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## Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Improving School Quality in Remote Areas

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze transformational leadership practices among school principals in improving school quality in remote areas through a Systematic Literature Review using the PRISMA method. Literature searches were conducted in Scopus and Google Scholar for publications from 2020 to 2025. After screening, twenty-four relevant articles were examined in depth. Findings show an increasing research trend from 2023 to 2025, focusing on learning innovation, teacher performance, and school culture. The four dimensions of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, were adapted to geographical constraints and limited resources. Implementation strategies include fostering an innovative school culture, optimizing local resources, strengthening teacher capacity, and building a shared vision through effective communication. Main challenges involve limited infrastructure, variations in principal competencies, resistance to change, and insufficient policy support. Transformational leadership positively impacts teacher retention, motivation, professional performance, learning innovation, and organizational culture. The study implies that strengthening transformational leadership in remote schools requires developing adaptive leadership capacities that respond to contextual limitations. These findings provide a foundation for adaptive leadership models that are relevant to the conditions of remote areas.

## 1. Introduction

Quality education is a fundamental right of every citizen guaranteed by the constitution, yet in reality, the gap in education quality between urban and remote areas remains a serious challenge in the national education system. Schools in remote areas face various complex issues, ranging from limited infrastructure, a shortage of qualified educators, to very restricted access to learning resources (Permatasari et al., 2023). Difficult geographical conditions further exacerbate the

situation, forcing many schools to operate with minimal facilities and insufficient government support.

In this context, the role of the school principal is crucial as a leader capable of transforming these limitations into opportunities for improving education quality. The concept of transformational leadership, introduced by Burns and further developed by Bass, emphasizes a leader's ability to create change through a strong vision, inspiring motivation, individual support, and the capacity to stimulate critical thinking and innovation. This leadership model comprises four core dimensions: idealized influence (charisma and role modeling), inspirational motivation (articulating compelling vision), intellectual stimulation (encouraging innovation and critical thinking), and individualized consideration (personalized support for development). International studies show that principals with transformational leadership can improve school climate, build teacher commitment, strengthen collaborative culture, and promote sustainable learning innovation. In remote areas, this approach is increasingly relevant because principals are required to have creativity, adaptive resilience, and high managerial capacity to overcome structural, geographical, and social obstacles (Ambawani, et al., 2024).

Previous studies indicate that transformational leadership of principals positively correlates with teacher motivation, a conducive school culture, and student academic achievement (Habibi, Mulyono, and Tegal, 2025). In remote areas, transformational principals often implement contextual strategies such as utilizing local resources, strengthening community networks, and empowering teachers to address limitations. Bibliometric analyses reveal growing academic interest in transformational leadership across various educational contexts, including underdeveloped, island, and border regions (Ridani and Sudadi, 2025). Research trajectories show an increasing focus on adaptive leadership practices, particularly in resource-constrained settings where conventional management approaches prove insufficient.

However, significant research gaps remain. Most existing studies focus only on the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance or overall school quality, while few comprehensively explore how transformational leadership is implemented in remote schools with all their complexities. Empirical evidence from Indonesia's border regions shows that implementation requires strategic adaptation strongly influenced by local conditions, yet systematic reviews compiling these adaptation patterns remain limited (Safitri, Triantoro, and Mawardi, 2025). Moreover, there is no in-depth synthesis of which dimensions of transformational leadership are most dominant, which strategies are most effective, which challenges are most critical, and how research narratives have evolved over the past five years. Additionally, the literature lacks comprehensive mapping of how these four dimensions are contextually adapted to address geographical isolation, infrastructure deficits, and limited human resources. Filling this gap is essential to generate a more complete, evidence-based understanding of the effectiveness of transformational leadership in remote areas.

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To address these unresolved issues, this study positions itself as a systematic effort to synthesize and map empirical evidence on principals' transformational leadership in improving school quality in remote areas. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA framework, this study examines scholarly publications from 2020 to 2025 to capture recent developments and shifts in research orientation. Specifically, the review seeks to identify the evolution of research trends over time, the distribution of transformational leadership dimensions emphasized in remote school contexts, and the dominant strategies, challenges, and impacts reported in the literature. Through this integrative approach, the study aims to reveal how research narratives have evolved in responding to geographical constraints, limited resources, and contextual demands of remote education, thereby providing a comprehensive and evidence-based foundation for understanding transformational leadership as a key mechanism for improving school quality in marginalized settings.

By answering these questions, this study aims to systematically review and synthesize empirical literature on school principals' transformational leadership in improving school quality in remote areas during 2020-2025. This study seeks to identify dominant leadership dimensions that are most frequently applied in geographically and structurally constrained educational contexts. It also aims to examine how transformational leadership practices are adapted to limited resources, infrastructure challenges, and socio-cultural conditions in remote areas. Furthermore, this study analyzes the strategies employed by school principals to enhance teacher performance, learning innovation, and school organizational effectiveness. Another objective is to explore the challenges and barriers faced in implementing transformational leadership in remote school settings. This study also aims to compare findings across different regional and contextual backgrounds to identify patterns and variations in leadership practices. Based on the synthesized evidence, the study formulates strategic recommendations for strengthening adaptive and context-sensitive school leadership. Ultimately, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of how transformational leadership can support efforts to improve and equalize education quality in remote areas.

## **2. Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach using the framework of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). This approach was chosen because it can produce a comprehensive, transparent, systematic, and replicable review in identifying, selecting, and analyzing research findings related to school principals' transformational leadership in improving school quality in remote areas. By following the PRISMA protocol, all stages of the process are conducted in a standardized manner, ensuring that the results have strong methodological validity.

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Data sources were obtained through the Publish or Perish (PoP) application by utilizing two reputable international databases, namely Scopus and Google Scholar. The search strategy was designed rigorously to capture literature in both Indonesian and English that is relevant to the research topic. Keywords used were bilingual combinations reflecting the main concepts of the study, including “transformational leadership,” “school principal,” “educational quality,” “remote area,” “kepemimpinan transformasional,” “kepala sekolah,” “mutu pendidikan,” and “daerah terpencil.” The publication range was limited to 2020-2025 to ensure the recency of findings. All obtained articles were downloaded in full-text format before entering the selection stage. Literature screening followed inclusion and exclusion criteria as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literatur

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	Indonesian - English	Other than Indonesian/English
Text Availability	Full-text available	Full-text not available
Publication Type	Indexed journal articles, conference proceedings, academic research reports	Unpublished literature, textbooks, opinion pieces
Relevance	Empirical, qualitative, quantitative, or systematic review studies relevant to transformational leadership	Not using scientific methodology or not relevant to leadership/school quality

Inclusion and exclusion criteria, as shown in Table 1, were applied to ensure the accuracy and quality of the literature analyzed. Inclusion criteria comprised indexed journal articles that underwent peer review, reputable international conference proceedings, and research reports published by accredited educational institutions. The literature had to explicitly discuss the practices of school principals' transformational leadership in the context of improving education quality in remote areas or regions with geographical challenges. Conversely, exclusion criteria included opinion articles without empirical data, general textbooks, publications not available in full-text format, and articles that were methodologically weak or irrelevant despite containing search keywords.

### ***Data Sources and Search Strategy***

Literature searches were conducted using two major academic databases, Scopus and Google Scholar, to ensure comprehensive coverage of international and relevant scholarly publications related to school principals' transformational leadership. These databases were selected due to their broad indexing of peer-reviewed journals and their relevance to educational leadership research. The search process focused on studies published between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent developments and contemporary perspectives. Keywords and Boolean operators were systematically applied to refine the search results and enhance retrieval accuracy. The initial search generated a substantial number of articles, reflecting

the growing scholarly interest in transformational leadership in remote educational contexts. A structured screening process was then implemented to assess the relevance of titles and abstracts based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that met the criteria were further evaluated through full-text review to ensure methodological rigor and thematic relevance. The flowchart of the article selection process is presented in Figure 1 to enhance transparency and replicability of the systematic review process.

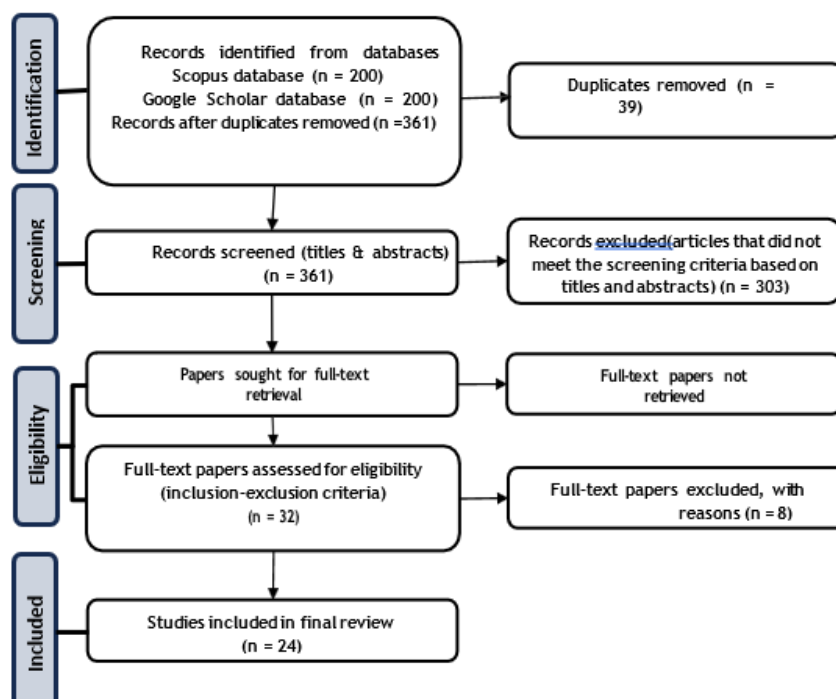


Figure 1. The flowchart of the article selection process is presented

As shown in Figure 1, the study selection process followed the PRISMA framework to ensure transparency and methodological rigor in the systematic literature review. A total of 400 records were initially identified from two major academic databases, namely Scopus (n = 200) and Google Scholar (n = 200), covering publications from 2020 to 2025. After the removal of 39 duplicate records, 361 unique articles remained and were subjected to title and abstract screening. During this screening stage, 303 articles were excluded because they did not meet the predefined inclusion criteria related to transformational leadership, school leadership, or remote-area educational contexts. The remaining 255 articles were sought for full-text retrieval to allow a more comprehensive eligibility assessment. However, 48 full-text articles could not be retrieved due to access limitations or unavailability of full-text documents. Consequently, 32 full-text articles were assessed in detail based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. At this eligibility stage, 8 articles were excluded due to conceptual misalignment with transformational leadership, insufficient focus on remote-area contexts, or methodological weaknesses. Ultimately, 24 studies fulfilled all eligibility requirements and were included in the final synthesis. This systematic reduction process, as visualized in Figure 1, demonstrates a transparent

and replicable approach to article selection, thereby strengthening the credibility and validity of the review findings.

### ***Data Extraction and Data Analysis***

Data extraction was conducted using a structured analysis sheet containing article identification, research objectives, methodological design, geographical characteristics of the study sites, transformational leadership dimensions examined, implementation strategies, contextual challenges encountered, and impacts on school quality. Data analysis was carried out through thematic coding to identify main themes, recurring patterns, and differences across studies. Emergent themes included transformational leadership strategies, leadership adaptation under limited resources, school organizational dynamics in remote areas, and tangible impacts on learning quality and teacher performance.

Findings from the analyzed literature were then synthesized using a narrative synthesis approach, which allows the integration of diverse research results into a coherent and comprehensive understanding of school principals' transformational leadership practices in remote areas. This synthesis provides an in-depth view of the contributions of transformational leadership to improving education quality while highlighting structural, geographical, and cultural challenges that must be addressed in remote contexts. Through this SLR approach, the study produced a thematic mapping illustrating strategies, challenges, implementation barriers, and the impact of school principals' transformational leadership on improving education quality in remote areas based on empirical evidence from the 24 selected articles.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### ***Results***

This section presents the results of the systematic literature review based on the analysis of 24 selected articles that met all inclusion criteria. The findings were generated through a structured process of data extraction, thematic coding, and narrative synthesis. The analysis aimed to identify dominant patterns and recurring themes related to school principals' transformational leadership in remote educational contexts. Results are organized to reflect the main thematic categories emerging from the reviewed studies, including research trends over time, key dimensions of transformational leadership, implementation strategies, and reported challenges and impacts. Bibliometric analysis was also employed to support the thematic findings by mapping keyword co-occurrences and research focus areas. The results highlight the distribution and relationships among core concepts frequently examined in the literature. Quantitative patterns, such as publication trends and thematic frequencies, are presented alongside qualitative descriptions of leadership practices. Overall, this section provides an empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion by clearly outlining what was found in the reviewed studies without interpretative comparison.

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## ***Bibliometric Results***

Analysis of the 24 articles meeting inclusion criteria revealed four main themes: 1) research publication trends from 2020 to 2025, 2) transformational leadership dimensions emerging in remote area contexts, 3) implementation strategies for improving school quality, and 4) challenges and impacts of transformational leadership on teachers and school organizations. These findings were obtained through thematic coding and narrative synthesis according to the SLR method. The literature mapping was visualized using VOSviewer to show the distribution and interrelation of the most frequently occurring keywords in research on school principals' transformational leadership and the improvement of education quality in remote areas. The visualization illustrates thematic relationships, highlighting the direction and current trends in educational leadership research, particularly in contexts with limited resources and challenging geographical conditions. The bibliometric map shows that themes such as leadership style, school principal, leadership, transformational leadership, role, and mediating role form dominant interrelated clusters, indicating a global research focus on the crucial role of transformational principals in achieving equitable education quality in remote areas.

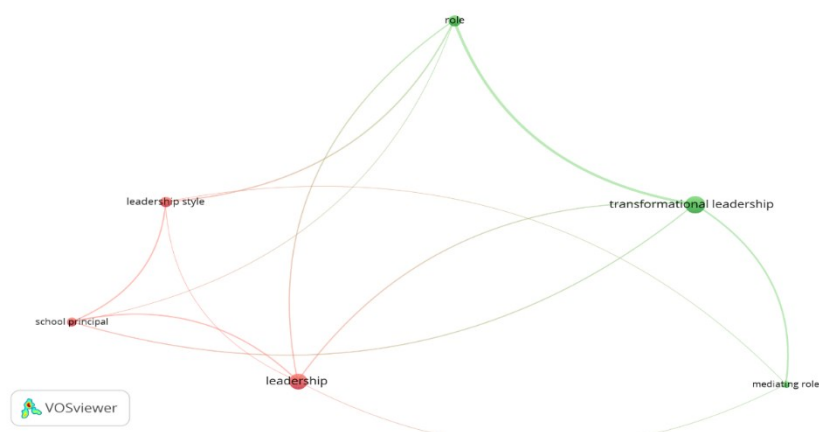


Figure 2. Keyword Co-occurrence Mapping Using VOSviewer

This subsection is intentionally presented in figure 2 show a descriptive manner to clearly distinguish bibliometric findings from interpretative analysis. The results reported are limited to observable patterns derived from keyword co-occurrence mapping using VOSviewer. The focus of this section is on identifying dominant themes and the structural relationships among frequently used keywords in the reviewed literature. No theoretical interpretation or causal inference is provided at this stage to avoid overlap with the discussion section. The description is confined to reporting cluster composition, keyword distribution, and centrality within the bibliometric network. This approach ensures that the results remain objective and data-driven. By separating descriptive findings from analytical interpretation, the methodological transparency of the study is strengthened. Consequently, this subsection provides a factual foundation for subsequent comparative and theoretical discussions.

### ***Research Trends 2020-2025***

The analysis of the selected literature indicates a gradual increase in the number of publications between 2020 and 2025, with a noticeable rise occurring during the period of 2023–2025. This increase reflects a growing scholarly interest in educational leadership issues within remote and geographically disadvantaged areas. The reviewed studies predominantly examine the role of transformational leadership in addressing challenges related to learning innovation, teacher performance, and school culture development. Several studies focus on how leadership practices contribute to improving instructional quality under conditions of limited resources. Other publications emphasize the importance of leadership in fostering teacher motivation and professional commitment in remote school settings. The literature also shows an increasing tendency to explore leadership as a response to educational inequality between urban and remote regions. In addition, recent studies place greater attention on contextual and adaptive leadership approaches rather than generic leadership models. Overall, these trends demonstrate a shift toward more context-sensitive research on school leadership in remote educational environments.

### ***Dimensions of Transformational Leadership in Remote Areas***

The four dimensions of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are applied with strong contextual adaptation. Idealized influence is demonstrated through principals' ability to build trust and moral role modeling amid limited facilities. Inspirational motivation appears in the formulation of a shared and realistic vision based on local conditions. Intellectual stimulation is reflected in efforts to encourage teachers to innovate despite restricted access to learning resources. Individualized consideration is shown through personal mentoring, which is essential for teachers in remote areas who frequently face psychological pressures.

### ***Strategies, Impacts, and Challenges in Transformational Leadership***

#### ***1. School Quality Improvement Strategies through Transformational Leadership***

Dominant strategies identified in the literature include:

- 1) Creating a culture of learning innovation. Principals provide space for pedagogical experimentation, contextual learning, and professional learning communities to encourage collaboration.
  - 2) Optimizing local resources. Principals leverage community potential, the local environment, and partnerships to offset facility limitations.
  - 3) Strengthening teacher capacity. Through training, mentoring, and constructive academic supervision, teachers are empowered to enhance their competencies.
  - 4) Building communication and a shared vision. Principals develop a collaborative culture that enables all school members to understand the school's goals and direction.
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These strategies are consistently associated with improved instructional quality and teacher performance.

*2. Impacts of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Retention and Performance.* Findings indicate that transformational leadership directly influences teacher retention, particularly by enhancing psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and a sense of belonging. Studies in this SLR confirm that emotional support, recognition of performance, and individualized coaching reduce burnout and strengthen teachers' commitment to remain in remote schools. In terms of performance, transformational leadership encourages teachers to adopt more creative, reflective, and student-oriented instructional practices. Increased intrinsic motivation, understanding of the school vision, and intellectual stimulation emerge as key mediators linking leadership style with improved teacher performance.

### *3. Implementation Challenges and Adaptive Solutions*

These challenges are consistent with findings in educational research that highlight limited access to learning resources and technology as major barriers to innovation and instructional improvement in under-resourced school contexts (Khusnunnisa & Andriani, 2025; Sartono & Laisaroh, 2022). Implementation of transformational leadership in remote areas faces several challenges, including:

- 1) Limited infrastructure and access. Geographic conditions, minimal facilities, and technological constraints inhibit innovation and teacher development.
- 2) Variations in principal competencies. Many principals lack sufficient training to implement transformational leadership effectively.
- 3) Resistance to change. Static school cultures and insufficient systemic support hinder innovative strategies.
- 4) Limited policy support. Incentives and facilities for teachers and principals often fall short of the needs of remote areas.

Empirical studies also show that gradual and context-sensitive integration of technology can support school innovation even in resource-limited environments, provided that implementation aligns with local needs and capacities (Septiani et al., 2025; Munawarah, 2025). The literature recommends adaptive solutions such as context-based leadership training, collaboration with local governments, gradual integration of technology, and the development of partnership networks to sustain school programs. The analysis of 24 articles shows broad agreement regarding the principal's central role as a transformational leader in improving educational quality in remote areas. This central role of school principals aligns with evidence from leadership studies emphasizing principals as key agents in shaping school culture, managing limited resources, and sustaining improvement initiatives (Hardiman et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2025). However, variations exist in focus, geographical context, and implementation strategies across schools. Most studies highlight positive impacts on motivation, performance, learning innovation, and teacher retention. Other studies emphasize that geographical isolation, limited facilities, and resource scarcity require principals to adopt leadership models different from those in urban or semi-urban schools.

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All articles consistently affirm the four core dimensions of transformational leadership as foundational drivers of change. Studies conducted in highly isolated areas place stronger emphasis on individualized consideration due to teachers' psychosocial pressures such as isolation, workload, limited professional support, and high turnover. In contrast, studies from less isolated remote regions highlight inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation as the primary drivers of learning innovation. Variations also appear in school-improvement strategies. Eight articles stress professional development through academic supervision, coaching, and needs-based training. Seven articles emphasize the use of local resources, community collaboration, and cross-institutional partnerships. Five articles highlight the importance of building a positive organizational culture to strengthen shared vision and commitment. Other studies underline low-tech innovation, professional learning communities, and ethical leadership as foundational elements of change. Regarding implementation challenges, all articles identify at least two major barriers: weak infrastructure and limited principal leadership capacity, especially in change management. Additional constraints include resistance to change, high teacher turnover, heavy administrative burdens, and inconsistent policy support. Despite these challenges, the studies conclude that transformational principals can optimize school potential through clear vision, participatory communication, instructional innovation, teacher empowerment, and community collaboration.

## ***Discussion***

### ***Comparison Across Studies***

While all reviewed studies consistently confirm the importance of transformational leadership in improving school quality, notable differences emerge across geographical contexts. Studies conducted in highly isolated and geographically extreme areas tend to emphasize individualized consideration as the most dominant leadership dimension. This emphasis reflects teachers' heightened psychosocial needs, including feelings of isolation, work overload, limited professional support, and high turnover rates. In such contexts, principals are required to provide emotional support, personal mentoring, and close interpersonal engagement to maintain teacher motivation and commitment. In contrast, studies conducted in less isolated remote regions highlight inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation as key drivers of instructional innovation. These regions generally have relatively better access to infrastructure and professional networks, allowing principals to focus more on vision-building and pedagogical innovation. The comparison across studies indicates that transformational leadership practices are shaped by contextual constraints rather than applied uniformly. Overall, this variation demonstrates that effective transformational leadership in remote areas requires flexibility and responsiveness to local conditions.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The findings of this review contribute to transformational leadership theory by highlighting its contextual adaptability in remote educational settings. Classical

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transformational leadership models were largely developed within organizational environments characterized by sufficient resources and institutional stability. However, the reviewed studies show that in remote school contexts, transformational leadership places stronger emphasis on relational support, emotional engagement, and problem-solving under constraints. This suggests that leadership effectiveness is not solely driven by visionary influence but also by leaders' capacity to respond to contextual limitations. The prominence of individualized consideration in highly isolated areas indicates the need to reframe transformational leadership as a context-sensitive construct. Moreover, the findings suggest that the relative importance of leadership dimensions may shift depending on environmental and organizational conditions. This challenges the assumption that all transformational leadership dimensions function equally across contexts. Therefore, transformational leadership theory should incorporate contextual sensitivity as a core analytical component when applied to geographically constrained educational settings.

### ***Implications for School Leadership in Remote Areas***

The comparative findings indicate that successful transformational leadership in remote schools extends beyond visionary and motivational roles. Effective principals must also demonstrate the ability to mobilize local resources and build collaborative relationships with communities, local governments, and external stakeholders. In many remote contexts, limited infrastructure and access to professional development require principals to adopt creative and adaptive leadership strategies. Sustaining teacher motivation under challenging conditions emerges as a critical leadership task, particularly in addressing issues of burnout and retention. The findings also suggest that leadership practices must be aligned with teachers' professional and psychosocial needs. Principals who adopt situational and adaptive leadership approaches are more likely to achieve sustainable school improvement. Furthermore, leadership development programs for remote-area principals should emphasize contextual problem-solving and relational competencies. Overall, leadership effectiveness in remote educational settings depends on adaptive, situational, and community-oriented leadership practices rather than standardized leadership models.

## **4. Conclusion**

Based on this systematic literature review, the study provides a comprehensive synthesis of empirical evidence on school principals' transformational leadership in improving school quality in remote areas. The main contribution of this research lies in identifying how the four core dimensions of transformational leadership are applied differently according to geographical and resource constraints, thereby extending existing leadership theory with a stronger contextual perspective. The findings demonstrate that effective leadership in remote schools requires adaptive, relational, and context-sensitive practices rather than uniform leadership models. From a practical perspective, the study highlights the need for context-based leadership development programs that strengthen principals' transformational

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competencies and responsiveness to local conditions. In addition, the findings underscore the importance of collaborative networks and the strategic use of information and communication technology to support sustainable school improvement and professional development in remote educational settings.

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