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The Role of School Principals' Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance at Proskill Health Vocational School Tualang and YPPI Vocational School Tualang, Siak Regency

Herlina Nasa*, Slamet Lestari
Educational Management, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

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* *Corresponding author:*

E-mail: Herlinanasa.2024@student.uny.ac.id

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the role of school principal leadership in improving teacher performance in vocational high schools in Tualang District and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors that shape the effectiveness of principal leadership. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design conducted at SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang and SMK YPPI Tualang. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and school staff, classroom observations, and document analysis, including Education Report Cards and lesson plans. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that principals who apply transformational and instructional leadership are able to improve the quality of instructional planning, implementation, and evaluation, including the strengthening of numeracy and linkages with the labor market. However, limited academic supervision, inadequate facilities, and weak collaboration among teachers still hinder the optimal improvement of teacher performance.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar of national development because it determines the quality of human resources, as emphasized in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards, which place educators at the center of quality improvement. In vocational education, Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2016 on the Revitalization of Vocational High Schools mandates SMKs to produce competent graduates aligned with the needs of business and industry, making teacher performance a decisive factor in achieving these goals. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering subject matter but also for facilitating learning, guiding students, and

shaping character. Supiani (2022) asserts that optimal teacher performance is essential for achieving learning objectives, while the Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education (2019) identifies curriculum mastery, subject mastery, assessment competence, professional commitment, and discipline as key indicators of teacher performance. However, empirical evidence shows that many teachers have not consistently met these standards, indicating persistent challenges in instructional quality and professional practice.

The Education Report (Rapor Pendidikan) serves as a comprehensive evaluation instrument that reflects both student learning outcomes and the contribution of teacher performance to overall school quality. Indicators such as learning quality, numeracy achievement, and link and match with the world of work are closely related to teachers' planning, instructional implementation, and reflective practices. Data from vocational high schools in Tualang District indicate that performance remains at a moderate level across these three priority indicators. Learning quality is constrained by limited instructional variation, weak classroom management, minimal innovation, and an underdeveloped culture of reflection. Numeracy achievement remains suboptimal due to weak conceptual understanding and teaching approaches that insufficiently foster logical and analytical thinking. Meanwhile, link and match with industry is hindered by suboptimal Teaching Factory implementation, limited school committee involvement, and low engagement of parents and students. These conditions demonstrate that moderate school performance is closely linked to teacher professional practices and underscores the need for systematic improvement.

In this context, principal leadership becomes a strategic and urgent factor. Principals function not only as administrative managers but also as instructional leaders who shape school direction, academic climate, and professional culture. Research by Hamdani Gazali et al., (2023) confirms a significant relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance, showing that clear direction, guidance, and role modelling enhance teacher discipline, motivation, and responsibility. Ministerial Regulation No. 13 of 2007 further strengthens this role by defining five core competencies of principals, namely personal, managerial, entrepreneurial, supervisory, and social competencies, which collectively support professional development and sustainable learning quality. However, field findings in vocational high schools in Tualang District reveal that leadership practices are not always optimal, as some principals prioritize administrative tasks over academic supervision, resulting in limited classroom observation and feedback. Although previous studies highlight the positive impact of effective leadership, research focusing on vocational schools in semi-urban contexts and linking leadership to concrete indicators in the Education Report remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of principal leadership in improving teacher performance at vocational high schools in the Tualang District and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing leadership effectiveness in this context.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Qualitative research, as stated by Creswell (2018), aims to understand the meanings constructed by individuals or groups regarding a social phenomenon within a natural context. This approach emphasizes in-depth understanding of processes, behaviors, and experiences of research subjects rather than numerical measurement. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach was used to comprehensively explore the role of principal leadership in improving teacher performance through direct interaction with informants in the field. The descriptive method was applied to systematically and factually portray how principals carry out their leadership functions and how teachers respond to the influence of such leadership on their performance at SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang and SMK YPPI Tualang.

The research was conducted at two educational institutions, namely SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang and SMK YPPI Tualang, both located in Tualang Subdistrict, Siak Regency, Riau Province. These schools were selected purposively because they share similar characteristics as vocational education institutions that focus on preparing graduates for the world of work and are facing the challenge of improving teacher performance, which is still categorized as "moderate" based on the results of the Education Report (Rapor Pendidikan). The study was carried out over a four-month period, from August to November 2025, covering the stages of preparation, data collection, data analysis, and the writing of the final research report.

The data in this study consisted of two main types, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from first-hand sources through in-depth interviews and field observations. The primary data sources included principals, vice principals in charge of curriculum, and both productive and adaptive subject teachers at SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang and SMK YPPI Tualang. These data were used to capture authentic information regarding how principal leadership is exercised to improve teacher performance, including strategies for coaching, academic supervision, and the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered in practice.

Secondary data were collected from various documents and written sources relevant to the focus of the study. These included the Education Report (Rapor Pendidikan), principals' work programs, academic supervision reports, minutes of subject teacher working group (MGMP) meetings, teacher attendance records, and school or Education Office policy documents related to teacher quality improvement and school management. In addition, literature such as books, journal articles, and previous research findings were utilized to strengthen the theoretical foundation and to support the analysis of the research results.

Data collection in this study employed three main techniques, namely interviews, observations, and documentation, which were applied in an integrated and complementary manner to ensure the depth and validity of the data. Interviews were conducted based on the assumption that leadership practices and their influence on

teacher performance are best understood through the lived experiences and perspectives of school actors. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were carried out with principals, vice principals, and teachers to explore their views on leadership styles, decision-making processes, supervisory practices, motivational strategies, and their perceived impact on teacher performance.

Observations were conducted to capture actual leadership practices and teacher behavior in natural school settings, allowing the researcher to compare stated perceptions with real practices. The observation focused on principals' interactions with teachers, leadership behavior during academic and managerial activities, supervision of teaching and learning processes, and teachers' instructional performance, discipline, and engagement in classroom and school activities.

Documentation was used to obtain objective and verifiable evidence that supports the findings from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included school programs, supervision reports, teacher performance evaluations, meeting minutes, academic planning documents, and other official records related to leadership and teacher performance. This documentation served to strengthen data triangulation and enhance the credibility of the research findings. Through this combination of qualitative, descriptive design, purposively selected research sites, multiple data sources, and triangulated data collection techniques, the study sought to construct a comprehensive and contextual picture of how principal leadership operates in practice and how it contributes to enhancing teacher performance at vocational high schools in Tualang District.

3. Results and Discussion

Research Findings

This research was conducted at two vocational high schools (SMK) located in Tualang Subdistrict, Siak Regency, Riau Province, namely SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang and SMK YPPI Tualang. These schools were purposively selected because they represent different characteristics in instructional management, leadership practices, and organizational conditions, while facing comparable challenges related to teacher professional development and instructional innovation. The research process was carried out systematically, beginning with preliminary observations to understand the school context, followed by the identification of key informants who were directly involved in leadership and teaching activities.

Data collection primarily relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with principals, vice principals, and teachers at each school. The interview process was designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding principal leadership practices and their influence on teacher performance. To ensure consistency and alignment with the research objectives, an interview guideline was developed and used during the data collection process. The list of interview questions used in this study is presented in Table 1. All interview data were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed using a qualitative thematic approach,

which resulted in two main themes: (1) the role of principal leadership in improving teacher performance, and (2) the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing principal leadership in achieving this goal.

Table 1. Interview Questions

No.	Interview Questions
1.	How do you describe the leadership style applied by the principal in this school?
2.	What strategies does the principal use to improve teacher performance?
3.	How does the principal provide supervision and feedback to teachers?
4.	In what ways does the principal motivate teachers to improve their professional competence?
5.	How does leadership influence teachers' discipline and commitment to teaching?
6.	What forms of support are provided by the school leadership to enhance teacher performance?
7.	What obstacles does the principal face in improving teacher performance?
8.	How do teachers respond to leadership policies and programs implemented by the principal?
9.	How does the principal encourage innovation in teaching and learning processes?
10.	What suggestions can be given to improve the effectiveness of principal leadership in this school?

SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang

The principal emphasized a strong commitment to modeling instructional leadership and being directly involved in classroom activities. The principal stated, "I always try to set a good example and be directly involved in learning activities. I hold routine meetings to discuss new ways of improving instructional quality. However, limited time often becomes a constraint" (KSSKPT). The vice principal confirmed this, noting that regular meetings and constructive feedback sessions were provided, although time limitations hindered the full execution of planned agendas (WKSSKPT). This highlights time constraints as a major obstacle to implementing instructional improvement strategies more effectively.

Academic supervision was another focus area. The principal explained, "Supervision is conducted through direct observation and discussions with teachers. We provide constructive feedback" (KSSKPT). Teachers responded positively, stating that they were guided to reflect on strengths and weaknesses in their instructional methods (GSKPT). However, several teachers expressed that the limited time allocated for supervision prevented them from fully applying the feedback. Despite this, the principal consistently attempted to provide clear guidance for instructional improvement. The principal also played an active role in promoting instructional innovation, particularly in the use of technology. The principal shared, "I always demonstrate new strategies and encourage teachers to participate in experimenting with these innovations, though some still feel challenged in adapting to new technologies" (KSSKPT). While many teachers were inspired to follow the principal's example, others struggled due to insufficient training (GSKPT).

The principal additionally worked to create a supportive professional climate by fostering open communication and a collaborative atmosphere. However, some teachers perceived ambiguities in communication regarding new programs, while others noted that limited facilities hindered the implementation of certain initiatives. Overall, at SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang, the principal's leadership played a significant role in improving teacher performance through direct modeling, supervision, and innovation. Nevertheless, time constraints, inadequate training, and limited facilities continued to impede optimal teacher development.

SMK YPPI Tualang

At SMK YPPI Tualang, the principal also demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing teacher performance through various motivational and instructional programs. The principal explained, "I try to always provide support through motivational programs such as training and seminars. However, the main challenge is building confidence among teachers who remain hesitant about change" (KSYPT). The vice principal added that although performance evaluations and positive feedback were routinely offered, some teachers felt that insufficient recognition hindered motivation (WKSSYPT). Teachers confirmed this perspective, noting that despite receiving guidance, their motivation sometimes declined due to a lack of appreciation for their efforts (GSYPT).

In terms of academic supervision, the principal observed lessons directly and engaged in discussions with teachers to provide feedback. Yet again, limited supervision time constrained the depth of guidance (KSYPT). Some teachers felt unprepared to adopt new strategies due to insufficient adaptation time. The principal also encouraged technology integration, although several teachers struggled to adjust to innovations (GSYPT). The principal attempted to create a conducive working climate by encouraging open communication among staff. However, teachers noted that limited facilities often triggered frustration and constrained the implementation of pedagogical improvements (GSYPT). Although the principal strongly supported instructional innovation, structural limitations such as inadequate facilities and insufficient technical training posed ongoing challenges. The school community, including the committee and parents, provided considerable support, which strengthened the principal's initiatives. Nonetheless, outdated or inconsistent policies and limited facilities continued to affect the execution of planned programs. Overall, while the principal at SMK YPPI Tualang displayed strong leadership in motivating and supervising teachers, issues such as insufficient facilities, limited time, and inadequate technical training hindered the full realization of instructional quality improvements.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Key Aspects / Major Findings	SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang	SMK YPPI Tualang
Instructional Leadership	Principal models teaching practices; routine quality-improvement meetings; main challenge: limited time for consistent implementation.	Principal emphasizes motivational programs (training/seminars); consistent support, though some teachers feel recognition is insufficient.

Key Aspects / Major Findings	SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang	SMK YPPI Tualang
Academic Supervision	Direct observation + discussion; constructive feedback appreciated; supervision time insufficient for optimal implementation of feedback.	Direct monitoring and regular input; limited time restricts depth; some teachers unprepared to shift methods.
Innovation & ICT	Principal encourages ICT experimentation; some teachers adapt well, others struggle due to limited training.	Strong direction on ICT and varied methods; adaptation difficulties and limited time for implementation persist.
Work Climate & Communication	Supportive and open climate; appreciation present; communication gaps in new programs; facility limitations hinder execution.	Open communication culture; inadequate facilities cause frustration and limit program effectiveness.
Motivation & Appreciation	Motivation through modeling and feedback; time constraints limit reinforcement.	Motivation programs in place; some teachers feel underappreciated, lowering motivation.
External Support	Some internal support exists; facility limitations and time management remain major issues.	Strong support from committee and parents; challenges arise from inadequate facilities and shifting policies.

Discussion and Findings

The Role of Principal Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance

In both schools studied, the principal's role is crucial in improving teacher performance through various leadership approaches grounded in direct example, academic supervision, and innovation in learning. However, the challenges encountered are closely related to limited time and resources, as well as teachers' readiness to adapt to the changes proposed.

Principals strive to motivate teachers by providing direct support through training and seminars, as well as by creating an open and mutually supportive working climate. Nonetheless, several challenges arise, such as insufficient time to fully implement programs and the perception among some teachers that their work is not adequately appreciated. This is reinforced by the statement of the principal at SMK YPPI Tualang, who said, "I try to always provide support through motivational programs such as training and seminars. However, the main challenge is building confidence among teachers who still hesitate to embrace change" (KSSYPT).

Academic supervision serves as one of the key instruments for developing teacher competence. Principals conduct direct observations of the teaching and learning process and provide constructive feedback to teachers. However, limited time to conduct comprehensive supervision remains a constraint in both schools. As one principal explained, "I carry out supervision by directly monitoring learning activities and discussing with teachers to provide input. However, the limited time for thorough supervision becomes an obstacle" (KSSKPT). Meanwhile, a teacher at the other school stated, "We are guided directly in our teaching practice, although sometimes we feel we still need more time to adjust to the new methods" (GSKPT).

Principals also play an important role in leading the implementation of instructional innovation, particularly in the use of technology. They often act as direct models in utilizing technology to improve learning quality. However, some teachers find it difficult to adapt to new technologies due to limited training and experience. As one principal emphasized, “I always support teachers by providing practical examples of how to integrate technology into learning. However, some teachers find it difficult to fully utilize technology” (KSSKPT).

Principals also have a major role in creating a conducive working climate to support teacher professionalism. An atmosphere of open communication and strong support from the principal is expected to build teachers’ morale and performance. However, several obstacles arise related to limited facilities that affect comfort and effectiveness in working. Principals from both schools agreed that although communication is generally good, the lack of facilities remains a significant challenge. The principal at SMK YPPI Tualang stated, “We always create an atmosphere that is open for communication. However, at times the lack of supporting facilities leads to frustration among teachers” (KSSYPT).

Principals in both schools also encourage the use of more varied learning media to improve instructional quality. Training and discussions are conducted to introduce new methods and media. However, some teachers feel burdened due to the limited number of training sessions and their lack of readiness to implement new media. The principal at SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang stated, “I support the use of various learning media by providing training, although some teachers are still reluctant to move away from traditional methods” (KSSKPT). Overall, these findings show that principals play an essential role in improving teacher performance through leadership that provides direct example, constructive supervision, and the implementation of instructional innovations. However, to enhance the effectiveness of such efforts, more attention must be given to the availability of time, facilities, and adequate training to support the desired changes.

The findings at both schools indicate that the effectiveness of principal leadership in improving teacher performance is strongly related to their ability to integrate motivation, academic coaching, and instructional innovation. Based on Vroom (1964), teacher motivation is determined by three elements: expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance will lead to rewards), and valence (the value attached to those rewards). When principals provide direct guidance, training, and tangible appreciation for teachers’ work, they strengthen all three aspects. Conversely, limited supervision time, inadequate technical training, and rewards that are perceived as irrelevant weaken the connection between effort, performance, and outcomes, thereby reducing teachers’ intrinsic motivation. In this context, the leadership styles of principals in both vocational schools still face challenges in balancing administrative demands with professional coaching of teachers, which, according to Vroom, may undermine teachers’ expectancy and instrumentality regarding their performance outcomes.

Furthermore, the role of principals in modeling behavior, fostering a conducive working climate, and encouraging instructional innovation is aligned with the

concept of instructional leadership as described by MacBeath (2001), namely leadership that focuses on improving the quality of teaching through collaboration, reflection, and ongoing support. Principals act not only as supervisors but also as learning leaders who nurture a culture of learning among teachers. At the same time, their efforts to build teachers' confidence, maintain open communication, and inspire staff reflect the characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2018), in which leaders mobilize followers through shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. While Vroom's theory explains why teachers are motivated, MacBeath's and Bass & Avolio frameworks explain how principals build leadership systems that foster such motivation in practice. Thus, the synergy between motivation (Vroom), instructional leadership (MacBeath), and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio) becomes the key to creating a school environment that is adaptive, innovative, and oriented toward the continuous improvement of teacher performance.

Previous studies show similar findings regarding the importance of the principal's role in motivating and supporting teachers. Harris & Muijs (2004) revealed that effective principals can improve teacher performance by providing appropriate support and developing teacher leadership through coaching and instructional innovation. They also highlight how principal-provided motivation influences teachers' readiness to adapt to proposed changes. In line with this, Day & Gu (2014) found that principals who support teachers through career development and professional learning help enhance teacher resilience and professionalism, although they also noted that lack of training and resources remains a major obstacle to implementing innovations effectively.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Principal Leadership

In both schools studied, various internal and external factors play an important role in supporting and inhibiting principal leadership in improving teacher performance. The most frequently mentioned internal factor by principals is their experience and competence in school management. They feel that their experience greatly helps them lead and understand each teacher's needs. However, the greatest challenge they face is the heavy administrative workload, which reduces the time available to focus on teacher development. One principal stated, "My experience in education and my ability to adapt to change support me in leading. However, the high administrative burden sometimes hinders me from focusing more on teacher development" (KSSYPT). Similarly, a vice principal from another school noted, "The principal's competence is very supportive, but we also face the problem of limited time between handling administration and developing teacher professionalism" (WKSSKPT). This reinforces the notion that although principals possess strong competencies, time constraints and administrative demands become the main limiting factors in their leadership.

Externally, both schools receive significant support from school committees and parents, which helps facilitate the programs that have been planned. However, frequently changing educational policies often become obstacles affecting the consistent implementation of these programs. One principal remarked, "Support

from the school committee and parents is very meaningful, but sometimes policies that arrive late affect the implementation of already-planned programs" (KSSKPT). A similar view was expressed by a vice principal in the other school: "Support from parents and the committee is very helpful. However, sometimes shifting policies make it difficult for us to implement programs that have already been designed" (WKSSYPT). In addition, limited facilities are a major barrier to improving instructional quality. Principals in both schools agreed that inadequate facilities often hinder the implementation of more varied and innovative teaching methods. As one principal explained, "Limited facilities greatly affect the quality of learning. We try to maximize what we have, but constraints in space and equipment remain obstacles" (KSSYPT). This is supported by a teacher's statement at the other school: "The limited facilities make it difficult for us to access the technology and tools needed in learning" (GSKPT).

The findings at both schools indicate that internal factors such as experience, leadership competence, and principals' adaptability are key assets in building teacher performance. According to Vroom (1964) theory, such experience and competence help boost teachers' expectancy, that is, their belief that their efforts will result in real performance improvements when supported by leaders who can provide guidance, modeling, and effective feedback. However, intense administrative pressure undermines the motivational function of principal leadership by reducing the time available for coaching and supervision, thereby weakening the instrumentality between performance and rewards. In this context, principals in both vocational schools tend to be trapped in administrative (decisional) roles, while their coaching roles (interpersonal and informational) are constrained by bureaucratic workload. As a result, their capacity as mentors and motivators has not yet been fully optimized to improve teacher performance.

On the external side, support from school committees and parents strengthens a collaborative climate that serves as an important motivational factor in Vroom's theory, particularly in enhancing valence, namely teachers' perception of the value of their performance outcomes. Social support from stakeholders makes teachers feel appreciated and reinforces the meaning of their efforts to improve performance. However, inconsistent policies and limited facilities act as inhibiting factors that reduce expectancy, as teachers find it difficult to see a clear pathway between their efforts and optimal learning outcomes. According to MacBeath (2001), effective instructional leadership requires structural support and a stable organizational culture to ensure continuous teacher development. This is reinforced by Bass and Avolio (2018) transformational leadership concept, which stresses the importance of emotional support, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation from principals so that teachers can overcome systemic obstacles such as limited facilities and shifting policies. Thus, although internal factors such as principals' competence and experience constitute major strengths, the effectiveness of their leadership is still strongly influenced by stable external systems and adequate working conditions.

The interaction between these supporting and inhibiting factors creates a complex dynamic in principal leadership. While there is significant external support from school committees and parents, limitations in facilities and time remain barriers that

must be addressed to improve the effectiveness of principal leadership in enhancing teacher performance. These findings are consistent with Rachma (2023) research, which shows that principal leadership significantly influences teacher performance when supported by teacher discipline and motivation, but also notes that heavy administrative burdens reduce principals' effectiveness in providing intensive coaching.

Furthermore, the findings align with Faridli (2024), who revealed that principal leadership that supports teacher well-being has a positive effect on teacher performance. They also noted that support from school committees and parents is crucial, even though constraints such as limited facilities and shifting policies remain significant obstacles. These results are consistent with the present study, which shows that external support and facility limitations play a major role in influencing the effectiveness of principal leadership.

4. Conclusion

The Role of Principal Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance

The leadership of principals at SMK YPPI Tualang and SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang plays a significant role in improving teacher performance through motivation, supervision, and instructional innovation. Principals provide direct support through training and foster an open and supportive working climate; however, the main challenges lie in limited time and insufficient resources, which hinder the full implementation of development programs. The application of technology as an instructional innovation is also constrained by teachers' limited readiness and inadequate facilities. Nevertheless, positive communication and strong leadership support remain well-maintained. Overall, greater attention to time management, facility provision, and ongoing training is needed to enhance the effectiveness of principal leadership in improving teacher performance.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Principal Leadership

Principal leadership at SMK YPPI Tualang and SMK Kesehatan Proskill Tualang is influenced by several internal and external supporting and inhibiting factors. The most prominent internal supporting factor is the principals' experience and competence in school management, which enables them to understand teachers' needs and make appropriate decisions. However, the main internal challenge is the heavy administrative workload that limits the principals' ability to focus on teacher development. Externally, strong support from school committees and parents contributes significantly to the smooth implementation of school programs. Nonetheless, inconsistent educational policies often hinder the execution of planned initiatives. Limited facilities also remain a major obstacle that reduces instructional quality, particularly in implementing more innovative teaching methods. Although external support is substantial, limitations in time, resources, and frequently changing policies continue to impede the effectiveness of principal leadership in improving teacher performance.

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