



The principal as a driver of quality: a systematic analysis of managerial competencies in improving non-academic achievement

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Article Info

Article history:

Received November 2nd 2025

Revised November 25th 2025

Accepted December 20th 2025

Keyword:

managerial competence;
school principals; educational
quality; non-academic
achievement; Systematic
Literature Review

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the managerial competence of school principals in improving the quality of education and non-academic achievement through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The study reviewed five articles published in SINTA journals from 2020 to 2023 using the PRISMA guidelines. The data were analyzed thematically based on the methods, instruments, and main findings of each study. The results show that all studies used a qualitative approach with instruments of interviews, observation, and documentation tested through data triangulation. Principals act as educators, managers, and motivators in managing school resources, designing coaching programs, and improving students' academic and non-academic achievements. Supporting factors included collaboration between teachers and school committees, while the main obstacles were limited funds and infrastructure. Overall, the managerial competence of school principals was proven to have a significant effect on improving the quality of education. It is necessary to strengthen adaptive, collaborative, and innovative leadership capacities to build a sustainable school culture that is responsive to modern educational challenges.



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INTRODUCTION

The principal plays an important and central role in improving the quality of education and learning. In addition to acting as administrators in schools, principals also play a role as leaders in implementing teaching and learning activities in schools (Ahya et al., 2021; Estiani & Hasanah, 2022). Furthermore, principals are also responsible for developing the potential of teachers and students through the proper management of school resources (Hamka, 2023; Pisiwati et al., 2024). With the changing times, educational institutions face a variety of complex challenges. Therefore, principals must have adaptive, collaborative, and performance-oriented managerial skills (Mustoip et al., 2023).

The quality of education is not only determined by academic achievement but also by non-academic achievements and accomplishments. Extracurricular, religious, sports, and scouting activities are examples of non-academic activities that play an important role in shaping students' character and personality. Therefore, schools must be able to design, manage, and evaluate various non-academic activities (Hayati & Abidin, 2023).

Various previous studies have highlighted the importance of the principal's role in efforts to improve the quality of education. Yulista et al. (2020) showed that the managerial competence of school principals influences the success of religious programs in junior high schools. This was reinforced by Pusveni et al. (2021), who explained that the empowerment of educators has a positive effect on improving the quality of learning in schools. Furthermore, Nugrahawati & Mulyanto (2022) and Devita (2023) made similar statements that principals have a central role in improving non-academic achievement in schools. However, previous studies are still individual, contextual, and do not provide a comprehensive picture of the general pattern of the principal's role in managing non-academic activities.

This certainly raises a research gap in understanding how the managerial competence of school principals contributes to improving quality and non-academic achievement based on previous studies. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a literature study through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

to analyze and synthesize relevant research results. The study aims to identify the methods, instruments, and research focus used in studies on the managerial competence of school principals and to describe the patterns and trends of research results related to improving non-academic quality and achievement. The results of this study are expected to provide information as an effort to improve the quality of sustainable school management.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the results of previous studies on the managerial and leadership competencies of school principals in improving school quality and non-academic achievement. The SLR approach was used to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the trends, methods, and conceptual findings of various relevant studies.

The research was conducted through several systematic stages adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model (O'Dea et al., 2021), as specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Systematic steps in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model

Stages	Description
Identify Research Objectives	Determine objectives to obtain an overview and in-depth understanding of how the principal's managerial competencies are implemented.
Literature Search Strategy	The literature search was carried out through SINTA-accredited national journals that are relevant to the field of education management. Using a combination of keywords: " <i>principal's managerial competence</i> ", " <i>educational leadership</i> ", " <i>school quality</i> ", and " <i>non-academic achievement</i> ".
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	Criteria included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Articles published between 2020–2023, Using a descriptive qualitative approach or case study, Focus on the role or managerial competence of the principal, Published in SINTA-accredited national journals. Exclusion criteria: Articles that do not clearly explain the research method, are irrelevant to the principal's leadership topic, or are not accessible in full-text format.
Article Selection and Screening Results	The selection process is carried out through three stages: (1) initial screening based on titles and abstracts, (2) full reading of the text of the article to ensure the suitability of the topic, and (3) grouping of articles that meet the criteria. Five articles were obtained that were in accordance with the criteria and objectives of the analysis.

Data was collected by extracting data from the literature, which is the process of systematically recording important elements from each article, including the author and year of publication, research objectives, methods and instruments used, and key research findings. Data analysis was performed using thematic synthesis techniques. The first stage involved coding key information from each article to identify recurring main themes. The second stage involved comparison and categorization, which was grouping the research results based on similarities in focus and methodological approach. The final stage was drawing thematic conclusions by compiling a conceptual narrative that described general patterns, contributions, and research gaps on the topic of principal managerial competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the five articles was conducted by identifying the general description of the research conducted. This is presented in full in Table 2.

Table 2 Analysis of the five articles was conducted

Author's	Publisher	General description
(Yulista et al., 2020)	<i>Management Studies: Journal of Islamic Education Management</i> , Vol. 2 No. 2 (2020), UIN Raden Fatah Palembang	Examining the managerial competence of school principals in improving the non-academic achievements of junior high school students in the religious field (Read, Write, Al-Qur'an and da'i/da'iyah). This qualitative research highlights aspects of planning, student management, and supervision and evaluation of religious non-academic activities.
(Pusveni et al., 2021)	<i>Journal of Education Management (JMP)</i> , Vol. 9 No. 2 (2020), Universitas PGRI Semarang	Discussing the managerial competence of school principals in improving the quality of schools in MIN 3 Brebes. This qualitative case study describes the implementation of quality improvement through the empowerment of educators, the resource management process, and the development of superior achievements.
(Nugrahawati & Mulyanto, 2022)	<i>Media Management Education</i> , Vol. 4 No. 3 (2022), Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa Yogyakarta	Analyzing the managerial competence of school principals in realizing non-academic achievements of elementary schools in Gunungkidul Regency. Focus on school program planning, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the results of implementing managerial competencies of school principals.
(Devita, 2023)	<i>Journal of Education Circle</i> , Vol. 2 No. 3 (2023), Lancang Kuning University (UNILAK)	Examining the managerial ability of school principals towards the non-academic achievements of students at SMP Negeri 14 Pekanbaru City. The aspects studied include planning, student management, supervision, and evaluation of non-academic religious activities, referring to Permendiknas No. 13 of 2007.
(Rojak et al., 2023)	<i>AL-AFKAR: Journal for Islamic Studies</i> , Vol. 6 No. 2 (2023), Universitas Islam Nusantara Bandung	Explain the implementation of the principal's leadership in improving non-academic achievement in scout extracurricular activities at SDIT MTA Karawang. Identify the role of the principal as an educator, manager, and motivator in supporting scouting activities.

The five studies analyzed generally had the same research topic, namely discussing the managerial and leadership abilities of school principals as an effort to improve the quality of education in schools. Yulista's research explains the managerial competence of school principals in planning, managing, and supervising non-academic activities in junior high schools. In addition, the contribution of school principals' managerial competence in improving school quality has also been studied by Pusveni. In the non-academic field, the managerial implementation of school principals was studied by Nugrahawati. Furthermore, the implementation of principals' managerial skills in achieving non-academic achievements focused on religious (Devita) and extracurricular (Rojak) fields has also been studied.

The research methods used and the main findings of the study are presented in full in Table 3.

Table 3. Research Methods and Key Findings

Author	Method	Instruments	Key Findings
(Yulista et al., 2020)	Qualitative (Descriptive)	Interviews, observations, documentation, data triangulation.	The principal plays a role in planning (vision-mission, strategic plan, budget), student management (coaching, rewards), as well as supervision and evaluation of religious activities. Obstacles: lack of funding, Rohis coaches, and student discipline.
(Pusveni et al., 2021)	Qualitative, Case Studies	Observation, interviews,	School principals carry out quality improvement through empowerment of educators and

Author	Method	Instruments	Key Findings
(Nugrahawati & Mulyanto, 2022)	Qualitative (Descriptive)	documentation, and data validity tests with <i>credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.</i>	education personnel, resource management, and fostering superior achievements. The quality of the school has increased, marked by A accreditation and increased public trust.
(Devita, 2023)	Qualitative	Interviews, observations, documentation.	The principal succeeded in arranging the school program well. Supporting factors: committee support, potential teachers, clear programs. Inhibiting factors: limited funds and facilities. Result: the school won many non-academic championships.
(Rojak et al., 2023)	Kualitative, <i>Field Research</i>	Observation, interviews, data triangulation.	The principal implements management functions (planning, management, supervision, evaluation) to improve non-academic religious achievements (da'i and Qur'anic literacy). Challenges: limited facilities, coordination, and student participation. The principal plays the role of an educator (teacher development), manager (funding and facilities), and motivator (rewarding). Results: scouting activities were more targeted and accomplished in various district-level competitions.

The five articles analyzed share similarities in their use of research methods. A qualitative approach was used in accordance with the objective of explaining the managerial role of school principals. Qualitative methods, including descriptive designs and field case studies, were used by researchers to explain phenomena in a sequential and in-depth manner.

The choice of research approach was in line with the topic being studied because school principals, as leaders in each educational unit, have complex and contextual duties and authorities. Therefore, the data obtained must be complete and collected through direct interaction between the researchers and the school principals. The use of research instruments in these five studies showed consistency and similarity.

Interview guidelines, observation, and documentation accompanied by data validity testing through triangulation were used in the research. The similarity in the use of these instruments certainly indicates a scientific approach that seeks to maintain objectivity and data validity. The use of these instruments allows researchers to describe the role of the principal based on actual practices and facts.

The findings of the five research articles provide important information that principals have important and crucial roles as educators, managers, and motivators. These tasks aim to build a school culture that is oriented towards improving academic and non-academic achievements. Programs designed by principals in a mature and structured manner can increase teacher professionalism and provide motivation for continuous development. This has been proven to significantly improve academic and non-academic achievements. The success of principals is also supported by various parties, such as the school committee, teacher collaboration, and a clear school vision. However, there are still obstacles that need to be addressed, namely financial constraints, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and student discipline.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of obstacles that need attention, namely financial limitations, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and student discipline and participation in non-academic activities. Based on the synthesis of findings and methodological patterns that consistently emerge in the five articles, it can be confirmed that the main trend of the research shows that the managerial and leadership competencies of school principals play a central role in improving the quality and non-academic achievements of schools. This role is realized through the implementation of core management functions, including program planning, resource and student management, supervision,

and evaluation of non-academic activities, with the principal playing a dominant role as an educator, manager, and motivator. In addition, research trends also show that descriptive qualitative approaches and case studies are the primary choices for examining these phenomena contextually and in depth, with successful implementation supported by teacher collaboration, school committee support, and a clear school vision.

Discussion

The overall findings of the analysis present a systematic literature review on the managerial competencies of school principals in improving the quality of education and students' non-academic achievements. The research findings also show that school principals play the roles of administrators, managers, and learning leaders (Acton, 2021; Miķelsone et al., 2024; Mustajab et al., 2023). In carrying out these roles, principals are not only focused on academic achievement, but also on developing student potential through religious, extracurricular, and social activities (Fathurrahman et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Sahid et al., 2021).

This research provides information that can map current research trends and demonstrate the importance of adaptive and collaborative leadership in the educational environment. The use of similar methods shows consistency in conducting assessments and appropriate instruments. This shows that research methods are key to the success of research (Furidha, 2024; Hendren et al., 2023).

Research instruments are also an important tool for achieving research objectives (Afifah Aulia Zayrin et al., 2025; Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The similarity of methods in the research also shows that research on school principal leadership focuses on the depth of the context being studied. The use of a qualitative approach is appropriate for data that is complex, contextual, and requires a deep understanding of a particular situation. In addition, the findings of this study also provide conceptual information that effective managerial practices depend on the ability of school principals to manage the system in their schools.

The findings synthesized from the five articles show that the success of principals in improving non-academic quality and achievement is greatly influenced by the synergy between managerial competence and school environment support. This means that principals play a major role in creating a positive, innovative, and high-quality culture (Lijun & Te, 2024). However, there are also challenges in the form of financial constraints, infrastructure limitations, and low student participation. Thus, the results of this SLR make an important contribution to the development of future education policies and principal training programs, particularly in strengthening managerial competencies based on collaboration, innovation, and empowerment of school human resources.

Although it provides a relevant picture, this study has limitations in the number of articles analyzed and the dominance of qualitative approaches, so that the generalization of the findings is still limited. In addition, variations in the context of educational units and policies have not been analyzed comparatively. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of the literature, use quantitative or mixed methods, and examine the causal relationship between principals' managerial competencies and students' non-academic achievements in various educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

A systematic literature review of five articles concludes that the managerial competence of school principals plays a significant role in improving the quality of education and students' non-academic achievements. School principals function not only as administrators, but also as learning leaders, educators, managers, and motivators who are able to create a conducive learning environment oriented towards the development of educational quality. Adaptive and collaborative leadership is a major factor determining the successful implementation of educational programs in schools. The findings also show that strengthening the managerial competence of school principals is a strategic necessity in efforts to build sustainable educational quality. The managerial success of school principals must be supported by innovation-based leadership training, increased collaboration among school stakeholders, and the provision of adequate resources. These efforts will result in a more adaptive and inclusive educational ecosystem that is capable of facing the challenges of the times.

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