Academic Supervision by School Principals: Enhancing Junior High School Teachers' Professional Competence

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of academic supervision by school principals in enhancing teacher professional competence at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh in Southwest Aceh, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach, the research examined the planning, implementation, and follow-up of academic supervision activities conducted by the school principals. The findings indicate that the principals' systematic approach to academic supervision includes comprehensive planning, active implementation, and targeted follow-up actions, all aimed at supporting the continuous professional development of teachers. The study demonstrates that these practices significantly improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Challenges such as limited time and the need for experienced supervisors and strategies to address these issues were identified. Overall, the research underscores the vital role of effective academic supervision in fostering teacher professionalism and enhancing educational quality, suggesting that these practices could be adopted in other educational settings to achieve similar benefits.

1. Introduction

The rapidly evolving landscape of modern education, influenced by quick technological advances and shifting social demands, emphasizes the importance of high-quality education [1, 2]. At the heart of this pursuit lies teacher professionalism, which involves various duties, such as following the curriculum, coming up with new teaching ideas, and always learning to improve [3].

However, achieving optimal teacher professionalism is closely linked to academic supervision, which enhances educational quality by providing targeted support to improve learning and teaching processes [4]. Despite the well-established importance of academic supervision in promoting teacher professionalism, there is a significant discrepancy between current supervisory practices and the desired outcomes regarding teacher competence and student learning achievements [5].

This discrepancy is evident in educational institutions worldwide, including developing countries such as Indonesia [6]. In particular, the province of Aceh, located in western Indonesia, has faced significant challenges regarding educational quality and teacher professionalism. Within Aceh, the region of Southwest Aceh has been grappling with these issues, as evidenced by the underutilization of professional development

opportunities and concerning levels of teacher certification, coupled with a decline in student performance indicators [7].

According to the regional education balance sheet data report for 2022, 98.8% of junior high school (SMP) teachers in Southwest Aceh possess bachelor's degrees. Yet, only 25% have been certified [8], indicating that many teachers cannot be considered professional competency. The education report card further evidences these results in 2023, which show a decrease of 1.65% in the numeracy score of junior high school students compared to the previous year [9].

These factors highlight the challenges faced by academic supervision and emphasize the urgent need for a thorough evaluation of its effectiveness, especially to enhance teacher professional competence in junior high schools [10, 11]. By conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current supervisory practices, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing targeted interventions, stakeholders can work towards bridging the gap between the desired outcomes and the current reality.

School principals are central in addressing these challenges [12]. Their role in academic supervision is pivotal, involving key responsibilities such as planning, implementing, and following up on supervisory activities [13]. It's crucial to recognize the importance of principals in bridging the existing gap and improving teacher professional competence. Through their guidance in academic supervision, principals create an environment that supports continuous improvement.

This study aims to investigate how school principals handle academic supervision in two junior high schools in Southwest Aceh, Indonesia: SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh. The research focuses on two main questions: first, how school principals plan and implement academic supervision within these educational institutions, and second, the effectiveness of follow-up strategies in maintaining and enhancing teacher professional competence. The study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on how academic supervision can improve teacher professional competence by answering these questions. It also aims to provide ideas for improving supervisory practices in the studied schools.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology employed in a qualitative study focused on enhancing the professional competence of junior high school teachers through academic supervision by school principals, as outlined in Figure 1.

This structured approach facilitates a thorough exploration of how academic supervision can enhance teacher competence, providing valuable insights into effective educational leadership practices.

2.1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach to comprehensively understand the phenomenon within its specific context. Qualitative research investigates social phenomena and human issues by examining detailed accounts from respondents' perspectives and conducting studies in natural settings. This approach allows for a holistic and in-depth exploration of the subject matter, providing a complex portrayal of the reality being studied [14, 15].

2.2. Study Location and Duration

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh in Southwest Aceh, Indonesia. The study took place over three months, from January to March 2024. During this time, the issued research permits carried out data collection, processing, analysis, report writing, research seminar presentations, revisions, and report printing. The chosen location and duration allowed for a comprehensive and timely investigation of the research topic.

2.3. Research Subjects

The research subjects included school principals, senior teachers, and students at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh in Southwest Aceh. These subjects were purposefully selected to provide a comprehensive perspective on the academic supervision process and its impact on teacher professional competence and student learning outcomes. School principals were chosen due to their central role in overseeing academic supervision activities. At the same time, senior teachers were selected for their firsthand experience with the supervision process and their insights into its effectiveness. Additionally, including students allowed for understanding the direct impact of teacher competence on the learning experience.

2.4. Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researchers themselves [16]. However, additional research instruments were developed to complement and compare data gathered through observation and interviews. These instruments included observational guidelines and interview guidelines. The observational instrument was used to obtain data on social situations, focusing on location, actors, and activities related to technology-based learning and communication in
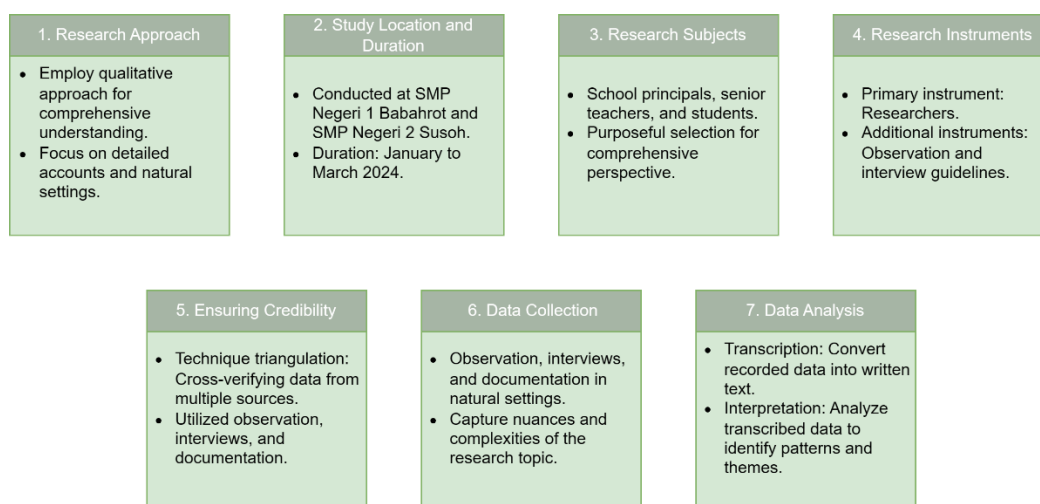
Figure 1. Overview of the methodology employed in the study.

schools. The interview instrument aimed to acquire data through direct question-and-answer sessions with school principals and senior teachers, providing valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives.

2.5. Ensuring Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, the study implemented technique triangulation, a method aimed at enhancing credibility by cross-verifying data from multiple sources and employing various data collection techniques. This approach involved observation, interviews, and documentation to gather information from different perspectives and contexts [17]. For instance, researchers directly witnessed academic supervision activities during observations, providing real-time insights into how principals interacted with teachers and students. Interviews with school principals, senior teachers, and students allowed for a deeper understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding academic supervision practices and their impact. Additionally, documentation analysis, such as reviewing supervision reports and school policies, provided supplementary evidence to corroborate the findings from observations and interviews. By triangulating data from these diverse sources and methods, the study ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of academic supervision practices and their effects on teacher professional competence and student learning outcomes.

2.6. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques are essential for gathering data for the research's analytical process. This qualitative study collected data in natural settings using primary data sources. The study utilized observation, interviews, and documentation as the primary data collection techniques [18]. These techniques allowed for a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation, capturing the nuances and complexities of the research topic.

2.7. Data Analysis Techniques

In this study, data analysis involved two main techniques: transcription and interpretation. Transcription entailed converting recorded interviews and observations into written text for analysis. This process ensured that all data were accurately documented and ready for examination. Following transcription, the researchers interpreted and analyzed the transcribed data to identify patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research questions. Interpretation involves examining the data to derive meaningful conclusions and understandings regarding how school principals conducted academic supervision and its impact on teacher professional competence. Throughout this process, the researchers iteratively reviewed and refined their interpretations to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings [19].

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh, focusing on the implementation of academic supervision by school principals to enhance the professional competence of middle school teachers. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation study, addressing subjects or research respondents related to the principals' academic supervision to improve teachers' professional competence.

Table 1. Comparison of academic supervision approaches.

Aspect	SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot	SMP Negeri 2 Susoh
Supervision Process	Hands-on approach involving classroom visits, interviews, and evaluation of learning outcomes	Continuous and structured approach focusing on planning, execution, and evaluation phases
Emphasis	Support and development activities post-supervision	Alignment with educational standards and goals
Collaborative Learning Opportunities	Group discussions, class visits, and individual conversations	Collaboration between principals, vice principals, and teaching staff
Tools/Methods	Learning simulations, personalized growth plans	Targeted support to enhance teaching skills
Atmosphere	Constructive and non-intimidating	Supportive environment for professional growth

3.1. Planning of Academic Supervision by School Principals

The school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh have systematically designed and implemented academic supervision plans to enhance the professional competence of their teaching staff. This proactive approach demonstrates the principals' commitment to ensuring high-quality education and continuous school improvement.

SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot, accredited with an A grade by the National Accreditation Board of Schools/Madrasahs (BAN-S/M), has adopted the independent learning curriculum. The school's significant number of students and staff, coupled with its expansive land area, highlights its potential for growth since its establishment in 1985. The selection of SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot for this study was based on various quality indicators, such as its accreditation grade and the documented improvement in students' literacy and numeracy skills, as reported in educational performance reports.

The planning process for academic supervision at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot involves several critical stages. First, the school principal and staff collaborate to set clear objectives based on identified issues within the school. Next, they create a schedule for supervision activities and select appropriate techniques to address the specific problems. Finally, they choose suitable instruments to assess the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. This comprehensive planning process is crucial for establishing targeted outcomes and ensuring that the supervision activities are tailored to the school's and its teachers' unique needs.

SMP Negeri 2 Susoh, which currently follows the K-13 curriculum, is also participating in the transition to the independent learning curriculum. Despite facing challenges such as limited resources and adapting to new curricular standards, the school remains committed to prioritizing the professional development of its teachers. The principal of SMP Negeri 2 Susoh has implemented a systematic and ongoing academic supervision plan to support teachers in enhancing their professional competencies and ensuring a smooth transition to the new curriculum.

The planning of academic supervision by school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh serves as a model for other schools seeking to improve the quality of education and support the professional growth of their teachers. By setting clear objectives, collaborating with staff, and selecting appropriate supervision techniques and instruments, these principals have created a framework for continuous improvement and enhanced educational outcomes. As more schools in Indonesia adopt the independent learning curriculum and strive for higher accreditation grades, the experiences of SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh can provide valuable insights and guidance for school leaders navigating similar challenges.

3.2. Implementation of Academic Supervision by School Principals

The school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh have implemented robust academic supervision processes to directly assess and enhance the quality of teaching within their schools. This hands-on approach involves various activities designed to provide teachers with constructive feedback and support their professional development, as outlined in Table 1.

At SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot, the principal and their team conduct classroom visits to observe teachers, allowing them to understand the teaching methods and strategies employed. They also interview teachers to discuss their classroom experiences, challenges, and successes. Additionally, the principal evaluates the learning process and outcomes to ensure they align with the school's educational goals and standards.

One notable aspect of SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot's academic supervision approach is the emphasis on support and

development activities following the supervision process. The principal organizes group discussions, where teachers can share their experiences and learn from one another. They also conduct class visits, allowing teachers to observe and learn from their colleagues. Individual conversations between the principal and teachers are held to discuss specific improvement areas and develop personalized growth plans. Furthermore, the school utilizes learning simulations to help teachers practice and refine their skills in a safe and supportive environment. This multi-faceted approach creates a constructive and non-intimidating atmosphere that encourages teacher growth and improves student learning outcomes.

Similarly, SMP Negeri 2 Susoh has adopted a continuous and structured academic supervision approach that focuses on the planning, execution, and evaluation phases of teaching. The principal works closely with their vice principals and teaching staff to ensure supervision activities align with educational standards and goals. By targeting each phase of the teaching process, the school can identify areas for improvement and provide targeted support to help teachers enhance their skills and effectiveness in the classroom.

Implementing academic supervision by school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring students' high-quality teaching and learning experiences. By employing a range of supervision activities and emphasizing support and development, these principals have created an environment that fosters continuous improvement and professional growth among their teaching staff. As a result, teachers are better equipped to adapt to changing educational landscapes, such as the transition to the independent learning curriculum, and to meet the diverse needs of their students. The success of these academic supervision practices can inspire other school leaders seeking to enhance the quality of education within their institutions.

3.3. Follow-up Actions from Academic Supervision

After conducting academic supervision, the school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh engage in targeted follow-up actions to address the findings and ensure continuous improvement in teaching quality. These follow-up actions are crucial for translating the insights gained during the supervision process into practical steps that support teachers' professional development and enhance student learning experiences.

One key aspect of the follow-up process is the specialized meetings between the principals and the supervised teachers. These meetings provide a platform for discussing the supervision outcomes and offering constructive feedback to improve teaching quality. During these meetings, principals and teachers collaborate to identify specific areas for improvement and develop actionable plans to address them. This personalized approach ensures that teachers receive the support and guidance they need to grow professionally and enhance their effectiveness in the classroom.

The follow-up actions extend beyond individual meetings. The principals also work with their vice principals and other school leaders to develop targeted professional development programs based on the supervision findings. These programs may include workshops, seminars, and training sessions that focus on specific areas identified during the supervision process, such as classroom management, instructional strategies, or the use of educational technology. By providing teachers with relevant and timely professional development opportunities, the schools demonstrate their commitment to continuously improving academic quality.

Moreover, the principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh recognize the importance of ongoing teacher support and mentoring. They establish systems for regular check-ins and follow-up discussions to ensure that teachers are making progress and to address any challenges they may face in implementing the feedback and recommendations from the supervision process. This ongoing support helps to foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the schools, as teachers feel empowered and motivated to refine their skills and adapt to the evolving needs of their students.

The follow-up actions taken by the school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh underscore the critical role that academic supervision plays in the continuous professional development of teachers. By engaging in targeted discussions, providing personalized feedback, and offering relevant professional development opportunities, these principals actively work to enhance the quality of education and improve student learning experiences. Their approach is a model for other school leaders committed to supporting their teachers' growth and ensuring enhanced educational quality within their institutions. As more schools in Indonesia and beyond recognize the importance of effective follow-up actions in the academic supervision process, the practices implemented at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh can provide valuable insights and inspiration for driving positive change in education.

Table 2. Challenges and mitigation strategies in implementing academic supervision.

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
Limited time for academic supervision	• Prioritize supervision tasks • Delegate administrative responsibilities • Schedule regular supervision sessions
Need for more experienced supervisors	• Invest in professional development for potential teacher supervisors • Foster a culture of shared leadership and responsibility among teaching staff
Budget constraints	• Find cost-effective solutions • Prioritize resources for academic supervision • Seek additional funding or grants for supervision initiatives
Adjustment to curriculum changes	• Provide ongoing professional development for teachers and supervisors • Collaborate with educational authorities for support and guidance on curriculum transitions

3.4. Challenges in Implementing Academic Supervision

While the school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh have made significant strides in implementing effective academic supervision practices, they have also encountered several challenges. These challenges highlight the complexity of the supervision process and the need for strategic planning and coordination to overcome them. Table 2 summarizes the challenges faced by the school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh in implementing academic supervision and presents mitigation strategies.

One of the primary challenges is the limited time available for academic supervision. Principals, burdened with extensive administrative duties, often find it difficult to allocate adequate time for direct observation and feedback sessions, which are critical for meaningful academic supervision. This can significantly affect both the depth and frequency of supervision sessions. Schools could consider delegating certain administrative tasks to other staff members or employing administrative assistants to mitigate this. Additionally, implementing a structured time management system that prioritizes academic supervision within the school's calendar can ensure that these activities are considered essential parts of the school day.

Another challenge is the need for experienced supervisors. The effectiveness of academic supervision hinges on the expertise of the supervisors, and there is a notable gap in the availability of experienced teachers who can take on supervisory roles. This lack of experienced supervisors can dilute the quality of feedback and guidance provided during the supervision. This challenge could be addressed by developing a mentorship program where experienced teachers are trained and encouraged to take on supervisory roles, thereby enhancing the pool of qualified supervisors. Investment in professional development programs that

focus on supervisory skills can also help prepare more teachers for these roles.

Moreover, budget constraints pose another critical challenge, as effective supervision requires resources for training, materials, and sometimes technological tools. Schools often struggle with limited budgets, making allocating sufficient funds for comprehensive supervision activities difficult. Principals might need to explore external funding opportunities, such as grants or partnerships with educational organizations, to secure the necessary resources.

Finally, adjusting curriculum changes, such as the transition to the independent learning curriculum, can present challenges for both teachers and supervisors. As new educational approaches and standards are introduced, teachers may require additional support and guidance to adapt their teaching practices effectively. Supervisors must also be well-versed in the new curriculum to provide relevant feedback and support. This requires ongoing professional development for teachers and supervisors and close collaboration with educational authorities to ensure a smooth transition.

To overcome these challenges, school principals must engage in strategic planning and coordination with all stakeholders involved in the educational process. This includes working closely with teachers, vice principals, and other school leaders to develop a shared vision for academic supervision and to allocate resources effectively. Engaging with parents, community members, and educational authorities can also help to build support for supervision initiatives and secure additional resources when needed.

3.5. Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

The findings of this study on academic supervision by school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP

Negeri 2 Susoh have several important implications for educational practice and policy. First, the systematic planning and implementation of academic supervision demonstrated by these principals highlight the crucial role that school leaders play in enhancing teacher professional competence and, ultimately, improving student learning outcomes. The success of these supervision practices underscores the importance of providing school principals with the necessary training, resources, and support to carry out their supervisory responsibilities effectively.

Moreover, emphasizing targeted follow-up actions and continuous professional development opportunities in these schools' supervision processes suggests that effective supervision extends beyond mere evaluation. It requires a commitment to ongoing support and collaboration between principals and teachers to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Educational policymakers should consider ways to incentivize and support such comprehensive supervision practices in schools across Indonesia and beyond.

However, this study also has some limitations that should be acknowledged. As a qualitative case study focused on two specific schools, the findings may not be generalizable to all educational contexts. The unique characteristics of SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh, such as their accreditation status, resources, and leadership, may have influenced the success of their supervision practices. Additionally, the study relied primarily on interviews and observations, which may be subject to participant bias or researcher interpretation.

Future research could build upon these findings by conducting larger-scale studies that examine academic supervision practices across a more diverse range of schools and contexts. Quantitative methods could investigate the relationship between specific supervision practices and measurable outcomes, such as teacher competence and student achievement. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of effective supervision on teacher professional development and school improvement.

Another important direction for future research is to explore innovative solutions to the challenges identified in this study, such as time constraints, limited resources, and the need for experienced teacher supervisors. This could involve investigating the potential of technology-based tools to streamline supervision processes or examining the effectiveness of peer coaching and mentoring programs in building teacher capacity for supervision.

Finally, as educational landscapes continue to evolve, with the introduction of new curricula and pedagogical approaches, future research should examine how academic supervision practices can adapt and respond to these changes. This could involve investigating the role of supervision in supporting teachers through curricular transitions, such as the shift to the independent learning curriculum, or exploring how supervision can foster the development of 21st-century skills and competencies in both teachers and students.

4. Conclusions

This study has thoroughly explored the role of academic supervision by school principals at SMP Negeri 1 Babahrot and SMP Negeri 2 Susoh in enhancing teacher professional competence. The research questions aimed to uncover how principals plan, implement, and follow up on academic supervision and the extent to which these activities are effective in maintaining and enhancing teacher professional competence.

The findings reveal that both school principals employ a systematic approach to academic supervision, which includes detailed planning, proactive implementation, and thoughtful follow-up. These practices not only support the professional growth of teachers but also contribute to improved student learning outcomes. This aligns with the study's objectives, demonstrating that well-structured academic supervision fosters teacher professionalism and ensures educational quality.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of academic supervision in the professional development of teachers and the enhancement of student learning experiences. The proactive role of principals in this process cannot be overstated. By continuing to refine and invest in academic supervision practices, there is significant potential to elevate educational standards within the schools studied and across broader educational settings. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing educational quality, offering actionable insights that can substantially improve academic environments.

Informed Consent Statement: All participants in this study provided informed consent prior to their involvement.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: All the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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