



The Role of Cognizant Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance and The Quality of Education at XYZ Elementary School, Jambi

Gideon Christian¹, Khoe Yao Tung²

Universitas Pelita Harapan
Email: gideon12.gc@gmail.com

Article History

Submitted:

21 Juli 2025

Accepted:

6 Desember 2025

Published:

Desember 2025

DOI:

<https://10.47530/edulead.v6i2.279>

Copyright: ©2025, Gideon Christian, Khoe Yao Tung

Keywords:

Cognitive Leadership;
Teacher Performance &
Educational Quality;
Elementary School; Adaptive
Leadership; Indonesia

Scan this QR Read Online



License:

This work is licensed under
a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License.



Abstract: As a developing elementary school, SD XYZ in Jambi operates with a limited budget, which constrains its ability to provide adequate learning facilities, teaching resources, and teacher welfare. This study examines the role of Cognizant Leadership in improving teacher performance and the quality of education at SD XYZ, a new school facing challenges in resource limitations, student retention, and the need for adaptive and reflective leadership. The research employed a single-case qualitative design, with data collected through observation and interviews involving the principal, six teachers, two parents, and representatives of the school foundation. Data analysis followed an inductive process through coding stages of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that context-aware leadership has a significant positive impact on teacher motivation and performance, particularly through empathetic, participatory, and empowering approaches. Leadership practices such as openness to feedback, two-way communication, and data-informed evaluation strengthen collaborative and professional school culture. Although Cognizant Leadership has not yet been fully institutionalized, its potential is evident in building trust, improving resource management, and guiding teachers toward higher instructional quality. This study concludes that Cognizant Leadership offers a strategic and contextually relevant approach for developing elementary schools like SD XYZ to become more responsive, reflective, and quality-oriented. The findings contribute to the growing literature on awareness-based leadership and its role in enhancing teacher performance and educational quality in resource-limited primary education settings.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and intellectual capacity as a foundation for lifelong learning. It equips children with essential cognitive abilities, moral values, and social skills needed for long-term development. In this regard, effective management of primary schools is essential to ensure the quality of both the learning process and its outcomes. However, managing primary education institutions, especially newly established schools such as SD XYZ Jambi, faces several structural and cultural challenges. These include limited human resources, restricted operational budgets, and weak management systems, which affect service quality and public trust.

Previous studies show that adaptive and context-based school leadership has a positive impact on improving education quality. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) highlight the importance of reflective and collaborative leadership in building a strong educational ecosystem.¹ Similarly, a meta-analysis by Tan, Dimmock, and Walker (2021), covering 108 studies, found that leadership practices which strengthen teacher capacity, encourage the use of educational data, and involve external stakeholders are consistently associated with better academic achievement and learning attitudes. In line with this, research shows that transformational leadership fosters teacher commitment and motivation in contexts of limited resources (Nguyen et al, 2020). Moreover, distributed and collaborative leadership approaches have been found effective in strengthening teacher agency and school improvement (Hallinger, 2018; Liu et al., 2021).

In the context of Jambi City, particularly within developing Christian and private elementary schools such as SD XYZ

and several similar institutions in the surrounding area, leadership plays an especially crucial role in sustaining teacher performance and maintaining public trust. These schools often face limited infrastructure, fluctuating student enrollment, and a shortage of professional development programs for teachers. Consequently, the quality of education relies heavily on how effectively the school principal demonstrates awareness, adaptability, and empathy in daily leadership practices. Studies by Hallinger (2018) and Killinc & Gumus (2021)

confirm that in resource-constrained primary schools, leadership that combines relational engagement with strategic awareness has the greatest influence on improving teacher motivation and instructional quality. This local context provides a concrete basis for examining how Cognizant Leadership principles can address both operational and strategic challenges in schools like SD XYZ.

Based on these insights, this article introduces the concept of Cognizant Leadership as a contemporary framework for educational leadership. This approach integrates elements of reflection, contextual awareness, and data-informed decision-making. Leaders who apply this model function not only as policy-makers but also as reflective change facilitators who understand the social, emotional, and psychological dynamics of their school communities (Hallinger, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2020; Qian, Walker, & Li, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in applying Cognizant Leadership in a Christian primary school that is still developing institutionally, serving students from low-income families, using a values-based learning system, and operating with limited resources. This article presents not only empirical findings but also innovative

practices in empowering teachers and strengthening school culture (Khoe, 2024). The main purpose is to analyze how the principal of SD XYZ Jambi applies Cognizant Leadership to improve teacher performance and education quality. This approach intersects with the concept of Shepherd Leadership, notably in how it emphasizes relational, sacrificial, and trust-based guidance within educational communities rather than hierarchical authority (Dami, 2024) In addition to contributing to the literature on educational leadership, this article aims to serve as a practical reference for primary school stakeholders in addressing managerial and social challenges. It specifically examines how the principal implements Cognizant Leadership to build a collaborative culture, improve teacher performance, and manage institutional challenges in a reflective and strategic way.

Data show that the number of students who do not continue their studies at SD XYZ has increased each year, as presented in Table 1.1 below:

Tabel 1.1 Data Sekolah

Year	Number of XYZ Kindergarten B Students Who Did Not Enroll in XYZ Primary School
2020/2021	2 from 9 students (22%)
2021/2022	7 from 14 students (50%)
2022/2023	8 from 18 students (44%)
2023/2024	6 from 23 students (27%)

2024/2025	11 from 28 students (40%)
-----------	---------------------------

The decline in student enrollment from Kindergarten B to SD XYZ, as shown in Table 1.1, reflects a public trust crisis that threatens the school’s very existence. This issue arises not only from a lack of facilities and teaching staff, but also from the absence of a strong school culture and the institution’s low competitiveness. In such a situation, school leadership plays a critical role. Conventional, administration-oriented leadership has proven insufficient to address the complex challenges faced by schools in the era of disruption (Bennis, 2009).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how the principal implements Cognizant Leadership within the context of a developing primary school. The approach was chosen for its capacity to explore the social, cultural, and organizational dynamics of SD XYZ holistically within its real-life context. The research subjects consisted of the principal as the main informant, six permanent teachers, two parents, and one foundation representative, all selected purposively based on their direct involvement in school management and decision-making processes.

Data were collected through three main techniques: (1) direct observation of the principal’s leadership activities, (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with all informants, and (3) document analysis of school archives, meeting minutes, and teacher evaluation reports. The researcher acted as the main instrument, equipped with an interview guide and observation checklist. Data validity was ensured through source and

technique triangulation and member-checking to confirm the accuracy of findings. The data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, involving three stages—data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing—supported by iterative coding as described by Saldana (2021, p. 67) : First Cycle Coding, Second Cycle Coding, and Theoretical Coding.⁷

Findings were organized thematically and presented in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, and direct quotations to maintain the authenticity of participants' voices. To strengthen validity, (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Triangulation framework was applied by comparing data across informants and techniques, ensuring credible and consistent interpretation. This methodological framework guided the preparation of the article and shaped the structure of the discussion, aligning the analytical process with the overall objectives of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Performance and the Quality of Education at XYZ Elementary School Jambi

Teacher performance at SD XYZ Jambi must be understood within the complex interplay between limited resources, institutional maturity, and community trust. As a newly established Christian school, SD XYZ operates under financial and managerial constraints that affect both instructional quality and teacher capacity. The data in Table 1.1 show that student retention from Kindergarten B to Grade 1 fluctuates between 22%–50% over several academic years, signaling an erosion of parental confidence and a perception that the school's learning outcomes do not yet meet expectations. Such a pattern implies not only competitive pressures from other schools but

also internal challenges in ensuring consistent teaching quality. Teachers thus face multiple demands, balancing classroom instruction with administrative duties, community outreach, and school promotion, which fragment their focus and increase workload intensity. Prior research has shown that teacher performance is closely linked to contextual factors such as leadership support, institutional clarity, and access to professional resources (Leithwood et al., 2019; Saleem et al., 2020; Kilinc & Gumus, 2021).

Nevertheless, despite these structural challenges, the qualitative evidence suggests that SD XYZ benefits from a relatively warm and cooperative work atmosphere. Teachers describe the principal as approachable, disciplined, and relationally engaged, fostering intrinsic motivation and emotional commitment to their vocation. Such an environment aligns with findings that supportive leadership enhances teacher well-being and engagement, especially in resource-constrained settings (Harris & Jones, 2020; Kilinc & Gumus, 2021). However, the school still lacks systematic mechanisms for teacher evaluation and professional growth. Most performance assessments remain informal and subjective, without clear benchmarks or development goals. As Hallinger (2018) emphasizes, educational quality improves when leadership is both relationally sensitive and strategically structured balancing empathy with accountability. The absence of formal mentoring, coaching, or reflective review sessions at SD XYZ therefore limits the translation of teacher motivation into sustained pedagogical improvement.

In addition, concerns expressed by parents and the school foundation reveal a growing gap between current practices and long-term educational aspirations. While the

school's emphasis on character education is valued, stakeholders expect stronger academic outcomes and a clearly articulated strategic roadmap for the next five to ten years. The principal's current focus on daily operations, though essential for order and discipline, does not yet address broader issues of competitiveness, curriculum development, and innovation. This finding echoes studies that highlight how leadership focused solely on operational control can stifle institutional learning and adaptability (Bush, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Qian et al., 2022). Therefore, improving teacher performance and educational quality at SD XYZ requires a dual approach: reinforcing the positive relational culture already present, while developing strategic systems that institutionalize professional learning, data-based evaluation, and shared accountability for educational excellence.

Cognizant Leadership and Its Role in Education

Cognizant Leadership is a leadership model characterized by deep situational awareness, reflective practice, and an empathetic understanding of organizational dynamics. Within educational contexts, it represents an evolution of traditional leadership frameworks by integrating cognitive awareness, emotional intelligence, and contextual sensitivity. Cognizant leaders are reflective practitioners who continuously analyze their decisions in light of social, cultural, and psychological realities. Rather than relying solely on hierarchical authority, they emphasize dialogue, shared meaning, and learning-oriented adaptation (Hallinger, 2018). In developing schools such as SD XYZ Jambi, this approach is crucial because it enables leaders to navigate uncertainty and resource constraints without compromising the institution's vision and values. Research by Maulana et al (2024). On adaptive

leadership in educational institutions further supports that reflective awareness helps leaders respond effectively to disruptions and sustain innovation in complex school environments.

A key aspect of Cognizant Leadership is its alignment with the principles of transformational and adaptive leadership, where self-awareness and contextual understanding become central to sustainable organizational change. Cognizant leaders act as facilitators of growth rather than mere supervisors of tasks. They intentionally observe the behavioral patterns of their teachers, understand intrinsic motivations, and design interventions that enhance both individual and collective performance. This aligns with Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) who assert that effective school leadership must be both relational and strategic strengthening teacher capacity while ensuring the continuity of institutional goals. In the case of SD XYZ, this leadership approach becomes visible through the principal's relational openness, participative meetings, and willingness to integrate teacher feedback into decision-making. These practices reinforce psychological safety, professional trust, and collaborative innovation core ingredients for a high-performing school culture (Zheng et al., 2019; Kilinc & Gumus, 2021).

Beyond fostering relationships, Cognizant Leadership also encompasses strategic foresight the ability to connect present realities with future needs through systematic planning. Bush (2020) and Qian, Walker, and Li (2022) emphasize that educational leadership must move beyond immediate operational issues toward visionary and data-driven strategy. A cognizant leader applies reflective analysis to identify systemic weaknesses and future opportunities, translating them into

actionable goals such as teacher development programs, curriculum renewal, and stakeholder engagement strategies. In this sense, Cognizant Leadership transforms reflection into action, allowing leaders to build institutional resilience while responding adaptively to emerging challenges. At SD XYZ, where the foundation expects a clear five- to ten-year roadmap, this approach is essential to bridge daily management with long-term sustainability.

Equally important, Cognizant Leadership cultivates a culture of learning and shared accountability. By promoting collective reflection and distributed decision-making, the leader encourages teachers to become co-owners of the school's vision. Such participative structures not only improve teacher performance but also enhance the overall quality of education through continuous self-evaluation and mutual support. This echoes findings by Harris and Jones (2020), who noted that reflective and collaborative leadership fosters teacher innovation and adaptability, particularly in disruptive or low-resource contexts. Thus, Cognizant Leadership can be seen as a holistic educational paradigm balancing empathy with strategy, awareness with execution, and short-term action with long-term growth. For developing schools like SD XYZ Jambi, it offers a viable path toward sustainable excellence built upon relational trust, reflective insight, and contextual intelligence.

The Role of Cognizant Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance and the Quality of Education

A core contribution of Cognizant Leadership lies in modeling consistent professional behavior that shapes teachers' discipline and attitudes toward work. At SD XYZ Jambi, the principal demonstrates

punctuality, presence, and personal commitment, traits that teachers identify as motivational and exemplary. This modeling effect aligns with the principle that leaders serve as visible moral compasses whose actions speak louder than directives. Teachers reported feeling compelled to arrive earlier and maintain high standards of conduct simply by observing their principal's example. This dynamic reflects what Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) term instructional contagion, where leaders' consistent behaviors foster a ripple effect of professionalism throughout the organization. Similar findings by Saleem et al (2020) and Kilinc and Gumus (2021) confirm that teacher job performance improves when leadership demonstrates integrity, reliability, and alignment between words and actions. Furthermore, transformational leadership theory supports that such modeling not only motivates compliance but also nurtures shared identity and intrinsic commitment (Wilson Heenan et al., 2024; Harris & Jones, 2020)

Cognizant Leadership enhances teacher performance by fostering participatory decision-making and cultivating a sense of ownership among staff. At SD XYZ, teachers are actively involved in discussions about school policies, schedules, and classroom strategies. This approach reflects principles of distributed leadership that value collective intelligence and shared responsibility (Lin et al., 2022; Distributed Leadership in Schools – MDPI, 2024)

. By engaging teachers in both formal meetings and informal dialogues, the principal strengthens mutual trust and professional solidarity, creating a psychologically safe environment for innovation. Research demonstrates that participative and reflective leadership practices enhance teacher self-efficacy and

professional learning communities Kilinc & Gumus, (2021); Harris & Jones, (2020). Hallinger (2018) further argues that context-sensitive collaboration generates commitment and adaptability, two key components of educational improvement. Thus, Cognizant Leadership contributes not only to relational harmony but also to sustained professional engagement that directly improves instructional quality.

Another significant contribution of Cognizant Leadership is its awareness-driven approach to managing teacher workload and welfare. At SD XYZ, the principal's awareness of teachers' challenges such as the exhaustion caused by prolonged classroom hours provides opportunities to re-evaluate policies that may inadvertently harm productivity. Cognizant leaders consider the human aspect of organizational functioning, integrating empathy into decision-making. Voelkel, Prusak, and Van Tassell (2024) highlight that principals who demonstrate contextual awareness and relational sensitivity significantly enhance teacher collective efficacy and overall performance outcomes. Similarly, adaptive leadership theory, as described by Maulana et al. (2024), emphasizes flexibility and continuous feedback loops to balance institutional demands with employee well-being. Research by Qian et al. (2022) and Bush (2020) supports that sustainable performance improvement depends on leaders' capacity to design policies that respect human limits while maintaining accountability. This equilibrium between empathy and structure ensures that teachers remain motivated, healthy, and capable of sustaining quality teaching over time.

Cognizant Leadership also contributes to educational quality by transforming awareness into long-term strategic planning. A cognizant leader

recognizes patterns in daily challenges and converts them into structured initiatives that address both present and future needs. At SD XYZ, the absence of a clear five- to ten-year plan has limited the school's competitiveness; however, adopting a cognizant approach enables the principal to craft context-based strategies that integrate character education with academic excellence. According to Bush (2020) and Leithwood et al (2019), visionary leadership establishes coherence between institutional goals, teacher capacity, and student achievement. Qian, Walker, and Li (2022) further argue that leaders who anticipate contextual shifts can mobilize their teams more effectively to sustain school improvement. Strategic reflection therefore becomes a hallmark of Cognizant Leadership turning situational awareness into actionable roadmaps that secure long-term quality and trust within the educational community (Hallinger, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2020),

Finally, Cognizant Leadership strengthens teacher performance through the promotion of reflection and continuous learning. Teachers who work under reflective leaders tend to analyze their teaching methods more critically and seek improvement based on feedback and data. At SD XYZ, informal discussions and open evaluation sessions reflect the principal's effort to cultivate a reflective culture. Saldana (2021) notes that iterative reflection through data reduction and analysis, enables professionals to derive deeper meaning and refine their practices. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2019) and Kilinc & Gumus (2021) emphasize that reflective leaders enhance teacher adaptability and learning agility, leading to more effective classroom strategies. By institutionalizing feedback, dialogue, and evaluation, Cognizant Leadership transforms professional reflection

into a habit of continuous improvement bridging the gap between daily practice and the school's broader mission for quality education (Harris & Jones, 2020; Saleem et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of Cognizant Leadership in improving teacher performance and the quality of education at SD XYZ Jambi, a developing primary school facing contextual and structural challenges. Using a qualitative case study approach, the findings reveal that the principal's leadership practices, although grounded in strong relational and moral foundations, are evolving toward a more reflective and strategic model of leadership. The results highlight that Cognizant Leadership, characterized by contextual awareness, reflection, and responsiveness, provides an effective framework for educational improvement in resource-limited settings.

The most substantial findings of this study lie in how Cognizant Leadership contributes specifically to enhancing teacher performance and educational quality through five interrelated roles. First, by modeling professional discipline and ethical work culture, the leader sets behavioral standards that strengthen teachers' motivation and commitment. Second, by fostering collaboration and participatory decision-making, the leader builds a culture of shared responsibility and professional growth. Third, through balancing operational policies with teacher well-being, Cognizant Leadership ensures sustainability and reduces burnout. Fourth, by developing strategic and context-based planning, the leader connects short-term practices to long-term educational goals. Finally, by promoting reflective practice and continuous learning, the leader

embeds adaptability and innovation within daily teaching practices.

These five roles collectively demonstrate that Cognizant Leadership bridges the gap between relational strength and strategic transformation. It empowers teachers to perform beyond compliance, fostering both professional excellence and institutional resilience. Although direct measurement of student achievement was not conducted, improvements in teacher motivation, collaboration, and instructional quality suggest positive implications for learning outcomes. Therefore, this study concludes that Cognizant Leadership can serve as a transformative approach for developing schools enabling leaders to cultivate awareness, intentionality, and sustainability in improving both teacher performance and educational quality.

REFERENCES

- Bennis, W. (2009). *On Becoming a Leader*. Basic Books.
- Bush, T. (2020). Theories of educational leadership and management. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(1), 9–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219856056>
- Dami, Z. A. (2021). Informal teacher leadership: Lessons from shepherd leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 27(3), 509–538.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1884749>.
- Distributed Leadership in Schools: Practices to Promote Teachers' Professional Development for School Improvement. MDPI (2024).

- Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652>.
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2020). *COVID-19 – school leadership in disruptive times*. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(4), 243–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>.
- Khoe, Y. T. (2024). *Kepemimpinan pendidikan Kristen: Gaya kepemimpinan dan inspirasinya dalam pendidikan Kristen*. UPH Press.
- Kilinc, A. C., Gumus, S. (2021). *Principal leadership and teacher professional learning: A systematic review*. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(3), 411–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220907327>.
- Leithwood., Kenneth., Harris., Alma., Hopkins., David. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>.
- Leithwood, K., Mascal, B. (2008). Collective Leadership Effects on Student Achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44.
- Lin, Q., et al. (2022). The relationship between distributed leadership and teacher innovativeness: Mediating roles of teacher autonomy and professional collaboration. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 948152.
- Liu, Y., Bellibas, M. S., & Gumus, S. (2021). The effect of instructional leadership on teacher collaboration and student achievement: Meta-analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(5), 762–782. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220925819>.
- Maulana, I., Sirajuddin, Susanti, R., Sari, E., Karnati, N. (2024). Adaptive leadership in the digital era in educational institutions. *Journal of Education Sciences (Edusci)*, 2(2), 115–124. <https://doi.org/10.62885/edusci.v2i2.510>.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage Publications.
- Nguyen, D., Harris, A., & Ng, D. (2020). A review of the empirical research on teacher leadership (2003–2017): Evidence, patterns and implications. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-02-2018-0032>.
- Patton, Michael Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Qian, H., Walker, A., & Li, X. (2022). Principal leadership in times of crisis: The case of COVID-19. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(1), 136–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220985110>.
- Saldana, J. (2021). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Saleem, A., Aslam, S., Yin, H., Rao, C. (2020). Principal Leadership Styles and Teacher Job Performance: Viewpoint of Middle Management. *Sustainability*.
- Tan, Charlene Y., Dimmock., Clive., Walker., Allan. (2021). How school leadership practices relate to student outcomes: Insights from a threelevel metaanalysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(5), 761–785. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211061445>.
- Voelkel, R. H., Prusak, K. A., & Van Tassell, J. L. (2024). Effective principal leadership behaviors that enhance teacher collective efficacy. *Education Sciences*, 14(4), 431. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14040431>.
- Wilson Heenan, I., Lafferty, N., McNamara, P. M. (2024). Enactment of transformational school leadership—Insights from primary school and system leaders. *Education Sciences*, 14(6), 557.
- Zheng, X., Yin, H., & Liu, Y. (2019). Are transformational leadership practices linked to teachers' well-being? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(6), 853–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143218764175>