



Sustainable quality culture in schools: a leadership perspective

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ABSTRACT

A sustainable quality culture is an institutional prerequisite for responding to demands for educational accountability in Indonesia. However, its implementation faces challenges related to leadership, professional collaboration, and variations in socio-educational contexts. This study aims to analyze the role of principal leadership in strengthening the SPMI cycle, examine the mediating function of PLCs, and identify the influence of contextual factors on the sustainability of a quality culture in secondary schools. An integrative literature review method was employed, with searches conducted in Google Scholar, Garuda, and DOAJ, guided by thematic relevance, peer-reviewed publications from 2014-2025, and operational clarity of variables. The synthesis results indicate three main levers: consistent, learning-oriented instructional-transformational leadership, PLCs institutionalized as collaborative inquiry, and integrated SPMI with data utilization based on continuous improvement cycles. The analysis found that PLCs act as mediators, translating leadership vision into changes in classroom practices, whereas socio-geographical contexts moderate the effectiveness of implementation. The sustainability of a quality culture requires systemic integration between instructional leadership, professional collaborative mechanisms, and adaptation to local characteristics. Therefore, a differential strategy in quality mentoring and a multi-level longitudinal research design are needed to strengthen theoretical validity.

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ABSTRAK

Budaya mutu berkelanjutan menjadi prasyarat institusional dalam merespons tuntutan akuntabilitas pendidikan di Indonesia, namun implementasinya menghadapi tantangan kepemimpinan, kolaborasi profesional, dan variasi konteks sosial-educatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam menguatkan siklus SPMI, menelaah fungsi mediasi PLC, serta mengidentifikasi pengaruh faktor kontekstual terhadap keberlanjutan budaya mutu di sekolah menengah. Metode literature review integratif digunakan dengan penelusuran melalui Google Scholar, Garuda, dan DOAJ menggunakan kriteria relevansi tematik, publikasi peer-reviewed tahun 2014-2025, serta kejelasan operasional variabel. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan tiga pengungkit utama: kepemimpinan instruksional-transformasional yang konsisten berorientasi pembelajaran, PLC yang terlembaga sebagai inkuiri kolaboratif, serta SPMI terintegrasi dengan pemanfaatan data berbasis siklus perbaikan berkelanjutan. Analisis menemukan bahwa PLC berperan sebagai mediator yang menerjemahkan visi kepemimpinan menjadi perubahan praktik kelas, sedangkan konteks sosial-geografis memoderasi efektivitas implementasi. Keberlanjutan budaya mutu memerlukan integrasi sistemik antara kepemimpinan pembelajaran, mekanisme kolaboratif profesional, dan adaptasi terhadap karakteristik lokal, sehingga diperlukan strategi diferensial dalam pendampingan mutu serta desain riset longitudinal multi-level untuk memperkuat validitas teoretis.

Kata Kunci: budaya mutu; kepemimpinan kepala sekolah; perbaikan berkelanjutan; PLC

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INTRODUCTION

The push for accountability and quality improvement positions school principals as visionaries, guardians of learning standards, and architects of a culture of quality. Indonesian studies show that learning-oriented leadership (articulating a data-driven vision, conducting dialogic supervision, and strengthening teacher capacity) correlates with the strengthening of a culture of quality and teacher performance. School principal leadership fundamentally impacts the quality of education in schools (Sari et al., 2021). Specific findings include improved consistency in the learning process through classroom observation-based supervision, enhanced teacher involvement in instructional decision-making through reflective forums, and increased teacher job satisfaction, which contributes to teacher retention (Mustoip et al., 2023). Empirical evidence indicates that transformational leadership combined with an instructional approach can boost teacher motivation by up to 64.6% in a secondary school context, with a mediating effect through a supportive organizational culture (Morris et al., 2020). These findings are highlighted in publications linking leadership to a conducive learning environment, collaborative practices, and school quality management.

State-of-the-art practices mark a shift from administrative approaches toward organizational learning through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and an integrated *Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal* (SPMI). The SPMP Policy/Permendikbud No. 28/2016 mandates the SPMI as a quality control framework based on national standards, which, when internalized, can foster a systemic and sustainable culture of quality within educational institutions. The novelty of this article lies in synthesizing evidence from Indonesia into a three-lever model and addressing research gaps regarding PLCs mediation and the moderating role of local context.

Field observations indicate that schools that rigorously implement the SPMI cycle—from quality mapping, improvement planning, and implementation through to audits and reflection—tend to demonstrate greater consistency in the learning process, more systematic classroom supervision, and more organized documentation of formative assessments. The integration of quality assurance systems with social innovation in higher education institutions has been shown to enhance sustainable performance through leadership mechanisms that empower all stakeholders. In contrast, the quality of sustainable quality management heavily depends on a transformational leadership style that engages all staff in the journey toward sustainability (Glavič, 2020). In many regions, strengthening Data-Driven Planning through the Education Report encourages schools to analyze AKM/ANBK (*Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum/Asesmen Nasional Berbasis Komputer*) results to determine improvement priorities; however, quality variations among educational institutions remain significant, so a culture of quality has not yet fully taken root as a daily work practice. Systematic reviews confirm that integrating technology and educator competencies within a transformational leadership framework significantly enhances learning effectiveness. However, the challenge of access disparities in rural areas remains a critical issue. Systemic change requires strong school organizations to consolidate innovative practices into coherent collective action. Operational evidence regarding the Education Report Card's function as a planning and monitoring tool is available through the official channels of the

Kemendikbudristek and publications by Pusdatin. At the same time, the ANBK captures literacy and numeracy achievements, which serve as an initial reference for PLCs/MGMP. Based on these facts, the question is formulated: how does the leadership of school principals enable the SPMI cycle and the use of the Education Report Card, thereby fostering a culture of sustainable quality in secondary schools.

Similarly, Indonesian studies have shown a positive relationship between school principal leadership, work/school culture, PLCs, and teacher performance. Studies and the repository of Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, as well as national articles, indicate that instructional leadership and school culture contribute to performance and teaching practices. At the same time, recent explorations of PLCs describe mechanisms of collegial support, peer observation, and reflection as levers for changing classroom practices (Syalwa et al., 2021). Against this evidence, the second research question is posed: to what extent do PLCs act as mediators, bridging leadership influence with the internalization of values, habits, and quality standards at the teacher/classroom level? Furthermore, variations in resources, parental/community support, and teacher stability are hypothesized to moderate the effectiveness of leadership and PLCs. This study aims to analyze the contribution of school principal leadership in strengthening the SPMI cycle and the utilization of the Education Report Card, examine the mediating role of PLCs in the formation of a sustainable quality culture, and identify the influence of socio-educational factors on the effectiveness of quality culture implementation in secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts and Dimensions of School Quality Culture

A school's culture of quality is a set of values, norms, and work practices that guide the behavior of school community members toward achieving learning quality standards. Key indicators include consistency in planning, implementation, and evaluation; the use of learning outcome data; and collaboration among teachers and support units (Wati et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, a culture of quality is also reflected through instructional discipline and a conducive work climate, which influence the regularity of formative assessments and feedback (Nashar et al., 2024). As this culture strengthens, variations in quality across classes decrease, best practices are documented, and the sustainability of innovation increases (Septian et al., 2025). Thus, a culture of quality functions as an "organizational engine" that connects standards, processes, and learning outcomes. In other words, a strong culture of quality is not merely the result of implementing standards, but a reflection of a collective commitment to continuous improvement through structured, reflective, and collaborative practices. The implementation of sustainable practices in higher education institutional leadership demonstrates that equity and excellence can be achieved through a global management approach responsive to socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. In contrast, sustainable leadership has been shown to drive faculty performance and classroom excellence by creating an environment that supports professional growth and effective learning (Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022; Kalkan et al., 2020).

Principal Leadership as a Catalyst for Quality Culture

The two leadership approaches most relevant to quality are transformational (vision, inspiration, reinforcement of values) and instructional (focus on the learning process, supervision, feedback) (Ismawiyah et al., 2024). Evidence from Indonesia shows that leaders who combine both are more effective at fostering a culture of quality, as vision is translated into measurable classroom behavior. Such leadership establishes clear standards, facilitates professional development, and ensures evidence-based follow-up (Wulandari et al., 2025). In practice, school principals serve as both architects of values and system managers. When consistent, leadership fosters work habits that support the sustainability of quality (Septian et al., 2025). The importance of school principals' support for digital transformation, technology-based professional development, and the building of a digital learning culture that contributes to the effectiveness of distance learning (Filho et al., 2020).

Professional Learning Community (PLCs) as Engines of Continuous Improvement

PLCs shift schools from individual work to organizational learning: teachers share plans, evidence, and reflections based on student achievement, then agree on improvement actions to pilot. When PLCs are led in an instructional, scheduled, and formative data-driven manner, effective practices spread rapidly and become "shared standards" that reduce quality variation across classrooms (Syahminan et al., 2024). Strong PLCs foster a sense of competence, job satisfaction, and commitment to implementation through psychological channels that mediate the effects of leadership on teacher performance (Syalwa et al., 2021). In PAUD/SD, PLCs help adapt play-based learning approaches and parent-teacher communication to align with quality standards (Cinantya et al., 2019). The effectiveness of PLCs requires clear objectives, safe discussion protocols, protected collaboration time, and the availability of easily accessible evidence (Ismawiyah et al., 2024). School principals align CPD with the PLCs agenda to ensure that the transfer of training to practice is tangible and measurable (Harjaya & Idawati, 2022). Documentation of artifacts (joint lesson plans, rubrics, feedback examples) accelerates the orientation of new teachers and maintains consistency in standards (Sumiati et al., 2024). In the field, disciplined PLCs have been shown to be associated with improvements in process indicators and instructional discipline (Tambunan, 2024). Therefore, strengthening PLCs is a key strategy for fostering a culture of quality that is consistent across all learning groups (Ardhi et al., 2024).

SPMI and the PPEPP Cycle as the Systemic Framework of Quality Culture

According to the FKIP ULM SPMI Standards, at the system level, SPMI provides a quality architecture that integrates standards, processes, and evidence, ensuring that changes do not depend solely on the school principal (accessible at <https://upmfkip.ulm.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Standar-SPMI.pdf>). The ULM Quality Assurance Agency states that the PPEPP cycle—comprising planning, implementation, evaluation, control, and improvement—ensures a closed-loop process each semester through internal audits and management review meetings (accessible at <https://jpok.fkip.ulm.ac.id/wp->

<content/uploads/2022/10/Kebijakan-Mutu-ULM.pdf>). In this way, SPMI serves as a framework that maintains the rhythm of the quality culture through changes in personnel and policies (Rahmah et al., 2022). Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in improving system performance and mobilizing all employees on the journey toward sustainability, although challenges related to employee commitment remain a constraint (Murtada et al., 2022). Furthermore, sustainable leadership in higher education institutions faces challenges, including a lack of interest from university administrations, limited expertise and resources, and the need to adapt curricula and invest in education for sustainable development (Hafid et al., 2025). Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) requires the identification of key issues that encompass a holistic approach, stakeholder awareness, participation and collaboration, as well as capacity building, with the main challenge being the timely and profound transformation of human society. In contrast, higher education institutions play an essential role in sustainability through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, and 16, emphasizing the importance of sustainability principles as the core of institutional strategies and organizational culture (Silva et al., 2021; Sugiyanto, 2025).

METHODS

This study employs an integrative literature review method. The literature review was chosen because it is suitable for synthesizing diverse research designs—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods—into a coherent thematic understanding when the primary objective is not to calculate standardized effects, as in a meta-analysis, but rather to establish conceptual clarity, identify patterns, and formulate an agenda for further research. Theoretically, this approach aligns with the integrative review framework, which emphasizes theory building through the integration of heterogeneous evidence and systematic conceptual reasoning. This methodological foundation draws upon both classical and contemporary guidelines on literature reviews, which underscore the role of the literature review in constructing new knowledge through critical synthesis rather than merely providing a descriptive summary.

The review procedure followed the standard steps of a high-quality literature review, beginning with the determination of the issue's focus and scope, the formulation of research questions, source identification, selection, and screening, extraction of key information, and, finally, narrative-thematic synthesis. A narrative-thematic approach was chosen because the research corpus on leadership, PLCs, and SPMI in Indonesia is relatively diverse in terms of study design, sample size, and outcome indicators; thus, this approach is better suited to linking findings across designs and uncovering the conceptual mechanisms that unify them. Methodological literature recommends this strategy when the purpose of the review is to construct a conceptual framework and ground practice, rather than to calculate effect sizes, while maintaining transparency of the process through reporting of search steps, inclusion criteria, and synthesis strategies.

The search was conducted primarily through Google Scholar, Garuda, and DOAJ using keyword equivalents in Indonesian and English related to school principal leadership, PLCs, SPMI, quality culture, and teacher performance. Source selection prioritized peer-reviewed works, strong thematic relevance, operational clarity of variables, and contributions to

understanding the mechanisms of relationships between concepts, in line with the guidelines for selecting evidence in integrative literature reviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Leadership as a Driver of Quality Culture

A synthesis of the literature indicates that school principal leadership is the most critical factor in the formation and sustainability of a school's culture of quality. School principals serve not only as administrative managers but also as instructional leaders who set the strategic direction for the quality of learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In the empirical realm of Indonesian education, it is evident that leadership that emphasizes academic supervision, teacher development, and reflection on learning outcomes has been shown to strengthen the school's organizational culture. Bush, in the book "Leadership and Management Development in Education," argues that the effectiveness of educational institutions depends heavily on leaders' ability to articulate a vision, manage resources, and motivate the entire school community to actively engage in quality improvement.

A comparative study of the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in educational settings confirms that the success of TQM is determined by leaders' ability to empower stakeholders and by a culture that supports pedagogical innovation, with practical recommendations including the integration of participatory leadership and performance-based reward systems (Mincu, 2022). Empirical evidence also shows that continuous communication, organizational culture, and leadership style have a direct and positive influence on cooperation, trust, and organizational commitment among faculty members at universities.

Another study highlights that quality-oriented leadership requires school principals to integrate academic supervision with data-driven reflection on quality. Within the framework of instructional leadership, school principals not only monitor curriculum implementation but also facilitate teachers in analyzing assessment results and establishing improvement plans (Hallinger, 2011). Studies show that school principals who actively lead reflective meetings within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can enhance alignment between learning objectives and teachers' assessment strategies (Harjaya & Idawati, 2022). This demonstrates that the effectiveness of leadership extends beyond the administrative dimension to encompass the dimensions of learning and innovation. School principals serve as catalysts who bridge quality policies with practical implementation within the instructional process.

The literature review also confirms that the effectiveness of a school principal's leadership is maximized when supported by a well-established quality system and structure. Permendikbud No. 28 of 2016 on the SPMI positions the school principal as the coordinator of the quality assurance cycle, which includes mapping, planning, implementation, evaluation, and standard-setting. School principals who systematically implement SPMI can foster a culture of reflection among teachers and improve academic accountability (Ranisa et al., 2025). A report by the South Kalimantan BPMP shows an average increase of seven points in quality scores at schools where the principal is active in the self-evaluation phase

and in following up on quality improvements (available at <https://web.lmpkassel.com/evaluasi-hasil-mutu-pendidikan>).

In theory, quality-oriented school leadership requires strategic capabilities to foster a reflective, collaborative, and adaptive culture within the educational organization. School principals need to establish evidence-based learning systems, integrate supervision with professional coaching, and cultivate a collective commitment to continuous improvement. School principals in resource-constrained areas who adopt an adaptive approach have proven more successful in maintaining quality over time compared to those who emphasize bureaucracy alone. These findings align with evidence that adaptive leadership, supported by a collaborative school culture, can mediate the relationship between leadership and teacher performance, particularly in the context of schools with structural limitations, and are reinforced by research on the importance of transformational leadership style in shaping a positive organizational culture and a strong institutional image through school cultural mechanisms (Mustoip et al., 2023).

It can be concluded that the school principal's leadership is a structural prerequisite for building a culture of quality, but it is not an automatic guarantee. If leadership is not accompanied by supporting mechanisms (such as routine supervision, self-evaluation, and data-driven feedback), then quality will remain merely rhetorical. Evidence from several studies indicates that effective school principals are those who not only lead but also initiate internal collaborative mechanisms to sustain a culture of quality. Therefore, in the Sustainable Quality Culture model, leadership must be viewed as a "starter engine" that requires collaborative processes and a quality system to function.

PLCs and SPMI as Internal Mechanisms of Quality Culture

A synthesis of the literature indicates that PLCs and SPMI serve as a binding mechanism between school leadership and a culture of sustainable quality. Hargreaves, in his book "The Challenge for the Comprehensive School: Culture, Curriculum, and Community", notes that within the framework of a learning organization, PLCs enable teachers to share best practices, reflect on learning outcomes, and develop collaboration-based professionalism. This aligns with Senge's perspective in the book "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization," which states that effective learning organizations are characterized by members' participation in collective learning and continuous improvement. In Indonesia, strengthening PLCs has become an integral part of implementing the SPMI, as stipulated in Permendikbud No. 28 of 2016 on the Quality Assurance System for Primary and Secondary Education.

A review of various national publications shows that the existence of PLCs has been proven to strengthen the effectiveness of SPMI in educational institutions. Transformational leadership that encourages teachers to collaborate in PLCs can improve alignment between lesson plans and school quality standards (Hartini et al., 2025). Research also demonstrates that routine reflection activities within PLCs enhance teachers' social connectedness and professional commitment, thereby strengthening a culture of quality (Harjaya & Idawati, 2022). Meanwhile, a report by the South Kalimantan BPMP reveals that schools adopting PLCs as part of SPMI achieved an average quality improvement of 10% higher than schools

that have not implemented them (accessible at <https://web.lpmpkassel.com/evaluasi-hasil-mutu-pendidikan>). The implementation of sustainable leadership in the context of global higher education demonstrates that social innovation serves as a partial competitive mediator between sustainable leadership and sustainable performance. However, managerial discretion does not show a higher positive moderating effect (Mustoip et al., 2023).

Empirical studies show that the effectiveness of SPMI depends heavily on the extent to which school principals encourage reflective practices among teachers through PLCs (Ranisa et al., 2025). In schools with active PLCs, the implementation of the quality cycle is more dynamic because collaboratively collected learning data drives it. This study shows that SPMI's success is determined not only by the availability of high-quality documents but also by how schools internalize the values of reflection, accountability, and innovation into professional routines. This collaborative approach transforms SPMI from a bureaucratic instrument into a means of transforming work culture based on shared learning.

Thematic analysis reveals that the effectiveness of PLCs and SPMI in strengthening a culture of quality is determined by three key dimensions: an organizational structure that supports collaboration, leadership that encourages participation, and a reflective culture that develops among teachers. Schools with a collaborative structure and a regular PLCs schedule tend to have higher levels of quality consistency (Sumiati et al., 2024). In addition, teachers in these schools demonstrate higher levels of professional commitment because they feel they are part of the quality decision-making process. The success of professional learning communities is greatly influenced by leadership that fosters mutual trust and collective responsibility.

Conceptually, the integration of PLCs and SPMI reflects the evolution of the quality assurance paradigm in schools from a control-oriented approach toward organizational learning. School principals play a crucial role in facilitating collective reflection, providing feedback based on quality data, and ensuring that follow-up improvements are implemented on an ongoing basis. The South Kalimantan BPMP recommends that every educational institution make PLCs an integral part of the SPMI cycle with measurable schedules and indicators (accessible at <https://web.lpmpkassel.com/evaluasi-hasil-mutu-pendidikan>). Additionally, leadership training focused on collaborative management and teacher professional development needs to be strengthened so that school principals can lead with a learning-based approach. Thus, PLCs and SPMI will not merely be administrative tools but will evolve into a collective learning system that instills quality values continuously across all levels of the school.

Social-Educational and Geographical Dimensions as Determinants of the Sustainability of School Quality Culture

Regional conditions, community characteristics, and the stability of the teaching staff are key factors in the success of quality improvement programs. The principal at SD Negeri Sungai Sandung 2 faces structural challenges, including limited facilities and low community participation, which require a leadership strategy that is adaptive to the characteristics of the socio-educational environment (Nashar et al., 2024). Bush, in the book "Leadership and Management Development in Education," explains that effective leadership must be able to align organizational strategies with local resources and needs.

A national study reveals significant variations in the implementation of quality assurance systems across educational institutions in urban and rural areas. Urban schools face greater exposure to public evaluation and quality competition, whereas schools in remote areas encounter challenges such as limited digital infrastructure and high teacher turnover (Hartini et al., 2025). Teacher turnover in areas with limited access also often hinders the continuity of the quality cycle, particularly during the reflection and follow-up stages of the SPMI (Ranisa et al., 2025). Therefore, school principals are required to develop a quality management model that is flexible, contextual, and realistic in light of the region's capacity.

A cross-national study on sustainable leadership in higher education institutions confirms that leaders with an inclusive style and a systemic mindset, as well as the ability to innovate, think long-term, and manage complexity, can overcome challenges such as a lack of administrative interest and resource constraints, while gender issues in sustainable leadership are beginning to be addressed seriously, indicating an encouraging trend in the transformation of educational institutions (Mustoip et al., 2023; Jusoh et al., 2024).

School principals in the coastal regions of South Kalimantan are leveraging support from religious institutions and local communities to strengthen work ethic and participation among school community members (Sumiati et al., 2024). Similar findings were reported by the South Kalimantan BPMP, which found that the level of community collaboration is directly proportional to the sustainability of the implementation of the SPMI (accessible at <https://web.lpmpkalsel.com/evaluasi-hasil-mutu-pendidikan>). Thus, socio-ecological factors serve as enhancers of a culture of quality when managed strategically. Schools that develop cross-institutional partnerships and utilize social resources have been shown to have more stable quality resilience compared to those operating in isolation.

Sustainable educational change can only be achieved if there is alignment between systemic policies and the social realities of the school, or what is referred to as the "alignment of the change environment." This is supported by the views of Suriansyah and Aslamiah in their book "Strategi Pembelajaran Anak Usia Dini", which states that schools capable of adapting the implementation of quality systems to local socio-educational characteristics demonstrate higher levels of teacher commitment and consistency in quality. This approach requires visionary yet flexible leadership that is oriented not only toward administrative standards but also toward the school's social dynamics. Therefore, the success of a culture of quality depends on the principal's ability to translate national policies into operational strategies that align with the school's social and geographical structure.

Conceptually, the socio-educational and geographical dimensions are not merely external factors, but strategic determinants in strengthening the education quality system. School principals need to develop inclusive quality assurance strategies that account for the social, economic, and geographical diversity of their regions (Sumiati et al., 2024). Leadership development programs should also be tailored to the region's specific needs to ensure the quality improvement approach is more contextually relevant and effective. BPMP and LPMP mentoring must be designed differently according to regional characteristics to ensure equitable national quality outcomes.

Discussion

The discussion of the study's findings indicates that the sustainability of a school's culture of quality cannot be understood solely through a single dimension of leadership, but rather results from the systemic interaction between structural, professional, and socio-educational factors. Conceptually, these findings reinforce the theories of instructional leadership and transformational leadership, which emphasize that educational leaders play a role in stimulating quality awareness and creating a collaborative learning environment, as outlined in the book "Transformational Leadership" by Bass and Riggio. However, this synthesis adds a new dimension: that leadership effectiveness will only be sustainable if integrated into learning organization systems such as PLCs and SPMI. In other words, quality-oriented leadership functions optimally when facilitated by mechanisms of collective reflection and institutional structures that support continuous learning.

A global perspective on higher education for sustainability emphasizes that higher education institutions contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, particularly through their transformational influence on student behaviors and their contributions to a prosperous society; however, this requires sustainability principles to be embedded at the core of institutional strategies (curriculum, operational procedures) and organizational culture (Jusoh et al., 2024). A systematic review of leadership styles, educational quality, and institutional management in the context of sustainable education reveals that transformational leadership plays a significant role in enhancing educator motivation and creating a conducive learning environment. However, the challenge of unequal access in rural areas remains a critical issue (Glavič, 2020).

Various studies reveal a consistent pattern: school principals with strong instructional leadership traits tend to foster a more consistent culture of quality compared to those who rely solely on administrative management. PLCs serve as a platform for strengthening teachers' commitment to quality through shared reflection; furthermore, the implementation of SPMI is effective when the principal actively guides the stages of data-driven quality evaluation and follow-up (Harjaya & Idawati, 2022; Ranisa et al., 2025). These findings align with the continuous improvement cycle theory, which positions continuous improvement as the primary foundation of a quality system in the book "Out of the Crisis" by Deming. However, unlike this classical theory, this study's results emphasize the importance of leadership acting as a facilitator of organizational learning rather than merely a controller of quality processes. This is where a new theoretical contribution emerges: that a school's quality culture does not arise from structural control, but from reflective habits mediated by learning-centered leadership.

Previous research has also shown that PLCs and SPMI serve a dual function as both quality control mechanisms and platforms for professional learning. A review of the literature indicates that schools with structured PLCs schedules and systematic integration of SPMI tend to exhibit more stable levels of quality consistency (Hartini et al., 2025; Sumiati et al., 2024). This aligns with the views of Argyris and Schön in their book "Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective," which states that the organizational learning loop model suggests that reflective organizations can sustain innovation through a two-way learning

cycle between policy and field practice. This means that when PLCs and SPMI are managed not as administrative obligations but as a shared learning system, a culture of quality becomes an inherent value in teachers' professional behavior.

The sustainability of a quality culture cannot be separated from the school's social-educational and geographical dimensions. Studies confirm that variations in social conditions, community support, and resource availability determine the effectiveness with which a quality system can be implemented (Sumiati et al., 2024; Ranisa et al., 2025). Schools in areas with limited resources can maintain quality if the principal adopts collaborative strategies and leverages the community's social capital. This confirms the theory of alignment of the change environment, which holds that the success of educational reform requires alignment between the policy system and the school's social environment.

A comparative analysis of sustainable leadership practices across various contexts indicates that effective leadership does not rely solely on a single leader but on fostering distributed leadership that empowers all stakeholders, with the conservation of material and human resources and a long-term perspective serving as key dimensions (Murtada et al., 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of a global approach to elementary school management and leadership demonstrates that equity and excellence can be achieved through management practices that are adaptive, culturally responsive, and leverage data-driven decision-making and technology integration (Mincu, 2022).

Overall, the analysis reveals a hierarchical relationship among the main variables: school principal leadership serves as a driving force, PLCs and SPMI act as mechanisms for internalizing quality, while the socio-educational and geographical dimensions function as factors determining the sustainability of implementation. This synthesis enriches educational leadership theory by positioning learning-centered leadership as the most appropriate conceptual model for sustainable quality systems in Indonesia. This model emphasizes that effective leadership does not stop at commands and evaluations, but lies in the ability to facilitate collaboration, reflection, and adaptation to the dynamics of the educational social context. Thus, a new finding of this study is that the success of a sustainable quality culture is determined by the balance between leadership vision, professional learning structures, and sensitivity to the school's social reality.

CONCLUSION

A culture of continuous quality in schools results from the integration of visionary educational leadership, collaborative mechanisms such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and *Sistem Penjaminan Mutu internal* (SPMI), and diverse socio-educational dimensions within the school environment. Principal leadership has proven to be the primary driving factor in fostering quality awareness and facilitating collective teacher reflection for continuous improvement. PLCs and IQA systems serve as institutional frameworks that transform quality assurance from a mere administrative obligation into a dynamic professional learning practice. Meanwhile, socio-educational and geographical variables determine the sustainability of quality culture implementation by requiring strategic adjustments tailored to regional characteristics. Therefore, strengthening leadership capacity, integrating PLCs into SPMI, and implementing quality support policies based on local needs are recommended

to ensure that a culture of quality can grow and endure across all educational institutions in Indonesia.

As a follow-up to this study's findings, it is recommended that efforts to strengthen the culture of quality in schools focus on three main strategies. First, the development of school principals' leadership competencies should focus on reflective and collaborative skills through learning-centered leadership training integrated with PLCs practices. Second, the integration of PLCs into the SPMI should be formalized in school policies so that every stage of the quality cycle involves teachers' collective reflection and learning. Third, institutions such as BPMP and LPMP need to implement a differential mentoring model based on the region's socio-educational characteristics, so that quality strategies can be adapted to local resource conditions and community support. Additionally, further research is recommended to empirically test this conceptual model of a sustainable quality culture across various levels of education using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to strengthen its theoretical validity and application in national education policy.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. All data, analyses, and content of the manuscript have been compiled originally and are free from plagiarism. The author also confirms that all references have been cited in accordance with academic standards and the ethics of scientific publication. The author extends gratitude to the academic advisors and colleagues in the Graduate Program at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat for their scholarly input, as well as to the South Kalimantan BPMP for providing access to references and data that enriched this study.

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