



The “Blusukan” Leadership Style of Elementary School Principals in Kota Lubuklinggau : What Lessons Can Be Learned?

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the phenomenon of elementary school principals in Kota Lubuklinggau engaging in *blusukan* leadership. The research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenology method. The subjects involved were school principals, teachers, and school staff. The data were collected using observations, interviews, and documentation. The obtained data were then analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s interactive models in the following steps: data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results indicated that: 1) the concept of *blusukan* was performed by the elementary school principals through their willingness to directly supervise the working conditions of their subordinates to get real and accurate information from various sources; such information might be taken as consideration when making a decision; 2) The *blusukan* leadership style was implemented by encouraging subordinates, hearing and valuing their views, and sustaining close bonds between leaders and subordinates; 3) communication made by leaders was clear and not ambiguous, also easy to understand language, so subordinates can accept messages accurately, 4) due to the other vital obligations of school principals, the *blusukan* style should not be executed on a daily basis. *Blusukan* could also be done on the fly to check on subordinates while working. In this digital age, leaders could also utilize technology to support their *blusukan* by controlling the jobs of their subordinates through CCTV media.

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Introduction

In Indonesian society, a new phrase called “*blusukan*” is emerging. MBWA (Management by Walking Around), a function carried out by Hewlett-Packard since 1973, is referred to as *blusukan* in academic circles. Joko Widodo is credited with popularizing the *Blusukan* in Indonesia. The city's significant elections have taken place in Solo (twice, in 2005 and 2010), the Jakarta governor election (2012), and the presidential election (2014), and up until this point, *blusukan* has sent Widodo to be the victor. According to a study by Zulkarnain & Harris (2017), five leadership models apply to Joko Widodo's political leadership: servant, horizontal, populist, democratic, and charismatic leadership. Servant and horizontal leadership are known to be the most distinctive.

Additionally, Ramdhani (2015) contended that Joko Widodo uses a transformational leadership style in addition to a rationale-empirical, normative-re-educative strategy. He also employs interpersonal communication in his leadership, to add to that. In his study, Salman (2013) asserted that Joko Widodo's *blusukan* uses an intensely personal style of interpersonal contact, which shares many characteristics with society. As a result, an emotional bond is created between him and his supporters.



For leaders to get knowledge rapidly and easily about society, *blusukan* may encourage people to create close emotional bonds with their subordinates. According to Nasution (2014), *blusukan* at least possesses the following traits: leaders receive urgent information from the initial source; correct information enables the formulation of appropriate solutions; and the psychological link between the government and the populace is ensured. These three elements are necessary in the current Indonesian leadership scenario.

To be more precise, school principals oversee teachers, staff, and students who exhibit a variety of traits and personalities. This necessitates that they coordinate and bring diversity together to foster effective communication and high levels of emotional engagement with their school community. It is anticipated that principals' involvement will enhance teachers' performance. It is impossible to ignore their significant contribution to bringing the school community together to achieve shared objectives. According to a 2013 study by Septiana and Ivada, school leadership has a significant impact on teachers' performance. The jobs of teachers will improve when leadership is carried out better. The leadership of school principals has a considerable favorable impact on teachers' performance, according to Cholil (2014).

As the success of the school depends on their roles, school principals must develop their managerial skills (Karweti, 2011). They should nurture and maintain instructors' motivation at schools so that teachers can work consistently on occasion. Motivation has the potential to inspire individuals to work cooperatively and effectively and to combine all efforts in pursuit of job pleasure.

According to a study by Zebua (2016), the presence and performance of teachers are substantially impacted by the leadership of the principal. Despite the fact that Cahyowati and Lestari's (2014) research showed that school principals' active involvement in managing teachers' primary responsibilities is extremely crucial to the learning process. Leaders should collaborate with friends and coworkers rather than viewing teachers as a resource to be exploited. The leadership style and interpersonal communication of school principals have a significant impact on teachers' effectiveness (Dwi, 2012). The effectiveness of principals in implementing their leadership style, communication, motivators, creativity, innovation, discipline, and interest in and concern for their subordinates cannot be isolated from teachers' success in carrying out their responsibilities. Learning quality in the context of educational professions, particularly teaching, reflects teachers' competence. Therefore, attempts to enhance teachers' professional capacity are strongly tied to academic supervision, which is ultimately intended to enhance the quality, processes, and outcomes of learning.

According to Carudin's (2011) study, the effectiveness of teachers is favorably correlated with the leadership of school principals. The impact of participative leadership on teachers' performance was also addressed by Ali et.al. (2016). According to Juniawati's research findings (2017), 17.8% of teachers' performance is correlated significantly with participative leadership and principal supervision, while other factors influence other teachers' performance.

A democratic school principal, according to Sahuri (2017), serves as a catalyst to encourage teamwork and cooperation with the aim of achieving organizational objectives. The leadership style of school principals has an impact on teachers' ability to perform at their best. According to Gunawan (2011), style plays a significant role in predicting performance improvements in teachers. A key factor influencing teacher effectiveness is the leadership style of school principals. Thus, it was found that leadership style might be used to gauge teachers' performance (Rai, 2011).



The current investigation will focus on the *blusukan* leadership approach used by Kota Lubuklinggau's school principals. The *blusukan* style of school principals has not been commonly addressed, and only a few studies specifically discuss it. The precise grounds for selecting this city as the research site are due to these factors: first, school principals there have been seen engaging in *blusukan* frequently; and second, it is more financially effective to conduct the study there as the researchers already dwell there and they intend to showcase the potential leadership in this city.

Research Method

The current research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The research was conducted at an elementary school in Kota Lubuklinggau. The subjects comprised the school principal, teachers, and school staff. Observations, interviews, and documentation were utilized to gather the data. The obtained data were analyzed by adapting the steps suggested by Miles et al. (2014): data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Having collected the data, the first step was to develop a coding system. The coding step was made based on the research setting, technique of data collection, data sources, research questions, and research schedule. The coding was then applied to analyze the data. The codes were used to classify all the data gained from the interviews, observations, and documentation. At the end of the field note of the observations or the interview transcript, the code of research location, data collection technique, data sources, date, month, and year were noted. The way to read the coding is presented below.

The second step was sorting the data. Once the codes were completed with their operational limitations, each of the field notes was re-read, and each unit of data got relevant codes. The units here are excerpts from field notes like sentences, or paragraphs. The codes were put at the edge of the field note page. All field notes were then copied. The copied versions were cut based on the units, while the original version was archived. The cut versions were sorted or classified based on the codes written at the edges. To facilitate tracking the original version, at the end of the units, notations were provided. In the third step, conclusions were drawn as temporary findings in every single case by synthesizing all the obtained data. Context diagrams were initially made. The conclusions were only drawn in the absence of bias.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

The concept of *blusukan* performed by school principals is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Concept of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

Research focus	Results	Informant
The concept of school principal <i>blusukan</i> leadership	The leader can observe directly the subordinate's condition when working, then give some space for them to state their opinion or argue, and such information can also be obtained from reliable sources who report the subordinate's working circumstances	School principal
	The leader cannot merely rely on information from one side; he should analyze the information he receives, remain focused on certain facts, and provide answers or make decisions. So, the information received can be a reference for him to make a decision	Teacher
	The way to discover every single issue in an organization is to watch subordinates perform their tasks, identify issues, analyze challenges or issues, and evaluate	School principal



Yes, indeed, a caring and visionary leader, whose idealism is to realize the organization's vision and mission, is supposed to give his concern and observe his staff in the workplace to ensure that they work properly based on their job description and functions	Teacher
To ensure that a choice is impartial and effective at solving problems, a wise and ideal leader should seek information from a variety of sources rather than just one.	School principal

In view of the findings, the notion of *blusukan* leadership cannot be separated from leaders' willingness to directly watch the condition of their subordinates as they work, with the expectation that the leaders would receive accurate information from many sources to make appropriate decision. The terms *blusuk* and *blesek* mean "enter". When people write "*diblusukake*" or "*diblesekake ing lendhutan*", it means they are put in the mud. If people say *keblusukblusuk*, it means that they enter an unfamiliar place; they do it for the sake of coming to the target place or even without knowing where they are going (Salman, 2013).

While the term *blusukan* refers to adventures, coming here and there to solely find out the condition of one place, either naturally or culturally. With a greater and deeper cultural intention, adventures mean preserving high pride and human safety to find out what should be put aside or left behind, what should be preserved, and even what should be developed. *Blusukan* is a term for people who go on adventures to places where problems exist and are unrevealed. They go on such adventures in an effort to invigorate God's destiny—to find out about the condition of the natural world or the existing people. Getting to know in this sense means not doing it haphazardly but knowing to permeate, getting optimum involvement, and providing service. The terms *blusuk*, *keblusuk-blusuk*, and *bludukan* cannot be found in the vocabulary of any Indonesian language dictionaries. This term originally comes from Javanese; it is usually familiar to villagers or those who live in the hinterland. When discussing "rural pastoral", the term *blusukan* has represented the rural mindset, which non-rural people are no longer familiar with.

The Approach of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

The approach of *blusukan* performed by school principals is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Approach of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

Research focus	Results	Informant
The approach of school principal <i>blusukan</i> leadership	An intelligent leader should have good self-management, think strategically, be considerate of work circumstances, and act fairly without engaging in any discrimination against a particular subordinate	School staff
	The ideal leader should be assertive, consistent, and able to communicate admirably with subordinates and show responsibility for their assigned job	School principal
	Ideally, a leader should not wait until issues develop before implementing <i>blusukan</i> . To learn more about his subordinates while they are at work, it is best for him to perform <i>blusukan</i> before problems arise	Teacher
	In terms of <i>blusukan</i> , the relationship between a leader and subordinates is comparable to that of an interlocutor, with the expectation that clear communication will occur. Between them, there are no misunderstandings	School principal
	The approach to motivating our subordinates might be accomplished by hearing and appreciating their ideas, expressing appreciation for whatever performance they are putting forth, and maintaining a family-like relationship	School principal

Concerning the findings, ideally, *blusukan* should not be done when an issue emerges, but rather before a problem arises, leaders are intended to have *blusukan* to learn about the



situation of their subordinates. Then, tactics for motivating subordinates include listening to and recognizing their ideas, even the little ones, and keeping a positive relationship with them.

Blusukan is a new term developing in Indonesian society. In an academic term, *blusukan* refers to MBWA (Management by Walking Around), which has been performed by Hewlett-Packard since 1973. *Blusukan* in Indonesia is popularized by Joko Widodo. When joining the presidential election, *blusukan* sent Widodo to be the winner. Based on a study conducted by Syugiarto (2022), Joko Widodo tends to implement servant leadership in his *blusukan* style. Further, Harahap (2023) suggested that Joko Widodo applies a transformational leadership style, in which he takes initiative, upholds moral principles in his job, and motivates others to work toward shared goals, both within and outside of the organization. Additionally, he also uses interpersonal communication in his leadership. Interpersonal communication like face-to-face communication applied in his *blusukan* (Gama et.al., 2020) indicates an intensely personal approach, which put people or followers to know him personally.

Blusukan might engage people in a tight emotional attachment between leaders and their subordinates so that leaders can easily and quickly detect information about the society. Nasution (2014) reported that *blusukan* has several characteristics: leaders get urgent information from the first source; accurate information enables appropriate solution formulation; and psychological attachment between government and people is guaranteed. These three aspects are crucially needed in the reality of recent Indonesian leadership.

Going more specific, school principals lead teachers, staff, and students at schools that have different characteristics and personalities, which requires the principals to synergize and unite the diversity with the intention of having good communication and good emotional engagement between school principals and their school community. The role of principals is projected to improve teachers' performance. Their significant role in synergizing the school community for the sake of attaining school goals cannot be neglected. In a study conducted by Zarwini et.al (2022) showed a partially, simultaneously positive, and significant relationship between the principal's leadership style and work motivation for teacher performance. The better leadership is performed, the better teachers' jobs will be. Suroso & Anggoro (2022) also pointed out the significant positive effect of school principals' leadership on teachers' performance.

School principals have a responsibility to improve school quality and advancement through their roles as managers, leaders, supervisors, administrators, educators, innovators, and motivators (Riani & Ain, 2022). They should motivate teachers to work well and foster and maintain teachers' motivation at schools so that teachers can work consistently from time to time, as motivation might catalyze people to work together, effectively, and integrate all efforts to gain work satisfaction.

A study conducted by Sarwar et.al. (2022) has indicated that principals' leadership significantly impacts teachers' performance. While the research reported by Sudarni et.al (2021) highlighted that school principals' active engagement when supervising teachers helps at promoting teachers' performance. Moreover, leaders should have good communication with teachers as co-workers by considering that it might affect the teachers' successful work. It was reported that positive effects are seen and there is a strong positive correlation between teacher performance and internal communication between the principal and the instructors (Narimo et.al, 2020).

Teachers' success in executing their duties cannot be separated from principals' ability to implement their leadership style, communication, motivators, creativity, innovation,

discipline, and interest and concern for their subordinates. In the context of educational professions, particularly teaching, learning quality is a reflection of teachers' professional ability. Therefore, academic supervision is closely related to efforts to improve teachers' professional ability, which in the end is expected to promote the quality, processes, and outcomes of learning.

Principals' leadership is positively connected to teachers' performance (Parveen et al, 2022), even to students' achievement (Sukmaswati et al., 2020). Arina et.al (2023) also mentioned the effect of participative leadership on teachers' performance. The research findings of Juniawati (2017) indicated that participative leadership and supervision by school principals have a significant moderate correlation with teachers' performance; therefore, at a reasonably high level of development, participatory leadership styles are thought to be the most effective at managing organizational members (Ahmad et al., 2020), in this case, schoolteachers.

School principals' ability to affect teachers' optimum performance cannot be separated from their leadership style. Teacher performance can be influenced and enhanced by the principal's democratic leadership style as proved by Agustin et al. (2022). Specifically, the study underlined that such a leadership style grants teachers as subordinates a wide range of authority. In a nutshell, principals' leadership plays a driving factor in teachers' successful performance (Mulyani et al., 2020).

The Communication of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

The communication of *blusukan* leadership performed by school principals is described in Table 3.

Table 3. The Communication of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

Research focus	Results	Informant
The communication of school principal <i>blusukan</i> leadership	Leaders should use simple, understandable language in their communications that are crystal clear and devoid of ambiguity to ensure that their subordinates accurately receive the messages	School staff
	Non-verbal communication is pivotal because it shows honesty and spontaneity to express feelings and ideas without any manipulation.	School principal
	Interpersonal communication or communication happening among persons is occurring in face-to-face interaction, in which people can observe one another's verbal and nonverbal cues	Teacher
	It is totally right that leaders should use easy-to-understand language so the messages they want to convey are delivered accurately; if not, miscommunication will occur	School principal
	Troubles faced by a leader when trying to communicate are technical problems, semantics, and behavior. Basically, communication barriers do not always come from the communicators but are also influenced by other factors	School principal

Referring to the results above, to ensure that their followers can understand and accept their words, leaders should establish clear and unambiguous communication. One cannot ignore the importance of nonverbal communication since it promotes authenticity and uninhibited sharing of thoughts, feelings, arguments, and opinions. Face-to-face engagement allows one to immediately observe the verbal or nonverbal cues of others, which is how interpersonal communication between people is established.

Leadership, borrowing the ideas of Northouse (2013), is a process in which individuals affect others to attain common goals. The convention of leadership as a process means that not attitude within a leader but a "transaction" happens between leaders and followers. The process demonstrates that leaders have an impact and are impacted by their followers. This emphasizes that leadership is not a linear and one-way process; it is

interactive. It is also explained by Sharma and Jain (2013) that leadership is a process in which someone impacts others to reach goals and direct the organization cohesively and coherently. This process is conducted by the knowledge and skills of a leader. They mention four factors of leadership, consisting of 1) leaders knowing themselves and what to do to influence his or her subordinates, 2) followers, 3) communication, and 4) situation.

Nurhayati (2012) defined *leadership* as having the ability to persuade someone else to act. To achieve the desired corporate goals, leadership will need the proactive capacity to influence others. In a larger sense, leadership refers to a task or endeavor intended to impress others, as well as the skill of influencing people's conduct both individually and collectively. It is possible to lead without adhering to the current policies. A decision-maker should oversee formulating new policies, work schedules, and contracts. In a structural setting, "leadership" can refer to a method of inspiring others to carry out their assigned tasks.

Leadership can also be explained as actions to direct, guide, and persuade others so that thoughts and activities stay consistent with their main basic jobs. In a non-structural context, *leadership* can be defined as a process of affecting thought, feelings, and behavior and directing all facilities to achieve shared goals. Leadership is also a group of people working together to inspire others to achieve set objectives. As highlighted by Bertocci (2009) "Leadership is the combination of characteristics or personality traits in an individual that compels that person to inspire others to achieve goals that, without the leader's motivation, would not normally be accomplished". Then he added, "Leadership effectiveness depends on the relationship among leaders and followers and the circumstances involved". The effectiveness of leadership depends on the relationship between leaders and their subordinates.

According to Budianto & Komalasari (2016) leadership quality will have an effect if it is accompanied by competence, skills, and the capacity to handle a variety of situations. A leader's productivity and efficacy in completing the task at hand are typically good indicators of how well he is performing his obligations. He is regarded as a successful leader if production rises, and all duties are completed efficiently. However, if output declines and leadership is ineffective within a predetermined period, he is labeled a failed leader.

The System of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

The concept of *blusukan* performed by school principals is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The System of School Principal *Blusukan* Leadership

Research focus	Results	Informant
The system of school principal <i>blusukan</i> leadership	Leaders should not perform <i>blusukan</i> every day because they should not continuously monitor the situation; there is only one specific time when they should do it	School principal
	Sudden inspection is very crucial for leaders to do to see the real condition. If the inspection is announced, the subordinates can cover up their wrong actions and do preparation to hide them, to give a good impression to the leaders	Teacher
	No, <i>blusukan</i> can be performed whenever with or without an issue to resolve. In addition to problem-solving, <i>blusukan</i> 's main objective is to foresee problems or troubles in the future	School principal
	Making use of information technology makes the work effective when it is used to perform real duties. Therefore, technology's role in supporting leaders' responsibilities is essential."	School principal
	A leader should give concern and consider the information he or she gains when doing <i>blusukan</i> before deciding or taking action because the wrong movement or decision will impact organizational activities	Teacher



The findings above point out that because leaders have other responsibilities, the *blusukan* system for monitoring subordinates' situations do not need to be verified every day. *Blusukan* can also be done unplanned, and in this day and age, technical advances can be used to support monitoring activities, such as by employing CCTV media.

Leaders should collaborate with friends and colleagues rather than viewing teachers as a resource to be exploited. Parveen et.al. (2022) have highlighted that principals' leadership style had a considerable and beneficial impact on teachers' job performance. The ability of principals to apply their leadership style, communication, motivators, creativity, innovation, discipline, interest in and concern for their subordinates, and discipline itself cannot be separated from teachers' success in carrying out their duties. The professional aptitude of instructors is a reflection of the learning quality in the context of educational professions, notably teaching. Therefore, academic supervision is directly tied to initiatives to enhance teachers' professional competence, which in turn is anticipated to foster the quality, processes, and outcomes of learning.

Pardosi & Utari's research (2021) highlighted the link between teachers' effectiveness and the leadership of school principals; in other words, the findings suggested that the more effective the principal's leadership techniques were, the better the teachers' work tended to be as well. Teachers' effectiveness is strongly and favorably correlated with the instructional leadership of school principals (Bada et.al., 2020). Additionally, Harris et.al. (2017) reported that school principals in their leadership, might conduct supervision and evaluation to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, certainly with a focus on teachers' performance.

The potential of principals to influence teachers' optimal performance cannot be isolated from their leadership style. Liu et al. (2022) provided detailed proof that principals' leadership even gives a beneficial impact either on teachers' efficacy or students' performance. Moreover, Asad et.al. (2022) revealed that leadership behavior, specifically transformational, also affects school culture; in this case, teachers' work culture is assuredly considered. Here we see that principals' leadership style has a dominant power in determining teachers' performance. The study by Er (2021) demonstrated a favorable relationship between principal leadership and teacher practice. It is understandable why their leadership is a deciding factor in the success of teachers at schools.

Conclusion

The results of this current study conclude that: (1) The concept of leadership cannot be separated from leaders' willingness to directly involve themselves in observing their subordinates' conditions when working. It allows them to gather reliable data from a variety of sources and use it as the foundation for their judgments or decisions. (2) *Blusukan* can be used to motivate subordinates by implementing the following tactics: maintaining a close relationship with them, listening to their ideas, and showing gratitude for them, and commending them even for the slightest achievements. (3) Communication established by leaders should be precise, not ambiguous, so that the subordinates can accept the leaders' messages well. Leaders are required to use simple language to guarantee their subordinates' understanding. (4) Considering that leaders have additional responsibilities, the *blusukan* method, which is used to ascertain the status of subordinates, does not need to be examined every day. *Blusukan* can also be performed on the spot, and in the modern era, technical advancements can be used to support monitoring activities, for example, by employing CCTV media.



Recommendation

From the drawn conclusions, the current study provides recommendations for these parties: policymakers, school principals, and teachers. It is highly recommended that policymakers constantly pay attention to the actual circumstances in the field so that the solutions they offer will be in line with the issues that arise there. School principals are advised to regularly monitor and assess their subordinates' performance while they carry out their primary responsibilities so that principals can use that information to make decisions. At the same time, teachers are expected to strive for performance enhancement, with or even without principals supervising them.

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