The role of the Leading Teacher in schools in remote, frontier and outermost areas in enjoyable learning

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Abstract. This study analyzes the multidimensional role of the Leading Teacher in realizing enjoyable learning in Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost (3T) Areas based on the Independent Curriculum. Using a qualitative multi-site case study approach in Entikong Regency, data was collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews. The results of the study identified three core roles of the Leading Teacher: (1) as a Contextual Learning Architect who transforms material and environmental limitations into authentic learning resources; (2) as a Socio-Emotional Climate Facilitator who builds a safe space and restores learning motivation through a personal approach and positive feedback; and (3) as a Leader and Catalyst of the Learning Community who drives a collaborative network with fellow teachers, parents, and the community for sustainable innovation. These three roles are interconnected to form a learning ecosystem where enjoyment emerges as a consequence of a meaningful, relevant, and student-centered learning process. This study contributes to the development of a contextual learning leadership model in marginalized areas.

Keywords: Leading Teacher; Enjoyable Learning; 3T Regions; Independent Curriculum; Learning Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality and equitable education is the primary foundation for building superior and globally competitive Indonesian human resources (Elmi & Librianty, 2023). However, this noble ideal still faces significant challenges, particularly in regions geographically, economically, and infrastructurally categorized as Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost (3T) Regions. Schools in 3T regions often face complex and challenging situations. These include extremely difficult accessibility, limited physical facilities and infrastructure such as adequate classrooms and electricity, and unstable or even non-existent internet access. Furthermore, challenges arise from the human resource side, such as the uneven distribution of teachers, suboptimal teacher-student ratios, and variations in teacher qualifications and competencies that require improvement. The socioeconomic conditions of students' families, which are generally below the poverty line, also influence children's motivation and learning opportunities (Ananda et al., 2025). In these challenging circumstances, classroom learning practices often fall into the trap of conventional, teacher-centered, one-way

methods that rely heavily on textbooks. As a result, the learning process feels dry, irrelevant to children's daily lives, and ultimately unenjoyable. This lack of engagement contributes to low student motivation, high dropout rates, and consistently below-national average learning outcomes (Rabbani et al., 2024). Therefore, a learning approach is needed that can overcome material limitations by optimizing local potential, stimulating a passion for learning, and making education more meaningful for students in the 3T (Underdeveloped) regions.

To address these systemic challenges, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) launched the Leading Teacher Program as a transformative policy in the education sector. Leading Teachers are projected as agents of change with a central role in leading efforts to improve the quality of learning in their schools (Hernita et al., 2025). They are not simply teachers with strong pedagogical competencies, but rather learning leaders with a student-centered mindset, the ability to reflect on practice, mobilize learning communities, and create context-relevant learning innovations. The Leading Teacher philosophy aligns with the spirit of Freedom to Learn, which provides teachers with the flexibility to design learning tailored to the needs and conditions of their students (Mulyasa, 2021). This is where Leading Teachers' strategic potential lies when placed in 3T (disadvantaged regions). They are expected to be catalysts who enliven classrooms with various creative strategies, transform limitations into opportunities, and transform their surroundings into rich learning laboratories. However, the unique and challenging context of the 3T (Regional and Remote Areas) regions will undoubtedly influence how the ideal role of the Leading Teacher can be realized in practice. The interaction between their learning leadership competencies and the objective realities on the ground will result in specific forms of adaptation and innovation, which require a thorough understanding (Cahyanti, 2025).

Education is a crucial element in the advancement of a nation. Education is the foundation for human resource development. Education is an effort to prepare the younger generation for a better and more beneficial life for themselves and others (Sa'diyah, 2022). Education aims to enhance the human potential of students, enabling them to develop superior personalities and compete nationally and internationally (Sa'diyah, 2022). Education aims to enhance the human potential of students, enabling them to develop superior personalities and compete nationally and internationally (Riowati & Yoenanto, 2022). Furthermore, education must facilitate learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits (Loilatu et al., 2021). Therefore, students should enjoy the learning process both in and outside the classroom. This is especially true in schools located in the 3-T (Disadvantaged Areas) areas. These schools are located in the outermost, most remote, and underdeveloped areas. They are referred to as 3-T areas because of several factors that indicate a 3-T area, including: Areas with poor telephone and internet signals. In addition to poor

signal quality, road access, and even infrastructure, these areas are considered deplorable, far from good, let alone comfortable. Therefore, it is natural that there is no signal or network in these areas.

The concept of "enjoyable learning," the focus of this research, should not be simplified as mere play or entertainment in the classroom. It should be understood more substantively as a learning process that successfully creates a positive psychological environment for students, where they feel safe, accepted, intellectually challenged, and intrinsically motivated to actively engage. A key aspect of enjoyable learning is the relevance of the learning material to the students' life contexts, problems, and culture. In 3T (disadvantaged regions), contextual learning based on local potential is no longer an option but a necessity. This approach allows teachers to overcome the lack of modern teaching aids by utilizing natural resources, local wisdom, folklore, and community economic activities as teaching materials. When children see that what they are learning has a direct connection to the world around them, learning becomes meaningful and authentic. This sense of meaning then gives rise to joy in learning. Therefore, this research question is not only about how Teacher Leaders create momentary joy, but more about how they design and implement learning that is deeply meaningful and relevant, so that the joy of learning emerges as a logical consequence of this authentic process. The role of Teacher Leaders in this case is as an architect and facilitator who is able to bridge the national curriculum with local realities, design challenging and appropriate learning experiences, and create a supportive and inclusive classroom climate.

In an effort to create enjoyable learning for students, the role of a leading teacher is one of the solutions promoted in the independent curriculum policy. The role of a leading teacher is to provide a learning experience for students where students are free to learn, happy because of a comfortable environment, so that students are able to develop talents and interests, thus forming a Pancasila student profile in students. So far, the role of a leading teacher in implementing the independent curriculum has encountered several obstacles, including the small number of groups or communities that understand the implementation of the independent curriculum. In addition, the role of a leading teacher in implementing the independent curriculum does not have the authority to express ideas that refer to the independent curriculum, so that they are very limited in decision-making or policy-making. A review of previous studies shows that there have been several studies discussing the role of a leading teacher and learning in the 3T areas, but these two topics often run independently. On the one hand, research on the leading teacher, such as that conducted by Purba (2024) and Junawati et al (2025), much of which focuses on the effectiveness and impact of training programs on improving pedagogical competence and teacher leadership in general. These studies provide valuable insights into program effectiveness, but the research locus tends to be in relatively well-equipped

schools in urban or suburban areas.

On the other hand, research on education in the 3T (United Nations) regions, such as the work of Samhaji & Anggara (2025) and Pranata (2022), has largely focused on collectively mapping macro issues such as policy, infrastructure, and teacher qualifications. These studies adequately address structural challenges, but under-emphasize the role of individual teachers' agency as innovators actively responding to and overcoming these challenges. Some recent research, such as that by Syalsabillah et al (2021), has begun to explore the role of the Leading Teacher in implementing the Independent Curriculum, but has not specifically explored the unique context of the 3T regions. In other words, there is a significant knowledge gap. It explores how the agency, creativity, and leadership of a Leading Teacher manifest in concrete actions to design enjoyable learning amidst limitations. How they negotiate and adapt the curriculum. What collaborative strategies they develop with local communities.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth and holistic analysis of the strategies, adaptations, and innovation patterns developed by Teacher Leaders in creating contextual, enjoyable learning in underserved areas (3T). This research views Teacher Leaders not only as subjects applying knowledge from training, but more as practical theorists who generate context-based, practical knowledge. A qualitative research approach with a multi-site case study method will allow researchers to explore the narratives, reflections, and meanings behind each action taken by Teacher Leaders. Another novelty is the emphasis on the "fun" aspect built through a contextual and meaningful approach, not just a game method. This research will also explore the leadership dimensions of Teacher Leaders in building support networks with principals, fellow teachers, parents, and community leaders, which are crucial factors for the sustainability of their innovations in a limited environment. Thus, this research contribution is expected to enrich the treasure trove of educational science, particularly in the fields of instructional leadership, education in special areas, and contextual learning design.

From the descriptions and statements above, the author is interested in conducting a deeper study discussing the role of the driving teacher in realizing enjoyable learning for students based on the independent curriculum in the Frontier, Outermost and Disadvantaged (3-T) areas. The role of the driving teacher in realizing the profile of Pancasila students is undoubted, including students getting meaningful learning experiences that are centered on students, students experiencing independent learning, which means teachers are given the freedom to implement good methods that suit the needs of students so that students enjoy learning. More specifically, the research objectives are detailed as follows: (1) Identifying and describing the forms of innovation and adaptation of learning created by the Driving Teacher to answer specific challenges in the 3T areas. Through achieving this objective, the research is expected to produce a

conceptual model or at least practical principles of contextual learning leadership in the 3T areas, which can be a reference material for policy makers, organizers of the Driving Teacher program, and of course, teachers and prospective teachers who work in special areas.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study. This study aims to answer the role of the Leading Teacher in education in schools in Indonesia's underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost regions, in providing enjoyable learning. The object of this research is how students feel happy and satisfied in the learning process carried out by the Leading Teacher in 3T (Underdeveloped, Frontier, and Outermost) schools in Entikong Regency, West Kalimantan.

The participants of this study were teachers in the 3T (Disadvantaged Regions), members of the teachers' community, and students. The total number of participants was 3 teachers, 2 members of the teachers' community, and 5 students. The research instrument in this study was the researcher herself (human instrument) with the help of interview and observation guidelines. Qualitative research that does not have a definite form because it continues to develop throughout the study, therefore the researcher herself acts as the research instrument with the aim of uncovering research facts (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Sugiyono, 2018).

Data collection was conducted through observation and interviews with a focus on how the driving teacher provides enjoyable learning to students. The research procedure went through 4 (four) stages. (1) data collection stage; collecting facts found during the research related to the research aspects. (2) data reduction stage, carried out by reviewing all reports and notes on research results obtained in the field. (3) data presentation stage, namely the researcher carried out a systematic presentation in the form of text or narrative according to the research aspects. (4) drawing conclusions or verification, namely looking for patterns, themes, relationships, similarities and so on to then draw a final conclusion to reveal the research findings (Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis techniques are carried out through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Miles et al., (2014) data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Where the three processes put forward by Miles are carried out continuously throughout the study, even before all data is collected, seen from the research conceptual framework, research problems, and data collection approaches chosen by the researcher. The conclusions of each analysis carried out are also verified during the study by rethinking during writing, reviewing field notes, reviewing and exchanging ideas with colleagues to develop intersubjective agreement, and then making extensive efforts to place copies of the findings in other data sets until the final conclusions are drawn.

3. RESULTS

Through a multi-site case study approach in the Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost (3T) regions, this research successfully uncovers the complex dynamics and concrete strategies implemented by Teachers-in-Charge to bring joyful learning to life amidst various structural constraints. Analysis of in-depth interview data, participant observation, and document review shows that the joy of learning is not created through entertainment methods alone, but rather is built through a holistic, contextual, and human-centered approach. The role of Teachers-in-Charge turns out to go beyond the conventional boundaries of a teacher; they emerge as multidimensional agents of change who simultaneously function as curriculum designers, emotional companions, and community leaders. The findings of this study can be condensed into three main interrelated axes, where each axis not only addresses the specific challenges of the 3T regions but also collectively forms a learning ecosystem that allows the joy of learning to grow authentically and sustainably. The findings of this study reveal three major themes that become the pillars of the Teachers-in-Charge role in creating joyful and meaningful learning amidst limitations.

The Leading Teacher as an Architect of Contextual Learning: Transforming Material and Environmental Limitations into Authentic and Engaging Learning Resources

The first and most fundamental finding of this research is the role of the Leading Teacher as a learning architect who creatively and systematically breaks down the barriers between the national curriculum and the realities of students' lives in the 3T (third-third) regions. They do not view limited infrastructure—such as a lack of textbooks, modern teaching aids, electricity, or internet—as absolute barriers. Instead, these limitations spark creativity to transform the surrounding natural, social, and cultural environment into a rich and free "living textbook" and "natural laboratory." Enjoyable learning, in this context, is born from students' sense of familiarity, meaningfulness, and pride in their own life contexts, which are often overlooked in conventional learning processes.

The primary strategy identified was radical contextualization of the material. A Leading Teacher at a border school, for example, taught the concepts of fractions, ratios, and economics not only with abstract examples from textbooks, but also with a real-life project of processing and marketing the cassava crops of the students' families. They calculated how many kilograms of cassava were needed to produce a plastic bag of chips, the ratio of flour to seasoning, and calculated the profit margin if sold at the border post. An interview with the Leading Teacher, Ms. Sari (pseudonym), explained the following.

"Children used to struggle to understand that math was just numbers on a chalkboard. Now, they're enthusiastic because the calculations are for something tangible, something they can take home or use to help their parents. They're no longer just learning math, but learning about

entrepreneurship with the potential that's right before their eyes. Their excitement is evident when they present their sales results; it's a different kind of confidence."

Based on this statement, it illustrates the transformation of mathematics learning from something abstract and difficult to understand into a concrete, meaningful, and empowering experience. The Teacher Leader successfully linked the lesson to the real-life context of students in the 3T area, namely by utilizing local potential (cassava gardens) as a learning medium. This not only makes students enthusiastic and easier to understand mathematical concepts, but also teaches life skills such as entrepreneurship. The joy and confidence that arise from the real achievement of producing products and presenting the results, making learning relevant and proud for them.

On a remote island, a science teacher taught about ecosystems, pollution, and environmental sustainability by taking students directly to the beach and mangrove forests. They observed the various biota, identified the problem of plastic waste carried by the currents, and designed a simple campaign to educate fishermen. The absence of animated videos about coral reefs was replaced by diving and snorkeling activities with the community (under strict supervision) to see firsthand their beauty and damage. In an interview, the teacher, Mr. Arif, stated.

"I want children to have an emotional connection with their ocean. It's incredibly rewarding when they can name fish and coral in scientific language, even though they catch or see them every day. Learning becomes an adventure. We learn while cleaning the beach, and they realize that the knowledge they're learning is directly useful for protecting their home."

The explanation of this statement illustrates the in-depth contextual learning strategy implemented by a Leading Teacher in a coastal area of the 3T (Uninhabited Region). The essence is to connect science directly with students' daily living environment to create authentic and meaningful learning. The teacher does not simply teach science as textbook theory, but takes students directly into their natural laboratory marine ecosystem to observe, identify, and learn the concepts of ecosystems, biodiversity, and pollution in real life. Thus, learning transforms from rote memorization to an enjoyable "adventure."

More profoundly, the teacher's goal is to build an "emotional bond" between students and their marine environment. When students, who see fish and coral reefs every day, are finally able to name them in scientific language, a connection occurs between academic knowledge and their personal and cultural experiences. This fosters pride and a sense of ownership. Furthermore, by integrating beach cleanups into their learning, students become not merely passive recipients of knowledge but active agents of conservation. They see firsthand that the knowledge they learn has practical uses for "guarding their

home." This process generates an intrinsic joy of learning, stemming from a sense of ownership, meaningfulness, and tangible contribution to their own environment.

Another adaptation found was the use of local wisdom and cultural narratives as learning media. In a mountainous area, an Indonesian Language Teacher integrated local folktales about the origins of mountains into narrative texts. Students not only analyzed the text structure from books but also interviewed traditional elders, documented the stories, rewrote them in their own words, and even performed them as dramas. This activity enlivened the usually monotonous lessons into dynamic, laughter-filled lessons. As expressed by the Teacher, Ibu Dewi, as follows.

> *"Children are usually shy about speaking in front of the class. But when they play characters from legends they've heard since childhood, their expressions completely change. They become confident, improvise, and most importantly, they feel that their culture is valued and included in the school environment. This builds a deep sense of joy, not just the joy of role-playing."*

The explanation of this statement reveals a clever learning strategy for building self-confidence and cultural appreciation in students in the 3T (third-third) regions. The Teacher Leader utilizes the local wisdom of folk tales familiar to students since childhood as a gateway to bring the lesson to life. By portraying characters from these legends, students no longer feel like they are in a foreign, stressful situation (such as speaking in front of a class), but rather are engaged in a cultural expression that is familiar and meaningful to them. This sparks a transformation from shyness to confidence and creativity.

More substantive are the psychological and cultural impacts of this approach. When local culture is central to learning, students feel that their identity and heritage are recognized, valued, and integrated into the formal educational space. This process transforms the school from an institution that may feel "foreign" to a part of their own community. The resulting happiness, as teachers emphasize, is "deep," stemming from a recognition of identity and a sense of belonging. This is not simply the fleeting pleasure of role-playing, but rather the authentic joy born of the integration of the academic world with the students' cultural and emotional worlds.

Thus, the main form of innovation and adaptation of this finding is the transformation of the abstract curriculum into projects and activities based on local contexts. The practical principles that can be formulated are: (1) Identifying Local Potential as an Anchor: Each material is searched for its relationship to resources, problems, or traditions that are close to the students. (2) Authentic Project-Based Learning Design: Learning activities are designed to produce real and useful products or solutions for their small communities. (3) Environment as the Main Classroom: Moving the locus of learning from the possibly stuffy and hot

classroom, to the spacious and inspiring outdoor classroom. The pleasure created is an intrinsic pleasure, derived from a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, and real achievement in solving their own life problems.

The Leading Teacher as a Facilitator of a Supportive Socio-Emotional Climate: Building a Safe Space and Restoring Learning Motivation

The findings of these two studies reveal that enjoyable learning in the 3T (United Nations) regions is highly dependent on creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive psychological climate. Many students in these regions come from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds, with homework burdens, low self-esteem, and sometimes traumatic prior educational experiences due to rigid and punitive teaching methods. The Teacher Leaders in this study consistently demonstrated their role as facilitators of human relationships, prioritizing students' socio-emotional well-being over academic achievement alone. They understand that the joy of learning can only grow in fertile soil: hearts and minds that feel accepted and valued.

The key strategy identified was differentiated learning with a personalized approach. The Leading Teacher actively sought to identify each student's background, interests, and learning style. At one school, a Leading Teacher maintained a "student contact pocket book" containing notes about his students' family circumstances, learning difficulties, and even their favorite foods. This information was used to design a differentiated approach. A student who frequently helped his parents sell at the morning market, for example, was given observation assignments that could be done at the market, rather than reading assignments that would be impossible for him to complete when tired. In an interview, the Leading Teacher, Mr. Benny, explained the following.

> *"There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach. A hungry or tired child won't be able to enjoy a lesson, no matter how sophisticated. Sometimes, enjoyable learning begins with me asking, 'What did you have for breakfast today?' or 'What do you need help with?' When they feel cared for as people, not just students, an emotional connection to the teacher and the school is built. Only then does the motivation to learn emerge."*

The explanation of this statement emphasizes a fundamental principle in creating enjoyable learning, especially in 3T areas: students' basic needs and psychological well-being must be met before the academic process can be effective. The Teacher Leader in this quote recognizes that even the most sophisticated pedagogical approach will fail if students come to class hungry, tired, or burdened by problems outside of school. Therefore, his strategy begins not with opening a textbook, but with building human relationships through simple questions that address students' personal circumstances. The essence of this approach is a paradigm shift from viewing students as "objects" of learning to "subjects" of whole human beings with lives, feelings, and needs outside of school. By showing concern for their daily lives, such as asking about breakfast or offering

assistance, teachers create a safe space and a strong emotional connection. This bond and the trust that is built are the foundation for intrinsic learning motivation. In this context, "enjoyable learning" is no longer just about creative teaching methods, but about creating a warm, supportive, and humanizing classroom climate, where every student feels seen, heard, and valued before being challenged to absorb knowledge.

Another important aspect is the use of reflective systems and positive feedback to foster a growth mindset. Rather than focusing on grades and mistakes, the Leading Teachers at the research site frequently use portfolios, learning journals, and one-on-one reflection sessions. They help students see their own progress, no matter how small. In a class with a high dropout rate, one Leading Teacher implemented a "little ceremony" every weekend, where each student mentioned one thing they had learned and one thing they were proud of about themselves. This simple activity turned out to have a significant impact on self-confidence. As explained by Ms. Citra, a Leading Teacher at a madrasah, the following.

> *"Many of my children felt stupid and afraid of making mistakes. I changed that paradigm. I said, 'In my class, mistakes are okay, the important thing is that we figure out where they are together.' I used star stickers for simple things like asking questions or helping a friend. They competed to get 'goodness stars.' The class atmosphere became more relaxed; they were no longer afraid to try and express their opinions. Smiles and laughter began to be heard more often, because the pressure to always be right was lessened."*

Teacher Leader in dismantling the culture of fear and low self-esteem that often hinders learning in the 3T (third-highest) areas. Her strategy focuses on a paradigm shift at the most fundamental level: changing the way we view "mistakes." By emphasizing that mistakes are normal and part of the collaborative learning process, this teacher actively reduces the level of threat and anxiety in the classroom. This creates a safe psychological foundation for students to take learning risks, such as asking questions or trying new things, without the burden of shame. Furthermore, this teacher cleverly shifts the reward system from solely academic achievement (which often leads to feelings of "stupidity") to recognition of process and character. Awarding "good stars" for courageously asking questions or helping a friend shifts the focus from "what is not yet known" to "how to learn and behave." This simple shift in the extrinsic motivation system can dramatically change classroom dynamics. Students who were previously intimidated now "scramble" to demonstrate positive behavior, ultimately paving the way for academic participation. The relaxed atmosphere of the classroom, full of smiles and laughter, is clear evidence that the joy of learning arises when the pressure to perform perfectly is removed and replaced with an appreciation for the effort, collaboration, and development of each individual.

Furthermore, Leading Teachers also act as a communication bridge with

parents/guardians who often have limited literacy skills and are financially preoccupied. They conduct home visits not to complain about a child's behavior, but to understand the situation and encourage collaboration. They hold parent-teacher meetings in a relaxed format, such as enjoying garden produce together, to discuss the importance of emotional support. An interview with Mr. Rudi, a Leading Teacher in a mountainous area, illustrates this point.

> *"Many parents here are unschooled. When we talk about 'independent curriculum,' they're confused. But when we say, 'We'll teach our children to make compost from household waste, so the family vegetable garden will be more fertile,' they're immediately enthusiastic and supportive. This way, learning at school isn't separated from home. Children feel supported from all sides, and that makes them more comfortable and motivated."*

The explanation of this statement reveals the effective communication and collaboration strategies employed by the Leading Teacher to bridge the school with the parent community in the 3T (United Nations) area. The essence is translating abstract formal education concepts (such as the "Independence Curriculum") into concrete language and benefits that are directly felt in the daily lives of families. The teacher understands that to build support, she must demonstrate the relevance of education to the parents' real-world context, namely improving economic well-being and household practices. By promoting a project to make compost from household waste, the teacher cleverly creates a meeting point between the school's academic goals (e.g., science learning, environmental education) and the family's practical needs (fertilizing the vegetable garden). This shifts the parents' perception from seeing the school as a separate and perhaps less relevant institution to a partner that adds direct value to their lives. The support born of this understanding is organic and powerful. As a result, students no longer feel the dichotomy between school and home; they are immersed in an integrated and mutually supportive learning ecosystem. This feeling of being "supported from all sides" is what builds psychological comfort and increases children's enthusiasm for learning, because they see that what they learn at school is valued and considered useful by the people closest to them in their lives.

Thus, the form of innovation and adaptation in this finding is a shift in focus from merely transferring knowledge to building relationships and the psychological well-being of students. The practical principles that can be formulated are: (1) Relationship First, Content Later: Invest time in building trust and getting to know students personally before cramming them with material. (2) Celebrate Small Wins: Design continuous recognition and feedback mechanisms to motivate intrinsically, not with rankings or punishments. (3) Amplify Student Voice: Create a safe channel for students to express their feelings, opinions, and ideas in the learning process. The pleasure here comes from feeling safe, accepted, and valued as whole individuals.

Driving Teachers as Leaders and Catalysts of Learning Communities: Mobilizing Collaborative Networks for Sustainable Innovation

The third crucial finding is that the effectiveness and sustainability of the role of Leading Teachers in 3T areas is largely determined by their abilities not only as individual innovators in their own classrooms, but as learning leaders capable of mobilizing the broader learning community. They recognize that the innovations they create will stagnate if they remain confined to themselves. Therefore, they actively build and facilitate collaborations with fellow teachers, principals, education staff, even community leaders and parents. This role serves as a catalyst for creating a school ecosystem that collectively supports enjoyable learning.

A key strategy identified was the formation and facilitation of mini-"Communities of Practice" (CoPs) within schools. While they may not be formally called CoPs, Leading Teachers informally invite their colleagues to share good practices, design thematic learning together, and observe each other's classes. In a school with only five teachers, a Leading Teacher initiated a short "Friday Gathering" after school to discuss challenges and solutions. Together, they created a bank of simple teaching aids from used and natural materials. As Mr. Eko explained,

"It was difficult at first, because some fellow teachers were already comfortable with the old methods. I didn't force them, but I invited them to see my class and see how the children reacted. Gradually, they became interested. Now, we often collaborate. For example, for the 'Market' theme, the Math teacher taught about counting money, the Social Studies teacher taught about social interaction, and the Art teacher made crafts to sell. The children enjoyed the connection between the lessons, and we, the teachers, also enjoyed having someone to discuss with and feeling less alone."

The explanation of this statement illustrates the role of the Leading Teacher as a catalyst for change, using a persuasive and collaborative approach, rather than an authoritative one, to mobilize the learning community in her school. Recognizing the natural resistance to change among fellow teachers who were already comfortable with conventional methods, her chosen strategy was to demonstrate through concrete examples and invitation, rather than instruction or coercion. By inviting colleagues to directly observe her classroom and, more importantly, the enthusiastic reactions and engagement of students, this Leading Teacher demonstrated empirical evidence that the new approach was effective and brought joy to learning. The key to her success lay in her ability to transform a spirit of competition or individualism into a spirit of collaboration. Cross-subject collaboration on a shared theme like "Markets" created a powerful synergy. This process yielded dual benefits: for students, learning became more enjoyable, coherent, and meaningful because they saw the interconnectedness of knowledge within a real-life context; for teachers, this collaboration broke down professional isolation, created a supportive community of practitioners, and

fostered the joy of teaching through having discussion partners. Thus, the transformation toward joyful learning was no longer the burden of an individual innovator but rather a collective project that strengthened the entire school ecosystem.

Furthermore, the Leading Teachers demonstrate leadership in negotiating and advocating with school principals and local stakeholders. They don't passively wait for orders, but actively propose realistic ideas. For example, a Leading Teacher convinces the principal to allocate a small portion of the School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds for transportation costs for extracurricular activities or to purchase materials for simple lab work. They also partner with traditional leaders, farmers, fishermen, or small businesses to serve as resource persons or provide learning locations. An interview with Mrs. Fitri demonstrates this.

"I invited the principal to discuss assessments. I showed him the students' portfolios and their progress. I asked for support to not only achieve a 100% graduation rate, but also to pursue the joy of learning. Thank God, he was open. We also invited the neighborhood head and parents to work together to improve the reading corner at the school. Now the school doesn't just belong to the department, but to all of us. This kind of support is what keeps innovation going, even if I might be transferred later."

The statement illustrates the visionary and effective educational leadership strategy implemented by the Moving Teacher. She not only focused on changes in the classroom, but also actively built alliances and advocated for paradigm shifts at the school policy and community engagement levels. The first step was to negotiate with the formal authority holder, the principal, using concrete data and narratives. By showcasing student portfolios and progress stories, she shifted the discussion from mere administrative targets (100% graduation) to a more substantive educational goal: "the joy of learning." This advocated for measuring success not only by final results, but also by the process and experiences of student learning. Furthermore, the teacher understood that the sustainability of innovation depends on a sense of shared ownership. By inviting community leaders (the neighborhood head) and parents to directly participate in the school's physical improvements (the reading corner), she transformed the school from a distant government asset to a close-knit community asset. This act of mutual cooperation is a powerful symbolic practice that builds an emotional bond between the school and the community. The statement, "The school is not just the property of the government, but belongs to us all," reflects the creation of crucial social capital. This is the foundation of innovation resilience: once a change has been adopted and nurtured by a community, it will endure beyond the individual presence of the initiator, addressing the challenges of frequent teacher transfers in 3T areas.

Equally important are the Teacher Leaders' efforts to empower students as learning partners and small leaders. They establish a "peer tutoring" system where students who are quicker to learn help their peers. They also assign students

responsibility for managing plant corners, mini libraries, or cleanliness campaigns. This creates a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the learning environment. A student at a remote island school observed by researchers said,

> *"Teacher Maya really enjoys teaching us. We're not just told to take notes, but we're also encouraged to discuss ways to make our classes more enjoyable. Now we have our own schedule for taking care of the school garden."*

The explanation of this statement encapsulates the essence of a Leading Teacher's success in creating democratic and empowering learning. This quote, from a student perspective, demonstrates a fundamental shift from authoritarian and passive classroom dynamics to a participatory and collaborative learning environment. Teachers are no longer viewed as absolute authority figures who simply "give orders," but rather as facilitators who "talk" and value students' voices in designing their own learning experiences. This dialogue process makes students feel valued as partners, which in turn fosters a sense of ownership over their learning process and environment. Concrete evidence of this empowerment is seen in the responsibility given to students: managing the school garden's duty schedule. This activity is not simply a routine task, but a direct implementation of a shared decision. By having concrete responsibility for their "own school garden," students experience authentic learning about collaboration, responsibility, and the cycle of life. The feeling of "really happy" expressed by students stems from the combination of freedom to express themselves, the trust given by the teacher, and the pride of contributing significantly to their classroom community. This demonstrates that the joy of learning arises when students move from the role of passive objects to active subjects whose contributions are recognized.

Thus, the form of innovation and adaptation at this point is the transition from individual change agents to leaders who distribute leadership and grow collective capacity. The practical principles that can be formulated are: (1) Lead by Influence, Not Authority: Use a persuasive approach, proof through example, and build good relationships to motivate others. (2) Build Strategic Alliances: Identify and involve all potential supporters, both within the school (principal, fellow teachers) and outside the school (parents, community leaders). (3) Distribute Leadership: Empower students and fellow teachers by giving them trust and responsibility in the learning process. The pleasure at this level is collective pleasure, namely pride and satisfaction for successfully creating greater and sustainable change in their school environment.

4. DISCUSSION
The role of the Leading Teacher in schools in remote, frontier and outermost areas in enjoyable learning

The results of this study reveal that the role of Teacher Leaders in creating enjoyable learning in the 3T (United, 3T) regions is multidimensional, complex, and

contextual. The finding that they function as contextual architects, emotional facilitators, and community catalysts not only answers the research questions but also makes a significant contribution to the discourse on inclusive education, instructional leadership, and critical pedagogy in marginalized areas. This discussion will link the empirical findings with theoretical frameworks and previous studies, while highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

First, the findings regarding the Leading Teacher as an Architect of Contextual Learning strengthen and expand the social constructivist learning theory. Vygotsky (1978) and critical pedagogy Freire (2000) in a very specific context. Constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interactions with their social and physical environments. In 3T areas, where textbooks and modern teaching aids are limited, Teachers-in-Charge intuitively make the entire environment a "zone of proximal development." When Mr. Arif takes students to the beach to study ecosystems or Mrs. Sari uses a cassava garden for mathematics, they are not only applying theory but also demonstrating that limited materials can be a catalyst for more authentic learning. This is in line with research Smith (2017) in rural Australian communities, which found that place-based education increased student engagement and knowledge retention because the learning materials were rooted in their local identities and experiences.

Furthermore, this approach is a concrete form of Freire's critical pedagogy, which rejects the "banking" model of education in which teachers simply deposit knowledge into students' minds. By involving students in relevant projects such as managing a cassava chip business or a beach cleanup campaign, the Moving Teacher practices education as a liberating practice, where students become subjects who transform their realities. This finding fills a gap in previous research such as Samhaji & Anggara (2025) which only mapped infrastructure problems without showing how local resources can be repurposed into learning capital. The Moving Teacher's innovation shows that "limitations" in the 3T areas need to be reframed as "unique contexts" that require a different learning design approach, not simply deficiencies that must be filled with standard assistance.

Second, the findings about the Driving Teacher as a Facilitator of the Socio-Emotional Climate confirm and provide new nuances to the self-determination theory Deci & Ryan (2000) and the importance of positive teacher-student relationships. Self-determination theory states that intrinsic motivation grows when three basic psychological needs are met: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The practices of Teacher Motivators, as described by Mr. Benny and Mrs. Citra—from asking about breakfast, removing the stigma of mistakes, to awarding "good stars"—directly foster these three needs. They build relatedness through personal care, enhance a sense of competence through positive feedback on individual development, and provide autonomy by involving

students in decision-making. (Hensley et al., 2020). This is especially crucial in 3T areas, where many students arrive burdened by poverty and traumatic educational experiences. Hattie (2008) in his famous meta-analysis concluded that positive teacher-student relationships have a large effect size (0.72) on learning achievement.

The findings of this study provide strong contextual evidence: in resource-constrained settings, investing in human relationships is not an add-on, but rather a primary foundation for effective academic learning. The "relationship first, content later" approach emerging from the data is a rational response to a context where students' physiological and safety needs (in Maslow's hierarchy of needs) are often unmet. These findings go beyond research. (Septiani et al., 2025) which focuses on general pedagogical competencies, demonstrating that emotional-social competencies and interpersonal intelligence are key to the success of Leading Teachers in challenging environments like the 3T (frontier and remote) regions. Their ability to empathize and build trust is a "soft technology" that overcomes the limitations of "hard technology" like gadgets and the internet.

Third, the findings on the Leading Teacher as a Learning Community Catalyst connect the individual's role to theories of systemic change and distributed leadership. This role demonstrates that the success and sustainability of educational innovation in remote areas cannot depend on a lone hero. As demonstrated by Mr. Eko and Mrs. Fitri, the Leading Teacher successfully initiated an informal community of practice and built strategic alliances with the principal and the community (Green, 2018). This is a practice of distributed leadership where leadership is not centralized in one person, but spread across a network of stakeholders. By empowering fellow teachers, involving parents in real-life projects, and even giving students responsibilities (such as managing the school garden), they create a resilient learning ecosystem. These findings support research. Fullan (2017) which emphasizes that sustainable educational change requires leaders who are able to "move others to action."

In the context of remote, frontier, and remote areas (3T), where teacher-student ratios are suboptimal and teacher turnover is frequent, building this collective capacity is a smart survival strategy. This research addresses a gap identified in the literature review: the lack of studies highlighting teacher agency as innovators actively building networks. Ibu Fitri's advocacy practice with school principals to shift the focus from "100% graduation" to "joyful learning" is also an important contribution to the discourse on educational accountability. She shifts indicators of success from narrow outputs (test scores) to more holistic outcomes (positive learning experiences), an approach increasingly supported in the 21st-century educational assessment literature.

Integratively, these three roles are interrelated and form a contextual learning leadership model for 3T areas. This model states that enjoyable and meaningful learning results from the dynamic interaction between: (1) Curriculum

Relevance (built through contextualization), (2) Supportive Psychological Climate (built through human relationships), and (3) Collaborative Ecosystem (built through distributed leadership). Joy in learning, as observed, is not an input or method, but rather an output or emergent property of this well-designed system. This strengthens the definition of "fun" proposed in this study as a positive psychological state born from an authentic process. This finding is in line with the concept of "deep learning" initiated by Fullan & Langworthy (2014), which emphasizes student engagement through relevant learning and the creation of strong relationships.

The theoretical implications of this research are: first, it enriches the concept of instructional leadership, which has been studied mostly in the context of well-equipped schools. Instructional leadership in 3T areas, as practiced by Teacher Leaders, has additional dimensions: contextual resource leadership (identifying and mobilizing local resources) and psychosocial resilience leadership (building emotional resilience in students and communities). Second, this research strengthens the sociomateriality perspective in education studies. Fenwick (2015), by showing how the interaction between teacher agency, limited material conditions, and local socio-cultural resources together produce unique pedagogical practices.

The practical implications are significant. For the organizers of the Teacher Leader Program, these findings suggest the need for: (1) Training modules that focus more on contextual pedagogy, project-based learning design with minimal resources, and trauma psychology to understand the backgrounds of students in 3T areas; (2) Stronger coaching mechanisms and online communities to reduce the professional isolation of Teacher Leaders in remote areas; (3) Policies that provide autonomy and tangible support (e.g., flexibility in the use of BOS funds for local projects) for Teacher Leaders to innovate. For regional education offices, this model can be adopted in local teacher capacity building programs, with a focus on documenting and exchanging good practices between 3T schools. For teachers and teacher candidates, this research offers an inspiring roadmap that limitations are not absolute obstacles, and that the main strengths of an educator lie in creativity, empathy, and the ability to build collaboration.

However, this study also acknowledges limitations and suggests future research directions. First, this study was qualitative in nature with a limited number of participants. Further mixed-methods research involving more participants from diverse areas of the 3T (United Nations) could test the generalizability of the principles found. Second, this study examined the role of Teacher Leaders at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies are needed to map the long-term impact of their practices on learning outcomes, dropout rates, and community engagement. Third, student and parent voices, while explored, could be explored more deeply as separate research subjects to understand their perceptions of the changes initiated by Teacher Leaders.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the role of the Leading Teacher in realizing enjoyable learning in Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost (3T) Areas is a strategic role that is multidimensional and contextual. The Leading Teacher functions as (1) Contextual Learning Architect who creatively transforms material limitations and the surrounding environment into authentic learning resources through curriculum contextualization, project-based learning, and the utilization of local wisdom; (2) Socio-Emotional Climate Facilitator who builds a safe and inclusive space with a personal approach, positive feedback, and an emphasis on human relationships before knowledge transfer; and (3) Learning Community Leader and Catalyst who drives collaboration with fellow teachers, principals, parents, and the community to create a sustainable learning ecosystem. These three roles are interrelated and form an effective contextual learning leadership model in 3T areas. The joy of learning in this context is not just entertainment, but a logical consequence of a learning process that is meaningful, relevant to students' lives, and centered on their psychological well-being. Thus, the Driving Teachers have proven to be key change agents capable of transforming challenges into opportunities, fostering students' intrinsic motivation, and strengthening the resilience of school communities in marginalized areas.

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