

Development of a Participative Leadership Model Integrating Mandailing Ethnic Culture to Improve Teachers' Literacy Competence

Sulhan Hamid H. Lubis¹, Restu², Aman Simaremare³, Eka Daryanto⁴

sulhanhamid@gmail.com, restugiran@unimed.ac.id, tuansimare@unimed.ac.id, eka-daryanto@unimed.ac.id

1-4 Universitas Negeri Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia

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Highlights:

- Active Participation in Decision-Making: The implementation of the participative leadership model, integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture, promotes a collaborative approach in decision-making, significantly involving teachers, principals, and staff, which enhances teacher literacy competence.
- Key Challenges in Implementation: Common challenges identified include a lack of clear understanding of the model's mechanism, limited resources, and resistance to change, making it important to address these factors for better results in applying the model.
- Positive Impact on Teacher Literacy Competence: Empirical evidence indicates that the model has effectively improved teacher literacy competence in senior high schools in Mandailing Natal Regency, particularly through its emphasis on collaboration and teamwork.
- Cultural Integration's Role: The integration of Mandailing cultural values with participative leadership practices strengthens the model by fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility among school stakeholders, which in turn contributes to better literacy outcomes for both teachers and students.

Purpose: This research developed and tested a participative leadership model for school principals, integrating Mandailing ethnic culture, to improve teacher literacy competence in Mandailing Natal Regency. The model was validated by experts and found to be feasible, with principals and teachers showing a strong understanding of the leadership style and cultural integration. The implementation of the model led to a significant improvement in teacher literacy, confirming its effectiveness in enhancing teaching quality.

Design/methodology/approach: The research employed a development and experimental approach using the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) model. The study involved three high school principals and 95 teachers from the Education Branch Office of Region XI in North Sumatra. The researchers conducted a pre-test and post-test design to compare teacher literacy competencies before and after the implementation of the participative leadership model integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture. The effectiveness of the model was tested using statistical hypothesis testing (t-test) to assess significant improvements in teacher literacy skills.

Findings: The study found that the Participative Leadership model integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture effectively improved teacher literacy competence in senior high schools. The model was validated through expert evaluation, ensuring its cultural and educational relevance. The principals' deep understanding of participative leadership and Mandailing values facilitated the model's seamless implementation, promoting collaboration among teachers and involving them in decision-making. The application of this leadership approach significantly enhanced teachers' ability to access, understand, and apply information, leading to improved literacy skills. Statistical analysis confirmed the positive impact, demonstrating a significant increase in teacher literacy competence. The findings suggest that integrating participative leadership with local cultural practices is both feasible and effective in enhancing teacher performance and creating a more dynamic learning environment. This model can be considered a valuable

approach for improving literacy in schools, especially in culturally rich regions like Mandailing Natal Regency.

Research limitations/implications: This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the research focused on only three senior high schools and 95 teachers in Mandailing Natal Regency, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The sample size and geographic scope may not fully represent the diversity of schools in other regions. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from teachers and principals, which may introduce bias or subjectivity into the findings. Lastly, while the Participative Leadership model integrated with Mandailing culture showed positive effects, further research is needed to explore its long-term impact and adaptability in other cultural contexts or regions. Future studies should consider expanding the sample size, exploring different educational settings, and using additional methods of data collection to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the model's effectiveness in improving teacher literacy competence.

Practical implications: The practical implications of this study suggest that the integration of Participative Leadership with Mandailing ethnic culture can significantly enhance teacher literacy competence in senior high schools. School leaders, particularly principals, can adopt this leadership style to foster a more inclusive and collaborative school environment. By involving teachers in decision-making processes, promoting teamwork, and encouraging cultural integration, principals can improve teachers' professional development and enhance their literacy skills. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of creating a supportive school culture that values open communication, collaboration, and continuous feedback. This approach not only benefits teachers but also positively impacts student learning outcomes. For schools in regions outside Mandailing, adapting this leadership model with local cultural nuances could provide a sustainable strategy for improving educational quality. School administrators should consider training and supporting teachers in adopting this participative model for long-term improvements in both teaching practices and student literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is not merely about the ability to read and write, but about how one applies that literacy knowledge in daily life. A person can more easily understand the concept of literacy if they have received an education, whether formal or non-formal. The higher one's level of education, the easier it becomes to grasp literacy concepts. With strong literacy skills, the overall quality of education is also expected to improve. (Kurniawan & Parnawi, 2023).

Life in the 21st century presents challenges that compel every nation to develop human resources proficient in a wide range of skills, one of the essential skills is literacy. Literacy is considered a critical component for building a nation capable of competing globally. Literacy skills relate to the demands of reading proficiency, which involve the ability to understand information analytically, critically, and reflectively (Benavot, 2015; Muhali, 2019; Singh, 2018).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores. In terms of ranking, Indonesia's position in PISA 2022 showed improvement compared to PISA 2018. Indonesia climbed five to six positions in the 2022 rankings. However, a significant point of concern is the decline in scores for reading, mathematics, and science—by approximately 12–13 points. In 2018, Indonesia's reading score was 371; this dropped to 359 in 2022. The mathematics score fell from 379 to 366, and the science score dropped from 396 to 366.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's reading literacy ranking improved from 74th in 2018 to 71st in 2022. In mathematics, the ranking rose from 73rd to 70th. For science literacy, the ranking went from 71st in 2018 to 67th in 2022. PISA 2018 was participated in by 79 countries, while PISA 2022 included 81 countries, comprising 37 OECD countries and 44 partner nations. The PISA sample is randomly selected by the OECD to represent the population of 15-year-old students in each country. In Indonesia, the sample includes students from all regions, including underdeveloped areas.

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This concerning situation has motivated me, as a high school educator residing in Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province, to contribute ideas for improving teachers' literacy competence through school principal leadership. The enhancement of teacher literacy competence is ultimately expected to lead to improved student literacy competence at the high school level. This initiative is grounded in the following realities.

Student literacy competence is generally acquired through school-based learning. Like any organization, a school requires a leader with the characteristics and skills necessary to sustain, grow, and fulfill its goals. Various leadership styles can be employed in professional environments to achieve shared objectives. Participative leadership, also known as democratic leadership, is based on Kurt Lewin's classic model of three leadership styles, known for his contributions to social psychology and experiential learning (Khan et al., 2016).

The main goal of secondary schools such as high schools is to prepare students for higher education. In addition, they aim to nurture students' academic and non-academic potential. High school principals play a crucial role in improving education quality, managing school administration, and guiding educational staff. They serve as educators, managers, and supervisors. It has empirically shown that participative leadership positively impacts teacher/staff performance and competence (Arina et al., 2023; Ayu & Darmayani, 2023; Guillén-yparrea & Ramírez-montoya, 2023; Irnawati & Nuryani, 2023; Junaris, 2023; Kemal et al., 2023; Putri, 2020).

Preliminary assessments using participative leadership indicators in senior high schools in Mandailing Natal under the Education Office Branch XI of North Sumatra revealed that three schools practice participative leadership: (1) SMAN 3 Penyabungan (42 teachers), (2) SMAN 1 Batang Natal (27 teachers), and (3) SMAN 1 Tambangan (26 teachers), totaling 95 potential teacher participants for experimentation. Literacy competency tests administered to these teachers yielded an average score of 6.5, indicating an unsatisfactory level that needs improvement. Preliminary assessments identified several problems, including teachers' limited information about literacy culture and its weak implementation—evidenced by the incomplete literacy-related administrative documentation.

Local wisdom as a cultural product must be understood through a new lens. The emergence of a holistic ecological-systemic paradigm has influenced multiple disciplines. Natural sciences and philosophy are beginning to engage with the ideas presented by this paradigm, offering solutions to interpret reality through both scientific and daily-life approaches. Mandailing ethnic culture is a form of local wisdom inherent to the Mandailing people. The local culture empirically affects employee/teacher performance and competence (Herdi et al., 2023; Khataee & Dowlatabadi, 2023; Knight, 2001; Lengam et al., 2023; Nambiar et al., 2020).

Mandailing is an ethnic group with a complete cultural identity. The name Mandailing is believed to derive from "Mandala-Holing," referring to a kingdom predating the 12th century, stretching from Padang Lawas to southern West Sumatra, within the current South Tapanuli area (Nasution, 2019). Mandailing culture features various traditional practices, including; *Dalihan Natolu*, a customary system that functions both ceremonially and as a social control tool ensuring community harmony (indicator: democratic consensus)(Arifiah & Siregar, 2022); *Martahi/Marpokat*, as deliberation, discussion, or group consensus (indicator: focus group discussion) (Ritonga, 2020); *Mangupa*, a traditional blessing ritual during key life events such as marriage, childbirth, or survival from danger (indicator: collaboration) ; *Marsialap Ari*, a collective mutual assistance in farming, reflecting the value of reciprocal help (indicator: teamwork); *Manyaraya*, a traditional rice harvesting event involving close family members (indicator: teamwork); *Martoktok*, a communal tradition of helping the underprivileged build homes (indicator: teamwork).

Collaboration enhances competence, as numerous studies have shown that effective teamwork plays a crucial role in boosting individual and group performance. (Adi et al., 2018; Ayu & Darmayani, 2023; Esteban et al., 2023; Guillén-y-parrea & Ramírez-montoya, 2023; Hackett et al., 2023; Ismael, 2023; Rahmat & Jon, 2023; Rosadi et al., 2020; Rusli et al., 2023; Safitri et al., 2021; Syarla et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2023). When individuals collaborate, they have the opportunity to share knowledge, learn from diverse perspectives, and distribute tasks based on each member's strengths. This synergy not only increases efficiency but also fosters a supportive environment where continuous learning and skill development are encouraged. Research consistently highlights that well-coordinated teamwork can lead to higher productivity, better problem-solving, and improved outcomes across various fields.

This research centers on developing a participative leadership model that incorporates Mandailing ethnic cultural values to enhance the literacy competence of high school teachers. Based on this focus, the research questions formulated are:

- 1) To what extent is the participative leadership model—integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture—valid in enhancing the literacy competence of high school teachers in Mandailing Natal Regency?
- 2) To what extent is the model feasible for practical implementation in improving the literacy competence of high school teachers in Mandailing Natal Regency?
- 3) How effective is the participative leadership model, based on Mandailing cultural integration, in advancing the literacy skills of high school teachers in Mandailing Natal Regency?

In line with the research questions, the objectives of this study are:

- 1) To design a valid participative leadership model that integrates Mandailing ethnic cultural values to strengthen literacy competence among high school teachers in Mandailing Natal.
- 2) To determine the feasibility of the developed model for real-world application in improving teacher literacy.
- 3) To assess the effectiveness of the participative leadership model that incorporates Mandailing cultural values in promoting literacy competence among educators.

The central hypothesis proposed in this study is: *"A participative leadership model for school principals that integrates Mandailing ethnic culture is valid, feasible, and effective in enhancing teachers' literacy competence."*

- 1) The development of this culturally integrated leadership model is anticipated to bring several benefits:
- 2) It can serve as a practical resource for learning and research while enriching the field of Educational Management.
- 3) There has been limited exploration of how local cultural values—specifically Mandailing culture—can be leveraged in school leadership to improve teacher literacy, making this study a valuable contribution to fill that gap.
- 4) The findings are expected to serve as a valuable reference, source of documentation, and academic resource, particularly concerning the role of local culture in advancing literacy education.
- 5) This research may also provide alternative insights for educational institutions in exploring, preserving, and applying Indonesia's rich local cultures in the educational context.

2. METHODE

This research adopts a research and development (R&D) approach, aimed at evaluating and refining existing development programs to establish effective procedures for both design and evaluation. The focus of the study is on enhancing the effectiveness of participative leadership practices among school principals through the integration of Mandailing ethnic cultural values, with the ultimate goal of improving literacy

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competence among teachers in public and private high schools within Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra.

The development framework utilized in this study follows the ADDIE model, which includes five key stages: Analysis, Design, Development (or Production), Implementation (or Delivery), and Evaluation. The study was conducted in high schools across Mandailing Natal Regency, where principals had already implemented a participative (democratic) leadership style. The schools involved in the study were:

- (1) SMAN 3 Panyabungan, with 42 active teaching staff;
- (2) SMAN 1 Batang Natal, with 27 active teachers; and
- (3) SMAN 1 Tambangan, with 26 active teachers. Altogether, the experiment involved a total of 95 teachers.

The research made use of three main instruments:

- 1) A questionnaire measuring the implementation of participative leadership, comprising six items (Setiawan, 2017);
- 2) A 22-item questionnaire assessing participative leadership integrated with Mandailing cultural elements. (Dhitasarifa et al., 2023; Purnama, 2020; Safitri et al., 2021; Setiawan, 2017) ;
- 3) A 21-item literacy competency test for teachers (Saryono et al., 2017).

To ensure the validity of the instruments, an expert validation process was carried out using four assessment items and a specific validation formula.

$$V = \frac{TSe}{TSh} \times 100 \% \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

V : validity

TSe: empirical total score

TSh: the maximum total expected

After obtaining the results from the expert validators, the overall conclusion can be aligned with the validity criteria as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Validation Criteria Based on Expert Judgment

Percentage scale	Validation level
85,01% - 100%	Highly Valid – Can be used without any revisions.
70,01% - 85%	Sufficiently Valid – Can be used but requires minor revisions.
50,01% - 70%	Insufficiently Valid – Not recommended for use due to the need for major revisions.
01,00% - 50%	Invalid – Should not be used.

(Saputri et al., 2017)

To test the hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of enhancing teachers' literacy competence, an experiment was conducted by comparing the old system with the new one in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency. The experiment can be carried out by comparing the situation before and after implementing the new system (before-after) or by comparing it with a group that continues to use the old system. The experimentals design follows the model O1 x O2. The experiment generates results through observations O1 and O2. O1 represents the literacy competence scores of teachers when the principal only implemented participative leadership, while O2 represents the scores after the principal applied participative leadership

integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture for one semester. The new participative leadership model will be deemed effective if the O2 scores significantly exceed O1.

To assess the hypothesis regarding the improvement in literacy competence among high school teachers in North Sumatra, before and after the principal's application of participative leadership integrated with Mandailing ethnic culture, a t-test will be used when the data follows a normal distribution. If the data does not meet the normal distribution assumption, the Wilcoxon rank test will be applied. The analysis is carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

3. RESULT

In the development of the Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership Model aimed at enhancing the literacy competence of high school teachers, four key implementation steps were undertaken:

First, the Socialization Phase: A workshop was held to introduce and disseminate the developed product, using the book *"Guidelines for Implementing the Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership Workshop to Enhance the Literacy Competence of High School Teachers."* The workshop proceeded smoothly, and the evaluation results highlighted the following key points:

1. All school principal participants attended the workshop for its full duration.
2. The workshop content was delivered in a clear and comprehensible manner.
3. The facilitators effectively communicated both verbally and through appropriate media.
4. The overall organization and execution of the workshop were seamless and successful.

Second, the Product Validation Phase: The validation process, conducted by five (5) expert reviewers, yielded the following summarized results:

Table 2. Validation of the Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership Instrument

No	Validation criteria	Score (max 100)
1.	Overall instrumen format	468
2.	Completeness and clarity of the statements presented	457
3.	Clarity of the assessment system and measurement scale of the instrument	462
4.	Use of language in accordance with Indonesian language standards	455
Total empirical score		1842

Table 3. Validation of the Teacher Literacy Competency Test Instrument

No	Validation criteria	Score (max 100)
1.	Overall instrumen format	468
2.	Completeness and clarity of the statements presented	476
3.	Clarity of the assessment system and measurement scale of the instrument	450
4.	Use of language in accordance with Indonesian language standards	471
Total empirical score		1865

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Based on the application of Formula (1), the validation score for the Participative Leadership Instrument integrated with Mandailing Culture was found to be $V = 92.10\%$, which falls within the "*highly valid*" category—indicating that it can be used without revision. Similarly, the Teacher Literacy Competency Test Instrument received a score of $V = 93.25\%$, also categorized as "*highly valid*". These expert validation results confirm that both instruments are valid and suitable for use in conducting research.

Third, the Feasibility Testing Phase: This stage involved 95 high school teacher respondents. They were asked to evaluate whether their principals had implemented the Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership model by responding to a validated instrument containing 22 items. The response options were: "Always" (scored 3), "Sometimes" (scored 2), and "Never" (scored 1). The overall mean score was 2.51, indicating that the leadership model was implemented *almost always*. Therefore, it can be concluded that the three high schools involved in the study had indeed adopted the newly developed leadership model. In other words, the product is considered feasible for implementation. With this confirmation of product feasibility, the assessment phase measuring improvements in teacher literacy competence could be carried out.

Fourth, the Product Effectiveness Testing Phase: The effectiveness of the model in enhancing teacher literacy competence was measured using instruments previously validated by expert reviewers. The results of this assessment were then compared with the initial literacy competency scores to determine the significance of any improvement. Before conducting a mean difference analysis between the literacy competence levels under the old leadership model (standard participative leadership) and the new model (Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership), the normality of the data needed to be assessed.

The normality test was applied to the difference (DIFF) between pre-implementation and post-implementation scores. If the data followed a normal distribution, a Paired Sample t-Test would be used; if not, the Wilcoxon Rank Test would be applied. The Shapiro-Wilk method in SPSS was used to assess normality. According to the test criteria, a Sig. value ≤ 0.05 indicates non-normal distribution, while a value > 0.05 suggests normality.

The Shapiro-Wilk test yielded a Sig. value of 0.000, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Consequently, the Wilcoxon Rank Test was used to determine the significance of the difference in literacy competence scores.

According to the Wilcoxon results, a significant mean difference is present if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than 0.05. The test produced a Sig. value of 0.000, confirming a statistically significant difference. Additionally, the analysis showed 95 positive ranks and 0 negative ranks, indicating that literacy competence scores after the implementation of the new leadership model were consistently higher than before.

In conclusion, the Wilcoxon Rank Test results demonstrate a significant improvement in the literacy competence of high school teachers following the implementation of the Mandailing Cultural Participative Leadership model. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the newly developed model is effective in enhancing teacher literacy competence in public and private high schools under the jurisdiction of Education Regional Office XI of North Sumatra Province.

4. DISCUSSION

The Participative Leadership model integrated with Mandailing Ethnic Culture can be implemented in various regions, even those unfamiliar with Mandailing culture. This is because the integration emphasizes practices by school principals that encourage high school teachers to engage in Focus Group Discussions

(FGDs), collaboration, and teamwork to enhance their teaching duties. These cultural elements strengthen the participative leadership style by promoting professional cooperation among educators.

The discussion in this study is informed by feedback from school principals and teachers, who raised key questions:

- 1) What challenges arise when implementing the Participative Leadership Model integrated with Mandailing Ethnic Culture to improve teacher literacy competence?
- 2) What factors contribute to the model's successful application?
- 3) What practical steps are involved in its implementation?
- 4) While the study demonstrates that the model improves teacher literacy competence in senior high schools in Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province, principals and teachers have called for a clearer explanation of how the integration of participative leadership with Mandailing values contributes to enhanced literacy competence.

The discussion is organized around the key components of the model:

- 1) Participative/Democratic Leadership
- 2) Collaboration
- 3) Focus Group Discussion (FGD)
- 4) Teamwork
- 5) Teacher Literacy

Each component is explored based on field-based feedback from principals and teachers in Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province.

Participative/Democratic Leadership

Democratic Leadership in senior high schools focuses on involving all stakeholders—principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents—in the decision-making process. This approach fosters harmonious relationships and encourages shared responsibility and mutual respect, in contrast to authoritarian leadership, which relies on top-down directives.

The literature highlights the value of democratic leadership in schools by creating an inclusive environment that balances rights and responsibilities. This leadership style supports not only academic development but also the cultivation of social values, community engagement, and a sense of responsibility in students.

To implement democratic leadership effectively, school principals should take strategic actions that engage the entire school community. Key steps include:

- 1) Establishing transparent communication channels.
- 2) Encouraging participation in decision-making.
- 3) Promoting collaboration and teamwork.
- 4) Respecting diverse opinions and encouraging constructive feedback.
- 5) Distributing responsibilities equitably.
- 6) Conducting regular evaluations and providing feedback.
- 7) Building mutual trust among all members of the school community.

By following these steps, principals can create a collaborative and inclusive environment where all stakeholders are empowered to contribute to the school's success.

Field observations and interviews with principals and teachers have identified several challenges in implementing participative/democratic leadership, including:

- 1) Misalignment between school culture and participative leadership values.
- 2) Limited experience or understanding of democratic leadership practices.
- 3) Conflicting viewpoints among stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents.

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- 4) Inadequate conflict management skills within the school community.
- 5) Resistance to changes in leadership style.
- 6) Time and resource constraints in reaching consensus on policy decisions.
- 7) Ineffective communication practices.

Effective application of democratic leadership requires the support of several key factors:

- 1) Clear and consistent communication.
- 2) Active participation and engagement of all school members.
- 3) Inclusive decision-making processes.
- 4) A leadership style that prioritizes collaboration and fosters cooperation among team members.
- 5) Development of an inclusive school culture where individuals, regardless of background or position, feel valued and recognized.
- 6) Competent human resource management.

Democratic leadership has the potential to significantly enhance teacher performance by creating a collaborative work atmosphere, offering teachers meaningful roles in school governance, and supporting their professional growth. This approach not only improves instructional quality but also contributes to achieving broader educational objectives for students. Through a trust-based and inclusive leadership style, principals can cultivate highly motivated, cohesive teams committed to delivering optimal teaching and learning outcomes.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a cooperative process involving two or more individuals working together to achieve a common goal by sharing ideas, knowledge, skills, and resources. Within the school context, a collaborative culture entails the active interaction among various stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and school staff—to enhance both learning outcomes and student development.

The benefits of cultivating collaboration in the school environment include:

- 1) Enhanced learning outcomes,
- 2) Development of social skills,
- 3) Increased creativity and innovation,
- 4) Promotion of shared responsibility, and
- 5) Greater engagement from parents and the wider community.

Overall, fostering a collaborative culture within schools is essential to creating a dynamic and effective learning ecosystem that supports both academic achievement and students' social-emotional growth.

To establish a strong culture of collaboration, school principals must focus on nurturing supportive relationships, strengthening communication, and facilitating effective cooperation among all school members—including teachers, students, staff, and parents. The following are key steps for developing a robust culture of collaboration in schools:

- 1) Establish a clear vision and mission for collaboration.
- 2) Build effective communication channels.
- 3) Promote teamwork among teachers and staff.
- 4) Develop student-led collaborative programs.
- 5) Allocate time and space for collaborative activities.
- 6) Provide training and professional development on collaboration skills.
- 7) Recognize and reward successful collaborative efforts.
- 8) Engage parents in school-based collaboration.

- 9) Conduct regular evaluations and reflective practices on the collaboration process.

By implementing these steps, principals can foster a thriving culture of collaboration that enhances instructional quality, strengthens community relationships, and positively impacts student development.

Field observations and interviews with principals and teachers reveal several barriers to implementing a culture of collaboration, such as:

- 1) Differences in teaching perspectives and methodologies,
- 2) Limited time for collaborative activities,
- 3) Resistance to change,
- 4) Constraints in resources and access to learning materials,
- 5) Lack of trust and strong interpersonal relationships among teachers,
- 6) Variations in teachers' skill levels and professional experience.

A review of the literature highlights several factors that contribute to the successful implementation of collaboration in schools:

- 1) Open and transparent communication,
- 2) Strong support from the school principal,
- 3) Formation of cohesive and committed work teams,
- 4) Development of a culture of sharing and collective learning,
- 5) Sufficient time allocated for collaborative activities,
- 6) Recognition and rewards for collaborative achievements.

Encouraging collaboration among teachers to solve instructional challenges is not without obstacles. However, with the right strategies and attention to these key success factors—especially open communication, time allocation, and recognition—principals can cultivate a school environment that supports and sustains meaningful collaboration.

A collaborative culture within schools plays a vital role in enhancing teacher performance. Through shared knowledge, joint problem-solving, and continuous professional development, teachers can progressively refine their skills. Furthermore, collaboration boosts teacher motivation and commitment to their professional responsibilities, thereby improving the quality of instruction delivered to students. Consequently, establishing a positive collaborative culture yields significant benefits not only for educators but also for students and the broader school community.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a qualitative method involving structured group discussions designed to collect information, opinions, and ideas from individuals who share relevant knowledge or experiences related to a specific topic. In an educational setting, FGD typically involves small groups of participants—such as teachers, staff, students, or parents—guided by a facilitator who ensures that each participant has the opportunity to voice their thoughts.

The implementation of FGD in schools offers numerous benefits, including:

- 1) Gaining diverse perspectives and feedback,
- 2) Facilitating collaborative problem-solving,
- 3) Increasing stakeholder engagement,
- 4) Enhancing the quality of decision-making,
- 5) Strengthening communication and cooperation,
- 6) Encouraging reflection and evaluation.

Overall, cultivating a culture of FGD within schools serves as a powerful tool for gathering insights, planning meaningful change, and fostering effective communication and collaboration.

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To institutionalize FGD as an effective decision-making and problem-solving tool, school principals must integrate it into the school's planning and improvement processes. FGD sessions can be conducted with teachers, staff, students, and even parents to address critical issues related to school development.

The following steps can support the successful implementation of FGDs:

- 1) Clearly define the purpose and expected outcomes of the FGD.
- 2) Identify relevant and meaningful discussion topics.
- 3) Select appropriate participants based on their knowledge and experience.
- 4) Assign a competent moderator to guide the discussion.
- 5) Schedule meetings and prepare a suitable venue.
- 6) Establish clear discussion guidelines and norms.
- 7) Conduct the FGD with active and inclusive participation.
- 8) Document discussion points and draw meaningful conclusions.
- 9) Implement the outcomes of the FGD sessions.
- 10) Evaluate the process and outcomes to identify areas for improvement.
- 11) Institutionalize FGD as a regular practice within the school culture.

By applying these steps, school principals can foster a collaborative and reflective culture where all school members contribute to continuous improvement efforts.

Based on observations and interviews with school principals and teachers, several challenges have been identified in implementing FGDs effectively:

- 1) Limited time available for collaborative discussions,
- 2) Resistance to collaborative processes,
- 3) Divergent opinions or teaching methods among participants,
- 4) Lack of facilitation or group discussion skills,
- 5) Limited access to necessary resources or materials.

Literature on collaborative FGD practices in educational settings suggests several enabling factors for success:

- 1) A supportive and collaborative school culture,
- 2) Strong and facilitative leadership,
- 3) Selection of relevant and engaging topics,
- 4) Provision of adequate time and appropriate facilities,
- 5) Utilization of technology to support collaboration,
- 6) Shared focus on common goals and collective improvement.

Encouraging teachers to participate in FGDs for resolving instructional challenges is a strategic move toward improving teaching quality and professional collaboration. While challenges such as time constraints, resistance to change, and methodological differences exist, they can be mitigated through constructive approaches that prioritize inclusivity, resource allocation, and technological support.

The integration of FGDs into the school's professional culture plays a crucial role in improving teacher performance. FGDs offer a platform for teachers to share experiences, evaluate instructional practices, and collaboratively resolve classroom challenges. This process not only fosters professional growth but also enriches teaching strategies, enhances motivation and accountability, and generates creative solutions that can be implemented in classrooms.

Therefore, cultivating a strong FGD culture within schools is more than a mechanism for problem-solving—it is a strategic approach to advancing teacher development and improving the overall quality of education.

Teamwork

Teamwork is a collaborative process where individuals work together in a group to achieve a common goal or complete shared tasks. In effective teamwork, each member contributes their skills, knowledge, and ideas to produce better outcomes than what could be achieved individually. Within the school context, teamwork involves cooperation among teachers, students, staff, and parents to create an environment that supports learning and student development.

The benefits of teamwork in school settings include:

- 1) Improving learning outcomes,
- 2) Developing social and communication skills,
- 3) Enhancing leadership and responsibility,
- 4) Fostering creativity and innovation,
- 5) Teaching conflict resolution,
- 6) Building solidarity and empathy,
- 7) Increasing efficiency in task execution.

Overall, a strong culture of teamwork in schools is essential—not only for boosting academic performance but also for equipping students with valuable social, emotional, and leadership skills for their future.

Building a Culture of Teamwork in Schools

Creating a strong culture of teamwork in schools is a critical step toward improving performance, fostering collaboration, and establishing a positive working atmosphere. School principals play a pivotal role in facilitating and guiding teams to work harmoniously and productively.

The following steps can be taken to develop an effective teamwork culture in schools:

1. Define a clear vision and shared values for collaboration,
2. Establish open and effective communication channels,
3. Foster trust among team members,
4. Encourage the formation of small, focused teams,
5. Provide training and development in teamwork skills,
6. Set common goals and clarify team responsibilities,
7. Allocate time for regular team meetings and collaboration,
8. Recognize and reward successful team efforts,
9. Manage conflicts wisely and constructively,
10. Conduct regular evaluations and reflections,
11. Institutionalize teamwork as a core part of the school's culture.

By following these steps, school leaders can build a strong foundation for teamwork, enhancing synergy among school members, simplifying goal achievement, and creating a more positive and productive school environment.

Field observations and interviews with school principals and teachers reveal several challenges in fostering a teamwork culture:

- 1) Differences in personality and working styles,
- 2) Lack of trust among teachers,
- 3) Insufficient time for collaboration,
- 4) Unclear or undefined shared goals,
- 5) Limited resources and facilities to support collaboration.

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Literature review suggests several key factors that contribute to successful teamwork in educational settings:

- 1) Supportive leadership that encourages collaboration,
- 2) Open and effective communication,
- 3) Valuing diversity within the team,
- 4) Clearly defined and measurable goals,
- 5) Development of collaborative skills,
- 6) Provision of adequate resources for teamwork.

Promoting teamwork among teachers is essential for enhancing the quality of teaching and fostering professional growth. However, challenges such as personality differences, lack of trust, and time constraints must be addressed through thoughtful and inclusive strategies. With supportive leadership, clear communication, shared objectives, and respect for team diversity, principals can foster the development of strong and effective school teams.

A culture of teamwork in schools can significantly improve teacher performance by creating a collaborative, supportive, and accountable working environment. Through joint lesson planning, classroom management collaboration, and professional development activities, teachers can collectively overcome instructional challenges and enhance the quality of education provided. Moreover, teamwork strengthens interpersonal relationships among teachers, boosts morale, and builds a positive school climate that also benefits students.

In conclusion, schools that successfully cultivate a culture of teamwork are likely to experience long-term improvements in both teacher performance and educational quality.

Teacher Literacy Competence

Teacher literacy competence refers to a teacher's ability and skills to access, comprehend, manage, and effectively utilize various forms of information and resources in a learning context. This competence extends beyond traditional reading and writing; it includes information technology skills, digital literacy, and the ability to integrate diverse knowledge areas into the teaching process.

Key aspects of teacher literacy competence include:

- 1) Reading and writing literacy: the ability to understand texts and clearly convey information to students.
- 2) Digital literacy: the capacity to use information and communication technology to support learning, including educational software, online learning platforms, and digital tools.
- 3) Media literacy: the ability to critically evaluate and use various information sources and media, and to teach students to do the same.
- 4) Mathematical literacy: the capability to understand and teach mathematical concepts in ways that are accessible to students.
- 5) Scientific literacy: the understanding and teaching of scientific concepts in engaging and meaningful ways.

The benefits of teacher literacy competence in schools include:

- 1) Improving teaching quality,
- 2) Enabling more interactive and innovative learning,
- 3) Helping students develop their own literacy skills,
- 4) Facilitating data-informed decision making,
- 5) Expanding access to learning resources,

- 6) Fostering students' critical and creative thinking,
- 7) Enhancing collaboration and teamwork.

In essence, teacher literacy competence is essential for creating a high-quality learning environment, supporting students' academic growth, and preparing them for increasingly complex global challenges.

Efforts to enhance teacher literacy competence can include the following strategies:

1. Designing literacy training programs,
2. Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs),
3. Providing access to literacy-related resources,
4. Integrating literacy into lesson planning,
5. Offering rewards and incentives.

Potential challenges that may arise in the process include:

- 1) Limited time for training participation,
- 2) Inadequate resources and facilities,
- 3) Low teacher motivation to engage in literacy activities,
- 4) Lack of experience in using technology.

A review of the literature reveals several key factors that support efforts to improve teacher literacy competence:

- 1) Supportive and inspirational leadership,
- 2) A conducive environment for literacy development,
- 3) Collaboration among teachers,
- 4) Effective use of technology,
- 5) Regular evaluations and constructive feedback.

To improve teacher literacy in senior high schools, school principals must take strategic actions such as organizing training programs, forming PLCs, providing resource access, and integrating literacy into teaching plans. Challenges such as limited time, resources, and teacher motivation must be addressed with practical solutions, such as flexible scheduling, seeking external support, and offering meaningful incentives.

Mechanisms for Enhancing Teacher Literacy through Participative Leadership Integrated with Mandailing Cultural Values

1) Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership emphasizes active participation from all team members, including teachers, in decision-making processes. The principal serves as a facilitator, listens to teachers' ideas and input, and motivates them to engage in learning and professional development initiatives. When teachers are involved in planning literacy development programs, their sense of ownership and motivation to participate increases. This style also allows teachers to experiment with literacy-based instructional methods, including technological integration and innovative teaching techniques. Such leadership fosters mutual trust through two-way communication and recognition of teacher contributions. It encourages openness and knowledge sharing among teachers and promotes collaboration in overcoming literacy teaching challenges. In practice, the principal can organize regular meetings to discuss literacy development progress, suggest new instructional methods, and allow teachers to propose ideas for literacy improvement.

2) Collaborative Culture

A collaborative culture creates an environment where teachers work together toward shared goals. This involves sharing knowledge, experiences, and resources to support each other in developing literacy competence. Through collaboration, teachers exchange literacy teaching strategies, lesson materials, and classroom experiences. This helps expand their perspectives and learn from each

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other's best practices. For teachers who typically work in isolation, collaboration provides a sense of support and access to collective resources, enhancing both literacy skills and teaching quality. It encourages continuous learning through constructive feedback and problem-solving, especially regarding student difficulties in reading or writing. Principals can support this by organizing collaborative workshops where teachers from different subjects share their literacy integration strategies, including reading materials, articles, and educational videos.

3) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs are structured discussions where teachers share ideas, experiences, and thoughts on specific topics—in this case, literacy and literacy-based teaching. FGDs allow teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, identify challenges, and explore effective strategies for literacy instruction. These discussions can focus on particular issues, such as students' struggles with understanding texts or writing essays. Through collective brainstorming, teachers generate solutions and creative approaches. FGDs also help develop leadership skills, as participants take turns leading discussions or sharing their expertise. In practice, principals can conduct regular FGDs on literacy-related themes, such as using digital texts in the classroom or improving students' writing abilities, with experienced teachers facilitating the sessions.

4) Teamwork in Literacy Development

In the school context, teamwork involves collaborative efforts among teachers to achieve common goals, such as improving teaching quality and student literacy. This collaboration leverages the strengths and expertise of each team member. For example, a language teacher might share strategies for teaching writing, while a math teacher contributes ideas on numeracy development. Team-based planning and implementation of literacy strategies enable interdisciplinary approaches that enrich the student learning experience. Professional development becomes a collective endeavor, with teachers learning, applying, and evaluating literacy strategies together. The outcome is a more engaging and comprehensive literacy environment for students. Principals can support this by forming literacy development teams composed of teachers from various disciplines to design comprehensive literacy instruction programs and classroom activities that foster reading and writing skills across learning contexts.

Integration of Democratic Leadership, Collaborative Culture, FGD, and Teamwork

The integration of democratic leadership, collaborative culture, focus group discussions (FGDs), and teamwork can significantly enhance teachers' literacy competence. Democratic leadership provides teachers with the opportunity to be actively involved in professional development processes, while a collaborative culture fosters an environment conducive to shared learning. FGDs and teamwork promote reflection, discussion, and collective problem-solving, enabling teachers to improve their literacy skills and innovate in their instructional practices. Through this combination, teachers are more likely to feel empowered, motivated, and equipped to develop literacy competencies that positively impact student learning outcomes.

The development of a Participative Leadership Model integrated with Mandailing Ethnic Culture faces several limitations:

- 1) It is assumed that the prevailing leadership style among senior high school principals is participative. Therefore, if a principal's basic leadership approach does not align with the participative model, the implementation of this culturally integrated participative leadership may be ineffective or inapplicable.

- 2) The study sample involved only three (3) senior high schools and 95 teachers as both subjects and objects of research. To enhance the generalizability of the findings regarding improvements in teacher literacy competence, future research should expand to include a larger number of schools and teachers, ideally across multiple provinces.

5. CONCLUSION

The implementation of democratic leadership in senior high schools offers a significant opportunity to foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment. By actively involving teachers, students, staff, and parents in decision-making processes, democratic leadership promotes shared responsibility, mutual respect, and improved communication. This leadership style not only supports academic development but also cultivates essential social values and a sense of community among all stakeholders. Through strategic actions such as open communication, promoting collaboration, and respecting differing opinions, principals can ensure that every member of the school community feels valued and empowered, ultimately contributing to the success of the institution.

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To add after review.

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