

## Principal Management in Improving the Professional Competence of Vocational School Teachers in Cianjur Regency

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**Abstract.** Improving education quality is a national priority, yet teacher quality in Indonesia still faces significant challenges. This study aims to analyze the managerial role of school principals in enhancing teachers' professional competence. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, the research was conducted at two vocational high schools with different challenges: SMK Negeri 1 Agrabinta and SMK Negeri 1 Leles in Cianjur Regency. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The results show that both school principals successfully and effectively implemented the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) management cycle. Program planning was based on a real analysis of teacher needs, while organizing was done through clear task delegation and internal collaboration. Implementation was carried out through innovative programs such as In-House Training and the adoption of learning models such as PjBL (Project-Based Learning) and Teaching Factory. Evaluation was conducted systematically, using both data-driven comprehensive and direct-feedback formative approaches. Despite facing classic constraints such as limited time, budget, and varied teacher participation, the principals applied adaptive solutions. These solutions included flexible scheduling, utilizing internal resources (teacher mentors, alumni), and strengthening a culture of sharing. These findings affirm that strong, solution-oriented managerial leadership by school principals is the key to overcoming challenges and significantly improving teacher competence, ultimately contributing to the creation of qualified and competitive graduates.

**Keywords:** School Principal Management, Teacher Professional Competence, Educational Management, Vocational Education.

### 1 Introduction

Education is a basic human need that serves as a strategic means of improving the quality of human resources (HR). The main objective of education is to create a better life through the optimal development of individual potential. This is in line with the definition of education in Article 2 of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that education is a planned effort to develop the potential of students so that they have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality,

intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, the community, the nation, and the state.

In the education system, teachers play a central role as the main actors who determine the quality of the learning process and outcomes. The quality of teachers directly affects the achievement of educational goals. However, various studies show that the quality of teachers in Indonesia still faces serious challenges. A World Bank report (2020) indicates that the pedagogical and professional competencies of teachers have not yet reached the expected standards. Similar findings were also reported by Kurniawati who highlighted teachers' weak ability to apply competency-based learning approaches. This condition contributed to the decline in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores in 2022, which reflected the low literacy, numeracy, and science skills of Indonesian students at the global level [1], [2].

To build quality education, the main focus should not only be on the physical development of schools, but also on improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. Improving the quality of teachers must be done continuously, covering social, cultural, economic, and most importantly, professional aspects through integrated, holistic programs that are relevant to technological developments. This is where the role of the principal becomes crucial [3].

Leadership and instructional management are important characteristics of effective schools. According to Kruger et al. and Buckridge & Guest effective principals are characterized by leadership actions that directly improve student achievement. This includes focusing on fundamental subjects, creating an orderly and conducive learning environment, establishing clear teaching strategies, coordinating academic programs, and actively supervising and supporting teachers. They are also development-oriented, innovative, and have a strong vision, ensuring that educational goals are achieved through careful assessment and academic reporting [4], [5].

Although Kruger et al. (2007) view principals as the center of managerial expertise and the sole individuals responsible, Bell (2002) offers a different perspective. Bell believes that principals cannot manage schools alone. They cannot bear the burden of motivating everyone or completing school tasks without substantial support from their colleagues. Thus, school success is the result of collective effort and collaboration, not just the heroism of one leader [6].

Previous research from Nigeria and Indonesia shows that the managerial leadership of principals is a key factor in improving school effectiveness and teacher professionalism. A study conducted by Ololade Kazeem Shonubi in two secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria, which had similar socioeconomic conditions and government policies, found significant differences. School A, with its exceptional leadership and management practices from its team and teachers, demonstrated higher school effectiveness than School B. These findings confirm that superior leadership practices and a strong school culture (built and maintained over time) directly influence the school climate and, ultimately, its effectiveness [7]–[9].

In line with these findings, Devy Shafiera's research at SMK Sunan Kalijaga Mangunan Sampung, Ponorogo, Indonesia, highlights the importance of synergy and collaboration. This study concludes that principal management is effective when the principal is assisted in collaboratively developing strategic plans with teachers, administrative staff, school committees, and parent representatives. This shows that

successful management does not only depend on the principal as an individual, but also on their ability to involve and synergize all stakeholders [10], [11].

Principals have a fundamental managerial and leadership role in improving teachers' professional competence. However, there is often a gap between ideal theory and reality in the field. Common problems include: Inaccurate planning: Teacher professional development programs are often not based on specific needs analysis, but merely follow general policies. Limited resources: Budget constraints and speaker qualifications are classic obstacles, especially in schools in remote areas. Conventional implementation methods: Training often takes the form of one-way lectures, which are ineffective. Weak evaluation: The absence of clear evaluation and follow-up mechanisms makes the effectiveness of the program impossible to measure.

Ideally, school principals' management of teacher competency improvement should follow a systematic and planned process, starting with planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. However, in practice, there are significant gaps that hinder effective implementation. However, there are several problems that occur in the field, such as: Inaccurate planning: Teacher professionalism improvement programs are often not based on specific needs analysis. Planning tends to be *top-down* and only follows general policies without considering the real challenges faced by teachers in the classroom, such as mastery of vocational learning methodologies or the adoption of new technologies [12].

Resource Constraints: Classic constraints such as budget limitations and a lack of qualified resource persons are serious obstacles. Especially in schools in rural areas with small numbers of students, it is difficult to bring in qualified resource persons who can provide practical and applicable training. Conventional Implementation Methods: Program implementation is often limited to formalities with one-way lectures that lack interactivity [13]. This fails to facilitate practical competency improvement, resulting in teachers' competencies being unmeasurable and not optimally implemented in the classroom. Weak Evaluation and Follow-up: The absence of a clear evaluation mechanism and post-training assistance makes the program's effectiveness unmeasurable and unintegrated with teacher performance. As a result, the efforts made do not have a significant impact on improving teaching quality. In short, the gap between ideal theory and reality in the field shows that a more strategic and adaptive approach is needed in principal management to ensure that teacher development programs are truly effective and sustainable [14], [15].

To address this gap, a case study was conducted in two vocational high schools, namely SMK Negeri 1 Agrabinta and SMK Negeri 1 Leles, Cianjur Regency. These two schools were chosen because they have relevant and contrasting characteristics. SMK Negeri 1 Agrabinta is located in a coastal area, while SMK Negeri 1 Leles has better accessibility. Despite having different geographical and socio-economic challenges, the results of the observation showed that both principals had implemented effective management. They applied the POAC (*Planning-Organizing-Actuating-Controlling*) management cycle to improve teacher professionalism. Some of the strategies implemented included.

Participatory planning: Involving teachers, school committees, and related parties in the preparation of strategic plans. Structured development programs: Requiring teachers to prepare learning tools and conduct periodic evaluations. Teacher empowerment: Organizing regular programs such as *in-house training*, internships in industry,

and encouraging active participation in subject teacher working groups (MGMP), school learning communities, and opportunities for continuing education. Monitoring and coaching: Providing ongoing motivation and guidance to improve teachers' knowledge and skills. As a result, around 80% of teachers in both schools have passed the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program, and vocational teachers actively participate in *upskilling* and *reskilling* programs. This positive development shows that with strong leadership and management, principals can overcome various obstacles and significantly improve teacher quality, which ultimately has an impact on improving the overall quality of education [13].

This study shows that the managerial role of the principal, supported by the collaboration of all elements of the school, is key to improving teacher competence. With the right strategy, challenges in the field, including geographical and resource constraints, can be overcome in order to achieve quality and competitive educational goals. Research examining this issue has significant novelty value. This research does not merely repeat existing findings, but focuses on an in-depth case study of two agriculture-based vocational schools in Cianjur Regency.

The purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the principal's management in improving the professional competence of teachers at SMK N 1 Agrabinta and SMK N 1 Leles, Cianjur Regency. This study attempts to answer several key questions, including how principals plan, organize, implement, and evaluate competency improvement programs, as well as what obstacles are encountered and what solutions are applied.

## 2 Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring in depth the experiences, practices, and meanings that arise in principal management. Case studies allow researchers to examine phenomena intensively in a real context, particularly at SMK N 1 Agrabinta and SMK N 1 Leles, which have different characteristics but are in the same social and administrative environment. According to Robert K. Yin, this is an ideal strategy for answering the questions "how" and "why" a phenomenon occurs in a real-life context. The targets of the study were school principals and teachers as the main actors in the academic supervision process. School principals were the main informants because they played a central role as supervisors, while teachers were positioned as subjects who felt the direct impact of supervision on their professional competence. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account their direct involvement in the academic supervision process, so that the data obtained was truly relevant and rich in context.

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observation was used to directly observe the principal's management practices, both in the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating stages. In-depth interviews were used to explore the experiences, perceptions, and responses of principals and teachers to the principal's management practices in improving teachers' professional competence. Documentation studies included analysis of documents such as the Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP), the Deputy Head of Curriculum's work program, and learning documents. The combination

of these three techniques enabled data triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings (interactive model from Miles, Huberman).

The research procedure was carried out in several stages. First, preliminary research to establish initial communication with the school and conduct a field survey. Second, data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation using the guidelines that had been prepared. Third, data reduction, which involved sorting and filtering data according to the research focus. Fourth, data presentation in the form of narratives, tables, and thematic matrices. Fifth, drawing conclusions by comparing field data with Terry's POAC management theory and regulations on teacher professionalism [16].

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles & Huberman [17] model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data obtained was continuously reviewed, linked, and verified with previous findings to form a comprehensive understanding of principal management practices. The POAC (planning, organizing, actuating, controlling) theoretical framework was used as an analytical tool to map how principals carried out management functions to improve teachers' professional competence.

With this design, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how principal management can play a role in improving the professional competence of vocational school teachers, as well as identify obstacles and solutions that arise in the field.

### **3 Results**

#### **3.1 Strategic Planning and Structural Organization in Teacher Development**

The foundational phases of the POAC framework—planning and organizing—serve as the critical bedrock for any successful educational intervention. At both SMK N 1 Agrabinta and SMK N 1 Leles, the principals demonstrated highly structured, deliberate, and data-driven planning practices that transcend mere administrative routine. Rather than relying on generic, top-down professional development templates, both principals actively engaged in real-time, granular analysis of actual teacher needs. This needs-assessment was systematically derived from comprehensive performance evaluations, classroom observation feedback, and structured input from the broader school management team. The empirical results of this diagnostic analysis were then meticulously integrated into the school's annual work program (Program Kerja Tahunan). This proactive practice is perfectly in line with Terry's theoretical postulations, which emphasize that effective planning must serve as a focused, highly measurable, and sustainable foundation for all subsequent organizational actions [18]. From a legal and regulatory standpoint, this robust planning methodology directly fulfills the stringent mandates outlined in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System [19], as well as the specific directives within Permendikbudristek Number 40 of 2021[20], both of which legally obligate school principals to actively facilitate and resource continuous teacher competency development.

In terms of organizational architecture, both vocational schools exhibit exceptionally clear, functional, and highly responsive structures. Recognizing that the burden of institutional improvement cannot rest on a single individual, the principals

actively and strategically delegate authority. They empower vice principals, curriculum heads, and specific department coordinators to manage and oversee targeted strategic programs. Furthermore, dynamic special task forces and ad-hoc teams are frequently formed to handle specific, time-bound developmental projects, such as preparing for national accreditation or integrating new digital learning platforms. This structural fluidity demonstrates that the organization within these schools is not merely oriented towards maintaining a rigid, static hierarchy; rather, it is dynamically engineered to create and sustain professional synergy among individuals. This practice is entirely consistent with Terry's core principle of promoting operational efficiency through deliberately planned structures and optimized working relationships [16], [21]. Moreover, this distributed leadership model perfectly complies with the regulatory spirit of Government Regulation No. 19 of 2017 concerning Continuing Professional Development (Pengembangan Keprofesian Berkelanjutan or PKB), which heavily emphasizes collaborative, team-based approaches to elevating pedagogical standards.

### **3.2 Actuating Innovations and Evaluating Pedagogical Impact**

The transition from strategic blueprints to observable classroom realities occurs during the implementation (actuating) and evaluation (controlling) phases. The actuating stage in both observed schools demonstrated remarkable success in motivating teachers to move beyond theoretical knowledge and take concrete, transformative pedagogical action. This success is most visibly evidenced by the widespread, successful application of highly innovative, student-centered learning models, specifically Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and the Teaching Factory (TEFA) paradigm. By immersing students in real-world, industry-standard production environments, teachers are forced to elevate their instructional delivery. This dynamic shift is deeply aligned with Terry's (2006) theoretical assertions regarding the critical importance of effective mobilization and intrinsic motivation within the actuating phase [16]. By creating an environment where innovative teaching is both expected and supported, the principals successfully operationalize their strategic plans. Furthermore, the integration of these advanced vocational programs not only meets the rigorous teacher competency standards mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 [19], but it also strategically assists teachers in fulfilling their required instructional workloads in strict accordance with the newly updated Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 11 of 2025.

Equally critical to the sustainability of these innovations is the evaluation function, which, interestingly, is implemented quite differently across the two schools, yet yields equally effective developmental outcomes. SMK N 1 Leles utilizes a highly comprehensive, quantitatively driven data-based approach. The principal employs clear, standardized evaluation instruments, rigorous scoring rubrics, and detailed performance metrics to assess teacher competency improvements. Conversely, SMK N 1 Agrabinta emphasizes a more qualitative, formative approach. Here, the evaluation process is heavily anchored in frequent, low-stakes classroom observations followed immediately by highly personalized, real-time reflective feedback sessions between the principal and the teacher. Despite their methodological differences, both institutional approaches are fundamentally aligned with Terry's (2006) managerial theory which explicitly views evaluation not merely as a terminal assessment or a punitive

administrative hurdle, but as a vital, continuous diagnostic tool designed to drive ongoing professional improvement. This clear commitment to continuous quality assurance proves that the principals have professionally and ethically exercised their managerial authority to evaluate, monitor, and follow up on teacher development programs, exactly as stipulated in the regulatory framework of Permendikbudristek Number 40 of 2021 [20].

### **3.3 Navigating Managerial Constraints through Adaptive Solutions**

Despite the fact that the overarching management architecture at both schools has been functioning commendably, the research identified a number of major, systemic obstacles that persistently threaten to hinder the ultimate effectiveness of these professional training programs. One of the most prominent and ubiquitous challenges faced by both institutions is the severe limitation of operational time and financial budgets. Highly structured training schedules frequently conflict with the teachers' primary, unyielding teaching hours, creating logistical bottlenecks. Simultaneously, the available institutional funds are chronically insufficient to regularly bring in highly competent, external resource persons or industry experts. In addition to these logistical and financial hurdles, the baseline level of teacher participation in voluntary training activities varies significantly. While some educators are highly proactive, others tend to exhibit passivity, demonstrating a marked reluctance to actively engage in professional development outside of mandatory hours. Compounding this issue of engagement is the fact that centrally provided training materials are often excessively general in nature, failing to address the highly specific, technical needs of individual vocational departments.

These challenging conditions clearly indicate that the actuating stage within the managerial process represents the most formidable hurdle that school leadership must overcome [22]. However, rather than succumbing to these systemic constraints, the solutions implemented by the principals at both schools demonstrate highly innovative and deeply contextual forms of managerial adaptation. To resolve the temporal conflicts, both principals collaboratively designed far more flexible, modular training schedules—utilizing block scheduling, after-hours micro-sessions, or integrating training directly into existing Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP) hours—ensuring that professional development does not interfere with core student learning activities.

To creatively overcome severe budget constraints, the school leadership strategically pivoted towards optimizing internal intellectual assets. They actively utilize highly motivated senior teachers as internal coaches, invite successful alumni, and leverage local practitioners from the surrounding industry as highly effective, low-cost alternative resource persons. This not only saves funds but also ensures the training is deeply grounded in local industry realities. Furthermore, the training materials are now meticulously compiled and customized specifically according to the unique pedagogical characteristics and technical needs of each vocational department, thereby drastically increasing their relevance and immediate applicability. Finally, robust efforts to increase overall teacher participation are systematically carried out through a highly personal, empathetic coaching approach that directly addresses individual teacher anxieties and encourages active involvement. This is further reinforced by

deliberately strengthening a school-wide culture of knowledge sharing among peers (peer learning) and establishing Communities of Practice (CoP) as a sustainable, collaborative learning strategy, ensuring that professional growth becomes a collective institutional habit rather than an isolated individual pursuit [23].

## 4 Discussion

The results of research conducted at SMK N 1 Agrabinta and SMK N 1 Leles show that principal management in improving teacher professional competence has been implemented systematically. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation studies, the planning and organization carried out by the principals at these two schools show the integration of theory and practice in improving teaching quality. Through data-based planning, principals can develop programs that meet the real needs of teachers, which is in line with G.R. Terry's [16] management theory that emphasizes the importance of targeted and measurable planning as the foundation for educational development. This is also in line with the provisions of Law Number 20 of 2003 and Permendikbudristek Number 40 of 2021, which require principals to facilitate the development of teacher competencies through good planning [20].

The organization in both schools also demonstrates success in creating a clear and functional structure. The organizational practices implemented not only create a static hierarchy but also build synergy between individuals within it. The principals of both schools delegate authority to the vice principals and department coordinators, enabling more efficient and team-based program management. This approach is in line with Terry's principle of prioritizing efficiency in structure and working relationships. It also refers to Government Regulation No. 19 of 2017 concerning Continuing Professional Development (PKB), which regulates the importance of cooperation among team members in developing teacher competencies.

During the implementation phase, the principals of both schools successfully motivated teachers to apply innovative learning approaches, such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Teaching Factory, which are in line with educational needs and objectives. These two methods not only support the fulfillment of teacher competency standards set out in Law Number 20 of 2003, but also meet the workload stipulated in the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation Number 11 of 2025. The application of these models has proven effective in improving teachers' practical skills, giving them the opportunity to adapt to the demands of the ever-changing world of education.

Evaluation is an important function in principal management. SMK N 1 Leles uses a more comprehensive data-based approach, while SMK N 1 Agrabinta implements a more flexible formative approach with a focus on classroom observation and direct feedback. Both approaches have proven successful in ensuring that evaluation is not only a tool for assessment but also for continuous improvement. This shows that the principals have carried out the evaluation function professionally, in accordance with Permendikbudristek Number 40 of 2021, which regulates evaluation and follow-up in teacher competency development [24]–[26].

However, even though the principal's management in both schools is running well, there are a number of obstacles faced, such as limited time and budget for training and

variations in teacher participation in these activities. The proposed solutions, such as more flexible training schedules and the utilization of internal resources, show that both schools are able to adapt to existing challenges. They designed training that was more relevant to the needs of each department and encouraged active teacher participation through a personal approach and a culture of peer learning. These adaptive measures show that the principals have good managerial skills in overcoming existing obstacles and strive to ensure that the training provided has a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching [13], [27].

## 5 Conclusion

Based on comprehensive research at SMK N 1 Agrabinta and SMK N 1 Leles, it can be concluded that principal management plays a key role in improving teachers' professional competence. In general, both schools have successfully implemented the four main management functions: planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating effectively, which ultimately has a positive impact on teaching quality and graduate relevance.

Overall, this study confirms that the success of improving teacher competence is highly dependent on systematic, adaptive, and solution-oriented principal management. With careful planning, effective organization, innovative implementation, and continuous evaluation, principals are able to turn challenges into opportunities to create a quality learning environment.

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