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## The leadership and supervision role of the principal in a public junior high school in Indonesia

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### Abstract

In the study reported on here we examined the supervision practices of school principals in enhancing teaching and learning at SMPN 1 State Junior High School in Limboto, Indonesia, following the implementation of the decentralised education system. Guided by the instructional leadership framework – which emphasises the principal’s role in setting clear academic goals, managing the instructional programme, and fostering a positive learning climate – we employed a qualitative research approach within a naturalistic paradigm to provide an in-depth analysis of the principal’s role in instructional supervision. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The study participants included the school principal, vice principals, teachers, supervisory lecturers, school workers, and community members – selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in the school’s supervision process. The findings reveal that the school principal plays a critical role in teacher professional development through structured activities such as mentorship, classroom observations, and workshops aimed at improving pedagogical skills. Teachers acknowledged that formal and informal interpersonal relations significantly contributed to a collaborative and supportive work environment. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of evaluation mechanisms, with periodic assessment used to identify skill gaps and implement targeted professional development initiatives. We concluded that effective instructional leadership is essential for enhancing teaching quality, with supervision practices that balance guidance, collaboration, and evaluation proving most effective. It is recommended that school administrators integrate teacher feedback into supervisory frameworks, while policymakers refine guidelines for instructional supervision to ensure sustainable improvements in educational practice. Future research could explore the perspectives of students and other stakeholders to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of school leadership on learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** educational evaluation; instructional supervision; qualitative research; school leadership; teacher professional development

### Introduction

Education systems worldwide operate within either centralised or decentralised frameworks (Bhatta, 2024; Greany, 2022). In a centralised education system, the central government holds authority over key aspects such as school infrastructure, curriculum design, student enrolment, textbook selection, teaching methodologies, and overall policy implementation (Nasution, 2017; Nuraini, Riadi, Umanailo, Rusdi, Badu, Suryani, Irsan, Ismail, Pulhehe & Hentihu, 2019). School principals and teachers primarily function as executors of these centrally determined policies (Zeinabadi, Kouhsari & Gurr 2023). However, in a decentralised education system, authority is distributed to regional and local governments, allowing schools greater autonomy in decision-making and management (Nasution, 2017; Shaturaev, 2021). This shift necessitates a more proactive role for school leaders, particularly in supervision and instructional leadership (Gessler & Ashmawy, 2016; Lee & Chiu, 2017; Printy & Liu, 2021).

The success of any education system is closely linked to the quality of its teachers, which in turn is influenced by instructional leadership tenets such as effective supervision and professional guidance. As instructional leaders, school principals play a crucial role in overseeing and supporting teachers’ professional development (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Through systematic supervision, constructive feedback, and targeted mentoring, principals encourage teachers to engage in continuous professional learning, ultimately enhancing teaching practices and improving overall quality of education (Chen, 2018; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019).

With the advancement of science and technology and the introduction of regional autonomy policies, including school-based management (SBM), education governance in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation. The enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the national education system and Law No. 25 of 1999 on financial balance between central and regional governments redefined the roles and responsibilities of school principals. Under the previous centralised system, principals were primarily responsible for administrative and managerial tasks. However, the decentralised system now requires them to assume greater responsibility as instructional supervisors, actively guiding teachers and driving school improvement efforts.

In alignment with the World Bank’s recommendations, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education has promoted the implementation of SBM to enhance education quality through greater autonomy and accountability (Asad, 2021; Bandur, Hamsal & Furinto, 2022; Hermino, 2016). This paradigm shift demanded a fundamental change in school leadership, particularly in how principals supervise teachers to ensure professional growth and institutional development.

The transition from centralised to decentralised education governance has placed increased supervisory responsibilities on school principals (Addi-Racciah, 2015; Arar & Abu-Romi, 2016). However, the extent to which principals in Indonesian schools have adapted to these new expectations remains unclear. Existing literature highlights the importance of supervision in improving teacher professionalism (Mwesiga & Okendo, 2018; Ngole & Mkulu, 2021; Shakuna, Mohamad & Ali, 2016), but there is limited empirical research on how school principals implement supervision in practice, particularly within the context of decentralised education.

Therefore, we aimed to use this study to address this gap by investigating the preparation and implementation of school principal supervision at SMPN 1 Limboto. Specifically, we sought to

- 1) examine the strategies employed by the school principal in conducting supervision under the decentralised education framework;
- 2) identify the challenges faced by the principal in executing supervisory duties;
- 3) assess the impact of supervision on teacher professional development and overall school performance.

By exploring these aspects in this study, we contribute to a deeper understanding of how school principals navigate their supervisory roles in decentralised education settings, thus providing insight for policymakers, educators, and school leaders.

#### Literature Review

*The role of supervision in educational administration*  
Supervision is a core function of educational administration that involves multiple stakeholders, including school inspectors, supervisors, principals, and the broader school community (Haris, Naway, Pulukadang, Takeshita & Ancho, 2018; Hossain, 2018). Effective supervision is essential for identifying and addressing challenges within the learning environment, ensuring that educators receive the necessary support and professional development opportunities (Noor, Herlinawati & Sofyaningrum, 2020). Carlos, Cardoso, Galante, Lamy, Massano, Silva, Gaspar and Seabra (2017) describe supervision as an ongoing process aimed at enhancing educators' capabilities, either individually or collectively. This aligns with Saihu's (2020) assertion that educational supervision should serve as a mechanism for motivation, coaching, and skills enhancement, enabling teachers to meet evolving educational demands.

Beyond administrative responsibilities, school principals are expected to ensure that all teaching and learning processes are effectively implemented. Unlike office managers whose duties revolve around paperwork, school principals must actively engage in professional supervision to promote

teacher competence and instructional effectiveness (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang, 2016). As supervisors, principals must inspire teachers to continually improve their pedagogical skills, adapt to changes in the education landscape, and maintain high professional standards (Komalasari, Arafat & Mulyadi, 2020).

#### *The principal's role in supervision and leadership*

The term "principal" refers to the head of a school, the person responsible for leading and managing an institution where teaching and learning occur (Ediger, 2014). A school principal can be described as a functional educator entrusted with managing school operations and leading instructional practices. In the context of instructional leadership, the term "lead" encompasses various responsibilities. According to Northouse (2016), to lead means to influence others toward achieving common goals through direction, motivation, and collaborative support. This includes managing school resources, guiding and mentoring teachers, and cultivating an inclusive and collegial learning environment.

In decentralised educational systems, the role of the principal extends beyond traditional supervision. It requires dynamic collaboration with vice principals, teachers, school staff, and the broader community. This aligns with the decentralised structure in Indonesia, where SBM entrusts greater autonomy and decision-making authority to school leaders, making community participation and internal collaboration essential (Bjork, 2006; Suryadarma, Widyanti & Suryahadi Sumarto, 2006).

Pidarta (2011) identifies seven key aspects of the principal's supervisory role in teacher and school development:

- 1) Fostering teachers' professional identity and personal growth;
- 2) Ensuring continuous professional development;
- 3) Improving the learning process;
- 4) Enhancing teachers' mastery of subject matter;
- 5) Addressing diverse teacher competencies;
- 6) Accommodating regional and cultural diversity;
- 7) Promoting collaboration between teachers and the community.

While the first four aspects emphasise the development of individual teachers, the last three highlight the broader institutional and socio-cultural role of the school leader. These seven dimensions collectively reflect the principal's dual function as instructional leader and school development facilitator, especially within a decentralised context where inclusive decision-making and shared responsibilities with vice principals, teachers, and stakeholders are vital.

By situating the principal's supervisory role within this decentralised framework, the literature review connects directly with the objectives and sampling of the study – emphasising the necessity

of involving the school principal and teachers and other stakeholders in shaping effective instructional supervision.

#### *The principal as a supervisor in instructional leadership*

The principal's supervisory role is closely intertwined with the broader concept of instructional leadership, which emphasises the responsibility of school leaders in enhancing teaching and learning. We adopted the instructional leadership framework developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) as conceptual foundation of the study. The framework identifies three key dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school learning climate. Within a decentralised educational system such as that in Indonesia, these functions become especially critical, as school leaders gain greater autonomy and are expected to take active roles in directing and improving instructional practices.

In Pidarta's (2011) view, an effective school principal should demonstrate the following leadership characteristics that support supervision and instructional improvement:

- 1) Relevance: Leadership actions should align with school objectives and goals;
- 2) Objectivity: Decision-making should be unbiased and based on evidence;
- 3) Significance: Leadership strategies should contribute directly to institutional success;
- 4) Practicality: Approaches should be measurable and efficient.

Western scholars similarly define leadership as the ability to influence and guide others toward achieving shared organisational goals (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Mansaray, 2019). However, effective instructional leadership involves providing vision, motivation, structured feedback, and access to professional development resources – elements essential to creating a productive teaching and learning environment (Pidarta, 2011). In this context, the principal's supervisory function goes beyond routine oversight and focuses on persuasion, influence, and collaborative problem-solving rather than direct teaching duties (Zahed-Babelan, Koulaei, Moeinikia & Sharif, 2019).

By grounding the discussion in the instructional leadership framework, the principal, in this study, is regarded as an administrator but also as a change agent who strategically guides instructional quality, fosters teacher development, and promotes shared leadership within a decentralised school system.

#### *The principal as an educator: A conceptual debate*

While the role of school principals as educators has been acknowledged, their primary function remains

administrative and supervisory. Teachers are responsible for direct instruction, whereas principals focus on overseeing teaching effectiveness and institutional management. They manage both teachers and administrative staff, stepping into instructional processes only when necessary, such as in the absence of a teacher (Lashway, 2003).

Certain perspectives portray school principals, rectors, and deans holding educator status due to their management responsibilities in educational institutions (Khaleel, Alhosani & Duyar, 2021; Naidoo, 2019). However, this view can obscure the distinction between educational leadership and instructional roles. Pidarta (2011) raises a critical question: If school principals are classified as educators, who then assumes the management function? Indonesian legislation provides clarity by distinguishing the roles – school principals are designated as managerial personnel, while teachers are recognised as professional educators, as stated in Law No. 14 of 2005 on teachers and lecturers.

As supervisors, school principals assist teachers in addressing learning challenges through various instructional models, including classical, group, and individual approaches (Mbua, 2023). Supervision should be based on scientific principles to enhance the quality of education (Palah, Wasliman, Sauri & Gaffar, 2022). Contemporary studies worldwide support the view that school principals are primarily organisational leaders who guide teachers in instructional improvement (Karim, Kartiko, Daulay & Kumalasari, 2021). Their role is to foster an environment conducive to professional growth rather than serve as direct educators (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023).

#### *The principal's complementary role in educational quality improvement*

The complementary roles of school principals and teachers are crucial in enhancing educational quality. While teachers focus on delivering quality instruction, principals ensure an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning. The idea that a principal's role as an educator is secondary does not diminish its importance. Both managerial and instructional supervision functions are essential for school effectiveness (Egwu, 2015).

A well-managed school with competent teachers does not automatically guarantee education of high quality. The principal's role in supervision and leadership significantly influences the quality of teaching and learning. Without proper supervision, even highly skilled teachers may not reach their full potential. Similarly, a competent principal without professional teachers cannot achieve meaningful educational outcomes. Therefore, the effectiveness of school supervision directly impacts student achievement and institutional success (Noor et al., 2020).

## Methodology

### Research Paradigm and Design

We employed the qualitative research approach guided by a case study design to explore the preparation and implementation of supervision at SMPN 1 Junior High School in Limboto. Qualitative research, often referred to as naturalistic inquiry, aims to understand human experiences and social phenomena in their natural contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It is particularly suitable for exploring complex social processes, such as educational leadership and supervision, where meaning is constructed through interactions and experiences.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine observable behaviour and the perceptions, beliefs, and values that underlie that behaviour. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on measurable variables, qualitative research focuses on depth over breadth, and emphasises the richness of data over generalisability. It provides a platform for participants' voices to be heard and captures the subjective experiences of principals and teachers as they engage in the supervision process (Merriam, 2009).

The case study design was selected for the following reasons:

- 1) To provide an in-depth description of school principal supervision;
- 2) To present a close researcher-subject relationship necessary to gather rich, detailed information;
- 3) To adopt an inductive, descriptive approach to capture the meaning of educational supervision as experienced by participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

By using this approach, we aligned the study with the constructivist paradigm which views knowledge as co-constructed between researcher and participant, and emphasises the importance of context in shaping meaning. The case study at SMPN 1 Limboto thus provides situated and meaningful insight and allows for a holistic understanding of how instructional supervision is planned and implemented in a decentralised educational setting.

### Research Site and Sampling

The study was conducted at SMPN 1 Junior High School, Limboto, Gorontalo Regency. This school was purposefully selected due to its recognised success in implementing effective educational supervision, as acknowledged by the local Board of Education. The school also serves as a reference institution for other schools in the district.

The purposive sampling technique was employed since it allowed us to select participants who were directly involved in school supervision and educational leadership. The sample included a diverse group of stakeholders to capture multiple perspectives:

- P1 – School principal (one) – to provide insight into supervision strategies and leadership roles;
- VP1–VP2 – Vice principals (two) – to discuss their roles in implementing and supporting supervision;
- T1–T10 – Teachers (10) – to share their experiences in delegated supervision and its impact on their professional development;
- SL1–SL2 – Supervisory lecturers (two) – to provide their academic perspective on educational supervision;
- SW1–SW3 – School workers (three) – to shed light on their roles in the overall supervision process; and
- CM1–CM2 – Community members (two) – to contextualise their external perspectives on the effectiveness of school.

Participants were selected if they had a minimum of 3 years of experience in their current role and were actively involved in school supervision activities, either formally or informally. Individuals with less than 1 year of experience or no direct participation in supervision processes were excluded from the study. To maintain confidentiality and facilitate the organisation and traceability of qualitative findings during analysis and reporting, coded identifiers were used (e.g., P1 for principal, T1–T10 for teachers, etc.).

### Data Collection Methods

In alignment with the principles of naturalistic inquiry as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), we employed multiple data collection methods to ensure a rich and holistic understanding of the supervision practices under investigation. The use of triangulated sources not only enhances the credibility of qualitative research (Denzin, 1978) but also allows a researcher to capture the complexity of human behaviour and institutional processes in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

The primary method involved semi-structured in-depth interviews which were conducted with key participants including the school principal, VPs, teachers, and supervisory lecturers. This approach enabled us to maintain a flexible yet purposeful structure allowing for the exploration of individual perspectives while ensuring alignment with the research objectives. The use of open-ended questions facilitated detailed narratives about participants' experiences with supervision planning, implementation, encountered challenges, and perceived effectiveness. According to Patton (2002), such interviews are essential in uncovering meaning from the participants' point of view within their specific contexts.

To complement the interview data, we incorporated participant observation as a means of capturing real-time interaction and behaviour in the school environment. We observed a variety of supervision-related activities, including classroom monitoring, feedback sessions, and school leadership meetings. These observations were

documented systematically in field notes to provide contextually grounded insight. As suggested by Spradley (1980), observation allows a researcher to witness institutional routines and interpersonal dynamics that may not emerge in interview settings.

Finally, we undertook document analysis to enrich the empirical data. We reviewed official documents such as supervision reports, lesson plans, teacher performance evaluations, and meeting records. These documents served to validate and contextualise the findings from interviews and observations, an approach recommended by Bowen (2009) for enhancing data triangulation in qualitative research.

By combining interviews, observations, and document reviews, we ensured methodological rigour and presented a comprehensive account of instructional supervision as it is practiced and experienced in the selected school.

#### Data Analysis

Data were analysed through an iterative and inductive process, primarily guided by the framework of Miles and Huberman (1994), but further supported by the analytical strategies of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2013). This approach allowed for a systematic exploration of the data while maintaining the flexibility needed to capture the depth and complexity of participants' experiences.

The first stage of analysis involved data reduction which entailed carefully reviewing and coding the interview transcripts, field notes, and document content. Initial codes were developed deductively – based on the research questions, and inductively – emerging from the data itself. These codes were then clustered into broader categories and themes that were relevant to instructional supervision such as planning, collaboration, and professional development. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of allowing themes to emerge organically in qualitative research, a principle adhered to throughout this process.

Following coding, displaying the data involved arranging the findings into thematic matrices, narrative summaries, and visual displays to facilitate interpretation. By systematically arranging the data, we were able to draw comparisons between participants and identify patterns in leadership practices. This stage also enabled the consolidation of evidence from interviews, observations, and documents which enhanced the analytical depth and clarity of the study (Creswell, 2013).

The final stage was drawing conclusions and verification in which patterns and relationships among themes were interpreted and validated. To ensure credibility, we employed member checking by sharing preliminary findings with selected

participants providing opportunities for them to confirm, clarify, or contest interpretations. This practice aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness, particularly in establishing credibility and confirmability in qualitative inquiry.

Overall, the integration of multiple data analysis strategies ensured a rigorous and trustworthy process. The combination of Miles and Huberman's (1994) analytical model with insight from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2013) strengthened our ability to produce valid and meaningful interpretations grounded in the lived experiences of the research participants.

#### Research Phases

The research process was arranged in three distinct but interrelated phases to ensure systematic and coherent execution.

The preparation phase involved conducting an extensive review of relevant literature to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study. During this phase, we also developed research instruments including interview guides and observation checklists aligned with the study objectives. This stage was concluded with the purposive selection of the research site, SMPN 1 Limboto, based on its recognised commitment to effective instructional supervision.

During data collection we gathered empirical data through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with the school principal, VPs, teachers, supervisory lecturers, school workers, and CMs. Meanwhile, observations were carried out during supervision-related activities. Official documents such as lesson plans and supervision reports were examined to triangulate the findings and deepen contextual understanding.

Finally, in the report-writing phase, we focused on analysing and interpreting the collected data. Using the inductive approach, themes were identified, categorised, and examined in light of the study's objectives and relevant conceptual framework. The final stage culminated in the preparation of a comprehensive research report in which the findings are presented, implications are discussed, and recommendations for future research and practice offered.

#### Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied, following the framework established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These four criteria are widely accepted as benchmarks for rigour in qualitative research and provide a comprehensive approach for assessing the validity of findings.

Credibility was established through several strategies. The use of triangulation – drawing on data from interviews, participant observations, and document analysis – helped to cross-verify findings and reduce the risk of bias (Patton, 2002). Additionally, we engaged in prolonged engagement at the study site for a period of 3 months which enabled the development of trust with participants and a deeper understanding of the school context. To further strengthen credibility, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and validate their interview transcripts and interpretations, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

To support transferability, we provided thick, rich descriptions of the research context, including detailed accounts of the participants' roles, school culture, and supervisory practices. Such depth enables readers and future researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to other educational settings with similar characteristics (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a transparent and well-documented audit trail. This included detailed records of the research process – field notes, coded transcripts, analytical memos, and decision logs – allowing external reviewers to trace the logic and consistency of the procedures followed in the study (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Finally, confirmability was reinforced through the practice of reflexivity in which we maintained a journal to reflect critically on personal assumptions, methodological decisions, and potential biases throughout the research process. This reflective stance helped to uphold objectivity and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's perspectives (Finlay, 2002).

By integrating these rigor-enhancing strategies and aligning with established qualitative research standards, we ensured that the findings were trustworthy and ethically sound.

#### Researcher Positionality

The main researcher, a seasoned teacher and newly appointed school principal, maintained an impartial approach during the study. Awareness of potential biases was addressed by adhering to systematic data collection and verification processes. While our backgrounds provided valuable insight, measures such as peer debriefing with academic experts were taken to ensure objectivity.

#### Results

The data collected at SMPN 1 Limboto revealed the principal's pivotal role in instructional supervision. This role spans four major dimensions: teacher professional development, human relations

skills, teamwork (group process skills), and evaluation skills. The presentation of the findings below is arranged according to the data collection method and participant groups to ensure triangulation and participant-centred reporting in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria.

#### Teacher Professional Development

Interviews with the principal (P1), several teachers (T1, T3, T6), and supervisory lecturers (SL1, SL2) revealed that teacher professional development at SMPN 1 Limboto was guided by a clearly articulated vision and a strategic plan for instructional growth. The principal stated that professional development activities were intentionally aligned with the school's broader educational goals: *"We have a structured vision. Every training and mentoring activity is linked to our bigger instructional goals"* (P1).

One teacher echoed this sentiment by emphasising the consistency of development programmes: *"Our principal ensures we're consistently involved in workshops and reflection meetings that enhance our teaching skills"* (T3).

In support, a supervisory lecturer commented: *"There's consistency in how the school builds teacher capacity, and it reflects national education goals"* (SL2).

Observations conducted during professional development sessions in March 2025 documented teachers participating in peer review exercises, reflective teaching dialogues, and student assessment planning. These events were structured around a teacher portfolio system, as outlined in the school's internal documentation. Furthermore, document analysis of lesson plans, workshop attendance records, and annual supervisory reports corroborated the interview data, confirming the principal's active role in coordinating workshops and teacher mentoring programmes.

Teacher professionalism was further evident in direct classroom observations which revealed that educators were not only refining instructional strategies but also engaging in informal mentoring with junior colleagues. This included ongoing supervision of peer instruction and personalised student guidance. A teacher explained as follows: *"Professional development here isn't just about lectures – it's about continuous support, feedback, and real growth"* (T6).

SL1 confirmed that the school's supervision model reflected a combination of technical skill enhancement and collegial support, adding that such a dual focus was crucial in achieving lasting pedagogical change.

#### Human Relations Skills

Another central theme that emerged from the data was the emphasis on human relations. Interviews

with VP1, T5 and T7, and CM2 consistently highlighted the principal's commitment to fostering emotional intelligence and positive interpersonal relationships in the school. VP1 described the leadership approach as "*relational and participatory*", explaining that the principal frequently engaged students and staff in informal and structured conversations. This finding was supported by classroom and staffroom observations which showed the principal interacting warmly with teachers and initiating team-based reflections.

A teacher described how this leadership style contributed to a sense of safety and trust: "*The human relationship aspect is really visible. You can approach anyone here. There's mutual respect*" (T5). This view was echoed by a community member who remarked as follows: "*As parents, we feel part of the school. We're invited to give input and even join student activities*" (CM2).

Document analysis further supported these findings. The school's 2023 character education report outlined structured initiatives such as character month during which students, teachers, and parents collaborated on moral and interpersonal development projects. These initiatives not only reinforced positive student behaviour but also improved communication among stakeholders. A teacher described the workshops as learning spaces but also as "*spaces for developing shared goals and values*" (T7).

Altogether, the school's emphasis on relational leadership contributes significantly to creating a positive school culture. This culture supports collaboration, emotional well-being, and a shared sense of responsibility for student success.

#### Teamwork (Group Process Skills)

Collaboration among educators at SMPN 1 Limboto emerged as a defining element of the school's instructional supervision practices. Based on interviews with teachers, VPs, and supervisory lecturers, as well as observations of teacher meetings and review of documentation from the curriculum team, we found that the principal promoted structured teamwork through two main avenues: strengthening MGMP (teacher education consensus points) and empowering internal development and quality assurance teams.

A teacher (T4) described the MGMP as a collaborative hub where teachers collectively develop lesson plans and exchanged classroom strategies: "*Through MGMP, we engage in collaborative lesson planning and share best practices, which ultimately improve our teaching methodologies*" (T4).

This finding was supported by observation data from a mathematics MGMP meeting held in February 2025 during which subject teachers revised their midterm assessments and harmonised grading rubrics. These activities appeared to

contribute to enhanced pedagogical consistency across subjects, the development of problem-solving strategies for instructional challenges, and a shared responsibility for student learning outcomes. A supervisory lecturer affirmed that the function of MGMP's (subject teacher forum's) goes beyond technical collaboration and contributes to "*building a culture of reflective teaching*" (SL1).

In addition to MGMP, the principal delegated critical supervisory tasks to a school-based development and quality assurance team. These teams, composed of senior teachers and administrative staff, monitored instructional outcomes and designed strategies for continuous improvement. A vice principal who supervises the team directly, explained: "*Our quality assurance team ensures that instructional methods stay relevant to curriculum goals and student needs. We often revise our strategies based on their assessments*" (VP2).

The relevance of this strategy was clear from the 2023–2024 internal quality evaluation report which detailed improvement plans related to literacy programmes and remediation for low-performing students. A community member also commented on this initiative: "*We were invited to contribute to school evaluation sessions, especially when it comes to community engagement and parental feedback*" (CM1).

By distributing leadership responsibilities through these collaborative structures, the principal fostered a shared commitment to instructional excellence. This reinforces the school's ability to adapt, innovate, and respond to both internal and external feedback.

#### Evaluation Skills

The final dimension of the principal's supervisory leadership was demonstrated in the school's rigorous approach to educational evaluation. Interviews, classroom observations, and review of assessment documents revealed that the principal played an active role in learning evaluation and research-based school development.

Several teachers, including T2 and T7, emphasised the significance of regular classroom assessment: "*Regular evaluations help us adjust our teaching strategies to better meet students' needs. We're asked to reflect on our lesson outcomes every 2 weeks*" (T2).

Observations of a teacher evaluation review meeting in April 2025 shows that evaluation data were used to redesign lesson pacing and improve student engagement strategies. The principal's approach appeared to ensure that teaching methodologies remained responsive to learners' needs, that curriculum implementation was continuously reviewed, and that students' academic

progress was monitored in a structured and responsive way.

Moreover, the principal has led the development of several school-based research instruments, including teacher performance appraisal forms, student progress tracking sheets, and subject-specific evaluation tools. These instruments were compiled and tested collaboratively with supervisory lecturers. A supervisory lecturer commented on this during the interview: *“We supported the principal in developing eight research-based tools that are now being used to monitor not just teaching performance, but also school management practices”* (L2).

A teacher noted how this impacted practice: *“Because of the instruments we use, our performance isn’t judged randomly. There are clear rubrics, and we understand what to aim for”* (T6).

One vice principal highlighted the influence of this system on strategic planning and stated that *“[t]he principal’s emphasis on data has made us more critical about how we evaluate success. We now rely more on evidence than assumption”* (VP1).

From a community perspective, a community member (CM2) indicated that some parents were invited to review student progress data during open-house sessions and this enhanced transparency and accountability.

Document analysis of the school’s supervision handbook and internal assessment rubrics confirmed the consistent use of these tools over the past 3 years, supporting the claim that evaluation at SMPN 1 Limboto was systemic and strategic.

## Discussion

The instructional supervision approach resonates with Combrinck and Daniels (2023) who emphasise the importance of principals’ mentoring programmes that integrate instructional leadership, managerial competence, and people-centred strategies. Furthermore, the principals’ systematic use of formative and summative evaluation strategies aligns with current scholarship on assessment methodologies aimed at driving instructional improvement. While the findings of this study affirm the principal’s multifaceted role at SMPN 1 Limboto – particularly in the areas of teacher professional development, human relations, teamwork, and evaluation – they also underscore the transformative potential of decentralised education policies. However, it is notable that the participants rarely articulated a direct awareness of how decentralisation has enabled their current supervisory practices. This omission suggests that while decentralisation provides the structural space

for localised leadership and innovation, its conceptual significance may not be fully recognised or internalised at practitioner level. This discussion, therefore, situates the findings not only within practical school experiences but also within broader theoretical frameworks on distributed leadership and education governance reform, contributing to a richer understanding of qualitative instructional leadership in post-decentralisation educational settings.

## Teacher Professional Development: Strategic Vision and Implementation

The principal’s role in teacher professional development is crucial in fostering a culture of continuous improvement. We found that the principal, as an instructional leader, strategically articulated a clear vision for professional growth, operationalised through institutional-level workshops. This finding aligns with Klassen (2024) who emphasises that leadership-driven professional development initiatives significantly improve teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes. Similarly, research by Whitworth and Chiu (2015) highlight that effective school leadership facilitates ongoing professional development, resulting in improved pedagogical strategies. In addition, Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) emphasise that strong school leadership directly contributes to teacher quality and improved student outcomes.

One of the most significant aspects observed in this study was the principal’s structured implementation of professional development programmes, particularly through workshops. These workshops served as platforms for collaborative learning, where teachers refined pedagogical approaches and discussed best practices. Combrinck and Daniels (2023) argue that principals’ mentoring programmes should focus on instructional leadership, management skills, and the contextual needs of educators. The findings of this study support this perspective as the workshops not only enhance instructional strategies but also cultivate leadership skills among teachers, thereby strengthening the overall academic environment.

Moreover, the principal’s emphasis on teacher professionalism extends beyond skills development to include instructional supervision and student mentorship. As noted by Harris, Jones, Cheah, Devadason and Adams (2017), a principal’s instructional leadership fosters accountability and ensures adherence to educational standards. This study, therefore, reaffirms their argument as the principal at SMPN 1 Limboto actively supervised teaching practices to maintain instructional quality. Furthermore, the holistic approach to student guidance echoes findings by Patti, Senge, Madrazo and Stern (2015) who stress that effective

leadership supports students academically, socially, and emotionally.

#### Human Relations Skills: Enhancing Collaborative School Culture

Another key finding pertains to the role of the principal in fostering human relations skills. The study highlights the significance of an instructional leader's creation of a conducive emotional environment and strengthening character education within the school. This is in agreement with the work of Dederling and Pietsch (2025) who found that relational trust among school members significantly influenced school improvement efforts.

The principal's efforts to establish a positive and supportive school atmosphere are evident through structured interpersonal interactions, particularly in teacher collaboration and student engagement. Research by Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami and Pianta (2016) underscores the role of trust and collegiality in enhancing professional learning communities. The findings of this study affirm that when teachers and students feel emotionally supported, they are more likely to engage meaningfully in the educational process.

Furthermore, the principal's character-strengthening initiatives observed in this study reflected a deliberate effort to integrate ethical values into the learning process. This corresponds with Lickona's (1999) model of character education which posits that fostering moral and ethical values in students contributes to their holistic development. By embedding character education in daily interaction the school might cultivate an environment that promotes ethical instructional leadership among students and educators.

#### Teamwork and Group Process Skills: Strengthening MGMP and Collaborative Learning

The results of this study reveal that teamwork is a core component of the principal's instructional leadership strategy, with particular emphasis on strengthening MGMP and quality assurance mechanisms. The principal's enhancement of MGMP could foster collective teacher engagement in curriculum planning, pedagogical discussions, and problem-solving activities. This finding resonates with the work of Admiraal, Schenke, De Jong, Emmelot and Sligte (2021) who argue that professional learning communities significantly improve instructional quality through collaboration.

In addition, the principal's empowerment of quality assurance teams ensured a systematic approach to educational improvement. This finding aligns with Schildkamp's (2019) emphasis on the importance of distributed leadership in schools. By delegating responsibilities to a development and quality assurance team, the principal's instructional leadership fostered a culture of shared leadership,

thus ensuring that decision-making processes are data-driven and collaborative.

#### Evaluation Skills: Data-driven Decision-making

The principal's evaluation skills appeared to play a pivotal role in monitoring learning processes and in the development of research instruments designed for systematic assessment. We found that the principal, as an instructional leader, actively evaluated individual and group learning outcomes, employing a balanced use of formative and summative assessment. This is in agreement with Irons and Elkington (2021) who emphasise that formative assessment significantly contributes to improved student learning outcomes.

In addition, the creation and implementation of eight context-specific research instruments demonstrated a strong commitment to evidence-based decision-making. These tools were used to assess teacher effectiveness, student progress, and curriculum alignment – practices that reflect what Sun, Johnson and Przybylski (2016) describe as essential elements of data-driven school leadership that enhance the quality of educational interventions.

Notably, these initiatives appear to have been made possible within the flexible governance framework introduced by Indonesia's decentralised education system. While the participants did not explicitly reference decentralisation, the principal's ability to tailor evaluation strategies, lead local innovation, and collaborate with internal quality teams indicated the practical impact of this policy shift. Decentralisation has provided school instructional leaders with the autonomy to make instructional decisions responsive to local needs, and in this case, it has allowed the principal to implement context-relevant evaluation practices. Thus, the findings must be viewed within the broader reform agenda that promotes localised authority and leadership agency in improving school performance.

#### Conclusion

This study highlights the role of the school principal as an instructional supervisor in enhancing teaching and learning at SMPN 1 Limboto. The findings indicate that supervision by the principal, as an instructional leader, primarily focuses on improving teachers' professional competencies through structured activities such as classroom observation, mentorship, and continuous professional development programmes. Teachers emphasised the importance of such supervision in refining their pedagogical approaches, particularly in lesson planning, material selection, and learner assessment strategies.

Beyond professional development, the study also reveals the significance of interpersonal relationships in fostering a collaborative school

environment. Teachers acknowledged that both formal meetings and informal bonding activities contributed to a sense of community that facilitates open communication and shared problem-solving. The role of collaborative forums such as MGMP was particularly emphasised, with educators expressing that these platforms enhanced teamwork and encouraged the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, evaluation mechanisms were found to be essential in instructional supervision, with several teachers acknowledging that periodic assessment helped them identify areas for improvement and guided targeted professional development. However, some participants raised concerns about the inconsistency of evaluations and highlighted the need for a more structured and transparent performance appraisal system.

These findings suggest important implications for educational practice and policy. School administrators, as instructional leaders, should strengthen supervisory frameworks by incorporating teacher feedback into the design of professional development programmes. Policymakers, on the other hand, should consider refining guidelines for instructional supervision to ensure that evaluation mechanisms are constructive and supportive. Finally, future research could further explore the perspectives of students and other stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how school instructional leadership influences educational outcomes.

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### Authors' Contributions

NL and AS jointly conceptualised the study and designed the research framework. NL drafted the manuscript and managed the data collection process. AS conducted the data analysis and contributed to the interpretation of the findings. Both authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### Notes

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