



The Role of School Principals in Improving Teacher Competency through Learning Communities in Public Special Schools Blitar City Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This research is preliminary research on the role of school principals in improving the competency of Special School teachers through a Learning Community in one of the Special Schools in Blitar City. This research aims to determine the role of school principals in improving the competence of special school teachers through Learning Communities. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects of the research are teachers in a Public Special School. The research is conducted in a Public Special Schools in Blitar City. The techniques used to collect data in this research are observation and documentation. The research results show that the managerial role of the school principal is a crucial element that plays the most important role in improving the competence of special school teachers. To improve the competency of special school teachers can be obtained by developing a Learning Community in the educational institution properly. The role played by the school principal is to facilitate collaborative learning about the MERDEKA curriculum, discuss and practice good practices of MERDEKA curriculum, facilitate collaboration in the development of teaching plans, learning reflections with teachers colleagues by reviewing learning modules related to rubric of assessment, problems faced in teaching learning process and the solutions taken. The Learning Community is a forum for teachers to exchange ideas and all matters related to teaching learning activities.

Keywords: School Principal, Teacher Competency, Learning Community.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are one of the most important pillars in education. The quality of education is highly dependent on the quality of teachers available today. In order for teachers to exist in the midst of students, teachers must maximise their role not only as educators but also as motivators for students. In addition, teachers must also be able to educate students and produce resilient students who are ready to face various challenges while making major changes in their lives. John Dewey emphasised that teachers need to create a social system characterised by democracy and the scientific process in the student learning environment in the classroom. The main task of the teacher is to motivate students to learn collaboratively and think about important social issues every day. At the same time, students learn democratic principles - through interaction with other students as part of group problem-solving activities (Musyrapah, 2017). Various supports are provided to improve the knowledge of teachers and educators. The types of support vary, including providing curriculum support materials in schools as well as platforms for teachers to learn together, public discussions on education policy planning, databases that monitor school quality, and various other policies (Giyanto, Hidayah, Julizar, Sari & Hartono, 2023). Given the variety of obstacles faced by students,

special education teachers have important duties and responsibilities. Special education teachers not only have to teach different knowledge and skills depending on the potential and characteristics of the learners, but are also able to act as paramedics, therapists, social workers, counsellors and administrators. In carrying out their duties, special education teachers always prioritise patience and perseverance in accommodating the different characteristics of their students. This is in line with Hastuti's (2017) opinion that special education teachers have an obligation to dedicate all their abilities, creativity, skills, and thoughts to raise excellent children. This is because children with disabilities usually experience thinking barriers, close themselves and even avoid other people. Without dedication, perseverance and creativity in developing engaging pedagogical approaches, special education teachers cannot fulfil their mission. Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers states that teachers act as learning facilitators, motivators, learning engineers, and inspirers in learning. In essence, teachers are required to be able to develop their competence, both pedagogical, social, personality and professional competencies. The position of teachers as professional human resources is to implement the national education system and develop the potential of students to become healthy and humane people who have faith and devotion to God Almighty and have noble character, and become

Table 1. Target group identity

Number of Educators	Employment Status			Teaching Assignment			
	Civil Servant	Government employees with labour contracts	Honorary Staff School	Specialised kindergarten	specialised primary school	special junior high school	specialised senior high school
12	5	5	2	1	5	3	3

Table 2. Learning Community Programme

Number	Programme Activity	Material	Team in charge
1	Identification of learning problems at each level of education a. Teachers' initial reflections on learning and the problems they face in the classroom. b. Planning lessons for learning improvement based on the results of initial reflection	- Problem identification - Initial reflection - Lesson planning	Person in charge of each team according to education level
2	Implementation of learning improvements in accordance with initial reflection and lesson planning	- Carried out in each class in accordance with the lesson improvement plan	Each teacher in accordance with the class they teach
3	a. Evaluation and feedback of learning improvement at each level of education b. Preparation of follow-up plans	- Evaluation of the implementation of the learning improvement plan through discussion and feedback from teachers related to the learning improvement plan that has been carried out by SDLB level teachers - Preparation of follow-up plans after evaluation and feedback	

knowledgeable citizens making them competent, creative, independent, democratic and responsible citizens. The role of the principal in improving the skills of teachers or educators and education personnel is an obligation and professional commitment in improving the quality of education (National Education System Law No.20 of 2003). The principal's role as a school manager begins with planning the school's operational programme, managing and utilising existing human resources (HR) and infrastructure, implementing the jointly designed programme, and monitoring the implementation of the school programme, as well as managing the school, including evaluation.

Along with the government's efforts to improve teacher welfare through the teacher professional allowance fund, it is not followed by an increase in teacher competence. There are still many teachers in the field who seem less enthusiastic about the teaching profession, less serious in their preparation, and less professional in carrying out their duties as special education teachers. In carrying out daily work, there are still shortcomings in teaching, decreased learning motivation, and lack of desire to develop knowledge and skills. There is also a lack of responsiveness to the changes in the Merdeka curriculum, which will be gradually introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology in February 2022. Therefore, school leaders strive to improve teachers' ability to keep up with developments in the world of

education, including by building learning communities. Learning Communities are groups of teachers who share the same vision and mission to discuss and exchange experiences and knowledge. This research is closely related to previous research conducted by Ani Sukarni (2023) which showed that learning communities foster collaborative learning across the independent curriculum. The existence of a learning community makes learning new things with colleagues easier and more enjoyable than learning alone, but it does not necessarily result in the same understanding as expected in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

This research is a preliminary study of the principal's role in improving the competence of special school teachers through Learning Community in one of the public special schools in Blitar City. This study aims to determine the role of the principal in improving the competence of special school teachers through the Learning Community. With this community, it is expected that all existing problems will be discussed together by involving and collaborating with all educators to achieve predetermined goals so that the principal can ensure that all teachers work according to their respective roles and responsibilities professionally. The principal's steps or actions taken in this study are expected to be the foundation for other principals to develop a more effective and meaningful Learning Community for special schools.

Table 3. Literature review analysis of the role of school principals in improving teacher competence through Learning Community

No	Author	Title	Cause of the problem	Research Results
1	Arizma Dimiyati (2018)	The influence of professional learning community on teachers' professional development at public madrasah aliyah in Lampung province	The reason is that teachers are less able to accept changes in the delivery of learning materials to students, unable to accept criticism and suggestions from teachers and fellow teachers, and consequently unable to accept changes in the delivery of learning materials to students. This is due to a lack of innovation so that learning does not go well. Achieving professional standards for teachers.	Based on the results of the study, dimensions such as leadership, shared values and vision, shared creativity, supportive conditions, and sharing experiences together influence teacher professional development by 81.8%, while the remaining 18.2% is influenced by other variables.
2	I Gusti Ngurah Rai (2018)	Application of the Learning Community Model to Improve the Ability of Hindu Religious Teachers to Develop Learning Implementation Plans	The teacher's ability to develop lesson plans is still lacking, so it needs improvement	The results showed that the ability of Hindu religious education teachers in Gugus III Rendang Sub-district in preparing lesson plans increased after the introduction of the learning community model in their coaching activities. This is evidenced by the average results and success rates of Cycle I and Cycle II. The average score of teachers' lesson planning skills in Cycle I was 64.68 and in Cycle II it was 71.85 so it appears to have increased by 7.17 points. The proportion of highly skilled teachers increased by 7.69% from 69.23% in cycle I to 76.92% in cycle II.
3	Sukirman (2020)	The effectiveness of teachers' working groups in improving teacher competence.	Teachers' ability to implement learning is still low and has not shown skills in preparing learning tools that are active, creative, fun and involve students.	The research results are: 1) The teachers' working group has identified the implementation of the teachers' working group activity programme, the types of teachers' working group activity programmes, the success of teachers' working group activity planning, and the ability of teachers' working group administrators to improve teachers' ability to develop plans. Explain the effectiveness of teachers' working groups to improve the effectiveness of teachers' working groups in improving teachers' ability to implement learning before and after teachers' working group activities. (2) Constraints to teacher development include devising appropriate strategies to arouse teachers' interest in participating in teachers' working groups, finding interesting learning methods, determining subject-related media, including the difficulty of allocating time. The carrying capacity of school staff in this case means that there is still a lack of competent and professional personnel. The talent is there, but the attendance is not enough. (3) The efforts of the Chimangu District Teachers' Working Group in improving teachers' capacity. Teachers who attend and participate in the teachers' working group determine the right strategy to stimulate teachers' interest in attending the group by introducing different learning methods. Not having different knowledge.
4	Surti Kurniasih, R.Teti Rostikawati, Lutfi Hari Susanto, Muhammad Taufik A (2020)	Building Learning Community with Mentoring Lesson Study at Kurnia Junior High School in Bogor City	Based on observations and interviews with principals and teachers, it is known that the learning process is still dominated by the teacher.	There is no collaboration between students and teachers in the learning process. We want to change and improve this to make learning more meaningful and give every student the right to learn. Outputs that are in accordance with the planned output targets include: 1) Developing relationships between school leaders and teachers to improve the quality of learning by creating a learning community among teachers in the design and implementation of learning. 2) Increase teachers' awareness in implementing classroom-based collaborative learning. 3) The formation of a learning community among teachers of the same subject. 4) The creation of collaborative learning that develops into a learning community among students. 5) Learning tools based on lesson design are created.
5	Junjun Ade Permana, Alan Rusyandi, Awang Kustiawan, Lilis Kholisoh, Maman Herman (2022)	KKG Management in Improving Teacher Professionalism	Teachers are still unprepared to teach.	The results show that the management of teachers' working groups in Manong Jaya sub-district, Gugus 3, Tasikmalaya province is optimal. On the other hand, teachers' professionalism has also improved. The teachers' working group is a forum for improving teachers' performance in planning, organising, implementing and evaluating work programs.
6	Syed Syahrul Zarizi (2022)	School Leaders Perceptions of Secondary Towards Amalan Professional Learning Communities in Johor	Teachers' professionalism in education is still low and action is needed by principals at Johor High School in Malaysia.	School leaders who play a very active role in community activities encourage teachers and school leaders to support, collaborate and consult each other to achieve the school's vision and mission. You can improve your professionalism
7	Rohiqotul Khusna, Nita Priyanti (2023)	The Effect of KOMBEL on Teachers' Pedagogical Ability in the NSIN Kindergarten Association Bekasi	Teachers' teaching skills vary widely. Some teachers are good at teaching and some are still lacking. Therefore, the gap between the two is very pronounced and affects teacher performance.	Participation in learning communities has a significant impact on a teacher's pedagogical skills. Through dialogue and collaboration, teachers gain knowledge and best practices for the classroom. Learning communities support and motivate teachers' professional development. Participation in learning communities has a positive impact on teachers' pedagogical skills.
8	Sandra Titihlawa, Titin Prihatin, Sawitro Eko Purnomo (2023)	The Role of the Principal and Compete in Improving Educators' Pedagogical Competence at Jayapura Combined High School	Educators face difficulties in implementing learning in their own curriculum because they are not able to fully implement their own curriculum.	Principals effectively manage the learning community so that it becomes a place to share experiences and solve problems in the learning process. Administrative actions taken by principals can create a learning community climate that maximises the role of the community in developing educators' capacity. The correlation between the role of learning communities and the improvement of educators' pedagogical competence is $r = 0.707$, very strong with an r value close to 100%. The role of learning communities has a significant impact on the development of educators' pedagogical skills.
9	Ani Sukarni (2023)	Improving Teacher Competence in Curriculum Implementation Through Learning Communities at SD Negeri Angkasa I, Kalijati Subdistrict, Study Year 2023/2024	Teachers are less motivated to introduce the independent curriculum in schools.	Learning communities promote collaborative learning through the independent curriculum. Although the learning community makes learning new things with colleagues easier and more enjoyable than learning alone, it does not necessarily result in the same understanding as expected in the implementation of the independent curriculum. Learning together in a learning community can foster confidence and a sense of togetherness in collaborative implementation.
10	Yuyus Wisnurata, Asep Suryanto, Rita Asmara Mukti, Winda Cantikat, Sopian Trenggana, Okke Rosmaladewi, Yusuf (2023)	Educational leadership strategies for optimising learning communities	The skills gap between educators at SMAN 23 Bandung requires an equitable learning culture ecosystem to improve the quality of learning at the school.	The Learning Community of SMAN 23 Bandung has demonstrated improved learning quality through the principal's leadership in collaborative efforts and a culture of continuous learning within the Learning Community of SMAN 23 Bandung.
11	Susana Siti Riiani ¹ , Siti Quratul Ain ²	The Role of School Principal in Implementing Education Quality Management	In learning and daily activities, it is less than optimal so that the output of students does not develop.	that the principal has carried out the role of principal in accordance with his role as Manager, Leader, Supervisor, Administrator, Educator, Innovator, and Motivator. The Principal has also made efforts in improving the quality of students and trying to realise the vision and mission of the school, realising active, effective and efficient learning, along with producing good learning characteristics and moral values of students.
12	DuFour, R. (2004)	DuFour, R. (2004). What is a "professional learning community"? Educational leadership, 61(8), 6-11.	Efforts to improve professional learning by using learning communities	The professional learning community model has now reached a tipping point, familiar to those who have witnessed the fate of well-meaning school reform efforts. In this all-too-familiar cycle, initial enthusiasm will turn to confusion about basic concepts followed by inevitable implementation problems.

METHODS

This research uses descriptive qualitative research, which aims to determine the role of principals in improving the competence of special school teachers through Learning Community. Through this qualitative method, it is expected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the role of principals in improving the competence of special school teachers, as well as appropriate solutions to problems faced in learning.

The location of this research was carried out at one of the State Special Schools in Blitar City with the research subjects being all educators or teachers at the school with a total of 12 teachers.

Techniques used in collecting data in this study using observation and documentation. Observations were made by carrying out observations to find out the various activities carried out in learning community

activities at school, recording and collecting data related to the role of the principal in shaping and creating programs implemented in Learning Community activities, analysing the obstacles and problems faced such as the reluctance of members to be actively involved, schedules that cannot run optimally and the lack of support from school infrastructure.

Documentation study in the form of reviewing several previous studies that are relevant to the problems found by researchers at school. Review of documentation in the form of scientific articles, books, journals and some other literature relevant to the study discussed.

To test the validity of the data obtained in this study, a data triangulation approach was used. Data analysis was carried out at the stage of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion

drawing. This triangulation approach aims to strengthen confidence in research findings by ensuring consistency and correlation between various data sources used in research.

Through this qualitative method, it is expected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the problems of deaf students in understanding the concept of multiplication operations, as well as appropriate solutions to improve their understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of observations, researchers obtained some information about the identity of the institution, the identity of the target group, the role of the principal, the activity programme and the problems that arise in the implementation of Learning Community activities.

It is known that Learning Community activities are carried out by 1) facilitating joint learning about the Merdeka Curriculum, 2) facilitating problem-solving discussions while sharing good practices of the Merdeka Curriculum, 3) facilitating collaborative development of teaching tools based on the Merdeka Curriculum, 4) facilitating peer learning reflection by reviewing modules together both related to assessment rubrics, learning problems faced, and various solutions that must be taken by teachers. Activities are carried out based on a predetermined schedule and incidentally as needed.

The multi-directional communication that is built gives positive value to teachers' confidence in making decisions, because the team works collaboratively, there is always a review of the activities the teacher has carried out, and there is an enrichment intervention for the activities the teacher has carried out. This makes it easier for teachers to develop an understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, in other words, the learning community becomes a forum and media for teachers to collaborate, synergise with one another. Learning community activities are carried out in two ways, namely scheduled and incidental. Routine activities are carried out according to a compiled schedule, while incidental activities are carried out when needed in activities or various problems are found in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The results showed that the principal is a crucial element that has the most important role in improving the competence of special school teachers by developing Learning Community in education units properly. The role played by the principal is to facilitate joint learning about the independent curriculum, conduct joint discussions and practice well, collaborate in developing teaching tools so that teacher competence will improve.

Discussion

One of the most important factors in human life is education, because with education one can improve intelligence, skills, develop the potential that exists in humans. Meanwhile, to improve the quality of education itself, the principal has a very influential role to help improve the quality of education. In the role of improving the quality of education, the principal must have the ability to foster and direct teachers to work together and professionally to improve the quality of students (Susana, & siti, 2022).

The learning community is a forum and media for teachers to discuss with each other to solve all the problems faced by teachers in carrying out their duties as professionals in schools, activities are carried out on a scheduled and incidental basis according to teacher needs. The principal as a manager plays a role in forming a community team by planning, organising, implementing and evaluating activities. In its implementation, all teachers collaborate in multi-directional communication to develop an understanding of the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. The team formed collaborates to take on roles and responsibilities together in implementing the curriculum at each stage. There is research that states an idea to improve schools by developing professional learning by optimising learning communities or Learning Community (duFour, 2004). The results showed that the principal is a leader who acts as a manager who has the most important role in improving the competence of special school teachers by developing Learning Community in education units properly. Learning Community activities are carried out by 1) facilitating joint learning about the Merdeka Curriculum, 2) facilitating problem-solving discussions while sharing good practices of the Merdeka Curriculum, 3) facilitating collaborative development of teaching tools based on the Merdeka Curriculum, 4) facilitating peer learning reflection by reviewing modules together both related to assessment rubrics, learning problems encountered, and various solutions that must be taken by teachers.

The results of this study have similarities with the results of research that has been done before that the learning community is a forum or media for teachers that facilitates learning and discussing to improve teacher competence regarding learning activities or others related to teacher professionalism. This similar research was previously conducted by Azima Dimiyati (2018), I Gusti Ngurah Rai (2018), Sukirman (2020), Surti Kurniasih, R.Teti Rostikawati et al (2020), Junjun Ade Permana, Alan Rusyandi, et al (2022), Syed Syahrul Zarizi (2022), Nita Priyanti (2023), Sandra Titihalawa, Titin Prihatin et al (2023), Ani Sukarni (2023), Yuyus Wisnurata. Asep Suryanto, et al (2023).

CONCLUSION

The role of the principal as a managerial implementing Learning Community activities is carried out by facilitating joint learning about the Merdeka Curriculum, facilitating problem-solving discussions while sharing good practices of the Merdeka Curriculum, facilitating collaborative development of teaching tools based on the Merdeka Curriculum, facilitating peer learning reflections by reviewing modules together both related to assessment rubrics, learning problems faced, and various solutions that must be taken by teachers. This activity is a forum for teachers to exchange ideas, ideas, and all problems related to learning activities and their professional fields, so that teacher competence can increase and have an understanding that is in accordance with the development of science and technology.

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