

The Management of Vocational Subject Teachers at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) Sabah-Malaysia: An Analysis of Availability, Adaptive Strategies, and Challenges of Overseas Vocational Education

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2026-01-07

Revised 2026-02-04

Accepted 2026-02-07

Keywords:

Indonesian Overseas Schools

Organizational Resilience

Productive Teachers

Teacher Management

Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

The management of productive teachers in vocational schools faces significant challenges, particularly in cross-border educational institutions that experience limitations in human resources, recruitment authority, and professional development opportunities. This study aims to analyze the management of productive teachers at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu, focusing on planning, recruitment, professional development, performance evaluation, compensation, and termination, and to identify adaptive strategies grounded in organizational resilience theory. This research employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal, program coordinators, productive teachers, and adaptive teachers, complemented by participatory observation and document analysis. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that the management of productive teachers faces multiple constraints, including mismatches in workforce planning, recruitment limitations, restricted professional development, suboptimal performance evaluation, and inadequate compensation systems. To address these challenges, the school implements adaptive strategies such as involving adaptive teachers, inviting industry practitioners as guest instructors, and establishing partnerships with business and industrial sectors. This study concludes that adaptive teacher management grounded in organizational resilience is essential to sustain the quality of vocational education and recommends strengthening data-driven human resource systems, continuous capacity-building programs, and strategic industry collaboration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the strategic means of developing human potential through a learning process that allows individuals to adapt and improve their quality of life [1]. The state guarantees the right of every citizen to education, as stipulated in Article 31 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, including for Indonesian citizens abroad. The fulfillment of these rights is implemented through the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Education and Culture Number 7 of 2015 on the Management and Implementation of Indonesian Education Abroad, which affirms the state's commitment to providing quality, sustainable educational services. One concrete form of this policy is the establishment of Indonesian Overseas Schools (SILN) and Community Learning Centers (CLC) as providers of formal and non-formal education services for the children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI).

Malaysia is one of the main destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers. Data from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia shows that the number of migrant workers in Malaysia reached 1.29 million people in 2022. Sabah, one of the largest states in Malaysia, is dominated by plantation areas, so most migrant workers work in the informal sector and in oil palm plantations. Educational services for migrant children in this region are facilitated by Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) and CLC. Currently, there are 111 CLCs at the elementary school level and 45 at the junior high school level, spread across Sabah and Sarawak, with SIKK serving as the parent school responsible for academic coordination and educational quality.

Vocational High School (SMK) is part of the national education system that aims to prepare graduates with work competencies aligned with the needs of the business and industrial worlds (DU/DI), as mandated by Law Number 34 of 2018. Vocational education is designed to produce graduates who are ready to work, adaptable, and productive in their field of expertise [2]. A number of studies confirm that vocational education requires a contextual learning approach, strong industry linkages, and the support of educators with pedagogical competence and professional experience [3],[4]. Competent vocational teachers have been shown to have a significant effect on students' skill development, work readiness, and learning success [5], [6].

Vocational education positions productive teachers as having a central role because they not only transfer technical skills but also bridge the needs of the school curriculum with industrial dynamics [7]. Therefore, the quality and availability of productive teachers are key factors in the effectiveness of practical learning and the relevance of vocational school graduates to the needs of the job market. A number of studies show that weak management of productive teachers directly impacts the low quality of vocational learning and the limitations of curriculum innovation [8],[9]. In addition, the imbalance between the needs of industry for competence and the capacity of productive teachers can reduce graduates' competitiveness and weaken industry's trust in vocational school graduates. This condition underscores the importance of managing productive teachers who are well planned, adaptable, and oriented to the needs of the job market.

SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (SMK SIKK) is the only Indonesian state vocational school operating abroad, precisely in Sabah, Malaysia. This school has a strategic role in providing vocational education services for migrant workers' children. SMK SIKK is currently opening three expertise programs, namely culinary, hospitality and tourism services, and aircraft technology, which are relevant to the needs of regional and global industries. This condition demands an effective and adaptive human resource management system, especially one that produces effective teachers.

Institutionally, SILN, including SMK SIKK, has a different administrative structure from schools in the country, as it is under the direct authority of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This structure affects the school's limited flexibility in planning, recruitment, and teacher career development. Field findings indicate that SMK SIKK is experiencing a serious shortage of productive teachers: only two in culinary programs, one in aircraft technology, and none in hospitality and tourism services programs. This condition has the potential to reduce the quality of practical learning and hinder the achievement of vocational education goals.

Previous research has focused chiefly on vocational teacher management, human resource planning, and school-industry partnerships in discussions of vocational schools in the country [10], [11], [12]. However, studies that specifically examine the management of productive teachers in Indonesian vocational schools abroad, given their structural and geographical limitations, remain very limited. Therefore, this study offers contextual novelty by exploring the adaptive practices and strategies of productive teacher management at SMK SIKK, a cross-border vocational education institution.

To understand the adaptation strategies schools employ, this study uses the theory of organizational resilience as an analytical framework. Organizational resilience refers to the ability of institutions to survive, adapt, and thrive amid constraints and the dynamics of changing environments [13]. This theory emphasizes the importance of structural flexibility, adaptive decision-making, and the ability of organizations to make optimal use of available resources. In education, organizational resilience helps explain how schools respond to internal and external pressures, including the limited number and competence of educators. This approach allows schools to maintain the continuity of the learning process, adjust human resource management strategies, and sustain the quality of educational services.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the management of productive teachers at SMK SIKK, including planning, recruitment, professional development, performance evaluation, compensation, and adaptive strategies used to address educators' limitations. The results of this study are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of productive teacher management studies in vocational education by adopting an organizational resilience perspective. In practice, the research findings are expected to serve as a reference for SILN managers and policymakers in formulating strategies to strengthen the management of vocational education human resources, especially in schools operating under limited conditions and across countries.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study design to examine in depth the practice of productive teacher management at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (SMK SIKK). The case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand phenomena holistically within the confines of a specific system with unique organizational characteristics and resources. In this qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, directly involved in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, sensitivity to the social context and institutional dynamics is crucial in generating research findings.

The research was conducted at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, an Indonesian vocational education institution abroad with specific challenges in managing productive teachers. This location was chosen due to the limited availability of qualified teachers and the need to maintain the relevance of practical learning to industry needs. The study lasted eleven months, from August 2024 to June 2025, allowing the researcher sufficient time for repeated observations and in-depth data collection.

The research data sources were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with consideration given to informants' direct involvement in productive teacher management. Key informants included the school principal, the expertise program coordinator, productive teachers, and adaptive teachers involved in the practicum. These informants were selected based on their strategic roles in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of teacher management, ensuring that the data obtained was rich and relevant to the research objectives.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face using flexible guidelines to explore the experiences, perspectives, and managerial practices of the informants. Observations examined practicum learning activities and interactions between teachers and school administrators, while the documentation study reviewed policy archives, activity reports, and human resource planning and evaluation documents.

In addition to these techniques, this study also utilized limited focus group discussions to deepen understanding of strategic issues emerging from the interviews and observations. The focus group discussions (FGDs) focused on the school's adaptation strategies to address the shortage of productive teachers and on efforts to maintain the quality of practicum learning. This technique allowed for clarification and enrichment of data through interaction between informants.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model [14]. The analysis stages include raw data collection, data reduction through classification and sorting of relevant information, data presentation in narrative form and a thematic matrix, and drawing conclusions accompanied by a continuous verification process. Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques of sources, methods, and theories, as well as confirmation of interim results with key informants to ensure the consistency and reliability of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Planning

Planning for productive teachers at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) is a strategic process focused not only on meeting the number of teaching staff but also on matching competencies to vocational education needs and industry demands. As an Indonesian school overseas, SIKK faces structural limitations due to a teacher recruitment policy that is entirely centralized at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The planning process is not supported by formal and standardized job analysis documents, job descriptions, and job specifications, resulting in school teacher needs proposals not always being accommodated at the central level. This situation creates a mismatch between schools' actual needs and the teachers assigned to them. Since its establishment in 2019, the shortage of productive teachers has been an ongoing problem, with the number of permanent teachers very limited and unable to cover all expertise programs for several years. This limitation has increased teacher workload and may affect the quality of productive learning. These findings indicate a gap between strategic human resource planning and policy implementation at the school level.

In response to these limitations, SMK SIKK has implemented various adaptive planning strategies to maintain the continuity of the learning process. The school assigns adaptive and normative teachers to teach productive subjects, taking into account each teacher's interests, readiness, and experience, though they do not always come from the same expertise group. Furthermore, planning is also developed through collaboration with the business and industrial world (DUDI) through guest teacher programs, industrial visits, and optimization of the school's production units. The principal acts as a visionary leader who encourages participatory, context-based planning through workload mapping, identifying competency gaps, and recording needs based on expertise programs. This approach aligns with the principles of participatory planning and instructional leadership [15]. Thus, productive teacher planning at SMK SIKK reflects a blend of structural limitations of central policy and local innovations responsive to the school's real needs.

3.1.2. Recruitment, Selection, and Placement

Recruitment of productive teachers at SMK SIKK falls entirely under the authority of the central government through the national mechanism for teachers at Indonesian Schools Abroad. Schools only propose position requirements each year without any authority to determine the final recruitment results. This situation creates a gap between schools' actual needs and the number and expertise of teachers accepted. Several productive teacher positions proposed several years ago remain unfilled. The teacher selection process is conducted nationally and involves a lengthy and rigorous process, including administrative selection, written tests, essay writing, microteaching, group discussions, and interviews. The interviews also assess national insight and understanding of the school's operational context abroad. Schools are not involved in the final selection stage, so they lack the opportunity to tailor the selection results to specific field needs. As a result, some teachers accepted have expertise backgrounds that do not fully align with the required productive subjects.

Information on productive teacher recruitment remains limited to official channels and informal networks. This situation has resulted in a limited number of applicants with highly specific vocational skills.

Productive teacher placement at SMK SIKK is carried out flexibly and adaptively to fill available vacancies. In practice, teachers who are not productive or adaptive are often assigned to teach productive subjects outside their areas of expertise. Some teachers with arts or science backgrounds teach hospitality, culinary arts, or basic technology. This cross-disciplinary assignment is a practical solution to maintain the learning process. However, such placements require teachers to make significant adjustments to teaching materials and teaching methods. Teachers not only act as instructors but also undertake additional duties such as mentoring, fieldwork, supervising students, and establishing collaborations with industry. To overcome limited technical competency, teachers actively learn independently and collaborate with colleagues. Some teachers participate in online training, join professional communities, and learn from students' practical industry experience. Collaboration with industry guest teachers is also an important source of learning. Although the quality of learning in terms of technical depth varies, this adaptive strategy maintains the continuity of the learning process. Overall, this situation demonstrates the high demand for flexibility, resilience, and teacher collaboration in the SMK SIKK human resource management system.

3.1.3. Development and Development

The development and mentoring of productive teachers at SMK SIKK is ongoing but not yet institutionally structured. Mentoring practices develop more organically in response to real needs and limited school resources. Solidarity and collaboration among teachers are the primary mechanisms for maintaining motivation and improving professional competence. Routine mentoring is conducted through monthly office meetings and semesterly in-house training activities, which serve as a space for reflection and sharing learning experiences. The principal plays an active role in encouraging teacher competency improvement through a participatory approach and support for learning initiatives. However, there is no systematically documented long-term competency development plan. The implementation of mentoring relies heavily on the collective commitment and initiative of individual teachers. This situation indicates that teacher mentoring at SMK SIKK is more adaptive than planned. Nevertheless, the mentoring process continues and contributes to maintaining the quality of vocational learning.

Professional development of productive teachers at SMK SIKK is carried out through a combination of formal activities and independent learning. Some teachers participate in training organized by the ministry, although access is limited due to time, the number of teachers, and geographical conditions. To address these limitations, teachers actively develop themselves through professional communities, online training, and experiential learning. Collaboration with business and industry is also used as a learning tool, particularly through guest teachers and interactions with students after fieldwork. Adaptive and productive teachers gain a wealth of practical knowledge from this collaborative process. However, professional development still faces obstacles such as high workloads, limited

practice facilities, and difficult access to certified training. These conditions require teachers to improvise in their learning and mastery of technical skills. In response, a culture of collaboration and peer learning has developed strongly within the school environment. Overall, teacher development at SMK SIKK is dynamic, anchored in collaboration, independence, and a spirit of adaptability.

3.1.4. Performance Assessment (Evaluation)

Performance evaluations of productive teachers at SMK SIKK are conducted periodically as part of efforts to maintain the quality of learning and teacher professionalism. The evaluation process involves classroom observations, learning reflections, and internal coordination meetings led by the principal. Performance assessments encompass not only classroom teaching activities but also teacher involvement in industrial practices, mentoring students during internships, and managing the school's production unit. SMK SIKK implements a 360-degree evaluation approach involving the principal, colleagues, students, parents, and industry partners. Input from various parties is collected through periodic reflections and discussed in internal evaluation forums. However, the evaluation indicators remain general and not fully specific to the characteristics of vocational learning.

Performance evaluations of productive teachers also consider student achievement and output as indicators of learning success. Student achievement in external activities and active involvement in the production unit are part of an indirect assessment of teacher performance. Furthermore, productive teachers are assessed based on their role in managing the school's production unit, which serves as a facility for student practice. Teachers' workloads are relatively high due to the simultaneous tasks of teaching, mentoring practical students, supervising internships, and engaging with industry. This situation demands evaluations that account for the complexity of teachers' duties and responsibilities. Performance evaluations at SMK SIKK are also conducted reflectively through activity reports and program follow-up discussions. Overall, teacher performance evaluations at SMK SIKK are inclusive and contextual, although they still face challenges in aligning indicators with the realities of productive teacher work.

3.1.5. Compensation

Research results show that productive teachers at SMK SIKK view compensation not only as a base salary, but also as a form of appreciation for the additional workload and practical responsibilities they undertake. The compensation system at SMK SIKK differentiates between civil servants (PNS) and non-civil servant (non-PNS) teachers, even though both perform relatively similar duties and responsibilities. Civil servant (PNS) teachers receive salaries and allowances from the state budget (APBN), in addition to their salaries as SILN (non-civil servant) teachers, while non-civil servant (PNS) teachers rely on SILN contracts and certification allowances, provided they meet the requirements. This structural difference creates a welfare gap within the same work unit. Non-civil servant (PNS) teachers often feel limited in their long-term financial security. This situation affects perceptions of fairness in the existing compensation system. In general, teachers continue to fulfill their duties with a high level of commitment despite differences in financial rights.

The certification allowance payment system for teachers at SMK SIKK is directly transferred from the central government to each teacher's account. This mechanism is considered faster and more efficient than the tiered system found in Indonesia. However, there are no additional incentives for tasks outside of teaching hours, such as committee work, weekend training, or extracurricular activities. All additional tasks are considered part of the main employment contract and are not compensated separately. This situation makes the compensation system feel flat and less responsive to variations in teacher workload. Productive teachers who are actively involved in production units and student mentoring feel an imbalance between their workload and the rewards they receive. Overall, the compensation system at SMK SIKK is stable but does not fully reflect the complexity of productive teachers' work.

3.1.6. Termination of Employment

At SMK SIKK, teachers are categorized as civil servants (PNS) and non-civil servants (non-PNS), resulting in significant differences in the contract system and job security. PNS teachers have renewable three-year contracts and guaranteed reassignment upon completion, providing a sense of security in career planning. In contrast, non-PNS teachers work on annual contracts with no guarantee of renewal or reassignment, creating uncertainty and psychological stress. This uncertainty impacts teacher job satisfaction and motivation, especially for those working far from home. Layoffs for non-PNS teachers can disrupt the continuity of learning, as the vacancies often involve key roles in production units and field work practices (PKL). Adaptive or guest teachers usually fill these vacancies, but limited technical competency can make the transition less smooth. Overall, contract uncertainty creates operational and managerial challenges for the school.

The principal at SMK SIKK plays an active role in managing layoffs, including providing performance appraisals and feedback, as well as administrative support, such as letters of recommendation or information about job opportunities. However, non-PNS teachers still face stress due to the temporary nature of their contracts and the annual evaluation that determines their renewals. This uncertainty affects the continuity of productive learning activities, including mentoring internship students, managing production units, and collaborating with industry. Some adaptive teachers are being utilized to fill vacancies, but their limitations in specific areas remain a barrier. Furthermore, the lack of career security domestically increases the risk of instability for non-civil servant teachers. Layoffs create an imbalance between the job security of civil servant teachers and the vulnerability of non-civil servant teachers, affecting loyalty, teacher collaboration, and the continuity of vocational programs. Overall, these different contract systems pose a major challenge to teaching staff management at SMK SIKK.

3.2. Discussion

Research findings indicate that the management of productive teachers at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu is generally in line with human resource management theory, which emphasizes the importance of organizational needs- and competency-based planning [16] [16]. However, in the context of Indonesian schools abroad, such planning

faces various structural limitations, primarily due to centralized authority and limited school autonomy. The absence of a detailed job analysis means that a productive teacher's need for planning is not fully grounded in long-term projections. This situation reinforces Muniroh and Muhyadi's findings that centralized human resource management systems are often less responsive to the contextual needs of educational units [17]. As a result, human resource planning is more adaptive and reactive to existing conditions. Nevertheless, this adaptive strategy allows schools to maintain the continuity of productive learning processes. These limitations at the planning stage then influence subsequent stages of human resource management.

As a consequence of this less-than-ideal planning, the recruitment, selection, and placement processes for productive teachers at SMK SIKK tend to be flexible and pragmatic. These findings partially support Smith and Hunter's view regarding the importance of competency-based selection [18]. However, in practice, the principle of person-job fit, Liu & Johnson have not been fully met [19]. Placing teachers across expertise is a common strategy to address the limited number and availability of productive teaching staff. This practice aligns with the concept of cross-functional assignment, which emphasizes role flexibility within an organization [20]. While capable of maintaining continuity of learning, this situation can create competency gaps if not balanced with adequate professional development. Therefore, the recruitment and placement process cannot be viewed as a series of standalone stages. This stage directly demands a continuous coaching and development strategy.

In addressing these conditions, coaching and developing productive teachers at SMK SIKK is a crucial tool for maintaining the quality of vocational learning. The research findings reinforce the theory of Desimone and Garrett, which emphasizes that effective professional development must be contextual and integrated with work practices[21]. However, the limitations of formal training programs mean that teacher competency development relies heavily on individual initiative. Collaboration with industry and experiential learning are strategic alternatives that support the concept of workplace-based learning[22]. These practices demonstrate that informal learning plays a significant role in improving the competency of productive teachers. This finding broadens the perspective on human resource development, which has traditionally focused on structured training. Therefore, the effectiveness of competency development needs to be linked to a relevant, context-specific performance evaluation system.

The performance evaluation of productive teachers at SMK SIKK serves as a quality control mechanism for the entire human resource management process. The implementation of feedback-based evaluations from various parties supports the comprehensive performance evaluation theory proposed by [23]. However, the evaluation indicators used do not fully represent the complexity of productive teachers' tasks in vocational education. The evaluation's dominant focus on general administrative and pedagogical aspects potentially overlooks the dimensions of technical skills and collaboration with industry. This finding suggests the need to adjust the evaluation system to be more contextual and responsive to the characteristics of vocational education abroad. Performance evaluation serves not only

as an assessment tool but also as a basis for managerial decision-making. The evaluation results are closely related to compensation policies and teacher job sustainability.

In the final stage of the HR management cycle, compensation and termination are directly linked to performance evaluation results. The research findings support the theories of Robbins, Judge, and Podgursky and Springer, which emphasize the importance of fairness and motivation in teacher compensation systems [14], [15]. However, in the context of Indonesian schools abroad, compensation policies are still faced with budget constraints and cross-border regulations. This results in performance-based incentives not being optimally implemented. The termination mechanism is also more administrative in nature than based on comprehensive performance evaluations. Nevertheless, this system still serves to maintain organizational stability and regulatory compliance. Overall, the research findings indicate that all productive teacher HR management functions at SMK SIKK are interconnected within an adaptive and contextual system.

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the management of productive teachers at SMK Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu reflects adaptive human resource management practices in the face of structural limitations and the demands of cross-border education. The findings emphasize that the sustainability of vocational education in Indonesian schools abroad cannot rely solely on conventional teacher management mechanisms; instead, it requires a strategic approach that can respond flexibly and sustainably to organizational dynamics, central regulations, and limited teaching staff.

The implications of this research encompass managerial, policy, and theoretical aspects. Managerially, the findings emphasize the importance of adaptive, collaborative school leadership that leverages cross-disciplinary competencies to manage productive teachers. From a policy perspective, the results indicate the need for structural support and regulatory flexibility from the central government to make human resource management at Indonesian schools abroad more responsive to local conditions. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of educational human resource management by positioning organizational resilience theory as a relevant framework for understanding teacher management practices in situations of limitations and uncertainty.

This research has several limitations. The study was conducted at a single research location using a case study design, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian schools abroad, which have different characteristics and contexts. Furthermore, the research data is primarily sourced from the perspective of school-level actors, thus not fully reflecting the dynamics of policy and decision-making at the national level. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ a comparative design or involve more than one Indonesian School Abroad to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Future research could also combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the relationship between productive teacher management, learning quality, and the outcomes of vocational education graduates abroad.

Practically, this research is expected to contribute to education stakeholders, policymakers, and the broader community by helping them understand the complexities of

effective teacher management in vocational education abroad. The findings are expected to inform the formulation of policies and management practices that are more equitable, sustainable, and oriented toward fulfilling the educational rights of children of Indonesian migrant workers.

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