

PRINCIPALS AS MANAGERS IN IMPROVING LEARNING QUALITY IN 3T SCHOOLS: A TANIMBAR SELATAN MULTI-SITE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Principal managerial leadership is a strategic factor in improving learning quality, particularly in Indonesia's disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas, where schools often experience limited facilities, teacher shortages, unstable internet access, and complex socio-geographical conditions. This study aims to analyze the role of principals as managers in improving learning quality at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan. This research employed a qualitative multi-site design to compare two schools with different institutional characteristics within the same island-based 3T context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation involving principals, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, and school committee representatives. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and cross-site comparison. The findings reveal two contextual managerial models. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki applied an adaptive-collegial model supported by teacher solidarity, flexible planning, interpersonal motivation, and humanistic supervision. Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan applied a transformational-structured model supported by formal programs, standardized supervision, literacy activities, and wider community networks. Both models contributed to learning management, although each faced different constraints. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki struggled with limited facilities, weak documentation, and less standardized supervision, while SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan faced bureaucratic delays, uneven teacher participation, student literacy problems, and certification-related assignment issues. This study contributes to educational management by offering a contextual managerial model for 3T schools, showing that principal effectiveness is not determined by a single universal leadership pattern, but by the ability to adapt planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling functions to local institutional capacity, teacher conditions, and island-based educational realities.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning quality is one of the central indicators of educational success. Quality learning is reflected not only in students' academic achievement, but also in the extent to which the learning process becomes meaningful, participatory, disciplined, contextual, and responsive to students' needs. In this regard, learning quality is not determined solely by teachers and students. It is also shaped by the effectiveness of school management, especially the role of the principal as the main managerial actor in the school organization. Mulyasa (2021) emphasizes that the principal has a strategic responsibility in directing school resources to achieve educational goals, while Wahjosumidjo (2019) explains that principal leadership determines the direction, climate, and effectiveness of school management.

In educational management, the principal is not merely an administrative figure who handles documents and formal school procedures. The principal also functions as a manager who coordinates human resources, curriculum implementation, learning facilities, school budgets, teacher performance, and the overall learning environment. Terry (2015) explains that management involves planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. These four functions are relevant in the school context because principals are required to plan school programs, organize teachers and resources, motivate school members, and supervise the implementation of learning. Similarly, Robbins and Coulter (2016) state that management is a process of coordinating work activities so that they are completed efficiently and effectively through other people.

The managerial role of principals becomes more demanding in the context of Merdeka Curriculum implementation, data-based school improvement, literacy and numeracy strengthening, and character education. These policy directions require school principals to become adaptive, evidence-oriented, collaborative, and responsive to local realities. However, schools in 3T areas often do not operate under ideal conditions. They face geographical isolation, limited facilities, unstable internet access, uneven teacher distribution, limited professional development opportunities, and varying levels of parental and community support. Suryadi (2019) notes that education in 3T areas faces complex challenges related to access, quality, infrastructure, and institutional capacity. Lassa (2020) also argues that island-based schools require different managerial strategies because educational services in archipelagic areas are strongly influenced by geography, transportation, and resource limitations.

Tanimbar Selatan represents an important context for examining principal managerial roles in 3T schools. As an island-based area, Tanimbar Selatan faces educational challenges related to access, infrastructure, teacher availability, and learning support systems. Schools in this region are required to maintain learning quality while simultaneously dealing with limited resources and geographical constraints. These realities make the principal's managerial role highly significant because the success of school programs depends on how principals plan realistically, organize available resources, motivate teachers, and conduct supervision under limited conditions.

SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan represent two different institutional contexts within the same geographical region. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki is a private Catholic school under a foundation, with relatively flexible internal coordination and a close collegial culture. Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan is a public school under local government administration, with more formal structures, broader access to government programs, and stronger bureaucratic procedures. Both schools seek to improve learning quality, but they do so through different managerial patterns. This contrast provides an important basis for understanding how school status, teacher capacity, resource availability, and institutional culture influence principal management in 3T schools.

Previous studies have widely discussed principal leadership, school management, teacher performance, and learning quality. Nurhayati (2021) found that principal managerial leadership contributes to teacher performance and learning quality. Anjani and Dafit (2020) also show that principal leadership has an important role in improving teacher professionalism. Meanwhile, Hallinger (2011) and Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) emphasize that school leadership contributes significantly to learning improvement when principals are able to build direction, develop people, and manage instructional programs. However, much of the existing research still focuses on general school contexts, urban settings, or single-site studies. Studies that specifically compare principal managerial practices between public and private schools in island-based 3T areas remain limited.

In addition, previous research often discusses principal leadership in general terms without sufficiently explaining how the POAC functions are adapted to resource limitations, teacher shortages, community conditions, and bureaucratic constraints in remote educational contexts. Rahabav (2019) explains that principal leadership in managing learning quality requires the ability to integrate planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation. However, in 3T schools, these managerial functions cannot always be implemented in the same manner as in schools with adequate resources. Therefore, this study positions itself within the gap between general principal leadership studies and the specific need to understand contextual managerial practices in island-based 3T schools.

The novelty of this study lies in its multi-site analysis of principal managerial roles through the POAC framework in two different institutional settings within a 3T island context. This study does not merely describe what principals do, but analyzes how managerial functions are contextually translated into school practices. By comparing SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of principal management as a contextual practice. The study argues that principal effectiveness in 3T schools is not determined by a single universal leadership model, but by the principal's ability to adapt managerial functions to school status, resource limitations, teacher capacity, and local socio-geographical conditions.

This study aims to describe and analyze the role of principals as managers in improving learning quality at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan. Specifically, it examines the planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling functions performed by principals, identifies supporting and inhibiting factors, and formulates contextual managerial patterns for improving learning quality in 3T schools. The study contributes to educational management by showing that school improvement in remote island contexts requires adaptive planning, participatory task distribution, teacher motivation, humanistic yet accountable supervision, and locally responsive decision-making.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand the processes, meanings, and dynamics of principal managerial roles in their natural school contexts. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is appropriate when researchers intend to explore social phenomena deeply based on participants' experiences and contextual meanings. The multi-site design enabled the researcher to compare two schools with different institutional characteristics and to identify similarities, differences, and contextual managerial patterns in improving learning quality. Yin (2018) explains that case study and multi-site inquiry are useful for examining contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are closely connected.

The research was conducted at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, located in Tanimbar Selatan, Maluku Province. The two schools were selected purposively because both are located in an island-based 3T context, face challenges related to facilities, teacher availability, and learning management, and represent different institutional types. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki represents a private Catholic school under a foundation, while SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan represents a public school under local government administration. This contrast provided a strong basis for cross-site comparison.

Research informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The main informants consisted of the principals of both schools. Supporting informants included vice principals, senior teachers, core subject teachers, administrative staff, and school committee or parent representatives. In total, the study involved informants who were directly related to learning planning, teacher task distribution, learning implementation, academic supervision, school administration, and community participation. Informants were selected because they had practical knowledge of school management processes and were involved in the implementation of learning quality improvement programs.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document study. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, administrative staff, and school committee representatives. The interview guide focused on five operational areas: how principals plan learning programs, how they organize teachers and facilities, how they motivate and guide teachers, how academic supervision is conducted, and what factors support or

hinder learning management. Semi-structured interviews were used because this technique allows researchers to maintain focus while still providing space for informants to explain their experiences in depth (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016).

Observation was conducted to understand the real managerial practices in both schools. The researcher observed school meetings, learning activities, teacher coordination, supervision practices, student activities, and the use of learning facilities. Observation was important because not all managerial practices could be fully captured through interviews. Through observation, the researcher was able to compare formal statements with actual school practices.

Document study was used to strengthen interview and observation data. The documents analyzed included school work plans, budget plans, curriculum documents, teaching schedules, teaching modules or lesson plans, supervision instruments, supervision reports, meeting notes, teacher attendance data, and school program documents. Document analysis was useful for examining whether managerial practices were formally recorded and systematically implemented.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. In the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were sorted, selected, coded, and categorized based on the POAC framework and emerging contextual themes. The main codes included planning, organizing, actuating, controlling, supporting factors, inhibiting factors, teacher participation, learning facilities, supervision practice, and learning quality. In the data display stage, the data were organized into site-specific matrices and cross-site comparison tables. This enabled the researcher to identify patterns within each school and compare them across sites.

In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the data by comparing statements among informants, matching interview results with observation notes and documents, and identifying similarities and differences between the two schools. Cross-site analysis was used to formulate contextual managerial models. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and thick description. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that credibility in qualitative research can be strengthened through prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, and thick description. In this study, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from principals, teachers, staff, and committee representatives. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing interview, observation, and documentation data. Member checking was conducted by confirming key findings with selected informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations were consistent with the realities experienced by participants.

Table 1. Research Sites and Institutional Characteristics

Aspect	SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki	SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan	Interpretive Meaning
School status	Private Catholic school under a foundation	Public school under local government administration	Institutional status shapes flexibility, bureaucracy, funding access, and participation patterns
Management tendency	Adaptive, collegial, and humanistic	Transformational, structured, and program-oriented	Both patterns are contextually relevant for 3T schools
Key resources	Strong teacher solidarity and flexible internal coordination	Formal programs, wider external networks, and more standardized supervision	Each school has a different source of managerial strength
Main constraints	Limited facilities, limited documentation, and less standardized supervision	BOS delay, participation polarization, literacy problems, and bureaucratic pressure	Constraints differ according to institutional context and resource configuration

Source: Research data processed from thesis findings, 2026.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Principal managerial role in learning planning

The findings show that learning planning at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki was conducted through beginning-of-year meetings and internal teacher forums. The principal involved teachers in preparing teaching modules, discussing learning needs, and adjusting curriculum implementation to student conditions. Planning was not understood only as the preparation of administrative documents, but also as a practical response to teacher limitations, student characteristics, and available facilities. The principal used internal evaluation results, student mastery levels, classroom problems, and teacher readiness as the basis for planning. This indicates that the planning function was participatory and adaptive.

From a managerial perspective, this pattern reflects the importance of contextual planning in limited-resource schools. Terry (2015) explains that planning is the first managerial function because it determines goals, strategies, and steps to achieve organizational objectives. In schools, planning becomes the foundation for curriculum implementation, teacher assignment, learning activities, and evaluation. Mulyasa (2017) also emphasizes that school-based management requires planning that is participatory, realistic, and responsive to school needs. Therefore, the strength of SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki lies in its ability to build planning through collegial dialogue and realistic adjustment.

However, the weakness of this pattern is the limited documentation of planning outcomes. When planning is highly informal and dependent on interpersonal coordination, the school may experience difficulty in evaluating program continuity, measuring learning progress, and preparing evidence-based improvement plans. Rahabav (2018) argues that learning management requires not only planning as a discussion process, but also planning as an institutional document that guides implementation and evaluation.

In contrast, learning planning at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan was more structured. The principal involved a small planning team consisting of curriculum leaders and senior teachers. This team helped formulate school programs, prepare learning schedules, design literacy activities, and coordinate academic planning. Several concrete programs emerged from this planning process, such as classroom reading corners, inter-class speech competitions, special reading and writing guidance, and arts-based student development. These programs show that planning in this school was not merely administrative, but also directed toward solving specific learning problems, especially student literacy and participation.

The structured planning model at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan reflects a stronger program-oriented management pattern. This is relevant to the concept of school-based management, which emphasizes school capacity to design programs according to local needs while remaining accountable to formal educational standards (Mulyasa, 2017). Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that teacher participation in strategic planning was not evenly distributed. Some teachers were involved more intensively, while others felt less included in the formulation of school programs. This condition shows that structured planning must still be balanced with participatory mechanisms to strengthen teacher ownership.

Cross-site comparison shows that SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki was stronger in collegial participation and realistic adjustment, while SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan was stronger in structured innovation and program clarity. The main implication is that learning planning in 3T schools needs to balance participation, efficiency, and documentation. Planning that is too informal may create weak program records, while planning that is too centralized may reduce teacher ownership. Therefore, effective planning in 3T schools requires principals to combine participatory dialogue with clear documentation and measurable learning targets.

Principal Managerial Role in Organizing Learning

Organizing learning at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki was carried out flexibly due to the limited number of teachers. Several teachers had to teach subjects outside their academic background because the school needed to maintain learning continuity. This condition created managerial pressure because subject linearity could not always

be fully fulfilled. However, the problem was mitigated by strong teacher solidarity. Teachers helped one another, shared teaching materials, learned independently, and discussed classroom problems collectively. Coordination was carried out through school meetings and internal teacher discussions.

This finding shows that organizing in 3T schools must be understood not merely as formal task distribution, but also as the principal's ability to maintain learning continuity under limited conditions. Robbins and Coulter (2016) state that organizing involves arranging and structuring work to accomplish organizational goals. In school management, organizing includes teacher assignment, schedule preparation, use of facilities, and coordination of instructional responsibilities. Ideally, teacher assignment should be based on academic qualification and subject linearity. However, in remote schools with limited teacher availability, principals often face difficult choices between formal compliance and learning continuity.

At SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, organizing was more functional and formal. Teaching assignments were influenced by school structure, curriculum needs, and certification requirements, especially the requirement for some teachers to fulfill 24 teaching hours. As a result, some part-time teachers received the remaining teaching hours, and teacher placement was not always fully aligned with academic expertise. The organization of schedules was handled by a small team, which made the process more efficient but also created the risk of reduced transparency and teacher polarization.

This condition shows that public schools in 3T areas may face different organizing challenges from private schools. While SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki experienced organizing problems mainly because of teacher shortages, SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan faced organizing problems because of bureaucratic regulations, certification demands, and formal administrative requirements. Suryadi (2019) explains that teacher distribution remains one of the major problems in 3T education. Lassa (2020) also emphasizes that island-based schools often require flexible staffing policies because geographic and administrative conditions make ideal teacher distribution difficult to achieve.

The comparison between the two schools indicates that teacher linearity is a shared problem, but its causes differ. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki experienced linearity problems because of limited human resources, while SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan experienced them because of certification-hour requirements and bureaucratic arrangements. This finding strengthens the argument that educational policy for 3T schools should provide more flexible teacher assignment schemes without ignoring quality standards. Principals need room to organize teachers contextually, but they also need policy support, teacher development, and inter-school collaboration to reduce the negative impact of non-linear assignments.

Principal Managerial Role in Actuating Learning

The actuating function at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki was strongly supported by routine motivation from the principal. Teachers continued to teach with commitment despite limited facilities, limited teaching resources, and unstable access to technology. The principal motivated teachers through direct communication, personal approach, and routine reminders about the importance of service, responsibility, and student development. The principal also monitored learning flexibly by visiting classrooms, observing learning conditions, and discussing problems with teachers.

This managerial pattern can be described as an adaptive-collegial pattern. The term adaptive refers to the principal's ability to adjust managerial decisions to limited school resources, while collegial refers to the strong interpersonal relationship between the principal and teachers. Conceptually, this pattern is close to humanistic and participatory school leadership, where teacher motivation, emotional support, and shared responsibility become important managerial resources. Wahjosumidjo (2019) states that principals must be able to influence, guide, and motivate school members to achieve educational goals. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) explain that successful school leadership involves setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving instructional programs.

In a 3T school context, this pattern is important because not all learning problems can be solved through facilities or formal programs. Some problems require teacher commitment, mutual assistance, and principal presence.

However, the findings also show that motivation alone is not sufficient to ensure sustainable learning quality. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki still needs stronger program documentation, more systematic teacher development, and clearer learning quality indicators. Without these elements, learning improvement may depend too heavily on personal commitment and informal solidarity.

At SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, the actuating function appeared through program innovation and stronger managerial direction. Reading corners, speech competitions, literacy guidance, and dance activities became visible school programs. These activities were not merely extracurricular, but also part of the school's effort to build student confidence, literacy culture, communication skills, and school identity. Dance activities, in particular, became a form of school identity and a magnet for student participation.

This pattern can be described as transformational-structured management. The term transformational refers to the principal's effort to mobilize change, encourage innovation, and build school identity. The term structured refers to the use of formal programs, clearer targets, and standardized mechanisms in implementing school activities. Hallinger (2011) explains that leadership for learning requires principals to focus on instructional goals, teacher development, and learning climate. In this regard, the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan demonstrated a stronger effort to translate managerial direction into visible student development programs.

Nevertheless, the implementation of programs at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan still depended heavily on individual teacher initiative. Limited projectors, underused smart boards, uneven teacher capacity, and different levels of teacher participation reduced the consistency of program implementation. This indicates that transformational-structured management requires not only vision and programs, but also wider teacher involvement, facility optimization, and continuous professional support.

The findings indicate that both schools used different actuating strategies. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki relied on emotional motivation, direct presence, and teacher solidarity. SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan relied on structured programs, achievement orientation, and school identity. Both strategies are meaningful in 3T contexts, but both require strengthening. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki needs more documented flagship programs, while SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan needs mechanisms to ensure that program implementation is not concentrated only among certain teachers.

Principal Managerial Role in Controlling and Academic Supervision

Supervision at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki was flexible, informal, and formative. The principal scheduled supervision every semester but also conducted incidental supervision when certain classroom problems emerged. Supervision was carried out through classroom observation and follow-up discussion. This model created a humanistic atmosphere because teachers did not feel heavily burdened by bureaucratic supervision. Teachers tended to perceive supervision as guidance rather than inspection.

This humanistic supervision model has important value in a small school with close interpersonal relationships. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) explain that instructional supervision should be developmental, meaning that supervision must help teachers grow professionally rather than merely judge their performance. Suharsaputra (2016) also emphasizes that educational supervision should provide guidance, assistance, and professional support for teachers. Therefore, the supervision pattern at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki can be seen as formative because it emphasizes improvement through dialogue and personal guidance.

However, because written instruments were not used consistently, supervision risked becoming subjective and less standardized. The absence of complete supervision records may also make it difficult for the school to evaluate teacher progress over time. Prajana (2020) argues that follow-up is an essential component of academic supervision because teacher improvement depends not only on observation but also on systematic feedback and documented improvement plans. Therefore, humanistic supervision needs to be complemented with simple but clear instruments so that teacher development can be documented more systematically.

In contrast, supervision at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan was more systematic and professional. The principal implemented supervision at least twice a semester through three stages: administrative supervision,

classroom supervision, and clinical supervision. Administrative supervision checked teaching documents; classroom supervision observed teaching practice; and clinical supervision provided private feedback and coaching. Teachers who were not ready received verbal reminders and time for improvement.

This model strengthened accountability because supervision was carried out through clearer procedures. It also helped the principal identify teacher readiness, classroom problems, and follow-up needs. Purwanto (2012) explains that supervision is an effort to assist teachers in improving the learning process. Therefore, standardized supervision should not be interpreted merely as inspection, but as a managerial mechanism to ensure that teachers receive feedback and professional support.

Cross-site comparison shows that each supervision model has contextual strengths. The humanistic supervision model is suitable for smaller schools with strong collegial relationships, while standardized clinical supervision is suitable for larger schools requiring clearer accountability. The most important implication is that supervision in 3T schools should combine humanistic support with simple but consistent instruments. Supervision should not be reduced to administrative control, but it also should not become informal guidance without documentation. Effective supervision requires balance between trust, accountability, feedback, and follow-up.

Table 2. Cross-Site Synthesis of Principal Managerial Functions

Function	SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki	SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan	Cross-Site Meaning
Planning	Participatory, gradual, based on internal evaluation and teacher discussion	Structured, program-oriented, and led by a small curriculum team	Planning must balance participation, innovation, efficiency, and documentation
Organizing	Flexible task distribution supported by strong teacher solidarity	Functional task distribution influenced by certification hours and formal procedures	Teacher assignment in 3T schools requires contextual flexibility and fairness
Actuating	Motivation, direct presence, and adaptive-collegial implementation	Flagship programs, literacy activities, speech competitions, and arts-based school identity	Learning implementation needs both motivation and program consistency
Controlling	Humanistic, flexible, and formative supervision, but less standardized	Systematic supervision through administrative, classroom, and clinical stages	Effective supervision should combine humanism and accountability
Main model	Adaptive-collegial leadership	Transformational-structured leadership	No single model is universally superior in 3T schools

Source: Cross-site analysis of research findings, 2026.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several factors supported principal managerial effectiveness at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki. The most important factor was strong teacher solidarity. Teachers supported one another by sharing materials, helping prepare teaching modules, replacing colleagues when needed, and discussing daily classroom problems. The principal's routine motivation also maintained teacher commitment. In addition, the school's private status created flexibility in adjusting programs to local conditions. Humanistic supervision and teacher openness to guidance strengthened the school climate.

The supporting factors at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan were different. The school had more formal programs, wider community networks, more systematic supervision, and stronger public visibility. The principal's structured leadership helped create concrete programs and encouraged student participation. Community support was also important because it strengthened the legitimacy of school programs and provided social backing for learning activities. Sumarsono (2020) explains that community participation and teacher commitment are important elements in school management because both strengthen program implementation and school accountability.

The inhibiting factors at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki were mostly internal-professional. These included limited facilities, limited number of teachers, insufficient documentation, less standardized supervision, unequal digital skills among teachers, and limited professional interaction with other schools. These obstacles indicate that the school needs stronger institutional documentation and teacher capacity development while maintaining its collegial culture.

At SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, the obstacles were more complex. They included bureaucratic delays in school operational funds, underused facilities, teacher participation polarization, literacy problems among students, and tension between certification requirements and subject linearity. These findings show that public school management in 3T areas is shaped not only by internal school dynamics but also by external administrative and policy structures.

Overall, the findings indicate that school status influences the type of managerial challenge faced by principals. Private schools may have greater flexibility but weaker formal support, while public schools may have broader access to government programs but stronger bureaucratic constraints. Therefore, managerial effectiveness in 3T schools should be understood as the result of interaction between principal leadership, institutional status, resource availability, teacher participation, and policy environment.

Discussion: Two Contextual Managerial Models in 3T Schools

The findings construct two contextual managerial models for 3T schools. The first is the adaptive-collegial model found at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki. This model is characterized by flexibility, participation, personal closeness, motivation, teacher solidarity, and humanistic supervision. It is suitable for schools with severe resource limitations, small teacher communities, and strong interpersonal relationships. Its strength lies in its ability to maintain school stability and teacher commitment under difficult conditions. Its weakness lies in the risk of weak documentation, subjective supervision, and limited innovation if the school relies only on internal solidarity.

The second is the transformational-structured model found at SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan. This model is characterized by vision, formal program structure, standardized supervision, literacy innovation, arts-based school identity, and broader external networking. It is suitable for schools with more organizational capacity and stronger accountability demands. Its strength lies in the ability to create visible school programs and strengthen institutional direction. Its weakness lies in the risk of reduced inclusiveness, teacher polarization, and dependence on the principal's personal leadership.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that principal management should be understood as contextual leadership. The POAC framework remains relevant, but its implementation must be translated into local realities. Terry (2015) provides a general managerial framework through planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. However, the findings of this study show that in 3T schools, those functions are not implemented in a linear or uniform manner. Instead, they are shaped by teacher availability, school status, facilities, bureaucracy, community support, and geographical conditions.

In urban schools, planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling may be supported by stable resources, professional development, adequate technology, and strong administrative systems. In 3T schools, however, these functions depend strongly on adaptation, social capital, teacher solidarity, community trust, and the principal's ability to make realistic decisions under resource constraints. Yuliana (2020) notes that adaptive school management is necessary in disadvantaged and remote areas because school leaders must respond to limitations through flexible and locally grounded strategies.

Therefore, this study argues that no single managerial model is best for all 3T schools. School improvement requires principals to read their institutional context carefully. Schools in survival conditions may need adaptive-collegial leadership to maintain stability, while schools moving toward development may need transformational-structured leadership to strengthen program quality and accountability. The most productive strategy is cross-learning between these models. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki can learn from SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan in program documentation, literacy innovation, and standardized supervision. Conversely, SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan can learn from SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki in teacher solidarity, personal approach, and humanistic supervision.

This cross-learning is important because 3T schools require both flexibility and structure. Flexibility allows schools to survive and adapt to limitations, while structure ensures continuity, accountability, and measurable improvement. Thus, principal managerial leadership in 3T schools should not be reduced to administrative compliance. It should be understood as a contextual practice that combines managerial rationality, local sensitivity, teacher empowerment, and sustained learning improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that principals at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki and SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan performed managerial roles through planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling learning. However, each school translated these managerial functions differently according to its institutional status, resource capacity, teacher conditions, and socio-geographical context. SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki applied an adaptive-collegial pattern characterized by participatory planning, flexible organizing, routine motivation, teacher solidarity, and humanistic supervision. SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan applied a transformational-structured pattern characterized by program innovation, formal organizing, structured implementation, literacy programs, arts-based school identity, and systematic clinical supervision.

The supporting factors at SMP Santo Paulus Saumlaki were teacher solidarity, principal motivation, school flexibility, collegial culture, and teacher openness to supervision. Its inhibiting factors were limited facilities, limited documentation, non-standardized supervision, unequal digital capacity, and limited teacher availability. In SMP Negeri 2 Tanimbar Selatan, supporting factors included structured programs, community networks, standardized supervision, school visibility, and student development activities. Its inhibiting factors included bureaucratic delays, teacher participation polarization, student literacy problems, limited facility optimization, and certification-related assignment problems.

The scientific contribution of this study is the formulation of two contextual managerial models for 3T schools: adaptive-collegial leadership and transformational-structured leadership. Both models are relevant, but neither is universally superior. Effective principal management in 3T schools requires contextual adaptation, participatory planning, fair task distribution, teacher motivation, simple but consistent supervision, sustainable documentation, and locally responsive decision-making.

Practically, the findings suggest that local education authorities should provide flexible teacher assignment policies, timely operational funding, inter-school professional forums, and targeted supervision training for principals in island-based 3T areas. Schools also need support in developing simple documentation systems, strengthening literacy programs, optimizing available facilities, and improving teacher professional collaboration. These efforts are important to ensure that learning quality improvement in 3T schools does not depend solely on the personal commitment of principals and teachers, but is supported by a sustainable institutional system.

This study has limitations. The findings are strongly grounded in the context of two schools in Tanimbar Selatan, so generalization to all 3T schools should be made carefully. Future research may involve more schools across different island regions, use mixed methods to measure the relationship between principal managerial practices and learning outcomes, or compare managerial models across public, private, religious, and community-based schools in other 3T areas.

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