# Principal Management to Improve Elementary School Teacher Motivation

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**Abstract**
Principal management plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher motivation, which significantly influences instructional quality and student outcomes. However, limited research has systematically examined the specific mechanisms through which principal management practices affect teacher motivation in elementary school contexts. This qualitative case study was conducted at two elementary schools in West Java: SDN Subangjaya 2 (Sukabumi City) and SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya (Bandung City). Data collection employed participatory observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers, and comprehensive documentation analysis. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, guided by Deming's PDCA management theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The study revealed significant variations in management practices between the two schools across four key dimensions: planning, implementation, supervision, and follow-up activities. SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya demonstrated systematic management approaches with structured supervision, regular feedback, inclusive decision-making, and consistent recognition systems. In contrast, SDN Subangjaya 2 showed limited utilization of collaborative facilities, informal supervision, and inadequate performance recognition, leading to teacher dissatisfaction and desire for transfer. Effective principal management requires systematic implementation of the PDCA cycle integrated with understanding of teachers' motivational needs. The successful practices at SDN 191 created conditions addressing teachers' professional security, collaboration needs, appreciation, and growth opportunities simultaneously, demonstrating that implementation quality determines motivational outcomes rather than program design alone. These findings have important implications for principal training and educational policy development in elementary education settings.

## INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership and management have emerged as critical determinants of school effectiveness and student achievement across diverse educational contexts. The role of school principals is crucial to a school's success, as their actions significantly influence teachers' practices, school quality, and students' behavior and outcomes (Aravena & González, 2021). As the head of the school, principals are responsible for overseeing all school activities and performance, setting and monitoring educational goals, supporting teachers and students, managing daily operations, and delegating roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders within the school (Agasisti et al., 2020; Dhuey & Smith, 2018). This multifaceted responsibility positions principals as pivotal figures in the educational ecosystem, where their managerial competencies directly impact organizational effectiveness and teacher performance.

The belief that granting greater autonomy to school principals would enhance school efficiency has prompted many education systems to expand their responsibilities and managerial discretion (Örgütü, 2016). However, in the absence of adequate planning and institutional support, this increased autonomy can lead to unintended negative consequences, such as significant disparities in performance across schools (Di Liberto et al., 2015). While autonomy enables principals to positively influence educational quality, yielding benefits both economically and pedagogically, prior research

has emphasized that effective training is essential to develop the managerial competencies required for this role (Keddie et al., 2020; Louis et al., 2010). This tension between autonomy and accountability underscores the complexity of principal management in contemporary educational settings.

Teacher motivation represents a fundamental component in the educational process, significantly influencing instructional quality and student outcomes. Teacher motivation is theoretically ascribed a key role in achieving high instructional quality and subsequently in students' academic motivation, emotion, cognition, and achievement (Fives & Buehl, 2016; Lauermann & Butler, 2021; Watt & Richardson, 2014). The literature supports that teachers' motivation has a significant influence on students' success, as motivated teachers maintain a learner-interested environment that enhances intrinsic motivation and improves learners' performance (Engin, 2020; Tamášová et al., 2024). When teachers demonstrate positive intent to teach with passion and enthusiasm, their students respond positively, ultimately leading to enhanced outcomes (Amjad et al., 2025). However, empirical evidence reveals a more complex picture, with relationships between teacher motivation and student outcomes varying depending on specific aspects of motivation and instructional quality (Lauermann & Butler, 2021).

Previous research has predominantly focused on the association between principals' leadership styles and measures of school effectiveness, typically emphasizing student achievement as the primary indicator (Bloom et al., 2015; Coelli & Green, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Studies have consistently demonstrated that effective principal management contributes to improved teacher performance and educational quality. Rostini et al. (2022) highlighted the significance of principal management on teacher performance and learning quality, while Noorhapizah et al. (2023) established the influence of principal management and work climate on teacher performance through teacher work motivation. Furthermore, Alwi and Mumtahana (2023) explored principals' strategies in improving teacher performance quality in Islamic elementary schools, demonstrating the contextual nature of effective management practices.

Research on managerial competencies has shown that principals' effectiveness extends beyond traditional leadership approaches. Zhahira et al. (2022) examined managerial competencies of school principals in enhancing teacher performance, while Simanjuntak et al. (2024) investigated principal management in improving teacher work ethics in vocational schools. These studies collectively suggest that successful principal management requires a comprehensive understanding of both administrative functions and human resource development. Anjani and Dafit (2021) further emphasized the managerial role of principals in improving educational quality in elementary schools, highlighting the need for systematic approaches to school management.

Despite extensive research on leadership styles and teacher performance, significant gaps remain in understanding the specific mechanisms through which principal management influences teacher motivation in elementary school contexts. Most studies have adopted effectiveness perspectives without examining how efficiently schools convert available inputs into outcomes (Thanassoulis et al., 2016). Additionally, while the relationship between management practices and teacher performance has been established, the specific processes and strategies that principals employ to enhance teacher motivation require deeper investigation, particularly in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

The integration of theoretical frameworks such as Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding principal management effectiveness. However, limited research has systematically examined how these theories translate into practical management strategies within elementary school settings. Halomoan et al. (2025) recently explored principal management in enhancing educators' work motivation, while Hamka (2023) investigated the role of principals on teacher performance improvement in suburban schools, yet comprehensive studies integrating multiple theoretical perspectives remain scarce.

This research addresses the identified gaps by examining principal management practices through a systematic lens that combines theoretical rigor with practical application. The study aims to analyze the planning, implementation, inspection, and follow-up stages of principal management in improving teacher motivation at two contrasting elementary schools. By employing qualitative case study methodology and integrating Deming's PDCA management theory with Maslow's needs theory, this research provides insights into effective management practices and their contextual adaptations.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for educational administrators. The findings are expected to inform policy development regarding principal competency standards and provide actionable strategies for improving teacher motivation in elementary education. Furthermore, the comparative approach employed in this study allows for the identification of best practices while acknowledging the importance of contextual factors in management effectiveness, thereby contributing to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership and management in diverse settings.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of principal management processes in improving teacher motivation within authentic educational contexts. The case study methodology was selected for its capacity to reveal phenomena comprehensively and systematically within real-world settings, particularly when examining complex managerial dynamics and their contextual variations (Komara et al., 2022). This approach aligns with the research objectives of exploring the multifaceted nature of principal management practices and their impact on teacher motivation across different institutional environments.

The research was conducted at two purposively selected elementary schools: SDN Subangjaya 2 in Sukabumi City, West Java, and SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya in Bandung City, West Java. These schools were chosen based on their contrasting managerial contexts and approaches to teacher motivation, providing rich comparative data for analysis. The study participants comprised school principals and teachers from both institutions, selected through purposive sampling to ensure comprehensive representation of perspectives regarding management practices and motivational experiences. The principals served as key informants regarding management strategies, planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, while teachers provided insights into the effectiveness and impact of these management approaches on their professional motivation and performance.

Data collection employed multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage and triangulation of findings. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe management practices, teacher interactions, and organizational dynamics within the natural school environment. These observations focused on formal meetings, professional development sessions, daily administrative processes, and informal interactions between principals and teachers. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with both principals and teachers to explore detailed information regarding management planning, implementation strategies, supervision practices, and follow-up actions. The interview protocols were designed to capture perspectives on motivational factors, challenges encountered, and the effectiveness of various management approaches. Additionally, comprehensive documentation analysis was performed, examining relevant institutional documents including school strategic plans (RKT), meeting minutes, training attendance records, supervision reports, teacher development certificates, and policy implementation documents.

The research instruments were developed based on established theoretical frameworks, particularly Deming's PDCA management cycle and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Interview guides were structured to explore each stage of the management process while allowing flexibility for emergent themes. Observation protocols were designed to capture both formal management practices and informal organizational behaviors that influence teacher motivation. To ensure validity, the instruments underwent expert validation by educational management specialists and were pilot-tested

in similar educational contexts. Reliability was enhanced through the use of multiple data sources and systematic documentation of all data collection procedures.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved systematically organizing, summarizing, and selecting essential information relevant to the research focus, particularly regarding management planning, implementation, supervision, and follow-up activities (Sugiyono, 2023). During this process, irrelevant information was filtered out while preserving contextually significant details that illuminated the management-motivation relationship. Data display was accomplished through narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and comparative frameworks that facilitated pattern recognition and cross-case analysis between the two schools.

The verification process involved continuous validation of findings through member checking with participants, peer debriefing with colleagues, and triangulation across multiple data sources and collection methods. This iterative approach ensured that interpretations accurately reflected participants' experiences and institutional realities. The analysis was guided by the theoretical frameworks of PDCA management principles and Maslow's motivational hierarchy, allowing for systematic examination of management effectiveness while remaining open to emergent themes and unexpected findings. Throughout the analysis process, reflexivity was maintained to acknowledge researcher positionality and potential biases, ensuring that conclusions were grounded in empirical evidence rather than preconceived assumptions about effective management practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis of principal management practices in improving teacher motivation revealed significant variations between the two case study schools across four key management dimensions. The findings demonstrate distinct patterns in planning, implementation, supervision, and follow-up activities that directly influence teacher motivational outcomes.

The examination of management planning processes revealed that neither SDN Subangjaya 2 nor SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya had developed specific, formal programs explicitly designed to enhance teacher motivation. However, both institutions utilized learning communities (kombel) as their primary strategy for professional development and collaborative engagement. Interview data from principals at both schools indicated that while formal motivational programs were absent, the learning community approach served as an implicit framework for addressing teacher professional needs. As one principal stated, "*We don't have a specific motivation program, but through learning communities, teachers can share experiences and develop their skills together*." This finding suggests that informal approaches to motivation may be more prevalent than structured programs in elementary school contexts.

The implementation stage demonstrated the most pronounced differences between the two schools. At SDN Subangjaya 2, observational data revealed limited utilization of available collaborative facilities and insufficient feedback mechanisms for teacher performance. Teachers reported feeling disconnected from decision-making processes, with one teacher noting, "*We have the facilities, but we don't really use them effectively for collaboration*." Documentation analysis showed irregular meeting schedules and minimal follow-through on collaborative initiatives. Conversely, SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya exhibited active collaboration practices with regular feedback sessions and inclusive decision-making processes. Teachers at this school expressed higher satisfaction levels, with participants commenting on the "*supportive environment where our voices are heard and valued*." Meeting minutes from SDN 191 documented consistent monthly collaborative sessions with structured agendas and clear action items.

Supervision practices revealed contrasting approaches between the institutions. SDN Subangjaya 2 demonstrated informal supervision characterized by personal approaches that, while well-intentioned, lacked systematic structure. Interview data indicated that while teachers appreciated the principal's openness, they desired more professional and consistent supervisory practices. One teacher

stated, "*The principal is approachable, but we need more structured guidance*." Documentation showed irregular supervision schedules and limited formal evaluation procedures. In contrast, SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya implemented structured supervision with regular meetings, rule-based conflict resolution, and systematic evaluation procedures. Teachers reported greater trust in management decisions and clarity regarding expectations and performance standards.

Follow-up activities demonstrated varying effectiveness in addressing teacher developmental needs. Both schools provided competency development opportunities through training and seminars, but the quality and consistency of support differed significantly. SDN Subangjaya 2 showed limited reward systems and inconsistent recognition of teacher achievements, while SDN 191 provided formal certificates, public acknowledgment of accomplishments, and tangible support for professional growth. Documentation analysis revealed that SDN 191 maintained comprehensive records of teacher development activities and achievement recognition, whereas SDN Subangjaya 2 had incomplete documentation of follow-up activities.

The identification of management obstacles revealed institutional-specific challenges that impacted teacher motivation differently. SDN Subangjaya 2 faced issues including uneven task distribution, inadequate performance recognition, limited professional development opportunities, and an unconducive work environment. Teachers expressed concerns about workload equity and desire for transfer due to environmental factors. Conversely, SDN 191 demonstrated effective management of these potential obstacles through fair task distribution, consistent recognition systems, adequate professional development support, and maintenance of a positive work climate.

## Discussion

The findings reveal significant implications for understanding how principal management practices influence teacher motivation in elementary school contexts. The absence of formal motivation programs at both schools aligns with previous research suggesting that many educational institutions rely on informal approaches rather than structured interventions (Anjani & Dafit, 2021). However, the differential effectiveness of learning communities between the two schools supports the argument that implementation quality, rather than program design alone, determines motivational outcomes.

The stark contrast in implementation effectiveness between SDN Subangjaya 2 and SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya demonstrates the critical importance of systematic management approaches. This finding corroborates Rostini et al. (2022), who emphasized that principal management significantly impacts teacher performance and learning quality. The successful implementation at SDN 191 reflects the principles articulated by Agasisti et al. (2020) regarding principals' responsibility for setting educational goals, supporting teachers, and managing daily operations effectively. The school's systematic approach to collaboration and feedback aligns with research indicating that principals' actions significantly influence teachers' practices and school quality (Aravena & González, 2021).

The differential supervision practices observed between the schools provide empirical support for the theoretical framework combining Deming's PDCA cycle with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. SDN 191's structured supervision approach demonstrates effective implementation of the "Check" phase of the PDCA cycle, while simultaneously addressing teachers' needs for security, appreciation, and self-actualization as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy. This integration supports Noorhapizah et al. (2023), who found that principal management and work climate influence teacher performance through teacher work motivation. The systematic supervision at SDN 191 created conditions that foster both professional security and opportunities for growth, addressing multiple levels of Maslow's hierarchy simultaneously.

The follow-up practices reveal important insights into the sustainability of motivational interventions. SDN 191's comprehensive approach to recognition and professional development reflects the multifaceted nature of teacher motivation described by Fives and Buehl (2016) and Lauermann and Butler (2021). The school's systematic documentation and consistent recognition

practices demonstrate understanding that teacher motivation requires ongoing attention rather than isolated interventions. This finding supports Tamášová et al. (2024), who argued that maintaining a learner-interested environment requires continuous effort to enhance intrinsic motivation and performance.

The obstacles identified at SDN Subangjaya 2 illustrate the consequences of inadequate managerial practices. The issues of uneven task distribution, insufficient recognition, and unconducive work environment directly contradict the principles of effective management outlined by Bloom et al. (2015) and Di Liberto et al. (2015). These findings support the concern that increased principal autonomy, without adequate training and institutional support, can lead to negative consequences and performance disparities. The teachers' expressed desire for transfer reflects the serious impact that poor management can have on educator retention and satisfaction.

The research findings provide empirical support for the theoretical integration of management practices with motivational theory. The successful practices at SDN 191 demonstrate how systematic implementation of the PDCA cycle can address Maslow's hierarchy of needs in educational contexts. The school's approach to planning (developing clear collaborative structures), doing (implementing regular feedback and inclusive decision-making), checking (systematic supervision and evaluation), and acting (consistent follow-up and recognition) created conditions that supported teachers' physiological needs (professional security), social needs (collaboration and belonging), esteem needs (recognition and appreciation), and self-actualization needs (professional growth and development).

These findings have important implications for principal training and educational policy development. The contrast between the two schools suggests that effective management requires more than good intentions; it demands systematic approaches, consistent implementation, and ongoing evaluation. The research supports the argument made by Keddie et al. (2020) and Louis et al. (2010) that effective training is essential to develop the managerial competencies required for principal effectiveness. Furthermore, the findings align with Zhahira et al. (2022) regarding the importance of managerial competencies in enhancing teacher performance, while extending this understanding to include specific mechanisms through which these competencies influence teacher motivation.

The study's contribution to understanding the relationship between teacher motivation and instructional quality supports the theoretical assertions of Watt and Richardson (2014) regarding teacher motivation's role in achieving high instructional quality. The observable differences in teacher satisfaction and engagement between the two schools provide concrete evidence of how management practices translate into motivational outcomes that potentially influence student achievement, supporting the chain of effects described by Engin (2020) and Amjad et al. (2025).

## CONCLUSION

This comparative case study demonstrates that principal management practices significantly influence teacher motivation through systematic implementation of planning, supervision, and follow-up activities rather than through formal motivational programs. The research reveals that effective management requires consistent application of Deming's PDCA cycle integrated with understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as evidenced by the contrasting outcomes between SDN Subangjaya 2 and SDN 191 Babakan Surabaya. The successful practices at SDN 191, including structured supervision, regular feedback, inclusive decision-making, and systematic recognition, created conditions that addressed teachers' professional security, collaboration needs, appreciation, and growth opportunities simultaneously.

The study contributes to educational management literature by providing empirical evidence for the theoretical integration of systematic management cycles with motivational theory in elementary school contexts. This research extends previous findings by demonstrating specific mechanisms through which managerial practices translate into teacher motivational outcomes, filling identified gaps in understanding the relationship between principal autonomy, management quality, and

educational effectiveness. The findings support the argument that management effectiveness depends on implementation quality and contextual adaptation rather than universal approaches.

The implications for educational practice include the need for comprehensive principal training programs that emphasize systematic management approaches, development of institutional support systems for consistent implementation of motivational strategies, and establishment of evaluation frameworks that assess both management processes and motivational outcomes. Policy implications suggest the importance of balancing principal autonomy with adequate professional development and institutional support to prevent performance disparities between schools.

The study's limitations include its focus on two schools within a specific regional context, which may limit generalizability to diverse educational systems and cultural contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures management practices at a specific time point without examining long-term developmental patterns or sustainability of motivational interventions.

Future research should investigate longitudinal effects of systematic management practices on teacher motivation and student outcomes, explore the role of cultural and socioeconomic factors in determining management effectiveness, and examine the development of management competencies through intervention studies. Additionally, research incorporating student achievement data and teacher retention rates would provide valuable insights into the broader impacts of management-motivation relationships in educational settings.

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