



Visionary Leadership and Teacher Competence in Strengthening Elementary School Competitiveness: An Instrumental Case Study

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Abstract

The quality of basic education in Indonesia continues to exhibit disparities between public and private elementary schools, particularly in rural areas where differences in leadership, teacher competence, and institutional capacity remain substantial. While previous studies have examined school leadership and teacher competence separately, limited research has explored their combined role in reducing educational quality disparities. This study analyzes the contribution of principals' visionary leadership and teacher competence to improving educational quality in Temanggung Regency. An instrumental qualitative case study was conducted in five purposively selected public elementary schools and one leading private elementary school. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Four themes emerged: (1) visionary leadership promotes continuous school improvement through a shared vision; (2) ongoing teacher professional development enhances instructional quality and learning innovation; (3) organizational adaptability and stakeholder collaboration strengthen school competitiveness; and (4) limited facilities, bureaucratic rigidity, and insufficient teacher development constrain quality improvement in public schools. Compared with the participating public schools, the private school implemented these dimensions more consistently, leading to stronger institutional performance and higher public trust. The findings underscore the need for integrated policies that reinforce leadership, teacher professionalism, organizational innovation, and institutional support to reduce educational disparities.

Keywords: Visionary Leadership; Elementary School Teacher Competence; Global Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Basic education plays a pivotal role in developing human capital and preparing future generations with competencies required in the twenty-first century. Although improving educational quality remains a national priority in Indonesia, substantial disparities persist not only between regions but also among schools operating within the same local context. An intriguing example can be observed in Temanggung Regency, Central Java, where several

neighboring public elementary schools have experienced a continuous decline in student enrollment, while one private elementary school located within the same educational environment consistently attracts approximately four to ten times more new students each academic year. This contrasting pattern cannot be sufficiently explained by differences in educational policies or regional socioeconomic conditions alone, suggesting that school-level organizational factors may play a decisive role in shaping institutional competitiveness (Vigna et al., 2026; Shi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, many education systems continue to experience disparities in educational quality caused by unequal access to educational resources, institutional capacity, and learning facilities (Odhiambo, 2024; Buadi et al., 2026).

Existing studies have widely acknowledged the importance of visionary leadership in enhancing school effectiveness, teacher motivation, and educational quality. Likewise, teacher competence has consistently been associated with improved instructional practices and student learning outcomes. However, most previous studies examine these variables in a general organizational context or compare schools across different regions. Limited attention has been given to situations in which schools operating under similar demographic, cultural, and policy environments exhibit strikingly different institutional performance. Consequently, the mechanisms through which visionary leadership and teacher competence contribute to school competitiveness in such anomalous contexts remain insufficiently understood.

Therefore, this instrumental case study investigates how visionary leadership and teacher competence contribute to the institutional competitiveness of an elementary school that has consistently demonstrated exceptional enrollment performance compared with neighboring public elementary schools in Temanggung Regency. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study aims to generate analytical insights into leadership practices that may explain this distinctive organizational phenomenon.

In Indonesia, basic education serves not only as a means of transferring academic knowledge but also as a foundation for character formation, literacy development, social competence, and lifelong learning. However, disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools remain a persistent challenge (Perwita & Widuri, 2022; Saputra & Suhartini, 2025). Consequently, parents increasingly prioritize school quality, institutional reputation, and educational services rather than geographical proximity when selecting schools for their children (Habibi et al., 2024; Berkat, 2025).

Socio-economic conditions further intensify disparities in educational quality. Rural public elementary schools frequently encounter limitations in infrastructure, learning technology, financial resources, and institutional flexibility, whereas many private schools are supported by stronger social capital, organizational investment, and adaptive management strategies that enhance educational competitiveness (Ipa et al., 2026). International evidence similarly indicates that educational reforms emphasizing leadership quality, teacher professional development, and institutional innovation significantly improve educational effectiveness and sustainability (Shi et al., 2025).

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that school leadership and teacher competence are fundamental determinants of educational quality. Visionary and transformational leadership enables principals to formulate strategic directions, foster innovation, strengthen organizational culture, and improve institutional adaptability to

educational change (Aydın et al., 2025; Schmitz et al., 2023; Holst et al., 2025). Likewise, teachers' professional competence, pedagogical expertise, digital literacy, and self-efficacy contribute substantially to creating innovative learning environments and improving student learning outcomes (Abdurrahman et al., 2025; Ru et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025). Conversely, limited institutional resources and inadequate professional development often reduce instructional quality and weaken school competitiveness, particularly in rural areas (Liu et al., 2024; Darwis et al., 2025).

Despite these findings, important research gaps remain. Most previous studies have investigated principal leadership, teacher competence, or educational quality as separate variables. Limited attention has been given to the interaction between visionary leadership and teacher competence in explaining disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools, particularly in rural Indonesian contexts. Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly focused on urban schools, academic achievement, or isolated institutional factors without adequately considering changing community preferences and institutional competitiveness as integral dimensions of educational quality (Khaqan & Redondo-Sama, 2024; Ayu & Ilmiana, 2025; Haetami, 2025).

Building upon previous research, this study supports the established importance of school leadership and teacher competence while extending existing educational management literature by integrating both variables within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine school leadership or teacher competence as separate determinants of educational quality, this study explores how both interact within a single organizational context to shape institutional competitiveness and educational quality. Focusing on an exceptional case in which neighboring public and private elementary schools operating under comparable demographic conditions exhibit markedly different enrollment patterns and institutional performance, the study provides an in-depth explanation of the organizational processes through which visionary leadership and teacher competence jointly influence school development.

This study contributes by examining an exceptional case in which a private elementary school consistently outperforms neighboring public schools in student enrollment despite operating within the same rural socioeconomic environment. By integrating visionary leadership, teacher competence, institutional competitiveness, organizational adaptability, and changing community preferences into a single analytical framework, the study provides insights that remain insufficiently addressed in previous research.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design to explore the role of principals' visionary leadership and teacher competence in addressing disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools in Temanggung Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, teacher professional development, and institutional dynamics within their natural educational context. The instrumental case study design was considered appropriate because it facilitates comprehensive exploration of educational quality

disparities through real-life cases, allowing the phenomenon to be understood beyond statistical generalization.

The study employed purposive case selection to investigate an exceptional educational phenomenon within the same local context. Five public elementary schools were selected because they are located within the same educational catchment area as the private school and have consistently experienced relatively low student enrollment over recent academic years. The private elementary school was selected as the focal case because it has consistently attracted substantially higher student enrollment, opened four new first-grade classes annually, and demonstrated sustained institutional performance despite operating under similar demographic and socioeconomic conditions. These contrasting institutional characteristics enabled an in-depth exploration of how visionary leadership and teacher competence may contribute to differences in educational quality and school competitiveness. Interviews explored participants' perspectives on visionary leadership, teacher competence, institutional challenges, and changing community preferences toward elementary education. Observations focused on leadership practices, school culture, learning activities, and teacher–principal interactions, while documentation included school profiles, student enrollment records, teacher development programs, policy documents, and educational achievement reports. To enhance data credibility, source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking were employed.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis followed an iterative thematic process through open coding, axial coding, and interpretation to identify patterns, relationships, and institutional strategies associated with educational quality disparities. The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through systematic field notes, an audit trail, continuous comparison of data sources, and researcher discussions to minimize interpretative bias. Ethical principles were maintained throughout the study by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, protecting participants' confidentiality through coding procedures, and using all research data exclusively for academic purposes.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Disparities in Educational Quality Between Public and Private Elementary Schools

The findings reveal a substantial disparity in educational quality between public and preferred private elementary schools in Temanggung Regency. Field observations, interviews, and document analysis consistently demonstrate considerable differences in student enrollment, institutional capacity, educational facilities, teacher professional development, and school competitiveness. The five public elementary schools included in this study enrolled only approximately 11–25 new students per school each academic year, whereas the preferred private elementary school consistently admitted approximately 100–120 new students annually. These findings indicate that a single private elementary school is capable of attracting a comparable number of students to the combined enrollment of five public elementary schools. Such evidence reflects a significant imbalance in public preference and institutional competitiveness within the local basic education system.

The disparity was further confirmed through direct observation of school facilities and institutional conditions. Public elementary schools generally experienced limitations in laboratory facilities, digital learning resources, library management, sports infrastructure, and innovation-supporting facilities. In contrast, the preferred private elementary school had established integrated science laboratories, digital libraries, coding classes, multimedia learning facilities, and well-maintained sports infrastructure. Interviews with school principals and teachers further indicated that these differences were not merely physical but also reflected unequal institutional capacity in managing educational development. Consequently, educational quality is increasingly perceived by parents not only through academic achievement but also through the availability of learning resources and the school's ability to provide an innovative educational environment.

The findings also demonstrate substantial differences in institutional management and organizational adaptability. Public elementary schools tend to operate within relatively rigid administrative procedures and centralized educational regulations, limiting institutional flexibility in responding to educational change. Conversely, the preferred private elementary school possesses greater organizational autonomy, enabling school leaders to initiate curriculum enrichment, develop innovative learning programs, strengthen partnerships with stakeholders, and implement continuous institutional improvement. Such flexibility allows private schools to respond more effectively to changing educational demands and strengthens their institutional reputation within the community.

Teacher professional development represents another important dimension contributing to educational quality disparities. The study found that teacher training in public elementary schools is generally conducted only once or twice annually and depends primarily on programs organized by educational authorities. In contrast, the preferred private elementary school independently organizes professional development activities four to six times each year, emphasizing digital literacy, innovative pedagogy, collaborative learning, and classroom creativity. This institutional commitment creates greater opportunities for teachers to continuously improve their professional competence and instructional effectiveness. Interview data further revealed that teachers in private schools perceive professional development as an integral component of school culture rather than merely an administrative requirement.

These findings indicate that disparities in educational quality extend beyond differences in physical infrastructure. Instead, they reflect broader institutional inequalities encompassing leadership effectiveness, teacher competency development, organizational innovation, and strategic school management. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that educational quality is strongly influenced by institutional capacity rather than solely by material resources (Aydin et al., 2025; McElfish et al., 2021). Similarly, research by (Shi et al., 2025) suggests that sustainable school improvement depends on the interaction between educational leadership, teacher professional development, and organizational learning. The present findings support these perspectives while providing empirical evidence from rural Indonesia that institutional flexibility and continuous human resource development substantially influence school competitiveness.

Another important finding concerns changing community preferences regarding elementary education. Parents increasingly evaluate schools based on educational quality,

institutional credibility, learning innovation, and future educational opportunities rather than geographic proximity alone. Although accessibility remains important for many families choosing public schools, parents selecting preferred private schools are willing to travel longer distances to obtain higher-quality educational services. This shift illustrates that educational quality has become a strategic determinant of public trust and institutional competitiveness. Consequently, competition among elementary schools is no longer based primarily on location but increasingly on the capacity of schools to provide innovative, high-quality, and sustainable educational services.

Overall, these findings answer the first research question by demonstrating that disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools are multidimensional. They are shaped by institutional governance, organizational flexibility, teacher professional development, educational innovation, and changing community expectations rather than by differences in facilities alone. Therefore, efforts to reduce educational inequality require comprehensive strategies that strengthen institutional capacity, improve school management, and promote sustainable teacher professional development alongside equitable resource distribution.

Visionary Leadership and School Competitiveness

Three major findings emerged from this study. First, differences in educational quality between the selected public and private elementary schools were primarily associated with differences in leadership orientation rather than differences in formal educational policies. Second, visionary leadership shaped teachers' professional learning, organizational culture, and institutional adaptability, which collectively strengthened school competitiveness. Third, institutional competitiveness was influenced not merely by the availability of facilities but by principals' capacity to mobilize available resources, build external partnerships, and respond strategically to changing community expectations.

Field observations further revealed that visionary leadership was reflected not only in strategic planning but also in daily managerial practices. Principals of preferred private schools actively initiated curriculum enrichment programs, encouraged the integration of digital learning technologies, developed partnerships with external stakeholders, and created organizational environments that supported creativity and collaboration among teachers. Interview data also indicated that teachers perceived school leaders as facilitators and motivators who consistently encouraged professional growth rather than merely supervising administrative performance. Such leadership practices created a shared institutional commitment toward continuous improvement and strengthened teachers' confidence in implementing innovative learning strategies.

Conversely, leadership practices in public elementary schools tended to remain administrative and procedural. School principals reported that institutional development initiatives were frequently constrained by centralized regulations, bureaucratic procedures, and limited managerial flexibility. As a result, opportunities to introduce educational innovation or respond rapidly to changing educational needs were often restricted. Teachers also acknowledged that although school leaders demonstrated commitment to fulfilling administrative responsibilities, strategic efforts to build long-term institutional competitiveness

were still relatively limited. These findings suggest that institutional flexibility significantly influences the effectiveness of school leadership in promoting educational transformation.

The findings support previous research emphasizing that visionary and transformational leadership positively influences school effectiveness, organizational innovation, teacher motivation, and educational quality. Likewise, (Holst et al., 2025) argue that educational leadership should extend beyond administrative management toward creating adaptive learning organizations capable of responding to technological and societal change. The present study confirms these perspectives while providing additional evidence that visionary leadership is particularly important in rural elementary schools facing disparities in institutional quality and increasing competition for student enrollment.

However, this study also extends previous research in several important ways. Earlier studies have primarily examined school leadership from the perspectives of instructional management, transformational leadership, or administrative effectiveness. Limited attention has been given to how visionary leadership interacts with institutional competitiveness, organizational adaptability, and community educational preferences within the context of disparities between public and private elementary schools. The findings of this study demonstrate that visionary leadership not only improves internal school management but also strengthens institutional reputation, public trust, and long-term educational sustainability. Consequently, school leadership should be understood as a strategic institutional resource that directly influences educational competitiveness rather than merely an administrative function.

The results further indicate that visionary leadership contributes to strengthening organizational learning by encouraging collaboration, innovation, and continuous professional development among teachers. Through clear institutional vision, effective communication, and participatory decision-making, school leaders create organizational conditions that enable teachers to adapt more effectively to educational change. This institutional environment supports sustainable school improvement and enhances schools' capacity to respond to evolving educational demands in the era of globalization.

Overall, these findings answer the second research question by demonstrating that visionary leadership functions as a strategic mechanism for improving institutional quality, strengthening organizational adaptability, and enhancing school competitiveness. More importantly, this study contributes to educational management literature by showing that the effectiveness of visionary leadership is determined not only by administrative capability but also by the principal's ability to integrate institutional vision, teacher empowerment, organizational innovation, and community engagement into a sustainable strategy for improving educational quality. This integrated perspective represents the primary theoretical contribution of the present study and distinguishes it from previous research that has generally examined school leadership as an isolated organizational variable.

Teacher Competence and Educational Quality

The findings indicate that teacher competence represents a strategic determinant of educational quality and institutional competitiveness in elementary schools. Data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis demonstrate substantial differences in teacher professional development between public and preferred private elementary schools. Public elementary schools generally rely on professional development programs organized by

local education authorities, with training activities conducted only once or twice annually. These programs primarily focus on curriculum implementation and administrative compliance. In contrast, the preferred private elementary school systematically organizes teacher professional development four to six times each year, emphasizing digital literacy, innovative pedagogy, collaborative learning, classroom research, and technology-integrated instruction. This institutional commitment enables teachers to continuously improve their professional competence and adapt to rapidly changing educational demands.

Interview findings further reveal that continuous professional development positively influences teachers' confidence, instructional creativity, and willingness to adopt innovative learning approaches. Teachers in the preferred private elementary school perceived professional learning as an integral part of the school's organizational culture rather than a compulsory administrative activity. They reported greater opportunities to participate in workshops, peer learning, mentoring programs, and collaborative lesson planning. Conversely, teachers in public elementary schools acknowledged that limited institutional support and infrequent training opportunities reduced their ability to implement innovative instructional practices consistently. Consequently, differences in institutional investment directly influence disparities in teacher competence and ultimately affect educational quality.

Classroom observations also indicate that higher teacher competence contributes to more interactive, student-centered, and technology-supported learning environments. Teachers with stronger pedagogical and digital competencies demonstrated greater flexibility in selecting instructional strategies, integrating digital resources, encouraging collaborative learning, and promoting students' critical thinking and creativity. These practices align closely with the competencies required for twenty-first-century education and contribute to improving students' learning experiences. In contrast, classrooms with limited professional support tended to rely on conventional teaching approaches that provided fewer opportunities for active student engagement and instructional innovation.

These findings support previous studies emphasizing that teacher competence is one of the strongest predictors of educational quality and student achievement. Likewise, (Liu et al., 2024) argue that continuous professional development enhances teachers' confidence in integrating educational technology and responding effectively to curriculum transformation. The present findings further reinforce the argument that teacher competence should not be viewed solely as an individual professional attribute but also as an institutional asset that strengthens school effectiveness, organizational learning, and educational competitiveness.

Nevertheless, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that teacher competence develops through institutional commitment rather than individual capacity alone. While earlier studies have generally examined teacher competence from pedagogical or instructional perspectives, this research shows that sustained competency development depends on visionary school leadership, supportive organizational culture, continuous professional learning, and institutional investment in human resource development. Therefore, disparities in educational quality cannot be explained simply by differences in teachers' personal abilities but must also be understood as consequences of unequal institutional capacity to facilitate professional growth.

Another important finding is that teacher competence contributes significantly to strengthening public trust in educational institutions. Parents increasingly associate teacher professionalism, instructional innovation, and learning quality with the overall reputation of schools. As a result, schools that consistently invest in teacher professional development are perceived as more capable of preparing students for future educational challenges. This finding suggests that teacher competence functions not only as an instructional factor but also as a strategic institutional resource influencing school competitiveness, student enrollment, and long-term educational sustainability.

Overall, these findings answer the third research question by confirming that teacher competence is a multidimensional construct closely associated with institutional quality, organizational innovation, and educational competitiveness. More importantly, this study contributes to educational management literature by proposing that sustainable teacher competence emerges from the interaction between visionary leadership, organizational learning, and institutional support rather than from individual professional capacity alone. This integrated perspective represents an important theoretical contribution and provides a broader explanation for disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools within the Indonesian context

Community Preferences and Educational Competitiveness

These findings support the argument that school choice increasingly reflects market-oriented educational behavior, in which parents evaluate schools based on perceived educational value rather than physical proximity. This pattern is consistent with the concept of institutional competitiveness, suggesting that schools capable of responding to changing societal expectations are more likely to sustain public trust. However, the present study indicates that these considerations are gradually being replaced by greater concern for educational quality, institutional reputation, teacher competence, and learning innovation. Interview data demonstrate that many parents are willing to enroll their children in preferred private elementary schools despite greater travel distances and higher educational costs because they perceive these schools as providing better preparation for students' future academic and professional development.

Field observations further indicate that this shift in community preference is closely associated with institutional competitiveness. Preferred private elementary schools consistently develop educational innovations, strengthen school branding, improve learning facilities, and invest in continuous teacher professional development. These institutional strategies enhance public trust and reinforce the schools' reputation within the local community. In contrast, public elementary schools continue to attract students primarily because of affordability and geographical accessibility rather than perceived educational excellence. Consequently, differences in institutional quality increasingly influence parents' educational decisions and contribute to disparities in student enrollment between public and private schools.

The findings also suggest that parents increasingly perceive elementary education as a long-term investment in their children's future rather than merely a compulsory stage of formal education. Parents expect schools to equip students with competencies required for the twenty-first century, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, and global awareness. Therefore, school selection is becoming more strongly

influenced by institutional capacity to provide innovative learning environments that prepare students for future educational and societal challenges. This finding illustrates that educational competitiveness has become closely linked to the ability of schools to respond to evolving community expectations and educational transformation.

These findings support previous studies arguing that parental school choice is increasingly determined by educational quality, institutional credibility, and learning effectiveness rather than solely by physical accessibility (Habibi et al., 2024; Chen & Murray, 2026). Similarly, educational competitiveness is strengthened when schools successfully develop adaptive organizational cultures, maintain high-quality educational services, and build sustainable relationships with stakeholders. The present findings reinforce these perspectives by demonstrating that community trust functions as an important institutional asset that directly influences school sustainability and competitiveness.

However, this study also extends previous research by showing that changing community preferences are not exclusively influenced by socio-economic considerations but are strongly associated with the interaction between visionary leadership, teacher competence, institutional innovation, and organizational adaptability. While earlier studies have generally examined parental preferences from economic or demographic perspectives, the present research demonstrates that institutional quality has become an increasingly influential determinant of school choice in rural elementary education. This finding broadens existing understanding of educational competitiveness by positioning community trust as both an outcome of institutional quality and a strategic resource for sustainable school development.

Overall, these findings answer the fourth research question by confirming that community preferences have shifted toward a stronger orientation to educational quality and institutional competitiveness. More importantly, this study demonstrates that sustainable school competitiveness is achieved not only through adequate educational facilities but also through visionary leadership, continuous teacher professional development, organizational innovation, and the ability of schools to build public confidence. This integrated perspective strengthens the theoretical understanding of educational competitiveness and provides practical implications for policymakers and school leaders seeking to reduce disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools.

Theoretical Contribution and Research Novelty

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the field of educational management, particularly in understanding disparities in educational quality between public and private elementary schools. Previous studies have generally examined principal leadership, teacher competence, institutional quality, or educational competitiveness as separate constructs. While these studies have significantly contributed to educational research, they have provided only a partial explanation of the complex institutional factors influencing disparities in elementary education. The present study demonstrates that educational quality disparities are multidimensional phenomena resulting from the interaction of visionary leadership, teacher competence, organizational adaptability, institutional innovation, and changing community preferences. Consequently, educational inequality should be understood not merely as a consequence of unequal educational resources but also as an outcome of differences in institutional capacity to respond to educational transformation.

The findings also extend previous educational leadership literature by positioning visionary leadership as a strategic institutional capability rather than solely an administrative or managerial function. The study shows that principals who formulate a clear institutional vision, encourage innovation, empower teachers, and strengthen organizational culture are more successful in building sustainable school competitiveness. Likewise, teacher competence is conceptualized not simply as an individual professional attribute but as an institutional asset developed through continuous professional learning, supportive leadership, and organizational commitment. These findings suggest that educational quality emerges from the interaction between leadership effectiveness, human resource development, and institutional learning rather than from isolated organizational factors.

Another important contribution of this study is the integration of community preferences into the analysis of educational competitiveness. The findings reveal that parents increasingly evaluate schools based on institutional credibility, teacher professionalism, educational innovation, and future learning opportunities instead of relying solely on geographical accessibility or educational costs. This indicates that public trust has become an important strategic resource influencing school sustainability and institutional competitiveness. Accordingly, educational competitiveness should be viewed as a dynamic process shaped by the reciprocal relationship between school capacity and community expectations.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of an integrated perspective explaining disparities in elementary education through the interaction of visionary leadership, teacher competence, organizational innovation, institutional adaptability, and community preferences within a rural Indonesian context. Unlike previous studies that examined these dimensions independently, this research proposes that sustainable educational quality is achieved through the synergistic relationship among institutional leadership, continuous teacher professional development, adaptive organizational culture, and public trust. This integrated framework offers a broader conceptual explanation of educational competitiveness and provides a foundation for future studies on educational quality improvement, particularly in developing countries facing similar institutional disparities. Furthermore, the findings provide practical implications for policymakers by emphasizing that reducing educational inequality requires comprehensive policies that strengthen leadership capacity, teacher professional development, institutional innovation, and collaborative partnerships between schools and communities rather than focusing exclusively on infrastructure development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that disparities in the quality of basic education between public and private elementary schools in Temanggung Regency are shaped by the interaction of institutional capacity, visionary school leadership, and teacher competence. The findings demonstrate that preferred private elementary schools are more successful in developing educational competitiveness through adaptive leadership, continuous teacher professional development, organizational innovation, and stronger institutional management. In contrast, public elementary schools continue to experience structural constraints, including limited institutional flexibility, insufficient professional development opportunities, and restricted educational resources, which reduce their capacity to respond effectively to changing educational demands. These findings answer the research objective by confirming that improving educational quality

requires integrated institutional strategies rather than isolated improvements in educational facilities alone.

The study also reveals that community preferences for elementary education are increasingly influenced by school quality, institutional credibility, and learning innovation rather than geographical proximity or educational costs. This finding suggests that educational competitiveness is becoming an important determinant of public trust and school sustainability. Theoretically, this research contributes to educational management literature by demonstrating that educational quality disparities can be better understood through the interaction of visionary leadership, teacher competence, organizational adaptability, and community preferences. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening leadership capacity, expanding continuous teacher professional development, encouraging institutional innovation, and providing greater managerial flexibility for public schools as strategic priorities for improving educational quality and reducing educational disparities.

This study is limited to a qualitative investigation conducted in a single regency with a relatively small number of research sites; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all educational contexts in Indonesia. Future research is recommended to employ comparative studies across different regions and educational settings, integrate quantitative or mixed-method approaches, and examine additional institutional factors influencing educational competitiveness. Such investigations would provide a broader understanding of educational quality disparities and support the formulation of more effective and evidence-based educational policies.

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