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The Managerial Success of Principals in Improving School Quality in Peripheral Areas

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Abstract

The disparity in educational quality between urban and peripheral schools highlights the importance of effective managerial leadership in optimizing school management. This study aims to analyze the managerial success of principals in improving school quality in peripheral areas through the management functions implemented in school administration. The research method used is qualitative, data were collected through observations and interviews with one principals, four vice principals, and five teachers so that the number of participants is ten people, this research was conducted in the suburbs of Aceh province in 2025 to 2026. The findings indicate that school quality improvement in peripheral areas is achieved through visionary leadership in planning school programs, participatory leadership in coordination and communication, and continuous evaluation of program implementation. This study concludes that improving school quality in peripheral areas depends not only on the availability of facilities and infrastructure but also on principals' managerial capabilities to optimize school management. School quality improvement is influenced by the synergy between physical resources and the managerial competence of principals in planning, coordinating, and continuously evaluating all school programs. The study recommends strengthening principals' managerial capacity by integrating planning, coordination, and evaluation functions to enhance school effectiveness and quality. The contribution of this research shows that the selected principal must have a deeper and broader knowledge capacity than his subordinates so that the solution can be present.

Keywords: Principal Managerial Leadership, School Quality, Peripheral Areas

Introduction

Educational quality in peripheral areas is often perceived as being relatively low due to limited access, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and shortages in human resources (1). Nevertheless, some schools have demonstrated significant improvements in educational quality despite operating under constrained conditions. This achievement suggests that school quality is not determined solely by geographical location or the availability of facilities; rather, it is also influenced by the principal's ability to effectively manage existing resources (2). Reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) and Statistics Indonesia Deparment (BPS) from 2024 to 2025 shows that more than 35.1% of schools experienced moderate damage, and more than 5% of schools experienced severe damage (3) this indicate that thousands of schools continue to face challenges related to educational access, the quality of educational personnel, and the availability of school facilities and infrastructure. These conditions suggest that successful efforts to improve educational quality amid various constraints are largely influenced by principals' managerial capabilities in managing school resources, particularly in peripheral areas.

Research on schools in peripheral areas has generally developed along three major strands. First, studies have focused on infrastructural limitations, such as inadequate facilities

and restricted access to education, which are often regarded as the primary causes of low school quality(4–6). Second, research has highlighted aspects of school culture, including interaction patterns and learning cultures that evolve within the school environment (7–9). Third, studies have emphasized managerial dimensions by examining school governance and management practices in addressing various limitations in educational resources (10–12). Despite these research trends, studies that specifically examine principals' managerial success in improving school quality in peripheral areas remain relatively limited. Therefore, investigating the managerial success of school principals is important for understanding how peripheral schools are able to enhance educational quality despite the constraints they face, and this constitutes the novelty of this study, how the school principal functions as a manager in a school located on the outskirts.

Consistent with these research trends, this study aims to analyze principals' managerial success in improving school quality in peripheral areas through the management functions implemented in school administration. Specifically, the study addresses three primary research questions. First, how do principals implement data-driven and needs-based planning as a form of visionary leadership to improve school quality? Second, how do principals coordinate and communicate in efforts to enhance school quality in peripheral areas? Third, how do principals conduct continuous evaluation of school program implementation as a form of managerial control for improving educational quality? These three questions constitute the central focus of this study.

This study is based on the argument that successful school quality improvement in peripheral areas is determined not only by the availability of adequate facilities, infrastructure, and resources, but also by principals' managerial capacity to utilize and manage these resources effectively. The managerial role of principals becomes particularly significant when management functions are implemented appropriately, especially in schools located in peripheral regions. These management functions encompass planning, communication, coordination, organizing, directing, and evaluation. Together, these functions ensure that plans are effectively implemented and subsequently evaluated to assess the extent to which organizational goals have been achieved. Furthermore, steering a school toward improvement in this modern era relies heavily on the principal's digital proficiency—an aspect of what is known as modern leadership. Modern leadership helps how a principal manages a school effectively and efficiently to achieve educational goals.

Literature Review

Principal Managerial Leadership

A principal's managerial capability is crucial for a school to achieve its goals optimally. As the sole leader responsible for managing the school, the principal must fully master five key competencies, one of which is managerial competence (13–15). These managerial competencies assist the school principal—both conceptually and practically—in managing the school under their leadership. The aim of this management is not only in the management system but also how every activity carried out cannot be separated from quality, both the quality of the process and the quality of the results. Education prioritizes quality, namely quality rather than a process, therefore schools must be managed so that they become better.

The principal's managerial implementation in carrying out management cannot be separated from management functions. There are many well-known management functions in the science of educational administration, but among the management functions used to manage schools are Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling (POAC) (16,17). In this concept, in carrying out management, the principal must start with planning. Effective planning starts with research, ensuring that fundamental and highly urgent needs are addressed promptly.

Next, the principal carries out organizing, in this case the principal forms groups or divides tasks among subordinates who have the competence to carry out the work. Then there is how planning is done properly and correctly. Finally, to ensure the objectives are met effectively, supervision is required to align actual outcomes with the intended goals; the controlling function serves to minimize any gap between the plan and reality as quickly as possible. If this management function can be implemented by a manager, then it can be ensured that the school can be managed well and correctly.

School Quality

School quality refers to the capacity and level of excellence of an educational institution to meet or exceed established standards. It is a multidimensional construct that is assessed not only through outcomes but also through the quality of the processes that generate those outcomes (18,19). High-quality schools are able to align educational components, such as curriculum, facilities, and teacher qualifications, with dynamic learning processes to develop students who are cognitively and socially competent (20). In addition, educational effectiveness and technological efficiency have become important dimensions of school quality, as schools strive to maximize student learning outcomes by optimizing the use of available resources (21). Based on this perspective, school quality is no longer determined solely by the grades students earn throughout their education but also by the extent to which schools foster character development and skills, one of the dimensions that must be mastered by every school member is the use of technology, good use of technology means that available resources can be utilized, of course the use of technology cannot be separated from the concept of managerial ability. As emphasized by (22), school quality is understood as an institution's ability to provide educational services that remain relevant to changing societal demands and developments. Therefore, school quality represents the integration of high academic achievement, sound organizational management, and service satisfaction experienced by all members of the educational ecosystem.

The implementation of school quality has been examined through studies demonstrating how high-performing schools exhibit specific classroom management characteristics, such as providing effective instructional feedback and optimizing learning time. Both factors have a direct impact on students' academic performance and examination outcomes (23). School quality is not solely determined by advanced facilities and infrastructure but also by teachers' ability to adapt instructional methods to meet students' needs while minimizing disparities in academic achievement (24). (25) found that high-quality schools create emotionally safe environments and foster strong connections among students, peers, and teachers. Similarly, low rates of bullying and high levels of student participation in meaningful extracurricular activities are important indicators of school quality. (26) further argues that school quality is achieved through leadership that effectively aligns school goals with sustainable digital practices. In some schools, quality is reflected in the implementation of digital assessment systems that enable teachers to monitor student progress in real time and actively involve parents in decision-making processes (27).

Peripheral Areas

Peripheral areas are dynamic transitional zones situated between urban systems and predominantly agrarian rural regions. (28) describe peripheral areas not merely as administrative boundaries but as outer zones of urban influence characterized by intensive interactions between urban and rural activities (29). These areas represent spaces of fragmented suburbanization, where urban infrastructure has begun to expand, yet public services often remain inadequate (30). In terms of education, access in peripheral areas encompasses both affordability and geographic accessibility, which are frequently constrained by underdeveloped

infrastructure (31). Educational access in these regions often reflects spatial inequalities, in which rapid residential growth is not matched by a proportional increase in educational facilities (32). Consequently, educational access in peripheral areas is a multidimensional issue that requires integrating spatial planning, transportation policies, and the equitable development of technological infrastructure.

In peripheral areas, educational success is determined not only by teachers but also by principals who can balance resource limitations with the social dynamics of local communities (33). Nevertheless, principals in peripheral areas often face more complex managerial challenges than their counterparts in urban centers, including managing students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and retaining teachers (34). Leadership in these settings requires a high degree of flexibility in establishing partnerships with private-sector organizations and local community leaders. Furthermore, teachers in peripheral areas frequently assume dual roles as educators and cultural mediators, bridging traditional rural values and the expectations associated with urban modernization (35). Educational success in these contexts depends on teachers' ability to implement culturally responsive pedagogy that reflects their students' needs and backgrounds. Therefore, adaptive managerial leadership is essential to ensuring that schools continue to function as agents of social stability amid rapid changes in land use and demographic composition (36).

Method

The unit of analysis in this study was a public senior high school located in a peripheral area of Aceh Province. The school was selected purposively based on its relevance to the study's focus on school quality improvement. This unit of analysis was chosen for three main reasons. First, the school demonstrates educational quality characteristics that are relatively comparable to those of schools in urban areas of Aceh, despite its peripheral location. Second, it reflects the characteristics of schools in peripheral areas, which face various resource and access limitations to education. Third, the school has relevant experience in implementing school quality improvement initiatives, enabling the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of principals' managerial success in a peripheral area. The location of the school in the outlying areas of Aceh can be seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Google Map of the research location

Figure 1 shows that the red box on Google Maps shows where the research data was taken. The green boxes represent the locations of provincial capitals. The yellow boxes represent the cities where the research was conducted, 11 of which are home to 15 high schools. Meanwhile, the blue line is the Aceh Province area. The selected research sites are public senior high schools holding 'A' accreditation valid from 2019 to 2029, and which have been led by the same principal for a period exceeding six years (from 2019 to 2026).

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach. A qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of the complexity of principals' leadership strategies. Meanwhile, the case study approach was used to intensively investigate phenomena occurring within a single educational institution, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of strategies to improve educational quality in a peripheral school. The research was conducted in three stages. First, the case was selected based on the study's focus on principal leadership strategies, the context of a school located in a peripheral area, and efforts to improve educational quality. Second, data collection was carried out systematically through observations and in-depth interviews. Third, the collected data were analyzed thematically and subsequently linked to relevant theoretical perspectives to explain how principals' leadership strategies contribute to educational quality improvement in peripheral schools.

The study used primary sources from key ten informants within the school, including one principal, four vice principals, and five teachers involved in the management of school programs. These informants were selected purposively based on their level of involvement in and knowledge of the managerial practices implemented at the school. In addition, the information obtained from informants was strengthened through direct observations of school management activities, enabling the data to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the principal's leadership practices in improving educational quality within a peripheral school context.

Data were collected through observations and interviews. Observation was chosen because it enabled the researchers to obtain firsthand insights into the principal's managerial practices in the daily operation of the school. The observation process involved directly examining the principal's activities and managerial practices in the administration and management of the school. Interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information on the principal's experiences, perspectives, and strategies for improving educational quality. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principals, and teachers who were directly involved in the management and implementation of school programs. The interviews were conducted directly with the help of a voice recorder. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner between the researcher and the informant. The interviews were also conducted face to face in a place determined by the informant. The duration of the interviews was relatively varied, ranging from 10 minutes to 18 minutes for each informant.

The recorded data is then written back in the form of an audit trail, then collected data were subsequently analyzed using sequentially analysis to identify and interpret the major themes emerging from the observation and interview findings. Analysis was selected because it facilitates the systematic representation of research findings while ensuring their accuracy and relevance. The analysis process was conducted through several stages. First, data reduction was carried out, during which the researchers selected and organized the most relevant data without adding to or altering the original information, thereby preserving the data's authenticity. Second, data presentation was undertaken by organizing information obtained from the interviews into a systematic format. The findings were then arranged in tables to enhance clarity and facilitate concise and coherent interpretation. Third, conclusion drawing was performed, whereby the researchers' formulated conclusions regarding key aspects of the

findings, including their strengths and limitations. These conclusions served as the basis for developing recommendations and proposing solutions to the issues identified in the study. In presenting the data, manual coding was also used by the researcher, thus making it easier to read and understand the research results, and also maintaining the confidentiality of the informants.

Results

Visionary Leadership in School Program Planning

The principal demonstrated visionary leadership through a data-driven and needs-based planning strategy. Planning was carried out by identifying school-related issues through sources such as the school quality report card and direct observations of the school environment. As stated by the principal: "At the school I lead, before developing any plans, I first collect data from the school quality report card and through direct observation. I then conduct an analysis together with the school development team to determine which areas need improvement" (Interview, July 9, 2025). This statement indicates that the principal employed a planning approach grounded in data analysis and school needs assessment by actively involving the school development team in identifying areas requiring improvement. Following the identification and analysis of school needs, the principal developed plans systematically and in a structured manner across several stages. As explained by the principal (45):

> "At our school, the planning process involves several stages. It begins by forming a team whose members possess the necessary competencies and a high level of motivation and commitment. When developing plans, we gather in the meeting room, where I map out what will be planned, where the activities will take place, and who will be involved in both the planning and implementation processes" (Interview, July 9, 2025).

The principal's statement demonstrates that the planning process was carried out through a series of stages, beginning with the formation of a team selected based on members' competencies, motivation, and commitment. Subsequently, planning was conducted through collaborative meetings in which the principal mapped out the programs to be implemented, including determining implementation locations and identifying stakeholders involved in both the planning and execution phases.

In efforts to improve school quality, the principal conducted analyses of various issues identified through both data-driven assessments and school needs assessments. Using these two approaches, the principal systematically followed up by developing priority programs aligned with the school's specific conditions and challenges. These initiatives were designed to address identified needs while supporting continuous school improvement. The implementation of the principal's planning strategies for enhancing school quality is presented in greater detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Implementation of the Principal's Planning Strategies for School Quality Improvement

Identified Problem	Data Source/Basis of Findings	Principal's Program	Future Outcome	Interview Excerpt
Low levels of students'	Guidance and Counseling (BK) reports	Weekly Qur'an reading	A religious character, and the habit of	"There are certainly challenges, particularly in general

Qur'anic literacy		program every Friday	reading diligently.	literacy and Qur'anic literacy. However, we have implemented programs by providing additional reading materials and copies of the Qur'an, as well as establishing a routine of reading the Qur'an for 15 minutes every Friday morning." (Interview with Principal, 45 years old)
Limited classroom space	Facilities and infrastructure data and direct observations	Proposal for funding to construct 15 classrooms	Adequate facilities and infrastructure create a comfortable learning atmosphere and produce a quality learning process.	"The principal developed plans based on identified needs and subsequently sought assistance from the central government. Alhamdulillah, our infrastructure limitations have been addressed through government support for the construction of 15 classrooms, and the project has now been completed." (Interview with Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, 54 years old)
Low teacher competency	Teacher performance evaluations and training participation records	In-House Training (IHT) program	A professional teacher with excellent competence.	"The principal organizes training programs for teachers, such as In-House Training (IHT), to improve their pedagogical competencies." (Interview with Biology Teacher, 38 years old)
Low teacher participation in	Records of teacher participation in	Seminars and competency enhancement	Professional teachers and sustainable	"Previously, a teacher facilitator was appointed as a

professional development activities	workshops and training programs organized by the education office	training programs	teaching careers	principal. The education office also encouraged us to participate, saying that doing so could lead to becoming a principal. However, many of us here were not particularly interested. They would say, 'Just participate; you might become a principal later,' but that was not something we were pursuing." (Interview with Vice Principal for Curriculum, 45 years old)
Limited digital learning resources	Inventory records of facilities and instructional needs	Collaboration with the education office and alumni to procure smart boards	Teachers who are able to utilize technology in the process of improving the quality of learning	"The principal sought collaboration with the education office and successful alumni. As a result of alumni support, we received smart boards to support teaching and learning activities at the school." (Interview with Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, 54 years old)

Source: Processed by the researchers, 2026.

Table 1 shows that the principal designed a range of programs based on the needs and challenges identified within the school. Low levels of students' Qur'anic literacy, as identified in Guidance and Counseling (BK) reports, were addressed through a weekly Qur'an reading program held every Friday. Limited classroom space, identified through facilities and infrastructure data and direct observations, was addressed by submitting a proposal to the central government for the construction of 15 additional classrooms. Meanwhile, low teacher competency, identified through teacher performance evaluations, was addressed through the implementation of In-House Training (IHT) programs. Low teacher participation in professional development activities also served as the basis for organizing seminars and competency enhancement training programs. In addition, limitations in digital learning resources, identified through facilities inventory records and instructional needs assessments, were addressed through collaboration with the education office and school alumni to procure

smart boards. These findings indicate that the principal's programs were needs-oriented and grounded in issues identified across multiple data sources.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the principal demonstrated visionary leadership in school planning by adopting a needs-based and data-driven approach to decision-making. The various programs implemented were not developed spontaneously; rather, they were preceded by a systematic identification of school needs and challenges through Guidance and Counseling (BK) reports, teacher performance evaluations, and data on facilities and infrastructure. Based on this analysis, the principal formulated programs in a structured manner, including initiatives to strengthen student literacy, enhance teacher competencies through In-House Training (IHT), improve educational facilities through collaboration with the central government, and procure digital learning media through partnerships with the education office and school alumni.

School Resource Management Through Participatory Coordination and Communication

The principal implemented managerial functions through effective coordination and communication across all school activities. In practice, these managerial functions were manifested through coordination, organization, and command, integrated into the management of school operations. In terms of coordination, the principal established structured communication channels by creating several groups tailored to specific needs, including a general school group, a management team group comprising vice principals, the treasurer, and the administrative coordinator, and a dedicated group for educational support staff. As stated by the principal (45): “My first strategy was to create a general school group and a school-wide communication group. Second, I established a group specifically for the school management team, consisting of vice principals, the treasurer, and the administrative coordinator. In addition, I created a separate group specifically for educational support staff” (Interview, July 9, 2025). These findings indicate that the coordinating function exercised by the principal facilitated systematic and targeted coordination in the implementation of previously planned school programs. Through structured communication mechanisms, the principal was able to ensure that information was disseminated efficiently, responsibilities were clearly communicated, and collaboration among school personnel was effectively maintained throughout the implementation process.

Furthermore, in the organizing function, the principal managed human resources by assigning responsibilities according to individuals’ competencies and educational backgrounds. In addition, the principal emphasized the importance of teamwork, commitment, and motivation in collaborative task completion. During implementation, the principal also highlighted the importance of empathy and mutual respect for differing perspectives to ensure that work processes remained aligned with shared organizational goals. As stated by the principal (45):

> “In carrying out the organizing function, I have several strategies. First, I assign tasks according to individuals’ competencies and educational backgrounds. Second, they must be willing to contribute beyond their basic responsibilities and work collaboratively as a team, because teamwork is extremely important. In addition, empathy is essential, as is motivation—the willingness to take action and accomplish tasks. Most importantly, there must be mutual respect for differing opinions and viewpoints expressed by others” (Interview, July 9, 2025).

This statement demonstrates that the principal’s organizing practices extended beyond the allocation of tasks and responsibilities. The organizing process also involved fostering a collaborative work culture based on teamwork, motivation, empathy, and mutual respect. By

aligning responsibilities with staff competencies and promoting constructive interpersonal relationships, the principal sought to optimize human resources and strengthen collective commitment toward achieving school improvement goals.

The principal's managerial practices demonstrate a structured approach to the implementation of school activities. This is evident in various activities that reflect the application of coordinating, organizing, and commanding functions in the management of school resources. These practices illustrate how managerial functions are integrated to ensure the effective implementation of school programs and the achievement of organizational goals. A more detailed description of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Implementation of Managerial Functions Through Coordination, Organization, and Direction in School Resource Management

Managerial Function	Field Findings	Interview Excerpt
Coordinating	WhatsApp group conversations used as a medium for coordinating school programs	"I always emphasize that the outcomes of activities conducted each month must be reported and communicated." (Interview with Principal, 45 years old)
Coordinating	Meeting minutes maintained as evidence of structured coordination activities	"Every meeting, regardless of its purpose, including committee meetings, is always documented through meeting minutes." (Interview with Physics Teacher, 43 years old)
Coordinating	Dissemination of meeting outcomes through digital platforms (Website, WhatsApp, and APSIS)	"The meeting minutes are usually shared back with the school group, uploaded to the website, sent through WhatsApp, and entered into APSIS after the conclusions have been finalized." (Interview with Guidance and Counseling Teacher, 37 years old)
Coordinating	Monthly routine meetings as a forum for communication and evaluation of school programs	"We have regular monthly meetings at the beginning of each month. These meetings discuss school developments, student issues, learning activities, and teacher discipline, serving as a way to remind and update everyone." (Interview with Student Council Advisor, 36 years old)
Coordinating	Clarification and reinforcement of information to avoid miscommunication	"Sometimes the outcomes of meetings are interpreted differently by some teachers, so the principal often provides clarification and reiterates the information." (Interview with Vice Principal for Public Relations, 43 years old)
Organizing	Appointment of vice principals and work teams based on competence and professionalism	"The principal selects vice principals and team members based on their professional competencies." (Interview with Vice Principal for Public Relations, 43 years old)

Organizing	Assignment of responsibilities through official decrees based on experience and competence	"The principal also assigns responsibilities to individuals according to their experience and expertise." (Interview with Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, 54 years old)
Commanding	Decision-making conducted through consultation and deliberation with teachers and staff	"When making decisions, the principal usually invites us to the meeting room for discussion before establishing a policy." (Interview with Physics Teacher, 43 years old)
Commanding	Directions provided flexibly according to needs rather than waiting for formal schedules	"The principal provides guidance whenever necessary. It does not have to wait for a scheduled meeting; if something requires attention, the principal immediately gives direction." (Interview with Guidance and Counseling Teacher, 37 years old)
Commanding	Principal serving as a role model in discipline and participation in school activities	"The principal leads by example for both students and staff. During community service activities, for instance, he participates directly. He always arrives earlier than the rest of us, which makes us reluctant to arrive late." (Interview with Student Council Advisor, 43 years old)
Commanding	Participatory leadership approach in addressing issues involving students and parents	"From our perspective, there are no major challenges. Most issues come from students and parents, and when they arise, the principal often invites us, as homeroom teachers, to discuss them together." (Interview with Vice Principal for Student Affairs, 46 years old)

Source: Processed by the researchers, 2026.

Table 2 demonstrates that school resources were managed through participatory coordination and communication practices. The coordinating function was implemented through WhatsApp groups, regular monthly meetings, documented meeting minutes, and the dissemination of decisions via the school website and the APSIS platform. These mechanisms enabled school information to be communicated openly and repeatedly, thereby minimizing the risk of miscommunication. In terms of organizing, the principal assigned vice principals and work teams based on their competencies and professional experience, supported by formal appointment decrees and a systematically structured organizational framework. Meanwhile, the commanding function was carried out through consultative decision-making processes, the provision of flexible guidance tailored to emerging needs, and the principal's role modeling of discipline and active participation in school activities. These findings indicate that the management of school resources was not merely instructional but also characterized by two-way communication and the active involvement of school stakeholders in decision-making.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that school resource management was implemented through participatory coordination and communication, systematically integrating the functions of coordination, organization, and command. This approach contributed to a school resource management system that was coordinated, structured, and participatory. The integration of coordinating, organizing, and commanding functions enabled optimal utilization of the school community's potential through competency-based task allocation, open communication, and decision-making processes involving various school stakeholders. These conditions indicate that the effectiveness of resource management is determined not only by organizational structures but also by the quality of communication and the active involvement of school members in supporting the implementation of school programs.

Continuous Evaluation of School Quality Improvement Programs

The principal demonstrated effective managerial performance through the continuous evaluation of school program implementation. Evaluation served as a key mechanism and performance indicator for assessing both completed and ongoing initiatives. The principal conducted evaluations both during program implementation and after completion. These evaluations were based on data and performance indicators contained in the school quality report card, which were reviewed at least once every six months. As stated by the principal (45): "This is reflected in the school quality report card. In addition to reviewing the report card, I also conduct monitoring and evaluation every six months" (Interview, July 9, 2025). The principal further explained that both the school quality report card and field conditions identified through monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, as well as regular school meetings, served as important sources of information for school development. As emphasized by the principal (45): "The school quality report card and the actual conditions in the field, whether obtained through monitoring and evaluation activities or through regular school meetings, provide input that I use for school development" (Interview, July 9, 2025). These findings indicate that the principal utilized information derived from the school quality report card and monitoring and evaluation activities as evidence-based inputs for formulating continuous school improvement strategies.

Table 3. Implementation of Continuous Evaluation Practices by the Principal

Program	Challenges Identified	Follow-Up Actions from Evaluation	Interview Excerpt
Workshop	Limited effectiveness in enhancing teacher professionalism	Teachers were required to apply workshop outcomes in classroom practice	"The principal asked me to implement in my classroom what I had learned during the workshop." (Interview with Biology Teacher, 43 years old)
Local Content Program	Limited instructional time resulting in student fatigue	Reduction and adjustment of instructional hours	"There was a program that should have been evaluated, but due to time constraints and a natural disaster, the principal decided that the evaluation would be conducted after the disaster had ended. For the time being, the activity schedule was adjusted accordingly."

			(Interview with Vice Principal for Curriculum, 45 years old)
Teacher Performance Improvement	Failure to achieve optimal outcomes	Improvement of instructional methods	"Through supervision, the principal always reviews the school quality report card first, and then directly approaches us to provide recommendations for improvement." (Interview with Guidance and Counseling Teacher, 37 years old)
Workshop	Unexpected illness of teachers or organizing committee members	Reallocation of duties among teachers	"While preparing for a workshop, the committee chair and several members suddenly became ill. At that time, the principal immediately stepped in and reassigned responsibilities to other teachers, and fortunately, the event was successfully carried out." (Interview with Vice Principal for Curriculum, 45 years old)
Student Council (OSIS) Activities	Limited addition of new activities	Introduction of new activities and program adjustments	"As the Student Council advisor, I rarely see new activities being added. In fact, some existing activities are often reduced because of financial and other constraints." (Interview with Student Council Advisor, 36 years old)
Academic Supervision	Limited availability of supervisors	Ongoing monitoring of program implementation	"For monitoring purposes, the principal occasionally uses supervision as an approach." (Interview with Physics Teacher, 43 years old)

Source: Processed by the researchers, 2026.

Table 3 shows that the principal implemented continuous evaluation through corrective actions and program adjustments. A focus on the application of training outcomes in classroom practice followed the evaluation of workshop activities. At the same time, time constraints affecting the local content program were addressed by adjusting the activity schedule. Teacher performance evaluations conducted through supervision were used to improve instructional methods, whereas challenges encountered during workshop implementation were addressed by redistributing responsibilities to ensure activities could proceed as planned. In student council (OSIS) activities, budget evaluations served as a basis for program planning and adjustments, while academic supervision was conducted periodically in response to identified needs. These findings indicate that the principal's evaluation practices were adaptive and oriented toward continuous improvement of school programs.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the principal utilized evaluation as an instrument for program control and continuous improvement. Evaluation was not only

employed to identify challenges encountered during program implementation but also served as the basis for determining the follow-up actions necessary to ensure that school quality improvement objectives were achieved. These findings indicate that the principal possessed the capacity to respond adaptively to various challenges and to ensure that each program underwent ongoing refinement in line with the school's evolving needs.

Discussion

The Effectiveness of Data-Driven Planning and Visionary Leadership in Improving School Quality

A principal's visionary thinking plays a crucial role in determining the direction and quality of school planning. Research-informed planning enables school programs to be designed more strategically and effectively, thereby improving educational quality. Systematic planning begins with identifying school needs and analyzing existing conditions, ensuring that the programs developed are grounded in empirical evidence and aligned with the school's actual needs. This is a critical factor that enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of planning in addressing the various challenges schools face. The process of needs identification can be conducted using a range of analytical techniques, including SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis is widely regarded as a strategic planning tool for systematically identifying and evaluating an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (37). This perspective suggests that effective planning should not be based solely on assumptions but should instead begin with a systematic analysis of organizational conditions and contextual realities. In planning, the role of the leader is very much needed so that teacher performance can contribute to the creation of quality education (38,39).

Effective planning can systematically and sustainably improve educational quality. This is possible because, philosophically, planning is not solely focused on addressing short-term problems but also on fostering continuous school improvement through visionary leadership. Strategic planning has expanded rapidly in education and has become a standard component of management processes aimed at enhancing educational quality (40). This perspective suggests that planning is not merely a managerial function; rather, it serves as a strategic instrument for promoting educational improvement. Therefore, a principal's ability to analyze needs, identify opportunities, and translate information into relevant programs and initiatives is a critical factor in the success of the planning process. In this regard, (41) explains that planners' effectiveness is strongly influenced by their knowledge and competencies in making high-quality decisions. Accordingly, visionary leadership serves as a fundamental foundation for principals to develop adaptive, targeted, and sustainable plans that support continuous school quality improvement.

Coordination and Communication as Foundations for Strengthening School Collaboration

Several managerial strategies can be employed to ensure that school programs are implemented in a more structured and participatory manner, thereby improving school quality, including coordination, organization, and command. Among these, coordination represents a crucial initial step in the principal's managerial strategy. Before any program, plan, or policy is implemented, it must first be communicated to all members of the school community to establish a shared understanding of objectives and expectations. Quality improvement within educational settings depends heavily on effective relationships and communication. Evidence suggests that educational planning emphasizes the importance of developing organizational structures that support educational transformation (42). Furthermore, effective planning requires leadership capable of guiding and directing organizational efforts toward clearly

defined goals (43,44). Based on these perspectives, it can be argued that effective coordination and communication significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of school program implementation.

Open communication is a critical factor in strengthening collaboration among members of the school community. Beyond its practical function, coordination plays an essential role in ensuring that information is conveyed clearly and accurately, while organizing contributes to the effective allocation of responsibilities and the placement of human resources according to their competencies, thereby enabling organizational goals to be achieved more efficiently. Communication in the digital era is not limited to physical spaces but can also take place via social media platforms, such as WhatsApp groups (45,46). Meanwhile, commanding serves to guide and motivate school members to carry out their responsibilities in accordance with established objectives. These findings are consistent with the argument advanced by (47), who emphasize that coordination, organizing, and directing are fundamental elements in ensuring organizational effectiveness. From this perspective, communication, organization, and direction play strategic roles in strengthening collaboration and supporting the continuous improvement and development of school quality.

Evaluation as a Mechanism for Program Control and Quality Assurance

Evaluation is essential to ensuring that strategic programs are implemented effectively and efficiently to support educational quality improvement. From a theoretical perspective, evaluation represents the final stage of the management process and serves as an instrument for measuring the extent to which program objectives have been achieved. Accordingly, evaluation may be conducted under two conditions: summative evaluation and formative evaluation (48). Summative evaluation is conducted after a program has been completed to assess the extent to which its objectives have been achieved. In contrast, formative evaluation is carried out while a program is still in progress to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement. Therefore, evaluation functions not only as an assessment tool but also as a control mechanism that enables schools to undertake continuous improvement efforts.

Evaluation is conducted to ensure that educational quality is maintained effectively (49). Evaluation can be carried out through various methods and procedures. However, one of the most appropriate approaches for improving educational quality is the Four-Level Evaluation Model (50). This perspective emphasizes that evaluation is an essential component of the quality assurance process because it provides schools with a basis for determining appropriate follow-up actions regarding implemented programs. Evaluation results can be used to identify programs that are ineffective and should be discontinued, to improve and further develop programs that still require refinement, or to sustain and replicate programs that have demonstrated success in subsequent implementation periods. Therefore, evaluation is not solely focused on measuring outcomes but also serves as a foundation for decision-making that supports continuous improvement in school quality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that successful improvements in school quality in peripheral areas are determined not only by the availability of school facilities and infrastructure but also by the principal's managerial capacity to establish visionary, collaborative, and sustainable school governance. The findings underscore that limitations in accessibility do not constitute a major barrier to school quality improvement when schools can optimize the functions of planning, coordination, and evaluation. Accordingly, principals' managerial leadership emerges as a

strategic factor in transforming peripheral schools into more competitive and adaptable institutions that meet evolving educational quality demands.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the literature on school quality improvement in peripheral areas by highlighting the role of visionary, collaborative, and sustainable managerial leadership. Understanding how principals implement managerial strategies is essential for achieving educational quality objectives. The findings emphasize the importance of concrete leadership strategies, particularly the ability of visionary principals who has a deep and broad theoretical understanding in compiling to develop systematic plans grounded in empirical evidence and data. The next finding requires a policy to select school principals based on professional abilities as evidenced by their educational background. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that a school's location in a peripheral area does not necessarily constitute a barrier to achieving competitive educational quality. Therefore, this research enriches the existing literature on principals' managerial strategies and provides strategic recommendations for strengthening principals' managerial capacities to support continuous educational quality improvement.

The primary limitation of this study lies in its restricted geographical scope, confined to Aceh, Indonesia, and in its reliance predominantly on qualitative data. These limitations highlight the need for comparative studies across regions and contexts (province, country), as well as for incorporating quantitative data to complement and strengthen qualitative findings. Variations in climate, culture, and principals' knowledge capacity and managerial competence may influence the achievement of educational quality outcomes. Future research should therefore adopt interdisciplinary approaches that integrate perspectives on managerial success to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how educational quality can be enhanced. In addition, further investigation is needed into government policies that can strengthen principals' professional authority and managerial capabilities. Another recommendation is the continued development of managerial and educational quality concepts grounded in contemporary educational scholarship and systematically and comprehensively integrated into the context of modern education.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

This study has received ethical approval (Ethical Clearance) from the Graduate School of Syiah Kuala University under number 778/UN11.F13/PG.01.04/2026. Ethical approval was granted after the study was found to meet the seven 2011 WHO ethical standards and to comply with the 2016 CIOMS Guidelines, which cover social values, scientific values, equitable distribution of burdens and benefits, risks, coercion/exploitation, confidentiality and privacy, and informed consent. This ethical clearance is valid from June 15, 2026, through June 15, 2027.

Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection

Consent to Publish

Informed Consent to Publish was obtained from all participants

Availability of data and materials

The data used for the study will be made available upon reasonable request

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