

Optimizing the Role of Curriculum Leaders in Enhancing English Language Teaching Quality

Hensi Nurhayati^{1*}, Rambar Nur Sasongko¹, Connie¹

¹Universitas Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

*Corresponding author e-mail: hensinurhayati497@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the optimization of curriculum leadership roles in improving the quality of English language teaching, focusing on the contributions of principals, vice principals, teachers, MGMP, and supervisors in curriculum management. The study emphasizes how these roles collectively influence the effectiveness of English learning in junior high schools. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom and institutional observations, and document analysis. The participants consisted of one principal, one vice principal for curriculum affairs, and four English teachers at SMPN 11 Bengkulu City. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that school leaders and teachers focus more on administrative tasks than improving teaching. As a result, students remain passive learners, developing stronger academic skills than practical abilities. This study highlights a systemic culture of administrative compliance that constrains instructional leadership in English language education. Unlike much of the existing literature that focuses on curriculum design, this study addresses the overlooked dimension of curriculum implementation and management at the school level. The study proposes the development of an "Integrated Curriculum Leadership" model in which principals, vice principals, MGMP, and supervisors collaborate synergistically to foster instructional innovation, teacher professional growth, and student communicative competence. By mapping existing practices, identifying gaps, and proposing a collaborative framework, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on curriculum leadership. It underscores the need for school leaders and policymakers to move beyond managerialism and create conditions that support sustainable, pedagogically oriented curriculum implementation for English learning.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation; Educational Administration; English Language Teaching; Instructional Leadership

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A. Introduction

English has become the international lingua franca, used in global communication, education, science, technology, and business (Prihantoro, 2020). English language competencies are now not just additional skills, but a basic competency for students to compete academically and professionally (Hillyard, 2011). In the context of Indonesian education, English proficiency plays an important role in increasing the competitiveness of the young generation at the global level.

The curriculum in Indonesia, including the Independent Curriculum, emphasizes competency-based learning, flexibility, and student-centered learning (Luturmas et al., 2022). Theoretically, this curriculum opens up a space for more communicative English learning innovation. However, in practice, various studies have shown that there is a gap between curriculum planning and implementation in the classroom, such as limited teacher training, readiness of educators, and support of infrastructure facilities (Prihantoro, 2020).

Curriculum management includes planning, implementing, controlling, and evaluating learning programs (Vass, 2020). At the school level, the effectiveness of curriculum implementation is greatly influenced by curriculum leadership run by school principals, vice principals in curriculum matters, teachers, and professional forums such as MGMP. The challenges that arise are often in the form of administrative dominance rather than pedagogical development, so that the space for innovation in English learning becomes limited (Akomaning, 2019).

Learning leadership or curriculum is understood as the efforts of school leaders in directing, supporting, and facilitating the implementation of the curriculum in accordance with educational goals. The principal and curriculum representatives play a role in supervision, monitoring, and coordination of teachers. Instructional leadership theory emphasizes the importance of the role of leaders in improving the quality of learning through teacher coaching, the provision of resources, and the creation of a collaborative learning culture.

The effectiveness of curriculum implementation is not only determined by individuals, but also by collaboration between actors (George, 2002). MGMP as a professional forum for subject teachers has an important role in sharing good practices, designing learning strategies, and harmonizing curriculum implementation (Rahardjanto et al., 2019). In addition, school supervisors act as mediators between national policies and school practices. This collaboration can strengthen the professionalism of teachers while improving the quality of English learning.

The literature shows that the quality of English learning is greatly influenced by the synergy between curriculum policies, school leadership, and competencies. Failure in one aspect can hinder the achievement of students' communicative competence. Therefore, research on the role of curriculum leadership in schools is important to

find the optimal model in linking national policies with learning practices.

B. Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method (Lubis et al., 2024; Milasari et al., 2021). Qualitative research is aimed at understanding social reality, namely perceiving the world as it is rather than as it should be. Therefore, a qualitative researcher must possess an open-minded character. Conducting qualitative research appropriately provides a window to understanding both psychological aspects and social reality (Murniarti, 2025).

Research Context and Participant

This study was conducted at SMPN 11 Bengkulu City, a public junior high school with approximately 600 students enrolled across grades seven to nine. The school demonstrates an average academic performance compared to other schools in the region, with particular challenges in English language learning outcomes. As a representative case study, SMPN 11 was selected because of its relevance in reflecting both the opportunities and difficulties of implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the school level.

The participants in this study consisted of one school principal, one vice principal for curriculum affairs, and four English teachers. They were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that all individuals directly involved in curriculum management and English instruction were represented. This composition enabled the study to capture a comprehensive perspective on curriculum leadership, spanning managerial, supervisory, and classroom-level roles.

Participant Role	Number	Selection Method
Principal	1	Purposive sampling
Vice Principal (Curriculum)	1	Purposive sampling
English Teachers	4	Purposive sampling
Total	6	

Data Collection Techniques

The data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. An inductive coding approach was employed, allowing categories and patterns to emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Initially, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were carefully read and segmented into meaningful units of information. These units were then assigned open codes, which were gradually refined and clustered into broader categories. From this iterative process, key themes such as “*Administrative*

Burden," *"Lack of Pedagogical Leadership*," and *"Isolated Practices"* emerged, reflecting the challenges faced by curriculum leaders in optimizing English language teaching.

To ensure trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed. Triangulation was applied across data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and methods (qualitative interviews, field observations, and document review) to validate findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Peer debriefing was also utilized, with colleagues providing critical feedback on the coding process and thematic development to minimize researcher bias. Together, these measures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study's findings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, the coding process was carried out. We employed an inductive coding approach, allowing categories to emerge naturally from the data rather than imposing predefined codes. Each transcript from interviews, observation notes, and documentation was carefully read, and meaningful units of text were highlighted and labeled with initial codes. Next, the codes were systematically organized and compared across data sources. Through iterative refinement, related codes were grouped together into broader categories. From these categories, themes emerged, such as *"Administrative Burden*," *"Lack of Pedagogical Leadership*," and *"Isolated Practices in Curriculum Management*." These themes represented recurrent patterns that reflected the challenges and roles of curriculum managers in improving the quality of English learning. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was applied by using multiple data sources (interviews with principals, vice principals, and teachers; observation; and document analysis) and methods. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy and resonance with their perspectives. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out with fellow researchers to discuss coding decisions, refine categories, and reduce potential bias. These steps strengthened the credibility and dependability of the analysis.

C. Results and Discussion

The central finding of this study is that a systemic culture of administrative compliance continues to dominate curriculum leadership, thereby stifling the development of instructional leadership in English language teaching. While curriculum leaders at SMPN 11 Bengkulu City fulfill reporting and procedural requirements, their focus on documentation and policy adherence leaves limited space for initiatives that directly enhance classroom practice. This compliance-driven culture contributes to fragmented implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, weakening the collective capacity of leaders and teachers to foster communicative

competence among students (Chen, 2021; Khalil & Kholofelo Semono-Eke, 2020).

The first theme, *administrative burden*, resonates with the concept of “managerialism” in education, where leadership is reduced to bureaucratic tasks rather than strategic or pedagogical guidance (Hallinger et al., 2017; Nadeem, 2024). Effective school leadership requires balancing managerial responsibilities with instructional leadership, a balance that was not evident in this case (Fisher, 2021; Sriyono, 2024). Instead, excessive attention to paperwork, compliance with national standards, and formal accountability processes displaced opportunities for leaders to engage in professional dialogue, mentor teachers, or encourage innovative teaching practices. This finding illustrates how managerialism, when uncritically applied, undermines the pedagogical mission of schooling.

The second and third themes *lack of pedagogical leadership* and *isolated practices* highlight the limited role of MGMP and supervision in supporting curriculum implementation (Dianto et al., 2023). While MGMP forums are formally designed as spaces for collaborative planning and professional sharing, in practice they often function as infrequent, administratively oriented meetings. Similarly, supervisory visits tended to focus on compliance checks rather than providing constructive feedback or professional coaching. This stands in contrast to the literature on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which emphasize sustained collaboration, shared goals, and reflective practice as mechanisms for teacher growth and improved learning outcomes. The case of SMPN 11 shows a significant deviation from this ideal, with professional networks and supervisory structures failing to operate as genuine PLCs. Instead of fostering collegial learning, they perpetuate isolated practices, leaving teachers without the collaborative support necessary to translate curriculum policy into effective classroom instruction.

The fourth theme reveals a critical consequence of weak instructional leadership: teachers tend to revert to traditional, exam-oriented methods that prioritize grammar translation and test preparation over communicative competence (Chen, 2021). Without consistent guidance and pedagogical support from curriculum leaders, English teachers at SMPN 11 rely heavily on textbook-driven instruction and rote memorization strategies. This approach neglects the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction, fluency, and real-life language use. The absence of strong instructional leadership therefore not only reinforces conservative teaching practices but also directly undermines the central objective of English education in Indonesia preparing students with the communicative skills needed for global engagement.

Theoretically, these findings highlight the need to move beyond fragmented leadership structures toward a more holistic model of curriculum leadership (Fisher, 2021). Practically, this study proposes an “Integrated Curriculum Leadership” model (Hallinger et al., 2017) for English language teaching, in which principals, vice principals, MGMP, and supervisors work synergistically rather than in isolation. In this model, principals act as instructional leaders who set the vision for English

learning, vice principals ensure curriculum alignment and teacher development, MGMP serves as a professional learning community that sustains collaboration and innovation, and supervisors provide constructive feedback that bridges policy with classroom practice. Such integration would transform curriculum leadership from a culture of administrative compliance into a collaborative system that actively drives pedagogical improvement and enhances student learning outcomes (Manouilidou et al., 2024).

This study is limited by its single-case design, focusing only on SMPN 11 Bengkulu City. While the case provides valuable insights, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools without caution. Future research should therefore adopt a multi-case approach across different regions and school contexts to capture broader variations in curriculum leadership practices. Additionally, action research projects could be undertaken to implement and test the proposed Integrated Curriculum Leadership model in practice, evaluating its effectiveness in strengthening instructional leadership and promoting communicative competence in English. Such studies would not only validate the model but also provide actionable strategies for policymakers and practitioners seeking to optimize English curriculum management nationwide.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the effectiveness of English language teaching at SMPN 11 Bengkulu City is strongly influenced by the extent to which curriculum leaders' principals, vice principals, English teachers, MGMP, and supervisors are able to perform their roles in a collaborative and integrated manner. The findings reveal that, while curriculum planning and implementation are formally carried out, much of the practice remains administratively oriented, with limited attention to pedagogical leadership and instructional innovation. Themes such as *administrative burden*, *lack of pedagogical leadership*, and *isolated practices* highlight persistent barriers that prevent curriculum leaders from fully optimizing their functions. The analysis further indicates that disconnects exist between national curriculum policy (such as the *Merdeka Curriculum*) and classroom-level practices, largely due to insufficient teacher readiness, lack of professional support, and limited supervisory follow-up. Although individual actors demonstrate commitment, the absence of systematic collaboration weakens the collective impact on student learning outcomes, particularly in developing communicative competence in English. Therefore, strengthening curriculum leadership requires moving beyond compliance toward a more collaborative, pedagogically driven model. This includes empowering school leaders to act as instructional leaders, facilitating continuous professional development, enhancing MGMP's role as a platform for teacher collaboration, and ensuring supervisors provide constructive feedback rather than merely administrative oversight. By addressing these challenges, curriculum leadership can be optimized to significantly improve the quality of English language teaching and better equip students with the competencies needed to engage in a globalized world.

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