

The Popular Supervisor Paradox: Reconstructing Supervisor Competency in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

Educational supervision is a decisive instrument for translating national standards into classroom practice, yet its effectiveness depends on supervisory competence that is distributed unevenly across Indonesia, most acutely in the eastern region where geographical isolation and infrastructural inequality constrain developmental practice. Existing scholarship, concentrated in better-resourced western contexts and oriented toward normative competency standards, has described the eastern competency gap in fragments without reconstructing it into a coherent account that connects pattern, condition, and concept. This study aims to reconstruct the recurring pattern of supervisory competence in Eastern Indonesia, to trace the structural and ecological conditions that produce it, and to advance a conceptual interpretation of that pattern. Employing library research within a qualitative-interpretive paradigm, the study identified sources through Scopus using a PRISMA-guided selection and analyzed the corpus through thematic analysis. The synthesis reveals that supervisory competence in the region is not uniformly low but unevenly developed, with relational and social capacities relatively intact while evaluative and research capacities remain underdeveloped, a configuration named the *popular supervisor paradox* in which high social legitimacy coexists with low technical capacity. Read ecologically, this deficit is structurally produced rather than individually owned. The study implies that transformative education and learning in disadvantaged regions depend less on monitoring supervisors than on converting their trusted social capital into analytic capability through adaptive, context-sensitive strengthening, thereby relocating the lever of educational transformation from inspection toward developmental, evidence-based supervisory practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational supervision occupies a strategically decisive position in any system that aspires to improve the quality of teaching, because it is through supervision that national standards, curricular reforms, and professional expectations are translated into the concrete practice of classrooms; yet that translation is only as strong as the capacity of the supervisors who perform it, and where that capacity falters the entire chain from policy to pedagogy weakens with it. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) insist that supervision properly understood is not administrative monitoring but a developmental intervention aimed at building instructional capacity over time, a conception that raises the stakes of supervisory competence considerably, since on this account a supervisor who cannot diagnose, evaluate, and guide cannot fulfill the role at all. This concern is sharpened in decentralized systems, where authority over educational quality is devolved to local governments whose capacities and priorities differ widely. In the Indonesian case, decentralization has reshaped how curricular reform reaches schools and how educational quality is governed at the regional level (Dewi, 2021; Zamjani, 2022), and scholars have questioned whether the devolution of authority reliably promotes learning or merely redistributes it according to local political settlements (Arif, 2025; Sumintono, 2023). Within such a system, the competence of

supervisors becomes not merely a professional concern but a determinant of whether educational reform reaches the schools that most need it, which is precisely why the uneven distribution of that competence across the archipelago demands close examination.

That unevenness is nowhere more consequential than in the disparity between western and eastern Indonesia, a disparity that is structural before it is individual. Eastern Indonesia, encompassing provinces such as East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, and West Papua, contends with geographical isolation, fragmented infrastructure, constrained mobility across dispersed islands, and an uneven distribution of qualified educational personnel, all of which bear directly on whether supervision can be conducted at the intensity that developmental practice requires. Such disparities are not incidental but persistent features of the system: educational inequality in Indonesia has proven resistant even to intergovernmental fiscal transfers designed to reduce it (Wirandana, 2024), and decentralization itself has been shown to mediate rather than dissolve the relationship between education and regional inequality (Siburian, 2024). In the eastern provinces these patterns acquire a concrete texture, where the availability of school facilities and socioeconomic conditions shape student outcomes (Werang, 2024) and where teachers and students in coastal Papua report contending with educational challenges that better-resourced regions never confront (Butarbutar, 2025). Tilaar (2019) argues that education policy in the region has too often been designed without regard to its distinct geographical and cultural realities, with the result that uniform national frameworks tend to reproduce rather than reduce inequality. The conditions under which a supervisor in a remote Papuan regency works, where reaching a single school may demand days of travel, differ so profoundly from those in a well-connected provincial capital that holding both to an identical standard measures capacity in one case and the absence of enabling conditions in the other, a distinction that the prevailing literature has been slow to register.

Scholarship on supervisory competence in Indonesia has accumulated steadily, yet it has tended to develop along parallel lanes that never quite converge into a coherent account of the eastern context. Muslimin (2020), in a literature review of supervisory competence, establishes that systematic and collaborative supervision strengthens teacher professionalism and institutional effectiveness, while Suharsaputra (2018) shows that supervisory competence shapes the quality of supervision specifically in underdeveloped areas. Alongside these, a substantial body of work has examined instructional leadership, managerial supervision, and evaluation competence as drivers of school performance. The difficulty is that the majority of this scholarship is concentrated in Java and Sumatra, where infrastructure, mobility, and access to professional development are comparatively favorable, so that its findings, however robust, describe contexts whose enabling conditions Eastern Indonesia does not share, and the resulting picture of supervision is one assembled from settings that differ in precisely the variables that matter most for the region in question.

This concentration has generated a genuine scholarly tension that deserves to be stated rather than smoothed over. One line of argument, oriented toward normative competency standards, treats supervisory competence as a relatively portable construct, measurable against the dimensions mandated by national regulation and improvable through training, an approach that promises comparability and policy traction across regions; from this vantage, competence functions as an institutionalized discourse that circulates globally and is held to apply uniformly across contexts (Chiang, 2021). A contrasting line, attentive to context, holds that competence cannot be abstracted from the geographical, infrastructural, and cultural conditions in which it is exercised, and that professional development is most effective when it is context-specific, collaborative, and driven by practitioners rather than imposed from above (Bergmark, 2023; Tang, 2021). The first view offers the appeal of uniform accountability; the second warns that uniformity, applied across radically unequal terrain, becomes a source of inequity in its own right. This study takes the tension seriously and argues that it cannot be resolved by choosing competence over context or context over competence, but only by analyzing how the two interact to produce the particular supervisory reality that the eastern region exhibits.

What remains underdeveloped, then, is not evidence that a competency gap exists but a

framework that explains its specific shape, accounts for the conditions that produce it, and recognizes a feature of eastern supervision that the normative literature systematically overlooks: that supervisors in the region are frequently accepted, trusted, and socially well integrated while remaining limited in the technical capacities that developmental supervision demands. The existing scholarship, by concentrating on normative standards and on better-resourced contexts, has had little occasion to name this configuration or to draw out its implications, with the consequence that recommendations for strengthening supervisory capacity have tended toward the generic and the centralized. Such recommendations prove difficult to enact in remote and archipelagic settings precisely because they presuppose the conditions those settings lack, a problem evident in studies of how instructional support must be radically reconceived for teachers in regions without reliable access to computers or the internet (Ofosu-Asare, 2024). The gap this study addresses is therefore conceptual as much as contextual: the eastern reality has been described in fragments but not reconstructed into an account that connects competency pattern, structural determinant, and conceptual interpretation.

Against this background, the present study pursues three aims that together constitute its contribution. It reconstructs, through a systematic library review and thematic synthesis, the recurring pattern of supervisory competence reported across the relevant scholarship; it traces the structural and ecological conditions that produce that pattern rather than attributing it to individual capability alone; and it advances a conceptual interpretation, the *popular supervisor paradox*, which names the coexistence of high relational legitimacy with low technical capacity and reframes capacity building as the conversion of existing social capital into analytic capability. The significance of this undertaking is twofold. Theoretically, it expands the discourse on educational supervision by positioning competence within the socio-geographical realities of a disadvantaged region rather than treating it as a uniform construct, thereby connecting supervisory practice to the broader project of transforming education and learning where transformation is most needed. Practically, it offers policymakers and regional authorities an evidence-informed and context-sensitive direction for strengthening supervision, one that respects the constraints of geography and infrastructure rather than legislating against them, so that the supervisor's trusted presence in the school might become, at last, a genuinely developmental force.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs library research conducted within a qualitative-interpretive paradigm. The design is appropriate because the object of inquiry is a body of ideas, evidence, and concepts concerning supervisory competence in Eastern Indonesia rather than a set of behaviors to be measured in the field. Library research permits the systematic gathering, examination, and synthesis of scholarship in order to reconstruct patterns and build a conceptual reading, which is the analytical task this article sets for itself (Snyder, 2019). Because the study does not collect primary field data, no scores, instruments, or respondents are involved; the findings are abstracted from published works and are presented as syntheses of what the literature reports. The choice of a conceptual library design also responds directly to a gap in the existing scholarship, in which supervisory competence in the eastern region has more often been asserted than systematically synthesized across a traceable corpus.

The search strategy followed an adapted PRISMA logic to make source selection systematic and reproducible. Records were identified through Scopus, accessed via the Publish or Perish application, which was selected because it provides structured bibliographic metadata, citation indicators, and exportable results suitable for transparent screening. Eight thematic keyword sets guided the search, organized around the study's three analytical strands: supervisory competence and quality (for example, *school supervisor competence*, *educational supervision*, *instructional supervision*); structural and geographical conditions (for example, *education disparity in remote regions*, *teacher professional development in rural isolation*, *geographical barriers to education*); and conceptual and developmental frameworks (for example, *instructional leadership model*, *adaptive technology professional*

development). The inclusion window was set to 2016–2026 to capture the most current decade of scholarship. A small number of seminal theoretical works published before this window were retained separately as conceptual anchors rather than as part of the screened corpus, a distinction made explicit so that the systematic count and the conceptual foundation are not conflated.

Records moved through four PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as depicted in **Figure 1**. During identification, the eight searches yielded a large pool of records, from which duplicate and repeated entries were removed. During screening, titles and abstracts were assessed, and the large majority of records were excluded because they belonged to unrelated fields that share the search vocabulary, principally clinical and nursing supervision, medical education, physical education, and child psychology. During eligibility, the remaining records were examined against substantive criteria: relevance to school-supervisor competence, contextual alignment with Eastern Indonesia or comparably remote and archipelagic settings, publication within the 2016–2026 window, and availability of sufficient bibliographic detail. Studies that addressed supervision only in non-educational or purely clinical contexts were excluded at this stage. The records satisfying all criteria formed the included corpus that underpins the synthesis, complemented by the separately retained conceptual anchors. **Table 2** details these criteria alongside the procedures used to safeguard trustworthiness.

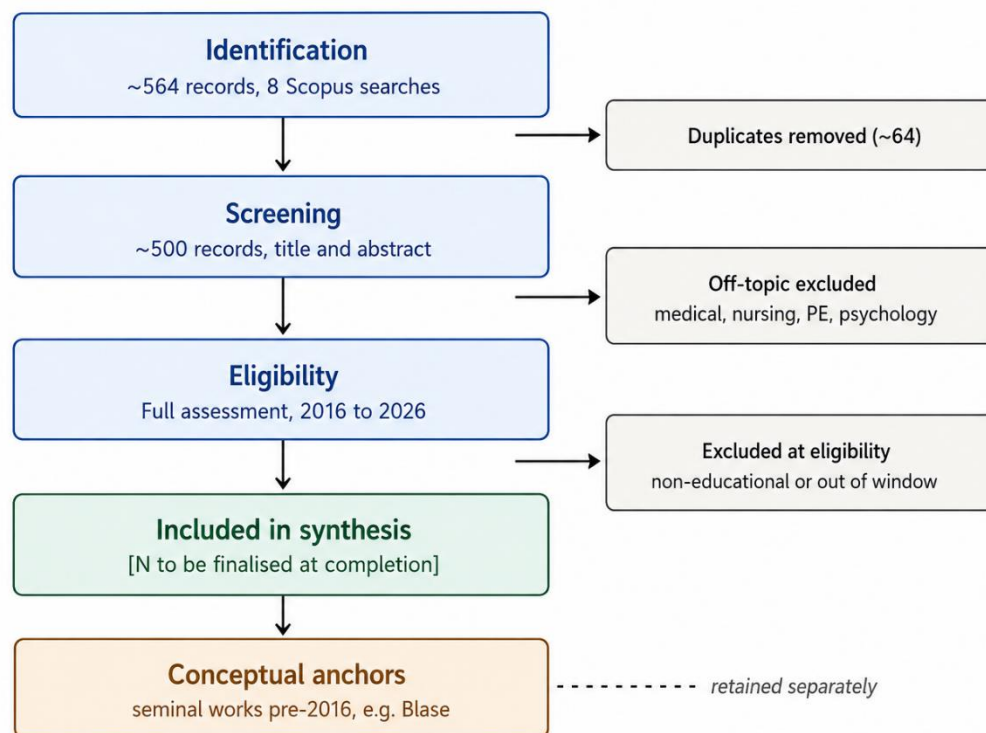


Figure 1. PRISMA flow of source selection

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The included corpus was analyzed through thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), supported by descriptive-analytical interpretation. This framework was chosen because the analytical task is to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across a body of scholarship rather than to quantify coding units, which aligns with the conceptual purpose of the study. The analysis proceeded through the framework's established phases, condensed here into four working stages. In familiarization, each source was read closely and repeatedly to grasp its claims, context, and evidentiary basis. In coding, recurring statements about supervisory competence and its conditions were labeled systematically. In theme

development and review, these codes were grouped, examined, and refined into the categories that structure the findings, namely the competency pattern, its structural determinants, and the conceptual reading. In defining and synthesizing, the themes were named and integrated into an interpretive account that both reconstructs what the literature reports and advances the conceptual contribution of the study. **Table 1** summarizes these phases.

Table 1. Analytical Phases of the Thematic Analysis

Phase	Stage	Procedure	Output
1	Familiarisation	Close, repeated reading of each included source to establish claims and context	Annotated understanding of the corpus
2	Coding	Systematic labeling of recurring statements on competence and its conditions	Initial code set
3	Theme development and review	Grouping and refinement of codes into candidate themes	Three analytical themes
4	Defining and synthesising	Naming of themes and integration into an interpretive account	Synthesised findings and conceptual contribution

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Several measures secured the credibility of the analysis. Source triangulation was achieved by reading findings across a deliberately diverse corpus, spanning Indonesian studies, comparable archipelagic and rural settings, and cross-national accounts of supervision and instructional leadership, so that no single study determined a theme on its own. An audit trail was maintained through the documented search vocabulary and the PRISMA flow recorded in Figure 1, allowing the path from identification to inclusion to be retraced. Interpretive consistency was preserved by returning repeatedly to the underlying sources when defining and naming themes, ensuring that the conceptual reading, including the "*popular supervisor paradox*", remained grounded in what the corpus actually reports rather than in prior assumption. **Table 2** consolidates the selection criteria and these trustworthiness procedures.

Table 2. Selection Criteria and Trustworthiness Procedures

Inclusion	Exclusion	Triangulation	Audit Trail
School-supervisor competence in educational settings	Clinical, nursing, or medical supervision	Indonesian studies read against comparable rural and archipelagic settings	Documented eight-set search vocabulary
Eastern Indonesia or comparable remote and archipelagic contexts	Unrelated fields sharing search vocabulary (physical education, child psychology)	Domestic findings cross-checked against cross-national accounts	PRISMA flow from identification to inclusion (Figure 1)
Published 2016–2026 (seminal anchors handled separately)	Outside window and not a conceptual anchor	Structural claims corroborated across multiple independent sources	Return to sources when defining themes
Sufficient bibliographic detail and retrievable record	Insufficient detail or non-retrievable		Consistent interpretive protocol across phases

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Three limitations follow from these choices and are stated openly. First, the study is conceptual rather than empirical; it synthesizes published scholarship and therefore cannot measure the effect of supervisory competence on teacher performance or learning outcomes, which only field research could establish. Second, the systematic corpus was drawn from a single database, Scopus, accessed through Publish or Perish; while this ensures indexed and traceable records, it may underrepresent regionally indexed Indonesian scholarship held in databases such as Garuda or SINTA, and future work could widen the source base accordingly. Third, because

part of the contribution is a newly named concept, some of the conceptual scaffolding rests on seminal works retained outside the systematic window, which strengthens theoretical grounding but should be acknowledged as a deliberate departure from a strictly date-bounded corpus.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Supervisor Competency in Eastern Indonesia: A Thematic Synthesis

This section organizes the synthesis in three movements that build upon one another. It begins by reconstructing the recurring pattern of competency strength and weakness reported across the corpus, then traces the structural and geographical conditions that produce that pattern, and finally consolidates the analysis into a conceptual reading of supervisory practice in the region. Because the study is a library review rather than a field measurement, the findings are presented as patterns abstracted from published scholarship rather than as scores obtained from respondents, and the discussion that follows in the next section interprets and positions these patterns against the wider literature.

The Recurring Pattern: Strong Relational Capacity, Weak Technical Function

A consistent theme across studies conducted in Indonesia and comparable settings is that supervisors are frequently accepted and trusted within their school communities yet remain limited in the technical dimensions of their role. Arman (2016) reports that the competence of school supervisors exerts a measurable influence on teacher work motivation and performance in Indonesian junior high schools, which establishes that supervisory capacity is consequential rather than ceremonial. Yet the same literature repeatedly locates the weakness of that capacity in the instructional and evaluative domains rather than in the personal or social ones. Arifin (2023), examining clinical supervision grounded in multicultural values within *pesantren*, shows that supervisors embedded in their communities possess considerable relational and cultural capital, which allows them to enter classrooms and engage teachers with legitimacy that an external inspector would lack. This relational strength, however, does not automatically translate into the analytic guidance that improves instruction, a distinction that becomes the conceptual hinge of the present study.

Table 3. Synthesis of the Competency Pattern Reported Across the Corpus

Competency Domain	Pattern Reported in the Literature	Representative Sources
Personal and social	Generally adequate; supervisors hold relational and cultural capital that grants legitimacy and access	Arman (2016); Arifin (2023)
Managerial and academic	Frequently constrained; guidance tends toward administrative compliance rather than instructional development.	Rahabav (2016); Marey (2020)
Educational evaluation	Weak; supervisors rarely move from observation to diagnostic, evidence-based assessment.	Rahabav (2016); Zulkardi and Zuhdi (2023)
Research and development	Most consistently absent; little capacity to generate or apply evidence to improve supervision.	Rahabav (2016)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the cited literature.

When the lens shifts specifically to disadvantaged and geographically isolated settings, the technical deficit sharpens. Rahabav (2016) finds that supervisors in Papua encounter substantial obstacles in conducting data-driven academic supervision, so that the supervisory act often stops at observation and reporting rather than progressing to diagnosis and intervention. Zulkardi and Zuhdi (2023), in their study of academic supervision in the geographical context of Southeast Maluku, document how the same normative supervisory standards yield very different practices once they meet the realities of dispersed islands and constrained mobility. Taken together, these studies establish the first thematic finding: supervisory competence in Eastern Indonesia is not

uniformly low but unevenly developed, with social and personal dimensions relatively intact while managerial, academic, evaluative, and research-oriented dimensions remain underdeveloped. **Table 3** synthesizes this pattern across the corpus.

The Structural Roots: Place, Isolation, and Infrastructure

The literature does not treat this competency pattern as a matter of individual deficiency but as the product of structural conditions that bear unevenly on different regions. A recurring argument is that physical location itself shapes supervisory capacity. Siaw-Marfo (2025) demonstrates, in a setting comparable to Eastern Indonesia, that school location influences the self-efficacy that supervisors bring to instructional supervision, which suggests that the gap is partly produced by where supervisors work rather than by who they are. Ovenden-Hope (2023) develops this into the broader notion of educational isolation, arguing that remoteness and the disadvantages attached to certain places systematically undermine the supply and sustenance of quality educational personnel. These accounts reframe the supervisory deficit as a geographical achievement rather than a personal failing.

A second structural theme concerns the scarcity of continuous professional development in remote regions. Maher (2017) shows that teachers and the personnel who support them in rural and remote areas depend on mediated forms of professional development, such as video conferencing, precisely because conventional in-person training rarely reaches them. Cadero-Smith (2020) documents the distinctive professional development challenges that confront leaders of rural districts, who must sustain capacity with thinner institutional support than their urban counterparts enjoy. Within the Indonesian periphery itself, Yulianti and Prasetyo (2024) show that blended learning offers a workable route for developing supervisory competencies in the frontier, outermost, and least-developed *3T* regions, which suggests that the deficit is responsive to deliberately designed and access-sensitive provision rather than fixed. The implication for Eastern Indonesia is direct: where access to sustained training is intermittent, the evaluative and research competencies that depend on cumulative analytic practice are the first to erode, yet they are also the dimensions most amenable to mediated intervention.

Table 4. Structural Determinants of the Competency Pattern

Structural Condition	Consequence for Supervision	Representative Sources
Geographical location and isolation	Lowered supervisory self-efficacy; reduced frequency and depth of school visits	Siaw-Marfo (2025); Ovenden-Hope (2023)
Limited access to continuous professional development	Erosion of evaluative and research competencies that require cumulative practice	Maher (2017); Cadero-Smith (2020); Yulianti and Prasetyo (2024)
Infrastructural and resource inequality	Narrowed institutional reach; supervision defaults to administrative verification	Nurman (2025); Partey (2024)
Sub-regional heterogeneity within the East	Uneven capacity across provinces; no single regional remedy suffices	Mu'min (2025)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the cited literature.

A third theme situates these conditions within the wider infrastructural inequality of the Indonesian periphery. Nurman (2025) analyzes the delivery of public services across Indonesia's outer islands and shows how infrastructural inequity constrains the reach of institutional functions, of which supervision is one. Mu'min (2025), examining the drivers of inclusive growth in Eastern Indonesia through a spatial lens, confirms that the region cannot be treated as homogeneous, since sub-regional disparities are themselves patterned by geography and access. Partey (2024), writing on resource deprivation and educational quality in Ghana, reinforces the generalizable point that material scarcity at the school level depresses the quality that any supervisory system can realistically secure. **Table 4** maps these structural determinants and the supervisory consequence each one carries.

Toward a Conceptual Reading: The Popular Supervisor Paradox

The two preceding themes converge on an interpretation that the existing literature implies but does not name. Supervisors in Eastern Indonesia are often socially successful and professionally constrained at the same time, accepted by their communities yet unable to deliver the substantive, evidence-based guidance that would lift instructional quality. This study names that configuration the *popular supervisor paradox*: a condition in which relational legitimacy is high while technical capacity remains low, so that social acceptance masks a developmental function that has not been fully realized. The paradox matters because it cautions against the assumption that a respected supervisor is necessarily an effective one, and because it reframes capacity building as a task of converting existing social capital into analytic capability rather than building competence from nothing.

Read through this lens, the corpus suggests that the most strategic point of intervention is not the relational domain, which is already strong, but the evaluative and research domains, which the literature identifies as both weakest and most consequential. Blase (1999) and Harris (2017) establish that instructional leadership is the mechanism through which supervisory presence becomes instructional improvement, while Stark (2017) and Rasdiana (2024) point toward developmental and technology-mediated approaches through which that mechanism might be strengthened in constrained settings. The conditions documented here therefore do not counsel resignation; they identify where adaptive, context-sensitive strengthening would yield the greatest return, an argument the discussion develops into a fuller account of why a one-size-fits-all model fails the region and what an alternative would require.

Discussion

The findings reconstructed in the previous section invite an interpretation that moves beyond description toward explanation: why supervisory competence in Eastern Indonesia takes the particular shape it does, and what that shape implies for any serious attempt to improve it. This discussion positions the three themes against the established literature, argues that the competency deficit is structurally produced rather than individually owned, and develops the conceptual contribution of the study into a claim about the conditions under which supervision can become genuinely transformational.

Supervision as Developmental Intervention, Not Administrative Verification

The first theme, the coexistence of strong relational capacity with weak technical function, gains its full significance when read against the developmental tradition in supervision theory. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) argue that supervision is properly understood not as administrative monitoring but as a developmental intervention that builds instructional capacity over time. The pattern reconstructed here suggests that supervision in Eastern Indonesia has not yet completed that conceptual transition: supervisors are present, accepted, and trusted, yet their practice frequently stops at verification rather than progressing to the diagnostic and developmental work that the tradition envisions. Hallinger and Heck (2010) sharpen the point by showing that instructional leadership influences school improvement chiefly through its effect on a school's collective capacity rather than through direct intervention, which means that a supervisor who cannot build capacity cannot, on this account, drive improvement regardless of how frequently they visit. The relational strength documented in the corpus is therefore necessary but not sufficient; it opens the door to influence that the technical deficit then prevents supervisors from walking through.

This reading also clarifies why the clinical model of supervision, which the field has long treated as a benchmark, remains difficult to enact in the region. Cogan (1973) conceived clinical supervision as a continuous cycle of observation, analysis, feedback, and follow-up, a cycle that presupposes sustained and frequent contact between supervisor and teacher. The structural

conditions reconstructed in the second theme make precisely that continuity scarce, so the cycle collapses into isolated, inspectional visits. The deficit in evaluative and research competence is thus not only a gap in individual skill but a predictable consequence of conditions that prevent the supervisory cycle from ever completing.

The Structural Production of the Competency Gap

The second theme repositions the competency gap as an ecological outcome rather than a personal failing, and here Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework offers the most economical explanation. Read ecologically, supervisory competence is shaped simultaneously at several nested levels: the individual supervisor's training and motivation at the innermost level, the regional policies and resource allocations that govern access to professional development at an intermediate level, and the national standards and infrastructural settlement that frame the whole at the outermost level. The corpus indicates that weakness at the outer levels, namely geographical isolation, intermittent professional development, and infrastructural inequality, propagates inward to constrain what any individual supervisor can achieve. This is why interventions aimed solely at the individual, such as one-off training, tend to disappoint: they address the innermost layer while leaving the outer conditions that reproduce the deficit untouched.

The ecological reading carries a direct policy implication that the literature supports. If competence is produced across nested levels, then a uniform national standard applied identically to a supervisor in a well-connected provincial capital and to one responsible for schools scattered across remote islands does not measure the same thing in both cases; it measures capacity in the first and the absence of enabling conditions in the second. Tilaar (2019), writing specifically on education and cultural policy in Eastern Indonesia, argues that policy designed without regard to the region's distinct geographical and cultural realities tends to reproduce rather than reduce inequality. The structural theme of this study substantiates that argument in the specific domain of supervision: the one-size-fits-all standard is not neutral, because it holds supervisors accountable for conditions that lie largely outside their control.

The Popular Supervisor Paradox and Its Resolution

The conceptual contribution introduced in the Results, the *popular supervisor paradox*, can now be argued against the literature rather than merely stated. The paradox names a configuration in which relational legitimacy is high while technical capacity is low, so that social acceptance masks an unrealized developmental function. The value of naming it lies in what it rules out and what it recommends. It rules out the assumption, implicit in much competency discourse, that a respected and well-integrated supervisor is therefore an effective one; the corpus shows that acceptance and effectiveness can diverge sharply. It recommends, in turn, a strategy that conventional deficit-model interventions overlook: rather than building competence from nothing, capacity development in this context should convert the social capital supervisors already possess into the analytic capability they lack.

This resolution distinguishes the present argument from the standard remediation logic. Where the deficit model treats the weak supervisor as an empty vessel to be filled through training, the paradox reframes the same supervisor as a partially equipped agent whose relational standing is an asset to be leveraged. The relational trust that supervisors hold is precisely the channel through which evaluative and research practices could be introduced collaboratively, since teachers are more likely to accept developmental feedback from a supervisor they already trust. The paradox, in other words, is not only a diagnosis but a design principle: interventions that ignore the relational dimension waste the one resource the region's supervisors reliably have, while interventions that build upon it convert a latent strength into instructional improvement.

Toward an Adaptive, Context-Sensitive Strengthening Model

Taken together, the three themes argue against generic capacity-building and for a contextual, adaptive approach. The reconstructed conditions identify where strengthening would yield the greatest return, namely the evaluative and research domains, and they specify the constraints any workable intervention must respect, namely isolation, intermittent access, and infrastructural limitation. An adaptive model responsive to these conditions would therefore begin with context-sensitive diagnosis rather than uniform assessment, differentiate provision by accessibility rather than treating all supervisors alike, rely on mediated and technology-supported delivery where in-person training cannot reach, and build deliberately upon existing social capital rather than ignoring it. Each of these design commitments follows from a specific finding rather than from abstract preference, which is what distinguishes a contextual model from a generic reform agenda.

The deeper contribution of this study lies in what it implies for the transformation of education and learning in disadvantaged regions. Transformational education, in the developmental sense advanced by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) and by Hallinger and Heck (2010), is not delivered by inspection; it is produced when those who support teachers can diagnose instructional problems, generate evidence about them, and guide sustained improvement. The findings of this study locate the precise point at which that transformation currently stalls in Eastern Indonesia: not in the willingness or the social standing of supervisors, which are adequate, but in the evaluative and research capacities through which supervisory presence becomes instructional change. This is a consequential reframing, because it relocates the lever of transformation from exhortation and monitoring to capability and condition. The study's specific contribution is therefore threefold. Conceptually, by naming the popular supervisor paradox, it identifies why well-regarded supervisory systems can nonetheless fail to transform learning, and it converts that diagnosis into a design principle that builds on relational capital rather than discarding it. Structurally, by reading the competency gap ecologically, it demonstrates that transformational supervision is a systemic achievement contingent on aligning individual, regional, and national conditions, not an outcome that individual effort alone can secure. Practically, by specifying an adaptive and context-sensitive direction for strengthening, it offers a route through which supervision in geographically disadvantaged regions might move from administrative verification toward the developmental, evidence-based, and collaborative practice that genuinely transformational education and learning require. In this sense the study contributes not merely a description of a regional deficit but a conceptual and strategic foundation for transforming how supervision supports teaching and learning where transformation is most needed and hardest to achieve.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that the competency challenges facing school supervisors in Eastern Indonesia are not individual shortcomings but the product of structural and ecological inequalities within the educational system, in which relational and social capacities remain adequate while the evaluative and research capacities that drive instructional improvement remain underdeveloped. The central conceptual contribution is the *popular supervisor paradox*, a configuration in which supervisors are socially accepted and trusted yet unable to deliver the substantive, evidence-based guidance that genuine improvement requires, a paradox that reframes capacity building as the conversion of existing social capital into analytic capability rather than the filling of an empty vessel. Read through an ecological lens, the deficit appears as a systemic achievement that aligns or misaligns individual, regional, and national conditions, which is why uniform national standards fail a region defined by isolation and infrastructural inequality, and why an adaptive, context-sensitive, and technology-supported strengthening direction is warranted. These findings are interpretive rather than empirically verified, since they synthesise published scholarship rather than measure practice in the field, and they therefore invite field research, including interviews, observation, and longitudinal study, to test and refine them. Ultimately, transforming education in

disadvantaged regions depends less on monitoring supervisors than on building the conditions under which their trusted presence can become developmental practice.

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