

Human Resources and Instructional Leadership in Improving Learning in Vocational Schools: Literature Review Study

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Abstract

Vocational education has a strategic role in preparing competent and work-ready human resources according to the needs of the industrial world. However, the quality of learning in Vocational High Schools (SMK) still faces various challenges, especially in the management of human resources and leadership effectiveness at the level of educational units. This study aims to analyze the role of human resource management and instructional leadership in improving the quality of learning in vocational schools. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. Data is obtained from relevant scientific articles through the Scencedirect database and Google Scholar. The selection process was carried out systematically through the identification, screening, and feasibility stages so that 15 articles were obtained in accordance with the research criteria. Data analysis was carried out descriptively by reviewing and synthesizing findings from various related studies. The results of the study show that human resource management carried out systematically through planning, development, and evaluation of teacher performance has a positive effect on improving the quality of learning. In addition, the instructional leadership of school principals has an important role in directing, fostering, and supervising the learning process through academic supervision, teacher professional development, and the creation of a conducive learning environment. The findings also show that there is a synergistic relationship between HR management and instructional leadership in improving the quality of learning in vocational schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has a strategic position in preparing competent and work-ready human resources according to the needs of the industrial world. Vocational High Schools (SMK) are required to produce graduates who not only master technical skills, but also have adaptability, creativity, and readiness to face the dynamics of technological developments (Aziz et al., 2025). However, various studies show that the quality of learning in vocational schools still faces challenges, especially related to human resource management and leadership effectiveness at the education unit level. This condition requires the strengthening of an education management system that focuses on improving the quality of the learning process in a sustainable manner (Gustry et al., 2024).

Human resource management (HR) is a key factor in determining the success of educational institutions. In the context of schools, HR management includes the process of planning, recruitment, development, performance assessment, and systematic evaluation of educators and education personnel (Waruwu et al., 2023). The implementation of effective human resource management has been proven to contribute to improving the quality of education through improving teacher competence and optimizing the performance of school organizations (Sukinawan, 2024). In addition, human resources are seen as the main asset of an educational organization that determines whether or not the institution's goals are achieved, so its management must be carried out in a structured and sustainable manner (R et al., 2023). In the era

of digital transformation, the role of HR management is increasingly strategic because it not only functions administratively, but also as an instrument for professional development and increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions (Muzakki et al., 2026).

On the other hand, the instructional leadership of the principal is an important element in improving the quality of learning (Sapitri, 2024). Instructional leadership emphasizes the role of the principal in directing, fostering, and supervising the learning process so that it runs effectively and is oriented to student learning outcomes (Silalahi et al., 2022). These leadership practices include academic supervision, teacher professional development, and the creation of a school culture that supports quality learning (Maula & Hidayatullah, 2024). Research shows that learning-oriented leadership is able to improve teacher work discipline, teaching quality, and student involvement in the learning process (Rusman et al., 2020).

The relationship between HR management and instructional leadership is synergistic in improving the quality of learning in vocational schools (Rinaldi et al., 2023). HR management provides a planned and targeted educator management system, while instructional leadership ensures that the entire process focuses on improving the quality of learning in the classroom (Supriyadi et al., 2024). Studies show that good human resource management, such as training, competency development, and teacher performance evaluation, has a direct effect on the quality of teaching and learning activities in schools (Muhammad et al., 2024). Thus, the integration between these two aspects is key in creating learning that is effective, innovative, and relevant to the needs of the world of work.

Although various studies have examined human resource management and instructional leadership separately, studies that synergistically integrate the two aspects in the specific context of vocational high schools (SMK) are still very limited. Previous research has generally examined one of the variables partially, so it has not provided a comprehensive picture of how the interaction between HR management and instructional leadership together contributes to improving the quality of learning in vocational schools. This research gap is the basis for the urgency of conducting this literature review. In addition, it should be emphasized that in this

study, the term "instructional leadership" is used consistently referring to the concept of instructional leadership developed by Hallinger (2005), namely the role of the principal in leading, directing, and optimizing the learning process. Based on this description, this literature review aims to comprehensively analyze the role of human resource management and instructional leadership in improving the quality of learning in vocational schools. This study is expected to provide a strong conceptual foundation and become a reference in the development of strategies to improve the quality of vocational education based on effective human resource management and adaptive instructional leadership.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method which refers to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to obtain a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the results of previous research related to human resource management (HRDM) and instructional leadership in improving the quality of learning in Vocational High Schools (SMK). According to Rismawati et al. (2025), systematic literature study is a research method that is carried out through the process of searching, selection, critical evaluation, and interpretation of relevant scientific sources to produce a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Literature searches were conducted on two main databases, namely Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, during the January–February 2026 period. The search strategy uses a combination of keywords in Indonesian and English, namely "Human Resource Management", "Instructional Leadership", "Learning Quality", "Vocational High School", "Human Resource Management", "Instructional Leadership", "Learning Quality", and "Vocational High School". These keywords are combined with the Boolean operators AND and OR to expand and narrow the search results according to the focus of the research.

The initial identification process resulted in 6,845 articles from across the database. After filtering by title, abstract, topic suitability, and removal of duplicate articles, 178 relevant articles

were obtained. Further screening stage based on full text access and the suitability of research variables resulted in 78 articles, then at the eligibility stage, an assessment of the quality of sources, validity of methodology, and relevance of findings was carried out so that 31 articles remained. Furthermore, based on the inclusion criteria in the form of reputable journal articles, published in the 2019–2026 range, in Indonesian or English, and discussing MSDM and/or instructional leadership in the context of vocational secondary education, 15 articles were obtained that were eligible for analysis. The exclusion criteria include articles that are not available in full text, do not go through a peer-review process, are not relevant to the focus of the research, or have low methodological quality. Data analysis was carried out using the thematic narrative synthesis technique by grouping findings based on the main theme, comparing results between studies, identifying research patterns and gaps, and compiling a comprehensive interpretation of the contribution of MSDM and instructional leadership to improving the quality of learning in vocational schools.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Human Resource Management in Vocational Education

Human Resource Management (HRDM) in the context of vocational education is a series of systematic processes that include planning, recruitment, development, performance assessment, and evaluation of educators and education personnel in order to achieve institutional goals optimally (Waruwu et al., 2023). In educational institutions, human resources are seen as the main asset that determines the success of the organization, so its management must be carried out in a structured and sustainable manner (R et al., 2023). Muzakki et al. (2026) emphasized that in the era of digital transformation, the role of MSDM is no longer just administrative, but has developed into an instrument for professional development and increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions.

In the context of Vocational High Schools (SMK), MSDM has a more complex dimension because it must consider the suitability of educators' competencies with the needs of the industrial world. Silalahi et al. (2022) stated that the quality of education is greatly influenced by

how human resources are managed comprehensively, starting from the aspect of technical competence to the development of soft skills. Sukinawan (2024) added that effective implementation of human resources has been proven to contribute to improving the quality of education through improving teacher competence and optimizing the performance of school organizations.

Human Resource Planning and Development at Vocational Schools

HR planning is a strategic initial stage in vocational education management. Julia & Ansori (2025) found that the systematic and sustainable implementation of MSDM at SMKN 7 Batang Hari has a positive impact on increasing the school's competitive advantage. Careful planning includes identifying the needs of educators, mapping competencies, and preparing development programs that are in line with the school's vision and mission. This is in line with the findings of Supriyadi et al. (2024) who stated that educator management that includes integrated planning, recruitment, coaching, development, and performance evaluation is able to significantly increase learning effectiveness.

In the aspect of human resource development, Gapari (2025) revealed that training and competency development of educators and education personnel, including motivation and awards, are the main factors that affect the effectiveness of human resources in the digital era. Nurwiati et al. (2023) added that development that includes planning, coaching, development, evaluation, and compensation has a positive effect on learning effectiveness and the quality of educational services. Meanwhile, Aly (2025) emphasized the importance of revitalizing human resources that are oriented towards the formation of the character of students who are creative, innovative, and adaptive to technopreneurship in order to answer the challenges of globalization.

Principal's Instructional Leadership in Improving the Quality of Learning

Instructional leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes the role of the principal in directing, fostering, and supervising the learning process so that it runs effectively and is oriented to student learning outcomes (Sapitri, 2024). Referring to Hallinger's (2005) model, the principal as an instructional leader carries out

three main functions: defining the school's mission, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive learning climate. Maula & Hidayatullah (2024) explained that instructional leadership practices include academic supervision, teacher professional development, and the creation of a school culture that supports quality learning.

Gustray et al. (2024) empirically proved that instructional leadership in Private Vocational Schools in Koto Tangah District is in the good category with an achievement rate of 87.6%, and has a positive and significant relationship with the quality of learning which reaches 91.4%. Werdiningsih et al. (2022) strengthened this finding by proving that the principal's instructional leadership and teachers' professional competence together had a significant effect on teacher performance up to 78.4%. Rusman (2025) concluded that school principals who play the role of learning leaders are able to direct planning, ensure implementation as planned, and carry out supervision oriented to improving the quality of the teaching and learning process.

Instructional Leadership Strategies in Teacher Development

Teacher coaching is at the core of effective instructional leadership practices. Rosnita & Sulastri (2023) found that teachers' perceptions of the instructional leadership of school principals in vocational schools in Pasaman District were in the able category with an average score of 4.4, with indicators of learning supervision and harmonious relationships obtaining the highest score of 4.5. Wahyudi et al. (2019) showed that the principal at SMK Pelita Bangsa Sumberlawang succeeded in improving the quality of education through the management of supervision of the teaching and learning process, control of learning time, development of the teacher profession, and the provision of incentives to outstanding teachers and students.

Nur et al. (2025) revealed that the instructional leadership model has a positive and significant influence on self-development, collaboration, and job satisfaction of teachers in the Makassar City Vocational School, with instructional leadership being more dominant in improving self-development and collaboration. Maftuhah et al. (2018) also found that instructional leadership has an indirect effect on teacher citizenship behavior through procedural

justice, which suggests that the quality of principal's leadership has a broad impact not only on the technical aspects of learning but also on the teacher's overall professional behavior.

Synergy of Human Resource Management and Instructional Leadership

The relationship between MSDM and instructional leadership is synergistic and complementary in improving the quality of learning in vocational schools (Rinaldi et al., 2023). MSDM provides a planned and targeted educator management system, while instructional leadership ensures that the entire process focuses on improving the quality of learning in the classroom (Supriyadi et al., 2024). Muhammad et al. (2024) emphasized that good human resource management, including training, competency development, and teacher performance evaluation, has a direct effect on the quality of teaching and learning activities in schools.

Makalao et al. (2026) provide a concrete picture of this synergy through the leadership of industrial partnership-based principals at SMK Ma'arif Al Mizan Jatiwangi, where the principal plays the role of a strategic leader who strengthens the quality of learning, management of industrial partnerships, and the implementation of sustainable quality management through the PDCA cycle. These findings show that school principals who actively integrate HR management with instructional leadership are able to create an adaptive, innovative, and school-oriented school ecosystem that improves the competencies and work readiness of graduates.

The Impact of Human Resources Management and Instructional Leadership on the Quality of Learning in Vocational Schools

Studies of various studies show that the positive impact of MSDM and instructional leadership on the quality of learning in vocational schools can be seen from various dimensions. In terms of human resources, Julia & Ansori (2025) and Nurwiati et al. (2023) prove that human resource management, which includes planning, development, and evaluation of teacher performance, is able to increase school competitive advantage and learning effectiveness. Firdaus et al. (2025) added that the implementation of integrated principal management at SMK PGRI 15 Jakarta has succeeded in improving the quality of PAI

learning through program planning based on vocational curriculum, strengthening religious character, and utilizing digital technology.

In terms of instructional leadership, Werdiningsih et al. (2022) proved that the contribution of instructional leadership to teacher performance was 54.1% and professional competence was 75.6%, while together the two explained around 78.4% of teacher performance variations. Muhlis et al. (2025) found that school principals who implement visionary leadership in digitalization policies and teacher empowerment through technology training are able to encourage effective implementation of technology-based learning. Nena et al. (2021) also prove that transformational leadership combined with good human resource management has a significant effect on work motivation, work discipline, and teacher performance in vocational schools.

Supporting Factors and Obstacles in the Implementation of HR Management and Instructional Leadership in Vocational Schools

The implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) and instructional leadership in vocational high schools (SMKs) is influenced by various supporting factors and challenges. Key supporting factors include the principal's strong commitment to teacher professional development, the availability of structured training and supervision programs, and a school culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement in learning practices (Rusman, 2025). In addition, Wahyudi et al. (2019) emphasized that a positive school climate, accompanied by incentive systems for outstanding teachers and students, plays a significant role in enhancing learning quality and motivating educational stakeholders to achieve better performance.

Despite these strengths, several obstacles continue to hinder the effective implementation of HRM and instructional leadership. These challenges include limited digital infrastructure, inadequate technological readiness among teachers, and the absence of systematic and sustainable competency development programs (Gapari, 2025). Furthermore, Aly (2025) noted that many human resource revitalization initiatives in vocational schools remain in the early stages of development, particularly in areas such as industry-based curriculum integration, teaching factory implementation, and the

utilization of e-learning platforms. Firdaus et al. (2025) also identified a persistent gap between teachers' competencies and the rapidly evolving demands of technology-based learning. Addressing these challenges requires continuous professional development, strategic planning, and proactive leadership from school principals to ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills needed to deliver effective and relevant learning experiences.

Efforts to Optimize Human Resources Management and Instructional Leadership in Vocational Schools

Various efforts to optimize MSDM and instructional leadership have been identified from the existing literature review. Nur et al. (2025) recommend the application of an integrative leadership model that combines instructional, digital, and transformational leadership to comprehensively improve teacher self-development, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Makalao et al. (2026) suggest strengthening school partnerships with the industrial world as part of the principal's leadership strategy to ensure the relevance of graduate competencies to the needs of the job market.

Supriyadi et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of an educator management system that includes data-driven planning, selective recruitment, ongoing professional coaching, and transparent performance evaluation as the foundation for HR optimization. Muhlis et al. (2025) added that school principals need to develop a comprehensive digitalization roadmap, including teacher mentoring training, the provision of adequate ICT infrastructure, and the creation of a sustainable technology-based learning ecosystem. Febriyanti et al. (2024) emphasized that transformational and democratic leadership styles applied synergistically have proven effective in creating a positive school environment, increasing teacher motivation, and encouraging students' active participation in the learning process.

Implications for Improving the Quality and Competitiveness of Vocational School Graduates

The findings of this literature review have significant practical implications for improving the quality and competitiveness of vocational school graduates. Systematically implemented

MSDM and effective instructional leadership together contribute to the formation of a conducive learning ecosystem, resulting in competent, adaptive, and job-ready graduates (Makalao et al., 2026). The results of this study show that vocational schools that have a strong MSDM system and visionary instructional leadership tend to produce graduates with higher competitiveness in the job market.

Practical implications for vocational school principals include: (1) strengthening a data-based and competency-based teacher performance management system that is aligned with industry demands; (2) institutionalize academic supervision that is planned, sustainable, and oriented towards improving the quality of learning in the classroom; (3) to create a professional learning community that encourages collaboration and sharing of best practices; (4) integrating the needs of the industrial world into teacher development programs systematically; and (5) building a culture of innovation and technological adaptation that is the foundation for sustainable improvement of the quality of graduates. The synergy between structured MSDM and adaptive instructional leadership is thus a strategic key in producing vocational school graduates who are competent, professional, and able to compete in the ever-evolving industrial era.

CONCLUSION

Human Resource Management (HRDM) and instructional leadership are two strategic components that have an important role in improving the quality of learning in Vocational High Schools (SMK). Based on the literature review that has been conducted, MSDM functions as a system that manages educators and education personnel in a planned manner through the process of planning, recruitment, competency development, performance assessment, and continuous evaluation. Effective human resource management has been proven to be able to improve teacher competence, learning effectiveness, and school competitiveness. On the other hand, the instructional leadership of the principal plays a role in directing, fostering, supervising, and developing the learning process so that it is oriented towards improving student learning outcomes. The practice of academic supervision, teacher professional development, the creation of a positive learning culture, and the use of educational technology are important parts

of effective instructional leadership. The results of the study show that the synergy between MSDM and instructional leadership has a significant impact on improving teacher performance, the quality of the learning process, work motivation, professional collaboration, and the readiness of graduates to face the demands of the world of work. However, its implementation still faces various challenges, such as limited digital facilities, gaps in teacher technology competencies, and suboptimal human resource development programs based on industrial needs. Therefore, it is necessary for the principal's commitment to integrate HR management with instructional leadership through data-driven planning, strengthening industry partnerships, developing professional learning communities, and digitizing sustainable learning. Thus, vocational schools can produce graduates who are competent, adaptive, innovative, and highly competitive according to the needs of the world of work and the development of modern industry.

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