

Implementation of School Principal's Managerial Competence in Improving School Quality

**Bambang Kusmiyanto¹, Ety Setianingsih², Prasetya³, Lilis Kholisoh Nuryani^{4*},
Maman Herman⁵**

Educational Administration Department, Universitas Galuh, Ciamis,
West Java, Indonesia

Email : bkusmiyanto@gmail.com¹, etysetya693@gmail.com², prasetyasebelas@gmail.com³,
liliskholisoh@unigal.ac.id⁴, mamanherman@unigal.ac.id⁵

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyse the implementation of principals' managerial competencies, which include conceptual, humanistic, and technical skills, in improving the quality of education in schools. A qualitative approach, employing descriptive methods, was used to examine the problems and gain deeper insights. Data collection techniques included interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Data were analysed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The study findings indicate that principals excel in coordinating policies, solving problems collaboratively, and developing structured plans, which have a positive impact on school operations. Humanistic skills, including communication, empathy, and teacher motivation, foster a supportive and productive environment. Principals' technical skills in curriculum development, classroom supervision, and administrative management contribute to school operational efficiency. This study suggests that principals who combine strong leadership with emotional intelligence and technical expertise create a conducive learning environment. This study contributes to educational leadership by offering practical insights for school administrators and recommends a focus on continuous professional development for principals to enhance their competencies.

Keywords: *Principal's Managerial Competence, School Quality, Teacher Motivation*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi kompetensi manajerial kepala sekolah, yang meliputi keterampilan konseptual, humanis, dan teknis, dalam peningkatan mutu pendidikan di sekolah. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif digunakan untuk mengkaji permasalahan dan mendapatkan wawasan yang lebih mendalam. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Data dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah unggul dalam mengoordinasikan kebijakan, memecahkan masalah secara kolaboratif, dan mengembangkan rencana terstruktur, yang berdampak positif pada operasional sekolah. Keterampilan humanis, termasuk komunikasi, empati, dan motivasi guru, mendorong terciptanya lingkungan yang suportif dan produktif. Keterampilan teknis kepala sekolah dalam pengembangan kurikulum, supervisi kelas, dan manajemen administrasi berkontribusi pada efisiensi operasional sekolah. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah yang menggabungkan kepemimpinan yang kuat dengan kecerdasan emosional dan keahlian teknis menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang kondusif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kepemimpinan pendidikan dengan

menawarkan wawasan praktis bagi administrator sekolah dan merekomendasikan fokus pada pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan bagi kepala sekolah untuk meningkatkan kompetensi mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Kompetensi Managerial Kepala Sekolah, Mutu Sekolah, Motivasi Guru*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential pillar for the development of any nation, including Indonesia. It plays a crucial role in fostering national growth by shaping individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also ethical, independent, and responsible. While the government has set high aspirations for the educational system through laws such as the National Education System Law, significant gaps still exist between educational policies and their practical outcomes (Caves & Oswald-Egg, 2023; Irman et al., 2023; Mooren et al., 2021). The challenge lies in implementing these policies, which affects the overall quality of education (Boto et al., 2021; Salim et al., 2024). Despite the efforts to improve education, schools, especially those in rural areas, still face difficulties in providing quality education. The principal's leadership, including their managerial skills, is a central factor in overcoming these challenges. The relationship between school leadership and school quality is crucial in addressing the existing issues in the educational sector.

The role of a principal extends beyond being a mere administrator; they are responsible for guiding and influencing the school's overall management and operation. Managerial competence is a fundamental trait for a principal as it involves the ability to plan, organize, lead, and control the school environment (Ghashghaeizadeh, 2020; Tian & Guo, 2024). This competency directly impacts the school's functioning and, consequently, its educational outcomes. Effective school leadership is crucial for improving student achievement and enhancing the school's environment (Arsul et al., 2021; Mushtaque et al., 2022). Principals are expected to possess conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills, which are integral to their management tasks. The principal's leadership is assessed based on their ability to manage resources, including the faculty, curriculum, and facilities (Arsul et al., 2021; Fatmawati et al., 2024). The question arises, however, as to how these competencies are effectively applied in real-world educational settings, particularly in schools where resources are limited.

School quality is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including the input, process, and output of the educational system. Input refers to the resources available to the school, such as teaching staff, facilities, and curriculum materials. The process involves the actual teaching and learning activities, which include the methods employed by teachers, the learning environment, and the students' engagement (Johnson et al., 2020). Finally, the output refers to the results of the educational process, which can be measured by students' academic performance, as well as their non-academic achievements. Quality education is not just about good exam results, but also about fostering an environment where students can thrive, develop their

character, and prepare for the future. Effective school leadership and management are essential for ensuring that these elements work in harmony (Thoha et al., 2023). However, despite the importance of leadership in improving school quality, many schools still struggle to achieve high standards in these areas.

Several studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between managerial competencies of school principals and school quality. Sakti et al. (2024) identified that principal leadership has a significant impact on the learning environment, which in turn affects students' performance. The principals who implemented strategic leadership were more likely to see improvements in their schools' overall quality (Haq & Roesminingsih, 2023; Memon et al., 2024). Tanzeh et al. (2021) showed that principals who actively engaged in professional development programs were able to enhance both their competencies and the quality of education in their schools. Berkovich and Hassan (2024) emphasized that principals who possessed a good understanding of management were better able to improve school outcomes. Despite these studies, a lack of research specifically examining the role of managerial competencies in relation to school quality in Indonesia remains, particularly in rural and peripheral areas.

While considerable research has been conducted on the relationship between principal competencies and school quality, a noticeable gap remains in studies that assess the specific challenges faced by school principals in rural and smaller schools in Indonesia. Most existing studies have been conducted in urban settings or larger institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how leadership competencies affect school quality in schools with fewer resources. Additionally, previous research often fails to differentiate between the types of managerial competencies that contribute most significantly to school quality. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on schools and analyzing how principals' competencies directly influence school performance. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on managerial skills as a predictor of school quality in less-researched areas and its application of these findings to smaller schools.

The primary focus of this study is to explore how the managerial competencies of school principals contribute to improving the quality of education in schools, specifically at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap. The research aims to answer the following questions: How do the managerial competencies of school principals affect the quality of education at these schools? What specific managerial skills are most influential in improving school quality? How can these competencies be enhanced to support the improvement of education at the school level? The study will examine various aspects of school leadership, including strategic planning, decision-making, and resource management, to assess their impact on both academic and non-academic outcomes.

This study has contributed to the understanding of how the managerial competencies of principals impact school quality, with a specific focus on Indonesian schools. By focusing on both conceptual and human skills, this research will provide insights into the effectiveness of leadership in schools with

limited resources. The argument underlying this study is that the principal's role in managing the school goes beyond administration; their competencies directly influence the success of educational programs, student outcomes, and the overall learning environment. Improving these competencies leads to a significant enhancement in the quality of education, which is crucial for the nation's development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research approach uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to examine issues and gain a deeper understanding of the problems under study (Hirose & Creswell, 2023). This research employs a descriptive method, a research approach that aims to describe and interpret an object as it is. This method is used primarily to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of the object or subject being studied. Furthermore, the descriptive method is also beneficial for identifying variations in problems related to education or human behavior.

This research will be conducted from October 2024 to June 2025 at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap, located at Jl. Jend. Sudirman No.109, Cleko, Tambakreja, Cilacap Selatan, Cilacap Regency, Central Java, Postal Code 53213, and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi, located at Jl. Raya Jambusari No.06, Jeruklegi District, Cilacap Regency, Central Java. The data processing steps in this research include reliability, validity, and triangulation. Qualitative reliability indicates that the approach used by the researcher is consistent when applied by other researchers or in different projects (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Therefore, data processing through data validity will be examined in detail, drawing on the processes of observation, interviews, and documentation from the research subjects.

In this research, the researcher uses data triangulation techniques (often referred to as source triangulation), which involve comparing and cross-checking the degree of trust in information or data obtained through interviews with secondary data in the form of relevant documents. Triangulation is a technique for verifying the validity of data by utilizing something else (Pregoner, 2025). From the above, triangulation can be achieved by: 1) comparing observation data with interview data; 2) comparing what is said in public with what is said privately; 3) comparing what people say about the research situation with what they say over time; 4) comparing one's condition and perspective with various opinions from people such as ordinary people, those with middle or higher education, the wealthy, or government officials; 5) comparing interview results with the contents of a relevant document.

The research design represents a research action plan, which is a set of sequential activities logically connecting research questions to the research conclusions that answer the research problem. The components of the design can include all research structures, starting from finding an idea, determining objectives, planning the research process, which involves planning, problem formulation, defining the research objectives, searching for information sources, reviewing various literature, determining the method used, data analysis, and testing hypotheses to obtain research results.

The research design used in this study is a case study and field research design, which includes four interrelated components: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data presentation, and (4) drawing conclusions and verification. This aligns with Miles and Huberman (Ruffa & Evangelista, 2021), who state that the main components to be genuinely understood are the data collection period, data reduction, data display (presentation), and conclusions or verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Conceptual Skills

The research findings show that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have been able to coordinate effectively in making policies, both vertically and horizontally. Vertical coordination is carried out by the principal with the work units above and below their authority and responsibility, while horizontal coordination is conducted with officials of the same level.

Each policy created is always discussed first with all interested parties and stakeholders, ensuring it is known and agreed upon by everyone in an official meeting. After that, the agreement is also consulted with the relevant officials at the Education Office before being implemented. Therefore, no party feels forced or reluctant to implement the policies. Furthermore, the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have been able to solve every problem that occurs at the school by: (1) first understanding the existing problems, (2) knowing the people involved, (3) planning the best strategy or solution for resolution, (4) resolving the issue with all relevant parties, and (5) ensuring that the problem has truly been resolved. Thus, the school becomes conducive.

The research findings show that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have also been able to make the best decisions for the school's progress by making decisions when they are focused and not emotional, gathering facts and information beforehand, staying open to all possibilities, determining the positive and negative impacts of the decision, positioning themselves from others' perspectives, communicating with all related parties, and evaluating every decision made. Next, the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have been able to develop well-structured plans for the school's progress by taking steps such as: (1) formulating the goals to be achieved and success indicators; (2) formulating priority programs; (3) detailing the activities; and (4) preparing a budget plan. Additionally, alternative programs are formulated in case the objectives cannot be achieved through a single program or activity.

Moreover, the principals also form the right working teams according to their respective fields, determine the appropriate budget and time for the activities to be carried out, prepare backup plans, and constantly evaluate the plans before they are implemented. Thus, the principal's approach to making well-structured plans for the school's progress has been carried out with impartial management, creating a scholastic environment, conducting

professional training, preparing infrastructure, and setting up assessment models.

Table 1. Aspect the Implementation of Managerial

Aspect	SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap	SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi
Vertical Coordination	Effective coordination with higher and lower units of authority	Similar coordination with both higher and lower units
Horizontal Coordination	Coordination with peers at the same level	Effective peer coordination at the same administrative level
Problem Solving	Understanding issues, planning solutions, collaborating with relevant parties	Similar approach in identifying issues and involving relevant stakeholders in solutions
Decision Making	Making decisions based on facts, communication with all involved	Decision-making is fact-driven and collaborative
Planning for School Progress	Detailed goal-setting, priority programs, and budget planning	Similar planning steps with structured activities and budgeting
Team Formation & Evaluation	Creating the right teams, preparing backup plans, evaluating activities	Forming appropriate teams, evaluating plans before implementation

Table 1 compares the implementation of managerial competencies between the two schools, with a focus on conceptual skills and their practical application. It shows that both schools exhibit similar strategies in several areas. For example, both principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi have implemented effective vertical and horizontal coordination by engaging all relevant stakeholders. Problem-solving processes are also quite similar, with both schools emphasizing understanding the problem, involving key players, and planning solutions. The decision-making process is informed by gathering relevant data and ensuring open communication with all concerned parties. When it comes to planning for school progress, both schools adhere to structured approaches, such as setting goals, detailing activities, and preparing budgets. Additionally, both principals place a strong emphasis on team formation and ongoing evaluation to ensure effective implementation of plans.

Human Skills

The research findings indicate that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have successfully established good cooperation with teachers and all other staff members at their respective schools. The principals consistently maintain good communication, using polite and respectful language, and are friendly to everyone. They respect others regardless of their status, religion, or caste. Furthermore, the principals are also sociable, humorous, yet firm in carrying out their duties. This makes the teachers in these schools more open in their work, feel more comfortable, participate in discussions, and receive better feedback from the principal and other teachers.

Additionally, the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have been able to establish good communication with teachers and other educational staff by clearly and effectively delivering the main points, always paying attention to their conversation partners to avoid misunderstandings, engaging in open and honest

dialogues with all teachers and staff, and making themselves available to discuss issues, share ideas, and address the challenges they face. Moreover, the principals encourage greetings and casual conversations every day when arriving at school to foster camaraderie, family ties, and brotherhood among everyone. Similarly, when a teacher is absent, they inquire at least by phone, and if someone is sick, they visit them together. Effective communication between the principal and teachers fosters harmonious relationships and strengthens collaboration to achieve educational goals.

The research findings show that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have also provided guidance and assistance in completing teachers' tasks by offering guidance and direction according to the issues faced by the teachers. If a teacher experiences difficulty, such as in preparing lesson plans (RPP) or syllabi, or other teaching tools, supervision is carried out to understand the teacher's understanding of their teaching duties, while also providing the necessary solutions. The principal, as a supervisor, is responsible for: (1) efforts to improve teaching, (2) supervising classes and teaching activities, (3) conducting class visits (during teaching) to obtain real-time information about activities and issues, (4) assigning appropriate tasks to teachers, and (5) assessing work performance.

Furthermore, the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have been able to build teachers' work motivation by: (1) controlling, influencing, and encouraging teachers to perform their tasks responsibly, honestly, effectively, and efficiently, (2) prioritizing openness and a humanistic approach, (3) assigning tasks and responsibilities to teachers in a balanced and capacity-appropriate manner.

In addition, the principals provide honest and fair performance evaluations, as well as moral support to teachers, creating a conducive and productive work environment. Teachers feel valued and supported, which motivates them to work harder and give their best for the school's progress. A good principal is not only assessed based on academic or administrative achievements but also on their ability to inspire and motivate their teachers. Vigorous and enthusiastic leadership can spread positive energy to all school members. The research findings indicate that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have continuously provided awards to outstanding teachers in the form of badges, special promotions, financial incentives, trophies, certificates, or other awards tailored to the achievements of each teacher. These awards are typically presented during the commemoration of Indonesia's Independence Day, National Teachers' Day, National Education Day, and other significant events. Teachers who regularly receive recognition, praise, and rewards become more productive, more engaged in their work, and more likely to stay at the school. Additionally, the awards given can serve as motivation for teachers to continuously improve the quality of their teaching and achieve higher accomplishments.

The research findings indicate that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have effectively managed and resolved various issues that arise within the school environment. Their approach

involves a systematic process that begins with understanding the root cause of each problem. They then identify the individuals or groups affected by the issue, ensuring a thorough assessment of the situation. Next, the principals carefully plan the most appropriate strategies or solutions, taking into account the input of all relevant parties. The resolution is carried out collaboratively, ensuring that all stakeholders are involved in the process. Finally, the principals ensure that the issue has been fully addressed and that the school environment remains conducive to learning. This methodical and inclusive problem-solving approach not only resolves issues but also fosters a positive and supportive school culture. By engaging with the entire school community and ensuring thorough follow-through, the principals maintain a harmonious and productive atmosphere for both students and staff.

Technical Skills

The research findings show that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have implemented regular class supervision conducted every mid-semester. The supervision activities carried out by the principals are more focused on helping teachers critically diagnose their activities and difficulties in the learning process. The stages of supervision by the principal begin with planning (pre-observation), during which a pre-observation discussion is held to clarify objectives and confirm the teacher's readiness. The next stage is implementation (observation), during which the principal observes the teacher's teaching activities with the students in the classroom. The final stage is the follow-up (post-observation), in which the principal and the teacher reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the activities conducted as input for future improvements, applying the coaching paradigm. Under the coaching paradigm, the principal as the coach remains focused on the teacher (the coachee) being developed, is open-minded, curious, has strong self-awareness, and can see new opportunities and the future.

The principal also uses the TIRTA framework with the following steps: (1) knowing and setting the goal (T) that the coachee intends to achieve, (2) digging into and identifying (I) the problems faced by the coachee, (3) after identifying the issues, the coachee, with the coach's help, can establish an action plan (R) based on the insights gained during coaching, and (4) the final stage of the TIRTA framework is the commitment or responsibility (TA) of the coachee to implement the action plan. Additionally, the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have evaluated and revised the teachers' teaching programs by reviewing the alignment between the existing curriculum and the teaching materials prepared by the teachers, such as the annual program, semester program, syllabus, and lesson plans (RPP). Moreover, the programs must align with the school's conditions and the students' needs.

The research findings indicate that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have also developed teaching programs by linking the curriculum with the teaching team and the vice-principals responsible for curriculum development.

They do the following: 1) Analyze the existing curriculum by understanding its objectives, basic competencies, and the materials that need to be taught; 2) Plan learning activities by arranging class activities, Extracurricular activities supporting learning, and other relevant programs; 3) Ensure alignment by connecting each learning activity with the goals and competencies outlined in the curriculum; 4) Allocate resources by ensuring the availability of necessary materials such as books, teaching aids, and facilities; and 5) Conduct monitoring and evaluation to oversee the program's implementation and evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the curriculum's goals.

The principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have managed student evaluation programs by establishing general policies regarding student evaluations, including the types of evaluations (formative and summative), the frequency of implementation, and assessment weights. Although the technical implementation of evaluations is often delegated to teachers and the curriculum team, the principal remains ultimately responsible for the school's overall evaluation system.

Table 2. Technical Skills Aspect

Aspect	SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap	SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi
Classroom Supervision	Regular mid-semester class supervision with pre-observation, observation, and post-observation stages	Similar structured supervision with clear stages: planning, observation, reflection
Curriculum Development	Analysis of curriculum objectives, competencies, and materials; detailed planning of learning activities	Similar curriculum analysis, planning, and alignment with school needs
Teaching Program Monitoring	Ensures curriculum alignment and resource allocation; monitors implementation	Follows similar processes for ensuring curriculum alignment and resource use
Student Evaluation Management	Establishes evaluation policies, delegates implementation, but maintains final responsibility	Similar approach to student evaluation management, with delegation but final oversight by the principal
Teacher Development	Provides classroom observations, constructive feedback, and encourages professional development	Facilitates teacher collaboration and supports participation in training and workshops
School Administration	Oversees administrative tasks with assistance from staff, ensures transparency and accountability	Similar administrative practices with delegation but final responsibility held by the principal

Table 2 compares the implementation of technical skills between the two schools, with a focus on classroom supervision, curriculum development, teacher evaluation, and administrative management. Both principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi engage in similar practices for classroom supervision, utilizing a structured process that includes pre-observation discussions, actual observation, and post-observation reflection. Both schools also adopt similar curriculum development practices, ensuring alignment between the curriculum, teaching materials, and student needs. In terms of student evaluations, both principals establish policies while delegating the actual implementation to teachers and the curriculum team, maintaining final

oversight of the system. The principals also encourage continuous teacher development by providing constructive feedback and facilitating professional training opportunities. Administrative management at both schools is also similar, with the principals overseeing the management of financial, human resources, and other school operations, often with the help of administrative staff and coordinators.

The research findings show that the principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have also assisted teachers in improving teaching by conducting constructive academic supervision through periodic classroom observations and providing specific, constructive feedback to teachers about their strengths and areas that need improvement in their teaching practices. The goal of this supervision is not to find faults but to offer support and clear guidance. In addition, the principals encourage collaboration among teachers in forums such as MGMP/MGBK and facilitate teachers' participation in various training programs, workshops, seminars, or continuous professional development programs (PKB). This helps teachers update their knowledge, master innovative teaching methods, and develop new skills. They also equip the school with the necessary facilities and infrastructure, although some aspects have not yet been completed. The principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap have managed various school administration tasks, including financial management, human resource management, infrastructure management, student affairs, reporting and documentation, public relations, and more. However, in carrying out these administrative tasks, the principals are often assisted by administrative staff, vice-principals, and coordinators of specific areas. Nonetheless, the final responsibility rests with the principal. Effective administration fosters an efficient, transparent, and accountable work environment, ultimately supporting the achievement of the school's educational objectives.

Discussion

The research demonstrates that the principals at both SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi have effectively utilized their conceptual skills in various aspects of school management. A study on the effectiveness of leadership skills in improving school outcomes found that principals who effectively coordinate both vertically and horizontally tend to create a more cohesive and efficient school culture (Aydemir & Türkel, 2022; Nuriyah, 2024). The principals at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi mirror this finding in their coordination efforts, which have significantly contributed to the successful implementation of school policies. The research indicates that principals who prioritize data-driven decisions and collaborate with stakeholders see more improvements in school quality.

Principals who develop well-structured plans and allocate resources efficiently can significantly improve educational outcomes (Campos & Kearns, 2024; Maduningtias et al., 2022). Both schools' emphasis on detailed planning and team building supports this perspective. Principals who engage in ongoing

evaluation of school activities tend to achieve higher levels of success in meeting educational goals (Muhith et al., 2023). This is evident in practice at both schools, where ongoing evaluation is a key part of their management strategy. The principals' ability to solve problems by engaging with relevant stakeholders and ensuring solutions are implemented reflects the findings of this study, demonstrating the importance of conceptual skills in effectively managing a school environment.

The research reveals that the principals at both SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi have effectively applied human skills to improve school quality. Their approach to communication, leadership, guidance, and motivation has contributed to building a positive, productive, and harmonious school environment. The role of emotional intelligence in school leadership was examined, and it was found that principals who foster strong relationships with their staff through empathetic communication and support have a more positive influence on school outcomes (Arsul et al., 2021; Skinner et al., 2021). This aligns with the findings from the two schools in Cilacap, where the principals' focus on effective communication and teacher motivation has fostered a strong school culture. This is evident in the practices at both schools, where teachers receive continuous feedback, recognition, and rewards, leading to higher engagement and motivation to perform well.

The principals who show genuine interest in the well-being of their teachers and offer personalized support contribute to creating a more collaborative and successful school environment (Arizmendi et al., 2023; Munawar et al., 2023). The principals at both schools in Cilacap exemplify this through their personal engagement with teachers and their efforts to address individual challenges. Meyer et al. (2022) suggests that leadership that balances firmness with empathy leads to better teacher performance and school achievement. School leaders provide both academic and emotional support; as a result, teachers are more likely to stay motivated and perform better (Gimbert et al., 2023; Patrick & George, 2023). This concept is directly reflected in the findings at both schools, where principals not only support teachers' professional needs but also ensure they feel emotionally supported and valued. These studies further confirm the critical role of human skills in shaping successful educational leadership.

The principals have implemented structured classroom observations and feedback mechanisms to help teachers improve their teaching practices. The principals' classroom supervision emphasized the importance of structured observation and feedback in helping teachers improve their practices (Bellibaş et al., 2022). The research found that principals who provide constructive feedback through regular supervision have a significant impact on teaching quality, aligning with the practices observed at both schools. Latifatus (2023) examined the impact of principals' involvement in curriculum development on student outcomes. This aligns with the practices at both schools, where principals take an active role in curriculum development and ensure that it meets the students' needs.

Principals who effectively manage school administration, including financial and resource management, create an efficient school environment that supports both teaching and learning (Ortan et al., 2021). The findings at both schools align with this perspective, where principals are involved in overseeing school administration while ensuring efficiency and accountability. The impact of professional development programs for teachers, finding that principals who encourage continuous learning and skill development contribute to the overall success of the school (Azmi et al., 2023). The principals' efforts in facilitating training programs and professional development at both schools are consistent with this finding. Falloon et al. (2022) examined the role of principals in student evaluation and assessment systems. The study concluded that principals who establish clear evaluation policies and maintain oversight can improve the effectiveness of assessments. This is reflected in the practices at both schools, where principals establish evaluation frameworks while delegating the implementation to other staff members, ensuring quality control and accountability.

The implications of this research underscore the crucial role of principals in utilizing their managerial competencies to improve school quality. The findings suggest that effective leadership, particularly through the application of conceptual, human, and technical skills, is essential for fostering a positive school culture, improving teaching practices, and ensuring academic success. Principals who engage in strategic planning, communication, and ongoing evaluation, while also supporting their teachers' professional and emotional needs, contribute to creating a collaborative and high-performance school environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussions, the implementation of the school principal's managerial competence at SMP Negeri 3 Cilacap and SMP Muhammadiyah Jeruklegi in Cilacap has been optimal in all aspects. From the perspective of conceptual skills, the principal can coordinate effectively in policy-making, solve problems that arise, make informed decisions to advance the school's progress, and develop well-structured plans to enhance the school's quality. In terms of human skills, the principal has been able to foster good cooperation with teachers, communicate effectively, provide guidance and assistance in addressing teachers' tasks, enhance teachers' work motivation, recognize outstanding teachers, and resolve school-related issues, all of which contribute to improving the school's quality. Meanwhile, in terms of technical skills, the principal has been able to conduct classroom supervision, evaluate and revise teaching programs, align the curriculum with learning activities, manage student evaluation programs, assist in improving teaching practices, and carry out school administration duties effectively, all of which support the enhancement of school quality.

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