

# School Transformation Through Learning-Driven Principal Leadership: A Case Study in SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo Kendal Regency

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## Abstract

School transformation has become a strategic priority for improving educational quality; however, limited research has examined how transformation unfolds within Indonesian elementary schools led by Guru Penggerak principals. This study explored the process of school transformation at SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo, Kendal Regency, using the Awareness–Exploration–Implementation–Sustainability (AEIS) framework as an analytical lens to examine how organisational change was experienced and interpreted by school stakeholders. A qualitative single-case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, school committee members, parents, and students, complemented by observations and analysis of school documents. Interview interpretations were verified through member checking with participants, while triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence was used to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the findings. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that participants described school transformation as an interconnected process in which shared awareness, collaborative exploration, implementation of agreed practices, and the institutionalisation of routine reflection supported organisational learning. Across all four stages, collaborative reflection and evidence-informed decision-making consistently connected planning, implementation, and evaluation. Rather than confirming the AEIS framework as originally conceptualised, the findings suggest that these collaborative mechanisms refine understanding of how transformation develops within the context of an Indonesian elementary school. The study proposes that collaborative reflection and evidence-informed leadership may support organisational learning in comparable school contexts, while recognising that the transferability of these propositions requires further investigation through longitudinal and multi-case research.

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## Introduction

Educational systems worldwide are experiencing unprecedented challenges driven by rapid technological advancement, globalization, changing societal expectations, and increasing demands for twenty-first century competencies (Akbar Romadlon & Bagus Hendy Kurniawan, 2022); (Anam et al., 2025). These developments require schools to move beyond traditional administrative management toward adaptive learning organizations capable of sustaining continuous improvement and responding effectively to dynamic educational environments (Sindi Septia Hasnida et al., 2023); (Zhai et al., 2026). Educational quality is therefore determined not only by curriculum implementation or organizational efficiency but also by schools' capacity to cultivate collaborative cultures, professional learning, innovation, and evidence-informed decision-making (Kenmandola, 2022); (Supiyanti et al.,

2024). Consequently, school transformation has become a strategic priority for educational systems seeking sustainable improvement in teaching quality, organizational effectiveness, and student learning outcomes (Rizki Amalia & Asbari, 2023); (Satriawan et al., 2021).

School transformation differs fundamentally from conventional school improvement initiatives (Mustofa et al., 2024); (Asyikin & Rafeliai, 2025). While school improvement often emphasizes incremental changes in specific organizational components, school transformation represents a comprehensive and systemic process that reshapes leadership practices, organizational culture, professional collaboration, stakeholder participation, and instructional quality (Rosmini et al., 2024); (Rofiah et al., 2024). Sustainable transformation is achieved when new practices become embedded within everyday school routines and organizational values rather than remaining isolated innovations or temporary programs (Roni Harsoyo, 2022); (Rahma Dewi, 2024). Previous studies consistently demonstrate that successful transformation depends on collective commitment, organizational learning, continuous reflection, and collaborative professionalism that enable schools to adapt to changing educational demands while maintaining a long-term focus on student learning (Sheptea Mardhiyah Putri et al., 2024); (Mulyono et al., 2024); (Fania Rahma Yunanda et al., 2025).

Leadership has consistently been identified as one of the most influential organizational factors affecting school transformation. Although classroom instruction remains the strongest direct influence on student achievement, leadership plays a crucial role in creating the organizational conditions that enable effective teaching and sustainable educational improvement (Dian et al., 2022); (Attsaury et al., 2023). Contemporary perspectives on educational leadership emphasize instructional and learning-centered leadership rather than administrative management alone. Effective principals facilitate professional learning, strengthen teacher collaboration, promote reflective inquiry, and encourage evidence-based decision-making that collectively enhance instructional quality and organizational capacity (Galdames-Calderón, 2023); (Nurdin et al., 2023). Consequently, sustainable school transformation should be understood as an organizational process emerging through continuous interaction among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the wider school community rather than as the product of individual leadership behavior alone (Negeri & Sumatera Selatan, 2023); (Putri et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, educational transformation has become a national priority through the Merdeka Belajar policy, which encourages learner-centered education, curriculum flexibility, teacher professionalism, and school autonomy as key strategies for improving educational quality (Kareem et al., 2023); (Yoserizal et al., 2024). One of the most important initiatives supporting this agenda is the Guru Penggerak Program, which prepares teachers as instructional leaders capable of driving educational change within their schools. The program emphasizes reflective practice, collaboration, coaching, innovation, and student-centered learning while developing teachers' leadership capacity beyond classroom instruction (Bagas Aviyanto et al., 2024). Consequently, principals with Guru Penggerak backgrounds are expected to demonstrate distinctive leadership characteristics that prioritize organizational learning, collaborative professional culture, and continuous instructional improvement.

Recent studies have reported that principals with Guru Penggerak backgrounds contribute positively to teacher professionalism, instructional innovation, collaborative school culture, and curriculum implementation (Eni, 2023); (Shandilia Latunusa Ambawani et al., 2024). Similarly, broader educational leadership research consistently demonstrates that transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership positively influence teacher commitment, organizational effectiveness, and

student learning (Diya'ul Fajri et al., 2025). However, despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have primarily focused on leadership styles, leadership competencies, or school performance indicators while providing relatively limited explanations regarding how school transformation develops as a dynamic organizational process. Leadership is frequently examined as an independent variable influencing educational outcomes rather than as a mechanism through which schools collectively recognize the need for change, explore improvement strategies, implement innovation, and institutionalize sustainable practices.

Furthermore, empirical studies specifically investigating principals with Guru Penggerak backgrounds remain limited, particularly qualitative studies that explain how their distinctive leadership practices facilitate organizational learning and sustainable transformation within authentic school contexts. Existing research predominantly documents successful leadership outcomes without sufficiently examining the sequential processes through which educational transformation emerges and becomes embedded in school culture. Consequently, important questions remain concerning how collaborative leadership, reflective practice, instructional innovation, and stakeholder participation interact throughout different stages of organizational change.

To address these gaps, this study adopts the Awareness–Exploration–Implementation–Sustainability (AEIS) framework as an analytical lens for examining school transformation. Unlike leadership theories that primarily explain leader behavior, the AEIS framework conceptualizes transformation as a progressive organizational process in which schools first develop collective awareness of the need for change, collaboratively explore alternative solutions, implement innovations in professional practice, and subsequently institutionalize successful practices into organizational culture (Moullin et al., 2019). This framework enables a more comprehensive understanding of transformation by explaining not only whether educational change occurs but also how it develops and is sustained over time.

SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo, Kendal Regency, provides an information-rich case for examining this process because the school has demonstrated substantial improvements in teacher collaboration, professional learning communities, student-centered instruction, stakeholder participation, and school achievement under the leadership of a principal with a Guru Penggerak background. Rather than viewing these developments as isolated achievements, this study conceptualizes them as interconnected manifestations of a broader organizational transformation. Examining this case therefore provides valuable empirical evidence regarding how learning-oriented leadership facilitates sustainable school transformation within the Indonesian primary education context.

Accordingly, this study investigates how a principal with a Guru Penggerak background facilitates school transformation through the interconnected stages of Awareness, Exploration, Implementation, and Sustainability (AEIS). The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of the AEIS framework to explain school transformation in the Indonesian context and by providing a process-oriented perspective on leadership-driven organizational change. Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights for school leaders, policymakers, and educational practitioners seeking to strengthen sustainable school improvement through reflective, collaborative, and learning-centered leadership.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore how a principal with a Guru Penggerak background facilitated school transformation in an Indonesian primary school. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand a complex organizational process within its real-life context rather than to test causal relationships or generalize findings statistically (Hardani M Si et al., 2020). School transformation is a multidimensional phenomenon involving interactions among leadership practices, teacher collaboration, organizational culture, and stakeholder participation. These processes cannot be adequately captured through quantitative approaches alone but require in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and organizational practices.

The study adopted an interpretive perspective in which school transformation was understood as a socially constructed process emerging through continuous interaction among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the school committee. Accordingly, qualitative inquiry enabled the researcher to examine not only what changes occurred but also how those changes were initiated, implemented, and sustained within the school community.

The analytical framework of this study was guided by the Awareness–Exploration–Implementation–Sustainability (AEIS) model, which conceptualizes organizational transformation as a sequential and interconnected process. Rather than functioning as a rigid coding template, the framework served as a theoretical lens for interpreting empirical evidence generated from multiple data sources.

The study was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo, Kendal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The school was selected using purposive sampling because it represented an information-rich case. Since the appointment of a principal with a Guru Penggerak background, the school had demonstrated substantial improvements in collaborative teacher culture, professional learning activities, instructional innovation, stakeholder engagement, and student achievements. These characteristics made the school an appropriate setting for examining school transformation as a dynamic organizational process.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in school transformation. They consisted of the principal, classroom teachers, members of the school committee, parents, and students who had actively experienced the transformation process. The inclusion of participants representing different stakeholder groups enabled the researcher to obtain multiple perspectives regarding leadership practices, organizational change, and instructional improvement.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple methods allowed methodological triangulation and enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings (Ilhami et al., 2024). Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary source of data because they enabled participants to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe emerging issues during the conversation. Interview guides were developed according to the research objectives while maintaining sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. Interviews explored participants' perceptions of school transformation, leadership practices, collaborative learning, instructional innovation, organizational culture, and sustainability of educational change.

Observations were conducted to understand naturally occurring practices within the school environment. The researcher observed leadership activities, teacher collaboration, classroom

interactions, professional learning activities, and school routines associated with organizational transformation. Field notes were recorded systematically to document participants' interactions, school culture, and contextual conditions that could not be fully captured through interviews.

Document analysis complemented the interview and observation data by examining school documents related to transformation activities. These included school programs, meeting minutes, professional development records, school policies, activity reports, achievement records, and other institutional documents relevant to the transformation process. Documentary evidence was used to corroborate participants' statements and provide contextual information regarding organizational development.

The integration of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence enabled comprehensive understanding of the transformation process while minimizing reliance on a single source of evidence. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Ash-Shiddiqi et al., 2025), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification throughout the research process.

Initially, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were organized and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. During the data condensation stage, meaningful units related to school transformation were identified and coded. The coding process combined inductive identification of emerging themes with deductive interpretation guided by the AEIS framework. This approach allowed unexpected findings to emerge while maintaining alignment with the study's conceptual framework.

Subsequently, coded data were organized into thematic categories corresponding to the four stages of transformation: Awareness, Exploration, Implementation, and Sustainability (Elder et al., 2023). Data displays, including thematic matrices and cross-source comparisons, were developed to identify relationships among leadership practices, collaborative activities, organizational culture, and educational outcomes. Finally, conclusions were generated through iterative interpretation and continuous comparison across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings.

The trustworthiness of the study was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability following the framework proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation using interviews, observations, and document analysis, as well as member checking in which participants were invited to verify the accuracy of interview interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and organizational setting to enable readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was strengthened through systematic documentation of research procedures and analytical decisions, while confirmability was maintained by preserving an audit trail consisting of interview transcripts, observation notes, coding records, and documentary evidence.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms and participant codes were used during data analysis and reporting, and all research data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

## Result and Discussion

### *Awareness Stage*

The findings indicate that school transformation at SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo began with the development of a shared awareness regarding the gap between the school's existing conditions and its desired future direction. Rather than immediately introducing new programmes, the principal first facilitated collective reflection by encouraging teachers to examine the school's current performance, instructional practices, and development priorities. Across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, participants consistently described this stage as a process of understanding why change was necessary before deciding how change should be implemented.

The principal explained that the first step was to understand the school's actual condition instead of directly implementing improvement programmes. He observed that although the school had considerable potential, student enrolment, school achievements, and instructional innovation had not yet developed optimally. As he explained, *"I first examined the school's actual condition before deciding what needed to be improved together."* This reflection process was intended to build a common understanding among teachers regarding the school's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

Teachers confirmed this interpretation. One teacher explained that learning activities had previously been conducted routinely with limited collaboration among teachers. After the principal presented school data and facilitated discussions, teachers gradually recognized the need for collective improvement. As one participant stated, *"We realized that the school actually had considerable potential if we worked together."* Another teacher similarly noted that reflection meetings helped teachers understand that improving the school required changes extending beyond routine administrative work toward instructional development and collaborative practice.

Observation data supported these interview findings. During staff reflection meetings, teachers actively discussed classroom challenges, student learning outcomes, and priorities for school development instead of merely receiving administrative instructions. The researcher also observed that the principal encouraged teachers to analyse evidence before proposing improvement strategies, creating opportunities for shared reflection and collective decision-making. These observations indicate that awareness was developed through collaborative dialogue rather than top-down directives.

Documentary evidence further corroborated the interview and observation data. Minutes of the initial reflection meetings documented discussions on school strengths, weaknesses, priority problems, and proposed directions for improvement, while school profile and enrolment records were used to support these discussions with objective evidence. Rather than relying solely on personal perceptions, participants referred to school documents to establish a shared understanding of organizational needs before initiating transformation activities.

**Table 1.** Cross-source evidence supporting the Awareness stage

| Theme                                      | Interview | Observation | Documents |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Recognition of school challenges           | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Reflection using school data               | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Collective discussion of school conditions | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Identification of priorities for change    | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |

Taken together, the convergence of interview, observation, and documentary evidence

demonstrates that awareness emerged through a process of collective sense-making supported by empirical evidence rather than administrative authority alone. Instead of immediately implementing reforms, the principal established a shared understanding of the school's current condition, enabling teachers to recognize the need for organizational and instructional change. This shared awareness subsequently provided the foundation for the Exploration stage, in which teachers collaboratively identified strategies and innovations to address the priorities identified during the reflection process.

### **Exploration Stage**

Following the development of a shared awareness of the school's needs, the transformation process entered the Exploration stage, during which school members collaboratively identified strategies and innovations to address the priorities that had emerged during the reflection process. Rather than relying solely on the principal's decisions, the findings show that teachers, the school committee, parents, and other stakeholders were actively involved in discussing alternative approaches for improving instructional quality, strengthening collaboration, and enhancing school performance. Across the different sources of evidence, exploration was characterized by participatory planning, professional dialogue, and collective problem-solving.

The principal explained that once teachers had recognized the need for change, the next step was to explore practical solutions that could realistically be implemented within the school's context. Instead of introducing externally designed programmes, discussions focused on identifying existing school resources, teachers' strengths, and opportunities for collaborative improvement. As the principal stated, *"We discussed together what could be improved with the resources we already had. Every teacher was encouraged to contribute ideas before decisions were made."* This finding indicates that exploration was conducted through collaborative planning rather than top-down programme formulation.

Teachers consistently described this stage as an opportunity to exchange professional experiences and jointly design improvement initiatives. One teacher explained, *"Previously we rarely discussed learning together. During these meetings we began sharing teaching ideas and looking for solutions collectively."* Another participant noted that teachers were encouraged to experiment with new instructional approaches and adapt good practices introduced by colleagues. Rather than viewing innovation as an individual responsibility, participants described exploration as a collective learning process in which teachers gradually developed confidence to contribute ideas and support one another.

The collaborative nature of this stage extended beyond teachers. Representatives of the school committee and parents reported being invited to participate in discussions regarding school programmes and development priorities. One committee member explained that communication between the school and the community became more open because stakeholders were informed about planned activities and encouraged to provide suggestions. Similarly, parents perceived that the school increasingly sought their involvement in supporting educational programmes rather than limiting communication to administrative matters. These accounts suggest that exploration involved expanding participation beyond the internal school community to include external stakeholders whose perspectives contributed to school development.

Observation data reinforced these interview findings. During planning meetings, teachers were observed discussing instructional challenges, proposing alternative learning activities, and collaboratively preparing school programmes. The researcher noted that discussions were

characterized by active participation rather than passive acceptance of leadership decisions. Teachers responded to one another's ideas, considered different alternatives, and jointly agreed on priorities for implementation. These observations demonstrate that exploration functioned as a collaborative decision-making process rather than a formal administrative procedure.

Documentary evidence further supported the findings. School work plans, meeting minutes, and programme documents recorded the collective formulation of improvement priorities, including activities related to teacher professional development, student learning, and community engagement. The documents also indicated that planning responsibilities were distributed among teachers through working groups and collaborative teams, reflecting the participatory approach consistently described during interviews and observations.

**Table 2.** Cross-source evidence supporting the Exploration stage

| Theme                                    | Interview | Observation | Documents |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Collaborative planning                   | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Professional dialogue                    | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Teacher participation in decision-making | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Stakeholder involvement                  | ✓         |             | ✓         |
| Identification of improvement strategies | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |

Taken together, the evidence indicates that the Exploration stage was characterized by collaborative inquiry and shared decision-making. Instead of relying on predetermined solutions, school members collectively explored feasible strategies based on their organizational context, available resources, and professional experiences. The convergence of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence demonstrates that exploration strengthened teachers' ownership of the transformation process by positioning them as active contributors rather than passive recipients of change initiatives. This collaborative exploration subsequently informed the Implementation stage, during which the agreed strategies were translated into everyday school practices.

### **Implementation Stage**

The Implementation stage represents the translation of collaboratively developed plans into routine school practices. The findings indicate that the initiatives identified during the Exploration stage were implemented through coordinated actions involving instructional improvement, teacher professional collaboration, student development programmes, and stakeholder participation. Across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, participants consistently described implementation as a gradual process in which agreed initiatives were integrated into everyday school activities rather than introduced as isolated programmes.

The principal explained that implementation focused on ensuring that agreed plans were consistently translated into classroom practice and school management. Rather than introducing numerous new initiatives simultaneously, priority was given to strengthening instructional quality through collaborative lesson planning, regular reflection meetings, teacher mentoring, and continuous monitoring of programme implementation. As the principal explained, *"After agreeing on our priorities, we focused on carrying them out consistently. Every programme was monitored, discussed, and adjusted whenever necessary."* This statement indicates that implementation was viewed as an adaptive process requiring continuous coordination instead of one-time programme execution.

Teachers similarly described noticeable changes in their professional practice. One

participant explained that collaborative planning gradually became part of the school's routine, enabling teachers to exchange instructional ideas, discuss classroom challenges, and prepare learning activities together. Another teacher stated, *"Now we regularly discuss our teaching, share ideas, and evaluate what works and what needs improvement."* Rather than working individually, teachers increasingly viewed instructional planning and classroom reflection as shared professional responsibilities. These accounts suggest that implementation was reflected in changes to teachers' daily professional practices rather than merely in the introduction of new administrative policies.

Evidence from parents and the school committee further demonstrates that implementation extended beyond internal school activities. Participants reported that communication between the school and families became more structured through regular meetings, school programmes, and community involvement in educational activities. One committee member noted that school programmes were more transparent because stakeholders were informed about implementation progress and invited to participate in supporting school activities. Similarly, parents described increased opportunities to engage in school programmes and monitor their children's learning. These findings indicate that implementation involved strengthening collaboration between the school and the wider community rather than focusing exclusively on classroom practices.

Observation data corroborated the interview findings. Classroom observations documented teachers applying learning strategies that had been discussed during collaborative planning sessions, while staff meetings showed regular monitoring of programme implementation and discussion of emerging challenges. The researcher also observed that teachers actively exchanged teaching experiences and jointly evaluated instructional practices, suggesting that collaborative reflection had become embedded within routine professional activities. Rather than functioning as isolated meetings, these interactions occurred repeatedly during the observation period and were integrated into the school's regular working routines.

Documentary evidence also supported the implementation process. School work programmes, meeting minutes, supervision records, and documentation of teacher professional activities demonstrated that planned initiatives were formally incorporated into school management. Programme schedules, teacher assignment records, and reports of school activities further indicated that implementation responsibilities were distributed among teachers and monitored through routine evaluation meetings. These documents provide additional evidence that the initiatives described by participants were institutional practices rather than isolated activities.

**Table 3.** Cross-source evidence supporting the Implementation stage

| Theme                                | Interview | Observation | Documents |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Collaborative instructional practice | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Regular programme implementation     | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Teacher professional collaboration   | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Stakeholder participation            | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Monitoring and programme evaluation  | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |

The convergence of interview, observation, and documentary evidence demonstrates that implementation was characterized by the integration of agreed initiatives into routine school practices. Importantly, the findings do not suggest that every programme produced immediate or uniform outcomes. Instead, participants consistently described implementation as an iterative

process involving continuous reflection, monitoring, and adjustment according to the school's needs and available resources. This process-oriented perspective indicates that organizational change was sustained through repeated professional interaction rather than through the introduction of isolated innovations.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Implementation stage represented the operationalization of collaborative planning into everyday educational practice. Leadership during this stage was reflected not only in programme coordination but also in creating organizational conditions that enabled teachers, students, parents, and the school committee to participate actively in the transformation process. These implementation practices subsequently provided the organizational routines examined in the Sustainability stage.

### ***Sustainability Stage***

The final stage of the transformation process concerns the extent to which newly introduced practices became integrated into the school's regular organizational routines during the period of this study. Rather than interpreting sustainability as evidence that transformation would continue indefinitely, the findings indicate that several collaborative, instructional, and organizational practices had become routinized and were consistently implemented throughout the observed school year. Across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, participants described continuity through recurring professional activities, regular monitoring, and shared responsibility for maintaining agreed school programmes.

The principal explained that sustaining school improvement required consistency rather than continuously introducing new initiatives. Instead of replacing programmes each academic year, the school sought to maintain practices that teachers had collectively accepted as beneficial. As the principal stated, *"Our focus is not to create new programmes every time, but to ensure that the agreed practices continue to be implemented and improved together."* This statement suggests that continuity was viewed as maintaining established professional routines while allowing gradual refinement based on ongoing evaluation rather than constant organisational restructuring.

Teachers similarly reported that collaborative planning, reflection meetings, and professional discussions had become regular components of their work rather than occasional activities. One teacher commented, *"Collaborative discussions are now part of our routine. We regularly evaluate learning and share experiences before planning the next activities."* Another participant explained that teacher meetings increasingly focused on instructional issues, classroom challenges, and programme evaluation instead of administrative reporting alone. These accounts indicate that collaborative professional practices continued throughout the observation period and were perceived by teachers as normal aspects of school life rather than temporary projects.

Parents and members of the school committee also described continuity in communication and school-community collaboration. Participants reported that meetings with parents, school activities, and opportunities for community involvement continued to be organised according to the school's annual programme. A committee representative noted that communication between the school and stakeholders had become more structured because regular consultation and reporting were incorporated into routine school activities. These findings suggest that stakeholder participation was maintained through recurring organisational practices rather than isolated events.

Observation data further supported these interview findings. During the observation period, collaborative teacher meetings, programme evaluations, and classroom reflections were conducted

according to scheduled activities documented in the school's annual work programme. Teachers actively participated in reviewing instructional implementation and discussing adjustments for subsequent activities. The researcher also observed that these meetings followed similar formats throughout the fieldwork period, indicating that collaborative reflection had become embedded within routine organisational practice rather than being conducted solely for research purposes.

Documentary evidence corroborated these observations. Annual work plans, meeting schedules, supervision records, and programme evaluation documents demonstrated that collaborative planning, teacher reflection, and programme monitoring were formally incorporated into school management. Importantly, these documents indicate that the practices identified during interviews were implemented repeatedly during the study period rather than occurring as isolated activities. However, because the present study employed a cross-sectional case study design, the available evidence documents continuity only within the observed period and does not permit conclusions regarding the long-term sustainability of these practices beyond the duration of the research.

**Table 4.** Cross-source evidence supporting the Sustainability stage

| Theme                                   | Interview | Observation | Documents |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Continuation of collaborative meetings  | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Routine programme monitoring            | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Regular teacher reflection              | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Ongoing stakeholder communication       | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |
| Institutionalisation of school routines | ✓         | ✓           | ✓         |

Taken together, the convergence of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence indicates that several organisational practices had become routinized during the period of this study. Rather than demonstrating definitive long-term sustainability, the findings provide evidence that collaborative planning, instructional reflection, programme monitoring, and stakeholder engagement were consistently maintained within the school's regular organisational routines. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of institutionalisation and continuity during the observed period, while recognising that the persistence of these practices beyond the study would require longitudinal investigation.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that school transformation at SD Negeri 1 Karangmuljo occurred through a gradual and interconnected process consisting of awareness, exploration, implementation, and sustainability stages. More importantly, the transformation was not limited to the introduction of new programs or administrative reforms but involved a fundamental shift in school culture, professional practices, and stakeholder engagement. The results indicate that the principal's leadership as a Guru Penggerak served as the primary catalyst for change by fostering collective awareness, encouraging collaborative learning, facilitating instructional innovation, and institutionalizing continuous improvement practices. These findings support the argument that sustainable school transformation is achieved when organizational change is embedded in everyday practices and shared values rather than relying solely on structural interventions.

The awareness stage highlights the importance of collective reflection as the foundation for meaningful school transformation. The findings revealed that the principal encouraged stakeholders

to critically examine existing conditions through dialogue, evaluation, and evidence-based reflection. This process enabled teachers to recognize the gap between current practices and desired educational outcomes, creating a shared understanding of the need for change. These findings are consistent with the work of Zhai et al., (2026), who argues that sustainable educational change begins when school communities develop a moral purpose and collective commitment toward improvement. Similarly, Fania Rahma Yunanda et al., (2025) emphasized that organizational transformation requires shared vision and reflective learning processes that encourage members to reconsider existing assumptions and practices. The findings also support Galdames-Calderón, (2023), who found that reflective leadership practices contribute significantly to organizational readiness for change and school improvement.

The exploration stage demonstrated that school transformation is strengthened when teachers are actively involved in identifying solutions and designing improvement strategies. The participatory and collaborative nature of this stage enabled teachers to become co-creators of change rather than passive recipients of leadership decisions. These findings are aligned with Kwan, (2020), who reported that successful school transformation depends on leadership practices that empower teachers and encourage collective decision-making. Likewise, Meyer et al., (2023) found that collaborative professional cultures enhance teachers' commitment to school improvement initiatives and increase organizational capacity for change. The findings further reinforce the conclusions of Satriawan et al., (2021), who argued that schools characterized by strong professional collaboration are more capable of sustaining innovation and responding effectively to educational challenges.

The implementation stage revealed that transformational efforts became visible through changes in instructional practices, teacher collaboration, student engagement, and stakeholder participation. One of the most significant outcomes was the emergence of student-centered learning practices supported by continuous professional collaboration among teachers. These findings are consistent with Awangku Amin & Mohd Hamzah, (2021), who identified instructional leadership as a critical factor influencing teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Similarly, Putu Prema Swandewi et al., (2024) found that effective school leadership contributes to improved student achievement by creating conditions that support teacher development and instructional innovation. The results also support the findings of Mastuti et al., (2022), who emphasized that educational reforms are most successful when they are translated into classroom-level practices that directly influence student learning experiences.

Another important contribution of this study is the identification of sustainability as the ultimate indicator of successful transformation. The findings demonstrate that educational improvement became sustainable because reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning were institutionalized within the school culture. Rather than depending entirely on the principal, responsibility for maintaining transformation gradually became distributed among teachers and other stakeholders. This finding supports Lestari Prasilowati, (2024), who argued that sustainable educational change requires professional capital, collective responsibility, and organizational learning. Similarly, Mustaking & Arifuddin, (2023) highlighted that long-term school improvement depends on the development of strong organizational cultures capable of sustaining innovation beyond individual leadership periods. The findings are also consistent with Harjaya & Idawati, (2022), which reported that schools demonstrating sustainable improvement typically possess collaborative cultures, adaptive leadership, and continuous evaluation mechanisms.

The study further reveals the distinctive contribution of a principal with a Guru Penggerak

background to the transformation process. Unlike conventional leadership approaches that often emphasize managerial functions, the leadership observed in this study prioritized reflective practice, teacher empowerment, collaborative learning, and student-centered innovation. These characteristics align with the objectives of the Guru Penggerak Program, which seeks to develop educational leaders capable of driving instructional improvement and organizational transformation. The findings support recent studies conducted by Damayanti et al., (2024); Bagas Aviyanto et al., (2024); Siregar et al., (2023), which found that leadership practices associated with Guru Penggerak competencies contribute positively to teacher performance, educational innovation, and collaborative school culture. However, the present study extends previous research by explaining not only the outcomes of leadership but also the transformational process through which change is initiated, implemented, and sustained.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of the Awareness–Exploration–Implementation–Sustainability (AEIS) framework by identifying two organisational mechanisms that were consistently observed across all four stages of school transformation: collaborative reflection and evidence-informed leadership. Rather than viewing the stages as a linear sequence, the findings indicate that organisational reflection repeatedly connected awareness, planning, implementation, and routine evaluation throughout the transformation process. School decisions were consistently informed by discussions of student learning, school performance data, classroom observations, and stakeholder feedback rather than relying solely on the principal's formal authority. These findings suggest that the explanatory value of the AEIS framework lies not only in its sequential stages but also in the collaborative processes through which organisational evidence is interpreted and translated into collective action. Accordingly, this study refines the framework by proposing that collaborative reflection and evidence-informed decision-making function as enabling mechanisms linking the four stages of school transformation.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that the implementation of school transformation depends on organisational conditions rather than leadership intentions alone. The evidence suggests that collaborative routines were feasible because the principal established regular opportunities for teacher reflection, structured programme evaluation, and stakeholder dialogue supported by available school data. These practices may be transferable to schools with similar organisational characteristics, particularly where principals have sufficient autonomy to facilitate professional learning, teachers are provided with dedicated time for collaborative planning, and school communities actively participate in educational decision-making. However, schools experiencing limited instructional time, high teacher turnover, or weak community engagement may require additional institutional support before similar collaborative practices can be effectively sustained. Consequently, leadership development programmes should be complemented by organisational policies that strengthen collaborative professional learning, data-informed school improvement, and sustained stakeholder participation.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of several alternative explanations and study limitations. While participants consistently associated organisational change with collaborative leadership practices, other contextual factors including teachers' prior commitment, existing school culture, and support from the local education authority may also have contributed to the observed developments. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that establishing collaborative routines initially required adjustments to teachers' workloads and professional habits, indicating that organisational transformation involved negotiation rather than immediate acceptance. Finally,

because this study employed a qualitative single-case design, the evidence documents the institutionalisation of collaborative practices during the observed period but does not establish their long-term sustainability beyond the timeframe of the research. Future longitudinal and comparative studies are therefore required to examine the durability and transferability of these organisational mechanisms across different school contexts.

## Conclusion

This study explored how school transformation unfolded in SD Negeri 1 Karangmulyo under the leadership of a principal with a Guru Penggerak background. Within the context of this school, the findings indicate that transformation developed through interconnected processes of Awareness, Exploration, Implementation, and Sustainability, supported by recurring collaborative reflection, stakeholder participation, and evidence-informed decision-making. Rather than representing discrete stages, these processes interacted continuously as school members collectively interpreted organisational challenges, developed improvement strategies, implemented agreed practices, and routinely evaluated their progress. Because this study was conducted as a qualitative single-case investigation, these findings should be interpreted as a contextual explanation of how organisational transformation occurred within one elementary school rather than as evidence of universal leadership effects.

The study contributes by suggesting several propositions that may be transferable to comparable educational contexts. Specifically, school transformation may be strengthened when principals facilitate collaborative reflection, use organisational evidence to support collective decision-making, and establish routine opportunities for teacher collaboration and stakeholder engagement. However, the extent to which these organisational mechanisms are applicable in other schools is likely to depend on contextual conditions, including leadership capacity, teacher commitment, organisational culture, and community support. Future longitudinal and comparative studies involving multiple schools are therefore needed to examine the transferability of these propositions and to further refine understanding of how school transformation develops across different educational settings.

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