

DIGITAL ERA TEACHER FOLLOWERSHIP: THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AS FOLLOWERS IN SUPPORTING PRINCIPALS

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of teachers as effective followers in supporting principals in the digital era. The research method used is qualitative with a library research approach. Data was obtained from various literature such as books, journal articles, and reports from educational institutions. The results of the study indicate that teachers have a strategic role in supporting principal policies, especially in integrating technology into learning. Effective teachers contribute to improving the quality of learning through the use of technology, supporting the principal's vision and mission, and adapting to the transformation of digital education. The success of the teacher's role is influenced by several supporting factors, such as access to technology, ongoing training, and commitment to digital learning. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, resistance to change, and high workloads are still obstacles that need to be overcome. As an integral part of digital education, teachers are expected to be able to optimize technology training, strengthen collaboration with principals, and utilize digital media as an effective means of communication. This effort requires synergy between teachers, principals, and other stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of education in the digital era.

Keywords: Teacher Followership, Digital Era, Effective Teacher, Principal

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran guru sebagai pengikut yang efektif dalam mendukung kepala sekolah di era digital. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan kepustakaan (library research). Data diperoleh dari berbagai literatur seperti buku, artikel jurnal, dan laporan institusi pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki peran strategis dalam mendukung kebijakan kepala sekolah, khususnya dalam mengintegrasikan teknologi dalam pembelajaran. Guru yang efektif berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran melalui pemanfaatan teknologi, mendukung visi dan misi kepala sekolah, serta beradaptasi dengan transformasi pendidikan digital. Keberhasilan peran guru dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor pendukung, seperti akses terhadap teknologi, pelatihan berkelanjutan, dan

komitmen dalam pembelajaran digital. Namun, tantangan seperti keterbatasan infrastruktur, resistensi terhadap perubahan, dan tingginya beban kerja masih menjadi kendala yang perlu diatasi. Sebagai bagian integral dari pendidikan digital, guru diharapkan mampu mengoptimalkan pelatihan teknologi, memperkuat kolaborasi dengan kepala sekolah, serta memanfaatkan media digital sebagai sarana komunikasi yang efektif. Upaya ini memerlukan sinergi antara guru, kepala sekolah, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya untuk meningkatkan efektivitas pendidikan di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Followership Guru, Era Digital, Guru Efektif, Kepala Sekolah

A. Introduction

Education is a process of activities carried out to change human behavior for the better and to develop the abilities that a person already has (Safitri et al., 2022). This is supported by the functions and objectives of national education as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, chapter 2, article 3, which states that *"National education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the life of the nation, aiming to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become democratic and responsible citizens."*

The purpose of education is to create someone who is qualified and has character so that they have a very broad view to achieve the desired ideals (Pangestu & Rochmat, 2021). The purpose of education concerns the interests of the students themselves, the interests of society, and job demands (Rifky et al., 2024). The educational process is directed at increasing mastery, knowledge, abilities, skills, development of attitudes and values in the context of the formation and development of students' self (Arifin, 2017).

In order to realize the educational goals above, support from all parties is needed, especially since the development of today's education world has undergone a significant transformation in the last few decades. In the modern era filled with technological advances and social change, education is becoming increasingly important in preparing individuals to face the challenges of a world that continues to develop (Pare & Sihotang, 2023); (Murtafi'ah & Al Rosid, 2024).

In the digital era that is all connected, technology has penetrated almost all aspects of our lives, including education (Putro et al., 2023). The internet and smart devices have opened up unlimited access to information and learning resources (Sundari, 2024). Of course, in order to reflect the digital era, the principal needs teachers as subordinates who are effective in carrying out their duties.

Teachers or also known as educators, as professionals must support the principal by being responsible for guiding and assisting the student learning process (Al Rosid & Mukaromah, 2021). Nella Agustin et al (2021) explained that teachers are

educational personnel who have an important influence in improving the development process of the nation's next generation. Teacher Law number 14 of 2005 concerning teachers and lecturers article 1 paragraph 1, *"teachers are professional educators with the main task of educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in early childhood education through formal education, basic education and secondary education."*

Achieving good performance cannot be separated from the intervention of a leader. Many organizations and institutions are successful because they have a competent and qualified leader. A good leader is a leader who is able to provide a positive influence on his subordinates because the leader is the backbone of the organization. (Juharyanto et al., 2021) Without good leadership, an organization or institution will find it difficult to achieve its goals, even to adapt to changes that are occurring inside and outside the organization itself. Therefore, an extra approach is needed that a leader must take to his subordinates so that all goals can be realized properly. (Mahfudh, 2022)

However, good leadership will not be able to run without the contribution of effective subordinates. (Kadarsih et al., 2020) Teachers as subordinates with their performance will have a significant impact on the success of the principal's leadership. So teachers as a profession are figures who are responsible for fostering, educating, directing, training and providing assistance to students both in physical development and spiritual development of children. While teachers as professionals in the structure of school institutions, teachers are responsible for assisting the principal in achieving his goals. (Rahmawati et al., 2024)

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes in the world of education, changing learning methods, communication patterns, and school management systems. Principals as leaders have a great responsibility in facing these changes, but the success of implementing digital policies in schools is highly dependent on the support and involvement of teachers as effective followers. The role of teachers is not only as teachers in the classroom, but also as strategic partners in realizing the principal's vision and mission, especially in adapting technology in learning.

However, in reality, many schools still experience gaps in the implementation of digital transformation due to low teacher readiness in adopting technology, lack of training, and resistance to change. Previous studies have focused more on the role of the principal as a leader of digital transformation, but have not discussed much about how teachers can contribute effectively in supporting the leadership of the principal in the digital era. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how teachers can become effective followers in supporting the principal in implementing digital-based education.

Through a qualitative approach with literature study, this study will discuss the factors that support and hinder the role of teachers as effective followers in the transformation of digital education. Thus, this study provides insight into strategies that can be applied to improve collaboration between teachers and principals to achieve more adaptive and innovative educational goals in the digital era.

B. Method

This research is a qualitative research that uses a library *research approach*, namely a series of studies related to library data collection methods, or research whose research objects are traced and explored through various library information through (books, manuscripts, encyclopedias, scientific journals, newspapers, magazines, and documents). (Nazir, 2011). This approach is used to deeply understand the theory and practice related to principal leadership and the role of teachers in the digital era. This type of research is descriptive analytical. This study aims to explore the concept of the role of teachers as effective followers in supporting principals in the digital era (Sugiyono, 2014). This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the theory and practice of principal leadership and the role of teachers as followers in the context of digital education transformation.

The research data were obtained from various relevant secondary sources, including books, indexed journal articles, educational institution reports, and other academic publications that discuss educational leadership, technology integration in learning, and the role of teachers in the digital era. Literature selection was carried out based on the criteria of relevance, source validity, and its relevance to the focus of this research. The stages of this research began by collecting data from relevant literature, including previous research, books, journal articles, and educational institution reports. Then classifying the data based on the main topics, namely the role of teachers, principal leadership, and technology integration in education. Furthermore, conducting a comparative analysis of the literature findings to understand patterns, challenges, and solutions and the last stage drawing conclusions based on the results of the analysis, which are linked to the concept of leadership theory and educational practices in the digital era. (Sukmadinata, 2010).

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach, which includes several stages, namely: 1) Data Reduction, all collected literature is analyzed to identify information relevant to the role of teachers as *followers* in supporting principals in the digital era. Data that is general or not in accordance with the focus of the research is eliminated to sharpen the analysis. 2) Data Classification, the reduced data is categorized into several main themes, such as principal leadership strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors for the role of teachers, and the effectiveness of technology integration in learning. 3) Comparative

Analysis, Findings from various sources are compared to identify patterns of similarities, differences, and gaps in the existing literature. This aims to obtain a deeper synthesis of the role of teachers in supporting school leadership in the digital era. 4) Conclusion Drawing, the results of the analysis are interpreted to formulate key findings that answer research questions and provide recommendations for improving collaboration between teachers and principals in the application of educational technology.

This systematic approach in data analysis aims to ensure that the research not only provides a theoretical overview, but also identifies applicable solutions in increasing the effectiveness of the role of teachers as supporters of principal leadership in the digital era.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Role of Teachers in Supporting the Principal's Work Program in the Digital Era

Teachers play a very important role in supporting the principal's work program in the digital era. As educators, teachers are not only responsible for teaching in the classroom but must also play an active role in supporting the principal's vision and mission, especially in integrating technology into the learning process. (Ahmad Muthi' Uddin et al., 2022) In the digital era, teachers are expected to be able to utilize various digital learning platforms, educational applications, and social media to facilitate more interactive and efficient learning. With the ability to adapt technology, teachers can help students learn in a more interesting and relevant way, and support the achievement of better educational goals (Dewi et al., 2023) .

In addition, teachers also have a strategic role in supporting policies implemented by the principal, such as the use of technology in school management or distance learning management. (Fathurrahman et al., 2022) Teachers who are able to adapt quickly to technological changes will become agents of change that support digital-based educational transformation. In this case, cooperation between teachers and principals is very important to ensure that the work programs being implemented run well and effectively. Teachers who have good technological skills and a willingness to continue learning will be able to contribute more optimally in achieving common goals in the world of education that increasingly relies on technology. (Istijarti, 2023)

a. Integrating Technology in Learning

Teachers must be able to integrate technology into everyday learning. The use of online learning platforms, educational applications, and social media greatly assists students in the learning process outside the classroom. (Dewi et

al., 2023) This integration not only makes learning more interesting, but also expands students' access to the information they need. By using technology, teachers can create a more interactive and flexible learning environment (Mahbuddin, 2020) .

b. Improving the Quality of Learning

Teachers play a role in improving the quality of learning by utilizing existing technology. Technology allows teachers to deliver material in a more efficient and interesting way. In addition, technology can also motivate students by providing various learning media that suit their learning styles. Thus, the quality of learning will increase, and students will be more enthusiastic in learning (Amiruddin et al., 2021) .

c. Following the Principal's Programs and Policies

Teachers are tasked with supporting policies implemented by the principal regarding the use of technology in learning and school management. The principal's technology-based work program will run smoothly if teachers are committed to supporting and implementing it in teaching and learning activities. By complying with these policies and programs, schools can create a more modern and effective educational environment. (Serena et al., 2024)

d. Effective Teacher Steps in Supporting Principals in the Digital Era

To effectively support principals in the digital era, teachers need to take several important steps. One of them is to participate in training and professional development that focuses on technology. (Syaiful Sagala, 2007) This training aims to improve teachers' ability to use technological devices and digital learning applications that are relevant to teaching materials. With ongoing training, teachers will be more skilled in integrating technology into the learning process and can follow the latest developments in the world of digital education (Rosmini et al., 2024) .

Collaboration with fellow teachers and principals is also an important step in supporting technology-based work programs. (Udin Syaefudin Sa'ud, 2011) Good communication and effective coordination between teachers and principals will facilitate the implementation of work programs. This collaboration strengthens the relationship between parties, which in turn will facilitate the achievement of common goals, namely improving the quality of education. (Mundiri & Bariroh, 2019) In addition, the use of digital media for communication is also very important in supporting the learning process in the digital era. (Daheri et al., 2022) Teachers can use instant messaging applications, social media, and *e-learning platforms* to interact with students and parents and convey information more efficiently. Thus, teachers can better

monitor student development and provide the assistance needed. (Karmilasari et al., 2023)

e. **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Teachers in Supporting Principals in the Digital Era**

In supporting principals in the digital era, there are several factors that influence the success of teachers in carrying out their roles. The main supporting factor is access to adequate technology. (Fakhrudin et al., 2023) Teachers who have good access to technological devices and the internet will find it easier to implement technology in learning, so that they can support the principal's work program effectively. In addition, commitment and willingness to continue learning are other important factors. (Rosmini et al., 2024) Teachers who are committed to following technological developments will be able to use them to improve the quality of learning. Support from the school, such as the provision of adequate technological facilities and training for teachers, is also very influential in facilitating the implementation of technology in schools. (Rönn-Liljenfeldt et al., 2024)

However, there are also inhibiting factors that can prevent teachers from supporting principals in the digital era. One of them is limited resources and infrastructure, where some schools may not have adequate technological devices or have limited internet connections, thus inhibiting the use of technology in learning. (Al-Jauhari, 2021) (Mahbuddin, 2020) In addition, resistance to change is another obstacle, where some teachers may feel uncomfortable or reluctant to adopt new technology in learning. Time constraints are also a major challenge, because many teachers have a heavy workload, so they do not have enough time to learn and implement new technology in the learning process (Husain & Muslim, 2021) .

2. Transformation of Teacher Roles in the Digital Era

In the digital era, information can be accessed easily and quickly. This requires teachers to not only master the lesson content but also have high digital literacy skills. Teachers must be able to navigate various sources of information, evaluate the accuracy of the content, and teach students how to use technology ethically and responsibly. (Khalisatun Husna et al., 2023) In this context, teachers function as facilitators who help students learn independently by utilizing various digital platforms. As followers, teachers need to support the principal in implementing policies related to the use of technology in schools. This includes following the directions and strategies set by the principal and providing constructive feedback on the implementation of these policies. (Andi Sadriani et al., 2023) Thus, the

relationship between the principal and teachers is very important in creating an innovative learning environment. (Munif, et.al, 2023)

Education in the digital era requires a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process. Increasingly advanced technology provides great opportunities for teachers to innovate and create more effective and interesting learning. However, to achieve this goal, good cooperation is needed between the principal, teachers, and all related parties (Fricitarani et al., 2023) .

3. The Importance of Digital Literacy for Teachers

Digital literacy is a very important skill for teachers in the modern era. Teachers must be able to use various digital tools to deliver learning materials effectively. For example, the use of online learning platforms, interactive applications, and social media can increase student engagement in the learning process. Teachers also need to teach students about digital ethics, including how to communicate politely in cyberspace and the importance of respecting copyright (Imaniah & Al Manar, 2022) . By equipping students with this knowledge, teachers not only fulfill their academic responsibilities but also prepare students to become responsible digital citizens. (Sihombing et al., 2024)

Teachers as part of the educational structure have a very large role in supporting the principal's work program. In this context, the role of teachers is not only limited to teaching and educating, but must also be able to adapt to technological developments and support the policies implemented by the principal. (Husain & Muslim, 2021) In this case, the principal acts as a leader who provides direction and vision for the development of the school, while teachers are tasked with implementing these policies properly. (Dewi et al., 2023) .

4. Collaboration between Teachers and Principals

Effective collaboration between teachers and principals is key to creating a school culture that is adaptive to change. The principal acts as a leader who sets the vision and mission of using technology in education. (Alwi et al., 2024) In this case, teachers as followers must be able to understand the vision and contribute to achieving common goals. Principals need to create a supportive working atmosphere for teachers. This can be done by providing resources, such as access to technological devices, digital literacy training, and time for collaboration between teachers. (Rosmini et al., 2024) When principals provide support and motivation to teachers, they will be more enthusiastic about implementing technology in daily learning. (Karmilasari et al., 2023)

Steps taken by teachers to support principals are crucial to the successful implementation of programs in the digital era. By participating in training,

improving skills in technology, and collaborating with fellow teachers and principals, teachers will be able to help principals achieve better educational goals. (Frictarani et al., 2023) The supporting and inhibiting factors in this process must be a shared concern. Support for teachers in the form of technological facilities and training is needed so that they can contribute optimally in supporting the principal's work program. Conversely, inhibiting factors such as limited resources and resistance to change need to be addressed so that the education process can run smoothly. (Husain & Muslim, 2021)

5. Challenges Faced by Teachers

Despite the many opportunities offered by the digital era, there are significant challenges faced by teachers. One of them is the lack of training and support from schools in terms of technology use. Many teachers feel unprepared or lack confidence in integrating technology into their learning. In addition, there are also challenges related to technology accessibility. (Alwi et al., 2024) Not all schools have adequate infrastructure to support the effective use of digital tools. Therefore, principals need to pay attention to this aspect and find solutions so that all teachers have equal access to technological resources. (Serena et al., 2024)

Through this research, it is hoped that it can provide a clear picture of the role of teachers in supporting principals in the digital era, as well as how teachers can contribute effectively to achieving better educational goals.

This study found that the role of teachers as followers in supporting principals in the digital era is very crucial. This is in line with (Bass's, 1990) findings in the Transformational Leadership theory, which states that leadership effectiveness depends not only on the leader himself but also on the response and support of his followers. In the context of education, teachers who actively support the principal's policies in implementing educational technology will be better able to create an innovative and adaptive learning environment.

A study conducted (Fullan, 2013) on changes in education also confirmed that the success of school transformation is greatly influenced by the readiness of teachers to accept and adopt innovation. Previous research (Rahman & Susanti, 2021) showed that principals who implement digital leadership experience challenges in inviting teachers to adopt technology, especially in the context of schools with limited infrastructure. This finding is reinforced by research (Zebua, 2023) which found that the lack of training for teachers is one of the main factors inhibiting digitalization in schools.

In this study, it was found that several key factors that support the effectiveness of teachers as followers in digital education include:

- 1) Access to adequate technology – Consistent with research (Haris & Nugroho 2020) which shows that schools with good technological infrastructure adopt digital-based learning systems more quickly.
- 2) Training and professional development – In line with (Guskey's, 2002) findings, ongoing training for teachers increases their readiness to use technology in the learning process.
- 3) Teacher commitment and readiness for change – (Kotter's, 1996) study emphasized that resistance to change is a major challenge in organizational innovation, including in the world of education.

However, several obstacles were also found in the implementation of the role of teachers as followers in the digital era. Research (Prasetyo & Lestari, 2023) revealed that the high workload of teachers often hinders them from participating in technology training, which ultimately results in low levels of adoption of digital innovation. This is in line with (Asrulla, et. al. 2021) which shows that lack of time and support from educational institutions are the main challenges for teachers in implementing digital strategies.

Based on comparison with previous studies, this study contributes by highlighting the importance of synergy between principals and teachers in overcoming the challenges of technology integration in schools. If previous studies have focused more on principal leadership in the digitalization of education, this study provides additional perspectives by looking at how teachers can become effective followers in supporting the policy.

Thus, this study proposes that strategies that can be applied to optimize the role of teachers include:

- 1) Increasing access to technological devices and internet connectivity so that teachers can more easily implement digital learning methods.
- 2) Regular training and mentoring for teachers in the use of technology to increase their readiness for change.
- 3) Building a collaborative culture between principals and teachers so that the implementation of digital policies is more effective and sustainable.

Through this strategy, it is hoped that schools can be better prepared to face the challenges of digital education transformation and maximize the role of teachers as followers who support the principal's leadership.

D. Closing

The conclusion of this study shows that the role of teachers in supporting the principal's work program in the digital era is very vital. Teachers are expected not only to teach in the classroom, but also to be able to integrate technology into learning, improve the quality of teaching, and support the principal's policies regarding the use of technology. Effective steps to support principals in the digital era include technology training, collaboration with fellow teachers and principals, and the use of digital media for more efficient communication. Supporting factors such as access to technology, teacher commitment to continue learning, and support from the school are very important to increase the effectiveness of the teacher's role. Inhibiting factors such as limited infrastructure, resistance to change, and time constraints can hinder the implementation of technology in learning. Therefore, it is important for all parties to work together and support efforts to improve teacher competence in order to optimally support the principal's program in the digital era.

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