



Strategic Clinical Supervision: Redefining Principal Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the management of principals' clinical supervision in improving teachers' professional competence, particularly within the dimensions of educational management: planning, organizing, implementing, supervising, and evaluating. The research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that clinical supervision is systematically planned through structured programs, needs-based target setting, and pre-observation communication. In the organizing and implementation stages, supervision is conducted collaboratively despite constraints such as limited time and competing managerial responsibilities. Continuous supervision and evaluation are carried out through classroom observations, reflective dialogues, and ongoing professional guidance tailored to teachers' needs. Follow-up actions emphasize sustainable professional development and instructional improvement. These findings imply that integrated and reflective clinical supervision management strengthens the principal's role as an instructional leader and significantly enhances teachers' professional competence. Effective supervision grounded in educational management dimensions contributes to sustainable school improvement and adaptive post-pandemic learning practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality remains a central issue in contemporary education because it directly influences students' learning outcomes and long-term societal development. The point is that improving teacher professionalism is essential for ensuring equitable and sustainable educational progress. The reason lies in the increasing complexity of learning demands, including technological integration,

curriculum transformation, and higher expectations for twenty-first-century competencies. Evidence from recent educational reforms in Indonesia shows that schools are expected to produce adaptive, critical, and digitally literate graduates, which requires competent and reflective teachers (Santosa et al., 2023). In this context, the principal's leadership extends beyond administrative management toward instructional guidance that supports teacher growth. Clinical supervision, characterized by systematic observation, feedback, and reflective dialogue, has been widely recognized as a strategic approach to strengthening professional competence. Therefore, examining how clinical supervision is managed is important not only for school effectiveness but also for broader educational quality improvement.

Despite the recognized importance of teacher professionalism, many schools still struggle to implement effective supervisory systems. The general problem faced by educational institutions is the gap between policy expectations and practical implementation. Principals are required to act as instructional leaders, yet they are often overwhelmed by administrative duties, limiting their capacity to conduct meaningful supervision. As a result, supervision may become procedural rather than developmental. Moreover, rapid educational changes—such as digital transformation and curriculum adjustments—demand continuous teacher adaptation, which cannot occur without structured professional support. Without systematic supervision management, efforts to enhance competence risk becoming fragmented and unsustainable. This condition creates disparities in teacher performance and ultimately affects student learning quality. Consequently, investigating how principals manage clinical supervision becomes crucial to understanding how professional competence can be strengthened in a consistent and context-sensitive manner.

In practice, clinical supervision has been implemented in many schools; however, its execution often varies in quality and consistency. After the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were required to redesign instructional strategies, integrate digital media, and respond to diverse student needs. Etiyaningsih et al. (2023) found that principal-led clinical supervision functioned as a strategic tool for supporting teachers during post-pandemic transitions. Nevertheless, field observations indicate that supervision is sometimes conducted irregularly, with limited follow-up and insufficient reflection. Teachers may perceive classroom observations as evaluative rather than developmental, generating anxiety or resistance. Furthermore, principals and teachers may hold differing interpretations of the objectives of clinical supervision, resulting in misaligned expectations (Nurcholiq, 2018). These phenomena suggest that the effectiveness

of clinical supervision depends not merely on its existence but on how it is systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated within a collaborative professional culture.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between clinical supervision and teacher professionalism from various perspectives. Lumbanbatu and Sembiring (2021) reported that clinical supervision contributed to improvements in teachers' professional competence, including the integration of technology in classroom instruction. Similarly, Hanafiah et al. (2022) demonstrated that structured supervision processes—ranging from planning and instrument development to reflection and follow-up—positively influenced teacher competence. Kartini and Susanti (2022) highlighted improvements in learning quality resulting from systematic supervision practices, while Salma (2022) described implementation stages, teacher perceptions, and supporting as well as inhibiting factors. In addition, Ikhwan and Rabbani (2024) emphasized the effectiveness of dialogic and supportive supervisory approaches in enhancing professionalism. Collectively, these studies confirm the significance of clinical supervision as a professional development strategy and underscore the role of principals in facilitating reflective teaching practices.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, several research gaps remain. First, many investigations focus primarily on outcomes rather than on the comprehensive management process of clinical supervision from the principal's perspective. The challenges. Therefore, a deeper investigation is necessary to dimensions of planning, organizing, implementing, controlling, and evaluating supervision as an integrated management cycle have not been explored in depth. Second, limited attention has been given to relational dynamics during supervision, such as trust-building, communication patterns, resistance, and emotional responses. While Etiyaningsih et al. (2023) discussed post-pandemic relevance, and Nurcholiq (2018) highlighted differences in understanding, there remains insufficient qualitative exploration of how principals strategically address these relational and managerial understand how clinical supervision management operates holistically and how it shapes teachers' professional competence in real school contexts.

This study offers novelty by positioning clinical supervision within the framework of educational management dimensions and relational leadership theory. Rather than merely assessing supervision outcomes, it explores how principals design supervision programs, align them with teachers' needs, foster collaborative reflection, and ensure sustainable follow-up. The state of the art lies in integrating managerial processes with interpersonal dynamics, recognizing that professional competence develops through structured systems and supportive relationships. By examining supervision as a cyclical and reflective

management practice, this study addresses the complexity of instructional leadership in contemporary schools. Furthermore, it contributes context-sensitive insights into how supervision practices adapt to diverse school cultures and resource conditions. This integrated perspective is important for developing a more comprehensive model of clinical supervision management that supports long-term teacher professional growth.

Based on the background above, the research problem centers on how principals manage clinical supervision and how this management influences teachers' professional competence. Specifically, the study investigates: (1) how principals plan clinical supervision to improve teachers' competence; (2) how they implement supervision processes in fostering professionalism; and (3) how they evaluate and follow up supervision activities. The underlying argument of this study is that clinical supervision enhances professional competence when it is managed systematically, collaboratively, and reflectively within clear educational management dimensions. If supervision is conducted as an integrated cycle—comprising needs-based planning, dialogic observation, constructive feedback, and sustainable follow-up—it is likely to strengthen teachers' instructional practices and professional identity. Therefore, this study contributes theoretically to instructional leadership discourse and practically to improving supervision management for sustainable educational quality.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design grounded in phenomenological inquiry to explore participants' lived experiences of clinical supervision management. The case study approach was selected because it enables in-depth, contextualized understanding of complex social phenomena within real-life settings (Fragkandreas, 2025; Viera, 2023). At the same time, the phenomenological perspective allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the principal's and teachers' experiences as primary informants (De Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Oluka, 2025). This design was considered appropriate because the study sought not only to describe supervisory procedures but also to interpret how clinical supervision management is perceived and experienced in relation to teachers' professional competence.

The research was conducted at a private junior high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia, selected purposively because it actively implements clinical supervision as part of its instructional leadership practices. The site was chosen due to its commitment to value-based education and the accessibility of participants who had directly experienced the supervision process. The participants consisted of one principal with four years of leadership experience and teachers with varying years of teaching experience and educational

backgrounds. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Ethical principles, including confidentiality and anonymity, were strictly maintained.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide flexibility while enabling in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences regarding supervision planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. The researcher established rapport to ensure emotional comfort and openness during interviews. Documentation, including supervision programs and related records, was used to corroborate interview findings and strengthen data credibility through technique triangulation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the condensation stage, relevant data were selected, focused, and categorized into themes related to supervision management and professional competence. Data were then organized into thematic narrative displays to identify patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified by re-examining field data and comparing sources to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Haq & Yasin, 2025; Tisdell et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Principal's Clinical Supervision Planning to Enhance Teachers' Professional Competence

To understand how clinical supervision planning was conducted by the principal in improving teachers' professional competence, the researcher conducted interviews with several informants directly involved in the clinical supervision process at the school. These interviews aimed to explore planning procedures, determination of supervision targets, program development, and teachers' readiness prior to the implementation of clinical supervision. The interview findings are presented below.

Table 1. Interview Excerpts on Clinical Supervision Planning

| Participant | Date of Interview | Key Statements on Clinical Supervision Planning |
|-------------|-------------------|--|
| SN | January 12, 2026 | Clinical supervision planning is conducted by developing annual and semester supervision programs, determining target teachers based on their needs, preparing observation instruments (teaching modules, methods, media, and assessment), and agreeing on the supervision schedule and focus with teachers. |

| | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| SE | January 13, 2026 | The principal communicates supervision plans through the school group. Teachers are encouraged to prepare learning tools such as lesson plans, syllabi, ice-breaking activities, instructional strategies, and evaluation plans to ensure effective supervision and readiness before classroom observation. |
| MH | January 13, 2026 | Clinical supervision aims to improve teaching quality and professionalism by establishing clear objectives, identifying supervision targets, planning appropriate schedules, and communicating supervision plans, goals, timing, and observation focus to reduce teacher anxiety and increase preparedness. |
| SR | January 13, 2026 | The principal conducts pre-observation meetings to discuss work programs, learning objectives, and expected student outcomes. Planning is supported by training activities that enhance teachers' enthusiasm and professional knowledge. |
| HL | January 12, 2026 | The initial stage involves checking teachers' readiness before observation, including teaching materials, modules, and student preparedness. The principal informs teachers that supervision will occur without specifying the exact time to encourage consistent instructional readiness. |

Based on the interview results, clinical supervision planning conducted by the principal demonstrates structured and needs-based managerial efforts. The principal develops clinical supervision programs systematically in annual and semester formats, ensuring that supervision is conducted in a planned and continuous manner rather than incidentally.

During the planning stage, the principal determines supervision targets based on teachers' individual needs and conditions, ensuring that clinical supervision is individualized and contextual. Additionally, the principal prepares observation instruments covering teaching modules, instructional methods, learning media, and assessment. These instruments indicate that clinical supervision focuses on enhancing teachers' pedagogical and professional competence.

Teachers reported that supervision planning was communicated through school communication channels and direct interaction. The principal encouraged teachers to prepare instructional tools comprehensively, including lesson plans, syllabi, instructional activities, and evaluation plans. This preparation had a positive impact by allowing teachers to prepare academically and psychologically prior to supervision.

Furthermore, supervision planning included pre-observation meetings where the principal discussed learning objectives, instructional programs, and expected student outcomes with teachers. This process demonstrates that clinical supervision is not solely evaluative but also developmental and supportive. Planning was further strengthened through training activities aimed at enhancing teachers' instructional knowledge and motivation.

Overall, clinical supervision planning was implemented systematically, communicatively, and participatively. The principal acted not only as a supervisor but also as a planner and professional mentor. This comprehensive planning served as a critical foundation for effective clinical supervision and contributed to improving teachers' professional competence.

Principal's Implementation of Clinical Supervision to Enhance Teachers' Professional Competence

To obtain a deeper understanding of the implementation of clinical supervision, the researcher conducted interviews with the principal and teachers focusing on the supervision process, challenges encountered, and strategies used to address these challenges. The findings are presented below.

Table 2. Interview Excerpts on the Implementation of Clinical Supervision

| Participant | Date of Interview | Key Statements on the Implementation of Clinical Supervision |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---|
| SN | January 12, 2026 | Implementation faces challenges such as limited time and supervision competence. These are addressed by developing structured schedules, delegating administrative tasks, integrating supervision into routine teaching, participating in principal training, learning coaching and mentoring practices, and collaborating with school supervisors. |
| SE | January 13, 2026 | Implementation does not encounter significant obstacles because teachers are supported with instructional tools, training, and socialization. Adequate preparation enhances teachers' understanding and classroom competence. |
| MH | January 13, 2026 | Challenges include scheduling conflicts, less relevant observation instruments, and limited principal availability. However, supervision supports teachers in evaluating materials, understanding student characteristics, and collaboratively adjusting teaching methods. |
| SR | January 13, 2026 | Challenges involve limited teaching resources, such as outdated textbooks. Teachers respond by utilizing IT-based learning media to improve instructional quality and professional competence. |
| HL | January 12, 2026 | Challenges include classroom management issues and differences in students' foundational abilities. Teachers address these by applying more effective strategies, allocating additional instructional time, and collaborating with the principal. |

The implementation of clinical supervision revealed dynamic challenges. The principal identified time constraints and supervision competence as primary barriers due to administrative responsibilities. To address these challenges, the principal implemented structured scheduling, delegated administrative tasks, and integrated supervision into regular instructional activities.

Additionally, the principal improved supervision competence through training programs, coaching and mentoring practices, and collaboration with school supervisors. These efforts demonstrate the principal's commitment to enhancing supervision effectiveness.

From the teachers' perspective, challenges included scheduling conflicts, less relevant observation instruments, limited instructional resources, and classroom conditions. Despite these challenges, clinical supervision positively influenced teachers' professional competence by encouraging reflection, instructional improvement, and innovation.

Teachers were motivated to evaluate instructional materials, adapt teaching strategies, and integrate technology into learning. This indicates that clinical supervision functions as an effective professional learning mechanism.

Overall, clinical supervision implementation was conducted despite structural and pedagogical challenges. Through adaptive and collaborative efforts between the principal and teachers, clinical supervision contributed to reflection, innovation, and professional competence development.

Evaluation and Follow-Up of Clinical Supervision in Improving Teachers' Professional Competence

To understand how clinical supervision evaluation and follow-up were conducted, the researcher interviewed participants regarding evaluation mechanisms, feedback processes, and follow-up strategies.

Table 3. Interview Excerpts on the Evaluation and Follow-up of Clinical Supervision

| Participant | Date of Interview | Key Statements on Evaluation and Follow-up |
|-------------|-------------------|--|
| SN | January 12, 2026 | Evaluation is conducted by comparing observation results before and after supervision, reviewing changes in teaching practices, and assessing follow-up implementation. The results are used to inform future supervision planning based on teachers' needs. |
| SE | January 13, 2026 | Evaluation is carried out through regular meetings to discuss teaching challenges. Follow-up includes developing future improvement plans, maintaining instructional strengths, and providing continuous guidance to teachers. |
| MH | January 13, 2026 | Evaluation involves classroom observation, student assessment, and collaborative discussions. Follow-up includes planning improvement strategies, providing support, monitoring progress, and conducting ongoing evaluation. |
| SR | January 13, 2026 | Evaluation follows structured stages: pre-observation, classroom observation, and post-observation evaluation. Follow-up includes reflective discussions, competency development, and instructional improvement efforts. |
| HL | January 12, 2026 | Evaluation includes constructive feedback and recommendations from the principal, motivating teachers to enhance lesson planning and teaching strategies. |

Clinical supervision evaluation was conducted systematically and continuously. The principal evaluated teaching practices by comparing pre- and post-supervision observations. This evaluation focused on both instructional processes and outcomes.

Teachers reported that evaluation was conducted through meetings, discussions, classroom observations, and student-related assessments. These activities helped teachers identify instructional weaknesses and engage in professional reflection.

Follow-up actions included collaborative planning, professional mentoring, resource provision, competency development, and progress monitoring. Constructive feedback served as a key motivator for instructional improvement.

Overall, clinical supervision evaluation and follow-up were implemented systematically, reflectively, and continuously. This process positioned clinical supervision as a strategic instrument for enhancing teachers' professional competence.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the principal's clinical supervision management demonstrates a coherent integration of planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up stages aimed at strengthening teachers' professional competence. This integrated approach aligns with the concept of clinical supervision as a professional assistance process grounded in classroom observation, reflective dialogue, and constructive feedback rather than mere administrative inspection (Lailiyah et al., 2025). The results confirm that supervision becomes meaningful when it is structured as a continuous developmental cycle. In this study, supervision was not treated as an isolated event but as a systematic managerial process embedded within instructional leadership practices. Such integration reinforces the view that effective supervision requires alignment between managerial functions and professional development goals.

At the planning stage, the principal developed annual and semester programs, identified supervision targets based on teachers' needs, prepared observation instruments, and conducted pre-observation communication. This reflects the pre-observation conference emphasized in clinical supervision theory, where objectives and focus areas are mutually agreed upon (Mursalin, 2022). Teacher involvement in determining supervision focus fostered openness and reduced anxiety, strengthening collaborative relationships. This finding supports Coffeng et al. (2023) and Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership in creating a supportive supervision climate. Moreover, the preparation of supervision instruments—

covering teaching modules, instructional methods, learning media, and assessment—demonstrates alignment with teachers' professional competency domains. Consistent with Hanafiah et al. (2022), needs-based supervision planning contributes significantly to improving instructional quality and ensuring supervision relevance.

During implementation, challenges such as time constraints and limited supervision competence emerged due to the principal's administrative workload. This condition corresponds with Cansoy et al. (2025) and Pargent et al. (2023) assertion that principals' complex responsibilities often hinder optimal supervision practices. However, adaptive strategies—including structured scheduling, delegation of administrative tasks, integration of supervision into routine instruction, and participation in coaching and mentoring training—reflect professional commitment to instructional leadership (Chiazor et al., 2025). From teachers' perspectives, additional challenges included scheduling conflicts, limited resources, and classroom diversity. Nevertheless, supervision encouraged reflective practice, instructional adjustment, and technology integration. These outcomes align with Edgar, Moroney, and Wilson (2023), who emphasized that clinical supervision fosters person-centred and reflective practice through supportive professional relationships, and with Ravalier et al. (2023), who highlighted the importance of reflective supervision in strengthening professional resilience, dialogue, and practitioner development.

Evaluation practices were conducted systematically through comparison of pre- and post-observation results, reflective meetings, and analysis of instructional changes. The focus extended beyond student outcomes to transformations in teaching practices, consistent with Yoon and Goddard (2023) and Kholifah et al. (2023), who emphasized that professional development and teacher self-efficacy play a crucial role in enhancing instructional effectiveness and overall instructional quality. Teachers perceived evaluation as developmental rather than judgmental, strengthening trust and professional responsibility. Constructive feedback from the principal motivated improvements in lesson planning and classroom strategies, reinforcing the findings of Zepeda et al. (2024) and Tahir and Fatima (2023), who highlighted that effective instructional leadership and principal-led professional learning initiatives significantly strengthen teachers' professional development and instructional practices.

Follow-up actions included needs-based supervision planning, competency development initiatives, mentoring, resource provision, and continuous monitoring. This sustained approach confirms that supervision was not episodic but cyclical and growth-oriented. As highlighted by Locatelli et al. (2024) and Amemasor et al. (2025), meaningful improvement requires a

structured, systematic, and continuously monitored process to ensure sustained impact and measurable professional growth. Overall, the study demonstrates that systematically managed and relationally grounded clinical supervision significantly enhances teachers' professional competence while strengthening the principal's role as an instructional leader.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the most significant finding lies in the integrative and reflective management of clinical supervision, which meaningfully enhances teachers' professional competence. The lesson learned is that clinical supervision becomes transformative when it is implemented as a continuous cycle of systematic planning, collaborative implementation, developmental evaluation, and sustainable follow-up. When teachers are actively involved in pre-observation communication and reflective dialogue, supervision shifts from a judgmental mechanism to a professional learning process. This reinforces the principal's role not merely as an administrative supervisor but as an instructional leader who cultivates trust, reflection, and professional growth. Academically, this study contributes to the field of educational management by integrating managerial dimensions with clinical supervision theory, offering a contextualized model that links leadership practices with teacher professional development.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single school context and a relatively small number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on qualitative data also emphasizes perceptions and experiences rather than measurable instructional outcomes. Future research is recommended to involve multiple school settings, apply mixed-method approaches, and examine the direct impact of clinical supervision on student learning achievement. Additionally, further studies could explore the development of technology-based or digital clinical supervision models to address contemporary educational challenges and expand supervisory effectiveness.

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