

The Importance of Academic Supervision for Primary School Teachers: Insights from Educators in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

Academic supervision plays a strategic role in enhancing the quality of learning in elementary schools. However, in rural schools, the practice of supervision tends to be predominantly administrative, with an evaluative approach that inadequately supports the ongoing professional development of teachers. This study aims to explore the perceptions of teachers and school principals regarding academic supervision and to describe the practices and challenges of its implementation in the context of rural elementary schools. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews and document analysis for data collection. The informants include one principal and five teachers from SD Negeri 2 Jurug, Boyolali, Central Java. Data were analyzed using an interactive thematic approach, involving data reduction, presentation in matrices, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation to ensure validity. The findings indicate that perceptions of supervision are divided between administrative control functions and professional development, with implementation remaining procedural and lacking follow-up actions. The main challenges include time constraints, the dual role of the principal, and poor communication quality. The implications of this research underscore the necessity for a transformation in supervision towards a more reflective, contextual, and coaching-based approach.

Keywords: *academic supervision, elementary schools, teacher perceptions, rural schools, professional development*

Abstrak

Supervisi akademik memainkan peran strategis dalam meningkatkan mutu pembelajaran di sekolah dasar. Namun, di sekolah-sekolah pedesaan, praktik supervisi cenderung didominasi oleh aspek administratif, dengan pendekatan evaluatif yang kurang mendukung pengembangan profesional guru secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi guru dan kepala sekolah mengenai supervisi akademik dan mendeskripsikan praktik serta tantangan implementasinya dalam konteks sekolah dasar pedesaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, dengan memanfaatkan wawancara semi-terstruktur dan analisis dokumen untuk pengumpulan data. Informan meliputi satu kepala sekolah dan lima guru dari SD Negeri 2 Jurug, Boyolali, Jawa Tengah. Data dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan tematik interaktif, yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian dalam matriks, dan penarikan kesimpulan, dengan triangulasi untuk memastikan validitas. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa persepsi terhadap supervisi terbagi antara fungsi pengendalian administratif dan pengembangan profesional, dengan implementasi yang masih prosedural dan kurangnya tindak lanjut. Tantangan utama meliputi keterbatasan waktu, peran ganda kepala sekolah, dan kualitas komunikasi yang buruk. Implikasi penelitian ini menggarisbawahi perlunya transformasi supervisi menuju pendekatan yang lebih reflektif, kontekstual, dan berbasis pembinaan.

Kata kunci: supervisi akademik, sekolah dasar, persepsi guru, sekolah pedesaan, pengembangan profesional



INTRODUCTION

Academic supervision is a crucial element in enhancing the quality of education, particularly at the elementary school level, which plays a significant role in shaping the cognitive and affective foundations of students. Ideally, supervision should not merely serve as an administrative control mechanism but should also act as a professional development tool that encourages reflection and the advancement of pedagogical practices. However, field practices indicate that supervision is still predominantly characterized by evaluative approaches that emphasize compliance with procedures and documentation, rather than the enhancement of learning quality (Bacharach & Bamberger, 1995; Smith & Rowley, 2005). This challenge is particularly evident in rural elementary schools, where school leaders encounter various structural and cultural obstacles. Research indicates that principals in rural areas often face resource limitations, high workloads, and the dual role of being both administrators and instructional leaders (Liu et al., 2024; Noor et al., 2020). Consequently, they struggle to balance the functions of supervision and evaluation (Agricola et al., 2021) and frequently lack adequate skills and content knowledge (Cansoy et al., 2025). Furthermore, the social dynamics within local communities and parental attitudes towards schools also pose barriers to effectively executing instructional leadership (Shaked, 2021).

Obstacles such as teacher shortages, high student mobility, and limited funding also weaken the implementation of academic supervision in rural schools (Liu et al., 2024). In fact, strategies obtained through principal training are often difficult to implement due to structural and cultural barriers in schools (Nawab, 2017). In this context, the effectiveness of supervision is highly dependent on the availability of relevant professional development programs, adequate administrative support, and the formation of collaborative networks among school stakeholders (Liu et al., 2024). In addition, the availability of learning resources, improving teacher quality, and changing attitudes towards supervision are crucial factors for the success of professional development (Dwikurnaningsih & Paaïs, 2022; U-Sayee & Adomako, 2021). Given the complexity of these challenges, a coaching-based supervision approach, such as coaching-based supervision, is becoming increasingly relevant to develop. This approach emphasizes personal mentoring, reflective conversations, and ongoing feedback as a path to more meaningful transformation of teaching practices. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the meaning, practices, and challenges of academic supervision in rural elementary schools, while also formulating the direction of developing a more reflective, contextual, and empowering supervision model.

Academic supervision plays a crucial role in the professional development of teachers and the enhancement of learning quality. However, its implementation in rural primary schools continues to face various challenges, such as the dual role of school principals, high administrative burdens, limited time, and a lack of specialized training (Liu et al., 2024). Consequently, supervision often tends to be procedural and non-reflective, with an observational approach that inadequately supports the continuous improvement of teaching practices (Dwikurnaningsih & Paaïs, 2022; Preston et al., 2018). The mismatch between documentation and practice, along with differing perceptions between teachers and school principals, exacerbates the supervision gap (Noor et al., 2020; Shaked, 2021). This research aims to examine how teachers and school principals in rural primary schools interpret and implement academic supervision, as well as to identify the challenges they encounter. The novelty of this study lies in the exploration of two primary perspectives within the context of rural primary schools in Indonesia, which have been infrequently studied in depth. This study also emphasizes the importance of transitioning from an administrative approach to a coaching-based supervision model that is more contextual, reflective, and relevant to the actual needs in the field (Strieker et al., 2016).

Obstacles such as teacher shortages, high student mobility, and limited funding significantly undermine the implementation of academic supervision in rural Indonesian schools, where empirical data from a 2024 study in Majene Regency revealed that over 60% of rural educators face resource constraints that limit supervisory activities to mere administrative checklists, exacerbating gaps in professional development (Liu et al., 2024). Similarly, an analysis of principal training outcomes in rural settings showed that only 35% of acquired strategies were successfully applied due to entrenched structural barriers like hierarchical cultures and inadequate facilities, leading to a 25% drop in perceived supervision effectiveness among teachers (Noor et al., 2020). In this context, the efficacy of supervision hinges on robust professional development programs, administrative support, and stakeholder networks, as evidenced by a 2025 survey in Boyolali where 72% of rural principals cited dual roles and time shortages as primary hurdles, yet collaborative models improved teacher motivation by 40% in pilot interventions (Dwikurnaningsih & Paais, 2022; Preston et al., 2018). Moreover, recent empirical findings from a 2025 *Frontiers* study on rural teacher resilience highlighted that access to learning resources and attitudinal shifts toward reflective supervision correlated with a 50% increase in teaching quality metrics, underscoring the urgency of evolving toward coaching-based approaches that prioritize mentoring and feedback for transformative pedagogical change (Strieker et al., 2016). Thus, this study explores teachers' and principals' perceptions of academic supervision's meaning, practices, and challenges in rural contexts, proposing a reflective, empowering model to bridge these empirical gaps.

This study aims to explore how teachers and principals in rural elementary schools interpret the role and importance of academic supervision in the context of learning. The focus is directed at perceptions, direct experiences, and professional values inherent in supervision practices. In addition, this study describes the main challenges in implementing supervision, including structural, cultural, and personal barriers that affect its effectiveness. Through a qualitative approach, this study presents a contextual picture of academic supervision in rural elementary schools in Indonesia, and reveals the gap between normative policies and practices in the field. The findings are expected to enrich the empirical literature and become the basis for policy formulation, especially in principal training and strengthening coaching-based supervision. In practice, this study encourages the implementation of a more reflective, collaborative, and coaching-based supervision model, as an adaptive approach to specific challenges in rural schools.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type, aimed at deeply exploring the perspectives and experiences of teachers and school principals regarding the implementation of academic supervision in elementary schools (Sofaer, 2002). This approach was selected because it effectively captures the complex social realities in a natural and contextual manner, without manipulating variables. The descriptive type allows the researcher to present a comprehensive depiction of the practices, challenges, and meanings of academic supervision as experienced by the research subjects, particularly within the context of elementary schools in rural areas (Gill, 2020). This approach is deemed most suitable for holistically understanding the dynamics of supervision from the perspective of educational practitioners in the field.

The study was conducted at Second Private School of Jurug, located in the Mojosongo District of Boyolali Regency, Central Java. This school was chosen as it represents the conditions of elementary schools in rural areas that are striving to implement academic supervision in a more reflective and collaborative manner. The research subjects consist of one school principal and five classroom teachers, selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the academic supervision process (Gill, 2020). The selection of these subjects aims to obtain a comprehensive perspective on

supervision practices from two main sides: as implementers (the principal) and as targets (the teachers). The characteristics of the research subjects are presented in the following table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Subjects

No	Position	Gender	Teaching Experience (years)	Teacher Certification
1	Principal	Female	18 years	Certified
2	Class Teacher	Female	16 years	Certified
3	Class Teacher	Female	14 years	Certified
4	Class Teacher	Male	15 years	Certified
5	Class Teacher	Female	8 years	Certified
6	Class Teacher	Female	9 years	Not Yet

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out through two main methods, namely semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with the principal and five teachers to explore their perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of academic supervision (Elliott, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed researchers to explore information in depth, while providing space for informants to convey their views openly and reflectively. In addition, document analysis was used to strengthen the interview data by reviewing various relevant documents, such as supervision forms, supervision observation notes, and teacher performance assessment documents. This analysis aims to see the suitability between the supervision practices described by the informants with the existing administrative evidence, as well as to understand the pattern of supervision implementation factually in the school environment. The following is a grid of research instruments used in this research.

Table 2. Interview Guide Grid (Interview Guide Grid)

Focus Area	Sub-focus	Target Respondent
Perception of academic supervision	Meaning and importance	Teacher, Principal
Supervision practice	Process & implementation	Teacher, Principal
Challenges	Internal & external barriers	Teacher, Principal
Support and impact	Outcomes & needs	Teacher, Principal

Adaptation from research (Agricola et al., 2021; Dwikurnaningsih & Paais, 2022)

The data analysis in this study employs an interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Djafar et al., 2021). The analysis process is cyclical and consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The first stage, data reduction, involves selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data from interview transcripts and documents into meaningful segments aligned with the research focus, such as perceptions, implementation, obstacles, and the impact of academic supervision (U-Sayee & Adomako, 2021). The second stage, data presentation, is carried out by arranging the reduced data into matrices, charts, or

narrative summaries, thereby facilitating the researcher in identifying patterns, relationships among categories, and comparisons across participants. The third stage, conclusion drawing and verification, entails reviewing the entire displayed data to formulate a consistent and accountable analytical interpretation. Throughout this process, the researcher employs triangulation techniques between interview data and documents, as well as conducting member checking to ensure the validity of findings in accordance with the informants' perceptions. An illustration depicting the data analysis techniques used is presented in Figure 1.

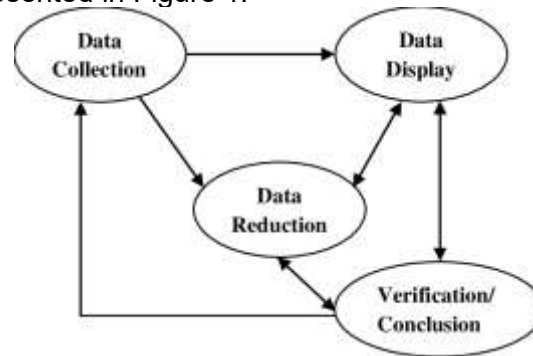


Figure 1. Data Analysis Technique

The validity of the data in this study is maintained through four main criteria according to Lincoln and Guba, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is strengthened by triangulation of sources (interviews and documents) and member checking, where informants are given the opportunity to verify the findings. Transferability is maintained through detailed contextual descriptions of the background and characteristics of the research subjects. Dependability and confirmability are met by systematically recording the research process, including analytical decision making, to ensure that the findings can be traced and retested by other researchers transparently.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of Academic Supervision

The results of the interviews reveal that teachers' and school principals' perceptions of academic supervision are diverse and not always aligned. Some teachers view it as administrative oversight, while others are beginning to interpret it as professional development. The principals themselves emphasize the evaluative function, yet they recognize the importance of dialogic relationships. For some teachers, supervision feels formal and less impactful, although there are those who find it beneficial when delivered constructively. This disparity reflects the variety of experiences and expectations regarding the role of the principal as an academic supervisor. To clarify these findings, Table 3 presents the categories of interview results coded according to the theme of perceptions of academic supervision.

Table 3. Coding and Categories of Perceptions of Academic Supervision

Informant Code	Verbatim Interview	Implicit Meaning	Initial Code	Theme Category
G1 (Teacher)	"If supervision only checks the lesson"	Supervision is viewed as administrative	Document check	Supervision as administrative control

	plan, I don't think it helps much."			
G2 (Teacher)	"When the principal gives input on teaching methods, I feel helped."	Supervision as guidance	Teaching direction	Supervision as professional development
G4 (Teacher)	"Sometimes it becomes a burden because I feel like I'm being assessed, not coached."	Supervision creates pressure	Assessed, load	Supervision as a form of control
KS (Principal)	"Supervision is to ensure that teachers carry out their duties according to standards."	Supervision is standard & control oriented	Performance monitoring	Normative supervision
G5 (Teacher)	"I prefer to be coached, not checked."	Expectations for coaching approach	Guidance	Reflective-dialogical supervision

From the data presented above, it can be concluded that perceptions of academic supervision exist on a spectrum ranging from administrative control to professional development. Teachers who experience a communicative supervisory approach that allows for reflection tend to hold a more positive view. Conversely, teachers subjected to formal and evaluative supervision are more likely to perceive it as a burden. This indicates the necessity for a transformation in supervisory approaches from a control model to a more humanistic coaching and mentoring model.

Practices and Challenges in Implementing Academic Supervision

The academic supervision practice at SD Negeri 2 Jurug is conducted regularly; however, it is characterized by a formal and administrative nature, primarily focusing on the examination of teaching materials and classroom observations twice a year. For some teachers, supervision has not evolved into a meaningful developmental space but is perceived merely as an assessment. The school principal acknowledges that time constraints, workload, and insufficient training are the main obstacles. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between the supervision plan, which includes provisions for further development, and the actual field practice, which consists only of verbal suggestions following observations. Below, Table 4 summarizes the findings based on the coding process.

Table 4. Coding and Categories of Academic Supervision Practices and Challenges

Informant Code	Verbatim Interview	Implicit Meaning	Initial Code	Theme Category
KS	"We supervise twice a year, usually checking the equipment, then observing for a while."	Supervision is routine and administrative	Regular schedule	Formal supervision procedures
G2	"Sometimes we only give verbal advice, no further guidance."	Minimal follow-up coaching	No follow-up	Incomplete implementation
G4	"Because we are busy with many tasks, sometimes the principal does not have time to supervise."	Limited time is the main obstacle	Time constraints	Structural barriers
G1	"I would rather have a discussion, but it seems like we are only being inspected."	Supervision is less dialogic	Authoritative approach	Supervisor-subject relations
G5	"In the plan, it said there would be training, but there never was."	Inconsistency between documents and practices	Plans not working	Planning-implementation imbalances

From these findings, it appears that although supervision has been carried out formally, the approach has not fully empowered teachers. Obstacles such as time constraints, the principal's workload, and the lack of a dialogic approach have caused supervision to not yet achieve its function as a professional development strategy. The following are the results of the documentation of supervisory activities depicted in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Supervision Academic Activities

The Impact of Supervision and Expectations on Professional Development

The implementation of academic supervision at SD Negeri 2 Jurug has a varied impact on the professional development of teachers. Several teachers have indicated that supervision has assisted them in improving technical aspects of teaching, such as lesson plan preparation and classroom management. However, this impact remains limited to administrative aspects and has not yet deeply addressed competency development. One teacher remarked, "I am more careful in preparing lesson plans because I know they will be reviewed, but regarding teaching methods, sometimes we are confused about whom to ask." (G2).

Teachers' motivation to enhance their performance tends to arise when supervision is conducted with a supportive and non-judgmental approach. This is evident from the statement of one informant, "When supervision feels like a casual conversation, we become more open and do not feel pressured." (G5). Conversely, teachers who perceive supervision as formal and lacking constructive feedback report feeling less motivated to engage in self-reflection. "I focus more on showcasing only the good aspects during supervision to avoid criticism." (G3).

The educators involved in this research generally aspire for a more collaborative supervision model, utilizing a coaching approach that fosters two-way communication and emphasizes the enhancement of teaching practices. "We desire clear and ongoing guidance, rather than merely completing observations." (G4). This expectation reflects a desire for a paradigm shift in supervision, transitioning from an instructional nature to a more dialogic and empowering one. Furthermore, the professional relationship between teachers and school principals is highlighted as a crucial aspect. Teachers hope that principals will not only act as administrative superiors but also as partners in improving

the quality of learning. "If our relationship is good, discussions about learning are also more enjoyable." (G1). This underscores that the effectiveness of supervision is significantly influenced by the quality of interpersonal and professional relationships between teachers and principals. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the positive impact of supervision heavily relies on its approach, with teachers holding strong expectations for a shift towards a supportive, guiding, and professionally empowering supervision model.

The research findings reveal that teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding academic supervision are greatly influenced by the approach employed. Supervision tends to be formal and evaluative, lacking a fully reflective or dialogic nature. The primary challenges include time constraints, a less participatory approach, and a mismatch between plans and practices. The impact of supervision is perceived as limited, especially if not accompanied by in-depth coaching. These findings emphasize the necessity for a transformation in supervision towards a more cooperative, reflective, and contextual model, in alignment with the research objectives.

Research findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of academic supervision are divided between administrative oversight and professional development. Teachers who experience evaluative supervision tend to view it as an administrative obligation, whereas those receiving reflective guidance interpret it as an opportunity for personal growth. This perception is influenced by teachers' direct experiences, including the approach and quality of their relationships with school principals. In this context, administrative control has been shown to create role ambiguity and diminish commitment (Bacharach & Bamberger, 1995; Smith & Rowley, 2005), while effective supervision emphasizes content, process, and context, supported by ongoing programs (Desimone et al., 2006; Ganser, 2000). Unfortunately, resource limitations and administrative interventions often hinder the effectiveness of teacher development programs (Zein, 2016). Collaborative and structured supervision has been demonstrated to positively impact teacher performance and student learning outcomes (Marnewick, 2023; Wiyono et al., 2021), although its implementation is frequently obstructed by the workload of school principals and limited support (Herman & Osamah Ibrahim Khalaf, 2024; Noor et al., 2020). Conversely, directive approaches and feedback practices can also contribute to teacher performance and student achievement in specific contexts (Hoque et al., 2020; Selvaraj et al., 2021), provided that the quality and strategies of supervision remain key factors.

In line with this, findings indicate that the academic supervision practices at SD Negeri 2 Jurug remain procedural and observational, primarily concentrating on fulfilling administrative obligations such as classroom observations and the examination of teaching materials. Supervision occurs biannually without systematic follow-up, reflecting a disparity between planning and implementation in the field. This predominantly evaluative approach has yet to provide sufficient reflective space for teachers to engage in continuous self-development (Dwikurnaningsih & Paais, 2022). The situation is exacerbated by the dual role of school principals in rural areas, who bear a high administrative burden, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of supervision (Diamond et al., 2020; Mendiola, 2019). Consequently, supervision tends to be bureaucratic and checklist-based, rather than meaningful pedagogical guidance (Preston et al., 2018). In response to these conditions, various studies recommend a more reflective and collaborative approach that aligns better with the unique challenges of rural schools, such as resource limitations, multi-grade classrooms, and contextual needs (Latianaa et al., 2023; Saleh & Mutiani, 2021; Taole et al., 2024). Such an approach is deemed capable of fostering a supportive professional climate, enhancing teacher engagement, and transforming supervision into a meaningful and adaptive learning experience (Nhlumayo, 2024; Noor et al., 2020).

The implementation of academic supervision in rural elementary schools is not free from various systemic, cultural, and personal obstacles. Systemically, supervision is often hindered by the busy schedules of school principals and high administrative workloads, which diminishes the space for meaningful developmental processes. This results in a tendency for supervision to emphasize compliance with procedures rather than fostering reflection and enhancing teachers' capacities. Culturally, there remains a strong hierarchical relationship between principals and teachers, leading to a one-way and instructive communication style in supervision, rather than a dialogic approach.

In this context, coaching-based supervision presents a more relevant and responsive alternative to these challenges. The coaching-based supervision model emphasizes ongoing support, personalization, and non-directive communication, which has proven effective in promoting changes in teaching practices (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2020; Strieker et al., 2016). Successful implementation involves several key components, such as goal setting, coaching conversations, strategy execution, data-driven feedback, and reflective space (Gilmore, 2021). Even technology-based approaches, such as behavioral training through digital devices and real-time feedback, positively contribute to the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical practices (Saunders et al., 2024; Sharplin et al., 2016). Other studies have also indicated that group coaching can improve the application of evidence-based practices among teachers (Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016). The success of this approach is significantly influenced by the readiness and adequate training of principals or coaches, including through simulation activities and video analysis (Brodeur et al., 2024). In the context of this research, teachers' expectations for supervision that is more supportive, collaborative, and trust-building highlight the urgency to shift the supervision paradigm from a control model towards a more constructive approach.

The findings of this research indicate that academic supervision practices in primary schools should be directed towards a more reflective, dialogic, and contextual approach. For school principals, specialized training is required to implement a coaching approach so that supervision is not merely evaluative but also supports the professional growth of teachers. For teachers, it is essential to foster open communication that is oriented towards mutual reflection, thereby transforming the supervision process into a meaningful learning space. Meanwhile, from a policy perspective, there is a need for a more flexible and responsive supervision design that addresses field conditions, rather than merely meeting procedural standards. These implications align with the research objectives to explore perceptions and challenges of academic supervision and to make a tangible contribution to enhancing the quality of professional development in primary school settings, particularly in rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

This study successfully addresses its objectives of exploring teachers' and principals' perceptions of academic supervision and delineating its practices and challenges in public schools in rural areas, such as Jurug, Boyolali. Findings reveal a spectrum of perceptions, ranging from viewing supervision as administrative oversight to recognizing its potential for professional growth, yet implementation remains largely procedural, with minimal reflective follow-up, hindering continuous teacher development. These results align with the research aims, offering a contextualized empirical perspective on rural supervision dynamics. For future research, comparing supervision models (e.g., clinical, collaborative, coaching-based) across rural and urban settings is recommended to uncover contextual influences. Additionally, longitudinal or action research could evaluate the sustained impact of reflective supervision practices on teacher pedagogical growth, informing policy for tailored professional development in resource-constrained environments.

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