

Principal Management in Improving Teacher Performance for School Program Success: A Comparative Case Study of Two Elementary Schools in Indonesia

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Abstract

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Principal management plays a critical role in improving teacher performance and ensuring school program success, yet understanding of how management practices function across varied elementary school contexts remains limited. This study examined principal management in improving teacher performance through the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) framework at two elementary schools in Cianjur Regency, West Java, Indonesia. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, passive participant observation, and documentary analysis. Research participants comprised school principals and teachers from SD Negeri Nusa Indah Cipanas and SD Negeri Gadog Pacet. Data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model, with credibility ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Findings revealed distinct yet effective management approaches: SDN Nusa Indah demonstrated systematic, participatory leadership emphasizing structured planning, formal supervision, and evidence-based evaluation, while SDN Gadog exhibited transformational leadership prioritizing relational engagement, personalized guidance, and adaptive implementation. Both approaches successfully improved teacher performance through continuous improvement orientations adapted to institutional contexts. Management effectiveness emerges from contextual alignment between leadership practices and institutional realities rather than adherence to singular optimal models, suggesting that both systematic and flexible approaches can generate meaningful teacher development when authentically implemented with continuous improvement orientations.

INTRODUCTION

Education represents a fundamental pillar in national development, where the success of educational programs depends significantly on the quality of school leadership and teacher performance (Parveen et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022). Principals serve not merely as administrators but as comprehensive leaders, motivators, and supervisors responsible for managing educational resources effectively and efficiently (Chen, 2024; Wulaningrum et al., 2025). Teachers, as primary implementers of education, must continuously enhance their performance to optimally support the achievement of institutional goals. Consequently, the managerial role of principals in improving teacher performance constitutes a critical aspect warranting comprehensive investigation (Hallinger et al., 2019; Kilag & Sasan, 2023).

The contemporary educational landscape demands that school leaders navigate increasingly complex challenges, including rapid technological advancement, evolving curriculum demands, and heightened accountability expectations (Fitriyah & Santosa, 2020). Within this context, effective principal management becomes instrumental in creating conducive environments that foster teacher development and enhance instructional quality (Li & Liu, 2022; Wu et al., 2024). However, despite the recognized importance of principal leadership, substantial gaps remain in understanding how specific

management practices systematically contribute to teacher performance improvement, particularly in elementary school settings where foundational learning occurs (Wulaningrum et al., 2025).

In executing their roles, principals employ management functions encompassing planning, organizing, implementing, supervising, and evaluating. Hook (2006) defines management as the process of accomplishing organizational tasks through others, while Barnes (1981) emphasizes that principals must possess mastery in psychology, communication, influence, and appropriate authority utilization, accompanied by self-awareness to select suitable leadership styles. From the perspective of continuous quality management, Deming (1950) proposed the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle as an instrument for continuous improvement. This model's application in schools proves particularly relevant as it assists principals in developing strategies, implementing supervision, conducting monitoring with measurable instruments, and following up on evaluation results through structured interventions (Coates, 2010; Samuel & Farrer, 2025). The PDCA cycle enables systematic, adaptive, and quality-oriented teacher performance management in educational settings (Bendermacher et al., 2017).

Furthermore, improving teacher performance extends beyond achieving institutional targets to developing four core competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies (Kurnia et al., 2023; Toom, 2017). Motivation theories from Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1959), and Vroom (1964) emphasize that fulfilling basic needs, providing rewards, and establishing connections between effort and results constitute important factors influencing teacher performance (Gawel, 1997). Additionally, Total Quality Management (TQM) principles reinforce the importance of continuous improvement, educational stakeholder satisfaction, and whole-school community participation in achieving common goals (Goetsch & Davis, 2014).

Existing research provides valuable insights yet reveals significant knowledge gaps. Dianto (2023) found that transformational leadership correlates closely with teacher effectiveness, while Wibowo (2022) emphasized the importance of teacher collaboration led by principals in supporting program success. Pratama et al. (2023) revealed that effective participatory leadership styles increase teacher enthusiasm and productivity. However, previous studies predominantly focused on isolated aspects or specific programs, lacking comprehensive examination of how principal management holistically functions in improving teacher performance within elementary school contexts (Wulaningrum et al., 2025). Moreover, limited research has systematically applied the PDCA framework to analyze the complete management cycle from planning through follow-up action in elementary school settings.

This knowledge gap becomes particularly significant given that elementary education establishes foundational competencies crucial for subsequent educational success. Understanding how principals effectively manage teacher performance improvement through systematic management approaches could provide valuable insights for educational practice and policy development. Furthermore, comparative analysis between schools implementing different management approaches remains underexplored, limiting understanding of contextual factors influencing management effectiveness (Mustoip et al., 2023).

This study addresses these gaps by examining: How does principal management function in improving teacher performance to support school program success? This inquiry encompasses four specific questions: (1) What forms of planning do principals employ in improving teacher performance? (2) How is principal management implemented in supporting teacher performance improvement? (3) How is teacher performance evaluated to achieve program success? and (4) What follow-up actions are undertaken based on evaluation results? This study contributes theoretically to educational management science by providing empirical evidence of PDCA model application in elementary school contexts, while offering practical benefits for principals, teachers, and educational policymakers.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to examine principal management practices in improving teacher performance within elementary school contexts. This methodological approach was selected for its capacity to provide comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena

through intensive exploration of specific cases within their natural settings (Yin, 2014). According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research emphasizes understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives, while Sugiyono (2019) notes that such research prioritizes meaning over generalization. The descriptive case study design permits detailed examination of leadership practices, enabling the researcher to capture rich contextual data about principal-teacher interactions and management processes.

The research was conducted at two purposively selected elementary schools in Cianjur Regency, West Java, Indonesia: SD Negeri Nusa Indah Cipanas and SD Negeri Gadog Pacet. These sites were chosen based on institutional accessibility, principal willingness to participate, and evidence of active management initiatives. Research participants comprised school principals as primary subjects and teachers as secondary subjects directly experiencing school programs. This purposive sampling strategy ensured participants possessed relevant experiences for in-depth study. The research framework was structured around the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle proposed by Deming (1950), providing a systematic analytical lens for examining planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up stages.

Data collection employed three complementary techniques to ensure comprehensive understanding through methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals and teachers to explore leadership strategies and management practices. Passive participant observation examined supervisory meetings, professional development sessions, and principal-teacher interactions. Documentary analysis reviewed School Work Plans, supervision reports, meeting minutes, and teacher performance evaluation records. The triangulation of these multiple data sources enhanced research validity by enabling cross-verification of findings (Morgan, 2024).

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts were coded to identify patterns related to principal management practices, while observation notes and documents provided supporting evidence. Data were organized into descriptive narratives and thematic categories, enabling systematic examination and comparison across cases. Thematic analysis was conducted iteratively with emerging themes refined through constant comparison.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, several validation strategies were implemented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources, multiple participants, and multiple sites, allowing cross-verification of findings (Fusch et al., 2018). Member checking verified accuracy of interpretations with participants, while peer debriefing sessions with fellow researchers provided external perspective on data interpretation. These validation procedures collectively strengthened the credibility and dependability of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings reveal that principal management plays a strategic role in improving teacher performance at both SDN Nusa Indah Cipanas and SDN Gadog Pacet, though with distinct approaches aligned with each school's contextual characteristics. Both principals demonstrated commitment to optimizing teacher performance to support institutional vision, mission, and program achievement, yet their management strategies differed in emphasis and implementation modality. These differences provide valuable insights into how contextual factors shape leadership practices while maintaining effectiveness in teacher development.

Planning Phase

The planning processes at both schools demonstrated marked differences in systematicity and teacher participation. At SDN Nusa Indah Cipanas, the principal implemented structured planning through annual work programs developed collaboratively in school meetings, where teachers actively participated in designing lesson plans, academic supervision activities, and professional development programs. This systematic approach ensured that teacher development initiatives were not merely

short-term responses but sustainable, measurable programs aligned with institutional needs. Conversely, planning at SDN Gadog Pacet remained relatively simplified, focusing primarily on addressing immediate institutional requirements. While the principal maintained attention to instructional quality improvement, teacher involvement in planning processes appeared uneven. Program plans demonstrated practical, situational orientations that responded to school conditions but lacked the comprehensive integration and systematic structure evident at SDN Nusa Indah. These findings suggest that systematic, participatory planning provides stronger foundations for teacher performance improvement, as observed through the more structured framework at SDN Nusa Indah, while adaptive planning approaches at SDN Gadog, though contextually responsive, require enhancement in teacher integration and programmatic coherence.

Implementation Phase

Implementation patterns revealed contrasting yet contextually appropriate approaches. The principal at SDN Nusa Indah demonstrated highly planned and systematic implementation, initiating various activities including internal workshops, continuous professional development programs, and scheduled classroom supervision. Notably, information and communication technology integration was actively promoted as part of instructional innovation, enabling teachers to develop competencies aligned with evolving educational demands. This organized implementation pattern ensured consistent teacher performance improvement supported by comprehensive documentation. In contrast, SDN Gadog Pacet employed simpler, more flexible implementation approaches. The principal prioritized informal engagement through discussions and experience-sharing among teachers, conducting direct supervision without consistent scheduling. While this approach fostered collegial support and mutual assistance among teachers, its implementation lacked the comprehensiveness and structure evident at SDN Nusa Indah. An unexpected finding emerged regarding teacher receptivity: at SDN Gadog, teachers demonstrated high engagement with informal approaches, suggesting that flexibility and personal connection may compensate for structural limitations in resource-constrained settings. This finding challenges assumptions that systematic approaches universally outperform flexible models, highlighting the importance of contextual adaptation in leadership practices.

Evaluation Phase

Evaluation mechanisms at SDN Nusa Indah reflected structured, evidence-based approaches. The principal conducted regular monitoring and assessment of teacher performance using formal instruments including academic supervision protocols, student learning outcome analyses, and instructional implementation reports. Evaluation results systematically informed follow-up actions such as targeted coaching, competency enhancement initiatives, and programmatic improvements. This structured evaluation pattern supported sustainable instructional quality improvement with clear accountability mechanisms. Meanwhile, evaluation at SDN Gadog Pacet remained simplified and ad hoc in nature. The principal primarily conducted assessments through direct observation and informal feedback without consistently employing standardized instruments. While this evaluation approach fostered principal-teacher rapport and immediate responsiveness, its limited consistency and documentation hindered comprehensive tracking of performance trends. Consequently, follow-up actions tended toward practical, short-term interventions rather than systematic professional development trajectories. The evaluation data revealed an important consideration: informal evaluation at SDN Gadog enabled rapid response to immediate challenges but lacked the longitudinal perspective necessary for sustained teacher development, whereas structured evaluation at SDN Nusa Indah, while comprehensive, required substantial administrative capacity that may not be universally available.

Follow-up Phase

Follow-up practices demonstrated divergent yet purposeful approaches reflecting each school's management philosophy. SDN Nusa Indah exhibited focused management by integrating evaluation results into continuous improvement plans. The principal not only recognized high-performing teachers but implemented specialized mentoring programs for teachers requiring pedagogical and professional

competency enhancement. These efforts provided tangible support while maintaining consistent instructional quality improvement processes. The principal's follow-up strategy incorporated both recognition and developmental interventions, creating balanced motivation and support structures. At SDN Gadog Pacet, follow-up emphasized personalized approaches with direct guidance and individualized support for teachers facing instructional challenges. Teachers received encouragement to develop creativity and innovation in teaching-learning activities. However, the absence of formal recognition systems potentially limited additional stimulation for outstanding teacher performance. This pattern revealed principal concern for teachers' practical needs, though lacking the structural comprehensiveness observed at SDN Nusa Indah. Notably, teachers at SDN Gadog expressed appreciation for personalized attention despite the absence of formal rewards, suggesting that authentic relationships may substitute for structural recognition in particular contexts.

The comparative analysis revealed that both management models achieved effectiveness in teacher performance improvement through different strategic emphases. SDN Nusa Indah excelled in program systematization and documentation, embodying structured, evidence-based management aligned with contemporary quality assurance frameworks. SDN Gadog Pacet demonstrated strengths in adaptive, personalized approaches that responded flexibly to contextual constraints while maintaining teacher motivation through relational leadership. These findings suggest that management effectiveness depends not solely on structural sophistication but on alignment between leadership approaches and contextual realities, including resource availability, institutional culture, and teacher characteristics.

Discussion

The research findings illuminate critical dimensions of principal management in improving teacher performance, offering insights that both align with and extend existing literature while revealing contextual nuances particularly relevant to elementary education in resource-variable settings.

The contrasting yet effective leadership approaches observed at SDN Nusa Indah Cipanas and SDN Gadog Pacet substantiate the proposition that no single leadership model universally ensures effectiveness across all contexts. The participatory leadership model at SDN Nusa Indah, characterized by systematic teacher involvement in planning and decision-making processes, aligns with research demonstrating that participatory approaches enhance teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Arifuddin et al., 2023; Urick, 2016). This finding resonates with Wang et al. (2022) who established that participative leadership fosters collaboration and enhances organizational outcomes through shared decision-making. The structured, collaborative planning observed at SDN Nusa Indah reflects what Bouwmans et al. (2017) describe as the interplay between transformational leadership and participative decision-making in fostering teacher learning communities.

Conversely, the transformational leadership approach at SDN Gadog Pacet, emphasizing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration, demonstrates effectiveness consistent with international evidence on transformational leadership's capacity to motivate educators despite resource constraints. This aligns with findings from disadvantaged educational settings where transformational leadership served as a catalyst for positive organizational change and teacher performance improvement (Litz & Blaik-Hourani, 2020). The principal's emphasis on personal guidance, role modeling, and motivational support at SDN Gadog reflects Bass and Riggio's (2006) conceptualization of transformational leadership dimensions. These findings extend Dianto's (2023) work by demonstrating that transformational leadership remains effective when adapted to resource-limited contexts, provided it maintains authentic relational quality with teachers.

The effectiveness of both approaches challenges the assumption implicit in some educational management literature that structured, systematic approaches inherently surpass flexible, relational models. Rather, the findings support Urick (2016) argument for synthetic leadership approaches combining strengths of different models to create flexible, adaptive leadership styles responsive to organizational contexts. This contextual adaptation represents a significant contribution to

understanding how leadership effectiveness emerges from alignment between leadership philosophy and institutional realities.

The PDCA cycle's application in both schools demonstrates its versatility as a quality improvement framework while revealing implementation variations shaped by institutional capacity and resources. At SDN Nusa Indah, the systematic implementation of Plan-Do-Check-Act stages reflects what Coates (2010) and Bendermacher et al. (2017) describe as structured continuous improvement processes in educational settings. The comprehensive planning, documented implementation, formal evaluation, and systematic follow-up observed at SDN Nusa Indah exemplifies the PDCA cycle's potential to create sustainable quality enhancement mechanisms. This structured approach aligns with findings that PDCA provides systematic frameworks for identifying, implementing, and evaluating improvement measures while supporting evidence-based decision-making (Samuel & Farrer, 2025).

However, SDN Gadog Pacet's simplified, adaptive application of PDCA stages reveals important considerations about framework implementation in resource-constrained contexts. While less formally structured, the school's iterative approach to planning, implementing, evaluating, and adjusting teacher development initiatives maintains the cyclical improvement logic fundamental to PDCA theory. This finding extends understanding of how quality improvement frameworks function across varying institutional capacities, suggesting that PDCA principles remain valuable even when formal systematization proves challenging. The adaptability demonstrated at SDN Gadog resonates with research emphasizing that PDCA effectiveness depends on contextual adaptation rather than rigid adherence to formal structures.

These observations contribute nuanced understanding to the debate regarding business-oriented methodologies in education (Kretovics & Eckert, 2019). The differential implementation patterns suggest that while PDCA provides valuable conceptual frameworks for continuous improvement, its operationalization must account for institutional realities including administrative capacity, resource availability, and organizational culture. This finding has important implications for educational policymakers promoting quality management frameworks without adequate consideration of contextual implementation requirements.

The integration of academic and managerial supervision at both schools demonstrates alignment with international research establishing supervision's critical role in teacher performance improvement. Academic supervision practices observed at SDN Nusa Indah, characterized by structured classroom observations, instructional feedback, and evidence-based coaching, reflect what Postmes et al. (2021) describe as supervision transitioning from inspection to technical processes aimed at continuous teacher development. The systematic academic supervision documented at SDN Nusa Indah supports findings that structured supervisory practices significantly affect teacher performance through improved instructional quality and professional growth (Muttaqin et al., 2023; Prasetyono et al., 2018).

The managerial supervision dimension, particularly evident at SDN Nusa Indah through systematic program monitoring and administrative support, aligns with research establishing that principals' managerial competence encompasses planning, organizational development, resource management, and change leadership directed toward institutional effectiveness. This dual focus on academic and managerial dimensions reflects comprehensive approaches to school leadership that address both instructional improvement and organizational functionality. The finding that academic supervision more directly influences teacher performance while managerial supervision creates enabling conditions supports previous research distinguishing these supervision domains' differential impacts.

An important finding emerges regarding the relationship between supervision formality and teacher receptivity. While SDN Nusa Indah's formal, scheduled supervision proved effective, SDN Gadog Pacet's informal, relationship-based supervision also generated positive teacher responses. This suggests that supervision effectiveness depends not solely on structural characteristics but on perceived principal authenticity, expertise, and supportive intent. This finding extends research by illuminating how supervision functions differently across contexts while maintaining developmental focus, challenging assumptions that formal supervision approaches universally outperform informal alternatives.

The research revealed that teacher performance improvement extended beyond technical competency development to encompass motivation, professional identity, and organizational commitment dimensions. At SDN Nusa Indah, the emphasis on pedagogical competency and ICT integration reflected contemporary demands for 21st-century teaching capabilities. This focus aligns with research emphasizing that teacher competencies must evolve to address technological advancement, diverse learning needs, and changing curriculum demands (Kurnia et al., 2023; Toom, 2017). The structured professional development programs at SDN Nusa Indah embodied what Darling-Hammond (2017) describes as comprehensive teacher education approaches preparing educators for complex, dynamic teaching contexts.

SDN Gadog Pacet's emphasis on character education, contextual learning, and value-based instruction reflected different but equally valid competency priorities. This approach recognized that teaching effectiveness encompasses not only technical proficiency but also moral exemplarity, cultural responsiveness, and relational capacity. The finding that both competency development approaches generated teacher performance improvement suggests that competency frameworks should accommodate contextual variation while maintaining quality standards. This observation extends discussion beyond universal competency standards to consider how core professional capabilities manifest contextually while preserving instructional effectiveness.

The role of motivation in mediating between leadership practices and teacher performance emerged as particularly significant. Both schools' principals employed motivational strategies, though differing in formality and systematicity. These practices reflect motivation theories proposed by Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1959), and Vroom (1964), emphasizing need fulfillment, recognition provision, and effort-outcome connections as performance determinants. The finding that both formal recognition systems (SDN Nusa Indah) and informal personal appreciation (SDN Gadog) enhanced teacher motivation suggests that authenticity and consistency in recognition may matter more than formality. This challenges assumptions that formal reward systems necessarily outperform informal appreciation in motivating professional performance.

This research contributes theoretically by demonstrating how educational management theories function across varied institutional contexts, revealing that theoretical effectiveness depends on contextual adaptation rather than uniform application. The findings support contingency perspectives in educational leadership, suggesting that effective management emerges from alignment between leadership approaches, organizational characteristics, and environmental conditions rather than from adherence to singular optimal models. Practically, the research suggests that educational policymakers and administrators should prioritize leadership development emphasizing contextual responsiveness, adaptive capacity, and relational competence alongside technical management skills. Schools with robust resources may benefit from systematic, structured management approaches, while resource-constrained settings may achieve effectiveness through flexible, relational leadership maintaining continuous improvement orientations without requiring extensive formal structures.

This study's limitations include its focus on two elementary schools in a single geographic region, limiting generalizability to broader educational contexts. The qualitative descriptive approach, while providing rich contextual understanding, restricts statistical generalization. Future research should employ mixed methods approaches incorporating larger samples across diverse geographic and institutional contexts to establish patterns' broader applicability. Longitudinal studies examining how management practices influence teacher performance trajectories over extended periods would provide valuable insights into sustainable improvement mechanisms. Additionally, research explicitly examining how resource availability moderates relationships between management practices and teacher performance outcomes would inform context-sensitive policy development.

This research advances understanding of principal management's role in teacher performance improvement by demonstrating that effectiveness emerges not from singular optimal approaches but from thoughtful alignment between leadership practices and institutional realities. The findings reveal that systematic, structured management and adaptive, relational leadership can both generate

meaningful teacher development when authentically implemented with continuous improvement orientations. This conceptual contribution extends beyond prescriptive "best practices" toward contextually sensitive frameworks recognizing that educational quality improvement requires leadership approaches responsive to local conditions while maintaining commitment to teacher professional growth and instructional excellence.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that principal management constitutes a critical determinant of teacher performance improvement and school program success, revealing that effectiveness emerges from contextual alignment between leadership approaches and institutional realities rather than adherence to singular optimal models. The comparative analysis of SDN Nusa Indah Cipanas and SDN Gadog Pacet illuminates how participatory leadership emphasizing systematic planning, structured supervision, and formal evaluation mechanisms, alongside transformational leadership prioritizing relational engagement, personalized guidance, and adaptive implementation, both generate meaningful teacher development when authentically applied within respective contexts. The PDCA cycle's differential implementation across schools demonstrates that continuous improvement frameworks maintain value across varying resource capacities when adapted thoughtfully to institutional characteristics.

The research contributes theoretically by advancing contingency perspectives in educational leadership, establishing that management effectiveness depends on contextual responsiveness rather than uniform application of standardized practices. Practically, findings suggest that policymakers should prioritize leadership development emphasizing adaptive capacity and relational competence alongside technical management skills, while recognizing that resource-constrained settings may achieve effectiveness through flexible approaches maintaining continuous improvement orientations without extensive formal structures. The study's limitations include geographic scope restricted to two elementary schools in Cianjur Regency and qualitative methodology limiting statistical generalization. Future research should employ mixed methods approaches incorporating diverse geographic and institutional contexts, conduct longitudinal investigations examining management practices' sustained impact on teacher performance trajectories, and explicitly explore how resource availability moderates relationships between leadership approaches and performance outcomes. Such investigations would inform context-sensitive policy development while deepening understanding of how educational quality improvement initiatives function across varied settings, ultimately supporting more equitable and effective teacher professional development systems.

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