

The Role of School Principals' Leadership in Supporting Learning Media Innovation in Early Childhood Education: A Literature Review

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Abstrak: *The leadership of school principals has a strategic role in supporting learning media innovation in Early Childhood Education (ECE). However, the results of research on this role are still scattered in various publications, so a study is needed that can provide a comprehensive picture. This study aims to analyze the role of school principal leadership in supporting learning media innovation in ECE through a literature review. Research data sources were obtained from scientific articles searched on Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases using keywords relevant to the research topic. Based on the selection criteria that have been set, 16 articles were obtained that were analyzed using content analysis techniques through thematic grouping, identification of finding patterns, and synthesis of research results. The results of the study show that the leadership of school principals supports learning media innovation through four main roles, namely building an innovation-oriented school vision and culture, developing teacher competencies in a sustainable manner, encouraging the use of digital technology in learning, and carrying out academic supervision and collaboration with various parties. Thus, the leadership of school principals that is adaptive, collaborative, and learning-oriented is an important factor in supporting learning media innovation in ECE.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of science, technology, and education policies encourages education units to continue to make updates in the implementation of learning (Nurlina et al., 2023). These changes require schools not only to be oriented towards achieving learning outcomes, but also to be able to present a learning process that is creative, adaptive, and in accordance with the needs of students (Halima et al., 2024). In this context, learning media innovation is one of the important components

because it plays a role in creating a more meaningful and interesting learning experience. The success of the implementation of these innovations is inseparable from the leadership role of school principals who are able to build a culture of innovation, facilitate the development of teacher competencies, and create a work environment that supports the birth of various new ideas in the learning process (Nurlina et al., 2025a; Gunardi & Kristiawan, 2026).

The learning characteristics of ECE units require the use of media that are able to provide a concrete, interactive, and appropriate learning experience for the child's developmental stage (Putri et al., 2026). Learning media is no longer seen as a complement to the learning process, but rather as a means that helps children explore the environment, develop creativity, build thinking skills, and increase engagement during learning activities (Nurlina et al., 2025b). Therefore, teachers are required to continue to develop varied, contextual media, and utilize the various learning resources available (Rasid et al., 2026). These efforts require support from school principals through policies that encourage innovation, the provision of facilities, professional development, and the creation of a collaborative culture so that teachers have the opportunity to design and implement learning media that suit the needs of early childhood (Wachyu et al., 2025).

Various research results show that the leadership of school principals has a significant contribution to the creation of a school climate that supports learning innovation (Nadillah et al., 2026). The principal not only performs administrative functions, but also plays the role of a learning leader who directs teachers to improve professional competence, encourage collaboration, facilitate training, and carry out academic supervision in an ongoing manner (Uyuni & Sulton, 2026; Bahera & Nurlina, 2024). This support has an impact on increasing teachers' ability to design and utilize learning media that is more creative, innovative, and in accordance with the characteristics of students (Maghfiroh et al., 2026). On the other hand, several studies also reveal that limited facilities and infrastructure, low opportunities to participate in professional development, and lack of optimal school policies are still obstacles in the development of learning media innovations, especially in Early Childhood Education units (Hijriyani et al., 2025).

Studies on the leadership of school principals and learning media innovations have developed in recent years. Some studies highlight the influence of principal leadership on improving teacher competence, school culture, learning climate, and quality of education (Yanti et al., 2025) while other research focuses on the development, utilization, and effectiveness of various learning media in improving the quality of the early childhood learning process (Farina, 2024). However, the two fields of study still tend to be discussed separately so that they do not provide a complete picture of how the leadership of school principals plays a role in supporting the birth of learning media innovations in ECE units. This condition shows the need to conduct a literature review to identify various forms of leadership support for school principals, strategies implemented, factors that affect the successful implementation of learning media innovations, and the direction of future research development.

This study aims to analyze and identify the trend of research results regarding the leadership role of school principals in supporting learning media innovations in Early Childhood Education units through literature review. This study focuses on identifying the form of leadership applied, the strategies carried out by school principals in encouraging learning media innovation, factors that support and hinder its implementation, and its implications for improving the quality of learning in ECE. The results of the study are expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the development of research in this field as well as a reference for school principals, teachers, researchers, and policy makers in developing leadership strategies that support learning media innovations in early childhood education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the literature *review* method to identify, analyze, and synthesize research results that discuss the leadership role of school principals in supporting learning media innovations in Early Childhood Education (ECE). According to Creswell, the literature review aims to provide an overview of relevant research results, connect them with existing knowledge, and identify research gaps that still need further study (Amalia & Nurlina, 2024). Therefore, this approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive picture of the development of research, the tendency of findings, and various aspects of the principal's leadership in supporting learning media innovation in ECE.

The source of research data is in the form of scientific articles obtained through literature search on several databases, namely Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search was conducted using a combination of keywords related to principal leadership, learning media innovation, and Early Childhood Education by utilizing Boolean AND and OR operators. The selected articles are scientific publications that are in accordance with the research focus, available in full text form, and published in the range of 2020-2026.

The articles obtained were then selected based on their suitability with the focus of the research. The selection criteria include articles that discuss principal leadership, learning media innovation, and Early Childhood Education, published in scientific journals, available in full text form, and directly related to the research objectives. Articles that are not in accordance with the topic, in the form of proceedings, theses, theses, dissertations, or review articles are not included in the analysis. Based on the selection process, 16 articles were obtained which were then analyzed using content analysis techniques through the process of grouping themes, identifying patterns of findings, and synthesizing research results to answer the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Analyzed Articles

The literature search process is carried out through the Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect databases in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria that have been set. After going through the stages of identification, screening, feasibility assessment, and final selection, 16 articles were obtained that met the criteria for analysis. The articles were published in the period 2020-2026 and use a variety of research approaches, including qualitative and quantitative research, mixed methods, multiple case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology. All articles discuss principal leadership in the context of early childhood education with diverse focuses, such as transformational leadership, digital leadership, instructional leadership, academic supervision, teacher professional development, and learning innovation.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Selected Studies

No.	Author(s) & Year	Country	Method	Main Theme
1	Keane et al. (2020)	Australia	Multiple Case Study	Principal leadership and technology innovation
2	Ariyani et al. (2020)	Indonesia	Qualitative Case Study	Innovative leadership
3	Tołwińska (2021)	Poland	Multiple Case Study	Digital leadership
4	Hidayat & Patras (2023)	Indonesia	Quantitative	Learning organization
5	Luo et al. (2023)	China	Grounded Theory	Digital leadership
6	Sitorus et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Mixed Methods	Academic supervision

7	Alam et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Quantitative Survey	Transformational leadership
8	Widyastuti et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Transformational leadership
9	Bahera et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Innovative leadership
10	Kurniasih & Suparno (2025)	Indonesia	Quantitative	Teacher professional development
11	Yuliana et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Learning quality
12	Hidayat et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Inclusive education leadership
13	Yanti et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Phenomenology	Teacher professional development
14	Trihantoyo et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Quantitative	Instructional leadership
15	Inayati et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Mixed Methods	Digital leadership
16	Fiantini & Rifa'i (2026)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Academic supervision

Based on the characteristics of the article analyzed, research on the leadership of school principals in supporting learning innovation in ECE shows the development of studies with various research focuses. Qualitative approaches dominated the articles analyzed, while quantitative approaches, mixed methods, multiple case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology were used to provide a more comprehensive perspective on leadership practices in ECE institutions. In general, the results of the synthesis show that the principal not only plays the role of the manager of the institution, but also as a learning leader who encourages innovation through teacher professional development, strengthening school culture, academic supervision, the use of digital technology, and the creation of an adaptive learning environment. Based on these findings, the discussion was further organized into several main themes that represent various dimensions of school principals' leadership in supporting learning innovations in ECE.

The Role of School Principals in Building School Vision and Culture to Support Learning Media Innovation

The results of the synthesis show that the leadership of the principal plays an important role in building the school's vision as a direction for the development of learning media innovations in ECE. Ariyani et al. (2020) explained that school principals realize their leadership through the preparation of a shared vision, effective communication, and teacher empowerment in carrying out learning. These findings are strengthened by Hidayat and Patras (2023) who show that school principals who build learning organizations are able to create a learning culture that encourages teachers to continue to develop innovative learning ideas and practices. This shows that a clear school vision is the basis for directing all school residents to support the development of learning media.

In addition to building vision, the leadership of the principal is also realized through the creation of a school culture that supports creativity and collaboration. Widyastuti et al. (2024) stated that transformational leadership is able to create a conducive work environment through motivation, professional support, and common goals. The findings are supported by Bahera et al. (2025) who show that open communication, motivation, and a positive work environment can increase teachers' confidence and productivity in developing learning. Such a school culture provides space for teachers to create and develop learning media that is in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood.

Based on the results of the synthesis, it can be understood that the principal's leadership in

building the school's vision and culture is an important foundation for the creation of learning media innovations in ECE. A shared vision provides a clear direction towards learning goals, while a collaborative school culture encourages teachers to continue to innovate and share good practices. Thus, learning media innovation does not only depend on the individual abilities of teachers, but develops into a part of the school culture built through the leadership of the principal.

The Role of School Principals in Developing Teacher Competencies to Support Learning Media Innovation

The results of the synthesis show that the leadership of school principals plays an important role in developing teacher competence as an effort to support learning media innovation in ECE. Hidayat and Patras (2023) explained that school principals who implement a learning organization are able to create a learning culture that encourages teachers to continue to improve their professional knowledge and skills. In line with that, Yanti et al. (2025) stated that school principals carry out their roles as managers, leaders, and innovators through teacher coaching and professional development programs. This effort provides an opportunity for teachers to improve their ability to design and implement more creative learning media.

The leadership role of school principals is also seen through the implementation of supervision, mentoring, and motivation on an ongoing basis. Kurniasih and Suparno (2025) found that the leadership of school principals has an effect on improving teacher performance through strengthening competence and confidence in carrying out learning. The findings are supported by Bahera et al. (2025) who show that effective communication, motivation, and a positive work environment can increase teachers' productivity in developing learning. Meanwhile, Fiantini and Rifa'i (2026) emphasized that academic supervision, continuous training, and collaboration with teachers and parents are important strategies in strengthening teacher competence in early childhood education units.

Based on the results of this synthesis, it can be understood that the leadership of school principals in developing teacher competencies not only focuses on improving teaching skills, but also on teachers' readiness to create and utilize innovative learning media. Through continuous training, supervision, mentoring, and motivation, school principals create a learning environment that supports the development of teachers' creativity. Thus, the development of teacher competence is one of the strategic roles of school principals in realizing learning media innovations that are in accordance with the needs and characteristics of early childhood.

The Role of School Principals in Encouraging the Use of Digital Technology to Support Learning Media Innovation

The results of the synthesis show that the leadership of school principals plays an important role in encouraging the use of digital technology as an effort to support learning media innovation in ECE. Luo et al. (2023) explained that the digital leadership of school principals is reflected in the ability to build vision, attitudes, and understanding in directing school residents to utilize technology to support the learning process. These findings are in line with Tołwińska (2021) who shows that school principals play a role in providing digital facilities, building a collaborative culture, and facilitating teachers in improving information and communication technology competencies. This role is the basis for creating a learning environment that is more adaptive to technological developments.

The leadership role of school principals is also realized through the provision of facilities, mentoring, and strengthening the culture of innovation in the use of digital technology. Keane et

al. (2020) explained that the active involvement of school principals in the implementation of technology is able to increase teachers' confidence to use digital-based learning media. The findings are supported by Inayati et al. (2025) who show that digital leadership contributes to increasing teacher creativity, student engagement, and collaboration with parents in the learning process. Meanwhile, Sitorus et al. (2023) emphasized that digital-based supervision provides more effective learning assistance and evaluation, although it still faces challenges in the form of limited infrastructure and teachers' digital literacy.

Based on the results of this synthesis, it can be understood that the principal's leadership in encouraging the use of digital technology does not only focus on the provision of devices, but also on the ability to build a digital vision, develop teacher competence, and create a school culture that supports the use of technology in learning. Through adaptive and innovation-oriented leadership, school principals are able to encourage teachers to develop learning media that are more interactive, interesting, and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. Thus, the use of digital technology is a form of implementation of the principal's leadership in supporting learning media innovation in ECE.

The Leadership Role of School Principals through Academic Supervision and Collaboration to Support Learning Media Innovation

The results of the synthesis show that the leadership of school principals through academic supervision plays an important role in supporting learning media innovation in ECE. Fiantini and Rifa'i (2026) explain that academic supervision accompanied by technical guidance, feedback, and continuous training is able to improve teachers' competence in designing more effective learning. These findings are reinforced by Sitorus et al. (2023) who show that digital-based supervision provides opportunities for teachers to obtain assistance and evaluation of learning more flexibly in accordance with technological developments. Through continuous supervision, school principals can encourage teachers to continue to develop learning media that are more creative and in accordance with the needs of early childhood.

In addition to academic supervision, the leadership of the principal is also realized through strengthening collaboration with teachers, parents, and various related parties in supporting learning media innovation. Hidayat et al. (2025) show that collaborative leadership is able to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education through cooperation between teachers, counselors, and parents. The findings are in line with Keane et al. (2020) who explained that the active involvement of school principals in building learning communities and providing support to teachers contributes to the successful implementation of learning innovations in schools. A well-built collaboration creates a learning environment that is more open to the development of innovative learning media.

Based on the results of the synthesis, it can be understood that the leadership of school principals through academic supervision and collaboration is a complementary strategy in supporting learning media innovation in ECE. Supervision provides direction, mentoring, and evaluation for teachers to improve the quality of learning, while collaboration strengthens the synergy between schools, teachers, parents, and various stakeholders in creating an innovative learning environment. Thus, the success of learning media innovation is not only determined by the ability of teachers, but also by the leadership of school principals in building a sustainable mentoring and cooperation system.

CONCLUSION

The results of the literature review show that the leadership of school principals has a strategic role in supporting learning media innovation in ECE through the development of an innovation-oriented school vision and culture, teacher competency development, the use of digital technology, and the implementation of academic supervision and collaboration. These four aspects complement each other in creating a learning environment that encourages teachers to develop learning media that are creative, contextual, and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. These findings confirm that the success of learning media innovation does not only depend on teacher competence, but also on the leadership of school principals who are adaptive, collaborative, and learning-oriented.

This research has limitations because it only uses articles obtained from the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases according to the predetermined selection criteria. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the data sources, publication time range, and analysis approaches in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership role of school principals in supporting learning media innovations in ECE.

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