



Leadership Strategies in Vocational Education: Enhancing School Quality through Teacher Capacity Building

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze school principals' strategies for improving educational quality through the development of teaching personnel in vocational secondary education. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings indicate that principals implement teacher development strategies through competency enhancement via training programs and the dissemination of training outcomes, reinforcement of discipline and continuous performance supervision, as well as the provision of support, recognition, and a collaborative work environment. These strategies contribute to increased teacher professionalism and improved learning quality. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including limited training quotas, inadequate learning support facilities, and restricted access to technology. To address these constraints, schools apply internal knowledge-sharing mechanisms, encourage teacher self-directed learning, and establish sustainable collaborations with industry partners and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The study underscores the critical role of strategic and effective school leadership in fostering teacher development as a key driver for enhancing the quality of vocational education and offers practical insights for educational leaders and policymakers in designing sustainable professional development initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar in the development of high-quality and competitive human resources. From an Islamic perspective, education is viewed as a foundational command aimed at developing human potential holistically, encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions, as emphasized in QS. Al-'Alaq verses 1-5. In line with this

view, Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 states that education is directed toward developing learners' potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, capable, creative, and responsible (Indonesia, 2003). Empirical evidence consistently shows that the quality of education is strongly determined by the quality of its teaching personnel, who play a central role in shaping learning processes and outcomes. Therefore, improving educational quality is not merely an institutional concern but a broader societal necessity to ensure sustainable social and economic development. Consequently, research that examines strategies to enhance educational quality through teacher development holds significant relevance for society at large (Kusumawati, 2025; Najiburohman et al., 2025; Syafiih, 2025).

Despite its strategic importance, education systems continue to face persistent challenges related to educational quality, particularly in developing countries (Arifin, 2024; Maulidy, 2025; Susanti et al., 2025). One major societal problem is the gap between the increasing demands for high-quality graduates and the limited capacity of educational institutions to develop competent teaching personnel. Rapid technological advancement, labor market transformation, and global competition require education systems to be adaptive and responsive (Dewi et al., 2024; Musthofa & Faizin, 2025; Safitri, 2024). However, these demands are often not matched by systematic teacher development. In vocational education, this issue becomes more complex, as vocational schools are expected to produce graduates who are both technically skilled and professionally prepared for the workforce. Limited access to training programs, uneven teacher competencies, and weak performance management systems hinder the optimization of teaching quality. These challenges ultimately affect graduate employability and contribute to broader social issues, such as educated unemployment, highlighting the urgency of addressing teacher development as a strategic educational priority.

Field observations indicate that many vocational secondary schools face significant obstacles in developing teaching personnel in a structured and sustainable manner. Teachers often have unequal access to professional training, both in pedagogical competence and vocational expertise aligned with industry standards. In addition, limitations in learning facilities and digital infrastructure further constrain instructional innovation. Curriculum changes and industry demands require teachers to continuously update their skills, yet without effective leadership strategies, professional development efforts tend to be fragmented and short-term. These conditions reveal a gap between the ideal competencies expected of vocational teachers and the actual conditions within schools. This phenomenon underscores the importance of the school principal's role as an instructional leader who not only manages administrative tasks but

also actively designs and implements strategic teacher development programs. Without strong leadership, efforts to improve educational quality through teacher development are unlikely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Previous studies have demonstrated that teacher management and professional development significantly contribute to educational quality. Indahyani et al. (2022) found that human resource management contributes 68.6% to improvements in educational quality. Similarly, Eka Sari and Hasyim Rosyidi (2021) emphasized that teacher professionalism in vocational schools is strongly influenced by access to training, performance coaching, and leadership support from school principals. Chastanti et al. (2024) further highlighted that principals who act as instructional leaders are more effective in enhancing teacher competence and learning quality. These findings suggest that leadership plays a critical role in shaping teacher performance. However, most existing studies focus on statistical relationships between variables and provide limited insight into how leadership strategies are implemented in practice, particularly in vocational education settings with diverse skill programs.

Other studies indicate that educational quality is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including principal leadership, school culture, school-based management, and partnerships with industry and the community (Arbain & Aziz, 2025; Siswopranoto, 2022). Nevertheless, prior research often positions principals as structural actors rather than strategic agents who actively design teacher development initiatives. Moreover, many studies rely on quantitative approaches, which may overlook contextual dynamics and implementation processes at the school level. As a result, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research that explores how school principals strategically develop teaching personnel to improve educational quality in vocational schools. This research gap is significant because vocational education has unique characteristics that require adaptive leadership and context-specific strategies. Addressing this gap is essential to provide practical insights that can inform effective school leadership practices.

This study offers novelty by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of school principals' strategic roles in improving educational quality through teacher development in vocational secondary education. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine variable relationships or policy impacts, this research focuses on concrete leadership strategies, such as competency enhancement, training dissemination, continuous performance coaching, and the creation of collaborative professional environments. The state-of-the-art contribution lies in integrating leadership practices with real challenges faced by vocational schools, including limited training opportunities, infrastructure constraints, and the need for alignment with industry demands. By capturing the lived experiences of

school leaders and teachers, this study advances current knowledge on strategic educational leadership and contributes a contextually grounded framework for teacher development in vocational education.

Based on the identified research gap, this study addresses the question of how school principals strategically develop teaching personnel to enhance educational quality in vocational secondary schools. The central argument of this research is that effective and strategic school leadership is a decisive factor in transforming limited resources into meaningful and sustainable teacher development initiatives. Through systematic training dissemination, continuous performance supervision, professional support, and collaborative partnerships, principals can significantly improve teacher professionalism and learning quality. This study contributes theoretically by enriching the literature on educational management and instructional leadership and contributes practically by offering actionable insights for school leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen the quality of vocational education.

RESEACH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach to explore in depth the strategies of school principals in improving educational quality through teacher development. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of participants and to capture complex processes, interactions, and contextual dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement (Niam et al., 2024; Nurfajriani et al., 2024). The descriptive approach enables a systematic portrayal of leadership practices as they occur naturally in the school setting, providing rich and meaningful insights into how teacher development strategies are planned and implemented. This design is particularly appropriate for educational management research that seeks to examine leadership roles, decision-making processes, and institutional practices in real-world contexts.

The research was conducted at a public vocational secondary school located in Muaro Jambi Regency. This site was selected purposively because it represents a vocational education institution with diverse skill programs and faces challenges related to teacher professional development, infrastructure limitations, and alignment with industry needs. Preliminary observations indicated that the school has implemented various leadership initiatives aimed at improving teacher competence, making it a relevant and information-rich setting for this study. Additionally, vocational schools have unique characteristics that require adaptive leadership strategies, particularly in responding to rapid technological changes and labor market demands.

Therefore, the selected site provides an appropriate context for examining principal leadership strategies in enhancing educational quality.

Data were collected using multiple techniques, including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, to obtain comprehensive and credible findings. Observations were conducted to capture natural interactions, school routines, and leadership practices related to teacher development. In-depth interviews were carried out with the school principal and selected teachers who were purposively chosen based on their involvement in professional development activities. Documentation, such as training records, school policies, and program reports, was also reviewed to support and enrich the empirical data. The use of multiple data collection techniques enables data triangulation and enhances the credibility of the research findings (Miles et al., 2014).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously throughout the research process, following the stages proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which include data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and focusing relevant information related to leadership strategies and teacher development. The condensed data were then organized and presented in narrative and thematic displays to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through pattern recognition and cross-checking of data sources. To ensure data trustworthiness, source and technique triangulation were applied, allowing findings to be validated and ensuring that the results are credible and academically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study indicate that the principal plays a strategic role in improving educational quality through systematic teacher professional development. Based on data obtained from observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, several key strategies were identified as being consistently implemented to support teacher development. These strategies encompass efforts to enhance teacher competencies, strengthen discipline and performance, and provide motivation and appreciation within a collaborative work environment. To present a clear and structured overview of these empirical findings, the principal's strategies in teacher professional development are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Principal Strategies in Teacher Professional Development

No	Aspect of Teacher Development	General Findings	Remarks
1	Teacher Competency Enhancement	The principal facilitates training programs, dissemination of training outcomes, and internal workshops	Not all teachers have access to external training opportunities
2	Teacher Discipline and Performance	Implementation of attendance monitoring, routine supervision, and performance evaluation	Administrative workload affects consistency of discipline
3	Teacher Motivation and Appreciation	Provision of motivation, non-material rewards, and work support	Financial incentives remain limited

Based on interviews with the principal and teachers, improving teacher competence through training and knowledge dissemination is identified as the primary strategy for enhancing teacher quality. Overall, teachers' competencies are categorized as relatively good, particularly in the use of instructional technology. Most teachers are within a productive age range and have completed the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG), enabling them to adapt more easily to digital-based learning. The principal stated that "most teachers in this school are relatively young and adaptable to technology-based instruction," indicating that the school possesses strong human resource potential to support professional development initiatives.

However, the implementation of training strategies has not yet been fully optimal. Limited quotas for external training and industrial internships restrict the number of teachers who can participate directly. As a result, teachers who attend training are required to disseminate the acquired knowledge to their colleagues. Observational data reveal differences in confidence levels and instructional mastery between teachers who participate directly in training and those who receive second-hand dissemination. Teachers who attend training tend to demonstrate greater innovation in technology-based instruction, while others still require further mentoring.

To address these constraints, the school applies a phased training management strategy supported by a structured dissemination system. Teachers who participate in training and industry internships are required to share outcomes through internal meetings, discussions, and peer mentoring. Although dissemination cannot fully replace direct training experience, this strategy helps maintain continuity in teacher competency development.

DISCUSSION

Teacher Competency Enhancement through Training and Knowledge Dissemination

The findings indicate that training and knowledge dissemination play a crucial role in improving teacher competence and, consequently, educational quality. This strategy functions not only as a means of enhancing individual teacher skills but also as a mechanism for collective knowledge distribution within the school. These findings reinforce the view that continuous professional development is a key determinant of instructional quality.

The requirement for trained teachers to disseminate their knowledge aligns with those who emphasize that teacher professional development is more effective when conducted collaboratively and sustainably (Adhinugraha et al., 2024; Kulsum et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2023; Yahya, 2023). Through dissemination, the impact of training extends beyond individual participants, maximizing institutional benefits despite limited access to external training opportunities. This approach reflects the principal's effort to optimize available resources amid structural constraints (Erliani et al., 2023).

Furthermore, this strategy demonstrates the principal's managerial competence as mandated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education Regulation No. 13 of 2007, particularly in human resource development and management. Although limited training quotas remain a challenge, dissemination serves as an adaptive solution within schools facing restricted access to formal professional development programs (Nasional, 2017). This finding supports Yusutria's (2022) argument that effective school leadership is essential in managing teacher development contextually and institutionally.

Strengthening Teacher Discipline and Performance Development

The results show that strengthening discipline and teacher performance is a vital strategy for maintaining instructional quality. Teacher discipline is understood not merely as rule compliance but as a manifestation of professional responsibility in delivering consistent and high-quality instruction.

The implementation of a digital attendance system and routine morning assemblies reflects the principal's managerial competence in regulating teacher work behavior. This finding is consistent with Santana et al. (2024), who assert that teacher discipline has a direct relationship with instructional quality and institutional order. Structured monitoring mechanisms enable school leaders to minimize disciplinary violations and enhance instructional consistency (Dinayanti et al., 2024).

Importantly, performance supervision is conducted through a persuasive and humanistic approach rather than punitive measures. Teachers reported that corrective feedback is delivered constructively, fostering a supportive work

climate. This approach aligns with Salsabila (2023), who emphasizes that teacher performance development is more effective when supported by respectful communication and professional recognition. Such leadership practices contribute to a positive school climate and reinforce teacher awareness of the importance of discipline in sustaining educational quality (Maisuroh & Jamil, 2024; Muharromah, 2025; Solehah, 2025; Wahyudi, 2025).

From a policy perspective, these findings are consistent with the leadership competencies outlined in Ministry Regulation No. 13 of 2007, particularly in the domains of leadership and teacher management. Thus, discipline reinforcement functions not merely as a control mechanism but as an integral component of school-based quality improvement strategies (Nasional, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the improvement of educational quality in vocational schools is strongly influenced by the principal's leadership strategies in developing teacher competencies. Training programs supported by knowledge dissemination mechanisms serve as adaptive strategies to address limited access to formal professional development, although their effectiveness depends on continuous mentoring and follow-up support. In addition, the strengthening of discipline, constructive performance supervision, and the provision of support and appreciation contribute to the creation of a conducive work environment and enhance teacher motivation. From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the field of educational management by emphasizing that teacher development is not merely a technical process but also a managerial and cultural endeavor driven by strategic and humanistic school leadership, particularly within the context of vocational education.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single vocational school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Furthermore, the study did not examine the direct impact of teacher development strategies on students' learning outcomes. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve multiple schools with diverse characteristics, adopt comparative or mixed-methods approaches, and investigate the relationships between principal leadership strategies, teacher professional development, and student achievement. Future studies may also explore more deeply the role of digital technology and industry partnerships in supporting the sustainability of quality improvement in vocational education.

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