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## Principal's Transformational Leadership in Optimizing Learning Communities at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, Jepara Regency

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the principal's transformational leadership in optimizing the learning community as a medium for teachers' professional development. Principals are expected to inspire, motivate, and empower teachers to foster a collaborative, reflective, and sustainable learning culture. This research aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, Jepara Regency, focusing on four dimensions: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to explore participants' lived experiences. The study was conducted from September to October 2025, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis followed the stages of data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and time. The findings indicate that the principal's transformational leadership effectively optimizes the learning community. Inspirational motivation strengthens collaboration and collective commitment, idealized influence builds trust and professional ethics, intellectual stimulation promotes innovation and lifelong learning, and individualized consideration supports mentoring and personal development. The integration of these dimensions creates a collaborative, reflective, and sustainable learning community that enhances the quality of learning.

## 1. Introduction

The existence of a learning community in schools has become a crucial platform for teachers and educational staff to continuously develop their professional competencies in response to increasingly complex educational challenges. A learning community provides structured opportunities for educators to exchange

ideas, collaboratively solve instructional problems, reflect on teaching practices, and respond collectively to changes in curriculum, assessment, and student needs. Ferayanti (2023) defines a learning community as a collaborative forum in which teachers and educational staff engage in systematic and continuous learning activities with clear, measurable objectives aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Through regular meetings, collaborative discussions, and shared reflections, learning communities foster professional dialogue that enhances instructional practices and ultimately impacts students' learning outcomes. In this context, the learning community functions not merely as an administrative program, but as a professional learning culture that supports sustainable school improvement.

The effectiveness of a learning community, however, is highly dependent on strong and supportive leadership. Leadership plays a central role in directing, motivating, and sustaining collective efforts within an organization, particularly in educational institutions where human interaction and professional collaboration are essential. Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence, inspire, encourage, and guide individuals or groups to work toward shared goals (Gisevius & Braun, 2025). Robbins and Judge (2015) emphasize that leadership is the capacity to realize an organization's vision and mission by influencing the attitudes and behaviors of its members. In the school context, effective leadership ensures that teachers remain engaged, committed, and aligned with institutional goals, while also fostering an environment that values collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning. Without effective leadership, learning communities often become symbolic, fragmented, or unsustainable.

One leadership approach that has been widely recognized for its positive impact on organizational development is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes empowering individuals, developing a shared vision, and motivating members to exceed routine expectations for the sake of organizational growth (Abdelgadir & Ahmed, 2025). This leadership style focuses on building trust, inspiring commitment, and encouraging innovation through meaningful interpersonal relationships. In schools, transformational principals are expected to motivate teachers not only to comply with institutional policies but also to actively participate in professional learning initiatives (Yakob & Sahudra, 2025). By fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, transformational leadership creates conditions in which learning communities can thrive as dynamic spaces for professional growth and instructional improvement.

Preliminary observations at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo indicate that the learning community has been functioning effectively, largely due to the transformational leadership practices demonstrated by the principal. Teachers' participation in learning community activities has reached approximately 90 percent, reflecting a high level of engagement and commitment. This strong participation is supported by a well-defined organizational structure and a systematic work plan developed collaboratively by the learning community team. Regular meetings, clear division of roles, and structured programs have enabled the learning community to operate consistently and purposefully. These conditions suggest that the principal's

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leadership has played a significant role in creating a professional environment that values collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement.

The leadership pattern of the principal therefore becomes an important and interesting focus for further investigation, as leadership significantly influences the success of educational organizations. The ability of a principal to manage change, motivate teachers, and sustain professional programs determines whether school initiatives can produce meaningful and lasting impact. Empirical evidence shows that not all principals are able to maintain effective leadership practices or optimize existing programs to support school development. Some learning communities fail to achieve their objectives due to weak leadership, lack of follow-up, or limited teacher involvement. Therefore, this study seeks to examine in depth how the principal's transformational leadership contributes to optimizing the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, with the expectation that the findings will provide valuable insights for strengthening leadership practices and improving the quality of professional learning in schools.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive orientation, aiming to understand and describe the research phenomena in depth through rich and meaningful data in the form of words, images, and documents rather than numerical data (Moleong, 2018). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore social realities in their natural context and to capture participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations comprehensively. Through this approach, the study seeks to reveal how leadership practices are implemented and experienced by school members within the learning community setting.

Data collection was conducted directly in the natural setting of the research site to obtain an authentic and holistic understanding of the research objects. Multiple data collection techniques were employed, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and insights regarding the implementation of leadership and learning community activities. Observation was used to examine real-time interactions, behaviors, and practices within the school environment, while field notes were utilized to record contextual information and reflective insights during the research process.

Documentation was collected to strengthen and support the primary data obtained from interviews and observations. Relevant documents included school programs, organizational structures, activity schedules, meeting records, and other institutional documents related to the learning community. The use of multiple data sources enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

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The research informants consisted of one principal, three teachers, and two administrative staff members who were selected based on their involvement and direct experience in the learning community. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation, the data were analyzed to identify patterns and themes that provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo is a public senior high school located on the border between Jepara Regency and Pati Regency. It is situated on Benteng Portugis Street, Tulakan Village, Donorojo District, Jepara Regency, within a densely populated rural residential area. The school employs 54 teaching staff and 12 administrative staff, the majority of whom hold undergraduate (bachelor's) degrees. In the 2025/2026 academic year, SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo accommodated 30 classes with a total of 1,058 students. The students come from various villages across several districts, including Donorojo, Keling, Cluwak (Pati Regency), Dukuhseti (Pati Regency), and surrounding areas.

Since the implementation of the zoning-based student admission system over the past four years, the student population of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo has become increasingly diverse, ranging from those living in close proximity to the school to those distributed across Donorojo, Keling, Cluwak, and Dukuhseti districts. Consequently, students' academic abilities and socio-cultural backgrounds vary considerably, resulting in diverse average competency levels. Under these conditions, transformational leadership is particularly essential at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, especially in optimizing the existing learning community, so that all teachers are able to provide equitable and effective educational services to students from diverse backgrounds.

The principal's transformational leadership serves as a primary catalyst in transforming schools into dynamic learning organizations, with the learning community functioning as the core and driving force of school development. This form of leadership goes beyond managerial functions by inspiring and empowering teachers to continuously enhance their competencies and performance collectively. Through transformational leadership, the learning community evolves from a mere forum for sharing experiences into a transformative engine that systematically and sustainably promotes school improvement. This leadership pattern is evident at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, where the implementation of transformational leadership enables the learning community to function optimally as a medium for mutual learning and knowledge transfer. As a result, teachers are better supported in developing more equitable competencies, ultimately contributing to improved instructional quality across the school.

Data collection in this study was conducted using three primary techniques: interviews, observations, and document analysis, involving the principal, teachers,

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and administrative staff as key informants and sources of information. The interviews were carried out through face-to-face interactions in the principal's office and around the school environment, with each session lasting approximately 15-20 minutes, the interview results are shown on table 1. An interview guide served as the main reference; however, the researcher also employed an adaptive approach to allow flexibility and facilitate deeper exploration of information related to transformational leadership practices, forms of support provided by the principal, and the level of teachers' participation in the learning community. In addition, observations were conducted to directly examine learning community activities, teacher interactions, and the leadership patterns enacted by the principal. Document analysis was used to review meeting minutes, supervision records, learning community work programs, and other relevant school documents. All collected data were then analyzed and thematically described to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the principal's transformational leadership patterns at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo.

Based on the research result which is done in SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, it found out that the principal has implemented the transformational leadership effectively in optimizing the learning community. It was showed from 4 dimension of transformational leadership of the principal which have been implemented in SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo in optimizing the learning community. The next discussion will elaborate the research result based on 4 dimensions of transformational leadership. They are (1) Inspirational Motivation, (2) Idealized Influence, (3) Intellectual Stimulation dan (4) Individualized Consideration.

Table 1. Interview Results

No.	Interview Questions	Responses
1	In transformational leadership, particularly in the dimension of <i>inspirational motivation</i> , what strategies do you use to motivate teachers to participate actively and consistently in the learning community to achieve its optimization?	My strategy to motivate teachers to be active and consistent in the learning community is by creating a positive, collaborative, and relevant atmosphere that aligns with their needs. I always encourage teachers to perceive the learning community not merely as a forum, but as a space for mutual support, sharing experiences, and finding real solutions to classroom challenges. In addition, I provide appreciation for every contribution, no matter how small, so teachers feel valued. I also ensure that learning community activities are clearly scheduled, have measurable goals, and emphasize direct benefits for improving teachers' competence and student learning outcomes.
2	How do you develop and enhance teachers' motivation to foster collaboration in optimizing the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo?	I develop and strengthen teachers' motivation by creating a supportive, inspiring, and appreciative environment. I emphasize that collaboration is not merely an obligation but a meaningful means for mutual learning and strengthening teaching competence. To achieve this, I provide opportunities for teachers to share best practices, participate in training, and implement innovations relevant to learning needs. Every contribution is appreciated so teachers feel valued and motivated to remain actively involved. I also highlight the tangible benefits of

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	collaboration in improving students' learning quality, which encourages teachers' commitment to optimizing the learning community.
3	<p>How do you build positive relationships to foster collaboration, encourage reflection, promote lifelong learning, and create collective commitment to support the optimization of the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo?</p> <p>I build positive relationships with teachers through open communication, mutual respect, and fostering a sense of togetherness. I make efforts to be present, listen to teachers' aspirations, and provide space for them to express ideas and challenges. As a principal, I adopt an open attitude and provide consultation and counseling opportunities so teachers feel supported in their professional development. In collaboration, I emphasize teamwork and sharing best practices. During reflection, I create a safe and supportive atmosphere where teachers can share experiences without fear. To promote lifelong learning, I encourage teachers' participation in training and provide access to learning facilities. Collective commitment is built through shared goal setting and appreciation of achievements, enabling the learning community to grow optimally and sustainably.</p>
4	<p>How do you encourage creativity and innovation to foster collaboration, reflection, lifelong learning, and collective commitment in optimizing the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo?</p> <p>I encourage creativity and innovation by providing space for teachers to experiment with new ideas in both learning activities and learning community programs without fear of failure. I facilitate forums for sharing innovative practices so teachers can inspire one another. During reflection, I encourage teachers to openly evaluate the results of innovations as part of collective learning. To support lifelong learning, I provide access to updated knowledge resources and encourage participation in training that enhances creativity. I also organize coordination activities related to school programs to accommodate teachers' ideas and initiatives. In building collective commitment, I emphasize that successful innovations are collective achievements that deserve appreciation. Through these strategies, the learning community develops optimally, dynamically, and sustainably.</p>
5	<p>As a principal, how do you value individual differences and uniqueness to foster collaboration, reflection, lifelong learning, and collective commitment in optimizing the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo?</p> <p>I value individual differences and uniqueness by recognizing them as strengths that enrich the learning community. In collaboration, I provide space for each teacher to share ideas and experiences based on their teaching style and background, creating complementary contributions. During reflection, I encourage teachers to share unique experiences without fear of comparison, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge for collective improvement. To promote lifelong learning, I facilitate teachers in choosing professional development paths aligned with their interests and needs, through training, literature, and discussion forums. In building collective commitment, I emphasize that diversity is a valuable asset, as shared strength emerges from differences, enabling the learning community at SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo to be optimized effectively.</p>

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### ***Inspirational Motivation of the principal to optimize the learning community***

#### **a. The ability of motivating and inspiring**

In optimizing the learning community in SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo, the commitment of the principal appears in the consistence of the presence and direct involvement in many learning community activities. The result of field data found out the consistency from the principal motivation to the lifelong learning includes 1) Study resource facilities 2) Appreciation to teachers' effort, and 3) Reflective customs. It shows the application of learner leadership who place study as the core of professional improve.

#### **b. The ability in developing trust and commitment**

The research result showed that trust grows from disclosure, two-way communication and model. However, collective commitment is aware because of the participation and appreciation to the contribution each learning community member. The principal creates opened and humanist working climate so all the teachers feel appreciated, trusted dan being involved in every decision making. Rifad research (2023) in Palu showed that teachers trust had increased when the principal acted on disclosure and model in which pushed active participation in digital literacy program. The similar pattern appeared in Donorojo where the principal was not only as decision maker but also as a dialogue facilitator that made the sense of belonging. Overall, in field, the principal showed transformational leadership style with the ability of strong inspirational motivation. Warm attitude, communicative and visioner would create positive vibe of Work and the principal can be a model for all the teachers and administrative staff at school.

### ***Idealized Influence Dimesion: A principal in optimizing Learning Community***

#### **a. Clear vision**

The research result showed that the principal has clear vision and communicative in guiding all the school society, especially in strengthening the quality of learning community. The principal explained that the conveying of the vision was not done in one way direction or formalistic but it was done by many medias and chances so all teachers understand the direction they want to achieve. It was strengthened by the research of Yuliana, Sulisworo and Hasanah (2025) that the principal who has transformational vision will have the capability to increase the commitment of teachers in School development program.

#### **b. The ability of giving appreciation and Validation**

The principal strategy in giving appreciation and validation will be a real model of motivated leadership. The research result showed that the appreciation given by the principal is not only giving the motivation on individual but also strengthen the belonging sense of the learning community. This appreciation custom will grow collaborative motivation, reflective and collective commitment for lifelong

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learning. This is in line with the research result of Novita and Radiana (2024), It found out that appreciation custom by the principal will influence significantly on the increase of the learning innovation in teachers learning community.

Overall, the research result showed that the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo was succeeded in realizing the Idealized Influence dimension by the leadership. The research result of the dimension showed that the model of the principal becomes a moral base and emotional to form the reflective learning custom. The teachers not only imitate the principal but also make integrity and responsibility as a team value in work. Through the ideal influence, the principal is capable in growing trust, commitment and collective moral awareness which strengthen the learning community at school continuously.

### ***Intellectual Stimulation Dimension of the Principal in Optimizing the Learning Community***

#### **a. The Ability of encouraging Creativity and Innovation**

The principal played an active role in fostering teachers' creativity and innovation by providing broad opportunities for experimentation, the application of new pedagogical approaches, and the development of fresh ideas within both classroom learning processes and professional learning community activities. Through this supportive leadership, teachers were encouraged to explore alternative instructional strategies without fear of excessive control or punishment for failure. Such an environment nurtured reflective practice, collaborative learning, and continuous professional growth among educators. In line with Bass's transformational leadership theory as cited in Suriagiri (2020), transformational leaders inspire their followers to think beyond conventional boundaries and challenge existing practices. This leadership approach emphasizes intellectual stimulation, where teachers are motivated to view challenges and failures as integral parts of the learning and innovation process rather than as obstacles. Consequently, the principal's leadership contributed to the creation of a dynamic school culture that values creativity, innovation, and ongoing improvement in teaching and learning.

#### **b. The Ability of Develop Problem Solving**

The research result found out that the capability of the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo in developing the skill of problem solving appeared to the practice in stimulating the teachers to have critical thought on real Challenges of learning process and in school management. On reflection process, the principal invited the teachers to analyze the root of problem and arrange realistic improvement steps together to grow collective awareness. Tichy and Devana in Ridwal (2018) stated that transformational leader doesn't solve all the problem alone but the leader makes the members have critically thought and find collective solution. Overall, the research result showed that the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo was succeeded in realizing intellectual stimulation dimension in the leadership. The principal was not only be an administration activator but also be an intellectual stimulator to encourage the teachers to have critical thought, creative and innovative. The

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principal was active in stimulating the teachers to do problem solving collaboratively and develop new ideas in the learning community activities.

### ***Individualized Consideration Dimension of the Principal in Optimizing the Learning Community***

#### **a. Noticing Individual Need**

The research result obtained that the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo showed high concern to the needs of each teacher individually and all the administration staff including professional development and working welfare. Nguyen et al. (2022) stated that educational leadership who concerns the difference of teachers needs can make psychological safety that strengthen loyalty and productivity. Thus, the concern of the principal will not only effect on work comfort but also increase teachers' active participation in learning community. The principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo does not only understand the personal need and also connect with effort to develop collaboration, reflection, lifelong learning and collective commitment in learning community at school. The concern of the individual teachers' need becomes a crucial base in encouraging trust, mutual respect, also responsibility in developing teachers professionalism.

#### **b. Giving constructive feed back**

Feedback is a personal concern which is showed by the principal to develop teachers' professionalism. In working on teachers' reflection, the teachers are guided to not only focus in deficiency but also the success that should be developed. The principal makes the feedback as means of developing confidence and lifelong learning spirit. The research of Novita and Radiana (2024) found out that teachers whom accepted positive feedback from the principal should significant improvement in participating the learning community and learning innovation. Individualize consideration dimension should that the concern of the principal to needs, potency and teachers' individual development also the administration staff is crucial. The concern is a crucial factor in creating inclusive collaborative situation in the learning community.

Based on the research result which was analyzed by for dimensions of transformational leadership of the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo should complete application and complement each other is important in optimizing the teachers' learning community. The dimensions form leadership pattern which not only focuses managerial aspect but also encourage humanity values, reflective and innovative at school. This dimension synergically make the learning community in SMA Negeri 1 Donorojo as reflective space, collaborative, and adaptive which not only increase teachers' competence but also strengthen professional custom and learning quality at school.

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#### 4. Conclusion

The findings indicate that the principal's transformational leadership has been implemented effectively, contributing significantly to the optimization of the learning community through strengthened collaboration, reflection, lifelong learning, and collective commitment. Inspirational motivation is reflected in the principal's ability to build passion and active participation among teachers through an inspiring vision and continuous encouragement, while idealized influence appears in consistent actions, integrity, and strong character modeling that position the principal as a respected role model. Intellectual stimulation is demonstrated by encouraging critical thinking, innovation, and reflective problem-solving, which enhance the community's intellectual capacity, whereas individualized consideration is evident in the principal's attention to teachers' needs, potential, and personal development, fostering an inclusive and supportive work climate. To sustain and enhance these achievements, the principal is encouraged to continue strengthening transformational leadership practices, teachers and administrative staff should deepen their collaborative and reflective participation in the learning community, and the Educational Department is advised to use these findings as a reference for promoting transformational leadership among school principals.

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