

The Role of Principals as a Manager and Supervisor in Improving Academic Quality in Vocational High School

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Abstract

This study examines the role of school principals as managers and supervisors in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings highlight the principal's role in designing academic programs, managing resources, and fostering a conducive learning environment. As a supervisor, the principal provides guidance and evaluation to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence. Effective academic supervision leads to improved teacher performance and student achievement. The success of this process relies on communication and support from all school stakeholders. The study concludes that strengthening the principal's leadership and supervisory skills should be prioritized in educational policies.

Keywords: Principal; Manager; Supervisor; Academic quality

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis peran kepala sekolah sebagai manajer dan pengawas dalam meningkatkan kualitas akademik di SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Kabupaten Rembang. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, serta dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peran kepala sekolah dalam merancang program akademik, mengelola sumber daya, dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang kondusif. Sebagai pengawas, kepala sekolah memberikan bimbingan dan evaluasi untuk meningkatkan kompetensi pedagogik guru. Supervisi akademik yang efektif berkontribusi pada peningkatan kinerja guru dan prestasi siswa. Keberhasilan proses ini bergantung pada komunikasi dan dukungan dari semua pemangku kepentingan di sekolah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan kepemimpinan dan kompetensi supervisi kepala sekolah harus menjadi prioritas dalam kebijakan pendidikan..

Kata Kunci: Kepala Sekolah; Manager; Supervisor; Kualitas akademik.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of science and technology (IPTEK) has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including education. Education plays a crucial role in developing competitive and adaptive human resources

to meet global challenges¹. Globalization and technological advancements demand that the education system continuously innovate to improve academic quality and produce graduates who are highly qualified and ready to compete in the job market².

The principal holds a strategic role in educational management, particularly in enhancing academic quality in schools. As a manager, the principal is responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating all educational activities within the school³. Additionally, the principal acts as a supervisor, guiding and overseeing the teaching and learning process to ensure it adheres to established standards⁴. Therefore, the leadership of the principal significantly influences the effectiveness of educational programs in schools⁵.

Vocational education, particularly in Vocational High Schools (SMK), faces unique challenges in improving academic quality and aligning graduates' competencies with industry demands⁶. One possible approach is to optimize the principal's role in implementing effective managerial policies and conducting continuous supervision of both educators and students. A principal who successfully integrates technology into school management and supports teachers' professional development will contribute to enhancing students' academic achievements⁷.

This study aims to analyze the role of the principal as a manager and supervisor in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. By understanding the principal's leadership strategies in academic management, this research is expected to contribute to the development of educational policies and the improvement of learning quality in vocational school environments.

School principals play a strategic role in managing schools to achieve optimal educational goals. As managers, principals are responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating all academic and administrative activities within the school⁸. The effectiveness of a principal's leadership in managing educational resources directly influences the quality

¹ Santoso, D. 2020. *Dinamika Pendidikan di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Andi.

² Suyatno. 2019. *Transformasi Pendidikan di Era Digital: Tantangan dan Peluang*. Surabaya: Graha Ilmu.

³ Mulyasa, E. 2018. *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

⁴ Sergiovanni, T. J. 2017. *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*. Boston: Pearson Education.

⁵ Hoy, W. K., and Miskel, C. G. 2016. *Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

⁶ Sudrajat, A. 2021. *Strategi Pengembangan Pendidikan Vokasi dalam Menyiapkan Sumber Daya Manusia Unggul*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

⁷ Gunawan, R. 2022. *Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan melalui Digitalisasi Pembelajaran*. Jakarta: Pustaka Edukasi.

⁸ Mulyasa, E. 2018. *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

of learning and students' academic achievements⁹. According to Santoso¹⁰, principals with strong managerial competencies can create a conducive learning environment and enhance the motivation of both teachers and students.

In addition to being managers, principals also serve as supervisors to ensure the effectiveness of the learning process. Academic supervision is carried out through monitoring, evaluation, and guidance for teachers to enhance their pedagogical competencies and professionalism¹¹. According to Suyatno¹², principals who perform supervisory functions effectively can improve the quality of the learning process and identify challenges faced by teachers in curriculum implementation.

Technological advancements have transformed the education sector, including teaching methods and school management. The digitalization of education has become a key strategy in improving academic quality by optimizing technology use in the learning process¹³. Digitalization not only accelerates access to information but also facilitates academic supervision and school administration. This supports principals in performing their roles as managers and supervisors more effectively. Vocational High Schools (SMK) face unique challenges in enhancing academic quality and aligning the curriculum with industry demands. Vocational education should focus on developing students' skills to meet workforce requirements. Principals play a crucial role in establishing partnerships with industries and ensuring that the learning process in vocational schools is competency-based and aligned with labor market needs.

This study references various literature sources to analyze the role of principals as managers and supervisors in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. This research is expected to contribute to the development of school leadership strategies in addressing modern educational challenges.

In line with the rapid advancement of information and communication technology, this study also focuses on the utilization of digital technology in enhancing academic quality at vocational schools, particularly in the managerial and supervisory roles carried out by school principals. The novelty of this research lies in identifying the role of principals not only as managers and supervisors but also as key drivers in implementing technology in educational management. This study explores how principals can leverage technology to improve the teaching and supervision processes in vocational schools, as well as integrate policies that support teachers' professional development and align the curriculum with industry needs. With this more comprehensive approach, it is expected that this research will contribute to the development of educational policies that are relevant to the global challenges

⁹ Hoy, W. K., and Miskel, C. G. 2016. *Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice*

¹⁰ Santoso, D. 2020. *Dinamika Pendidikan di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0*.

¹¹ Hoy, W. K., and Miskel, C. G. 2016. *Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice*.

¹² Suyatno. 2019. *Transformasi Pendidikan di Era Digital: Tantangan dan Peluang*.

¹³ Gunawan, R. 2022. *Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan melalui Digitalisasi Pembelajaran*.

and rapid changes in the education sector.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. The qualitative method was chosen because it is based on post-positivist philosophy and is used to examine natural phenomena without experimental intervention¹⁴. This research focuses on the meanings and subjective interpretations of informants' experiences regarding the role of principals as managers and supervisors in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency.

The phenomenological approach is used to explore individuals' subjective experiences related to the studied phenomenon. According to Moustakas¹⁵, this approach aims to understand individuals' lived experiences and how they interpret those experiences. In this study, phenomenology helps uncover the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school staff regarding school leadership in managing academic quality.

The research subjects consist of the principal, teachers, and school staff at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. The study location was selected purposively due to its relevance to the research objective of exploring managerial and supervisory practices in improving academic quality.

The researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection, consistent with Sugiyono¹⁶, who states that in qualitative research, the researcher acts as a key instrument conducting observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data collection involves three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations are conducted to directly examine the management and supervision processes implemented by the principal to enhance academic quality. In-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and school staff are used to gather information on leadership strategies in managing academic quality. Documentation analysis involves reviewing official school documents such as academic policies, supervision programs, and student evaluation reports¹⁷.

Data analysis follows the interactive model developed by Miles & Huberman, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data into relevant information. Data presentation is carried out through descriptive narratives and thematic tables illustrating the managerial and supervisory patterns of the principal. Conclusion drawing involves interpreting the analysis results and connecting them with theories and previous findings.

¹⁴ Creswell, J. W. 2017. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

¹⁵ Moustakas, C. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

¹⁶ Sugiyono. 2018. *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

¹⁷ Moleong, L. J. 2019. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

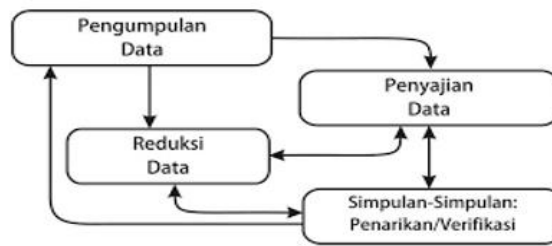


Figure 1. Miles & Huberman Model

To ensure data validity, this study applies source and methodological triangulation, as suggested by Patton¹⁸. Triangulation is conducted by comparing interview results, observations, and written documents to obtain an accurate and objective understanding of the principal's role as a manager and supervisor in enhancing academic quality. Through this research method, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be gained regarding school leadership strategies in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented based on the stages of data analysis that have been conducted, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis aims to understand how the principal plays the role of a manager and supervisor in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. This research process is based on a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, allowing researchers to explore the subjective experiences and practices of school principals in academic management within the school environment.

At this stage, data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation are summarized and selected to remain relevant to the research focus. Data reduction is carried out by filtering key information related to the principal's strategies in academic management and instructional supervision. Irrelevant or general information is excluded from further analysis. In this study, the principal, teachers, and school staff involved in school management provided various insights into the strategies implemented to improve academic quality. In-depth interviews with the principal revealed that several programs had been implemented to ensure that academic management runs effectively and efficiently.

The principal holds a dual role, both as a manager who organizes the academic system and as a supervisor who oversees and guides educators. As a manager, the principal is responsible for planning educational programs, determining academic policies, and allocating educational resources to optimally support teaching and learning activities. Additionally, the principal

¹⁸ Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

supervises various academic aspects to ensure that the educational standards applied at SMK Negeri 1 Sale align with national policies.

Interviews revealed that the principal actively monitors and evaluates the performance of educators and students' academic outcomes. This is done by conducting routine classroom supervision, holding regular evaluation meetings with teachers, and analyzing student exam results to determine necessary improvement steps. Moreover, the principal strives to enhance teacher professionalism by organizing various training programs, workshops, and seminars relevant to modern educational developments.

After the reduction process, data is presented in a descriptive narrative format to provide a clear picture of the principal's role in improving academic quality. The data indicate that the principal of SMK Negeri 1 Sale applies various managerial strategies, such as planning teacher quality improvement programs through training and workshops, as well as continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation. In terms of supervision, the principal actively provides guidance and evaluation for educators to ensure the effectiveness of teaching methods¹⁹. Additionally, the principal serves as a mediator between the local government and the school in implementing established academic policies.

Furthermore, observations revealed that the principal adopts participatory leadership strategies to enhance academic quality. In this model, the principal does not only act as a decision-maker but also as a facilitator who encourages active participation from educators in academic planning and evaluation. The principal promotes collaboration among teachers in designing innovative and competency-based lesson plans and developing more interactive teaching methods to improve students' comprehension of learning materials.

In terms of supervision, the principal implements an academic supervision strategy based on direct observation and reflection. Supervision is carried out systematically to identify challenges teachers face in the teaching process and provide constructive solutions. The supervision process includes several stages: classroom observation, reflective discussions with teachers, and the formulation of recommendations for instructional improvements. Through this approach, the principal assists teachers in developing their pedagogical competencies and enhances the effectiveness of classroom teaching and learning.

Based on data analysis, the study found that the principal plays a crucial role in improving academic quality through systematic managerial approaches and continuous supervision. The principal not only functions as an administrative leader but also as a facilitator in teacher professional development and instructional quality improvement. This conclusion is reinforced by the phenomenological approach used in this study, which emphasizes a deep understanding of individual experiences and perspectives. From interviews and observations, it was found that the principal's role in academic management significantly impacts academic quality improvement,

¹⁹ Sugiyono. 2018. *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*.

both in terms of teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

The principal's strategies for improving academic quality encompass various aspects, including the formulation of academic policies, management of educational resources, and professional development of educators through training and supervision. Additionally, the principal plays a role in fostering a conducive academic culture, where teachers and students are encouraged to continuously learn and develop themselves. Through an inclusive and participatory leadership approach, the principal can create an educational environment that supports better academic achievement.

To ensure the validity of the findings, this study applies the triangulation technique as recommended by Patton (2002). Triangulation is conducted by comparing interview results, observations, and written documents to obtain an objective and accurate picture. The credibility aspect is also reinforced by reconfirming findings with informants. Moreover, this study applies transferability strategies by providing a detailed description of the research context, ensuring that the findings can be applied to similar situations in other schools.

From the validity testing results, it can be concluded that the principal plays a crucial role in improving academic quality through systematic academic management and continuous supervision. With the right strategies in academic management and educator supervision, the quality of education at SMK Negeri 1 Sale can continue to be enhanced to achieve higher educational standards. This discussion provides an in-depth analysis of the principal's role as a manager and supervisor in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency. The research findings are linked to relevant theories and previous studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The findings indicate that the principal plays a managerial role by implementing strategies of planning, organizing, executing, and evaluating academic management. This role aligns with Terry's²⁰ view that management involves the processes of planning and organizing to achieve organizational goals effectively. In the school context, the principal is responsible for formulating the academic vision and mission, developing work programs, and allocating resources optimally to support the learning process.

A study by Kodliyaka²¹ emphasizes that a principal, as a manager, must be able to plan and develop the school organization according to its needs and lead the optimal utilization of resources. Furthermore, Hamidi and Nurmal²² highlight the importance of the principal's role in administrative management and supervision to achieve educational goals.

Moreover, Rochajati et al.²³ reveal that the principal has a strategic role in managing the school, including developing short-term, medium-term, and

²⁰ Terry, G. R. 2011. *Principles of Management*. 8th ed. Richard D. Irwin.

²¹ Kodliyaka, A. 2023. "Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Manajer dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan." *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 11 (2): 78-85.

²² Hamidi, and Nurmal, A. 2019. "Peran Kepala Sekolah dalam Pengelolaan Administrasi dan Supervisi Pendidikan." *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 7 (1): 45-53.

²³ Rochajati, A., Suryadi, B., and Wulandari, D. 2023. "Peran Strategis Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Akademik." *Jurnal Pendidikan Manajemen Sekolah* 9 (2): 88-99.

long-term programs and optimizing educational facilities to support school success and improve academic quality. Oetari et al.²⁴ also emphasize that the principal's managerial role involves planning, organizing, executing, and supervising efforts to enhance teacher competence, which ultimately impacts academic quality improvement.

As a supervisor, the principal is responsible for ensuring that the teaching and learning process runs effectively and efficiently while providing guidance and support to teachers in carrying out their professional duties. Artanti et al.²⁵ state that effective supervision involves classroom observations, providing constructive feedback, training, and continuous professional development. This aligns with the findings of Rahayu et al.²⁶, which highlight that principal supervision significantly influences teachers' skills and performance. Lisna and Munastiwi²⁷ add that principals, as supervisors, need to facilitate teachers with activities that support competency improvement, thus enhancing teacher professionalism along with ongoing supervision. Additionally, research by Zaini²⁸ shows that principals are required to develop their schools, both in terms of human resources and the learning process, through effective supervision.

Emphasizes that principals, as supervisors, are responsible for monitoring teacher performance to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning and providing coaching based on observation results. Furthermore, Wahyudi²⁹ highlights the importance of the principal's role in human resource management, particularly in improving teacher competence through training and workshops.

The combination of good academic management and effective supervision by the principal has a positive impact on academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale. Research by Tuffahati et al.³⁰ indicates that the principal's role as a mentor enhances teachers' professional abilities, ultimately improving the quality of education. Additionally, Fitriani³¹ asserts that principal supervision in fostering teacher professionalism significantly contributes to improving the quality of learning.

²⁴ Oetari, D., Suryadi, B., and Wulandari, D. 2024. "Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Manajer dalam Meningkatkan Kompetensi Guru." *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Sekolah Dasar* 8 (1): 15-25.

²⁵ Artanti, Y., Suryadi, B., and Wulandari, D. 2024. "Implementasi Supervisi Akademik oleh Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru." *Jurnal Optika* 8 (1): 15-25.

²⁶ Rahayu, S., Prasetyo, B., and Lestari, M. 2023. "Pengaruh Supervisi Akademik Kepala Sekolah terhadap Kinerja Guru." *Jurnal Basicedu* 7 (3): 1234-1245.

²⁷ Lisna, and Munastiwi, E. 2020. "Peningkatan Kompetensi Guru melalui Supervisi Akademik oleh Kepala Sekolah." *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5 (1): 33-45.

²⁸ Zaini, M. 2022. "Pengembangan Sekolah melalui Supervisi Akademik oleh Kepala Sekolah." *Jurnal Edukatif* 4 (3): 456-467

²⁹ Wahyudi, A. 2012. "Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia dalam Pendidikan." *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 4 (1): 23-34.

³⁰ Tuffahati, I., et al. 2023. "Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Pembimbing dalam Meningkatkan Profesionalisme Guru." *Jurnal Innovative* 5 (2): 67-78.

³¹ Fitriani, R. 2019. "Pengaruh Supervisi Kepala Sekolah terhadap Profesionalisme Guru." *Jurnal Pendidikan Guru* 4 (2): 112-120.

From the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the principal holds a dual role as a manager and supervisor in improving academic quality. As a manager, the principal is responsible for planning, organizing, and evaluating academic policies. As a supervisor, the principal provides guidance and oversight of the teaching and learning process to ensure the quality of instruction is maintained. Implementing appropriate strategies in both aspects allows the principal to make a significant contribution to academic quality improvement in schools.

This study also reinforces previous findings that emphasize the crucial role of principals in fostering a strong academic culture and enhancing academic standards. As a practical implication, the research findings can serve as a reference for other school principals in implementing more effective management and supervision strategies, as well as for policymakers in formulating education policies aimed at improving academic quality in vocational schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings regarding the role of the principal as a manager and supervisor in improving academic quality at SMK Negeri 1 Sale, Rembang Regency, it can be concluded that the principal holds a highly strategic role in school management. As a manager, the principal is responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and overseeing academic programs, as well as managing the available resources within the school. The principal also serves as a decision-maker in various academic policies aimed at enhancing the quality of learning. Additionally, as a supervisor, the principal conducts academic supervision of teachers, provides guidance, and carries out continuous evaluations to improve teacher professionalism in the learning process. Effective supervision has been proven to enhance teacher performance and positively impact student learning outcomes. The findings also indicate that the effectiveness of the principal's role as a manager and supervisor highly depends on leadership style, communication skills, and support from all school stakeholders. Collaboration between the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, and parents is a key factor in achieving better academic quality. Therefore, the success of a school in improving academic standards does not solely rely on the principal but also on the synergy of all parties involved in the educational ecosystem.

Limitations of this study include the focus on a single vocational high school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other schools with different contexts or challenges. Additionally, the study primarily relied on qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, which might be subject to bias or misinterpretation. The research did not examine the long-term impacts of the principal's leadership on academic outcomes, as it was conducted over a limited period. Furthermore, factors such as government policies and external economic influences were not explored in-depth, although they may also play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of school management.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations can be made. First, principals should enhance their competencies in academic management and supervision through training and continuous professional development. Second, in carrying out the supervisory role, principals should adopt a more participatory approach by involving teachers in academic planning and evaluation. Third, it is essential for schools to strengthen a collaborative work culture that engages all stakeholders in supporting academic quality improvement programs. Fourth, further research is recommended to explore in greater depth the factors that influence the effectiveness of principals in carrying out their roles, particularly in terms of educational policies and implementation challenges in the field. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for developing more effective principal leadership strategies to improve academic quality in vocational schools and other educational institutions.

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