
Managerial competence of school principals in enhancing teacher performance: A case of a vocational high school

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Abstract

School principals' managerial competence plays an important role in supporting teacher performance and improving school quality. However, few studies have examined how such competence is put into practice in Indonesian vocational schools. This study examines how principals' managerial competence is implemented, the challenges encountered, and the strategies applied to support teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun. This qualitative case study employed semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the principal, a vice principal, and teachers. The data were analyzed thematically, and triangulation was used to ensure credibility. The findings indicate that collaborative planning, organizational coordination, academic supervision, and continuous professional development characterize the principal's managerial competence. Nevertheless, limited funding, inadequate facilities, and differences in teacher motivation remain challenges. The study highlights that collaborative leadership and participatory decision-making can support teacher development in vocational education.

Keywords

Educational leadership, managerial competence, school principal, teacher performance, vocational school

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Introduction

School leadership has become one of the main factors influencing education quality and school success. Among the competencies required of principals, managerial skills are critical because principals are responsible for managing resources, allocating tasks, guiding and supervising staff, and evaluating institutional progress toward educational goals. In an era of educational transformation, principals are required not only to manage administrative responsibilities but also to promote teacher professionalism and support continuous school improvement (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2020). Effective school leadership is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism for building professional learning cultures, strengthening teacher capacity, and improving organizational effectiveness (Robinson et al., 2008).

In Indonesia, the implementation of school-based management has expanded the responsibilities of principals, who are expected to improve educational quality through effective leadership practices and strategic management of school resources. National education standards require principals to demonstrate managerial competence in planning programs, organizing resources, building cooperation, and supporting teachers' professional growth. Effective managerial leadership can create a supportive school environment that strengthens teacher motivation, improves instructional quality, and contributes to better organizational performance. Teacher performance remains a key factor influencing student learning outcomes, and principal support plays an important role in shaping teachers' professional practices (Grissom et al., 2021).

Teachers' effectiveness depends not only on individual competence but also on organizational support and leadership practices. Previous studies indicate that strategic planning, academic supervision, professional development opportunities, and participatory decision-making are important characteristics of effective principal leadership. These practices can strengthen teacher commitment, encourage instructional improvement, and increase job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, managerial competence should be viewed as a leadership strategy that develops teaching capacity and supports institutional effectiveness. Research also shows that principals who build collaborative professional environments are better able to sustain teacher learning and school improvement initiatives (Kılınç et al., 2020).

Despite growing research on educational leadership, studies examining how managerial competence is implemented in Indonesian vocational schools remain limited. Previous studies have predominantly adopted quantitative approaches, emphasizing statistical relationships between leadership and teacher performance while providing limited understanding of the managerial processes and contextual challenges that principals encounter. Furthermore, vocational schools face distinctive demands, including competency-based curricula, industry collaboration, and workforce preparation, which require principals to exercise adaptive managerial leadership.

SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun provides an appropriate context for examining this issue. Beyond routine administrative responsibilities, the school is a setting where managerial practices are implemented through strategic planning, academic supervision, collaborative decision-making, and teacher professional development activities aimed at improving teaching quality.

However, challenges such as limited financial resources, inadequate facilities, and differences in teacher motivation may influence the effectiveness of principal leadership practices. Therefore, this study focuses on three main issues: first, how principals apply managerial competence to support teacher performance; second, the challenges encountered during implementation; and third, the strategies developed to overcome these challenges. This study is expected to deepen understanding of principals' managerial practices in vocational education and to offer practical advice to school leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and teacher development.

Literature Review

Managerial competence and teacher performance in school leadership

Managerial competence is a central dimension of school leadership. It is a fundamental capability that enables principals to operate schools effectively through strategic planning, resource management, coordination, supervision, and evaluation. Effective school leaders must integrate managerial responsibilities with instructional leadership practices to ensure that organizational resources contribute to improved teaching and learning quality. Bush and Glover (2014) distinguish managerial leadership, which focuses on organizing school resources and structures, from instructional leadership, which emphasizes improving classroom practices and learning outcomes. Studies also emphasize that principals' managerial competence contributes to school effectiveness by strengthening organizational structures, supporting teacher collaboration, and creating conditions that facilitate continuous improvement (Bush & Glover, 2014; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, managerial competence is embedded within the professional responsibilities of school principals, including planning, organizing, implementing, controlling, and evaluating school programs through the effective use of human, physical, and financial resources. Principals are expected to manage school resources strategically while developing a collaborative environment that supports teacher professionalism. Research indicates that effective managerial practices among principals are closely related to organizational capacity building, school improvement planning, and sustainable educational development (Clark, 2017; Usman et al., 2018).

Teacher performance and professional development

Teacher performance refers to teachers' ability to design effective instructional plans, implement meaningful learning activities, evaluate student achievement, and reflectively improve their teaching practices. High-quality teacher performance is influenced by professional competence, motivation, commitment, participation in continuous professional development, and the ability to create meaningful learning experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). However, teacher performance cannot be viewed solely as an individual responsibility because leadership support, organizational climate, and institutional resources also shape it.

Studies show that school leadership practices that offer opportunities for collaboration, mentoring, feedback, and professional learning strongly influence teacher professional growth. Effective principals contribute to teacher development by establishing supportive

environments in which teachers can improve their instructional skills and engage in continuous learning (Kılınç et al., 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Postholm, 2012). Therefore, improving teacher performance requires not only strengthening individual teacher competence but also developing organizational systems that encourage professional improvement.

Principal leadership and teacher performance improvement

Previous research consistently demonstrates that principals play an essential role in influencing teacher performance through leadership practices and organizational development. Leithwood et al. (2020) explain that principals influence student outcomes indirectly by strengthening teachers' instructional capacity and creating supportive school conditions. Similarly, Grissom et al. (2021) found that principals with strong managerial and instructional competencies are able to establish collaborative cultures that enhance teacher motivation, professional commitment, and instructional effectiveness.

These findings are supported by research showing that effective principals improve teacher performance through several mechanisms, including instructional supervision, professional development facilitation, collaborative decision-making, and strategic resource allocation (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2008). Therefore, managerial competence should be understood not merely as administrative ability but as a leadership strategy that enables principals to build systems that support teacher learning and school improvement.

Managerial competence in Indonesian vocational schools

Although research on educational leadership has increased, empirical studies examining how principals apply managerial competence in Indonesian vocational schools remain limited. Many previous studies emphasize statistical relationships between leadership styles and teacher performance but provide less explanation of how leadership practices are implemented within specific organizational contexts.

Vocational schools have unique characteristics because they are expected to develop students' competencies according to industry needs, implement competency-based curricula, and establish partnerships with external stakeholders. These characteristics require principals to demonstrate adaptive managerial capabilities. Studies indicate that vocational school leaders must balance administrative management, industry collaboration, and innovation in school programs (Khurniawan et al., 2021). Therefore, qualitative research is necessary to explore how principals implement managerial competence and overcome contextual challenges in improving teacher performance.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and school-based management, this study proposes that principals' managerial competence influences teacher performance through interconnected leadership processes. Managerial competence refers to the principal's ability to plan strategically, allocate resources, supervise academic activities, make organizational decisions, and support teacher professional development.

Instructional leadership explains how principals improve teaching quality through supervision, feedback, and support for instructional improvement. Transformational leadership highlights the importance of motivating teachers, developing a shared vision, and encouraging organizational commitment. Meanwhile, school-based management emphasizes participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility among school stakeholders. Integrating these perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of how principals use managerial competence to support teacher performance improvement (Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The conceptual framework of this study assumes that effective managerial competence contributes to teacher performance through three interconnected mechanisms: (1) effective implementation of managerial responsibilities, including planning, organizing, supervision, and evaluation; (2) identification and management of organizational challenges, including limited resources and differences in teacher motivation; and (3) application of collaborative leadership strategies to strengthen professional development and teacher effectiveness. This framework is consistent with studies emphasizing that sustainable school improvement depends on the interaction among leadership capacity, organizational support, and teacher professional learning (Grissom et al., 2021; Kılınc et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008).

Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study design to analyze the contribution of the principal's managerial skills to teacher performance development at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun, Sarolangun Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was selected because it allows an in-depth examination of leadership behaviors in the workplace and enables researchers to obtain participants' viewpoints through their stories and descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Research site and participants

SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun, a public vocational secondary school in Jambi Province, participated in the present study. The school was at the forefront of developing effective managerial leadership practices to foster teacher development through principal leadership. Snowball sampling was used to select participants, starting with the principal as a key informant whose insights were expected to be rich in understanding of the phenomenon under study. The other participants were recommended on the basis of their knowledge of the phenomenon and the key informant's network. The final participants comprised one principal, one vice principal for curriculum, and six teachers with varied experience and teaching loads. This sampling method helped the researchers gather in-depth and trustworthy data on principal leadership and teachers' classroom practices.

Data collection

We gathered data from three different yet complementary sources: semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews enabled us to understand how participants perceive the principal's managerial qualities and to identify their major problems and approaches to improving teachers' work performance. Classroom

and school observations mainly served to show how leaders practice their roles, how they conduct supervision activities, and how teachers deliver lessons in authentic classroom environments. In addition, by reviewing related documents, such as the school strategic plan, supervision reports, teacher performance records, meeting minutes, and professional development programs, we cross-checked and compared the findings from the interviews and observations.

Data analysis

Qualitative data from interviews with staff and managers at different levels about the challenges of managerial practice were analyzed and interpreted through thematic analysis, based on the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020), which consists of data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Following a data saturation approach, the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were coded inductively and continuously until themes emerged around managerial competence, organizational challenges, and leadership strategies. These themes were then cross-checked against findings from the other data sources to identify common threads, patterns, and relationships that could help explain the phenomenon under study and guide managerial implications and policy development.

Trustworthiness

Methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results by comparing evidence across three data sources: interviews, observations, and documents. In addition, we applied member checking by returning interview summaries to participants for feedback and verification, and we used peer debriefing with other educational researchers to support consistent analysis. Through these methods, we safeguarded the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The results suggest that the principal's managerial abilities at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun play a significant role in improving teacher performance, as revealed through three interrelated aspects: (1) the application of managerial competence, (2) the problems faced in applying it, and (3) the managerial methods employed to improve teacher performance. Evidence from interviews, observations, and document analysis consistently shows that competent leadership behaviors create a collaborative work environment that motivates teachers and nurtures their professional growth.

Implementation of the principal's managerial competence

Interview results indicated that the principal was building managerial competence through regular planning, openness in setting up organizational structures, direct monitoring of school activities, and professional training for staff members. One of the school's leaders pointed out that annual and semester work schedules were developed together with the vice principals and teachers so that all learning activities matched the school's main goals and

purposes. “Every academic year, we prepare school programs together. Teachers are involved in determining priorities so that every activity supports the improvement of learning quality and teacher performance.” (Principal). The vice principal for curriculum echoed this sentiment, stating with conviction that collaborative planning makes school operations run much more smoothly.

“Teachers are invited to discuss academic programs, supervision schedules, and school targets. This participation increases their commitment to implementing the agreed programs.” (Vice Principal)

The recorded data indicated that teachers’ meetings were conducted regularly. These meetings also gave teachers a platform to raise teaching-related problems, share their views on matters at hand, and bring up other issues for discussion. The principal’s work plans and supervision schedules were also checked against related documents, which showed that work was done as planned, systematically, and with adequate preparation.

This finding suggests that the principal mainly uses a democratic management style, and that teachers are active participants not only in delivering instructional content but also in various other activities related to running the school. This involvement creates a sense of identification with the organization and a shared effort toward achieving targets. The principal acts not only administratively but also as a facilitator whose decisions are made collectively with teachers and through whom school resources are coordinated, so that teachers remain well informed about, and engaged with, the process.

Academic supervision and professional development

This study highlights another significant finding related to academic supervision. Teachers’ accounts indicate that classroom supervision was conducted routinely, with constructive feedback and professional exchanges as the main features of the supervisory visits, which are intended to lead to better teaching methods. As one teacher put it,

“Classroom supervision aims to enhance our strengths rather than pinpoint our weaknesses. Instead, the principal discusses our teaching practices and provides suggestions for improving classroom management and instructional methods.” (Teacher 1)

Another teacher noted that the supervision process regularly pushes educators to raise their professional standards.

“After every supervision session, we receive feedback that helps us improve lesson planning, assessment, and classroom interaction.” (Teacher 2)

The written reports also indicated that teachers could engage in seminars, training, and professional development through workshops, Subject Teacher Forums (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*, MGMP), and internal training sessions throughout the academic year.

The results suggest that academic supervision at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun more closely resembles professional coaching than purely administrative assessment. Constructive feedback

and ongoing professional development foster teachers' reflective practice, build confidence, and support instructional improvement. As a result, managerial ability greatly helps raise teacher professionalism.

Challenges in improving teacher performance

Although general management practices were carried out well, participants also mentioned challenges in making teachers more effective.

“Our biggest challenge is the limited school budget. Sometimes we cannot send all teachers to external training because financial resources are insufficient.” (Principal)

The principal admitted that the lack of funds hampered several aspects of teacher training.

“Some practical equipment is still limited, so teachers must adjust learning activities according to available resources.” (Teacher 3)

Teachers pointed out a shortage of learning materials, mainly practical devices for technical and craft subjects, which in turn limited instructional outcomes.

“Some teachers actively participate in training and innovation, while others still require encouragement to improve their teaching methods.” (Vice Principal)

The results show that the organizational hindrances to the effectiveness of school improvement strategies include external factors, such as insufficient financial resources and a lack of infrastructure, as well as internal ones, such as varying levels of teachers' motivation and readiness for improvement. These challenges show that improving teacher performance requires not only strong leadership but also adequate institutional resources, coupled with teachers' continued involvement.

Managerial strategies for enhancing teacher performance

To address these problems, the principal used several managerial strategies. The main strategies were increasing collaborative decision-making, holding academic supervision meetings at regular intervals, encouraging staff to participate in professional development programs, and building relationships with key education stakeholders. One teacher described the principal's leadership as supportive and encouraging.

“The principal always encourages us to participate in workshops and teacher forums. Even when funding is limited, internal sharing sessions are organized so that knowledge can be distributed among teachers.” (Teacher 4)

Similarly, another teacher stressed the role of open communication.

“Whenever problems arise, they are discussed together during meetings. This makes teachers feel appreciated and more responsible for improving school performance.”
 (Teacher 5)

The observation data showed that school meetings contributed to staff collaboration, while document analysis confirmed that professional learning activities and regular supervision programs took place. The results show that, by engaging staff in collaboration and providing professional development and continuous supervision, the principal uses a managerial leadership style that supports the efficient use of resources. The principal does not rely on financial resources alone but makes effective use of organizational strengths by enhancing communication, teamwork, and teacher involvement. These techniques support a positive school culture that makes continuous learning possible, even with limited resources.

Overall, the results indicated that the principal’s managerial ability positively affects teachers’ performance through participatory planning, effective organization, academic supervision, and continuous in-service development. Although financial shortages, poor facilities, and low teacher motivation remain major problems, adaptive managerial methods have helped the school build a culture of collaboration and continue developing teachers’ professional abilities. The study thus supports the assertion that managerial competence is more than administration and can be used as an efficient way to improve instruction and create a more effective school.

Table 1. *Coding, categories, themes, and subthemes*

Initial codes	Categories	Subthemes	Themes
Collaborative annual planning	Participatory management	Teacher involvement in planning	Implementation of managerial competence
Teachers participate in school meetings	Participatory leadership	Shared decision-making	
Annual work plans and school programs	Strategic management	Planning and goal setting	
Delegation according to expertise	Organizational management	Task distribution and coordination	
Regular coordination meetings	Organizational communication	Communication and collaboration	
Classroom observations	Academic supervision	Monitoring instructional practices	
Feedback after supervision	Instructional improvement	Reflective teaching and coaching	
Supervision improves teaching quality	Professional support	Continuous instructional guidance	
Teachers attend workshops	Professional development	Training and seminars	
Participation in MGMP activities	Professional learning community	Collaborative professional learning	
In-house training programs	Capacity building	Continuous professional development	

Limited school budget	Financial constraints	Inadequate funding for programs	Challenges in enhancing teacher performance
Lack of teaching facilities	Infrastructure constraints	Limited learning resources	
Limited vocational equipment	Resource limitations	Practical learning barriers	
Differences in teacher motivation	Human resource challenges	Varying professional commitment	
Resistance to innovation	Teacher readiness	Adaptation to change	
Internal knowledge-sharing sessions	Resource optimization	Peer learning practices	Managerial strategies for enhancing teacher performance
Routine academic supervision	Instructional leadership strategy	Continuous mentoring	
Encouraging participation in training	Professional support strategy	Capacity enhancement	
Open communication with teachers	Collaborative leadership	Building trust and engagement	
Stakeholder collaboration	External support strategy	Resource mobilization	
Problem-solving through meetings	Participatory problem-solving	Collective decision-making	

Thematic findings of principal managerial competence

The analysis of interview, observation, and document data generated three major themes that explain how the principal's managerial competence contributes to teacher performance development at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun. The first theme concerns the implementation of managerial competence through participatory planning, organizational management, academic supervision, and professional development support. The findings indicate that the principal's managerial role extends beyond administrative responsibilities. The principal involves teachers in school planning processes, organizes tasks based on institutional needs, conducts academic supervision to monitor and improve teaching practices, and facilitates professional development activities to strengthen teachers' competencies. These practices demonstrate that managerial competence functions as a mechanism for building a collaborative and supportive school environment.

The second theme highlights the challenges encountered in efforts to improve teacher performance, particularly financial limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and differences in teacher motivation and readiness. Although the principal has implemented various managerial initiatives, the effectiveness of these efforts is influenced by internal and external conditions within the school. Limited resources affect the implementation of professional development programs and the availability of supporting facilities, while variations in teacher motivation and readiness create different levels of engagement in improvement activities.

The third theme focuses on the managerial strategies developed by the principal to overcome challenges and sustain teacher performance improvement. The findings reveal that

collaborative leadership, continuous supervision, professional development support, resource optimization, and stakeholder collaboration are important strategies applied by the principal. Through these approaches, the principal attempts to maximize available resources and encourage collective responsibility among teachers and school stakeholders.

Overall, the thematic analysis shows that the principal's managerial competence involves a combination of planning ability, organizational coordination, instructional supervision, and adaptive leadership strategies. The findings suggest that teacher performance improvement is determined not solely by individual teacher capacity but also by the leadership practices, organizational support, and collaborative culture developed within the school. These themes correspond with the three research questions and provide an analytical pathway linking the empirical data from interviews, observations, and documents to the study findings.

Discussion

This study addressed three research questions: (1) how principals use their managerial skills and competence to help teachers work more effectively and improve their performance; (2) what difficulties arise when managerial competence is put into practice; and (3) what management strategies were used to address those problems and how they were overcome. The results indicate that managerial competence goes beyond carrying out administrative duties. It is a strategic leadership tool that can help teachers become professionals and improve the school overall.

Implementation of the principal's managerial competence, the first research question asked how the principal employed managerial competence to enhance teachers' working capacity. The data analysis showed that the principal mostly displayed managerial competence through participatory planning, organizational management, academic supervision, and professional development. Teachers participated in developing the school's annual work plan, selecting school priorities, and even making school decisions.

In addition, the principal used regular classroom supervision and constructive feedback to help teachers improve their teaching skills and ways of working with students and to reflect on their professional performance. These findings suggest that, in management, leadership can serve as an integrated approach that brings together two aspects of school work: managing the school and, in particular, supporting teaching. The principal not only focused on controlling school work but also created an open and friendly workplace in which collaboration, professional learning, and sharing of duties happened naturally. In this way, teachers became more active school stakeholders, and an innovative school culture gradually emerged.

Many of our findings align with Hallinger (2003), who describes instructional and transformational leadership as complementary approaches through which principals improve teaching and school effectiveness. Leithwood et al. (2020) also highlight that effective principals influence the success of schooling not only directly, in the classrooms where they intervene, but also by improving teachers' capacity for professional development and creating supportive conditions within a school. This study builds on previous research, and its results support the view that collaborative planning and classroom monitoring are effective ways to run a school and develop teachers in the Indonesian vocational school system.

From an instructional leadership perspective, academic supervision in our research resembled professional guidance for teachers rather than the formal inspection typically carried out by school officials. Constructive feedback guided teachers on what to improve and

how to improve their classroom practices after reflecting on their past teaching performance. Our findings are also consistent with Robinson (2011), who argues that leadership strategies that directly involve teaching and learning produce the greatest improvements in a school over time.

Challenges in implementing managerial competence, the second research question examined the problems experienced in implementing managerial competence. Results showed that limited financial resources, a lack of educational facilities, and varying levels of teacher motivation and professional preparedness were major hindrances to improving teacher performance. These limitations have hampered the effective delivery of professional development and restricted access to instructional supplies, particularly at the vocational level, where special equipment is needed, and thereby also limited learning opportunities for students.

The study shows that a principal's leadership ability contributes only modestly to school effectiveness without a strong organizational infrastructure or a favorable school environment. Resource shortages limit teachers' professional development and innovation, while varying teacher motivation directly affects their willingness to participate in professional learning. These factors mean that school development cannot be achieved by improving the principal's administrative skills alone; the institution must also provide sufficient support and educational resources.

Hallinger (2018) supports this perspective, arguing that school leadership cannot be understood apart from the institutional, community, and economic contexts in which it operates. Grissom et al. (2021) also indicate that principals' effectiveness in school development depends partly on managing organizational constraints and maintaining high levels of teacher motivation and professional commitment. The findings therefore point to two complementary priorities: strengthening managerial capacity at the organizational level and developing individual teachers through human resource development.

Managerial strategies for enhancing teacher performance, the third research question focused on the managerial strategies the principal used to address the challenges. The results indicated that the principal relied on collective leadership, ongoing academic guidance, personal growth, transparent dialogue, and partnership with other stakeholders as the main methods for enhancing teacher competence. Although funding was limited, the principal made the most of available resources by holding in-house training, creating and participating in Subject Teacher Forums (MGMP), promoting self-teaching and peer learning, and holding regular mentoring sessions. A collaborative approach gave teachers opportunities to share teaching experience, identify classroom-level issues, and find solutions together. These methods enabled teachers to continually develop their professional capacity and teaching quality, strengthen their loyalty to the institution, and take responsibility for one another.

The study shows that flexible managerial leadership is defined not by the availability of resources but by the mobilization of organizational capacity through leadership. A combination of constant monitoring, joint decision-making, and the formation of professional groups helped maintain teacher performance under resource-limited circumstances. These findings further support Caldwell's (2005) conception of school-based management, which highlights joint ownership of school improvement and shared decision-making. In addition, the results align with Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), who highlight that regular professional learning and a culture of support among colleagues are major factors in achieving high-quality teaching and strong learning outcomes.

This research advances understanding of the leadership–school performance nexus by demonstrating how managerial capability operates on a daily basis in schools, in contrast to earlier studies that primarily focused on correlations between leadership variables and teacher performance. The study finds that leaders’ effectiveness arises from interlinked managerial work processes such as planning, monitoring, communication, coaching, and personal growth. In other words, managerial capability should be seen as evolving through interactions between individuals and their situation, not just as a set of tasks.

In conclusion, the study proposes that the principal’s managerial ability helps enhance teacher quality through a combination of participatory school development, supervision, professional support, and collaboration. Despite limited funding, equipment shortages, and varying teacher motivation, the principal’s managerial approach has enabled the institution to develop staff capacity and teaching quality continuously.

This research adds to the existing literature by providing contextual evidence from a vocational secondary school in Indonesia, where the factors influencing principals’ managerial skills differ from those in other contexts. Finally, this study provides evidence that a principal’s role in improving teacher performance lies mainly in a beneficial combination of managerial and instructional support, professional development, and collaborative work among staff.

Conclusion

This study indicates that the principal’s managerial competence at SMK Negeri 1 Sarolangun is important for improving teacher performance through participatory planning, effective organization, academic supervision, and continuous professional development. The results also show that managerial competence extends beyond administrative duties to include collaborative leadership, reflective teaching, and a supportive organizational climate. While challenges such as limited funding, inadequate facilities, and variations in teacher motivation remain, adaptive, collaborative leadership can support teacher development and maintain instructional quality. These findings also bring instructional leadership and school-based management back into focus, as managerial competence emerges as a dynamic leadership process that combines organizational management with teacher capacity development.

The study raises several points of interest. Theoretically, it strengthens educational leadership theory with qualitative evidence from Indonesian vocational schools, showing that managerial competence is a range of interdependent leadership processes rather than a series of separate administrative duties. Practically, school authorities should promote participatory management, continuous academic supervision, and professional learning communities to support teacher development. Governments and policymakers should ensure that schools are adequately funded, infrastructure is upgraded, and leadership development programs are provided. Future studies might use mixed-methods designs and compare case studies across different vocational schools and regions to improve the generalizability of the findings and further examine the link between managerial competence, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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