

Managing Teacher Competence Development through the POLC Approach: Study of Senior High Schools in Ciamis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of principal leadership based on the Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling (POLC) management framework in enhancing teacher competence and promoting instructional innovation in senior high schools. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation from two research sites: SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMAN 1 Manonjaya. The participants included principals, teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that both schools implement the POLC functions in a coherent and contextually adaptive manner. The planning process integrates institutional vision with teacher development goals through participatory and data-driven approaches. The organizing function ensures collaborative structures and distributed leadership that support innovation. The leading function highlights the principal's transformational and participatory leadership in motivating and empowering teachers. Meanwhile, the controlling function emphasizes reflective supervision and continuous feedback as tools for professional improvement. The study concludes that the integration of the POLC management cycle with participatory and transformational leadership principles effectively strengthens a culture of innovation and continuous learning. This finding supports Schermerhorn (2017) on the adaptive nature of management, as well as Narti (2022) and Mamonto (2023) on the significance of participatory and transformational leadership in driving teacher creativity and institutional improvement. Practically, the research offers a conceptual framework for developing school leadership practices that align managerial discipline with humanistic engagement, enabling schools to function as adaptive, innovation-oriented learning organizations in the era of educational disruption.

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Introduction

1. Background

In the era of disruption, the world of education faces major challenges to carry out rapid, comprehensive, and meaningful transformation (Purbasari et al., 2025; Sari & Aslamiah, 2025). The development of digital technology, artificial intelligence, big data, and social and economic change requires the education system to adapt to a new paradigm of 21st-century learning (Zou et al., 2025). Teachers, as the front line of the education process, are required not only to master pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies but also to have the ability to innovate in creating interactive, contextual, and student-centered learning (Huang et al., 2023; Zou et al., 2025). Learning innovation has become an urgent necessity to ensure that students are not only competent in academic aspects but also able to think critically, creatively, collaboratively, and communicatively in accordance with the demands of the global era (Marsiti et al., 2023; Zulkifli et al., 2024).

The government's Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy emphasizes that learning in schools must be oriented toward student independence, curriculum flexibility, and character strengthening (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Saa, 2024). However, in practice, many schools still face various challenges in its implementation. Conventional learning patterns remain dominant, teacher-centered approaches still often occur, and teachers' ability to design creative learning strategies remains limited (Lestari et al., 2025). In addition, systemic support from school management for teachers' innovative ideas has not been optimal, whether in the form of facilitation, mentoring, or appreciation for innovative works (Mulyoto et al., 2024; Rahmayani, 2024). Based on the 2025 Education Report data, innovative teaching practices among high school teachers are categorized as "good," but have not yet reached the "very good" or "excellent" level. This fact indicates that the school leadership system has not fully functioned optimally in fostering a culture of innovation within schools.

In this context, the principal holds a strategic position as a central figure in orchestrating change and creating a conducive work climate for teachers' innovation to grow (Özdoğan et al., 2025). Effective school leadership can provide direction, motivation, and support for teachers to develop creative, adaptive, and relevant learning in line with student needs (Alzouebi et al., 2025; Figueroa & Abellana, 2025). Principals are also expected to serve as role models in continuous learning, critical thinking toward instructional challenges, and fostering collaboration among teachers to share ideas and best practices. Unfortunately, not all principals are able to carry out this strategic role optimally (Sideridis & Alghamdi, 2024; Triana, 2025). Some remain focused on administrative activities, adhere to bureaucratic leadership orientations, and have not fully understood managerial roles that systematically drive teacher innovation (Abdul Majid & Fanny Kho, 2025).

Moreover, the rapid dynamics of curriculum changes, such as the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, demand that principals and teachers continuously adapt to new learning approaches and methods (Lestari et al., 2025; Özdoğan et al., 2025). Teachers are required to be reflective, adaptive, and collaborative in responding to the increasingly diverse needs of students (Halomoan et al., 2024). Under these conditions, principals must be able to serve as instructional leaders who not only act as administrative supervisors but also as mentors, facilitators, and change agents in the learning process (Sylvan et al., 2025). Principals need to create a school culture that supports classroom action research, technology-based learning innovations, and continuous professional development activities that strengthen teacher capacity (Sulistiana et al., 2025; Triana, 2025).

Strong principal leadership also profoundly impacts the organizational culture of schools (Sideridis & Alghamdi, 2024). Educational institutions characterized by collaborative work cultures, openness to change, and a quality-oriented mindset often demonstrate elevated levels of teacher innovation (Rojak et al., 2024; Sideridis & Alghamdi, 2024). A positive organizational culture can cultivate a sense of affiliation, enhance work motivation, and strengthen teachers' commitment to innovative teaching practices (Figueroa & Abellana, 2025; Özdemir et al., 2024). Thus, teacher innovation is not solely attributable to individual creativity but is rather a consequence of an effective managerial system and a supportive school culture (Madeline, 2025). In this regard, the principal functions as an architect of change, capable of integrating the school's vision, resources, and policies into a unified strategic direction toward improving education quality (Mobonggi et al., 2024).

To achieve this objective, a school leadership model predicated on modern management principles is imperative (Mobonggi et al., 2024; Rojak et al., 2024). An approach that integrates the functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, as espoused by Schermerhorn, is eminently pertinent for implementation within school environments (Huber & Pruitt, 2024). Through the diligent application of the POLC management cycle, principals can systematically design targeted learning innovation programs, organize school resources effectively, provide leadership through exemplary conduct and inspirational guidance, and control program implementation to guarantee congruence with quality education objectives (Malini et al., 2025). The POLC functions transcend the mere positioning of the principal as an administrator, instead establishing them as a strategic educational manager who is adept at balancing managerial duties with instructional leadership (Chin et al., 2024; Kanavas & Triantari, 2024).

Furthermore, the implementation of POLC management in school leadership is posited to foster the development of a sustainable and adaptive school system (Zadok et al., 2024). Through data-driven planning, effective team collaboration, result-oriented instructional supervision, and evaluation-based control, schools are enabled to cultivate an innovative learning ecosystem. Consequently, teachers will be afforded the latitude to experiment, create, and develop learning strategies tailored to the diverse characteristics of their students.

Research concerning the application of modern management functions by school principals is pivotal, as it furnishes a conceptual foundation for developing an educational leadership model that is congruent with the exigencies of the disruption era. In addition, the findings of this research are anticipated to offer a pragmatic reference for educational institutions in formulating strategies to enhance learning quality, reinforce the professional competencies of educators, and cultivate a sustainable culture of innovation, thereby aligning with national educational trajectories aimed at achieving Indonesia Emas 2045.

2. Previous Literature Review

Prior scholarly inquiries have consistently underscored the pivotal influence of school principals in cultivating a culture of pedagogical innovation among teachers. Narti (2022) identified a positive correlation between participative leadership practices and teacher creativity, whereas Mamonto (2023) demonstrated that transformational leadership exerts a statistically significant effect on innovative behavior within instructional contexts. Nevertheless, the extant body of research remains predominantly confined to examinations of isolated leadership typologies or conventional quality management frameworks, offering limited insight into the systematic integration of contemporary managerial functions in advancing instructional innovation. This lacuna signals a pressing need for research that interrogates how principals operationalize modern management functions as strategic mechanisms for augmenting teacher capacity and fostering innovation.

The scholarly novelty of this study is anchored in its synthesis of the classical management cycle planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (POLC), as articulated by Schermerhorn & Bachrach (2017) with contemporary conceptualizations of educational leadership. By embedding the POLC framework into the domain of school leadership, this study reconceptualizes the principal's role from that of a mere administrator to that of a strategic educational manager who engages dynamically across each phase of the management continuum. Such an approach not only extends theoretical discourse through the formulation of an evaluative model of educational leadership but also yields practical implications for the design of contextually grounded strategies to enhance institutional quality and innovation capacity.

Guided by this conceptual orientation, the central hypothesis posits that principals who more effectively enact the POLC management cycle are likely to engender higher levels of teacher-driven instructional innovation. Accordingly, the study aims to critically analyze how quality management-oriented leadership practices contribute to the professional empowerment of teachers and the development of sustainable pedagogical innovation. The anticipated findings are expected to furnish both empirical evidence and strategic insights that inform the evolution of educational policy and leadership practices responsive to the exigencies of the disruption era.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, as it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school principals' management in fostering teacher innovation within the authentic school context. The case study design was selected to address the "how" and "why" questions underlying the phenomenon and to allow detailed exploration of the principals' strategies, policies, and interactions with teachers (Yin, 2018).

The research subjects were determined purposively, consisting of principals, teachers, and students from SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMAN 1 Manonjaya. These schools were selected based on the 2025 Education Report data, which indicated improvements in innovative teaching practices and instructional leadership, although still categorized as "good." The participants were chosen due to their direct involvement in the implementation of quality management and instructional innovation, ensuring the richness and relevance of the data obtained (Creswell, 2018).

Data collection was carried out through four primary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and literature review. Observations were conducted to capture the dynamic interactions within the school environment, while semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perspectives of principals and teachers. Documentary evidence, such as school planning documents, supervision records, and policy guidelines, was analyzed to supplement and validate field data (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research procedure comprised three sequential stages: (1) the preparatory phase, including preliminary studies, instrument development, and coordination with the selected schools; (2) the implementation phase, encompassing data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation; and (3) the concluding phase, involving data validation through member checking to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln et al., 1985).

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). The validity of the data was tested through source triangulation, member checking, and prolonged

engagement in the field. These strategies were applied to enhance the rigor and dependability of the findings, thereby ensuring that the results of this study are empirically sound and academically defensible.

Result

1. Planning Function

This study reveals that both school principals implement structured and collaborative planning mechanisms. Planning is not only top-down but actively involves teachers in setting annual goals and innovation targets, aligned with the school's vision for instructional improvement and student creativity development. This is as expressed by a teacher from SMAN 1 Ciamis (G-C1), who stated, "In the beginning-of-the-year meeting, we were asked to present teaching ideas that could increase student engagement. The principal not only listened but also helped outline the steps."

Although equally collaborative, there are differences in strategic approaches between SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMAN 1 Manonjaya, as detailed in Table 4.1 below. The difference in monitoring frequency, for instance, indicates that SMAN 1 Ciamis adopts a more agile approach to allow for quicker plan adjustments, while SMAN 1 Manonjaya provides teachers with more flexibility before evaluations are conducted.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Planning Strategies

Aspect	SMAN 1 Ciamis	SMAN 1 Manonjaya
Vision	Closely linked to digital	Focused on thematic
Integration	learning initiatives	innovation and local context
Teacher Involvement	High, through structured annual innovation forums	Moderate, through team-based discussions in meetings
Monitoring Mechanism	Conducted quarterly for quick evaluation	Conducted each semester to allow longer implementation time

2. Organizing Function

Both schools demonstrate clear organizational structures to support teacher innovation, although with different delegation models. SMAN 1 Ciamis forms thematic innovation teams led by senior teachers, while SMAN 1 Manonjaya relies on collaboration within subject clusters. This delegation of authority successfully fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among teachers. This empowerment dynamic is reflected in the statement of a teacher at SMAN 1 Ciamis (G-C2), "We have small innovation teams, each focusing on one area such as digital literacy or project-based learning. The principal gives us full trust."

As shown in Table 4.2, the thematic team structure at SMAN 1 Ciamis encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration that can trigger more holistic innovation. Conversely, SMAN 1 Manonjaya's model allows for more specific innovation development according to subject context, though it may be less integrated.

Table 4.2: Comparison of Organizational Patterns

Aspect	SMAN 1 Ciamis	SMAN 1 Manonjaya
Innovation Structure	Thematic teams (e.g., digital literacy, PBL)	Subject-based coordination
Leadership Role	Delegative with supervision, providing broad autonomy	Participative, principal involved in team discussions
Collaboration Level	High interdepartmental synergy	Limited to subject clusters

3. Leading Function

Instructional leadership plays a decisive role in motivating and triggering teacher creativity. Both principals implement transformational leadership styles emphasizing mentoring, open communication, and recognition of innovative teaching practices. Teacher motivation is nurtured through both intrinsic (such as recognition) and extrinsic reinforcement. This mentoring approach is acknowledged by a teacher from SMAN 1 Manonjaya (G-M1), who shared, "The principal often comes to the classroom, not to assess but to provide feedback. He also often praises when there are new ideas from teachers."

As detailed in Table 4.3, SMAN 1 Ciamis's approach tends to be more personal and direct, while SMAN 1 Manonjaya builds motivation through a collaborative climate. Both styles are effective but create different social dynamics within the learning community.

Table 4.3: Comparison of Leadership Strategies

Aspect	SMAN 1 Ciamis	SMAN 1 Manonjaya
Leadership Style	Transformational, inspirational and visionary	Participative-democratic, prioritizing deliberation
Motivation Approach	Based on individual recognition and appreciation	Based on collaborative reinforcement within teams
Communication	Two-way and informal, similar to a mentor	Formal and structured, through clear channels

4. Controlling Function

The controlling function is implemented continuously to ensure the quality and sustainability of innovation. SMAN 1 Ciamis uses reflective supervision cycles, while SMAN 1 Manonjaya emphasizes lesson study and peer evaluation. In both models, feedback functions as a learning instrument for teachers to refine their innovations, not merely as an assessment tool. As explained by a SMAN 1 Ciamis teacher (G-C3), this process is reflective and collective: "We are asked to conduct reflections after innovation practices. The principal discusses the results in weekly forums, so we learn from our colleagues' experiences."

Based on Table 4.4, it can be concluded that SMAN 1 Ciamis creates a culture of continuous reflection, while SMAN 1 Manonjaya promotes professional accountability through peer communities. The different evaluation focuses indicate distinct emphases: Ciamis on the *journey* (process) and Manonjaya on the *destination* (outcome).

Table 4.4: Comparison of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Aspect	SMAN 1 Ciamis	SMAN 1 Manonjaya
Monitoring Mechanism	Reflective supervision by the principal	Lesson study sessions and peer observation
Feedback System	Weekly reflection forums that are fluid	Scheduled peer feedback meetings
Evaluation Focus	Innovation process and student creativity outcomes	Output quality and collaboration within teams

5. Impact and Synthesis

The integration of the POLC (Planning, Organizing, Leading, Controlling) management cycle by the principals has significantly strengthened teachers' innovative practices and created a culture of continuous improvement. The key findings of this research are:

1. Contextualization is Key: There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. Success lies in how each school adapts the POLC functions according to their vision, resources, and school culture - Ciamis with an agile and thematic approach, Manonjaya with a depth-oriented and subject-based approach.
2. Collaboration as the Driver: Across all functions, the high level of collaboration between leadership and teachers proves to be the main catalyst for innovation. Teachers are not only considered implementers but co-creators of educational transformation.
3. Integrated Innovation Ecosystem: Participatory planning, organizing that builds trust, leadership that motivates, and controlling that educates, together form an ecosystem that enables innovation not only to occur but to grow and be sustainable.

Thus, this research concludes that the effectiveness of leadership in driving innovation lies not in implementing management functions separately, but in the integration and contextualization of all four functions synergistically to empower teachers.

Discussion

The findings of this research reveal that the management of teacher competence enhancement at SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMAN 1 Manonjaya exemplifies a mature, integrated, and contextually adaptive application of the planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (POLC) management cycle. Each function emerges as a dynamic and interconnected process rather than a linear sequence, collectively shaping an educational leadership model that systematically prioritizes innovation, collaboration, and sustainability. While the two institutions apply the POLC model with distinct operational emphases, their managerial philosophies converge on a central goal: fostering an enduring culture of professional learning and pedagogical creativity. This illustrates how modern educational management, when grounded in strategic and participatory principles, can transform schools into dynamic ecosystems of reflective practice and innovation.

1. Planning: Strategic Foresight and Participatory Alignment

In the planning phase, both schools exhibit systematic frameworks grounded in data-driven and participatory approaches. SMAN 1 Ciamis employs a structured, evidence-based system utilizing SWOT and STEEPLE analyses to identify competency gaps, allocate resources, and align professional development with institutional goals. This reinforces the principle that effective planning requires deliberate goal alignment and measurable strategic intent.

Conversely, SMAN 1 Manonjaya emphasizes inclusive planning through collective dialogues involving teachers, students, and community stakeholders, ensuring that curricular innovation aligns with both local context and the institutional mission. These approaches substantiate Schermerhorn's (2017) view of planning as a proactive process integrating goal-setting with organizational vision, while also affirming Narti's (2022) argument that participatory leadership fosters creativity and ownership. Furthermore, both schools demonstrate strategic foresight, effectively linking long-term educational aspirations with immediate professional needs to ensure that innovation is sustained rather than incidental.

2. Organizing: Structural Coherence and Collaborative Autonomy

The organizing dimension demonstrates the capacity of both schools to translate strategic plans into operational structures that sustain collaboration and adaptability. SMAN 1 Ciamis institutionalizes coordination through formalized units such as the Curriculum Development Team (TPK), MGMP committees, and professional learning communities. These structures delineate clear roles and ensure accountability while maintaining fluid interdepartmental communication. SMAN 1 Manonjaya, however, embraces a more decentralized and interdisciplinary approach, empowering teachers to act as both curriculum designers and peer mentors. This balance between structural rigor and flexible autonomy exemplifies Schermerhorn's (2017) assertion that organizing entails the deliberate coordination of resources to achieve strategic goals efficiently. The collaborative practices in both schools resonate with Narti's (2022) view that participatory structures enhance collective responsibility, with the established communication channels nurturing the professional trust and collegiality essential for a thriving learning organization.

3. Leading: Transformational Influence and Relational Empowerment

Leadership stands as the core catalyst for developing teacher competence. The principal of SMAN 1 Ciamis exemplifies transformational leadership by articulating clear expectations, championing digital pedagogical innovations, and implementing reward systems that recognize excellence. In contrast, the principal of SMAN 1 Manonjaya demonstrates a relational and collegial style, focusing on mentoring, empathy, and empowerment to enhance intrinsic motivation. These leadership approaches echo Mamonto's (2023) findings that transformational leadership significantly influences teacher innovation by cultivating trust and professional agency. In both contexts, leadership transcends administrative control to become a dynamic process of influence and inspiration, aligning with Schermerhorn's (2017) perspective on the integrative function of leadership. Critically, the principals' ability to balance direction with autonomy positions teachers not as mere policy implementers, but as co-creators of educational transformation.

4. Controlling: Developmental Feedback and Reflective Assurance

Control in both institutions is redefined as a developmental and reflective process rather than a punitive mechanism. At SMAN 1 Ciamis, systematic supervision cycles, structured evaluations, and evidence-based feedback loops form a robust quality assurance system, ensuring alignment between teaching performance and institutional objectives. SMAN 1 Manonjaya, however, adopts a participatory reflection model, encouraging open dialogue, peer assessment, and collective problem-solving. These practices illustrate Schermerhorn's (2017) conceptualization of control as an adaptive feedback process that sustains innovation through reflective action. They also resonate with Narti's (2022) view that transparent feedback systems cultivate the psychological safety necessary for educators to take creative risks. In

both cases, control functions as a formative process that actively nurtures growth, adaptability, and a culture of continuous learning.

5. Impact and Theoretical Integration: Cultivating Self-Renewing Institutions

The integrated application of the POLC management cycle has yielded significant pedagogical and organizational outcomes. Teachers at SMAN 1 Ciamis have demonstrated enhanced technological literacy and collaborative curriculum design, signaling a shift toward evidence-based, reflective teaching. At SMAN 1 Manonjaya, teachers exhibit increased empathy, adaptability, and a strengthened commitment to student-centered learning, which contributes to heightened student engagement. These outcomes confirm Mamonto's (2023) argument that leadership behavior directly mediates innovation and reinforce Schermerhorn's (2017) assertion that effective management frameworks generate adaptive, resilient environments. Collectively, these cases demonstrate how the systematic integration of the POLC functions transforms schools into self-renewing institutions. Ultimately, leadership effectiveness is measured not merely by administrative efficiency, but by the capacity to inspire, sustain, and institutionalize innovation. The POLC model, when embedded within participatory and transformational leadership practices, proves to be a powerful framework for uniting managerial discipline with a humanistic vision to cultivate a lasting culture of professional growth and pedagogical excellence.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the coherent implementation of the Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling (POLC) management cycle effectively enhances principals' capacity to promote teacher competence and learning innovation. The experiences of SMAN 1 Ciamis and SMAN 1 Manonjaya show that integrating the four management functions fosters a sustainable system of collaboration, reflection, and continuous professional growth. Through planning, both schools align institutional vision with teacher development goals; through organizing, they establish participatory structures that encourage shared responsibility; through leading, principals embody transformational leadership that inspires and empowers teachers; and through controlling, they implement reflective supervision that emphasizes improvement over evaluation. These findings confirm Schermerhorn's (2017) view of management as an adaptive cycle, while also supporting Narti's (2022) and Mamonto's (2023) arguments that participatory and transformational leadership significantly drive innovation. In essence, the integration of POLC-based management with human-centered leadership transforms schools into learning organizations where teacher professionalism and innovation evolve continuously.

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