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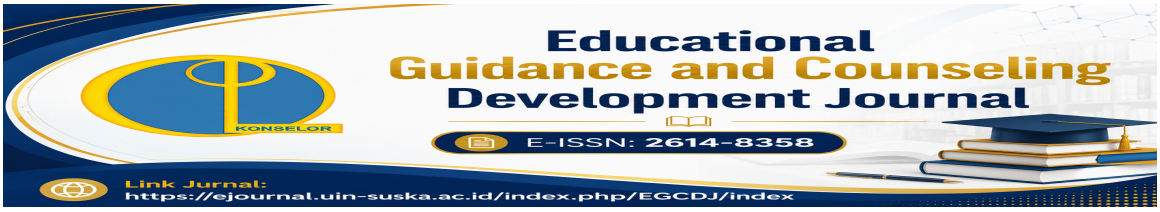

Distributed Leadership in School Counseling Supervision: A Qualitative Single-Case Study at a Public Senior High School

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Abstract: This study explores the manifestation of distributed leadership within the context of guidance and counseling (GC) supervision in an Indonesian public senior high school. Despite growing recognition of distributed leadership as an effective paradigm in educational management, its application to the domain of school counseling supervision remains theoretically underdeveloped, particularly in non-Western educational settings. Employing a qualitative single-case study design, this research collected data through a semi-structured in-depth interview with one GC teacher at SMAN 8 Pekanbaru, analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Findings reveal that GC supervision is co-constructed by a network of five actors the school principal, vice-principal for student affairs, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and the external GC supervisor each enacting distinct yet complementary supervisory functions. Five thematic clusters emerged: (1) multi-actor distribution of supervisory roles; (2) the principal's strategic and administrative supervision; (3) the external GC supervisor's clinical and professional development functions; (4) internal collaborative dynamics as an informal early-warning system; and (5) perceived gaps and developmental aspirations. The study contributes a conceptual model of distributed supervision in school counseling, demonstrates the organic emergence of distributed leadership in GC settings without formal policy design, and identifies critical implications for school policy, counselor professional development, and the regulatory framework governing GC supervision.

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INTRODUCTION

The governance of school counseling services has long been conceptualized through a hierarchical lens, positioning the externally assigned GC supervisor as the singular authority responsible for monitoring and evaluating the performance of school counselors. This model, rooted in bureaucratic organizational theory, reflects a top-down understanding of professional oversight that has dominated school counseling literature for decades (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Lambie & Sias, 2009). However, as educational organizations increasingly embrace complexity and collaborative professional cultures, there is growing recognition that effective supervision cannot be the exclusive domain of a single designated actor (Spillane, 2006; Harris, Jones, Ismail, & Nguyen, 2019). This tension between formal supervisory authority and the practical realities of distributed professional responsibility lies at the heart of the present inquiry.

Globally, distributed leadership has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks in educational leadership scholarship over the past two decades. Spillane (2006) defines distributed leadership not as a delegation of tasks, but as a constitutive property of leadership practice that is stretched across multiple leaders and followers within an organization. Subsequent scholarship by Harris et al. (2019) and Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) has consistently demonstrated that schools implementing distributed leadership models exhibit stronger professional learning cultures, higher teacher efficacy, and improved student outcomes. Yet, despite this substantial body of work, the application of distributed leadership theory to the specific domain of school counseling supervision has received remarkably little scholarly attention (Mullen, Lambie, & Conley, 2018; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

In the Indonesian context, GC services are formally governed by Ministerial Regulation No. 111 of 2014, which establishes a regulatory framework for guidance and counseling in primary and secondary education. However, the regulation does not explicitly address the multi-actor dynamics that characterize supervisory practice in schools, leaving the organization of GC supervision largely to individual institutional initiative (Salahudin, 2018; Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2016). As a consequence, supervisory practices vary significantly across schools, and the potential contributions of non-designated actors such as principals, vice-principals, homeroom teachers, and subject teachers to the supervisory ecosystem remain unrecognized in both policy and research. This regulatory and empirical gap represents a critical oversight, particularly given the documented relationship between the quality of multi-source supervision and the professional development of school counselors (Mullen et al., 2018; Mason, N., et. al., 2022; Chae, N., Backer, A., et. al., 2023).

Three significant research gaps motivate this study. First, the intersection of distributed leadership theory and school counseling supervision has not been systematically investigated in any educational context, leaving a conceptual void at a theoretically productive junction. Second, empirical studies of GC supervision in Southeast Asian, and specifically Indonesian, schools are sparse, limiting the transferability of Western-derived models to local contexts. Third, the perspectives of GC teachers themselves as the practitioners most immediately affected by supervisory dynamics have rarely been centered in qualitative investigations of supervision quality (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). This study addresses all three gaps simultaneously.

The primary research question guiding this study is: How does distributed leadership manifest in the supervisory ecosystem of school counseling at a public senior high school in Indonesia, as experienced by a GC teacher? Subsidiary questions include: (a) Which actors contribute to GC supervision, and what are their respective roles and contributions? (b) How

do formal and informal supervisory functions interact within this ecosystem? and (c) What challenges and developmental needs does the GC teacher identify in relation to the existing supervisory arrangement?

The novelty of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it constitutes the first systematic application of Spillane's distributed leadership framework to the domain of GC supervision in an Indonesian school setting, thereby extending the conceptual reach of distributed leadership scholarship into a previously unexplored professional domain. Empirically, it produces a grounded conceptual model of distributed supervision in school counseling that is directly derived from practitioner experience, offering a foundation for future multi-case and comparative studies. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: the Literature Review section critically synthesizes relevant theoretical frameworks; the Methodology section describes the research design and analytical procedures; the Findings section presents five thematic clusters with supporting verbatim evidence; the Discussion section interprets findings in relation to theory and prior research; and the Conclusion section synthesizes key insights and their implications.

METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study adopts a qualitative single-case study design following Yin (2018), whose case study methodology privileges the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A single-case design was selected because the case a GC teacher operating within a specific Indonesian public school context is theoretically critical: it represents an instance of a phenomenon (distributed GC supervision) that theory predicts but that has not yet been empirically examined (Stake, 2005). The epistemological orientation of the study is constructivist-interpretive, emphasizing the GC teacher's subjective meaning-making processes as the primary source of insight into the phenomenon under investigation.

Research Context and Participant

The research was conducted at SMAN 8 Pekanbaru, a public senior high school operating within the national Indonesian educational system and subject to the regulatory framework established by Ministerial Regulation No. 111 of 2014. The participant (identified as W throughout this article to protect anonymity) is a GC teacher with two years of professional experience at the school. Purposive sampling was employed, with the selection criteria being: (a) active employment as a GC teacher for a minimum of one year; (b) direct and ongoing experience with the school's supervisory arrangements; and (c) willingness to participate in a reflective, in-depth interview. A two-year tenure was considered sufficient to provide meaningful experience of the supervisory ecosystem while also retaining the informational freshness of relatively recent professional entry, which may yield particularly observant accounts of organizational structures that more experienced practitioners take for granted.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview comprising seven thematic sections: (A) participant demographics; (B) identification of supervisory actors and their roles; (C) mechanisms of performance monitoring; (D) the external GC supervisor's role in program planning; (E) professional support and development; (F) supervisor involvement in

institutional decision-making; and (G) aspirations and recommendations. The interview guide was developed through a systematic review of distributed leadership and GC supervision literature and subjected to conceptual peer review prior to administration. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure naturalistic and fluent expression. All responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Transcribed data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019): (1) familiarization through repeated reading; (2) systematic generation of initial codes; (3) theme search from assembled codes; (4) theme review and refinement; (5) theme definition and naming; and (6) production of the analytical report. Coding proceeded inductively in the first instance, allowing themes to emerge from the data without a predetermined framework, before being subjected to a deductive pass to identify resonances with the theoretical constructs of distributed leadership and GC supervision. This two-stage coding strategy ensures that the analysis is grounded in the participant's lived experience while remaining analytically engaged with relevant theory.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Credibility was established through theoretical triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), employing three complementary theoretical lenses distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and clinical supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019) to interpret the data from convergent theoretical perspectives. Conceptual member checking was conducted by presenting core analytical themes to the participant for accuracy verification. Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting all analytical decisions. Transferability is supported by the thick description of the research context provided throughout this article. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The participant was assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw without consequence. All data were stored securely and accessed exclusively by the research team.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded five overarching themes, each illuminating a distinct facet of the distributed supervisory ecosystem within which the participant operates. These themes are presented below with supporting verbatim evidence translated into English.

Theme 1: Multi-Actor Distribution of Supervisory Roles

The most prominent and structurally significant finding is that supervisory responsibility in the GC domain is not concentrated in a single actor but is distributed, largely organically, across a minimum of five organizational actors: the school principal, the vice-principal for student affairs, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and the external GC supervisor from the district education office. The participant explicitly mapped these actors and their respective contributions without prompting, demonstrating a coherent awareness of the distributed supervisory architecture:

> *"The school principal has a quite important role in supervising GC services, including program approval, program evaluation, performance reporting for GC, and coordination with the GC teacher."*

This mapping reveals not a delegation of a single supervisory function but the simultaneous enactment of qualitatively distinct supervisory functions by different actors a configuration that aligns directly with Spillane's (2006) conception of leadership as 'stretched over' multiple individuals. Critically, the distribution follows a functional logic: each actor contributes based on their unique positional access to information and their relational proximity to different dimensions of GC service.

Theme 2: The Principal's Strategic and Administrative Supervision

The school principal emerges in the participant's account as the institutional anchor of administrative supervision, performing three primary functions: formal program approval, periodic evaluative oversight, and cross-unit coordination. These functions operate on a structured temporal cycle semi-annual and annual program evaluations that provides predictability and institutional accountability for the GC program:

> *"The principal is involved in supervising, directing, and approving the GC program prepared by the GC teacher. In addition, the principal provides program evaluation on a semester and annual basis."*

The periodicity of the principal's supervisory engagement structured around institutional reporting cycles rather than the situational and continuous demands of counseling practice distinguishes it categorically from the clinical supervision provided by the external GC supervisor. This functional specialization, while effective for institutional accountability, may leave gaps in the real-time professional support available to the GC teacher between formal evaluation periods.

Theme 3: External GC Supervisor's Clinical and Development Functions

The external GC supervisor, appointed by the district education office, performs the most professionally specialized supervisory functions in the ecosystem. The participant's account highlights three distinct functions: (a) formative program development through review and revision of GC program documents; (b) clinical supervision through scheduled supervisory observations; and (c) a transformational catalytic role characterized by the recommendation of innovative service approaches:

> *"The supervisor plays a role in guiding the preparation of programs to align with service standards and student needs. Usually the supervisor revises the GC program that has already been prepared to make it more complete and in line with student needs."*

The formative dimension of this supervisory function intervening at the program planning stage rather than only evaluating post-implementation outcomes is particularly noteworthy, as it represents a developmental rather than merely evaluative supervisory orientation. More strikingly, the participant identified an instance of explicit pedagogical innovation recommended by the external supervisor:

> *"The GC supervisor once recommended a career information service through a career game. With this career game, students became more active and enthusiastic about getting career-related information because the implementation was more engaging."*

This recommendation transcends compliance monitoring and reflects the inspirational and intellectually stimulating dimensions of transformational supervision (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Alobaidani et al., 2020; Yanti et al., 2025; Maarif et al., 2026). However, the participant also notes that supervisory engagement is temporally bounded by scheduled visits and semester-start/end coordination meetings, signaling that the clinical supervision function, while developmental in quality, remains limited in frequency.

Theme 4: Internal Collaborative Dynamics as an Informal Early-Warning System

The homeroom teachers and subject teachers collectively perform an information-provision function that, while not formally designated as supervisory, effectively extends the GC teacher's observational reach across the school community. The vice-principal for student affairs performs a coordination function that mediates between the GC teacher and other school units in complex case management:

> *"They provide reports or information to the GC teacher regarding learning difficulties, behavioral changes, or problems experienced by students in the classroom so that they can be followed up through GC services."*

This network of informal information provision constitutes what Wilkerson (2009) would describe as an ecological support system for counseling practice. From a distributed leadership perspective, these actors are enacting a tacit form of supervisory contribution expanding the GC teacher's situational awareness and enabling more timely and targeted interventions without recognizing themselves as participants in a supervisory system. The participant similarly does not categorize these colleagues as supervisors, framing their contribution as collaborative information sharing rather than oversight. This asymmetry between function and identity highlights the theoretically significant phenomenon of unreflective distributed leadership practice.

Theme 5: Perceived Gaps and Developmental Aspirations

Despite broadly positive assessments of the existing supervisory arrangement, the participant articulates specific and structured developmental needs that collectively reveal the distance between the current and aspirational states of GC supervision. Three priority areas are identified with notable clarity:

> *"I hope the GC supervisor can provide more intensive mentoring and continuous professional development. In addition, it is hoped that there will be more training activities that can improve the competence of GC teachers in dealing with various dynamics of student problems."*

The three priority areas articulated increased supervisory frequency, more intensive mentoring in program planning and reporting, and expanded training for technical counseling skills and program innovation collectively describe a trajectory from the current periodic-formal mode of supervision toward a continuous-developmental mode. This aspirational trajectory is theoretically significant because it precisely mirrors the shift that distributed leadership theory predicts as organizations move from compliance-oriented to capacity-building orientations (Harris et al., 2019; Azorín et al., 2019; Harris et al, 2022).

Table 1. Matrix of Actors, Roles, and Contributions in the GC Supervisory Ecosystem

Actor	Role in GC Supervision	Contribution to GC Service Quality
School Principal	Administrative supervision; program approval; semi-annual & annual evaluation; cross-unit coordination	Ensures GC program alignment with school vision and policy; provides institutional legitimacy; establishes accountability cycle
Vice-Principal (Student Affairs)	Case coordination; mediation between GC teacher, homeroom teachers, and school administration	Facilitates coordinated responses to student discipline and character development issues; bridges institutional units
Homeroom Teachers	Student development informants; early-warning	Provide academic, behavioral, and social data on students; extend GC teacher's observational reach;

Actor	Role in GC Supervision	Contribution to GC Service Quality
	system; contextual support	support timely case identification
Subject Teachers	Academic and behavioral problem reporting; detection of student condition changes	Supply observational data for GC follow-up; strengthen the internal referral system; enable proactive GC intervention
External GC Supervisor	Clinical supervision; program review and revision; professional development; innovation recommendations	Develops GC teacher's technical competence; ensures service standards compliance; stimulates programmatic innovation (e.g., MGBK, career game workshops)

Source: Thematic analysis of in-depth interview data, 2025

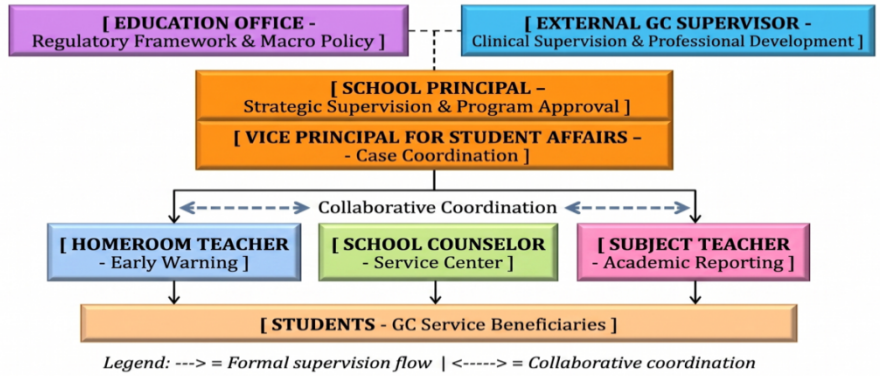

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Distributed Leadership in GC Supervision

Source: Developed from research data (2025)

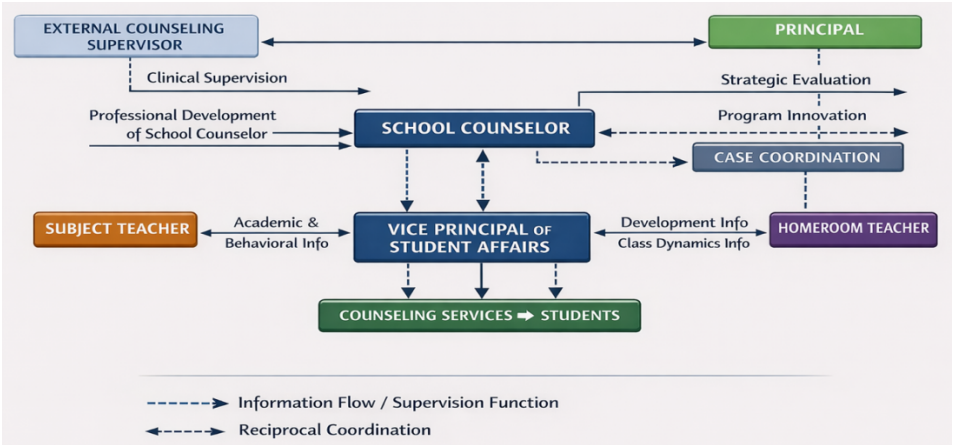

Figure 2. Functional Network Diagram of the GC Supervisory System

Source: Developed from research data (2025)

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how distributed leadership manifests within the supervisory ecosystem of school counseling in an Indonesian public high school, as experienced by a practicing GC teacher. The findings, analyzed through the integrated lenses of distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006; Tian, M., Risku, M., & Collin, K., 2016; Harris et al., 2019; Nguyen, D., Harris, A., & Ng, D. 2020), transformational supervision (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and professional development models in school counseling (Lambie & Sias, 2009; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019), reveal a supervisory architecture that is, at once, more distributed and more organically emergent than existing literature has previously documented in GC settings.

The most theoretically significant finding is the confirmation that GC supervision in this Indonesian school context is constitutively distributed not as a result of deliberate policy design, but as an organic response to the inherent complexity of counseling practice in a school setting. This finding directly substantiates Spillane's (2006) theoretical claim that distributed leadership frequently emerges spontaneously from organizational necessity rather than being engineered top-down. The parallel with Spillane's model is striking: the school functions as an organizational ecology in which different actors occupy different epistemic and relational positions, and each actor's contribution to GC supervision follows from the unique access to information and relationships that their position affords. The principal's access to institutional strategy and resources, the homeroom teacher's relational intimacy with students, and the subject teacher's observation of academic behavior each constitute distinct forms of supervisory capital that, when combined, produce a richer supervisory environment than any single actor could provide.

The identification of a dual supervision structure with the principal performing administrative supervision and the external GC supervisor performing clinical supervision represents a novel empirical contribution that elaborates and contextualizes Dollarhide and Miller's (2006) theoretical distinction. In previous literature, this distinction was primarily conceptual; the present study provides grounded evidence that the two supervisory functions are, in practice, enacted by different actors following different logics and temporal rhythms. The principal's evaluative engagement is structured by institutional accountability cycles (semester and annual reports), while the external supervisor's engagement is structured by the developmental needs of the GC teacher. This temporal differentiation has important practical implications: the institutional cycle-based rhythm of the principal's oversight, while essential for program accountability, creates potential blind spots in the professional support available to the GC teacher between formal evaluation points.

The transformational dimension of the external GC supervisor's contribution most vividly illustrated by the recommendation of the career game as an innovative service delivery mechanism is a finding that warrants particular attention. Existing research on GC supervisors in Indonesian schools tends to emphasize procedural compliance and administrative functions (Reza & Sugiyo, 2015; Wiyono, 2017; Salahudin, 2018; Amelisa & Suhono, 2018; Syafitri et al., 2023). The participant's account suggests that, in at least some cases, the external supervisor performs a transformational function by modeling intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration two of the four behavioral dimensions of transformational leadership identified by Bass and Riggio (2006). This finding suggests that the potential of the external GC supervisor role as a vehicle for innovation-oriented professional development has been systematically underestimated in both policy and research.

The informal early-warning network constituted by homeroom and subject teachers represents what may be characterized as tacit distributed leadership supervisory contribution

that is functionally significant but not recognized as such by its contributors or by the GC teacher who benefits from it. This finding resonates with Spillane and Diamond's (2007) observation that distributed leadership practices are frequently tacit and unreflective. The invisibility of this network to the participants themselves has important implications: if these informal supervisory contributions were made explicit and institutionalized through formal coordination mechanisms, they could be significantly amplified and rendered more systematic. Borders et al. (2012) demonstrate that formal multi-source supervision produces stronger learning outcomes than informal arrangements; the present study suggests an opportunity to formalize what is currently operating as an organic but underutilized supervisory resource.

Comparing the findings of this study with the broader literature on supervision and distributed leadership yields several points of resonance and divergence. The resonance with Mullen et al.'s (2018) finding that multi-source supervision is associated with higher counselor professional satisfaction and efficacy is particularly strong: the participant explicitly affirms the value of the existing multi-actor arrangement while simultaneously expressing a desire for its intensification and formalization. This pattern appreciating the existing distributed structure while aspiring to a more deliberate version of it may represent a characteristic feature of GC settings where distributed leadership has emerged organically rather than through designed intervention. The divergence from prior literature lies principally in the demonstration that distributed GC supervision occurs in a non-Western, developing-country context without the institutional infrastructure (such as peer supervision networks or professional learning communities) typically associated with multi-source supervision in Western research.

The unexpected finding of transformational supervision behavior by the external GC supervisor deserves specific attention. Given the regulatory and resource constraints that characterize district-level GC supervision in Indonesia, the emergence of innovation-oriented recommendations represents a form of supervisory resilience that transcends institutional limitations. This finding suggests that individual supervisory actors may exercise transformational influence even within structurally constrained systems, a possibility that has not been prominently addressed in prior supervision research.

The implications of these findings are threefold. For school leadership practice, the findings suggest that the distributed supervisory potential already present in Indonesian schools can be unlocked through deliberate institutional design specifically, by formalizing the coordinative roles of homeroom and subject teachers, establishing regular multi-actor case consultation forums, and developing the principal's capacity for clinical GC supervision alongside administrative oversight. For the external GC supervisor, the findings point to the value of reorienting from a periodic evaluative stance to a proactive orchestrator role that actively cultivates and coordinates the distributed supervisory network within each school. For policy, the findings provide an empirical basis for advocating revisions to Ministerial Regulation No. 111 of 2014 that explicitly recognize and institutionalize multi-actor supervision as a normative feature of high-quality GC service delivery.

This study acknowledges several significant limitations. The single-case, single-informant design constrains the scope of analytical claims and precludes statistical generalizability. The reliance on self-report data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias and limits the triangulation of perspectives across different supervisory actors. The specificity of the SMAN 8 Pekanbaru context a public senior high school limits the direct transferability of findings to other school types, educational levels, or national contexts.

These limitations are acknowledged explicitly and are incorporated into the following section on future research directions.

Future research should pursue at least four directions arising from this study. First, multi-case comparative studies across different school types (public and private, urban and rural, junior and senior high schools) are needed to test the generalizability and boundary conditions of the distributed GC supervision model proposed here. Second, multi-informant studies that collect data from principals, external supervisors, homeroom teachers, and GC teachers within the same school would enable the mapping of convergences and divergences in supervisory experience across actor positions. Third, action research projects that deliberately implement and evaluate formalized distributed supervision models in Indonesian schools would generate evidence about the conditions under which organic distributed supervision can be amplified through institutional design. Fourth, longitudinal studies tracking beginning GC teachers through their first several years of practice would illuminate the developmental trajectory of supervisory experience and its relationship to professional identity formation.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative single-case study provides the first systematic empirical documentation of distributed leadership as a constitutive feature of GC supervision in an Indonesian school context. The findings demonstrate that GC supervision at SMAN 8 Pekanbaru is enacted by a network of five actors the school principal, vice-principal for student affairs, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and the external GC supervisor each contributing distinct yet functionally complementary supervisory functions without explicit policy mandate or formal coordination architecture.

Three core conclusions are warranted. First, distributed GC supervision is an organically emergent phenomenon in this school context, arising from the inherent complexity of counseling practice rather than from deliberate institutional design. This finding empirically validates Spillane's (2006) theoretical proposition that distributed leadership emerges from organizational necessity in complex task environments. Second, the supervisory ecosystem is structured around a functional dual-supervision pattern, with administrative supervision performed by the principal and clinical supervision performed by the external GC supervisor, supplemented by an informal early-warning information network constituted by internal teaching staff. Third, while the existing distributed arrangement is perceived as functionally adequate by the GC teacher, a clear aspirational gap exists between the current periodic-formal mode of supervision and a desired continuous-developmental mode a gap whose closure depends on both individual supervisory actor reorientation and systemic policy reform.

The conceptual model of distributed GC supervision developed in this study offers a theoretically grounded and empirically derived framework for future research and policy development. By demonstrating the intersection of distributed leadership theory and GC supervision scholarship, this study opens a new line of inquiry that holds significant promise for the advancement of both fields, as well as for the practical improvement of school counseling service quality in Indonesia and comparable educational contexts.

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