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# Strategies and Challenges in Promoting Teacher Discipline: Insights from Vocational High Schools in Indonesia

Kamaruzzaman Kamaruzzaman <sup>1</sup>, Bahrún Bahrún <sup>1,\*</sup> and Khairuddin Khairuddin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Master of Educational Administration Study Program, The Graduate School, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia; kamaruzzamansmk@gmail.com (K.K.); bahrún@usk.ac.id (B.B.); khairuddin@usk.ac.id (K.Kh.)

\* Correspondence: bahrún@usk.ac.id

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of principals in promoting and sustaining a disciplined culture among teachers in vocational high schools within West Aceh District, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative, descriptive research design, the study focuses on three main objectives: examining the specific disciplinary programs implemented by principals, exploring how these initiatives are evaluated for effectiveness, and identifying the challenges principals face in ensuring consistent discipline among teachers. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed to teachers and semi-structured interviews conducted with principals, enabling a comprehensive understanding of both perspectives. Thematic analysis revealed that principals prioritize structured program implementation and regular evaluation as key strategies for managing discipline. Despite overall positive responses to the effectiveness of these initiatives, teachers highlighted several challenges, including inconsistent policy enforcement and varying levels of commitment, which hinder the establishment of a cohesive disciplinary environment. The findings suggest that while principals play a crucial role in shaping discipline, addressing specific challenges through additional resources and teacher engagement could further enhance policy adherence and effectiveness. This study provides valuable insights into the impact of leadership on school discipline and offers recommendations to strengthen disciplinary practices in vocational education settings.



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## 1. Introduction

Effective school leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes by fostering a supportive and disciplined environment for teachers and students alike. Research consistently highlights the critical influence of principals in promoting organizational values, enforcing discipline, and ensuring adherence to professional standards within schools [1, 2]. This is particularly vital in vocational education settings, where schools are tasked

with preparing students for industry standards and workforce demands [3].

In Indonesia, vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, or SMK) have a unique mandate to equip students with practical skills tailored to local industry needs. However, ensuring consistency in teacher discipline within such institutions poses distinct challenges. These challenges range from policy enforcement disparities to limited resources and varying levels of teacher commitment [4, 5]. West Aceh District,

located in Indonesia, presents a distinctive socio-economic and educational landscape that makes it a compelling focus for this research. The region is characterized by its reliance on agricultural and maritime industries, which heavily influence the vocational education system. Vocational high schools in this area play a crucial role in equipping students with industry-specific skills tailored to the region's economic needs. Despite their importance, these schools face significant challenges, including limited resources, inconsistent enforcement of policies, and varying levels of teacher commitment. Additionally, the recovery from socio-political unrest and natural disasters has created a unique set of obstacles for the education sector in West Aceh. These factors necessitate strong leadership to foster discipline and ensure the quality of vocational training aligns with both local industry standards and broader educational goals. The role of school principals in addressing these challenges cannot be overstated, as they act as cultural architects who shape the discipline and professionalism of their institutions [6, 7].

Principal leadership in fostering teacher discipline has emerged as a significant area of study in educational research. Contemporary studies emphasize that principals serve as cultural architects who shape institutional values, set behavioral expectations, and establish professional standards [8]. Through strategic leadership practices, principals can cultivate a culture of discipline by consistently communicating expectations, modeling desired behaviors, and implementing structured accountability systems [2, 9]. This role becomes particularly critical in vocational education settings, where principals must align disciplinary practices with specific vocational competencies and industry requirements [10].

Previous studies have examined the relationship between principal leadership and teacher discipline, often underscoring the importance of clear communication, regular evaluation, and accountability systems in fostering a disciplined school culture [11, 12]. Nevertheless, research specific to vocational schools, particularly in Indonesia, remains limited. Understanding how principals in these settings navigate unique challenges and implement effective disciplinary strategies is essential for improving both educational quality and student outcomes.

This study aims to explore the strategies principals in vocational high schools in West Aceh District, Indonesia, use to promote teacher discipline. By examining the specific disciplinary programs implemented, the evaluation methods used, and the obstacles encountered, this research seeks to contribute to the

broader discourse on educational leadership in vocational contexts. The findings are intended to provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen teacher discipline and enhance the effectiveness of vocational education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design to examine the role of principals in fostering a culture of discipline among teachers in vocational high schools (SMK) in West Aceh District. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of the processes, experiences, and perspectives of principals in the targeted context. Descriptive analysis enables a detailed exploration of specific actions and strategies, providing insight into the principal's role in promoting discipline within their institutions.

### 2.2. Study Population and Sampling

The study focused on two vocational high schools in West Aceh District, SMK Negeri 2 Meulaboh and SMK Negeri 1 Woyla, with 12 teachers and two principals participating. This sample size was deliberately chosen to align with the qualitative, descriptive research design, which prioritizes in-depth exploration of specific phenomena over broad generalizability. Qualitative research often emphasizes the richness of data collected from smaller, focused samples, allowing for a deeper understanding of complex issues such as leadership dynamics and discipline management. Additionally, the selected schools and participants were purposively sampled to represent vocational high schools in the region and to capture the unique challenges and contextual realities faced in West Aceh District. Given resource and time constraints, a larger sample was not feasible; however, the selected schools provided sufficient scope for gathering meaningful, contextually relevant insights. Furthermore, the use of triangulation, combining data from both teachers and principals, ensured that multiple perspectives were considered, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings. While the sample size may appear limited, the detailed, context-specific insights generated from this study are valuable for understanding leadership practices in vocational education settings. Future research could expand the sample size or include additional schools to validate and generalize these findings.

### 2.3. Data Collection Methods

The data collection process for this study took place over three months, from, allowing sufficient time to gather

comprehensive data from both teachers and principals. Semi-structured interviews with principals lasted approximately 60 minutes each and were supplemented by follow-up interviews as needed to ensure data saturation. The follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify initial responses and to verify the completeness of the data, ensuring that no critical themes were overlooked. The open-ended questionnaires distributed to teachers were carefully developed to align with the study's objectives. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of teachers and principals outside the study sample to assess the clarity and relevance of the questions. Based on feedback from the pilot test, adjustments were made to refine the wording and structure of the questionnaires. Additionally, the instruments were reviewed by a panel of experts in educational leadership and qualitative research to establish content validity and ensure that the questions effectively captured the intended constructs. This rigorous validation process enhanced the reliability of the data collection tools, contributing to the robustness of the study's findings.

#### *2.4. Data Derivation and Representation*

Although this study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design, the data presented were derived through a systematic process of transforming qualitative insights into quantitative summaries. This methodological approach aimed to make qualitative findings more accessible and interpretable while remaining true to the research's qualitative nature.

Data were collected using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, designed to elicit detailed, descriptive responses regarding perceptions of disciplinary programs and the strategies school principals employ. These qualitative instruments provided a rich source of information, capturing diverse perspectives from teachers and principals.

The responses underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Each participant's response was carefully coded into categories such as "positive" and "negative" perceptions and specific strategies, such as "program implementation" and "evaluation methods." This coding process enabled systematic organization of the qualitative data, allowing identification of key themes relevant to the study's objectives.

Responses were classified as "positive" or "negative" based on predefined criteria to ensure consistency and transparency. A response was categorized as "positive" if it explicitly or implicitly expressed satisfaction, support, or acknowledgment of effectiveness regarding

disciplinary programs, principal support, or teacher commitment. For example, statements such as "The principal provides clear guidelines" or "The program has helped improve teacher behavior" were coded as positive. Conversely, a response was labeled "negative" if it highlighted challenges, dissatisfaction, or perceived ineffectiveness, such as "Policies are inconsistently enforced" or "There is a lack of follow-up from leadership." To ensure reliability, the categorization process was conducted independently by two researchers. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus meetings, and ambiguous responses were clarified by consulting the original data context. This systematic approach ensured that each response was accurately and fairly represented within the analysis.

#### *2.5. Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis was used in this study to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the collected data. The process began with transcribing interview recordings and thoroughly reviewing questionnaire responses. This initial step enabled a comprehensive understanding of the data, allowing for the assignment of codes to recurring themes and key concepts that emerged, specifically related to the principal's role in discipline management, teachers' perceptions of these policies, and the challenges they encountered.

In the coding and theme development phase, open coding was used to identify broad themes concerning leadership roles, disciplinary strategies, and cultural challenges. These initial codes were refined and organized into specific categories, such as "program implementation," "evaluation methods," and "challenges in discipline management." Each category was aligned with the study's objectives, providing a clear structure for understanding the various aspects of disciplinary practices within the school environment. To ensure analytical rigor, the thematic analysis process incorporated inter-rater reliability checks. Two independent coders analyzed the interview transcripts and questionnaire responses to identify recurring themes. Coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus meetings, ensuring alignment with the study objectives. A third researcher was consulted when disagreements persisted, further enhancing the reliability of the coding process. This collaborative approach ensured that the findings accurately reflected the data and reduced potential bias in theme identification.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings, data were triangulated. This involved integrating multiple

data sources, including teacher and principal responses, document analysis, and limited observational data. Relevant school documents, such as disciplinary policies and attendance records, were analyzed to corroborate participant responses. Observations during site visits provided additional context, capturing real-time interactions and disciplinary practices. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the findings and strengthened their credibility by reducing potential biases.

Additionally, member checking was conducted as a final step in data validation. In this process, participants were allowed to review interpretations of their responses, thereby confirming the accuracy of the data representation. This step not only reinforced the study's credibility but also ensured that the findings accurately reflected the participants' insights and experiences regarding discipline within the school setting.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of disciplinary policies and principals' strategies for managing discipline. The data gathered from open-ended questionnaires and interviews were analyzed thematically, yielding key themes and patterns.

#### 3.1. Teacher Perceptions on Disciplinary Policies

Teachers expressed varied opinions regarding the effectiveness of disciplinary programs and the challenges they encountered. As seen in [Table 1](#), key themes include the perceived effectiveness of disciplinary programs, challenges faced, principal support, and teacher commitment.

The data presented in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#) are derived from thematic analysis of responses collected through open-ended questionnaires completed by 12 teachers. These tools provided teachers with a platform to share detailed qualitative insights into their perceptions of disciplinary policies and the challenges they faced. The data were categorized into recurring themes, such as program effectiveness, principal support, and commitment to policies. Positive and negative responses were tabulated to visually represent the prevalence of these themes.

The transformation of qualitative insights into visual representations was achieved by coding and grouping teacher responses into themes. For example, phrases indicating approval or appreciation of principal support

were categorized as "positive responses," while mentions of inconsistencies or challenges were coded as "negative responses." This process enabled a coherent and accessible depiction of teacher perspectives.

The data indicate a generally positive response to principal support (75% positive responses) but also reveal significant challenges in adhering to disciplinary policies, with 80% of responses reflecting difficulties in this area. [Figure 1](#) visualizes this comparison of positive and negative responses, highlighting the strengths and areas for improvement as perceived by teachers.

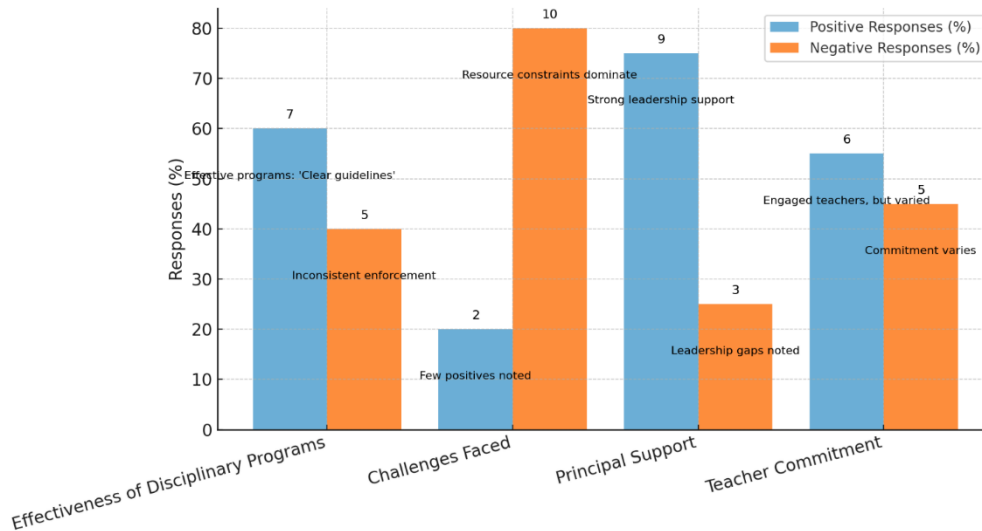
#### 3.2. Principal Strategies in Managing Discipline

Principals outlined various strategies to foster a disciplined culture, emphasizing program implementation, evaluation methods, handling challenges, and engaging teachers. As shown in [Table 2](#), the strategies are distributed by frequency of mention, with program implementation receiving the greatest focus. Similarly, the findings in [Table 2](#) and [Figure 2](#) summarize the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data from two principals. These interviews explored their strategies for fostering a disciplined environment, focusing on program implementation, evaluation, and handling challenges. The frequency of themes such as program implementation and evaluation methods was noted during coding and subsequently visualized in the figures.

The four principal strategies, program implementation, evaluation methods, handling challenges, and teacher engagement, are interdependent and collectively contribute to fostering a disciplined school environment. Program implementation lays the foundation by establishing clear expectations and structured disciplinary policies. Evaluation methods then act as a feedback mechanism, allowing principals to assess the effectiveness of these programs and make necessary adjustments based on observed outcomes or teacher feedback. Handling challenges is closely tied to both implementation and evaluation. Challenges such as inconsistent policy enforcement or resource limitations often emerge during the evaluation phase and require tailored solutions to ensure that the programs remain effective. For example, if evaluations reveal teacher resistance, strategies to enhance teacher engagement become critical. Teacher engagement, in turn, reinforces the other strategies by promoting collaboration and accountability. Actively involving teachers in the development and refinement of

**Table 1.** Teacher perceptions of disciplinary policies.

| Theme                                  | Positive Responses (n) | Negative Responses (n) | Positive Responses (%) | Negative Responses (%) |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Effectiveness of Disciplinary Programs | 7                      | 5                      | 60                     | 40                     |
| Challenges Faced                       | 2                      | 10                     | 20                     | 80                     |
| Principal Support                      | 9                      | 3                      | 75                     | 25                     |
| Teacher Commitment                     | 6                      | 5                      | 55                     | 45                     |



**Figure 1.** Teacher perceptions of disciplinary policies.

**Table 2.** Principal strategies in managing discipline.

| Strategy               | Frequency (n) | Frequency (%) |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Program Implementation | 7             | 35            |
| Evaluation Methods     | 5             | 25            |
| Handling Challenges    | 4             | 20            |
| Teacher Engagement     | 4             | 20            |

disciplinary programs fosters a sense of ownership, making them more likely to adhere to and support the policies. This engagement not only addresses challenges but also strengthens the evaluation process by incorporating diverse perspectives.

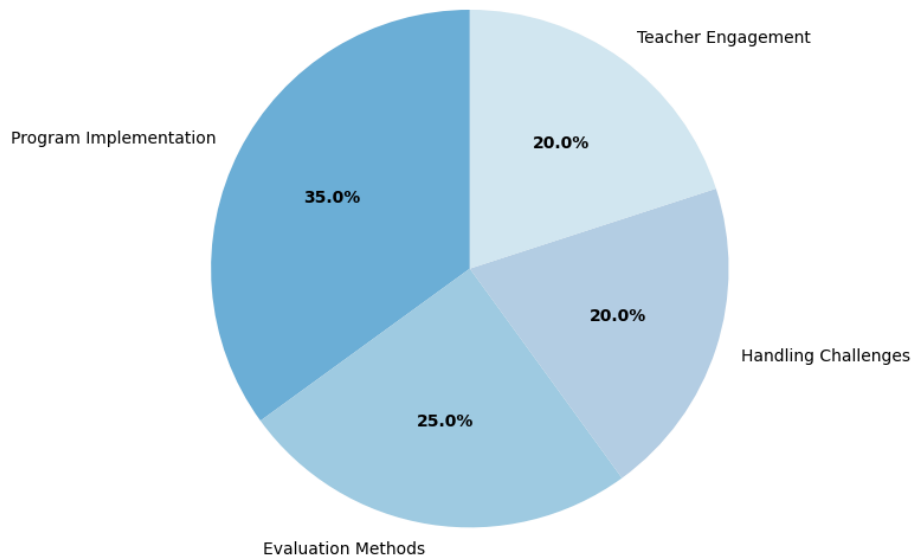
Figure 2 further illustrates the distribution of these strategies, showing the emphasis on program implementation (35%) and evaluation methods (25%) as key components of managing discipline in schools.

These findings underscore the importance of targeted strategies and strong principal support in creating a disciplined school environment. The data presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that, while there is substantial support for disciplinary programs among teachers, challenges such as adherence difficulties and varying commitment levels remain obstacles. Specifically, 80% of responses reflect challenges, suggesting that additional resources or adjustments to disciplinary policies may be required to address these issues effectively.

In addition to these insights, Table 2 and Figure 2 highlight the strategies most frequently used by principals, with a particular focus on program implementation (35%) and evaluation methods (25%). This focus suggests that principals prioritize structured programmatic approaches and consistent assessment of outcomes. By implementing clear disciplinary programs and evaluating their effectiveness, principals aim to establish a predictable and supportive environment for both teachers and students.

The emphasis on program implementation aligns to set clear expectations for teacher behavior and ensure that disciplinary policies are consistently applied. Meanwhile, the reliance on evaluation methods reflects a need for ongoing feedback and adaptation. Principals who actively evaluate their strategies can identify areas of improvement and make data-driven decisions that reinforce a disciplined school culture.

Moreover, the role of teacher engagement and challenge management, each accounting for 20% of the principal



**Figure 2.** Distribution of the principal's strategy in managing discipline.

strategies, highlights the importance of communication and problem-solving in sustaining discipline. Engaging teachers in the disciplinary process promotes ownership and accountability, while addressing challenges as they arise prevents issues from escalating. These strategies support the idea that effective school discipline is not solely about rules but also about collaborative efforts between principals and teachers.

The findings of this study align with existing research on educational leadership while contributing new insights specific to vocational schools in the Indonesian context. Previous studies [13] and [9] have emphasized the importance of program implementation and evaluation in fostering discipline. This study reaffirms these findings and adds a unique perspective by highlighting additional challenges in vocational settings, such as aligning disciplinary practices with industry-specific competencies and addressing resource constraints, as noted in the West Aceh District.

Furthermore, while prior research on teacher engagement [14, 15] has shown its role in improving policy adherence, this study extends that understanding by demonstrating how engagement can also mitigate challenges, such as resistance to policy enforcement. The findings also corroborate [15], which stressed the iterative nature of leadership strategies, but contextualize this within the specific socio-economic and educational challenges of rural vocational schools in Indonesia. By situating these findings within the broader literature, this study underscores the critical need for context-specific strategies in addressing teacher

discipline, offering actionable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

### 3.3 Discussions

The findings from this study highlight the central role of principals in fostering a disciplined school environment, particularly in vocational high schools, where structured, consistent discipline is crucial to educational outcomes. Prior research underscores that effective leadership and clear policies significantly influence the behavior and commitment of both teachers and students [16]. The identified strategies, program implementation, evaluation methods, handling challenges, and teacher engagement, reflect the multifaceted responsibilities of principals in creating a culture that prioritizes discipline and accountability.

A key finding in this study was the emphasis on program implementation as the most frequently mentioned strategy, accounting for 35% of principal responses. This result aligns with [17], which suggests that implementing structured disciplinary programs is essential for establishing clear behavioral expectations and minimizing ambiguity. Such programs offer a consistent framework that helps teachers understand their roles and responsibilities, contributing to a stable and focused educational environment. For vocational schools, where practical skills are prioritized, such a structure is particularly beneficial, as it aligns with the need for a disciplined approach to skills development [7].

The significant use of evaluation methods (25%) as a strategy further highlights the importance of feedback in maintaining and adjusting disciplinary practices. Effective

evaluation allows principals to monitor the impact of disciplinary policies, identify areas for improvement, and ensure alignment with school goals [18]. Regular assessment and feedback loops provide principals with actionable insights, enabling them to address issues promptly and support teachers who may struggle with specific aspects of discipline. This finding supports the notion that an iterative approach to disciplinary management is essential for adapting to changing needs within the school [19].

Teachers' perspectives, as illustrated by the high percentage of negative responses to challenges (80%), indicate the difficulties they encounter when implementing disciplinary measures. Factors such as varying levels of teacher commitment and inconsistent enforcement of policies contribute to these challenges [14]. Teachers play a critical role in maintaining a disciplined environment, but without adequate support, they may face significant obstacles that hinder their ability to enforce policies effectively. This underscores the need for principals to actively engage with teachers, ensuring they feel supported and valued in their efforts to maintain discipline. The 80% of negative responses regarding challenges highlight issues of inconsistent policy enforcement, resource limitations, and varying teacher commitment levels. Inconsistent enforcement undermines leadership credibility and teacher motivation, while resource shortages leave staff unsupported in implementing disciplinary measures. Additionally, varying levels of teacher commitment often stem from a lack of involvement in policy development, which can lead to resistance or disengagement. To address these challenges, standardized enforcement protocols and clear communication are essential to ensure fairness. Resource constraints can be mitigated by seeking funding, forming partnerships, or using cost-effective training resources. Engaging teachers in policy design fosters ownership and accountability, enhancing commitment. Regular feedback mechanisms can further identify and resolve inconsistencies, creating a cohesive and disciplined school environment.

Interestingly, the study also found that 20% of principals highlighted teacher engagement as a strategy. This aligns with the research of [15], who posits that involving teachers in the development and implementation of disciplinary policies enhances their commitment and fosters a collaborative school culture. When teachers participate in these processes, they are more likely to feel invested in the success of disciplinary programs, leading to greater commitment and consistency in policy enforcement. This finding suggests that teacher engagement not only strengthens disciplinary outcomes

but also promotes a positive school culture where all stakeholders work toward common goals.

The study's findings also indicate areas where further improvements could be beneficial. For instance, although there is substantial support for principal-led disciplinary programs, addressing the specific challenges highlighted by teachers could further enhance program effectiveness. According to [20], tailored interventions that consider individual teacher needs and challenges are more effective in promoting adherence to disciplinary policies. Addressing these issues requires ongoing communication and collaboration between principals and teachers, reinforcing a shared commitment to discipline and educational quality.

In general, this study supports existing literature emphasizing the role of school leadership in shaping a disciplined environment. Principals who prioritize program implementation, continuous evaluation, and active teacher engagement foster a sustainable, positive school culture. However, as the challenges faced by teachers indicate, there remains a need for targeted support to address specific difficulties in policy adherence. Future research could examine the impact of additional support structures and teacher training, particularly in the vocational school context, to enhance the overall effectiveness of disciplinary strategies.

### *3.4 Limitations*

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of principals in fostering teacher discipline in vocational high schools, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a small sample of 12 teachers and 2 principals from 2 vocational schools in West Aceh District, Indonesia. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts, particularly outside the region or in different types of schools.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or selective memory. Although steps were taken to ensure the credibility of findings, such as triangulation and member checking, these biases may still have influenced the results.

Lastly, the study's qualitative, descriptive design, while appropriate for exploring processes and perceptions, does not allow for causal inference. This limits the ability to determine the direct impact of specific strategies on teacher discipline.

### 3.5 Directions for Future Research

This study has underscored the importance of principals in fostering teacher discipline within vocational high schools. However, several areas warrant further investigation to deepen our understanding and enhance practical applications. Future research could adopt mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative insights with quantitative analysis. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive exploration of the relationship between principal strategies and teacher discipline, offering both depth and statistical generalizability.

Expanding the geographic and institutional scope of similar studies is another important direction. Research conducted across a wider range of schools, including those in urban and rural settings or in different regions of Indonesia and beyond, could offer comparative insights. This would help identify both context-specific challenges and universal strategies applicable to diverse educational environments. Incorporating perspectives from other stakeholders, such as students, parents, and administrative staff, could also provide a more holistic understanding of disciplinary practices. These viewpoints would enrich our knowledge of how disciplinary measures affect and are perceived by the entire school community, leading to more inclusive and balanced approaches.

Longitudinal studies represent another valuable avenue for future research. By tracking the long-term impact of disciplinary strategies implemented by principals, researchers could gain insights into their sustainability and effectiveness over time. Such studies would also help identify which approaches yield the most significant improvements in teacher discipline and school culture. Additionally, investigating the influence of cultural and contextual factors on the effectiveness of disciplinary strategies would provide important insights. Factors such as societal norms, policy frameworks, and resource availability play critical roles in shaping the success of such measures. Exploring these aspects would help tailor disciplinary approaches to specific educational contexts. Lastly, as technology integration in education management continues to grow, future studies could examine how digital tools support or hinder the development of a disciplined school environment. Technologies such as automated attendance systems or online monitoring platforms hold promise for improving efficiency but may also introduce new challenges that require careful evaluation.

### 4. Conclusions

This study underscores the critical role of principals in fostering a disciplined culture in vocational high schools, highlighting strategies such as program implementation, evaluation, handling challenges, and teacher engagement. While the findings provide valuable insights, actionable steps are necessary to help school leaders and policymakers enhance disciplinary practices. Principals should prioritize consistent enforcement of disciplinary policies by establishing clear guidelines and implementing standardized protocols. Policymakers can support this by allocating funding for professional development programs tailored to the unique challenges of vocational education, such as aligning disciplinary measures with industry-specific competencies. Additionally, fostering collaborative environments where teachers contribute to policy design and evaluation can enhance engagement and commitment.

To address gaps in this study, future research should explore how cultural and regional factors influence disciplinary practices across Indonesia, comparing urban and rural settings. Investigating the integration of digital tools, such as attendance monitoring systems or online feedback platforms, could also provide insights into improving efficiency and accountability in vocational schools. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the sustained impact of specific leadership strategies on teacher discipline and student outcomes would offer more comprehensive evidence to guide policy and practice.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, particularly its small sample size of two schools, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other vocational schools in Indonesia. Regional differences in resource availability, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms could significantly influence the applicability of these strategies. Therefore, while the results provide a valuable starting point, further research with larger, more diverse samples is needed to validate and expand upon these findings. By addressing these challenges and exploring the proposed research directions, vocational high schools in Indonesia can better equip their leaders to create disciplined, effective, and supportive educational environments.

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