



Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze trends and empirical findings on primary school policies and practices in Indonesia and internationally. The study uses a qualitative design through a Systematic Literature Review approach. A total of 884 articles were identified using Publish or Perish software, then selected using the PRISMA protocol, resulting in 34 articles that met the criteria for in-depth analysis. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis framework to identify key themes and research gaps. The results showed that 60% of the empirical studies reviewed highlighted policy aspects, while the other 40% focused on practices in primary schools. The analysis stated that the effectiveness of education policy is highly dependent on school leadership, management transparency, and the availability of adequate infrastructure. Innovative practices such as character education, literacy development, and transdisciplinary learning have been shown to contribute positively to improving the quality of elementary schools. This study provides recommendations in the form of 6 months of continuous training at the beginning of leadership for school principals and a collaboration forum for public and private elementary school teachers as a regular discussion forum for good practices with incentives in the form of accreditation points and 21st-century learning innovation grant funds for schools that actively participate.

Keywords: Elementary School, Policy and Practice, 21st-Century Learning

INTRODUCTION

Basic education is the first step in the formal education system. The essence of basic education is very important because it provides the foundation for a decent life in any society in the world (Alfurqan et al., 2020). Elementary schools focus on intellectual, spiritual, and emotional intelligence as a basis for responding to the challenges that elementary school students will face (Muliastri, 2020). Putri (2024) states that a good basic education system not only provides students with knowledge but also teaches them the skills, values, and morals they need to become productive citizens and contribute to society. The effectiveness of a school can be seen from the academic quality of its students, which is influenced by school leadership, good teaching practices, a positive culture, and parental involvement.

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Cognitive Insight in Education

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Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

As the foundation and mainstay of formal education, school-based management is an important tool for monitoring and improving the quality of elementary schools (Fadlillah, 2024). The quality of this management is one of the factors that influence school effectiveness. Fathurrochman et al. (2022) state that an effective school is one that has a good management system and is able to empower every important element of the school, both internal and external, efficiently and effectively to achieve the school's goals and vision. Teachers' strategies and expertise in teaching, as well as the appropriate use of facilities and infrastructure available at the school, are important factors in achieving this effectiveness (Dila et al., 2024). Therefore, planning, organizing, mobilizing, assessing, supervising, and following up are important elements in educational innovation management (Haq et al., 2023). However, the application of these management elements may differ in each category of elementary school.

There are two categories of elementary schools in Indonesia, namely public elementary schools and private elementary schools. In Indonesia, there are ten factors that distinguish these two categories of elementary schools, namely affiliation, language used, cultural background, curriculum, learning time, ethical values, pathways to higher education, facilities, and costs (Cakranegara, 2021). The differences between school categories are not limited to management aspects, but also affect student academic achievement and create gaps in the quality of education in Indonesia (Bloom et al., 2015). The curriculum in private elementary schools is much more effective than in public elementary schools (Millah et al., 2022). Private elementary schools are better prepared to manage the policies implemented, but this is not effective in public elementary schools because government policies are not evenly applied (Kulsum, 2020). The reality in the field regarding policies and practices in elementary schools, such as curricula that do not meet student needs, uneven distribution of teachers, low levels of continuing education, and administrative burdens that reduce the focus on teaching, are still problems in many elementary schools (Hasibuan & Martha, 2025). Currently, the focus of policy has shifted from the initial focus on academics to student development (Ma, 2024). In line with the research conducted by Muttaqin et al. (2020), it shows that differences between sectors and types of schools affect learning outcomes.

Although access and quality of education are important points for public elementary schools, improving quality cannot be effective without government support (Parji & Prasetya, 2020). This can be seen in private elementary schools, which have higher costs and depend on funding from parents and committees, but they can adjust their internal policies and management to improve teacher quality and responsive governance (Arifin et al., 2024). This difference indicates a gap in the quality of education between public and private elementary schools. The findings of Shodiqin et al. (2025) show that the public's perception of the quality of education in private elementary schools is more positive than that of public elementary schools, especially in terms of educational services, character building, and school facilities. However, these results differ from the findings of Parji & Prasetya (2020), which emphasize that improving the quality of education in public elementary schools is highly dependent on policy support and government intervention. This situation indicates an urgent need to examine the relationship between policy and basic education practices more comprehensively, so that the direction of the policies implemented is truly capable of improving the quality and equity of education.

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

Previous studies have not extensively examined the relationship between policy implementation and educational practices in public and private elementary schools. Therefore, this study systematically examines the relationship between policy and practice in public and private elementary schools. In an effort to strengthen the findings and broaden the research perspective, the author also conducted a literature review of international articles to gain a more comprehensive understanding of basic education policies and practices in various countries outside Indonesia. Comparative education studies between countries play an important role in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of national education systems, so that they can be used as a basis for formulating more adaptive policies (Ratnawati et al., 2024). A systematic analytical framework is needed to link policy with educational practice (Kholifah et al., 2024). Based on this, this study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize various national and international research findings, so that the relationship between education policy and practice can be mapped in a structured and evidence-based manner. There are limitations in reviewing previous research to determine future strategies, but it is important to understand what has been done before taking new steps (Monroe et al., 2019). Therefore, this study analyzes empirical research to obtain more concrete and contextual findings. Previous SLR studies rarely highlight the relationship between policy and practice in the context of primary schools, both public and private, and have not conducted many comparative studies between Indonesia and other countries.

This study offers a novel approach that systematically analyzes the relationship between education policy and practice in public and private elementary schools through a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which integrates findings from management, policy, and facility aspects that have rarely been addressed holistically in previous studies. Therefore, this study aims to analyze trends and key findings in research on basic education policy and practice in Indonesia and at the global level. The research questions posed in this study are (1) what are the trends in research related to education policy and practice in public and private elementary schools, both in Indonesia and abroad? and (2) what are the main findings that can be formulated as a basis for recommendations for education policy and practice in elementary schools in Indonesia?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach through the systematic literature review (SLR) method. SLR research is a type of literature research method (Simamora et al., 2024). Watajdid et al. (2021) stated that a number of studies in SLR utilize Publish or Perish and several supporting applications, such as Mendeley and Microsoft Excel, to perform descriptive analysis of selected articles. This study was conducted based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) protocol developed by (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA is classified into five stages, namely: (1) determining eligibility criteria, (2) conducting a literature review, (3) quality assessment, (4) data collection, and (5) data item selection (Moher et al., 2009). This study used the Covidence platform to help make the systematic literature review process more structured. In evaluative studies, the Covidence platform has been identified as one of the most appropriate and widely used platforms (Khurshid et al., 2021).

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review
as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

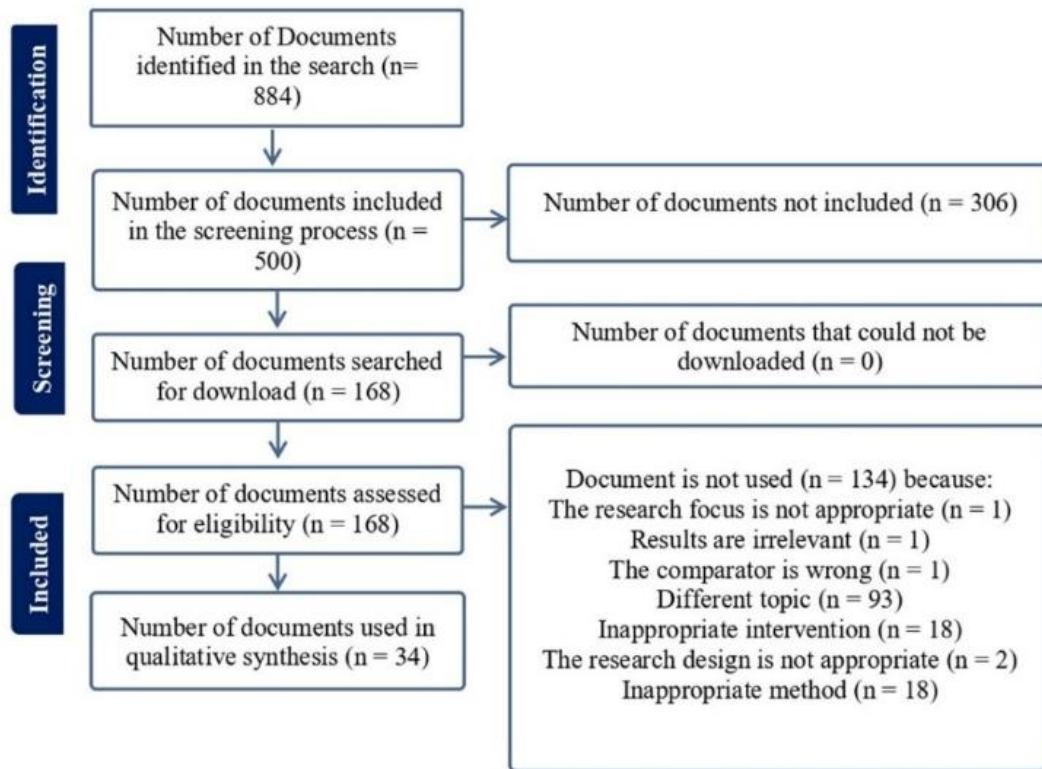
Inclusion and exclusion criteria are strictly defined as described in Table 1, which covers aspects of journal indexing, research methods used, article language, participant education level, and article completeness. For journal indexing, this study applies different criteria based on the origin of the article: Indonesian articles must be indexed in Sinta, while international articles must be indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. This approach ensures that all articles included meet recognized quality standards in accordance with their respective national or international contexts. Articles from reputable journals that are not indexed in Sinta and Scopus but are published in peer-reviewed journals are also considered if they meet other quality criteria.

Table 1 Article selection criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Journal articles containing empirical data	Books, <i>non-peer-reviewed</i> publications
Using Indonesian and English	Languages other than Indonesian and English
Elementary school students (elementary school)	Early childhood education, junior high school, high school/vocational school, university students
Research samples come from Indonesia and abroad	In Indonesia only
For Indonesian articles: indexed in Sinta	Not indexed in Sinta
For international articles: indexed in Scopus	Not indexed in scopus

The article search was conducted using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application on the Scopus and Google Scholar from August 30 to September 28, 2025. The keywords used were “education policy in public and private elementary schools” and “educational practices in public and private elementary schools.” The search time frame was set from January 2018 to September 2025.

The Covidence platform was used in the process of identifying 884 articles obtained from the Publish or Perish (PoP) application. After removing duplicates and applying initial screening based on titles and abstracts, 450 articles remained for full-text review. The studies in this SLR covered public and private school systems spread across various regions of Indonesia and several other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Chile, Japan, and the United States. Most studies in Indonesia focused on school management, financing, character education, curriculum implementation, and literacy programs in primary schools, both in urban and rural areas. Meanwhile, international studies highlighted the integration of digital technology, inclusive education, health and nutrition programs, and the implementation of equity oriented policies.



Source: Personal Documents, 2025

Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

The entire process of identifying, screening, and including literature is visualized in Figure 1. This flowchart illustrates the steps taken in the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the help of the Covidence platform.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trends in Policy Research and Practices in Private and Public Elementary Schools in Indonesia and Outside Indonesia

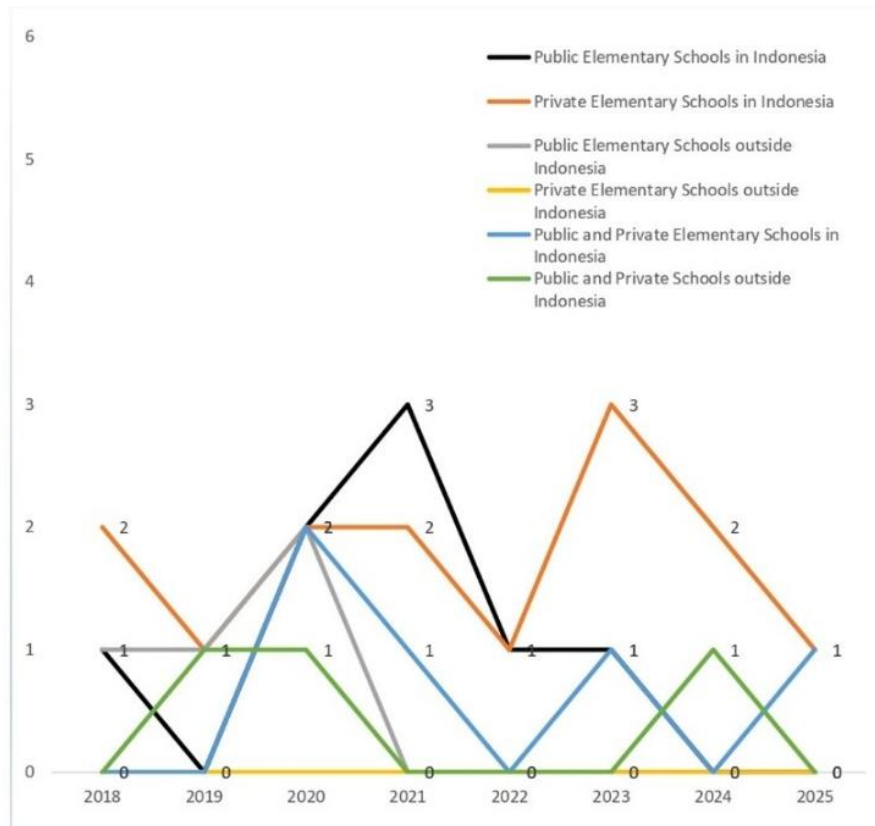
The first results of this study are shown in Figure 2, which shows that publications of articles related to policy and practice in elementary schools fluctuated from 2018 to 2025.

The highest number of publications related to public elementary school policies and practices occurred in 2021, while for private elementary schools it occurred in 2023. There are still few studies on elementary schools outside Indonesia, so the main focus is on empirical research in Indonesia.

Cognitive Insight in Education

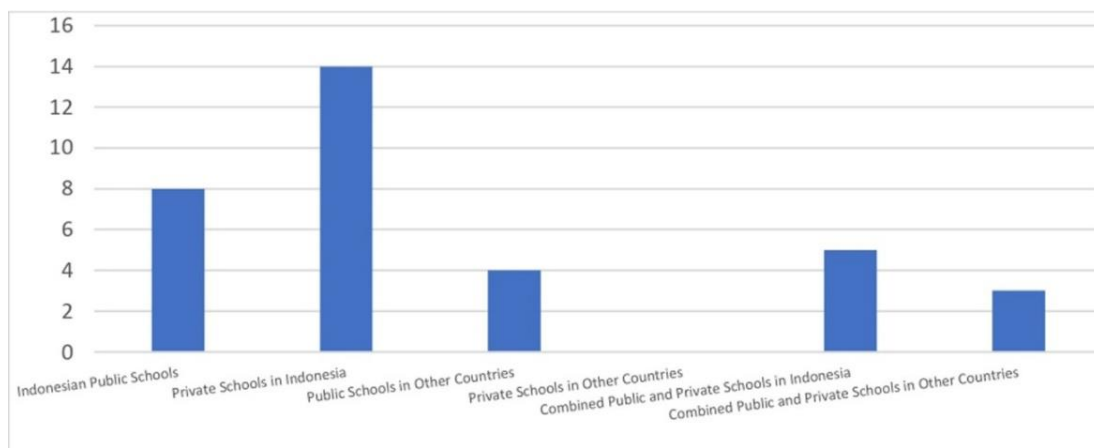
Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali



Source: Personal Documents, 2025

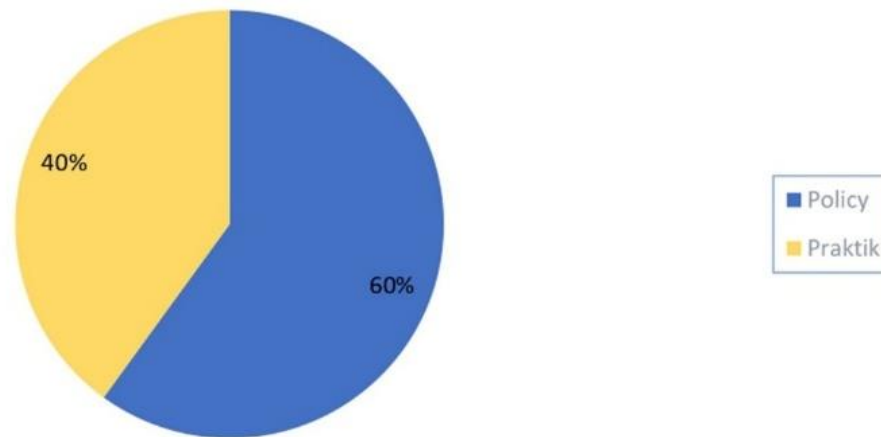
Figure 2 Number of Articles Published Each Year



Source: Personal Documents, 2025

Figure 3 Number of Studies in Elementary Schools by Region and School Category

The second result shows that research related to policies and practices in private elementary schools is the most common, with 14 studies.



Source: Personal Documents

Figure 4 Distribution of research on policies and practices in elementary schools

The third result shows that 60% of the studies discussed policy, while 40% discussed practices in the field.

Based on a thematic analysis of the 363 articles included, this study identified five main themes that emerged from the cross-study synthesis:

School Leadership and Management

Cross-study analysis shows that principal leadership is a key factor in the successful implementation of educational policies and practices in elementary schools. Based on the findings of Latifah & Wulandari (2023) in a quantitative study, the effectiveness of principals is influenced by competence (77.4%), motivation (61.1%), infrastructure (97.8%), and school climate (97.8%). However, a synthesis of 12 other studies reveals that the effectiveness of principals does not only depend on the individual principal, but also on external factors such as parent participation and teacher performance (Al Islami et al., 2024; Hardian et al., 2025; Rahmat, 2019; Yudhi, 2025).

The studies analyzed show that principals who are equipped with professional development, intensive guidance, and performance feedback from stakeholders are proven to be able to improve teacher performance and actively collaborate with various stakeholders in policy making (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2023). These findings are consistent in 8 of the 14 studies on private elementary schools that were analyzed.

The Gap Between Policy and Practice

A synthesis of 21 studies reveals a consistent gap between formulated policies and their implementation in the field. Ideal and administratively relevant conditions often do not align with student needs when analyzed in practice, and many obstacles are found (Malik et al., 2021; Manurung et al., 2020). This gap is most evident in the practice of the School Literacy Movement, which faces obstacles such as low teacher awareness and interest, limited facilities

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

such as books, and limited funding allocation to implement the School Literacy Movement (Bakti, 2020; Syahbuddin, 2020). Similar findings emerged in 15 other studies analyzing various policy programs in public and private elementary schools.

Management and Transparency of Financing

An analysis of 18 studies revealed significantly different funding patterns between public and private elementary schools. Public elementary schools rely on government BOS funds and follow a systematic process that includes planning, organizing, budget implementation, and evaluation, accompanied by financial statements and reports from the school treasurer (Manurung et al., 2020; Syahbuddin, 2020).

In contrast, financing management in private elementary schools is carried out flexibly and sourced from several parties in the form of student fees, foundation support, and fundraising so that cost allocations can be targeted based on the specific needs of students (Adilah et al., 2023; Latifah & Wulandari, 2023; Nafisah, 2018). Case studies in several private elementary schools show that cost allocation varies in policy and practice, such as at Al-Qalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School, which allocates funds for extracurricular activities, student health efforts, and English clubs, while Insan Unggul Elementary School allocates 50% of its funds for teacher honoraria (Hardian et al., 2025).

Effectiveness of Infrastructure and Resources

Based on the findings of Hardian et al (2025) in a quantitative study, facilities and infrastructure contribute 97.8% to school principal leadership and the quality of elementary school learning. A synthesis of 16 other studies confirms that educational infrastructure is an important foundation for the quality of learning in schools (Manurung et al., 2020; Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Saputra, 2023). The facilities and infrastructure in question not only include adequate classrooms but also the need for libraries, laboratories, learning media, and information technology, which are determining factors for the success of the learning process. However, obstacles in terms of limited funding for the procurement and maintenance of infrastructure were consistently found in 12 of the 16 studies.

Educational Innovation and Technological Adaptation

An analysis of 14 studies reveals that the digital divide in elementary schools remains a serious problem and an obstacle in formulating policies and practices. Many educational innovations in the 21st century require technology to be integrated into the learning process (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Saputra, 2023), but various obstacles have been identified, namely limited technological infrastructure, uneven internet access, and teachers' difficulties in adapting to technology (Hardian et al., 2025). Similar obstacles were also found in studies outside Indonesia, namely in Chile, which revealed that many subjects have not been optimally integrated with technology (Cabello et al., 2020). Of the 14 studies that analyzed technology integration, 11 studies reported similar obstacles related to infrastructure limitations and teacher competence.

Effectiveness of Infrastructure in Elementary School Policy and Practice

Facilities and infrastructure contribute 97.8% to principal leadership and the quality of elementary school learning (Hardian et al., 2025). Empirical research has found that

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

educational infrastructure is an important foundation for the quality of learning in a school (Manurung et al., 2020). The facilities and infrastructure in question not only include adequate classrooms, but also the need for libraries, laboratories, learning media, and information technology, which are determining factors in the success of the learning process (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2023).

Empirical research shows that infrastructure management must begin with prioritizing school needs that affect the health and comfort of school stakeholders. However, there are obstacles in terms of limited funding for infrastructure procurement and maintenance. Empirical research on elementary schools outside Indonesia tends to be general in nature, but limited funding is also a similar obstacle in Indonesian elementary schools. Elementary schools in Japan and South Korea have uneven infrastructure distribution, even though the government has contributed to equal distribution (Bessho et al., 2019; Century et al., 2020). This study finds that it is urgent for the government to commit to continuing to allocate funds for the development of infrastructure, both in terms of procurement and maintenance, to support the quality of elementary schools, both in Indonesia and outside Indonesia (Hardian et al., 2025).

Implementation of Total Quality Management

Total quality management in elementary schools is important because it can improve the effectiveness of school management that focuses on long-term commitment, revitalization, and empowerment of all school stakeholders so that the quality of education in elementary schools can be achieved (Hardian et al., 2025; Rahmat, 2019). However, in practice, it requires the active involvement of all school stakeholders, including the principal, teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee.

Total quality management policies and practices are implemented based on principles of student and parent satisfaction, involvement of all school stakeholders, data-based performance evaluation, and revitalization. Empirical research analysis found that elementary schools that implement total quality management can improve various aspects of learning quality (Manurung et al., 2020), but its implementation requires changes in school habits and is a long and difficult process (Adilah et al., 2023).

This study is in line with research that discusses how elementary schools with effective principal leadership management are able to improve teacher professionalism. Total quality management not only has an impact on good management in schools, but also on the development of human resource capacity. This study recommends that total quality management be implemented in many elementary schools as a sustainable elementary school policy and practice.

Adaptation of 21st Century Learning Technology in Elementary Schools

The digital divide in elementary schools remains a serious problem and a hindering factor in formulating policies and practices. This is because many educational innovations in the 21st century require technology to be integrated into the learning process (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2023). However, there are various obstacles, namely limited technological infrastructure, uneven internet access, and teachers' difficulty in adapting to technology (Hardian et al., 2025). These obstacles are also felt in elementary schools outside

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

Indonesia, namely in Chile, which revealed that many subjects have not been optimally integrated with technology (Cabello et al., 2020).

Based on empirical research analyzed in relation to educational policies and practices, there is a need for change among policy makers to meet pedagogical needs that are integrated with technology so that elementary schools can achieve relevant educational quality in the 21st century, which places students as active learners and enables them to integrate knowledge through exploration, collaboration, and problem solving with adequate technological adaptation.

Health and Environmental Education in Elementary Schools

Character building through healthy living habits is not only done at home, but elementary schools are also the right place to introduce students to healthy living (Nafisah, 2018; Saputra et al., 2023). Empirical research related to health program policies and practices in elementary schools is still not optimal, but several schools have implemented healthy living habits through nutritious breakfasts, healthy canteens, student health initiatives, and the provision of clean water and the use of vacant land for farming (Hardian et al., 2025). Elementary schools serve as the foundation for character development, so consistent healthy lifestyle habits will have a significant impact on students' lives into adulthood.

This study also found that environmental education is not merely teaching ecological concepts theoretically, but elementary school students are directly guided to carry out environmental education practices, such as waste management and greening the school environment (Rangkuti et al., 2022). Meanwhile, practices in elementary schools outside Indonesia, namely in the United States, emphasize policies on healthy living habits, indicating that the high risk of obesity among male elementary school students is a problem that requires practices relevant to the students' conditions. The practices found to address this problem are improving the school environment by providing healthy food in the cafeteria and encouraging physical activity (Amram et al., 2020). The findings analyzed reveal that elementary schools are not only a space for cognitive development in students, but the physical and mental health of students is also integral to the creation of targeted quality education in elementary schools (Kariyanti & Indrawati, 2023; Rangkuti et al., 2022).

Comparison of Public and Private Schools

Several factors that differentiate public elementary schools and private elementary schools were found in the empirical research that has been analyzed. The first is that the allocation of costs in public elementary schools depends on BOS funding sources, which go through several strict stages (Hardian et al., 2025; Syahbuddin, 2020), while private elementary schools are more flexible, which gives them an advantage in finding and formulating more relevant policies and practices (Bakti, 2020; Nurhidayah & Rohmadi, 2024). Second, the curriculum and extracurricular activities in public elementary schools are monotonous due to binding regulations, while private elementary schools are more diverse and provide broader opportunities for students to discover their talents and interests from elementary school (Latifah & Wulandari, 2023; Nafisah, 2018). Third, accreditation and achievements in private elementary schools are superior because they are supported by teacher competence, infrastructure, and a consistent evaluation system (Nurhidayah &

[Rohmadi, 2024](#)). However, in the analyzed research, there are still private elementary schools that are not yet accredited ([Rahmat, 2019](#)).

This difference highlights the urgent need for more inclusive and equitable policies and practices in the distribution of resources. This can begin with support for resources and flexibility in formulating policies and practices in public elementary schools. In contrast, in private elementary schools, flexibility in allocating costs needs to be monitored to prevent irregularities in implementation, and discriminatory practices in the admission of new students need to be anticipated ([Hardian et al., 2025](#); [Ini & Komariyah, 2021](#)). The differences found in this empirical study recommend collaboration in the learning process in public and private elementary schools so that improvements in education quality can be carried out comprehensively ([Priyadi & Putri, 2024](#)).

Policies and practices in elementary schools outside Indonesia

Empirical research analysis related to primary school policies and practices outside Indonesia provides an important perspective. Research in Saudi Arabia shows that teacher support for developing their capabilities through training is still not a particular focus in improving the quality of primary schools ([Alenezi & Alfaleh, 2024](#)). Empirical research in Japan that has been analyzed reveals that remedial programs can effectively improve the quality of learning, but cannot be implemented in all types of subjects because in the analyzed research, remedial programs can improve Japanese language scores but have no effect on mathematics ([Bessho et al., 2019](#)). This indicates that the effectiveness of remedial programs will be effective but depends on the subject. This is in contrast to the empirical research by [Bradbury et al \(2019\)](#) in American elementary schools, which emphasizes collaborative learning methods and pays attention to students' psychological needs. This study found that American students are more suited to side-by-side programming than pair programming because it better meets their physical and cognitive needs and adaptability in learning. Another finding is the empirical study by [Bertrand et al. \(2018\)](#) in California elementary schools, which shows that school principals seem to favor certain ethnicities and races. This indicates that the principal views parents of students with dark skin as a group that can support the school's goals, thus requiring special guidance. This bias can hinder policy formulation and practice, so this study recommends emphasizing equality and building awareness among all stakeholders so that they can work together to overcome their differences in background in order to support the quality of elementary schools.

Empirical studies analyzed from various countries confirm that primary school policies and practices outside Indonesia place greater emphasis on innovation based on social justice, health, and support for teacher competence. Multicultural awareness is needed to strengthen collaboration between school stakeholders to support equal quality of education at all levels of society ([Alenezi & Alfaleh, 2024](#); [Amram et al., 2020](#); [Bertrand et al., 2018](#)).

CONCLUSION

Based on 34 empirical studies analyzed, researchers found nine topics that can be used as a basis for formulating policy recommendations and practices for elementary schools. The first topic is that 77.4% of school principal leadership is a determining factor in the successful implementation of policies and practices in elementary schools, but this success cannot be

Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review
as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

separated from the collaboration of all stakeholders. The second topic is that financial management in public elementary schools depends on school operational assistance funds, which must go through several procedures to reduce the possibility of errors, while financial management in private elementary schools has the flexibility to allocate costs so that they are targeted at student needs. The third topic is that facilities and infrastructure contribute 97.8% to the success of learning, but in reality, facilities and infrastructure are hampered by funding, so their implementation is not on target. The fourth topic is that the implementation of total quality management has been proven to improve management performance through continuous commitment and collaboration among school stakeholders. The fifth topic is the adaptation of learning technology in the 21st century, which faces obstacles in the form of limited infrastructure, unequal internet access, and teacher competence, which continue to slow down the development of elementary schools. The sixth topic is health and environmental education through the habit of healthy living in elementary schools, which has a long-term impact on shaping students' character.

Based on these findings, the Ministry of Education needs to strengthen the development of principal competencies through ongoing training with mentoring during the first six months of leadership, as well as providing a forum for collaboration between public and private elementary school teachers with accreditation points and grant incentives. Reforms are needed in the financing system to give public elementary schools greater flexibility while maintaining accountability, as well as the allocation of sustainable funds for educational infrastructure. Policies must address the policy-practice gap through comprehensive preparation involving field practitioners, pilot testing, and monitoring systems. Investment in technology infrastructure and digital competency development for teachers needs to be prioritized, and a more equitable allocation of resources is needed to reduce the gap between public and private elementary schools.

This study has limitations, including the dominance of private elementary school studies, the limited number of international studies (17.6%), and a greater focus on policy than on practice. Future research needs to increase empirical studies in public elementary schools, conduct cross-country comparative studies, explore the implementation of practices through direct observation, examine alternative financing models, evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs, and conduct longitudinal studies on the long-term impact of policies on student learning outcomes to provide a stronger evidence base for the formulation of practical and relevant basic education policies.

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Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review
as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Annisa Rifah Rahman, Rezkilaturahmi, Hardianto Rahman, Nur Zalikha Binti Razali

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Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review
as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

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Cognitive Insight in Education

Primary School Policies and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review
as a Basis for Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

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