

THE INFLUENCE OF CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT, PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP, AND TEACHER WORK MOTIVATION ON SCHOOL QUALITY IN SOUTH BALIKPAPAN

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 13-07-2026

Revised : 31-08-2026

Accepted : 25-08-2026

KEYWORDS

Curriculum
management, Principal
Leadership, Teacher
Work Motivation, and
School Quality

ABSTRACT

Improving school quality has become a strategic priority in enhancing educational outcomes, particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires effective curriculum management, adaptive school leadership, and highly motivated teachers. This study aims to analyze the influence of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation on school quality in State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District. A quantitative approach with an ex post facto design was employed involving 88 teachers from SMA Negeri 4 and SMA Negeri 5 South Balikpapan. Data were collected using validated and reliable questionnaires and analyzed using simple and multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation each have a positive and significant influence on school quality, while simultaneously explaining 54.7% of the variance in school quality, with teacher work motivation emerging as the strongest individual predictor. These findings indicate that improving school quality requires an integrated management approach that combines effective curriculum implementation, transformational school leadership, and strengthened teacher motivation. This study contributes to the educational management literature by providing empirical evidence on the complementary roles of these three factors and offers practical recommendations for schools and policymakers in designing sustainable strategies for improving educational quality.

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INTRODUCTION

The improvement of education quality has become a strategic priority in preparing competitive and high-quality human resources. Education serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a process of developing students' character, competencies, and life skills. Therefore, ensuring educational quality is a shared

responsibility of educational institutions and government authorities. In Indonesia, Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System guarantees every citizen the right to obtain quality education, while the fulfillment of educational quality is measured through the achievement of the National Education Standards (SNP), which encompass content, process, graduate competencies, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, financing, and educational assessment (Arief, 2023). Consequently, schools are expected to continuously improve their quality through systematic and sustainable quality assurance mechanisms, including accreditation and internal quality management.

School quality reflects the effectiveness of educational processes in producing graduates who possess academic competence, character, and competitiveness. Previous studies have shown that school quality is influenced by various managerial and organizational factors, particularly curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher performance (Kemala & Oswari, 2023; López, 2024). Effective curriculum management enables schools to organize learning systematically through curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation that are aligned with students' needs (Nasbi, 2017). Likewise, principal leadership plays a central role in directing organizational change, empowering teachers, and creating a positive school culture that supports educational improvement (Abrori & Muali, 2020). Furthermore, teacher work motivation contributes to teachers' commitment, creativity, and instructional performance, which ultimately affects school quality (Hartati & Bangkinang, 2024).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has further strengthened the importance of curriculum management and instructional leadership. Since its nationwide implementation in 2022, schools have been given greater autonomy in designing and implementing learning according to their local contexts (Madhakomala et al., 2022). Although this flexibility provides opportunities for innovation, it also creates differences in teachers' understanding and schools' readiness to implement the curriculum effectively. As a result, curriculum management and principal leadership become increasingly important in ensuring that curriculum implementation contributes to educational quality.

Despite various efforts to improve educational quality, empirical evidence indicates that achieving accreditation does not necessarily reflect the actual quality of learning. In Balikpapan City, 57.1% of senior high schools have obtained Accreditation A, while the remaining schools still hold Accreditation B, C, or have not yet been accredited. Although SMAN 4 Balikpapan and SMAN 5 Balikpapan achieved Accreditation A with scores of 95, recent Education Report Card data indicate that several learning quality indicators—including classroom climate, affective support, and teachers' cognitive activation—remain at a moderate level and have declined since 2023. These findings suggest that schools with high accreditation status may still experience challenges in improving learning quality, indicating that accreditation alone is insufficient to represent overall school quality.

Field observations conducted by the researcher on April 26, 2024, in State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District also revealed several practical issues. Although schools have implemented curriculum management stages consisting of planning, development, implementation, and evaluation, differences remain in curriculum planning quality, teacher involvement in decision-making, and follow-up actions after curriculum evaluation. In addition, teachers reported decreased enthusiasm in conducting innovative classroom learning due to increasing administrative responsibilities. The observations further indicated that teachers perceived limited support and motivation from school principals, particularly in professional development and collaborative decision-making. These conditions potentially reduce teacher motivation and hinder continuous school quality improvement.

Several previous studies have independently demonstrated that curriculum management positively influences school quality (Kemala & Oswari, 2023), principal leadership significantly affects educational quality (López, 2024), and teacher work motivation contributes to teachers' performance and school effectiveness (Hartati & Bangkinang, 2024). However, most of these studies examine these variables separately or focus only on direct relationships between

one independent variable and school quality. Moreover, limited research has investigated the simultaneous influence of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation on school quality within the context of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in public senior high schools in South Balikpapan District. This condition constitutes the research gap addressed in the present study.

The selection of State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District is based on several considerations. First, these schools have fully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, providing an appropriate context for examining curriculum management practices. Second, despite achieving relatively high accreditation, Education Report Card indicators reveal persistent challenges in learning quality. Third, the district represents schools with varying organizational characteristics and implementation practices, making it an appropriate setting for understanding how managerial factors influence school quality. Therefore, investigating these schools provides empirical evidence that may contribute to improving educational management under the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study offers a contribution by developing a comprehensive model that examines the simultaneous effects of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation on school quality within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Unlike previous studies that primarily investigated these variables separately, this research integrates the three variables into a single analytical framework to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of school quality. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for school principals, policymakers, and educational stakeholders in designing effective strategies to improve educational quality.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze the influence of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation on school quality in State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on educational management and provide empirical evidence for strengthening school quality improvement policies in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using an ex post facto approach. Quantitative research is a systematic approach that investigates relationships among variables using numerical data and statistical analysis based on objective, measurable, logical, and empirical principles (Balaka, 2022). The ex post facto approach was selected because the independent variables had naturally occurred and were not manipulated by the researcher. This study examined the influence of curriculum management (X_1), principal leadership (X_2), and teacher work motivation (X_3) on school quality (Y) in State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 4 Balikpapan and SMA Negeri 5 Balikpapan, located in South Balikpapan District, Balikpapan City, Indonesia. These schools were purposively selected because both have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and have obtained Accreditation A, while their Education Report Card still indicates moderate learning quality. Data collection was carried out from February to April 2025 using a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers.

The population consisted of 112 teachers from the two public senior high schools. The research location was first determined through purposive area sampling, considering the schools' accreditation status, implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and accessibility for data collection. After the research sites were established, respondents were selected using proportionate random sampling to ensure that each teacher had an equal opportunity to participate while maintaining proportional representation from each school. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

where n represents the sample size, N is the population (112 teachers), and e is the sampling error (0.05). Based on this calculation, the required minimum sample was 88 teachers, consisting of 45 teachers from SMA Negeri 4 Balikpapan and 43 teachers from SMA Negeri 5 Balikpapan.

Data were collected using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The research instrument was developed based on established theoretical frameworks for each variable. Curriculum management was measured through indicators of curriculum planning, curriculum organization, curriculum implementation, and curriculum evaluation, adapted from curriculum management theory proposed by Nasbi (2017). Principal leadership was measured using indicators covering the principal's roles as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator (EMASLIM), based on Mulyasa (2007) and Permendikbud No. 15 of 2018. Teacher work motivation was measured through indicators including achievement, responsibility, recognition, professional development, and work commitment, adapted from Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and previous educational motivation studies. School quality was assessed using indicators referring to the National Education Standards (SNP), including learning quality, educational management, educational services, and graduate outcomes (Arief, 2023).

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire underwent content validation by educational management experts and empirical validity testing using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient. Instrument reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were first employed to describe respondents' characteristics and variable distributions. Before hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including the normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), linearity test, multicollinearity test using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, and heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test. Hypothesis testing consisted of simple linear regression to examine the partial effect of each independent variable on school quality and multiple linear regression to analyze the simultaneous influence of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation on school quality. Statistical significance was determined at the 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Based on the research results, the study involved 88 teachers selected as research respondents. Based on educational background, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (S1), while the remainder held a master's degree (S2).

Validity Test

The validity of the research instrument was assessed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique by comparing the calculated correlation coefficient (r -count) with the critical value of the correlation coefficient (r -table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the sample used in the instrument testing, the r -table value was 0.361. Questionnaire items with an r -count greater than 0.361 and a significance value below 0.05 were considered valid and retained for data collection, whereas items that did not meet these criteria were excluded from further analysis.

The validity test results indicate that the curriculum management instrument initially consisted of 21 items, of which 13 items were declared valid and 8 items were invalid. The principal leadership instrument comprised 27 items, with 25 valid items and 2 invalid items. The teacher work motivation instrument contained 23 items, of which

22 items were valid and 1 item was invalid. Meanwhile, the school quality instrument initially included 32 items, with 24 valid items and 8 invalid items.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the majority of questionnaire items met the validity criteria and were therefore suitable for measuring the respective research variables. Only the invalid items, which had *r*-count values lower than the *r*-table value or significance values greater than 0.05, were excluded from the final research instrument. Consequently, the subsequent data collection and statistical analyses were conducted using only the validated questionnaire items, ensuring that each construct was measured accurately and appropriately.

Reliability Test

The reliability test is used to assess the consistency and stability of the measurement instrument so that it can provide trustworthy results. The basis for decision making in this reliability test is if the Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.60, then the reliability test results on the instrument are said to be reliable and vice versa. Table 2 below is the table of the research instrument reliability test results:

Table 2. Instrument Reliability Test Results

No	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
1	School Quality	0.882	Reliable
2	Curriculum Management	0.944	Reliable
3	Principal Leadership	0.967	Reliable
4	Teacher Work Motivation	0.926	Reliable

Based on the reliability test results, it shows that curriculum management is 0.882, the principal leadership variable is 0.994, the teacher work motivation variable is 0.967, and the school quality variable is 0.926.

Normality Test

The normality test is used to identify whether the regression estimation error values have a normal data distribution in the study. If the Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) value is smaller than the significance level used, which is 5%, it is concluded that there is a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable not following a normal distribution, but if the significance value exceeds 5%, then the data is declared to be normally distributed. Table 3 below is the table of the research normality test results:

Table 3. Normality Test Results

No	Variable	Asymp. Sig	Description
1	Curriculum Management	0.064	Normally distributed data
2	Principal Leadership	0.063	Normally distributed data
3	Teacher Work Motivation	0.071	Normally distributed data

Based on the results obtained in the table above that the significance value of the curriculum management variable $0.064 > 0.05$, the principal leadership variable $0.063 > 0.05$, and the teacher work motivation variable $0.071 > 0.05$, it can be concluded that all data from each variable are normally distributed.

Linearity Test

The linearity test is conducted to determine whether each independent variable has a linear relationship with the dependent variable, variables have a linear relationship if the Significance value from Deviation from Linearity > 0.05 is obtained, but if the significance < 0.05 then it is said to be non-linear. Table 4 below is the table of the research linearity test results:

Table 4. Linearity Test Results

Variable Relationship	F-count	Sig	Description
X1 with Y	1.020	0.438	Linear
X2 with Y	0.713	0.810	Linear
X3 with Y	0.680	0.842	Linear

Based on the results obtained in the table above that the significance value of the curriculum management variable $0.438 > 0.05$, the principal leadership variable $0.810 > 0.05$, and the teacher work motivation variable $0.071 > 0.05$, it can be concluded that all data from each variable have a linear relationship.

Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test is conducted to determine whether there is a relationship among the dependent variables by looking at the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The guideline for a regression model free of multicollinearity is having a VIF value < 10 . Table 5 below is the table of the research multicollinearity results:

Table 5. Multicollinearity Test Results

No	Variable	VIF	Description
1	Curriculum Management	3.558	No multicollinearity occurs
2	Principal Leadership	4.594	No multicollinearity occurs
3	Teacher Work Motivation	3.068	No multicollinearity occurs

Based on the results obtained from the table above, it can be concluded that the multicollinearity test results on the variables of Curriculum Management, Principal Leadership, and Teacher Work Motivation have a VIF value < 10 so that multicollinearity does not occur.

Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test aims to determine whether the residual variance in the regression model remains the same in every observation. (*Scatterplot Graphic*) Source: Data processing results with SPSS Based on the Heteroscedasticity Test, it shows that the scatter plot graph meets the provisions of the decision-making guidelines so that it can be concluded that there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity. Thus, the ideal regression model requirements can be met and proceed to hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test is used to test the validity of the proposed assumptions with simple regression tests in order to measure the influence of four different hypotheses. Thus, it can be known how the impact of the independent variables (X1), (X2), and (X3) on the dependent variable (Y).

Simple Linear Regression Test

Simple linear analysis aims to measure how much influence each independent variable has on the dependent variable. The guideline for simple linear regression is a significance value of less than 5% so that it can be said the independent variable affects the dependent variable. Table 6 below is the table of hypothesis test results with simple linear regression in the study:

Table 6. Simple Linear Hypothesis Test Results

Independent Variable	Constant	Regression Coef.	T	F	Sig	R2
Curriculum Management	26.930	1.093	8.825	77.876	0.000	0.475
Principal Leadership	34.219	0.497	7.787	60.638	0.000	0.414
Teacher Work Motivation	27.779	0.651	8.908	79.354	0.000	0.480

Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis in table 6, it can be explained as follows: The curriculum management constant value of 26.930 states that every 1% increase in the curriculum management variable will be followed by an increase in the School Quality variable of 1.093. This shows there is a positive and significant influence between the curriculum management variable (X1) on school quality (Y), this is shown based on the regression coefficient value showing a positive value of 1.093 with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with t-count

8.825 > t-table 1.991. As for the R Square value of 0.475, namely the curriculum management variable affects school quality by 47.5% while the remaining 52.5% is influenced by other factors. The principal leadership constant value of 34.219 states that every 1% increase in the principal leadership variable will be followed by an increase in the School Quality variable of 0.497. This shows there is a positive and significant influence between the principal leadership variable (X2) on school quality (Y), this is shown based on the regression coefficient value showing a positive value of 0.947 with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with t-count 7.787 > t-table 1.991. As for the R Square value of 0.414, namely the principal leadership variable affects school quality by 41.4% while the remaining 58.6% is influenced by other factors. The teacher work motivation constant value of 27.779 states that every 1% increase in the teacher work motivation variable will be followed by an increase in the School Quality variable of 0.651. This shows there is a positive and significant influence between the teacher work motivation variable (X3) on school quality (Y), this is shown based on the regression coefficient value showing a positive value of 0.651 with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with t-count 8.908 > t-table 1.991. As for the R Square value of 0.480, namely the teacher work motivation variable affects school quality by 48% while the remaining 52% is influenced by other factors.

Multiple Linear Regression Test

Multiple linear analysis aims to measure how much influence each independent variable has simultaneously on the dependent variable. The guideline for simple linear regression is a significance value of less than 5% so that it can be said the three independent variables affect the dependent variable. Table 7 below is the table of hypothesis test results with multiple linear regression in the study:

Table 7. Multiple Linear Hypothesis Test Results

Independent Variable	Constant	Regression Coef.	T	F	Sig	R2
Curriculum Management	19.868	0.220	2.975	33.849	0.000	0.547
Principal Leadership		0.122	-0.294			
Teacher Work Motivation		0.121	3.287			

From the table above, the results obtained on a multiple regression test among the variables of curriculum management, principal leadership and teacher work motivation on school quality are formulated through the equation $Y = 19.868 + 0.220X_1 + 0.122X_2 + 0.121X_3$, so that the constant value of the curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation variables is 19.868. The research results show there is a positive and significant influence among the variables of curriculum management (X1), principal leadership (X2), and teacher work motivation (X3) on school quality (Y), this is shown based on the multiple linear regression test results showing that the significance value of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation is 0.000 smaller than the significance level of 0.05 with an f-count value of 33.849 > f-table 2.71. As for the R Square value of 0.547, namely the variables of curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation affect school quality by 54.7% while the remaining 45.3% is influenced by other factors.

Discussion

The Effect of Curriculum Management on School Quality

The findings of this study indicate that curriculum management has a positive and statistically significant effect on school quality. The simple linear regression analysis revealed that curriculum management explained **47.5%** of the variance in school quality, suggesting that effective curriculum management is one of the major determinants of educational quality in public senior high schools in South Balikpapan District. This finding implies that schools with better curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation tend to provide more effective learning processes, resulting in improved educational outcomes.

Curriculum management serves as the foundation for organizing educational activities because it determines how learning objectives are translated into classroom practices. Effective curriculum management ensures that

learning resources, instructional strategies, and assessment systems are aligned with curriculum objectives and students' needs. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, where schools are granted greater autonomy in designing learning experiences, effective curriculum management becomes increasingly important to ensure consistency between curriculum planning and classroom implementation.

These findings are consistent with the curriculum management theory proposed by Nasbi (2017), which emphasizes that curriculum management is a systematic process consisting of curriculum planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. According to this perspective, schools that continuously evaluate and improve curriculum implementation are more capable of adapting learning to students' characteristics and educational developments. Likewise, Haryani (2022) argues that curriculum management requires collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and educational personnel to ensure that educational objectives are achieved efficiently.

The results also support previous empirical studies. Kemala and Oswari (2023) reported that curriculum management significantly contributes to school quality because it improves instructional effectiveness and organizational performance. Similarly, Syuaibah et al. (2020) found that curriculum evaluation followed by continuous improvement programs strengthens educational quality. The present study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that curriculum management remains a significant predictor of school quality within schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

However, this study extends previous research by examining curriculum management simultaneously with principal leadership and teacher work motivation. Although curriculum management independently contributes to school quality, its effectiveness depends on the successful implementation carried out by school leaders and teachers. Therefore, curriculum management should not merely focus on administrative compliance but should emphasize continuous curriculum improvement, teacher collaboration, and innovation in learning practices. These findings suggest that strengthening curriculum management under the Merdeka Curriculum requires schools to establish systematic curriculum evaluation mechanisms and professional learning communities that support continuous instructional improvement.

The Effect of Principal Leadership on School Quality

The findings demonstrate that principal leadership has a positive and significant influence on school quality, explaining 41.4% of the variation in school quality. This indicates that school principals play a strategic role in creating organizational conditions that support effective teaching and learning. Although the contribution of principal leadership was slightly lower than curriculum management and teacher work motivation, the results confirm that leadership remains an essential component of educational quality improvement.

The role of the principal extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include instructional leadership, organizational management, innovation, and teacher empowerment. Effective principals establish a clear school vision, encourage collaboration among teachers, allocate resources efficiently, and create an organizational climate that promotes continuous improvement. Such leadership becomes increasingly important in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, where schools require adaptive leadership capable of facilitating educational transformation.

These findings support the leadership theory developed by Mulyasa (2007) through the EMASLIM framework, which identifies principals as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators. According to this framework, school principals are expected to influence organizational effectiveness by improving teacher performance and facilitating school development. In addition, Permendikbud No. 15 of 2018 emphasizes that principals are responsible for managerial leadership, entrepreneurship development, and academic supervision, all of which contribute to school quality improvement.

The findings are also consistent with previous empirical studies. López (2024) reported that instructional leadership significantly improves school quality by enhancing teacher performance and organizational effectiveness.

Likewise, Abrori and Muali (2020) found that visionary leadership encourages teacher professionalism and institutional effectiveness through effective communication and resource management. Jumali et al. (2023) further demonstrated that principal leadership positively influences school quality by improving teachers' commitment and instructional performance.

Nevertheless, field observations conducted in this study indicate that teacher participation in decision-making remains limited and communication between principals and teachers is not yet optimal. These conditions may explain why the contribution of principal leadership is lower than teacher work motivation. Leadership effectiveness depends not only on managerial competence but also on the principal's ability to establish trust, collaboration, and professional support within the school community. Therefore, principals should strengthen participatory leadership practices, promote collaborative decision-making, and provide continuous professional support for teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Effect of Teacher Work Motivation on School Quality

Teacher work motivation was found to have the strongest individual influence on school quality, explaining 48.0% of the variance in school quality. This finding indicates that motivated teachers are more likely to demonstrate commitment, creativity, responsibility, and innovation in delivering classroom instruction, ultimately contributing to better educational quality.

Teacher motivation plays a central role in determining instructional effectiveness because teachers are directly responsible for implementing the curriculum and facilitating student learning. Highly motivated teachers are more willing to prepare learning materials, utilize innovative teaching methods, participate in professional development activities, and provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Conversely, low work motivation may reduce instructional quality and limit teachers' willingness to adopt innovative learning practices.

These findings are consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which explains that intrinsic motivational factors, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for professional growth, significantly improve employee performance. In educational settings, teachers who experience professional satisfaction and organizational support tend to exhibit stronger instructional commitment and higher productivity.

The findings also support previous studies. Hartati and Bangkinang (2024) reported that teacher work motivation has a substantial influence on school quality because motivated teachers demonstrate greater enthusiasm in classroom instruction. Similarly, Syukri and Alfattah (2024) found that teachers' intrinsic motivation contributes significantly to organizational effectiveness and educational quality. The present study confirms these findings within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, where teachers are expected to develop innovative learning strategies and implement student-centered instruction.

Field observations further revealed that many teachers perceived administrative workloads as reducing opportunities for instructional innovation. This suggests that improving teacher motivation requires not only financial incentives but also organizational support through reduced administrative burdens, increased professional autonomy, recognition of teacher achievements, and stronger support from school leaders. Therefore, enhancing teacher motivation should become a strategic priority for schools seeking to improve educational quality.

The Simultaneous Effect of Curriculum Management, Principal Leadership, and Teacher Work Motivation on School Quality

The multiple regression analysis demonstrated that curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation simultaneously have a positive and significant influence on school quality, explaining **54.7%** of the variance in school quality. This result indicates that school quality cannot be improved by focusing on a single managerial aspect; instead, educational quality is influenced by the interaction of curriculum management, leadership practices, and teachers' motivational conditions.

The findings suggest that curriculum management provides the instructional framework, principal leadership establishes organizational direction and support, while teacher work motivation determines the effectiveness of curriculum implementation in classroom practice. These three components complement one another in producing high-quality educational outcomes. Consequently, school quality improvement requires an integrated management approach rather than isolated interventions.

The remaining 45.3% of the variance is likely explained by other factors that were not included in this study, such as teacher competence, organizational culture, school climate, learning facilities, parental involvement, educational financing, and students' socio-economic backgrounds. Future studies are therefore encouraged to incorporate these variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of school quality.

Compared with previous studies, this research offers an important contribution by integrating three organizational variables within a single analytical model. Most previous studies investigated curriculum management, principal leadership, or teacher motivation separately. In contrast, this study demonstrates that these variables collectively explain more than half of the variation in school quality, indicating that educational quality is multidimensional and requires coordinated organizational efforts.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that policymakers and school administrators should not focus exclusively on curriculum reform or leadership development. Instead, school quality improvement programs should simultaneously strengthen curriculum management systems, develop transformational leadership among school principals, and enhance teacher motivation through professional development, organizational support, and reduced administrative burdens. Such integrated strategies are expected to improve the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and ultimately enhance the quality of education in Indonesian public senior high schools.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study contribute theoretically by reinforcing educational management theories that emphasize the interconnected roles of curriculum management, leadership, and teacher motivation in improving school quality. The study also extends previous literature by demonstrating that these variables remain significant within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Practically, the results provide evidence for education policymakers, school principals, and educational stakeholders that improving school quality requires integrated interventions combining effective curriculum management, transformational leadership, and strategies to strengthen teacher motivation. Such evidence may support future policy development and school improvement programs aimed at achieving sustainable educational quality.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation are significant determinants of school quality in State Senior High Schools in South Balikpapan District. Among the three variables, teacher work motivation emerged as the strongest individual predictor of school quality, indicating that teachers' professional commitment, enthusiasm, and willingness to innovate play a fundamental role in creating effective learning environments. However, the findings also demonstrate that school quality cannot be improved through a single factor. Instead, it is the result of the interaction among effective curriculum management, adaptive principal leadership, and motivated teachers who collaboratively support the implementation of educational programs. These findings reinforce the importance of adopting an integrated educational management approach, particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, where curriculum autonomy, instructional leadership, and teacher professionalism must complement one another to achieve sustainable school quality.

This study contributes to the development of educational management by providing empirical evidence that curriculum management, principal leadership, and teacher work motivation collectively explain a substantial

proportion of school quality. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined these variables independently, the present research demonstrates that their combined influence provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping school quality. Therefore, the findings offer both theoretical and practical implications for improving educational management and strengthening school effectiveness.

Based on these findings, school principals are encouraged to strengthen transformational and instructional leadership by promoting collaborative decision-making, supporting teachers' professional development, and fostering a positive organizational climate. Schools should continuously improve curriculum management through systematic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. At the same time, efforts to enhance teacher work motivation should prioritize reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, expanding professional learning opportunities, and recognizing teachers' achievements to encourage instructional innovation. Future researchers are recommended to investigate additional factors that may influence school quality, such as organizational culture, teacher competence, school climate, parental involvement, and digital transformation, as well as to employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of school quality improvement.

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