

**Discussing Instructional Leadership in the Context of
Sekolah Penggerak (*Transforming Schools*)****Raihani**Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
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trimaulana@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper discusses the concept of instructional school leadership introduced by the government to schools in Indonesia as part of a larger educational reform since 2019. Although the spirit of employing a type of instructional leadership has been quite strong from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MOECRT), a solid and thoughtful concept is hardly found. Therefore, this paper uses a training material that was incorporated in the Guru Penggerak training which includes a slide for instructional leadership. We analyse this material in the light of the evolving theories of instructional leadership in the literature, contextual demands and changes occurring surrounding schools. We found that Rutherford's concept of instructional leadership used in the 'Guru Penggerak' training does not seem to be in line with the literature since it is too broadly conceptualised and does not at all touch the very core business of classroom and instruction.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, School Leadership, Indonesian Education, Sekolah Penggerak.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has recently launched a series of new initiatives to reform its education and school. One of the flagships of such initiatives is Program Sekolah Penggerak (Transforming School Program). The translation of Sekolah Penggerak into "transforming school" may attract debates and controversy, although we prefer to use "transforming" to translate "penggerak" as it represents the program's core objective, that is to reshape some schools to become models for, and to help them, to transform other schools. In some articles, we saw a literal translation of it so that it reads "moving schools", which of course hardly represent the true meaning of the program.

A large vision of the transforming school program, as it is written on the official website, is to transform Indonesia who is advent, independent, and having integrity through the creation of Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Students)¹. In the official academic document (Tim Puslitjak, 2020), there are five types of intervention in the program, namely: 1. Consultative and asymmetric mentorship; 2. Human resources empowerment; 3. New learning paradigm; 4. Evidence-based educational planning; and 5. School digitalisation. Currently, there have been

three batches of schools already until the end of 2022, which accumulated into 14,237 schools across Indonesia. This is small compared to the total number of schools which is more than 217,000 schools excluding a significant number of Islamic day schools (madrasah).

One of the transforming school program foci is the capacity building of school leaders that opted to participate in the program. The government believes that school leaders for the transforming schools need to be trained in instructional leadership because this particular style of leadership corresponds squarely with instructional processes practiced in schools (PSKP, 2023; Tim Puslitjak, 2020). In other words, as coined in the literature (Blase & Blase, 2000; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001; Zepeda, 2004), instructional school leaders are focused with improving teaching and learning. As part of their jobs, they are active in supervising teaching and learning processes and provide useful feedback for teachers. In essence, they are oriented to see their students successful in learning.

While there is an ambition to improve the qualities of school leadership in such a new shape of

¹ <https://psp-web.pauddikdasmen.kemdikbud.go.id/#/home>

school, more thoughtful conception of instructional leadership coming out from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT) has been hardly found. There is, however, some information that could be drawn from the workshop materials for the Guru Penggerak training. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we will use this as a point of discussion with questions of how this conception corresponds to the widely available literature on instructional leadership and how it responds to the country's characteristics of changes and diversity which are manifested in contemporary Indonesia schools. This paper, therefore, aims to offer a contribution to the discussions of instructional leadership that is hopefully suitable for schools operating in the Indonesian context. It argues that instructional leadership in Indonesian schools should be conceptualised to not only cover aspects of teaching and learning, but also responds to issues of educational changes and cultural diversity.

Methodology of the Research

This paper is derived from an intensive study of instructional leadership that is being implemented in Indonesian schools. This study used a content analysis method by selecting relevant documents readily available online and supplied by reliable persons. Content analysis is a method employed to value and analyse certain words or themes to answer the determined research questions. We collected the documents from both online and training materials, analysed and interpret to generate conclusions for this paper. We used "phare" and "sentence" as the levels of analysis to generate codes and categories. We compared the codes and categories in one document with another to gain more insightful interpretation, and draw conclusions (Elo et al., 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Current reforms in Indonesian education

Since the inception of the 2019 Jokowi administration, Indonesian education has been undertaking significant reforms initiated by the new minister of education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT) introduced a larger program called "Merdeka Belajar" which subsumes twenty-five flagship programs or episodes (Kemendikbudristek, 2021a). Merdeka belajar is to transform Indonesian education into an effective process to enable its competitive human resources that internalise in themselves "Pancasila Profile". Students with Pancasila Profile possess the spirit of life-long learning, a global insight, and behaviours that are

underpinned by Pancasila values. According to the Ministry, they would have six characteristics including having faith and piety, good morality, diverse and global insight, collaborative attitudes, independency, critical thinking ability, and creativity. Further as stated in its website, one of the 25 episodes of Merdeka Belajar which will be the focus of this paper is Program Sekolah Penggerak (PSP) or Transforming School Program (Episode 7).

PSP is part of the current government's plan to realize the vision of an advanced Indonesia that is sovereign and independent through the improvement of education. This program focuses on developing holistic student learning outcomes that include competencies (literacy and numeracy) and characters and begins with superior human resources (principals and teachers). This program is aimed at perfecting the school transformation program that had been implemented before. PSP began to be implemented in 2021 by involving 2,492 schools from all levels of education in 34 provinces and 111 districts/cities (PSKP, 2023). One hundred percent of schools participating in this program is expected to occur in the next few years. This program has five main characteristics, namely: collaboration between the ministry and local government, carried out holistically, covering all school conditions, using a three-year mentoring approach, and integrated with the school ecosystem. In addition, the program intervenes in five areas: consultative and asymmetric assistance, strengthening school human resources, learning with new paradigms, data-driven planning, and school digitalization.

As mentioned in the framework of the PSP change theory (PSKP, 2023; Tim Puslitjak, 2020), every intervention carried out is expected to cause positive changes for improving the quality of learning both quickly and long-term. At the education unit (school) level, the first impact that is expected to emerge is the improvement of knowledge and skills of principals and teachers. This increase in the knowledge and skills of the principal/teacher will trigger an improvement in the quality of the learning process followed by an increase in student learning outcomes. In PSP, positive achievements in education units are also expected to be transmitted to surrounding education units. Meanwhile, at the regional level, PSP intervention will be able to produce an initial impact in the form of a paradigm shift and improvement in the competence of regional human resources such as in the Education Office and supervisors. This initial change will trigger the growth of regional ecosystems oriented towards improving the quality of learning marked by various programs, budget adjustments and regulations that support the transformation of education units in improving student learning outcomes.

Instructional leadership in the literature

One of the significant change initiatives brought by PSP is school leadership which is now directed towards instructional leadership. Previously, in our observation, school leadership in Indonesia was conceptualised with a stronger emphasis on managerial competencies of school leaders as can be seen in the National Education Standards (Raihani, 2007, 2008). This observation is in line with the Minister's statement that school leaders should not become operational leaders². This statement corresponds to the practice of school leadership which is generally more oriented to administrative routines which make school leaders like administration gate keepers. On day to day basis, school principals were often stranded in such routines as signing papers, attending meetings and ceremonies, and trying to comply with managerial requirements of school. This picture of school leadership, however, does not depict all practices of school leaders. Usually, as Raihani's previous research support cited above, schools that achieve an outstanding performance are led by exceptional principals whose leadership is exercised beyond the above managerial orientations.

Although the Ministry promotes instructional leadership as a way to improve leadership practices that supports the initiative of PSP, they have not solidly introduced any concept of such leadership. Our extensive search for such a concept in the Ministry's webpages only led us to sporadic opinions on instructional leadership. The most explicit information of the concept is a PSP booklet officially written by the Ministry in which school leaders are described to incorporate collaborative competencies to work with other principals and implement instructional leadership and management (Kemendikbudristek, 2021b, p. 12). More explanations seem to be left to other stakeholders including academics who have written many pieces of articles on this type of school leadership. It is interesting, however, to learn that their conception of instructional leadership seems to be limited to a narrow concept of curriculum and academic leadership.

Pertinent to our critiques above, in line with the evolutionary division of instructional leadership (Ng, 2019; Sheppard, 1996; White, 2021), we would like to argue that instructional leadership as a concept can be placed in either one of two ways, namely: first, it is considered as a part of school leadership, not as an overarching concept of leadership in school, or second, it is conceptualised as an overarching concept to embrace all aspects of school leadership practices that facilitate the transformation of student learning. The first choice

would lead to a consequence that instructional leadership may be excessively promoted at the cost of other aspects of leadership which are also significantly important for school improvement. Meanwhile, the second option would broaden the concept of instructional leadership into the inclusion of such aspects in the conception. The following section articulates the argument further and support it with global references.

The narrow conception of instructional leadership proposes a definition of leadership practices that directly have an impact on classroom teaching and learning such classroom supervision. In this conception, school principals are usually required to accomplish traditional tasks of instructional leaders, which encompass the conduction of setting up specific goals, assigning resources to teaching and learning, managing curriculums, supervising lesson plans, and assessing teachers (Qin, 2022, p. 95). Setting up specific goals mean that instructional school leaders understand the existing position of teaching and learning, and this leads to the formulation of its pedagogical objectives both for teachers and students. The principals identify and utilise resources available to support the process of teaching and learning, that would help teachers to improve their teaching practices. Instructional school leaders also manage school curriculum and supervise lesson plans and teaching practices. In addition, they regularly and continuously evaluate teacher performance and provide corresponding feedback for improvement.

The above narrow characteristics of instructional leadership directly shoot the heart of teaching and learning at school. However, they could not respond to all school demands for simultaneous moves towards school improvement. Although student outcomes are the ultimate goals of all education efforts and programs and they are achieved through classroom teaching and learning as the most direct factors, preconditions of these should be considered equally pivotal. Failure to establish these preconditions means possibly unsuccessful efforts in improving teaching and learning practices, and hence potential failure in facilitating to high student achievement. Therefore, experts have tried to propose a broader concept of instructional leadership to encompass almost all aspects of school as leadership's work targets. Hallinger and Murphy (1987) suggest a useful model by conceptualising three broad dimensions of instructional leadership, i.e., defining school's mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. These dimensions cater almost schooling processes from the missions through the very near end to student outcomes. This

² <https://gtk.kemdikbud.go.id/read-news/mendikbud-kepala-sekolah-harus-menjadi-instructional-leader>

means that this comprehensive conception is designed to work on the establishment and refinement of factors that lead to the betterment of learning climate for students to achieve high learning outcomes.

David Ng (2019) explains that each of the three above dimensions embeds certain functions. Defining school's missions consists of the functions of framing the school's goals and communicating the school's goals. Instructional school leaders have the responsibility to develop school's vision and missions, share them with school's stakeholders, and align other's visions and missions so that they all are on the same page of school development and improvement. The dimension of managing instructional programs comprises coordinating curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, and monitoring student progress. An instructional school leader should have the capability of coordinating curriculum by developing further school curriculum, involving teachers in the curriculum process, ensuring that the curriculum meet the national standards, and guide teachers through curriculum adaptation and changes. Supervising and evaluating instruction means that school principals conduct a regular and continuous monitoring and evaluation of how teachers do their jobs. Similarly, they have to constantly monitor students' learning progress. All of these monitoring and evaluation activities should aim at improving both teaching and learning practices.

The dimension of promoting positive school climate encompasses protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility. Instructional school leaders are required to ensure that learning timetable and timeline are followed as guidelines for implementing the teaching and learning process at school. To motivate both teachers and students, they also need to provide incentives and rewards for both of them. For teacher improvement particularly, they should foster professional development for teachers and themselves. They need to become a role model for teachers in continuous efforts in capacity building. Instructional leaders, therefore, should maintain their visibility among teachers and students at school since their existence could become gatekeepers as well as inspirations for others. David Ng concludes that all these leadership activities can together contribute to the creation of a supportive school climate for effective teaching and learning.

Instructional leadership in the eye of Guru Penggerak trainers

As indicated earlier, there is no a single set of instructional leadership style and practices officially

proposed by MoECRT. After we searched in all accessible materials, we found materials for the Guru Penggerak training that include a specific power point presentation slide that describes a set of characteristics of instructional leadership (Nurchayani & Rajasa, n.d.). This conception has seemed to be drawn from a Twitter post by Mike Rutherford in October 2017³. Mike Rutherford is the President of Rutherford Learning Group, Inc., whose main concern is with improving educational leadership. The Guru Penggerak trainers seem to have used Rutherford's material on instructional leadership in coaching participating teachers who would eventually become principals. Rutherford's concept of instructional leadership was used by the module developers as complementary to their training module of "Pengambilan Keputusan Berbasis Nilai-Nilai Kebijakan Pemimpin" or Decision Making Based on Leaders' Good Values". The Rutherford's concept that has been translated into Indonesian can be seen in the picture below. It is important, however, to note that this concept might not be used as the official concept of instructional leadership, but it seems to be widely used for teacher training in the context of Guru Penggerak.



Picture 1. Rutherford's Instructional Leadership

The picture above depicts Rutherford's Instructional Leadership which seems to start from clear and compelling direction. This direction will inspire leadership activities of instructional leaders to achieve objectives. The leadership goes on to develop self-knowledge, which is the ability of school leaders to understand their own existing conditions both internal and external. Instructional leaders, as the picture suggests, should pay attention to work-life balance through careful management of time and life so that healthy life and fruitful works can be achieved. These leaders set very clear objectives, share them with others in the organisation, and use these objectives to develop coherent activities and programs. This is in this concept of instructional leadership 'shared purpose and coherent work'. In making decisions on school matters, instructional leaders use ethics as bases and

³<https://twitter.com/RLGMike/status/917817829902159874>

foundations to ensure the creation of a fair, just, caring and meritocratic workplace.

Communication, influence, and persuasion are part of the inherent qualities of effective instructional leaders. These leaders communicate ideas and collaborate with others in order to exercise influence to achieve leadership objectives. They must be able to persuade teachers and other staff to work on what previously agreed and what they think good for schools. Instructional leaders work in supportive culture, climate, and community. Often these conditions are not readily available in the first place, but school leaders need to work to create them. Beyond the above qualities, they should also think of leadership succession. They identify several potential candidates to continue their work when they leave either for retirement or another job. They actively prepare these candidates to become future instructional leaders of the schools.

Apart from the above trained material, we found an ‘Peraturan Dirjen Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan No. 6565/B/GT/2020’ (the Regulation of General Director for Teachers and Educational Admin Staff) of MoECRT on Model of Teacher Competencies, which outlines a quite complete set of school leadership. It includes instructional leadership which sets out four competencies, namely: leading the efforts to create a supporting learning environment, leading planning processes for student-centred teaching, leading reflections and evaluation for student learning improvement, and engaging parents to coaching their children in learning. This regulation also explains these competencies with several corresponding indicators. Although this regulation looks good and responsive to the current conditions of school leadership, for some reasons it has not been used to guide the current training practices of principal leadership.

Discussion and Conclusion

Investigating into the translated concept of Rutherford’s instructional leadership, we were first concerned with the translation accuracy of each characteristic contained in the original concept. We list here a comparison table of all the characteristics to make it clear how accurate is the translation.

Table 1. Comparison of Translation

Original Text	Translation	Accuracy
Self Knowledge	Pengetahuan diri	Ok
Time & Life Management	Manajemen waktu & Kehidupan	Ok
Change Agency	Agen Perubahan	Ok
Shared Purpose & Coherent Effort	Tujuan dan Usaha Bersama	Tujuan Bersama & Usaha Koheren

Ethical Decision Making	Pengambilan Keputusan Beretika	Ok
Communication , Influence, Persuasion	Pengaruh komunikasi persuasif	Komunikasi , Pengaruh, Persuasi
Culture, Climate, Community	Budaya, Iklan, Komunitas	Ok
Leadership transition & Succession Planning	Transisi kepemimpinan dan perencanaan suksesi	Ok
Clear, Compelling Direction	Arahan yang jelas dan tegas	ok

From the table above, most translation of the original texts is accurate. There are a couple translations that could be fixed to become more accurate, although only one of the two that might be misleading into practices different from what the concept initiator wants, namely: tujuan dan usaha bersama. Shared purpose should be translated into tujuan bersama, and coherent efforts should be translated into usaha koheren. Conceptually, these characteristics mean that instructional leaders should establish shared purposes among school’s stakeholders, and all the efforts to improve school conditions and student learning should be coherent with those purposes and one effort should be coherent with another.

Rutherford’s concept of instructional leadership which has been part of the training materials for teachers and principals in Indonesia is much broader than the broader concept of instructional leadership proposed in the literature as outlined above. We cannot find any characteristic listed in the concept that is directly oriented to improve the teaching and learning process. If we categorise school into the following layers: first, student learning, second, curriculum and teachers, and third, school conditions, this concept of instructional leadership deals mostly with the third layer. This concept goes beyond Hallinger and Murphy’s (1987) of instructional leadership, which is centred on broad dimensions, i.e., defining school’s mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. The concept adopted by the PSP training does not even list any characteristic that directly target the improvement of teaching and learning, and hence student outcomes. This is in fact not in line with an instructional leadership concept aspired by MoECRT mentioned above. The MoECRT’s PSP official booklet describes that instructional leadership is to incorporate collaborative competencies to work with other principals and

implement instructional leadership and management.

If we analyse further, Rutherford's conception of instructional leadership resembles a concept of educational transformational leadership proposed by several experts. The educational transformational leadership is described as leadership practices that transform school conditions into exceptionally better ones to improve student outcomes. Leithwood (2005b), for example, proposes three large dimensions of this leadership, namely: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning organisations. What makes this different from Rutherford's concept is that in Leithwood's concept instructional leadership dimensions are clearly articulated, whilst in Rutherford's one it is hardly indicated. In one explanation of this model, Leithwood et al., (2004) that school transformational leaders need to provide instructional guidance for teachers. Leithwood also suggests that school leadership should deal with school culture and community, teacher's individual capacity and professional community, and classroom conditions including content of instruction, nature of instruction, and student assessment (Leithwood, 2005a, p.5).

However, there are of course positive notes on Rutherford's instructional leadership which is used to train school principals in Indonesia. As a generic concept of school leadership, it is to be applauded to cover characteristics necessary for school leaders to be effective. Also, early in the introduction, we indicated that Indonesian education is undertaking significant changes and student population in Indonesia is characterised with diversity. Changes are so rapid, and diversity means not only religious and cultural diversity but also economic diversity, which often makes it more challenging to instructional leaders and teachers. First, the conception by Rutherford clearly suggests that instructional school leaders should develop the capacity as change agents. This could mean three things. Instructional leaders serve as agent for changes imposed by the government including PSP. They can also serve agents for changes occurring in both immediate and broader contexts such as population changes and technology revolution. In addition, they could play as the initiators of change, not just following and complying with changes. Each requires different level of leadership capacity. Second, Rutherford's concept of instructional leadership provides a characteristic that can be utilised to encompass how school leaders deal with diversity of student population. This characteristic is ethical decision making, which should be defined as a process of decision making that considers diversity as an ethical principle in guiding any decision made and effort undertaken. Subsuming in this principle is fairness, justice, and prejudice reduction.

In conclusion, Rutherford's instructional leadership that has been part of the training material for Guru Penggerak does not have a direct target at instructional dimensions of schools or the teaching and learning process. It is too broad to be called instructional leadership since it deviates from what the literature seems to have a consensus of its concept. Although it is not an official version of instructional leadership and used only as complementary of a training module, we are particularly worried about the potential misleading if this concept is translated literally in the training without the trainers steering into a conception and application closer to instructional leadership discussed in the literature. What has been advocated by the ministry would not be achieved through the Guru Penggerak training because what delivered is not what preached. Rutherford's, however, is still potential to be further developed to incorporate a more explicit mention of instructional characteristics that have been advocated in the literature. Therefore, we offer several recommendations for a conceptual improvement of instructional leadership as follows:

First, MoECRT should provide a fixed and firm concept of instructional leadership to be used subsequently by trainers and school principals as a guide. The ministry could revisit the above mentioned Dirjen regulation on school leadership and/or draw a concept from global and national research on school leadership that is proven to be successful in improving student learning and outcomes and examine it through meaningful seminars and discussions to generate a final conception that considers greatly Indonesia's educational characteristics and contexts. Second, the concept should be trialled in several different schools, refined, and finalised. The concept can be formulated differently depending on specific contexts where it is going to be exercised and should be opened for changes when required but the original ministry's concept should be retained for future reference. Third, all educational offices, schools, trainers, and principals should follow the developed concept and try to implement in their work setting. Again, when required, changes can be made to accommodate contextual demands.

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