a clear direction."

Strategy Implementation

The implementation of the optimisation strategy of the KOPI DUPA Learning Community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur focuses on five components: the commitment of school leaders, resource organisation, effective communication, evaluation and monitoring, and adjustments to development.

The principal demonstrated strong commitment by serving as the primary driver of the learning community, establishing the Management Decree and designating KOPI DUPA as a priority program for the school. This commitment is strengthened through direct involvement in activities, the provision of special space and Time (every Friday at 10.30–11.00 after KBM), and ensuring that implementation does not infringe on students' right to learn. Consistency is the key to success, as acknowledged by the school supervisor; the activities continue to run even though the principal is unable to attend.

The organisation of resources starts from agreement with teachers, the formation of management structures, the preparation of Learning Community SOPs that contain general objectives, special goals, activity plans, and success indicators (for example, 80% of active teachers, the existence of teaching modules, learning innovations, good practice expos, and improvement of student learning outcomes). Socialisation is carried out formally through meetings and informally with a personal approach to invite teachers who are initially hesitant.

KOPI DUPA activities include workshops, module discussions, peer teaching, sharing best practices, and disseminating training results. The learning community is also a forum for coordinating school programs such as P5 and Adiwiyata. Communication is established effectively through teachers' WhatsApp groups and activity flyers. Observations show a relaxed yet focused learning atmosphere, an interesting use of learning media, and active teacher participation.

There are adjustments to developments, for example, the delivery of the latest materials, such as AI-based learning media. Activities are carried out weekly, but can be added as needed. All teachers have the opportunity to participate in out-of-school training and serve as resource persons during dissemination. The principal also serves as a learner, fostering a collaborative and egalitarian atmosphere. The implementation was closed with a reflection session and feedback from the principal, including appreciation, a readiness evaluation, and suggestions for further improving the activity.

Strategy Evaluation

The strategy evaluation stage in the optimisation of the "KOPI DUPA" learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur is carried out consistently and integrated into each activity. The evaluation aims to ensure the program's sustainability, identify successes and bottlenecks, and develop relevant follow-up plans. Based on observations, interviews, and document reviews, it is evident that evaluation reflection is routinely conducted at the end of each learning community meeting. Although most evaluations are still conducted orally, there is evidence of teacher reflection notes that include detailed information on new knowledge, practical activities, peer good practices, impact on learning, and suggestions for improvement.

Table 2. Summary of Reflection Findings of Teachers

Reflection Aspect	Key Findings	Examples/Evidence
New Knowledge/Skills	Digital learning technologies (Gamma, ChatGPT, Canva, AI, Scratch), innovative lesson planning, differentiated learning, interactive media, literacy-numeracy lesson plans.	"We learned how to make quick questions and lesson plans with Gamma."
Most Useful Parts	Sessions of sharing good practices and reflection, hands-on practice of learning applications.	Observation: the teacher was enthusiastic during the role play & game session.
Peer Good Practices	Crossword puzzles for social studies, narrative text role play, WOW games, differentiated learning, Gamma for lesson plans.	Teacher's reflection notes.
Impact on Learning	Teachers are more creative, innovative, confident, student-oriented, open to technology.	Teacher interview: "We became more enthusiastic about teaching."
Difficulties & Solutions	Limited time, fatigue, drowsiness; Solution: complement each other, study independently, bring a laptop.	Field observations.
Teacher's Contribution	Become a resource person, share good practices, give ideas, apply learning outcomes.	Attendance records and resource person schedules.
Suggestion	Add hands-on practice sessions, external speakers, consistent schedules, focus on real student results.	Interview results of senior teachers.
Self-Reflection	Teachers feel motivated, ready to face curriculum changes, and aware of the importance of improving learning.	"I feel like I'm a teacher."

Teachers were encouraged to conduct structured reflections at the end of each activity, and the results were summarised in Table 2. The findings show that teachers gained new knowledge, such as AI-based learning tools and differentiated instruction, identified applicable practices (peer teaching, role play, WOW games), and acknowledged positive impacts on their creativity and confidence in managing student-centred learning. At the same Time, difficulties such as Time constraints and fatigue were addressed collectively through peer support and independent study initiatives. In addition, teachers actively served as resource persons, shared best practices, and proposed improvements for

future agendas, demonstrating that reflection served as a strategic instrument rather than an administrative formality.

In addition to teachers, the evaluation also involves other internal stakeholders such as students and the school management team. Students provide feedback on changes in teaching methods, which then become material for improvement in the learning community. External stakeholders, such as school supervisors, also play a role in monitoring, accompanying, and evaluating the program. She said, "If the school includes the Learning Community as a Program, we will automatically evaluate it at the end of the year... Many schools are motivated through learning communities."

Evaluation data also indicated that implementation consistency reached 90% in the initial stage and improved to 100 % in the following semester. The monitoring and evaluation instrument for KOPI DUPA comprises 22 indicators across planning, implementation, material quality, results, and documentation. However, this instrument has not been used to its fullest. However, the evaluation went well through other mechanisms, such as the Table of activity achievement per period.

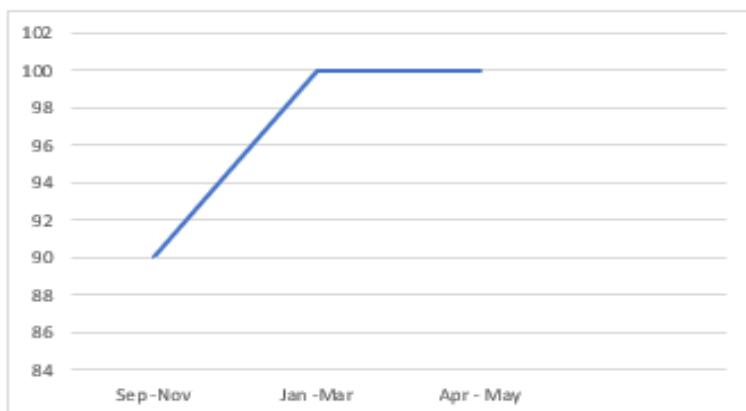


Figure 1. Percentage of KOPI DUPA implementation
(Source: KOPI DUPA 2024/2025 Monitoring Document)

The evaluation results showed that in the initial period (Sep-Nov), the implementation reached 90% because it was still in the stage of forming the management and agenda. In the following two periods (Jan-March and April-May), implementation reached 100%, indicating stable, structured, and consistent progress.

Learning supervision is another evaluation instrument that measures the impact of learning communities on teaching practices. The Vice Principal for Curriculum recognises improvements in teacher competence, collaboration, and creativity in learning, which have a positive impact on student comfort and learning outcomes. He said, "The involvement of all elements of the school makes learning more interesting...children accept a learning model other than in the classroom."

The follow-up analysis showed that the evaluation results led to an even semester activity plan, which includes routine activities every Friday after teaching and learning sessions, a focus on learning reflection, P5 plans, and

sharing good practices, as well as training in literacy, numeracy, and educational technology. The principal also emphasised the need for more comprehensive evaluation documentation in the future, even though teachers' learning outcomes have been well documented in the school's digital system. This is in accordance with the principal's statement, "We always do evaluation... But it has not been documented in detail. In the future, this is what we will improve."

The results of observations, interviews, and document reviews indicate that there is a Publication Team in the management of the Learning Community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur. Its role is not only to document and publicise activities, but also to build the school's image (school branding). The school supervisor appreciated the quality of this publication, even assessing that not all big schools have a publication team as good as SMPN 2 Pancur. Neat documentation becomes a portfolio of activities while making monitoring easier.

The impact of the learning community optimisation strategy can be seen in increased teacher and student achievement, creativity, and innovation. Collaboration established through discussions, sharing good practices, and coordination produces various ideas that are manifested in school activities and competition participation. The Vice Principal emphasised that this collaboration makes teachers more creative and students more excited.

Discussion

This study analyses the strategy for optimising the "KOPI DUPA" learning community, implemented by the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Pancur, through the three stages of strategic management outlined by David & David (2016): formulation, implementation, and evaluation. This approach provides a systematic analytical framework that enables an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the principal's practical actions and strategic management theory, while also allowing comparisons with previous research findings.

Strategy Formulation

The formulation stage at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur began with assessing teachers' needs through early semester meetings, classroom supervision, and informal discussions. This step aligns with the environmental scanning principle in David & David's (2016) framework, which emphasises identifying internal and external factors before formulating strategies. Additionally, the principal conducted a SWOT analysis to map strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, followed by setting a vision and mission as well as measurable long-term goals. This strategy aligns with Bryson's (2018) view that evidence-based formulation ensures that the program is relevant to real needs. These findings reinforce Ichwan's (2024) study, which stated that a needs-based vision and mission increase teachers' sense of ownership. However, this research differs in a key respect: the integration of the learning community's mission into the School Activity Plan (RKS) and the National Education Standards, which Ichwan's work did not explicitly address.

In addition, integrating the learning community's objectives into the RKS and National Education Standards demonstrates that strategic formulation was not merely procedural but transformative, ensuring that PLC activities are

embedded in the school's broader quality assurance system. This strengthens Krasniqi's (2020) argument that principals who align strategic plans with institutional policies are more likely to sustain PLCs in the long term, because teachers perceive the program as part of their professional duty rather than an additional workload.

Strategy Implementation

The implementation stage at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur demonstrates the principal's direct involvement in leading activities, setting regular schedules, facilitating training, and optimising the role of guru penggerak (transformational teachers) as the community's core drivers. This practice aligns with the strategy implementation concept by Hunger & Wheelen (2020), which emphasises resource management, clear role division, and effective communication. The use of communication media such as WhatsApp groups, bulletin boards, and weekly meetings strengthened coordination, aligning with Hudson (2024) findings that open communication is the foundation of thriving Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Recent studies also highlight the principal's essential role in fostering a collaborative culture through transformational leadership practices, which include empowering teacher leaders, providing ongoing professional development, and actively participating in professional learning community processes (Adeoye et al., 2025; Lagarense et al., 2025). This leadership style has been shown to improve teacher engagement and innovation by building trust and shared responsibility among teachers (Kılıç et al., 2024; Adeoye et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the integration of educational technology and digital platforms to support learning communities is increasingly recognised as a critical component for sustaining teacher collaboration and adapting to evolving educational needs (Gu et al., 2023). The 100% implementation rate confirms that the key success factors identified by Leso et al. (2023) – leadership commitment, appropriate organisational structure, adequate resources, and a continuous evaluation system – have been met. Compared to Titihalawa et al. (2024), this strategy excels in integrating educational technology (e.g., AI and digital platforms), which was not the primary focus of that study.

Moreover, the principal's active role as both leader and learner demonstrates characteristics of distributed leadership, in which authority and expertise are shared among teacher leaders. This resonates with Truong et al. (2025), who highlight that effective PLCs in Southeast Asia thrive when principals decentralise authority and cultivate collective ownership of professional growth. The continuous use of reflective practices and technology integration further demonstrates adaptive leadership, which is crucial in preparing teachers to face rapid curricular and technological changes.

Strategy Evaluation

The evaluation stage was conducted formally at the end of each semester and informally after each learning community meeting, involving the principal, teachers, supervisors, and the school committee. Evaluation instruments included teachers' reflection notes, attendance records, activity documentation,

and observations of teaching practices. This approach is consistent with David & David's (2016) evaluation concept, which includes reviewing internal and external factors, measuring performance, and taking corrective actions. The findings reinforce Titihalawa et al.'s (2023) conclusion that regular evaluations have a positive impact on pedagogical competence and teaching quality. However, this research differs by combining participatory evaluation with an integrated digital documentation system, which facilitates monitoring and enhances school branding.

Beyond that, the participatory evaluation model fosters a feedback loop that not only measures performance but also builds a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. This aligns with Lee et al. (2022), who emphasise that reliable PLC evaluation instruments must capture both process and impact dimensions, such as teacher collaboration quality and student learning outcomes. At SMP Negeri 2 Pancur, the integration of reflection notes, digital documentation, and supervisor monitoring indicates that evaluation has become a driver of innovation rather than merely a means of compliance with administrative requirements.

Overall, the principal's strategy at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur not only aligns with the theoretical framework of strategic management but also enriches the discourse on learning community management by integrating programs, adapting to technology, and branding through publications. Similarities with previous studies lie in the emphasis on leadership and teacher collaboration, while differences appear in the level of integration and innovation. These findings imply that the sustainability of learning communities requires structural support, a culture of mutual accountability, and the use of technology to maintain relevance amid educational developments.

CONCLUSION

The principal's strategy to optimise the "KOPI DUPA" learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur follows three complementary stages. In formulation, the principal identifies teacher needs, establishes the vision and mission, conducts a SWOT analysis, and defines measurable, long-term goals aligned with school conditions to build teacher ownership. Implementation involves the principal's direct leadership, optimising driving teachers, providing facilities, preparing SOPs, and ensuring effective communication, achieving 100% implementation and adapting to technological advances. Evaluation is conducted formally and informally with stakeholders, using measurable tools to assess strengths and weaknesses and identify follow-up actions, ensuring sustainability and continuous improvement.

Recommendations include maintaining consistent, data-driven strategy cycles, expanding inter-school collaboration, and using learning communities for ongoing teacher development and innovation. Local governments and supervisors should provide policy, training, and recognition to exemplary schools. Future research could adopt quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to measure the impact on student outcomes and teacher performance, and to compare learning community effectiveness across educational levels.

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