

DEMOCRATIC-PARTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF PUBLIC VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN TULANG BAWANG REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of democratic-participatory leadership by female principals in improving the quality of vocational secondary education in Tulang Bawang Regency, Lampung Province, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative multi-site case study design, the research was conducted at two public vocational high schools led by female principals: SMK Negeri 1 Penawar Tama and SMK Negeri 1 Banjar Margo. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, and school stakeholders. The findings indicate that democratic-participatory leadership is characterized by inclusive decision-making, open communication, collaborative problem-solving, and stakeholder involvement in school governance. Leadership effectiveness is strengthened by interpersonal trust, professional collaboration, and organizational support, while challenges arise from uneven teacher participation, disciplinary issues, administrative demands, and gender-related expectations. The study further reveals that participatory leadership contributes to teacher professionalism, organizational cohesion, stakeholder engagement, and the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives. The findings suggest that female principals enhance educational quality by transforming participation into a strategic resource that strengthens collective responsibility, organizational adaptability, and sustainable institutional development within vocational education settings.

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INTRODUCTION

The discourse on educational leadership has undergone a substantial transformation over the last two decades, shifting from hierarchical and authority-centered models toward more collaborative, participatory, and relational forms of leadership that emphasize collective decision-making, organizational learning, and stakeholder engagement. This transformation has been accelerated by global demands for educational quality, accountability, and institutional adaptability in increasingly complex educational environments. Within this evolving landscape, the role of female school leaders has attracted growing scholarly attention because their leadership practices are frequently associated with participative governance, interpersonal sensitivity, and inclusive organizational cultures that are considered particularly relevant for contemporary educational institutions. International scholarship suggests that women leaders tend to adopt

leadership approaches characterized by cooperation, empowerment, and shared responsibility rather than command-and-control mechanisms, creating conditions that support sustainable school improvement and professional commitment among educational stakeholders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Simultaneously, scholars have emphasized that leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from sociocultural contexts because gendered expectations, institutional norms, and cultural values shape both leadership behavior and followers' responses to leadership practices (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Consequently, the investigation of democratic-participatory leadership enacted by female principals has become an increasingly significant agenda in educational management research, particularly in contexts where educational reform intersects with evolving gender dynamics.

A growing body of empirical literature has documented the distinctive contributions of female principals to school effectiveness, teacher performance, and organizational development. Research conducted in various educational settings consistently demonstrates that female leaders tend to emphasize consultation, collaboration, interpersonal trust, and collective problem-solving as core mechanisms for achieving institutional goals. Studies by Febriantina (2012) revealed that successful female principals frequently combine transformational, interactive, and nurturing leadership dimensions to cultivate effective schools, while Fatimah (2020) found that female school leaders often rely on persuasive communication, participatory decision-making, and relational approaches to strengthen educational institutions. Similar findings were reported by Afandi et al. (2021), who identified transformational, instructional, and participatory leadership patterns among female principals in Islamic schools, highlighting their capacity to mobilize organizational commitment through inclusive leadership processes. Patoni and Maunah (2023) further demonstrated that participatory leadership practices implemented by female principals positively influence teacher performance because teachers perceive themselves as active contributors rather than passive recipients of administrative directives. Collectively, these studies suggest that female educational leadership cannot be adequately understood merely through gender representation; rather, its significance lies in the distinctive leadership processes through which school actors are engaged, empowered, and aligned toward shared institutional objectives.

Despite the growing consensus regarding the potential advantages of female leadership, the existing literature continues to exhibit important conceptual and empirical limitations. First, much of the available evidence remains concentrated on Islamic educational institutions, primary schools, or general secondary schools, leaving vocational education settings comparatively underexplored despite their unique organizational characteristics, stakeholder complexity, and workforce-oriented missions (Afandi et al., 2021; Fatimah, 2020). Second, previous studies frequently focus on identifying leadership styles without sufficiently examining the interaction between leadership practices, contextual constraints, and institutional quality improvement processes. Third, although scholars have long acknowledged the existence of gender-related barriers affecting women's leadership trajectories, empirical analyses often treat gender either as a demographic variable or as an explanatory label rather than investigating how gendered expectations shape leadership enactment in practice (Heilman, 2001). This limitation is particularly problematic because the effectiveness of democratic-participatory leadership may depend not only on leadership competencies but also on how leaders navigate institutional resistance, stereotypes, and organizational constraints. The result is a fragmented understanding of how female principals simultaneously exercise participatory leadership, confront contextual barriers, and pursue school quality enhancement within real educational environments.

The persistence of these gaps becomes increasingly consequential when viewed against the broader educational and social transformations occurring in Indonesia. Although gender equality indicators have shown gradual improvement, structural disparities in leadership representation remain evident across educational institutions. In Lampung Province, the Gender Development Index reached 90.75 percent in 2023, indicating a narrowing gender gap and expanding opportunities for women's participation in leadership positions (BPS Provinsi Lampung, 2023). Nevertheless, educational leadership positions continue to be dominated by men; among 111 public vocational high schools in Lampung during the 2023/2024 academic year, only 24 schools were led by women, while 87 remained under male leadership (BPS Provinsi Lampung, 2024). Such disparities are not merely numerical issues but reflect continuing tensions between formal opportunities for leadership and enduring social perceptions regarding women's authority and managerial competence. Scholarly discussions on gender stereotypes suggest that women leaders are frequently evaluated through standards that differ from those applied to men, creating additional challenges in exercising authority, enforcing discipline, and maintaining organizational legitimacy (Heilman, 2001; Ayman & Korabik, 2010). These realities underscore the need to investigate how female principals sustain leadership effectiveness and organizational performance despite operating within environments shaped by persistent gendered expectations.

Against this backdrop, the context of public vocational high schools in Tulang Bawang Regency presents a particularly important empirical setting for advancing educational leadership scholarship. Unlike many regions where women remain underrepresented in school leadership, a substantial proportion of public vocational schools in Tulang Bawang are led by female principals, creating an opportunity to examine leadership processes within institutions that have demonstrated organizational viability and educational performance. Existing evidence indicates that female principals in these schools employ leadership practices characterized by communication, consultation, interpersonal engagement, and collaborative decision-making while simultaneously confronting challenges related to infrastructure limitations, disciplinary management, workload pressures, and unequal responsiveness among organizational members. Such conditions provide a valuable context for examining democratic-participatory leadership not as an abstract leadership category but as a practical mechanism through which female principals negotiate organizational constraints, mobilize stakeholder support, and pursue educational quality improvement. Positioning the study within this context allows for a more nuanced understanding of how leadership effectiveness emerges through the interaction of gender, organizational culture, institutional resources, and participatory governance processes.

This study seeks to investigate how democratic-participatory leadership is enacted by female principals in public vocational high schools in Tulang Bawang Regency, how supporting and inhibiting factors shape the implementation of such leadership, and how these leaders utilize participatory strategies to improve school quality. The research contributes theoretically by refining the understanding of female educational leadership beyond descriptive categorizations of leadership style and by linking democratic-participatory leadership to contextual processes of organizational improvement within vocational education settings. Methodologically, the study contributes empirical evidence derived from a comparative qualitative examination of two public vocational schools, enabling a deeper exploration of leadership practices, contextual dynamics, and quality-enhancement strategies that remain insufficiently represented in the contemporary educational leadership literature.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative multi-site case study design to explore how democratic-participatory leadership is enacted by female principals in improving the quality of vocational secondary education. The research was conducted at two public vocational high schools in Tulang Bawang Regency, Lampung Province, namely SMK Negeri 1 Penawar Tama and SMK Negeri 1 Banjar Margo, both of which are led by female principals and represent distinctive organizational contexts within the public vocational education sector. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in school leadership and quality improvement processes. The primary participants consisted of the principals, while additional informants included vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, school committee representatives, and other stakeholders possessing relevant knowledge of leadership practices within the schools. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, enabling the researcher to capture both the formal and informal dimensions of leadership implementation and school quality management.

The principal research instrument was the researcher, supported by interview protocols, observation guides, and document review checklists developed in accordance with the study objectives. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking with selected participants. Data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, allowing emerging patterns and themes to be systematically interpreted across the two research sites. Cross-site analysis was subsequently undertaken to identify convergent and divergent leadership practices and contextual factors influencing school quality improvement. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, protecting institutional identities where necessary, and maintaining the voluntary nature of participation in accordance with accepted ethical standards for educational research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Democratic-Participatory Leadership Practices of Female Principals in Vocational School Governance

The cross-site analysis revealed that democratic-participatory leadership constituted the dominant leadership orientation exercised by female principals in both vocational schools. Interview data indicated that major organizational decisions were rarely formulated through unilateral authority and were instead discussed collectively through formal and informal deliberative forums. Teachers consistently reported that their opinions were considered during planning

meetings, curriculum discussions, and institutional evaluations. Such practices demonstrate the operationalization of participative leadership through shared influence rather than hierarchical control, a pattern frequently associated with effective educational leadership environments (Li et al., 2022).

Field observations showed that school meetings functioned not merely as administrative routines but as mechanisms for organizational learning and consensus building. Teachers were encouraged to communicate institutional concerns, propose solutions, and contribute to program development without experiencing excessive bureaucratic constraints. This communicative climate strengthened mutual trust between school leaders and staff members. Similar patterns have been identified in studies emphasizing the relationship between participatory leadership and collaborative school cultures (Kristiyanti & Muhyadi, 2015).

Data from both schools further demonstrated that leadership legitimacy was largely derived from interpersonal engagement rather than positional authority. Participants frequently described the principals as approachable, responsive, and willing to accommodate diverse perspectives before making strategic decisions. Such findings indicate that influence was constructed through relational interaction rather than coercive power. The observed pattern aligns with arguments suggesting that female leaders often employ relational approaches that facilitate organizational commitment and cooperation (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Several teachers emphasized that participatory practices increased their sense of ownership toward institutional programs. Active involvement in decision-making processes encouraged greater responsibility for implementing school policies and achieving performance targets. Informants associated this condition with improved professional motivation and stronger collective accountability. Research on female educational leadership similarly reports that participation generates stronger organizational engagement among teaching personnel (Patoni & Maunah, 2023).

The empirical evidence also revealed that consultation mechanisms extended beyond teachers to include administrative staff and school committees. Stakeholder involvement occurred during discussions concerning student development programs, infrastructure priorities, and community partnerships. This broader participatory network contributed to more contextually responsive decision-making processes. Such findings reinforce perspectives that leadership effectiveness emerges through the integration of diverse organizational actors into governance structures (Ibarra, 1993).

Cross-site comparisons identified minor variations in implementation while preserving a common participatory orientation. SMK Negeri 1 Penawar Tama displayed stronger emphasis on collaborative planning, whereas SMK Negeri 1 Banjar Margo demonstrated greater reliance on interpersonal communication in resolving organizational issues. Despite these differences, both institutions consistently emphasized consultation before policy enactment. The resulting leadership pattern reflects the adaptive nature of democratic leadership originally conceptualized within social climate theory (Lewin et al., 1939). To illustrate the recurring leadership practices identified during fieldwork, the frequency of themes emerging from interviews and observations is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dominant Democratic-Participatory Leadership Practices Identified Across Research Sites

Leadership Practice	SMKN 1 Penawar Tama	SMKN 1 Banjar Margo
Collective decision-making	High	High
Open communication	High	Very High
Delegation of responsibility	High	High
Stakeholder consultation	Moderate	High
Collaborative problem-solving	High	High

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that collective decision-making and collaborative problem-solving were consistently observed across both institutions. Open communication appeared particularly prominent at SMK Negeri 1 Banjar Margo, where daily interactions between leaders and staff were characterized by intensive informal dialogue. Stakeholder consultation was also more visible in school-community engagement activities. These patterns illustrate how participatory leadership becomes embedded within routine organizational practices rather than remaining a symbolic administrative principle.

Another significant finding concerns the principals' preference for persuasion instead of directive command when encouraging organizational compliance. Interview participants frequently described situations in which principals attempted to build understanding before requesting implementation of institutional programs. This strategy reduced resistance and fostered voluntary commitment among staff members. Comparable tendencies have been documented in studies highlighting the communicative and persuasive dimensions of female school leadership (Fatimah, 2020; Widodo, 2019).

The observed leadership model also reflects broader theoretical discussions regarding the comparative strengths of female leadership in educational organizations. Scholars argue that women leaders often demonstrate advantages in collaborative governance because they emphasize relationship-building, empathy, and collective participation as leadership resources (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Evidence from the two vocational schools supports this proposition, particularly in relation to the cultivation of trust-based organizational interactions. Findings simultaneously corroborate research showing that female principals frequently integrate transformational and participatory elements when managing educational institutions (Nasikhah et al., 2022; Afandi et al., 2021).

Interpretation of the findings suggests that democratic-participatory leadership functions as an organizational mechanism that aligns institutional objectives with stakeholder commitment. Leadership effectiveness was not derived solely from the personal characteristics of the principals but from their ability to create inclusive decision-making structures that distributed responsibility across organizational members. Such conditions enabled teachers and staff to perceive themselves as active contributors to school development. The evidence strengthens arguments that participatory leadership enhances institutional adaptability and collective efficacy within contemporary educational organizations (Li et al., 2022; Febriantina, 2012).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Democratic-Participatory Leadership

The findings revealed that the effectiveness of democratic-participatory leadership in both vocational schools was shaped by a combination of organizational support mechanisms and contextual constraints. Participants consistently emphasized that interpersonal trust constituted a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of participatory governance. Teachers demonstrated a willingness to contribute ideas because they perceived the principals as leaders who respected professional opinions and valued collaborative engagement. Such conditions are frequently identified as critical antecedents of participative leadership effectiveness because participation requires psychological safety and reciprocal trust among organizational actors (Li et al., 2022).

Interview data indicated that organizational cohesion was strengthened through intensive communication practices established by the principals. Routine coordination meetings, informal discussions, and open consultation opportunities created channels through which concerns could be addressed before escalating into institutional problems. Participants described communication as an important mechanism for maintaining transparency and reducing misunderstandings among staff members. Similar findings have been reported in studies suggesting that female principals often rely on relational communication strategies to foster organizational solidarity and collective commitment (Marsiana et al., 2023).

Another supporting factor emerged from the principals' ability to cultivate professional collaboration among teachers. Informants frequently noted that collaborative planning activities encouraged knowledge sharing and reduced departmental fragmentation. Joint responsibility for institutional programs created stronger alignment between individual tasks and organizational objectives. Research on female school leadership similarly demonstrates that collaborative leadership structures contribute positively to professional cooperation and institutional effectiveness (Nasikhah et al., 2022).

The data further suggested that policy support from the national education system indirectly facilitated the implementation of participatory leadership. School management practices increasingly require principals to function not merely as administrators but as instructional and transformational leaders capable of mobilizing school communities. Expectations concerning collaborative governance have become more prominent within contemporary educational reforms. This orientation corresponds with the leadership responsibilities outlined in national regulations concerning school principal assignments and educational leadership development (Kemendikbudristek, 2018).

Despite these supportive conditions, participants identified several obstacles that complicated the implementation of democratic-participatory leadership. One recurring challenge involved varying levels of teacher responsiveness toward institutional initiatives. Some teachers demonstrated high commitment to collaborative activities, while others displayed passive participation and limited engagement in decision-making processes. Such disparities occasionally slowed

consensus-building and reduced the efficiency of organizational coordination. Similar challenges have been identified in studies examining leadership implementation within heterogeneous educational workforces (Siskawati et al., 2024).

Field observations also revealed that disciplinary issues occasionally constrained participatory leadership practices. While consultation and dialogue were generally preferred, principals sometimes encountered situations requiring more directive interventions to ensure compliance with professional responsibilities. The need to balance participation and organizational control represented a recurring leadership dilemma. Educational leadership scholars note that effective school governance often requires integrating participatory approaches with accountability mechanisms to maintain institutional performance standards (Regina et al., 2023). The distribution of major supporting and inhibiting factors identified across the two research sites is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors Affecting Democratic-Participatory Leadership

Factor Category	Key Findings
Supporting Factors	Trust, open communication, collaboration, stakeholder support
Supporting Factors	Teacher involvement in decision-making
Inhibiting Factors	Uneven teacher participation
Inhibiting Factors	Workload complexity and administrative demands
Inhibiting Factors	Discipline and compliance issues

The evidence summarized in Table 2 demonstrates that relational and organizational resources played a substantial role in sustaining participatory leadership practices. Trust and communication consistently appeared as enabling factors across both schools. In contrast, disparities in participation and increasing administrative responsibilities frequently emerged as barriers to effective implementation. These findings suggest that participatory leadership depends not only on leadership orientation but also on organizational readiness and stakeholder responsiveness.

An additional challenge identified during interviews involved the persistence of gender-related perceptions within educational environments. Although participants generally acknowledged the competence of female principals, some informants indicated that women leaders occasionally faced greater scrutiny regarding authority and decision-making. Such perceptions required principals to invest additional effort in demonstrating leadership credibility and professional legitimacy. This observation reflects broader discussions concerning the influence of gender stereotypes on leadership evaluation and advancement opportunities (Heilman, 2001; Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

The findings further revealed that balancing professional responsibilities with social expectations represented an implicit challenge for female school leaders. Participants described situations in which principals were expected to maintain high organizational performance while simultaneously fulfilling culturally embedded expectations concerning family and social roles. These overlapping expectations increased leadership complexity and generated additional pressures that are less frequently discussed in formal leadership frameworks. Similar concerns have been highlighted within work-family conflict literature examining leadership experiences among professional women (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Martins et al., 2002).

Interpretation of the findings indicates that democratic-participatory leadership operates within a dynamic interaction between enabling and constraining conditions. Leadership effectiveness depended not only on the principals' commitment to participation but also on their capacity to manage organizational conflict, maintain professional discipline, and negotiate contextual expectations. The evidence suggests that successful female principals employed participatory leadership as a flexible rather than rigid strategy, adjusting their approaches according to institutional needs and stakeholder characteristics. This adaptive capacity resonates with conflict management perspectives emphasizing the importance of balancing collaboration, authority, and organizational objectives in complex institutional settings (Afzalur Rahim, 2002).

Contribution of Democratic-Participatory Leadership to School Quality Improvement

The findings demonstrated that democratic-participatory leadership contributed significantly to the improvement of school quality through the creation of a collaborative organizational climate. Participants consistently reported that the principals encouraged collective responsibility for achieving institutional goals rather than concentrating accountability

within administrative structures. Teachers perceived themselves as active partners in school development processes, which strengthened their commitment to organizational performance. Such conditions correspond with educational leadership perspectives emphasizing that sustainable school improvement depends upon the active engagement of internal stakeholders rather than solely on managerial authority (Rahmaten & Mustari, 2023).

Interview data revealed that participatory leadership positively influenced teacher professionalism and instructional performance. Teachers indicated that opportunities to contribute ideas and participate in decision-making processes increased their motivation to improve teaching quality and fulfill institutional responsibilities. Professional dialogue became more frequent because staff members viewed school improvement as a shared endeavor rather than an externally imposed obligation. Similar findings have been reported in studies showing that participatory leadership enhances teacher performance through increased ownership and professional engagement (Patoni & Maunah, 2023).

The analysis further showed that collaborative leadership practices strengthened organizational adaptability in responding to educational challenges. Participants described how school programs were often designed through consultation processes that considered local needs, resource availability, and stakeholder expectations. This approach enabled schools to formulate realistic and context-sensitive strategies for institutional development. Such adaptive capacity is frequently recognized as an important characteristic of effective educational organizations operating in dynamic environments (Febriantina, 2012).

Evidence from both schools indicated that democratic-participatory leadership also contributed to the development of a positive organizational culture. Teachers emphasized the emergence of mutual respect, openness, and shared commitment as defining features of daily institutional interactions. The principals actively modeled respectful communication and encouraged constructive dialogue across professional roles. These findings align with research suggesting that female school leaders often foster inclusive organizational cultures characterized by trust and interpersonal cohesion (Widodo, 2019).

Participants further reported that stakeholder involvement improved the legitimacy and effectiveness of school policies. Decisions developed through consultation were generally perceived as more acceptable because organizational members had opportunities to contribute during policy formulation stages. This participatory process reduced resistance and facilitated smoother implementation of institutional programs. Previous studies similarly indicate that participative leadership increases acceptance of organizational decisions by enhancing perceptions of procedural fairness (Li et al., 2022). The principal quality-related outcomes identified across the two schools are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. School Quality Improvements Associated with Democratic-Participatory Leadership

Quality Dimension	Observed Improvement
Teacher professionalism	Increased collaboration and responsibility
Organizational culture	Stronger trust and communication
School governance	More inclusive decision-making
Stakeholder engagement	Higher participation in school programs
Institutional effectiveness	Improved implementation of strategic initiatives

The evidence presented in Table 3 indicates that leadership effects extended beyond administrative efficiency and influenced multiple dimensions of school quality. Improvements were observed in professional relationships, governance processes, and stakeholder participation. Participants consistently associated these developments with the principals' commitment to inclusive leadership practices. Such findings suggest that democratic-participatory leadership generates organizational benefits that operate simultaneously at individual, group, and institutional levels.

Another important finding concerns the role of leadership in strengthening institutional discipline without undermining participation. The principals encouraged dialogue and consultation while maintaining clear expectations regarding professional responsibilities and organizational standards. Teachers acknowledged that accountability mechanisms remained present despite the collaborative nature of leadership practices. Educational leadership research indicates that effective school leaders frequently combine participatory engagement with structured performance expectations to sustain institutional quality (Siskawati et al., 2024; Regina et al., 2023).

The findings also demonstrated that female leadership contributed to school improvement by mobilizing social capital within and beyond the school environment. Strong interpersonal relationships facilitated cooperation among teachers, administrative personnel, parents, and external stakeholders. These networks expanded access to support resources and strengthened institutional resilience when facing operational challenges. Such observations are consistent with network-based perspectives arguing that leadership effectiveness is partly determined by the ability to cultivate productive relational connections across organizational boundaries (Ibarra, 1993).

Cross-site analysis revealed that school quality improvement was not attributable solely to individual leadership characteristics but to the interaction between leadership practices and organizational participation. The principals successfully transformed participation into a mechanism for collective problem-solving, shared responsibility, and institutional learning. Their leadership reflected the advantages frequently associated with female leadership approaches, particularly in contexts requiring collaboration, communication, and stakeholder engagement (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). The findings also reinforce evidence from studies of female principals showing that democratic and participatory leadership can function as a strategic pathway toward educational effectiveness and organizational sustainability (Kristiyanti & Muhyadi, 2015; Marsiana et al., 2023).

Interpretation of the overall findings suggests that democratic-participatory leadership serves as an important driver of quality improvement in vocational secondary education. School quality emerged through the integration of collaborative governance, professional empowerment, organizational trust, and accountable leadership practices rather than through centralized managerial control. The experiences of the two vocational schools indicate that female principals can effectively mobilize institutional resources by fostering inclusive participation while maintaining strategic direction. This pattern supports contemporary educational leadership scholarship that views school improvement as a collective organizational process shaped by leadership, culture, and stakeholder engagement operating in mutually reinforcing ways (Afandi et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that democratic-participatory leadership constitutes the dominant leadership orientation practiced by female principals in public vocational high schools in Tulang Bawang Regency and serves as a significant mechanism for enhancing school quality. The findings reveal that leadership effectiveness is manifested through inclusive decision-making processes, open communication, stakeholder engagement, and the distribution of organizational responsibilities, which collectively strengthen trust, collaboration, and institutional commitment. The implementation of such leadership is supported by positive organizational relationships, professional cooperation, and stakeholder participation, while challenges emerge from disparities in teacher responsiveness, disciplinary issues, administrative complexity, and persistent gender-related expectations. Despite these constraints, female principals successfully employ adaptive leadership strategies that balance participation with accountability and organizational control. The study further indicates that democratic-participatory leadership contributes to improved teacher professionalism, stronger organizational culture, more effective school governance, enhanced stakeholder involvement, and greater institutional adaptability. These findings reinforce the argument that school quality improvement is not merely a function of managerial authority but is fundamentally shaped by collaborative leadership processes that mobilize collective capacity and transform organizational participation into sustainable educational development.

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