
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AS A MANAGER IN IMPROVING SCHOOL QUALITY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Siti Mukhayati¹, Senowarsito², Maryanto³

¹²³Universitas PGRI Semarang; Indonesia

Correspondence E-mail; mukhayatist@gmail.com

Submitted: 13/12/2025

Revised: 17/03/2026

Accepted: 07/04/2026

Published: 28/04/2026

Abstract

This study examines the role of the principal as a manager in improving school quality at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung, Pemalang Regency. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, this research explores the implementation of POAC managerial functions consisting of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling in school management practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and school committee members, and were analyzed using an interactive analysis model. The findings indicate that the principal applies participatory and data-based planning grounded in the Education Report Card, organizes human resources according to teacher competencies, actively carries out academic supervision and professional development activities, and implements reflective and accountable controlling processes involving school stakeholders. These managerial practices foster a collaborative and professional school climate, strengthen teacher professionalism, enhance instructional quality, and support improvements in student learning outcomes. This study concludes that the effective application of POAC-based managerial leadership is a key factor in achieving sustainable school quality improvement in primary education.

Keywords

Academic Supervision, Learning Quality, Pedagogical Competences, Primary Education, Teacher Professional Development.



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INTRODUCTION

The managerial role of school principals has a solid legal foundation. Nevertheless, challenges remain in the field. Data from the Teacher Competency Test (*Uji Kompetensi Guru*) from 2015–2021 revealed that approximately 81% of teachers did not reach the minimum standard. This indicates a persistent gap between the expected professional standards and actual teacher competencies, partly due to suboptimal managerial and supervisory functions of school principals (Kasih et al., 2024; Warman, 2022).

The context of this study focuses on SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung, located in Ulujami District, Pematang Regency. Despite its competitive environment situated near private schools, the institution maintains high community trust and stable student enrollment. However, academic and non-academic achievements have not shown significant improvement. School programs such as teacher training, literacy strengthening, and contextual learning have been implemented, yet measurable progress in learning quality remains limited. This situation suggests the need for stronger managerial strategies, particularly in planning and implementing structured, sustainable programs aligned with the *Standar Kompetensi Lulusan (SKL)*. Recent Rapor Pendidikan data (2023–2024) indicate that SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung experienced progress in literacy, numeracy, and student character, along with positive school safety and diversity indicators. Nevertheless, learning quality still requires enhancement through innovative pedagogical methods, teacher reflection, and strengthened school vision and mission alignment. These findings reaffirm the importance of the principal's managerial and supervisory roles in sustaining quality improvement.

As the manager at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung, the principal is responsible for managing human resources and academic activities in an effort to improve the quality of education. The principal bears full responsibility for planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising all teaching staff at the school (Hamka, 2023). The principal carries out these duties in a professional and collaborative manner, with a focus on improving the quality of education. The principal manages resources through competency development, academic supervision, motivation, and fostering a collaborative work culture. In this regard, the principal is responsible for managing academic activities and ensuring that learning programs and activities run smoothly. Thus, the principal of SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung plays a central role in efforts to improve the quality of education at the institution they lead.

The improvement of educational quality by school principals is influenced by a number of managerial factors. The managerial competencies of school principals are the primary factors influencing success, including planning, problem-solving, and program management skills (Chen, 2024). The availability of quality resources also has a significant impact. These resources include human resources, facilities and infrastructure, and funding that is appropriately targeted toward the programs being implemented. Another factor is a school's organizational culture that fosters collaborative activities and a commitment to improving the quality of education. Support from various parties and stakeholders is also a crucial factor in strengthening the principal's managerial effectiveness to create quality education.

A school principal's managerial leadership is strongly linked to improvements in the quality of education at the school. Improvements in educational quality are reflected in academic achievement, discipline, and a conducive learning environment (Sher & Inamullah, 2025). Effective managerial functions foster the development of learning quality, which directly impacts academic achievement (Parveen et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Clear regulations and a collaborative culture help build a sense of discipline among students and educators. Furthermore, a principal who is able to create a safe, comfortable, and supportive educational environment has a direct influence on a conducive learning environment. Thus, improved managerial leadership by the principal will correspond to higher school quality, as evidenced by improved academic achievement, discipline, and a conducive environment.

Previous research has been conducted to examine school principals as managers in improving the quality of education. The results of the research indicate that the managerial functions of school principals are an integral and key component of efforts to improve the quality of education (Suhaedin et al., 2024). The study by (Mahmuda et al., 2023) also noted similarly that the quality of education is largely determined by the principal's ability to lead their institution. This is because the direct managerial practices carried out by school principals impact the quality and capabilities of teachers, as explained in previous research (Galdames-Calderón, 2023). These findings are also confirmed by (Karim et al., 2023) that managerial leadership has a direct impact on educational outcomes. This is because there is a causal relationship between school principal management and improvements in educational quality through teacher performance (Rostini et al., 2022).

Conceptually, the managerial role of a school principal is based on planning, organizing, executing, and controlling the school organization (Townsend, 2019). The principal is responsible

for optimizing all available resources within the school to achieve organizational goals (Rohmadiyah et al., 2024; Sunaengsih et al., 2019). The principal must also serve as the primary driving force for improving the quality of education through learning that aligns with organizational goals (Daniëls et al., 2019; Kemethofer et al., 2025). Thus, the principal holds specific authority to manage all educational and instructional programs within the school in accordance with shared needs and goals.

Based on the background provided, this study aims to explore and describe how the managerial role of the school principal contributes to improving school quality at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung. This study is expected to make contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study provides insights and enriches the discourse on managerial leadership in the context of education. Practically, this study serves as a reference for developing effective and contextually appropriate school management strategies in elementary education. School principals can use the findings of this study as a guide in designing a managerial approach that fosters a collaborative culture to improve the quality of education.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to explore how the principal's managerial role contributes to improving school quality at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung, Ulujami District, Pematang Regency. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it provides a holistic understanding of complex educational realities within their natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to (Castro, 2023; White et al., 2025), the effectiveness of educational management can best be examined through direct engagement with school practices, enabling a contextual interpretation of leadership behavior and its impact on institutional quality.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung, a public elementary school that consistently implements managerial-based quality improvement programs but still faces several challenges in achieving optimal learning outcomes. The participants in this study included the school principal, teachers, and school committee members who were actively involved in the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating school programs. They were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct relevance to managerial and school quality improvement efforts (Haryati et al., 2021).

Data were gathered using three complementary techniques to ensure the richness and accuracy of findings. 1) In-depth interviews, conducted with the principal, teachers, and school committee representatives to obtain detailed insights into managerial strategies; 2) Observation, carried out during meetings, learning activities, and supervision sessions; and 3) Documentation review, involving analysis of relevant school records such as the *Rencana Kerja dan Anggaran Sekolah (RKAS)*, teacher supervision reports, Rapor Pendidikan, and meeting minutes. A series of research activities, including interviews, observations, and documentation, was conducted over a four-week period from October 6, 2025, to October 14, 2025. All instruments were developed based on key managerial functions planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC) as commonly used in educational leadership studies (Indrawati & Wahira, 2025; Ramdhani & Taufiq, 2025).

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (2014), which consists of three main stages. 1) Data reduction, which involves selecting, grouping, and simplifying information. The researcher transcribed the interview data and calculated the percentage of observation results. The interview data were then grouped by theme, including planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. 2) Data presentation, by organizing the data into descriptive narratives and matrices. The researcher presents the grouped interview data in a research results table and presents the interview data in a diagram; 3). Drawing conclusions and verification, which is conducted through repeated analysis and reflection, is supported by triangulation between interviews, observations, and documentation. At this stage, the researcher combines the three results to arrive at appropriate conclusions and ensure the reliability of the data produced.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The research findings provide a description of the principal's role as a manager in improving the quality of elementary schools. An overview of the principal's role highlights key points as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Role of the Principal as a Manager in Improving School Quality at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung

Planning	Organizing	Actuating	Controlling	Impact
Data-driven (school	Assigning tasks based	The principal actively	Data-driven routine	The quality of learning has

reports, evaluations). Participatory (involving teachers and committees). Tailored to the school's actual needs.	teachers' competencies. Forming working groups (curriculum, literacy, etc.). Regular coordination and open communication.	supervision and mentoring. A supportive approach (not fault-finding). Enhancing teachers' motivation and competence. Training opportunities are available (in-service training, workshops, and lesson study).	and evaluations. Involving teachers and the school committee. Transparency and accountability. Focus on continuous improvement.	improved. Teachers are more professional and creative. Students are more active and high-achieving. A culture of collaboration and school excellence has been established.
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Source: Author's research, 2025

Planning

Research results indicate that the principal of SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung has implemented the planning function with a participatory and data-driven approach. The principal plans work programs that meet the school's actual needs through analysis of the Education Report Card and school evaluations. Interviews revealed the principal stating, "We always start planning by looking at the education report card data, teacher evaluation results, and input from the school committee. We create all programs together to make them more realistic and aligned with the school's needs." Teachers are also involved in designing programs related to professional development and collaborative learning improvement. This is confirmed by a teacher's statement: "We were invited to develop competency improvement plans, including training and classroom mentoring. So, it wasn't an order from above, but a mutually agreed-upon outcome." This inclusive planning fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the success of the school's programs. These results align with the principles of participatory planning and have been successfully implemented by the principal. Educational leadership is considered successful when the principal is able to develop strategies that are data-driven and aligned with educational goals.

Organizing

The success of the organizing function is determined by the principal's ability to manage human resources and the organizational structure proportionally. The principal forms various work teams, such as the curriculum team, academic supervision team, and literacy team, with a clear division of tasks based on the teachers' competencies and experience. Interviews with the principal indicate that "Each teacher has a clear role; for example, some are the coordinator of the literacy

program, while others are responsible for extracurricular activities. Everything is tailored to each teacher's abilities." Coordination between team members is conducted regularly in weekly meetings to ensure the program's implementation is integrated. This is reinforced by a teacher's statement that, "We routinely conduct weekly coordination to report on the progress of activities. The principal always emphasizes the importance of cooperation and mutual assistance." A clear division of tasks and open communication demonstrate the principal's ability to create a collaborative and conducive work environment.

Actuating

The principal plays an active role as the primary driver in designing and implementing school quality improvement programs. The principal conducts regular academic supervision and provides direct mentoring to teachers. This was stated by the principal in the statement, "I try to go directly into the classroom to observe. After that, I discuss the learning with the teachers so they know what's going well and what needs improvement." This action is crucial and highly appreciated by the teachers, who feel more motivated and appreciated. Teachers also stated that, "The principal's presence in the classroom makes us more motivated. He doesn't find fault, but rather offers suggestions to make learning more interesting." This means the principal's role also involves initiating various capacity-building activities, such as in-house training, lesson study, and workshops on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Controlling

The principal's supervisory function is carried out systematically, reflectively, and based on data. Monitoring activities are carried out through monthly evaluation meetings and analysis of student learning outcomes, which are used to improve the program. This was conveyed by a teacher in the statement, "At the end of each month, we hold an evaluation program. The principal asks us to present the results and then work together to find solutions if there are any obstacles." The principal also involves the school committee in overseeing program implementation and the use of BOS funds to ensure transparency and accountability. This was confirmed by the school committee, which stated, "We are involved in BOS evaluation meetings and school activity reports. The principal is open to input from the committee." Supervision is not only intended to identify shortcomings, but also to improve and strengthen program implementation to make it more effective.

Impact of Managerial Function Implementation

The implementation of managerial functions by the principal of SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung has produced a significant and multidimensional impact on improving the overall quality of the school. Through systematic planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling, the principal has succeeded in building a culture of professionalism, accountability, and collaboration among teachers. This managerial practice has encouraged teachers to become more disciplined, reflective, and creative in designing and implementing effective learning strategies. Regular academic supervision, mentoring, and collaborative discussions have strengthened teachers' pedagogical competencies, motivation, and confidence in applying innovative teaching practices. As a result, instructional quality has improved, and students have shown greater engagement and achievement across various areas of learning.

The principal's leadership style, characterized by openness, transparency, and participatory decision making, has strengthened cooperation with the school committee and parents. Their active participation in planning, evaluation, and program implementation has created a sense of shared ownership and mutual responsibility in achieving the school's goals. This strong collaboration among school stakeholders has helped build a sustainable culture of continuous improvement and educational excellence. Overall, the principal's managerial leadership serves as a vital factor in developing an adaptive, cohesive, and quality-oriented school environment that effectively supports the achievement of educational objectives in a consistent and sustainable manner.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that improving the quality of education at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung depends on the principal's effectiveness in carrying out managerial functions. The principal plays a key role in planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising school activities. A participatory approach utilizing data is recommended. The application of these four functions demonstrates that effective educational management encompasses strategic efforts to build a collaborative work culture within the school environment. This aligns with the statement that management is a continuous process of coordinating resources to achieve organizational goals (Liu, 2024; Tavo & Rasmus, 2024).

The planning aspect is the initial part of the managerial process. The principal applies the principles of data-driven management by analyzing the Education Report Card and school evaluation results as the basis for program development. This process is conducted in a participatory

manner, involving teachers and the school committee, so that every decision reflects the real needs and local context of the school. This is consistent with the theory that management is capable of fostering a participatory and corrective culture (Hald et al., 2021). This approach strengthens a sense of ownership among the school community and fosters shared responsibility for the program's success. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that inclusive planning can improve the effectiveness of program implementation and strengthen teacher motivation (Khaleel et al., 2021; Urton et al., 2023). Furthermore, participatory planning is a key characteristic of strategic leadership that adapts to change (Hrivnák et al., 2021; Namazi & Rezaei, 2024; Saragih et al., 2024).

Findings regarding organizing matters indicate that the principal has implemented human resource management skills proportionally and based on individual competencies. The formation of work teams, such as the curriculum team, literacy team, and academic supervision team, allows for a clear and efficient division of tasks. Each teacher is assigned a role according to their capacity, with regular communication and coordination in mind. This practice demonstrates the application of collaborative and flexible organizational principles. This aligns with previous findings that a competency-based organizational structure and open communication can directly contribute to improving teacher performance (Khan et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2024; Rogers, 2021).

In its actuating function, the principal acts as an instructional leader, actively guiding teachers through academic supervision and capacity-building activities such as lesson study and in-house training. The principal's presence in the classroom also serves as a platform for teacher reflection and professional development (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023). In theory, the principal plays a key role in providing feedback to teachers at the school in order to improve the quality of education. This attitude creates a supportive work culture and motivates teachers to innovate. This aligns with the statement that academic supervision oriented toward professional development improves the quality of learning and student learning outcomes (Julianda et al., 2024; Lorensius et al., 2022; Rokhman et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the controlling function is carried out through reflective monitoring and evaluation. Evaluations are conducted monthly through a joint forum between teachers, the school committee, and the principal to review program achievements and find solutions to emerging challenges. The involvement of the school committee demonstrates accountable and participatory supervisory practices. This reflective and collaborative supervisory process aligns with the assertion that shared reflection is key to maintaining consistent educational program quality (Ajugo, 2024;

Gardner et al., 2022).

The general findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the four managerial functions has a significant impact on improving teacher professionalism, community involvement, and school management efficiency. However, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. This study was only conducted in one school, so the results and findings obtained are contextual and cannot be generalized widely to various conditions. Different socio-cultural conditions may affect the implementation of managerial functions. This study is also limited to a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This certainly limits more objective and measurable assessments. In addition, the limited research time meant that observations of the principal's managerial practices and their impact on improving the quality of education could not cover the entire school program cycle in the long term. External aspects that also influence the effectiveness of the principal's managerial role have not been identified in detail to provide additional information.

Based on these limitations, further research should expand the scope of the study to include several schools with diverse characteristics. The use of diverse schools will allow for diverse results, so that the findings obtained are more relevant to a broader context. The use of a mixed methods approach is necessary to ensure that the results are more comprehensive, measurable, and can be better described in statistical data. Designing a longer study period would also allow for the collection of data over a full cycle, so that the conclusions drawn would be consistent with all managerial policies implemented during that period.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's role as a manager at SD Negeri 01 Pagergunung significantly contributes to improving school quality through the implementation of comprehensive managerial functions, including planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. The principal is able to optimize each of these functions in a participatory, data-based, and collaborative manner, thus creating a conducive, professional, and quality-oriented work climate. In the planning aspect, the principal successfully integrates the Education Report Card analysis with the school's real needs. In the organizing aspect, the division of tasks is carried out according to teacher competencies and is accompanied by open communication. In the implementation aspect, the principal plays an active role in teacher professional development through academic supervision

and training. While in the supervising aspect, reflective and accountable evaluations are carried out together with the school committee. The implementation of these four managerial functions has a positive impact on improving teacher performance, community involvement, and student learning outcomes. Thus, the results of this study confirm that participatory and reflection-based managerial leadership is a key factor in realizing sustainable improvements in the quality of basic education, while providing practical implications for other school principals to strengthen a collaborative culture and data-driven management system in school management.

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