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Participatory PERT for Educational Planning: Integrating Vocational and Religious Agendas in an Islamic Vocational High School

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Abstract

Islamic vocational high schools must fit classroom instruction, workshop practice, industry placements, competency examinations, and religious character formation into one academic calendar. Many of them still plan these activities by intuition. This study examined how the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) was applied to improve the efficiency of educational planning, how far it changed the use of time and the allocation of roles, and what constraints educators faced along the way. A qualitative case study was conducted at an Islamic vocational high school in Central Java, Indonesia. Data came from in-depth interviews with six key informants, observation of planning meetings, and analysis of school work plans and activity schedules. The data were analyzed with an interactive model and verified through source and method triangulation. The school broke its programs into activity units and gave each one three time estimates, which leaders, teachers, and industry partners worked out together. The resulting network diagram allowed academic, vocational, and religious activities to be scheduled without conflict and made clear who was responsible for each task. Teachers used existing PERT schedules well but found it hard to construct diagrams on their own. These findings imply that PERT serves schools best as a participatory planning practice. Its lasting adoption depends on sustained mentoring that helps teachers build schedules and not only follow them.

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INTRODUCTION

Planning in Islamic vocational high schools is more demanding than in general schools, yet it is still often carried out by intuition. These schools must fit classroom instruction, workshop practice, industry placements, competency examinations, and religious character formation into a single academic calendar **(Balachandran, 2026; Houghton et al., 2022; Obembe, 2026)**. Many of these activities depend on one another, and several depend on industry partners whose schedules the school does not control. Educational planning is meant to identify needs, set goals, and allocate resources so that programs reach their intended outcomes **(Dalgaard et al., 2021; Wicaksono et al., 2026)**. In practice, however, school plans are frequently drawn up as annual lists of programs with target months, giving little attention to how long each activity will take or what must be completed before it can begin. When one activity slips, such as the preparation of examination materials or the confirmation of placement slots, the delay spreads to the activities that follow, and conflicts surface only during implementation. The core problem, then, is not that schools lack plans. It is that they lack a planning method capable of handling interdependent activities under uncertain conditions.

Two bodies of research bear on this problem, but they have developed largely apart from each other. Studies of school improvement planning consistently show that plans struggle to function as working tools. **Carvalho et al. (2022)** examined 663 strategic action plans from

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Portuguese schools and found that most read as lists of actions rather than instruments of strategy, with weak data-based monitoring and goals that rarely met SMART criteria. **Meyers et al. (2023)** reached a related conclusion in eight urban schools in the United States. Principals using short-cycle plans completed many planned tasks, but they seldom revised their plans within a semester, because established routines limited adjustment in real time. Research on the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) has moved in a different direction, toward more accurate estimation. **Yudistira et al. (2024)**, for example, showed that discrete event simulation can predict project completion time more flexibly than the normal-distribution Monte Carlo approach common in PERT studies. Read together, the first line of research diagnoses weak planning without offering a scheduling technique. The second refines the technique while treating time estimates as given inputs supplied by specialists.

This separation leaves an important question unanswered: how does a probabilistic technique such as PERT work when the estimates come from teachers and school leaders rather than from trained estimators? The question matters because, in schools, the people who estimate durations are the same people who carry out the work, and their estimates are shaped by workload, experience, and institutional habits. Existing applications of PERT in educational settings, such as the comparison of conventional and PERT-based activity plans by **Forcael et al. (2024)**, report differences in planned duration but say little about the participants, interactions, and constraints behind those numbers. The present study addresses this gap in three ways. In terms of context, it examines PERT in an Islamic vocational high school, where vocational and religious agendas compete for the same time. In terms of focus, it looks at how estimates were produced and how the schedule integrated these agendas. In terms of method, it uses a qualitative case study, an approach rarely applied in PERT research, which has been dominated by quantitative scheduling analysis.

Building on this gap, the study pursues three specific objectives. First, it analyzes the strategy a school used to apply PERT in setting and scheduling its educational programs. Second, it examines how far PERT improved the use of time, the allocation of roles, and the basis for planning decisions. Third, it identifies the technical and institutional constraints that educators encountered, along with the responses they proposed. Together, these objectives extend the school planning literature by showing how a specific scheduling technique can turn plans from lists of programs into sequences of dependent, monitored activities. They also extend the PERT literature by examining the human and organizational conditions under which the technique is adopted outside industry. For school leaders, particularly in vocational schools that work closely with industry partners, the findings offer a grounded account of what PERT can and cannot do, and of the support teachers need to use it independently.

This study argues that PERT can improve school planning, but only if it is treated as a shared practice rather than as a calculation carried out by a few people. Within a school, how reliable a PERT schedule turns out to be depends largely on who provides the time estimates. It also depends on whether the network diagram can place vocational and religious activities in a single sequence, and on whether teachers can progress from following a schedule to building one themselves. To examine this argument, the study needed a close understanding of how the principal, the curriculum leader, planning committee members, and teachers made sense of PERT, contributed to the estimates, and coped with its technical demands. Informants' views alone would not have been enough. The study therefore also traced what actually changed in the school calendar and in the way tasks were assigned. A qualitative case study combining interviews, observation, and document analysis was chosen for this purpose, and the next section describes it in detail.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a single-case study design to examine how the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) was applied to improve the efficiency of

educational planning **(Endarwita et al., 2026; Råbu & Binder, 2024; Vighnarajah, 2026)**. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study sought to understand planning as it actually took place in a school, including the decisions, interactions, and constraints that numbers alone cannot capture. A case study design allowed the researchers to follow the shift from conventional to PERT-based planning within one institution and to trace how stakeholders, procedures, and organizational conditions shaped that shift. The study was conducted at SMK NU Ma'arif 2 Kudus, an Islamic vocational high school in Central Java, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively for two reasons. First, the school runs a demanding program that must align a rigorous vocational curriculum with the cultivation of religious character. Second, the school had begun moving its planning system from a conventional model to a structured PERT-based approach, which made it a suitable setting for examining both the efficiency gains and the difficulties of implementation.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis **(Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Mansoor et al., 2026)**. Six key informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the school's planning process **(Bagheri et al., 2022; Olea, 2026; Samani et al., 2026)**. They were the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the chair of the Planning Committee, and 3 teachers who also served as heads of vocational programs. Semi-structured interviews explored how informants understood PERT, how they took part in estimating and scheduling activities, and what obstacles they encountered. Observation focused on planning meetings and the development of work plans, with particular attention to how activities were broken down, how time estimates were discussed, and how schedules were finalized. Document analysis covered the *Rencana Kerja Sekolah* (RKS, School Work Plan), the academic calendar, and activity schedules prepared before and after PERT was introduced. **Table 1** summarizes the data collection techniques, the informants or sources involved, and the focus of the data drawn from each.

Table 1. Data Collection Matrix

Technique	Informant or Source	Code	Focus of Data
In-depth interview	Principal	KS_01	Reasons for adopting PERT; planning practices before and after adoption; basis for decision-making
In-depth interview	Vice principal for curriculum	WK_01	Breakdown of programs into activities; integration of academic and non-academic agendas
In-depth interview	Chair of the Planning Committee	KP_01	Time estimation process; allocation of tasks and responsibilities
In-depth interview	Teachers and heads of vocational programs (3)	GR_01–GR_03	Use of PERT for teaching modules and the UKK (Uji Kompetensi Keahlian, vocational competency test); technical difficulties; support needed
Observation	Planning meetings and work-plan development	OBS	How activities, time estimates, and schedules were produced and discussed
Document analysis	RKS, academic calendar, activity schedules	DOC	Timelines, delays, and overlaps before and after PERT implementation

Data were analyzed continuously during and after fieldwork using the interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification **(Monaro et al., 2022)**. In the reduction stage, interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were coded and grouped according to the three objectives of the study: the strategy for applying PERT, its effects on time and resource use, and the constraints faced in implementation. In the data display stage, the coded data were organized into matrices and comparison tables. These allowed patterns to be compared across informants and sources, for instance between teachers who used existing PERT schedules and those who had to construct diagrams themselves. In the final stage, provisional conclusions were drawn from these displays and then verified by returning to the raw data. To establish credibility, the study applied source triangulation by comparing accounts from

informants at different levels of the school, and methodological triangulation by cross-checking interview data against observation notes and documents **(Chand, 2026; Vida & Sántha, 2026; Vivek et al., 2023)**. Findings were retained only when they were supported by more than one source or technique.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Interview, observation, and document data were analyzed together and produced three themes, one for each objective of the study. The first theme describes the strategy the school used to move from intuitive scheduling to PERT-based planning. The second examines how that shift affected time use, role allocation, and decision-making. The third covers the technical constraints educators faced and the responses they proposed.

Breaking Down Programs and Estimating Activity Durations with PERT

Before adopting PERT, the school prepared its *Rencana Kerja Sekolah* (RKS, School Work Plan), its *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* (RPP, lesson plans), and its teaching modules without clear time estimates for individual activities. The plans listed the programs to be run and the period for each. They did not say how long each step would take or which steps had to be finished before others could start. When one step ran late, no one could easily see how the delay would affect what came next, and overlapping activities came to light only when they collided during implementation. Interviews and document review indicate that approximately 60–70% of planned activities were regularly delayed or overlapped with other activities. The principal [KS_01] explained that this conventional approach could no longer cope with the complexity of vocational programs. Within a single academic year, the school must coordinate classroom instruction, workshop practice, industry placements, and religious character-building. In response, the school broke each program down into measurable activity units. The principal, the vice principal for curriculum, teachers, and partners from business and industry did this work together. As a result, the people responsible for each activity also helped estimate how long it would take.

Each activity unit then received three duration estimates. **Figure 1** shows how the three estimates were defined and how they were combined into a single expected time for scheduling.

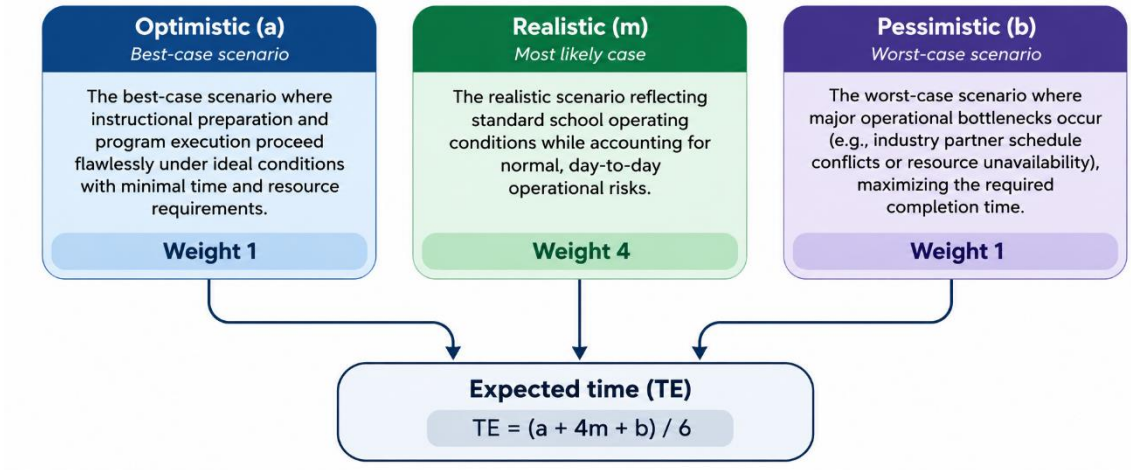


Figure 1. PERT Three-Point Time Estimation Framework Applied to School Activities

Figure 1 shows that the school no longer gave each activity a single fixed date. Each activity was planned across three scenarios: an optimistic duration (a) for ideal execution, a most likely duration (m) for normal conditions, and a pessimistic duration (b) for foreseeable bottlenecks. The scenarios were combined into an expected time, $TE = (a + 4m + b) / 6$. The most likely estimate carries the greatest weight, while the optimistic and pessimistic estimates set the limits within which an activity could reasonably finish. In practice, this calculation made explicit what

had previously stayed implicit. Planners could see how wide the gap between the best and worst case was for each activity. That gap revealed where the risk of delay was concentrated. Activities with a narrow range could be scheduled with confidence. Activities with a wide range, such as UKK preparation that depends on industry assessors, needed earlier starts or closer monitoring. The framework therefore did more than produce a schedule. It showed which parts of the school year were fragile and why.

A teacher [GR_01] reported that this mapping helped teachers finish their teaching modules on time. It also made the critical path of the *Uji Kompetensi Keahlian* (UKK, Vocational Competency Exam) clear, from initial preparation through the announcement of results. Observation of planning meetings and review of the revised RKS confirmed that the expected time for each activity became the basis for the school schedule and for assigning tasks.

The interview and document evidence point in the same direction. Once each activity had three estimates and identified predecessors, the schedule stopped being a list of target months and became a sequence of interdependent tasks. The calculation also separated critical activities, about 20–25% of the total, from non-critical activities with slack time. Coordinators could watch the critical activities closely, while the slack in other activities absorbed minor delays without disrupting the overall plan. Three-point estimation also changed how teachers talked about uncertainty. Instead of committing to a single date they might miss, they could give a realistic range and name the conditions it depended on. In the researchers' view, involving stakeholders from different roles in this process was what moved the school from reacting to delays toward anticipating them. The estimates came from the people closest to each task, not from the planning committee alone. Seen this way, the strategy was as much about organizing participation in planning as it was about applying a calculation technique.

Reducing Schedule Conflicts and Clarifying Roles through the PERT Network Diagram

Observation and the revised academic calendar showed a concrete change once the network diagram was in use. Mandatory academic programs and extracurricular activities fit into the calendar without scheduling conflicts. The *Praktik Kerja Lapangan* (PKL, Field Work Practice) and character-building activities had previously competed for the same weeks. They were now arranged so that neither disrupted the other. Teaching modules and lesson plans that had often been late were finished within the planned period. The diagram also tied each activity to a responsible implementer, so guidance counselors, committee members, and industry instructors each had defined tasks and timeframes. To show the scale of these changes, **Table 2** compares planning conditions before and after PERT was introduced, along with the evidence for each aspect.

Table 2. Planning Conditions Before and After PERT Implementation

Aspect	Before PERT	After PERT
Time estimation	No explicit duration for each activity	Optimistic, most likely, and pessimistic estimates for each activity
Activity sequencing	Programs listed by period, with no dependencies shown	Network diagram showing preceding and succeeding activities
Delays and overlaps	Approximately 60–70% of activities delayed or overlapping	Critical activities (20–25%) closely monitored; slack used to absorb minor delays
Academic and non-academic agendas	Academic, extracurricular, PKL, and character-building activities frequently clashed	Scheduled without conflicts
Teaching modules and RPP	Often completed late	Completed within the planned period
Role allocation	Overlapping tasks and unclear responsibilities	Each activity assigned to a responsible implementer
Basis for decisions	Assumptions and past practice	Interdependencies shown in the network diagram

Table 2 shows that the change brought by PERT was structural, not cosmetic. Every row describes a move from something left unstated to something made explicit. Durations that had been guessed became estimated. Sequences that had been assumed became mapped. Responsibilities that had been negotiated as problems arose were assigned in advance. The most telling contrast is in the delays-and-overlaps row. Before PERT, the school had no way to tell which delays mattered. After PERT, attention could be focused on the roughly one-quarter of activities that determined whether the school year ran on time. The table also shows that the gains were in coordination, not in budget. None of the rows reports cost savings. What improved was the school's ability to see conflicts during planning instead of during execution. Finally, the evidence for each row comes from more than one type of source, which strengthens confidence that these changes reflect actual practice rather than the perceptions of a single informant.

The principal [KS_01] attributed these changes to the way PERT makes dependencies between activities visible. In his account, decisions about the school calendar no longer rested on assumptions or habit. They rested on what the network diagram showed about the order and timing of activities, combined with the judgment of the people involved. This matches what was observed in planning meetings, where discussion of the calendar referred directly to the diagram and the calculated durations.

Taken together, the observations, calendar documents, and the principal's account show that the main gain was in coordination. Conflicts between activities surfaced during planning rather than during implementation, and responsibilities were settled before activities began. This matters in a vocational school, where a single delay, for example in preparing UKK materials, can affect workshop schedules, industry partners, and student placements simultaneously. The researchers interpret the greater transparency of workflows as likely to reduce role confusion and improve coordination across departments. When activities, timeframes, and implementers are visible to everyone, educators know what is expected of them and of their colleagues. These benefits, however, depended on educators being able to read and build PERT diagrams. The next theme shows that this ability was not yet evenly shared.

Teachers' Difficulty in Constructing PERT Diagrams

A teacher [GR_02] said that the school's initial orientation helped him understand the general framework of PERT. Even so, he found it hard to construct a PERT diagram on his own without intensive guidance. His experience reflects a wider pattern seen at the start of implementation. Most teachers were unfamiliar with network diagrams and probabilistic time calculation, and they relied on the planning committee or school leaders to prepare these for them.

This account differs from the more positive experience GR_01 described in the first theme. The difference seems to lie in the type of task each teacher handled. GR_01 worked with activities that had already been mapped, using the schedule to complete teaching modules and follow the UKK timeline. GR_02 described the harder task of building a diagram independently. The difficulty, then, was less about using a PERT schedule than about constructing one. This distinction matters because it shows that the barrier was a specific technical skill, not rejection of the method. Teachers accepted the purpose of PERT and recognized its benefits, but many could not yet carry out the calculation and diagramming without support. The researchers see this as a normal part of the transition to a new management tool. It is also a real risk. If the tool remains too complex for most teachers, its use may stay concentrated among a few staff members, and planning consistency could weaken once those individuals are no longer directly involved.

The informants also identified ways to address this constraint. GR_02 emphasized the need for regular technical training rather than a single orientation session. He also called for practical guidelines built on real planning cases at the school, so that teachers could learn from familiar activities such as the UKK and PKL rather than from abstract examples. Finally, he stressed the importance of consistent commitment from school leadership. Together, these proposals suggest that the initial awareness-raising should grow into a structured, ongoing capacity-building program. Based on these accounts, the researchers conclude that the active involvement of school leaders in mentoring and monitoring is a key condition for PERT to become a routine

part of how the school plans its work. Without that involvement, it risks remaining an analytical exercise used by only a few staff.

Discussion

The first finding indicates that the school introduced PERT by breaking its programs down collaboratively and assigning three time estimates to each activity. In one respect, this mirrors earlier applications of the technique, and in another it departs from them. In the construction and industrial settings reported by **Nugroho et al. (2025)**, activity durations are typically set by technical specialists. At the school studied here, the estimates were supplied by the people who would carry out the work, namely the principal, the vice principal, teachers, and industry partners. PERT therefore served two purposes at once. It remained a calculation tool, yet it also became a means of organizing who takes part in planning. The finding is consistent with **Mutmainnah et al. (2025)**, whose comparison of conventional and PERT-based activity planning favored the latter. What the present study adds is an account of why this advantage appears in schools. Three-point estimation allowed teachers to voice uncertainty openly, so they were no longer pressed to promise dates they doubted they could meet. The finding also lends support to **Setyaningsih et al. (2024)**, who argue that school improvement planning requires reducing bias in shared decision-making. In this case, the explicit range between the optimistic and pessimistic estimates acted as a practical check on wishful scheduling.

The second finding, conflict-free scheduling and clearer task assignment, points to a different kind of efficiency from that reported by **Guo dan Song (2026)**, who examined CPM and PERT as tools for improving the use of company resources. The gains at this school had little to do with cost. They came from better coordination, as conflicts were identified at the planning stage and responsibilities were settled before activities started. The result also builds on Suharsoyo et al. (2026), who traced how vocational school–industry partnerships moved from administrative to managerial practice. The present study identifies a concrete tool that makes such a shift workable in the day-to-day calendar of a school. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of this finding is the way separate agendas were brought together. Academic programs, the PKL, the UKK, and religious character-building activities had long competed for the same weeks, but they were now scheduled without clashing. **Efendi (2024)** treats the management of Islamic character education in vocational schools as its own stream of activity. The evidence from this school suggests that, once dependencies are mapped, character-building can sit within the same workflow as vocational training instead of being fitted into whatever time remains.

The third finding, teachers' difficulty in constructing PERT diagrams, **Patarakin et al. (2026)**, both of whom note the technical demands of modern management and scheduling techniques. Yet the barrier observed here was narrower than these studies imply. Teachers did not resist the innovation, and their technical literacy was not uniformly low. GR_01, who worked from an existing PERT schedule, used it effectively, whereas GR_02 struggled when asked to build a diagram from scratch. The literature seldom separates using PERT from constructing it. **Siller et al. (2023)**, for example, treat technology adoption in school management as a single capacity that a school either possesses or lacks. The findings of this study point instead to two levels of capacity, each requiring its own form of support. Orientation may be enough for teachers to learn how to use a schedule, but constructing one calls for repeated practice with real school cases and continued mentoring. This gives concrete shape to the leadership role described by **Kierstead et al. (2023)**, who connect principal leadership with teacher collaboration and organizational change. At this school, leadership mattered most when it took the form of sustained mentoring in a specific technical skill.

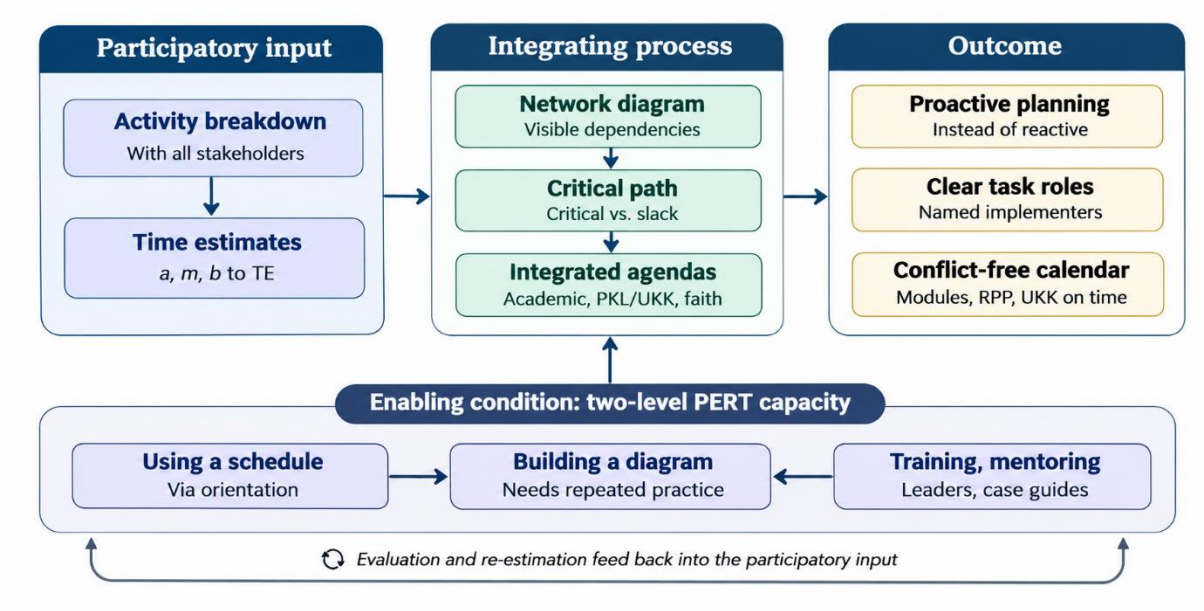


Figure 2. Participatory PERT Adaptation Model for Islamic Vocational School Planning

As **Figure 2** illustrates, the value of PERT at this school depended on more than the calculation itself. Three elements worked together. The first is participatory input, through which the people closest to each activity supplied the time estimates. Had the estimates come from the planning committee alone, the expected times might have been little more reliable than the intuitive dates they replaced. The second is the integrating process, in which the network diagram placed academic, vocational, and religious agendas in a single sequence. Here the model departs most clearly from industrial uses of PERT, which typically schedule one technical project rather than several agendas grounded in different values. The third is the enabling condition at the base of the model. Whether the planning cycle continues after the initial guidance ends depends on two levels of capacity, from using a schedule to constructing a diagram. Taken as a whole, the model proposes that PERT becomes an institutional practice in a school only when participation, integration, and capacity building operate together. Where one of them is missing, the technique is likely to remain an analytical exercise confined to a few staff members.

Comparison with earlier research brings three specific contributions of this study into view. First, the study recasts PERT as a participatory planning practice instead of a specialist scheduling tool, showing that in schools the people who supply the estimates matter as much as the formula that combines them. Second, it demonstrates that PERT can bring vocational and religious character agendas into one workflow, a planning problem particular to Islamic vocational schools that the PERT literature has not yet examined. Third, it distinguishes between using and constructing PERT as two levels of capacity, which gives school leaders a more precise basis for designing training than a general appeal to improve technical literacy. Collectively, these contributions extend the literature on transformational education at the level of organizational and professional learning. The study makes no claim about changes in student outcomes. What it does show is how a school learned to plan in a new way. Teachers began to anticipate delays rather than react to them, and leaders shifted from directing activities to mentoring a shared planning skill. This pattern fits the account of transformational school leadership offered by Sliwka et al. (2024), in which changes in practice grow out of teachers' professional learning and not from structural reform alone.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how PERT was applied to educational planning in an Islamic vocational high school, how it changed the use of time and roles, and what limited its use. The

evidence shows that PERT made planning more dependable once leaders and teachers produced the estimates together, although teachers' ability to construct diagrams remained uneven. Several limitations should be noted. The study took place in a single school with a fairly homogeneous group of teachers, so its findings cannot be generalized statistically to other institutions. Efficiency was described through informants' accounts, observation, and documents rather than measured as time saved or schedule adherence. The study also captured an early phase of implementation and cannot show whether the practice was sustained. Future research could compare several vocational schools with different levels of digital literacy, or use mixed methods to track schedule adherence over more than one academic year. Studies that test specific training models for diagram construction, or simple PERT tools designed for teachers, would also help schools move from following schedules to building them.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors used ChatGPT to assist with language editing, restructuring of sections, drafting of figures, and the identification of relevant literature during manuscript preparation. All research data, including interview, observation, and document data, were collected and analyzed by the authors. The authors reviewed, verified, and revised all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of this article.

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