

## The Principal as a Manager: Improving Primary School Quality

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### ABSTRACT

**Background.** This study aims to describe the principal's managerial role in improving the quality of education at SDN 2 Srimulyo, Musi Rawas Regency, and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation.

**Methods.** A qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Participants included the principal, teachers, school committee members, and students.

**Results.** The findings reveal that the principal engages in data-driven planning, enhances teacher competencies through professional development programs, optimizes school resources, and promotes student character education. Key supporting factors include visionary leadership, active stakeholder involvement, and technology integration in school administration. However, significant challenges include limited financial resources, low teacher participation in decision-making, and inadequate infrastructure.

**Conclusion.** This study underscores the critical role of the school principal in strategic and collaborative management to improve the quality of primary education.

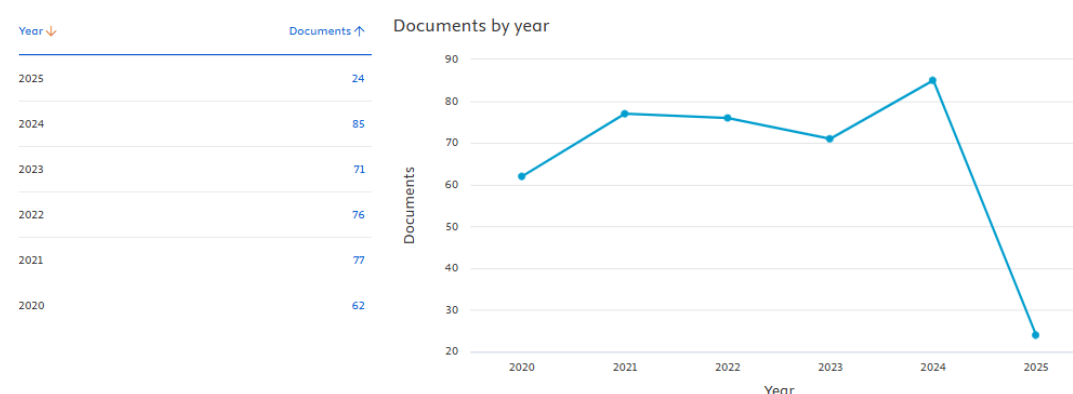
## 1. INTRODUCTION

Principals in their managerial functions contribute to improving the quality of education in schools. Applying sound management principles can improve teacher discipline, student achievement, and efficiency in school management. (Karim et al. 2025; Moore 2025) The principal is also the highest leader in educational institutions, responsible for leading a school and ensuring the quality of human resources in academic institutions. (Lindström 2020)

The urgency of this research lies in the need to examine more deeply how the role of school principals as managers contributes to improving the quality of primary schools. By understanding the managerial dimensions of school principals and the challenges they face in their implementation, it is expected that more effective strategies and approaches can be found in supporting school principals' leadership. (Phonna et al. 2024) This research is also expected to provide input for policymakers in designing training and competency development programs for school principals so that they can perform their managerial functions optimally.

The author tried to search the Scopus database for publication articles with the keywords Principal and Manager in the field of social science studies from 2024 to 2025 and obtained

information that 395 articles raised the topic of principals and managers.



**Figure 1.** Publication trends in the last 5 years

This is in line with (He, Guo, and Abazie 2024), which unveiled a robust relationship between the instructional leadership exercised by school principals and the motivation levels of teachers. Furthermore, it has identified several facets of leadership that predict teachers' professional development. By understanding the managerial practices implemented at SDN 2 Srimulyo, the results of this study can serve as a reference for other schools in improving the quality of education through better leadership.

Learning processes and activities that exist at school can run well to achieve the educational goals that have been set. (Foluke 2024) Although many studies have discussed the role of school principals in education management, there are still gaps in specific studies on how principals apply their managerial competencies per Permendiknas No. 13/2007 standards. This is in line with (Bauwens et al., 2022), principals need to develop activities that can encourage the improvement of managerial competencies that can support the improvement of their leadership. (Ekmekci et al. 2025; Griffard, Davis, and Ceja-Rodriguez 2025; Morte-Nadal and Esteban-Navarro 2025) Many principals still make plans based on their wishes, carry out poor management, do not create a positive culture, manage teachers who are not yet optimal, manage facilities and infrastructure non-optimally, and manage finances by not using data-based methods. (He et al. 2024; Kyambade et al. 2024) In addition, few qualitative studies explore school principals' experiences, challenges, and strategies in carrying out their managerial roles to improve the quality of education in these schools.

The selection of SDN 2 Srimulyo as the research site is based on the school's strategic role as one of the driving schools in its region. As a driving school, SDN 2 Srimulyo is responsible for serving as a model for transformation in improving the quality of learning and school management. However, behind this achievement, the school also faces typical challenges of primary schools in semi-rural areas, such as limited facilities, low parental involvement, and disparities in teacher competencies. (Ifani and Kartiwi 2023; Kartiwi and Susantob 2021;

Nipriansyah et al. 2023; Puspita and Kartiwi 2023) As a key actor in the Sekolah Penggerak program, the principal is expected to perform administrative functions that are not only administrative but also strategic and visionary. (Patilima 2022; Syafi'i 2022) Therefore, this study must explore how the principal's managerial practices at SDN 2 Srimulyo contribute to improving school quality and how these strategies can be replicated in other primary schools undergoing educational transformation.

This research is novel in examining how principals at SDN 2 Srimulyo implement their managerial roles based on Permendiknas No 13 of 2007. A descriptive qualitative approach will be used to explore the principal's experiences, challenges, and strategies in improving the quality of education. (Hoque 2025) Thus, this research explains the phenomenon theoretically and provides a real picture of school leadership practice in a local context.

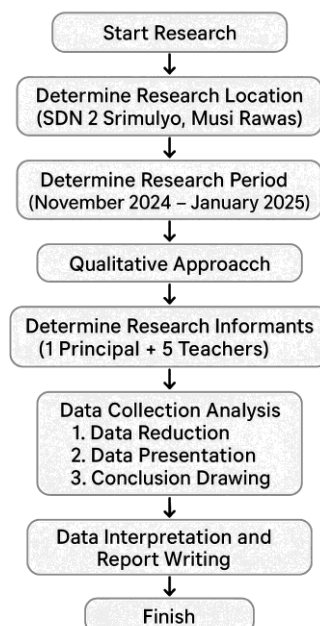
Based on state-of-the-art research. The first research conducted (Zai et al., 2022) which resulted in the role of the principal in the implementation of school-based management at SMA Negeri 1 Ulugawo is not independent of the professionalism of the principal in the implementation of school-based management at SMA Negeri 1 Ulugawo has been carried out with good, marked by exemplary principal school comes every day to school, compiling work programs school, and organizational structure school. So that educators and education personnel know their duties and functions, which in the end becomes one of the community's attractions (participants, students) to attend school at SMA Negeri 1 Ulu Gawo. Second (Zai et al., 2022), which resulted in the role of the principal in the implementation of school-based management at SMA Negeri 1 Ulugawo is not independent of the professionalism of the principal in the implementation of school-based management. The third research, conducted (Wahyudin, 2018) which resulted in the Leadership of the principal at the level of the education unit greatly determines the success of the implementation of the curriculum, the role of the principal of the school especially in facilitating teachers to carry out effective and productive learning, while teacher leadership at the classroom level becomes an integral part of the success of learning—fourth research. This was conducted (Komariah, Endarwati, and Mahfud 2020), which resulted in the head of school being an educational leader who plays an important role in improving teacher performance. The fifth research, conducted by The leadership role of the principal in improving teacher performance at SDN 12 Palu is very understanding of its leadership role as used in this thesis, using the theory from Mulyasa, namely as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator.

Based on the background of the above problems, research on the role of the principal as a manager in improving school quality at SDN 2 Srimulyo, Musi Rawas Regency is important to do because this research is new, and has never been done by previous researchers, no one has examined the role of the principal based on Permendiknas number 13 of 2003 with a full managerial role with 16 existing sub-competencies.

## 2. METHODS

This research was conducted at SDN 2 Srimulyo, Kabupaten Musi Rawas. The research was carried out for 3 months, from November 2024 to January 2025. This is qualitative research, which aims to obtain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the meaning of the phenomena in the field. The research instruments in this study were interviews addressed to each principal about the efforts made, and teachers in carrying out learning process activities to improve the quality of education in each of the schools used as research sites. The data that has been collected cannot be directly presented in the research report, but must be processed and analyzed first. Data analysis is made after the data and information obtained are analyzed according to the needs (Elçi, 2024; Makofane et al., 2024). Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and continuous effort. Three stages of data analysis were carried out: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

The subjects of this research have informants as the main subjects or primary subjects, who are the principal, the board of teachers, educators, or school education personnel at SDN 2 Srimulyo. The subjects of this research were selected based on the people involved in the role of the principal as a manager in improving school quality. This research has a total of 6 subjects, which consist of the principal and five teachers. The principal and five teachers.



**Figure 1.** Results of Systematic Literature Review

Source: processed by researchers

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### RESULTS

##### 3.1. The Principal's Role as a Manager in Improving Education Quality at SDN 2 Srimulyo

Based on interviews and documentation, the principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo demonstrated a comprehensive and structured managerial role. The principal develops data-based short-term, medium-term, and long-term programs in planning. This process involves analyzing the education quality report card and involving stakeholders such as teachers, the school committee, supervisors, and student guardians. Planning focused on improving literacy and numeracy, building students' character, and fulfilling infrastructure.

In organizing, the principal designed a clear and compelling school organizational structure. Tasks are divided proportionally according to the competencies of teaching and education personnel. In addition, strengthening communication among school members through regular coordination meetings prioritizes establishing a collaborative work culture.

The principal encourages program implementation through supervision and mentoring at the implementation stage. For example, learning group activities are conducted three times a week to support the improvement of teachers' competencies, as well as the Saturday Sharing program and the Office Management Working Group to strengthen the learning process.

Principals regularly monitor program and teacher performance for supervision and evaluation. Evaluation is followed up to ensure quality improvement from year to year. This is reflected in the increased quality report card scores due to the programs implemented. The results of data interpretation are visualized in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1.** The principal's role as a manager

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicators/Field Findings	Data Source
The Principal's Role as a Manager	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short, medium, and long-term planning</li> <li>• Education quality report analysis</li> <li>• Data-based planning (PDB)</li> <li>• Stakeholder involvement in planning</li> </ul>	Interviews with the principal, teacher AN, and teacher NB
	Organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and effective organizational structure</li> <li>• Proportional task distribution</li> <li>• Coordination among school elements</li> </ul>	Interviews with the principal, teacher WS, and teacher GN
	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execution of annual programs</li> <li>• Teacher learning communities (Kombel) are held three times a week</li> <li>• "Saturday Sharing" &amp; PMO programs</li> </ul>	Observations, interviews, and program document
	Supervision & Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular evaluation meetings</li> </ul>	Interviews, meeting documentation

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicators/Field Findings	Data Source
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow-up based on quality reports</li> <li>Principal's supervision practices</li> </ul>	

Source: interview, observation, and documentation study January – March 2025

### 3.2. Supporting and Hindering Factors for Principals in Managerial Roles

This study also identified several supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing the principal's role as a manager. Supporting factors include:

- The commitment and collaboration of the school community, from teachers and staff to student guardians and the community.
- The availability of facilities and infrastructure continues to be developed through needs mapping and effective procurement programs.

Inhibiting factors include:

- Budget constraints sometimes limit the maneuvering capacity for implementing innovative programs.
- The quality of human resources still needs to be improved equally, especially in the utilization of educational technology.
- Frequent changes in national education policies require schools to adapt quickly.

Despite these obstacles, the principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo can demonstrate adaptive, participatory, and data-based leadership. This shows that the principal's role as a manager is not only administrative but also strategic and transformational in improving the quality of basic education. The results of data interpretation are visualized in the table as follows:

**Table 2.** Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicators/Field Findings	Data Source
1. Supporting factors	Stakeholder commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active involvement of the teacher, the school committee, and the parent</li> <li>Collaboration among school members</li> </ul>	Interviews with AN, WS, and NG
	Facilities & infrastructure Government support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of learning media</li> <li>ICT-based learning facilities</li> <li>Involvement of village officials</li> <li>Collaboration with the school supervisor and the local education office</li> </ul>	Quality report, interview Interviews with NB, GN, and the principal
2. Inhibiting factors	Budget constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited resources to implement all priority programs</li> </ul>	Interviews with the principal and teacher
	Uneven human resources Policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some teachers still require professional development</li> <li>The need for quick adaptation to new regulations</li> </ul>	Kombel observations Policy documentation

Source: interview, observation, and documentation study January – March 2025

## DISCUSSION

### **The Principal's Role as a Manager in Improving School Quality**

SDN 2 Srimulyo conducts planning divided into short-term planning, Annual programs related to learning, extracurricular activities, and improving infrastructure. Medium-term planning: Preparation of a program to improve teacher competence, fulfill national education standards, and develop the curriculum. Long-term planning: Development of the school into a leading institution through learning innovation and strengthening relationships with the community. This aligns with (Farhangian et al., 2022), which explains that plans and actions help design the model. The planning made by SDN 2 Srimulyo with the term and involving collaboration between stakeholders makes tiered planning will run according to the conditions according to the conditions and circumstances of the students.

Strategies for succession planning include familiarization, cooperation, organizational learning, trust-building, foresight, and systematic thinking Second, target identification at SDN 2 Srimulyo from the results of the analysis of the educator's report card, the target focus is obtained by collaborating with the supervisor, principal, teachers, student guardians and committee chairman. This aligns with (Rubiherlan et al., 2024), which states that using the Education Report Card in program development at SDN Puncak 2 is carried out through the identification flow of reflection and improvement involving the school community. Program development is carried out according to the agreement between the principal, teachers, and the school committee based on the discussion results and the analysis of the education report card.

The collaboration of school members in preparing RKAS and school activity programs is carried out from the results of the analysis conducted by a small team that finds the focus of the objectives of the program that has been implemented, preparing a data-based RKAS based on recommendations from the school quality report card and adjusting the quality report card that is not good. This is in line with (Caupayan, 2025; Komariah et al., 2020), which states that preparing the School Work Plan (RKS) is a problem related to the data that must be used for school work planning. Changes in data for the school quality report card make it a problem for schools to use data to prepare the RKAS. This is (Bateman & McDonald, 2023) in line with the level of play a teacher engaged in, which was influenced by the interaction of teachers' espoused practices, availability of learning events around the policy, relationships with administration, and engagement with COPs, mediating actors in the assemblage.

Preparing a program improvement plan focusing on the quality report card at SDN 2 Srimulyo focuses on improving literacy and numeracy because it is still low and considered important. After all, numeracy literacy is the basis of students' basic knowledge. This aligns with the statement that strategic management in education significantly improves student literacy and numeracy through targeted program planning and implementation. (Khalijan et al. 2024)

With strategies such as teacher professional development, parental involvement, and balanced curriculum adjustments, educational institutions can create a learning environment that is relevant and conducive to improving students' basic skills.

The plan to improve literacy and numeracy, SDN 2 Srimulyo, also plans to improve character through an anti-drugs and anti-bullying movement at school. This movement is based on the Education Report Card, which shows low results regarding student character. This aligns with Stevenson et al, which states that bullying cases are acute and must be immediately treated. Creating an educational environment that is friendly, comfortable, safe, and full of tolerance becomes a must so that bullying cases never pollute the world of education again. Internalizing character tolerance can be one of the practical solutions in overcoming bullying. (Stevenson and Thompson 2025)

The plan to improve character at SDN 2 Srimulyo begins with in-house training (IHT) in learning about students' desires and needs. This aligns with (Safitri et al., 2023), which states that In-House Training (IHT) can support teacher learning in other projects to improve student character. This is in line with (Nyiramana, 2023), the quality of teaching is primarily influenced by the quality of training teachers undergo before and after entering their work.

Financial management must be carried out efficiently and transparently by allocating budgets based on priority needs, recording and reporting the use of funds accountably, and seeking alternative funding sources such as cooperation with external parties. This is in line with (Indemne & Escalona, 2024). Effective liquidation of allocated funds for public elementary schools is critical for ensuring transparency, accountability, and proper utilization of resources within the Department of Education.

When managing school resources, principals allocate and optimize teaching staff, financial resources, and facilities and infrastructure transparently. This is supported by (Weiner et al., 2021), which states that principals need to develop programs that appeal to school quality, establish harmonious relationships, and provide good service to school stakeholders to ensure effectiveness and good school management.

The principal also plays a role in managing change and innovation by encouraging the application of technology in learning and school management. A conducive school culture and climate are created by building a comfortable, safe learning environment and instilling a culture of discipline and innovation. Making innovations by implementing a curriculum based on students' abilities has improved learning outcomes. This is supported by (Foluke, 2024), repositioning the curriculum in general terms would ensure improved and quality learning outcomes, especially when all necessary resources are adequately and sufficiently made available to the schools and the professional instructional process.

The management of teachers and staff is carried out by providing regular training and mentoring, and ensuring that performance evaluations are carried out regularly. This is in line



(Phonna et al., 2024) with the maintenance of facilities work, which is carried out periodically, and the Head of Administration conducts monitoring (supervision) of equipment that no longer works optimally and upgrades the equipment so that it can function optimally. Building school relations with the community, the principal establishes communication with parents, the community, and the business world to support school development. This aligns with (Feng 201), which motivates teachers to leave classroom responsibilities and find better value alignment with formal leadership roles.

Curriculum and learning adjustments are developed to be aligned with national policies, educators' circumstances, and learners' needs, and managed with the principles of flexibility and innovation. Teachers use it to facilitate student learning, including master classes, group discussions, practical activities, collaborative projects, educational technology use, and other pedagogical techniques. All stages are designed to support students in adapting to the school environment (Avellan-Zambrano, Chila-Cusme, and Solórzano-Solórzano 2025).

Financial management principles ensure that budgets are managed with transparency, accountability, and efficiency, while school administration is run with an orderly and systematic system. This is in line with (Winaya et al., 2022), the use of BOS funds has been adjusted to the results of meetings compiled in the budget plan by applying the principle of transparency. The existence of transparency in school financial management, including BOS funds, tends to be very orderly and systematic.

Information technology is increasingly optimized through e-learning, learning applications, and technology-based school management systems. This is in line with (Yuldashevich, 2020), primary school teachers should be accustomed to the practical and conscious use of information and communication technologies, computers, radio, television, and technical equipment in higher pedagogical education. To do this, it is advisable to equip them with methods of using information and communication technologies.

Principals conduct monitoring, evaluation, and reporting based on performance indicators, which are used as the basis for planning and following up on improving the quality of education. This is in line with (Caupayan, 2025), mentoring practices also increase the conviction of the teachers to internalize their roles as teachers in the making. Most importantly, they aided the development and refinement of pre-service teachers as they created meaningful and fulfilling internship experiences.

### **Factors supporting and hindering principals in their managerial roles.**

The existence of good cooperation with teachers and staff greatly influences support from educators and education personnel, as well as the performance of a principal. The staff and educators' work spirit, professionalism, and readiness to carry out their duties will make it easier for the principal. This is in line (Syamsul, 2017) with the school body, leadership should be developed among all teachers, at all levels. All teachers should participate in developing the

vision and mission of the school to face the future era. All members of the organizational group should be willing to accept new responsibilities, take risks, and build consensus and trust among colleagues.

Supportive government policies, such as the Mobilizing Schools program and BOS funds. External factors that influence the role of school principals are clear education policies, adequate budget allocations, and guidance from the education office that will strengthen the role of school principals as managers in managing schools well. This is in line with (Ekmekci et al., 2025). School community stakeholders should also find ways to improve workplace conditions and culture to achieve greater conformity between teachers and their school-work environment to improve teacher retention.

Principals also face challenges such as limited school budgets. Limited funds and infrastructure are internal factors faced by schools. With these limitations, schools must be able to carry out efficient fund management. Because of this, efficient management must be carried out, and many programs must be postponed due to limited funds. At SDN 2 Srimulyo, the limited funds are very influential because school development is centered on the government budget in the form of School Operational Assistance. This is in line with (Majer & Makuac, 2023) the need for normalization of the budget process by continuing the transition from a situation where cash rationing played a key role in determining resource allocations to a situation where budget appropriations become a predictable guide to resource availability. This can be overcome by managing funds efficiently and planning in stages according to the problem's focus.

Parents' participation in school programs hinders the effective implementation of education quality improvement programs. Lack of community involvement in education, such as low parental concern for children's academic development, can make it difficult for school principals to implement programs to improve the quality of education. This is in line with (Makofane et al., 2024). The principals disclosed that most parents do not show up to provide academic support to their children. Some parents feel ashamed when they are called to discuss their children's academic progress due to the family's conditions. This can be overcome by collaborating with student guardians, committees, and the government to socialize the important role of parental participation in improving their role at school.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

First, principals have a vital role in improving the quality of education at SDN 2 Srimulyo, including planning, managing human resources, developing the curriculum, utilizing information technology, and conducting good evaluations. 1) The principal's role in planning is to divide the planning into short, medium, and long term by using a data-based planning approach to determine school development priorities, involving various stakeholders, such as

teachers, school committees, and supervisors, in the planning. 2) The role of the principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo in managing school change and development. The principal builds the school as an innovative learning organization, encourages the improvement of teachers' competencies through training and professional development, and utilizes technology in administration and learning. 3) The role of the principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo in managing school finances and administration. The principal applies the principles of accountability, transparency, and efficiency in financial management, ensuring that funds are used according to the priority needs of the school, and conducts regular financial recording and reporting. 4) The role of the principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo in managing school relations with the community. The principal establishes partnerships with the school committee, parents, and the surrounding community, seeks financial support and external resources for school development, and develops cooperation programs with business and industry. 5) The role of the principal in monitoring, evaluating, and reporting. The principal of SDN 2 Srimulyo plays a role in supervising and evaluating educational programs at the school, preparing periodic reports on school development and educational quality achievements, and making continuous improvements based on evaluation results.

Secondly, the main supporting factors in improving the quality of education at SDN 2 Srimulyo are the strong leadership competence of the principal, support from the teaching and education staff, and supportive government policies such as the Mobilizing Schools program and BOS funds. However, some inhibiting factors must be overcome, such as the limited school budget and the lack of parental participation in supporting school programs. Therefore, this can be overcome by managing funds efficiently and focusing on planning in stages according to the focus of the problem to be solved. Innovative strategies are needed to optimize available resources and increase the involvement of various stakeholders in school management. This can be overcome by collaborating with student guardians, committees, and the government to socialize the important role of parental participation in increasing their role at school.

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