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Transformational Leadership of School Principals

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A B S T R A C T

School principals play a crucial role as heads of educational institutions, serving not only as administrators but also as agents of change. The primary objectives of this study are to evaluate the effectiveness of this leadership model in the field of education, identify the factors influencing its success, and provide practical implications and recommendations for school principals and education policymakers. The research method employed by the researcher is qualitative research using a case study approach to examine the role of transformational leadership by the school principal at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan. The study participants consist of 13 informants: 1 school principal, 10 teachers, and 2 educational staff members. The novelty of this study lies in the principal's tactics for managing such resistance without triggering open conflict (chaos). The principal did not use formal authority to impose sanctions but instead implemented the "Embracing Through Respect" strategy. In this study, data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving the principal, teachers, and school staff. The research results and discussion indicate that the principal at SD 01 Sastrodirjan in Wonopringgo Subdistrict has applied a transformational leadership style in managing the school.

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important sectors in the development of highquality human resources. To achieve effective educational goals, the leadership of the school principal is essential. The term "leadership" originates from the English word "Leadership," but generally, it can be defined as a close relationship between an individual and a group. A leader must be able to foster innovation, build a positive work culture, and empower the entire school community toward positive change. The changes and challenges in the world of education demand that school principals possess adaptive and visionary leadership skills. One form of leadership that developed by particularly relevant to addressing these challenges is transformational leadership. The transformational leadership model developed by

Bass & Avolio (1993) offers an effective approach to bringing about positive transformation in the school environment. Through transformational leadership strategies, management can be aligned with the school's vision and mission. In the opinion, Sofiah Sinaga et al. (2021) said that leaders, such as school principals, can understand their subordinates, thereby translating the vision into action. Leaders are also open to criticism and suggestions from anyone, and this approach can foster a culture of progress and change.

Nevertheless, the implementation of transformational leadership in school settings often faces various obstacles. Some of the main challenges include limited human and financial resources, resistance to change from some educators, and excessive administrative burdens (Adeoye & Ainnubi, 2023). Principal leadership is a crucial component of the school's organizational processes and achievements (Hidayat et al., 2024). Principals now have more complex duties, where they are expected to lead students and teachers and be involved in many areas, such as finance, community relations, academic achievement, or even public relations (Meidelina et al., 2023). Due to these issues, school principal management is not functioning effectively, hindering principals from achieving school goals (Wolor et al., 2022).

In the school context, school leadership is defined as leadership in which leaders utilize their charisma, as well as intellectual stimulation, to transform and revitalize their organization. Transformational leadership not only improves teacher performance directly but also through indirect mechanisms, such as fostering a positive school climate, cultivating a collaborative culture, and strengthening data driven management systems (Suryadi et al., 2024). The urgency of transformational leadership is becoming increasingly critical because the success of improving educational quality is largely determined by the quality of teachers' performance as the primary actors in the learning process. Teachers do not merely act as content deliverers but also as learning facilitators, designers of learning experiences, and agents of change at the classroom. In Indonesia, the low quality of education is reflected not only in students' academic achievements but also in regional disparities in quality, a weak culture of school innovation, low utilization of learning technologies, and a lack of data driven decision making practices (Sri Widijastuti, 2025). This situation is exacerbated by school management practices that remain traditional and administrative in nature, thereby failing to encourage professional development

Based on the above discussion, an indepth study of transformational leadership in school management has become increasingly urgent, given the demand for schools to function as adaptive, innovative, and continuous learningoriented learning organizations. Therefore, transformational leadership theory is positioned as the primary conceptual framework from the outset of the study to understand how school principals' leadership influences organizational culture, teacher performance, learning innovation, and the overall quality of school management. The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of this transformational leadership model in the field of education, identify the components that influence its success, and provide practical implications and recommendations for school principals and education policymakers.

2. Methodology

The research method used by the researcher is qualitative research employing the case study method. The type of research used in this study is descriptive. For researchers using case studies in their research and to develop research findings, suggests that they should consider the most appropriate type of case. Cases can be single or collective, multi site or single site, and focus on a single case or a single issue (intrinsic instrumental) (Creswell et al., 2007). Second, in determining the case to be studied, it can be examined from various aspects, such as diverse perspectives on the problem, processes, or events; or it can be selected from ordinary cases, accessible cases, or unusual cases (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). Descriptive qualitative research is an inquiry that focuses intensively on a specific object, examining it as a problem. In this study, it is used to explore in depth the role of transformational leadership in improving the quality of education in madrasahs (Farid et al., 2024). The approach used in this study is the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is a research procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior (Taylor, 2015). The method involves transcribing the data, then coding the field notes, and interpreting the data to draw conclusions. This study employs a qualitative research design using field research methods (Tanjung et al., 2024). This approach aligns with the primary objective of the study, which is to describe and analyze the role of transformational leadership in improving the quality of education in madrasahs (Wahrudin, 2023).

The case study approach was chosen because it enables an indepth exploration of phenomena within the realworld context of SDN 01 Sastrodirjan. Data were collected through three main techniques: (1) in depth interviews with the principal, 10 teachers, and 2 educational staff; (2) participatory observation of school activities; and (3) a documentary study of work plan archives and school self evaluation reports to understand the principal's role in transformational leadership. Qualitative research is a type of research that provides a detailed, holistic, and complex picture of a specific phenomenon from the participants' perspective, rather than focusing on measurement or generalization (Creswell et al., 2007). Data analysis followed the thematic model which includes the following stages: (1) data familiarization, (2) coding, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, and (5) theme naming. To ensure data validity, source triangulation (comparing data from different informants), methodological triangulation (combining results from interviews, observations, and documents), and checking (reconfirmation with respondents) were conducted. The analysis focused on the four dimensions leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Besides that, the analysis also focused its relevance to the fulfillment of the 8 National Education Standards.

A Principal must have a planned service strategy with an accountable program. Principals collectively carry out their work to develop student competencies based on their individual abilities and expertise (Intan et al., 2025). Principals actively participate, transformatively, and collaborate with teachers and other educational staff to design school self evaluations, often known as EDS. This qualitative study analyzes the role, strategies, and stages of principals in developing teacher

professionalism in State Junior High Schools in Pidie Regency. The research focuses on three key aspects: The principal's role in fostering the integrity of teacher professionalism, The principal's strategy in cultivating teacher teaching competence, and the principal's stages in developing teacher communication soft skills. Using a case study design, data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation from principals and 14 certified teachers from State Junior High School 1 Muara Tiga and State Junior High School 3 Muara Tiga. The findings indicate that the principal's role involves valuebased leadership, collecting accurate information, and effective communication. Implemented strategies include creating a conducive work environment, providing resources, building a collaborative culture, utilizing technology, and conducting periodic evaluations. The stages for developing communication soft skills involve planning, teacher professional development, supervision, evaluation, and data driven decision making (Darmawati et al., 2025).

Other study, the research examines the role of the principal as a manager in instilling character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro, Kecamatan Doro, Kabupaten Pekalongan (Dewi et al., 2025). The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to understand how the principal plans, implements, supervises, and evaluates character education programs. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings show that the principal plays a crucial role in integrating character education into the school's curriculum, daily routines, and extracurricular activities. The planning of character education is thorough and involves collaboration with teachers, students, and parents. The implementation of character programs is successfully carried out, with regular monitoring and evaluation ensuring continuous improvement. The study also identifies challenges such as time constraints and the need for continuous teacher training in character education. Despite these challenges, the principal’s leadership has positively impacted students' behavior, with notable improvements in discipline, cooperation, and academic performance. This study highlights the importance of the principal’s managerial role in fostering character development in schools and underscores the need for ongoing professional development for educators to ensure effective character education implementation.

The process of developing codes and themes was conducted through thematic analysis by identifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation. After all interview data, observation data, and documentation were collected, the researcher conducted repeated readings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. During the initial coding phase, each informant statement relevant to the principal’s transformational leadership practices was coded based on the meaning it conveyed. Some of the codes that emerged included the principal’s exemplary leadership, motivating teachers, supporting learning innovations, participatory communication, teacher professional development, and individual coaching. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader categories. These were then analyzed and developed into main themes reflecting the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These themes were then examined by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation

to ensure consistency and alignment with the data from SDN 01 Sastrodirjan in Wonopringgo Subdistrict, Pekalongan Regency.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

SDN 01 Sastrodirjan, located in the Wonopringgo subdistrict of Pekalongan Regency, is surrounded by a community environment that strongly upholds mutual cooperation and religious values. The school has a clean, orderly, and disciplined learning atmosphere. Observations also indicated that interpersonal relationships among teachers and between teachers and students are warm, communicative, and collaborative, creating a conducive environment for character development.

Regarding data collection, interviews were conducted in a semi structured manner, allowing participants to explain their experiences naturally while still being guided by predetermined themes. The interviews were conducted in three stages: (a) principal's interview to explore basic understanding of the implementation of tranformational leadership, (b) in depth interviews focusing on the principal's managerial role, and (c) confirmatory interviews to validate findings. Interviews with the principal were conducted in the headmaster's office, while interviews with teachers took place in the library to ensure comfort and openness. Each interview occrured or took placed between 40–60 minutes and was audio recorded with permission. Field notes were also taken to capture nonverbal expressions and contextual details. The interview guide used in this study is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Interview Questions Used in Data Collection

No	Responden	Dimensions	Sample Interview Questions
1	Principals	Idealized Influence	The leader demonstrates a high level of dedication.
		Inspirational Motivation	Leaders have a clear vision.
		Intellectual Stimulation	Leaders Encourage Creativity
		Individualized Consideration	Mentoring and developing subordinates.
2	Teachers	Idealized Influeence	My leader is highly dedicated to his work.
		Inspirational Motivation	My leader clearly communicated the school's vision to all members.
		Intellectual Stimulation	My manager encourages his subordinates to come up with new ideas.
		Individualized Consideration	My manager provides me with personal mentoring or guidance
3	Staffs	Idealized Influence	My leader sets an example for my subordinates.
		Inspirational Motivation	My leader is able to explain the school's longterm goals in a way that is easy to understand.
		Intellectual Stimulation	My leader encourages subordinates to come up with new ideas.

Individualized Consideration	My leader understands that every team member has different needs.

The Implementation of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Idealized Influence Dimension

This study examines the role of the principal's transformational leadership in improving the quality of education at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan. The results show that, in terms of the "ideal influence" dimension, the principal has already implemented leadership by example in behavior and attitude, as evidenced by a high level of discipline and integrity, as well as a strong commitment to his responsibilities. The principal does not merely issue orders but demonstrates a high level of commitment to work, arrives on time, exhibits integrity in managing the school budget, and maintains consistency between words and actions. In the context of Indonesia's organizational culture, which tends to be paternalistic, a leader with high integrity plays a crucial role in shaping the commitment of subordinates. When teachers observe the principal demonstrating sincere dedication, feelings of respect and trust emerge. This trust serves as the principal's primary social capital for driving educational reform at the school level. Qualitative data indicates that idealized influence does not stem from the principal's academic rank or formal authority, but rather from consistency between their words and actual actions (walking the talk). Teacher informants used the terms "ngayomi" and "ing ngarsa sung tuladha" to describe this dimension.

The principal demonstrates his charisma through simple yet consistent actions: being the first to greet students at the school gate every morning; maintaining full transparency in financial management for example, regarding the School Operational Assistance (BOS) Fund through a public bulletin board; and being open to criticism during faculty meetings. It is this charisma that helps build the principal's moral legitimacy. When a leader possesses strong moral legitimacy, teachers voluntarily follow instructions not out of fear of bureaucratic sanctions, but out of deep respect and trust.

The Implementation of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Inpirational Motivation Dimension

In terms of inspiration, the principal has demonstrated the ability to articulate the school's vision and mission in an inspiring manner, as evidenced by the principal's ability to express appreciation to various parties both verbally and symbolically. The principal routinely uses staff meetings, morning briefings, and informal discussions to articulate the school's vision and mission in an engaging and motivating way. The principal no longer views the vision and mission as mere wall decorations in the reception area, but rather as "living documents" that are translated into challenging yet realistic operational goals. The principal's ability to instill optimism especially in the face of the transition to a new curriculum and the integration of digital technology has led teachers to view these challenges not as burdens, but as opportunities for growth.

In school vision and mission documents, the stated goals often sound abstract. However, research findings show that transformational principals are able to translate that abstraction into down to earth, everyday language. The process of inspirational motivation does not take place through formal, oneway communication from a podium, but rather through the tradition of casual discussions in the teachers' lounge over tea, or by taking advantage of shared lunch breaks. It is in these informal settings that the principal instills optimism, describes the school's future potential, and assures teachers that they are the key agents of that change. This communication style successfully breaks down bureaucratic barriers, transforming the school's vision into a shared vision.

The Implementation of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Intellectual Stimulation Dimension

In addition, the principal also strives to boost the morale of teachers, staff, and students alike. Furthermore, in terms of intellectual stimulation, the principal demonstrates the ability to provide teachers with the freedom to innovate and participate in training to develop their competencies. This is evident in the principal's support for innovative teaching methods, such as project based and digital learning. The principal also facilitates internal training for teachers. From another perspective, in the dimension of care, the principal has implemented measures to ensure that personal needs and fairness in task distribution are addressed. In this dimension, observations reveal that school principals pay attention to teachers' psychological needs. Principals assign tasks proportionally and in a personalized manner to each teacher.

The Implementation of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Individual Consideration Dimension

The final dimension individual consideration is reflected in the principal's willingness to listen to each teacher's personal complaints, needs, and career aspirations. Principals act as mentors and advisors, not merely as bosses demanding performance reports. This study found that school principals who effectively apply individual consideration are able to identify teachers with potential to participate in leadership training or the "Guru Penggerak" program. This humanizing approach to work relationships reduces teachers' workrelated stress and enhances their sense of belonging to the school.

Based on the research findings, the principal at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan has successfully and effectively applied the principles of transformational leadership. By setting an example through disciplined behavior, consistency, and active involvement in various school activities, the principal serves as a role model capable of inspiring teachers, staff, and students. The positive interactions fostered through the provision of advice and guidance reflect the principal's commitment to building harmonious relationships while supporting the educational process at the school. This aligns with Bernard M. Bass's theory, which states that transformational leaders act as role models who are admired, respected, and trusted by their followers (Kamaludin & Citaningati, 2023).

In addition, the principal proactively initiates informal meetings to discuss various challenges and provide clear guidance. This approach creates opportunities for teachers to participate in decision making, which ultimately boosts their morale and strengthens their commitment to the school's vision. The principal's optimistic attitude in facing obstacles also fosters a positive and collaborative work environment. All these aspects demonstrate that the principal's leadership has successfully built a work culture that supports the school's holistic development and promotes improvements in graduate quality. Through this approach, the principal has created an educational environment focused on enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process and graduate outcomes, while strengthening collaboration among the school community to achieve shared goals. Inspirational Motivation.

Based on the research findings, the principal at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan practices transformational leadership, which has a positive impact on improving the quality of graduates and the educational environment at the school. Through clear and consistent communication regarding the school's vision and mission, the principal has successfully fostered a sense of ownership among teachers and staff and encouraged their active involvement in the process of educational innovation. Recognition of teachers' and students' achievements, along with support for extracurricular activities, creates a conducive academic atmosphere and boosts the morale of the entire school community. This transformational leadership also fosters innovation and creativity. The principal gives teachers the freedom to explore new teaching methods relevant to the needs of today's students and to integrate technology effectively. This approach ensures that education at the school remains relevant and capable of meeting the demands of the times without neglecting Islamic values. Intellectual Stimulation.

The transformational approach implemented by the principal at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan has fostered a productive atmosphere in which teachers and students can grow professionally and academically and contribute to the achievement of the school's vision and mission. This is consistent with Bernard M. Bass's theory, which states that transformational leaders strive to stimulate their followers to think innovatively and creatively, redefine problems, and seek new solutions. These leaders encourage their followers to try new approaches without fear of public criticism, creating an environment that supports the exploration of diverse ideas and perspectives.

Based on the results of observations conducted at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan regarding the implementation of transformational leadership by the principal, it was found that each dimension has been effectively applied in school management. This implementation encompasses the aspects of ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, as reflected in the principal's behavior and the resulting impact on teachers and the school environment. Details of the observation results for each dimension of transformational leadership are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation Results

Dimension	Implementation	Observation Results
Idealized Influence	The principal serves as a role model in behavior and attitude.	Demonstrates high standards, disciplined conduct, integrity, and a strong commitment to their responsibilities.
Inspirational Motivation	The principal has the ability to articulate the school's vision and mission in an inspiring and consistent manner.	The principal expresses appreciation to various parties, both verbally and symbolically. The principal also strives to motivate both staff and students.
Intellectual Stimulation	The principal provides teachers with the freedom to innovate and participate in professional development.	There is support from the principal for the implementation of innovative teaching methods such as project based or digital learning. The principal also facilitates internal training for teachers.
Individualized Consideration	The principal takes into account personal needs and fairness in the distribution of tasks.	The principal pays attention to teachers' psychological needs. The principal assigns tasks proportionally and with personal consideration for each teacher.

Based on this data, it is evident that the principal successfully implemented all dimensions of transformational leadership as formulated (Bass & Avolio, 1993), namely ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. In the dimension of ideal influence, the principal served as a role model through discipline, high integrity, and commitment to his responsibilities. In terms of inspirational motivation, the principal was able to articulate the school's vision and mission in an inspiring manner and was consistent in offering recognition to boost the morale of teachers and students. Furthermore, the principal also encourages intellectual stimulation by giving teachers the freedom to innovate in their teaching. Training is provided to enhance teachers' competencies. In terms of individual attention, the principal demonstrates concern for the needs of teachers and educational staff by assigning tasks proportionately and providing support. Meanwhile, based on the results of interviews conducted on May 5, 2026, with teachers and educational staff, the following findings were obtained: (1) An informant with the initials MR stated, "The principal routinely and consistently involves teachers in developing the school's programs. When developing the program, he doesn't just give orders; he's also willing to listen to input from teachers," (2) An informant with the initials MFA stated, "To improve the competence of teachers and educational staff, the principal often provides opportunities to attend training. In addition, the principal also consistently encourages us to innovate, both in teaching and in administrative matters," (3) An informant with the initials YN stated that "If there are problems at the school whether internal or external the principal usually invites us to discuss them directly and provides constructive guidance."

Based on the results of these interviews, it can be concluded that the principal has implemented the four main aspects of transformational leadership: serving as a role

model, motivating subordinates, encouraging innovation, and paying attention to all subordinates without exception. From the interview results, the researcher also identified three typologies of teachers' responses to the principal's leadership style transformational leadership of school principals: a. Early Adopters (The Champions): Typically dominated by young teachers or change agents who feel their aspirations are supported by the principal's transformational leadership style. They serve as the principal's "right hand people" in driving digitalization and differentiated learning programs. b. Passive Followers (The Bystanders): A group of teachers who do not reject change but also do not take the initiative. They act only when there are written instructions and direct supervision. c. Latent Resisters (The Skeptics): This group generally consists of several senior teachers who have grown comfortable with conventional methods and linear bureaucracy. They often interpret the principal's transformative steps as actions that are "too hasty" or "disrupt the established order."

The qualitative finding that constitutes the novelty of this study is the principal's tactic for overcoming this resistance without triggering open conflict (chaos). The principal did not use his formal authority to impose sanctions but instead implemented a strategy of "Engaging Through Respect." Senior teachers who were resistant were not sidelined but were given the respected role of "Cultural Advisory Council" members or were involved as mentors in formal school ceremonies. Meanwhile, for technical matters related to technology and the new curriculum, the principal mobilized younger teachers. This strategy of cultural compromise proved effective in dampening internal political turmoil at the school and transforming active resistance into passive support, which gradually melted into total acceptance.

Discussion

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding the transformational leadership of school principals, which were conducted in accordance with the methods used, the results indicate that transformational leadership has a positive impact on teachers' work discipline, work enthusiasm, and the quality of the learning process. Furthermore, transformational leadership is capable of bringing about changes in work behavior that are oriented toward improving the quality of education. This is consistent with previous research which stated that the transformational leadership style of school principals has a positive effect on teacher performance at SMK Bina Mandiri Cileungsi in Bogor (HM & Haryadi, 2023). The research findings also indicate that the successful implementation of transformational leadership is influenced by several factors, including the principal's leadership competencies, effective interpersonal communication, the school's organizational culture, and support from the entire school community. Principals with strong communication and managerial skills tend to be better able to build harmonious working relationships and increase teacher participation in various school programs. Furthermore, a school culture that fosters innovation and collaboration is a key factor in supporting the success of transformational leadership. This study also highlights that school principals need to develop an inspirational leadership style focused on empowering teachers (Adeoye et al., 2025). When formulating educational policies, school principals should provide

support through training programs and leadership development initiatives for principals to ensure that the implementation of transformational leadership runs optimally. Thus, transformational leadership can be understood as an effective leadership model for improving the quality of education because it is capable of creating positive, sustainable changes in teacher performance, school culture, and the quality of learning.

4. Conclusion

Research has shown that the transformational leadership of the principal at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan in Wonopringgo Subdistrict has a significant impact and contributes greatly to improving the quality of education, boosting teacher motivation, strengthening professional commitment, fostering a culture of quality, and creating a work environment conducive to learning. There are four main aspects of the principal's transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The research findings indicate that this transformational leadership style is capable of fostering a positive work culture that is participatory, innovative, and focused on improving teacher performance as well as the quality of student learning. Limited resources and resistance to change present challenges that must be addressed strategically.

The impact of effectively implementing this transformational approach suggests that it can serve as a guide or reference for the development of school management. The principal successfully created an environment conducive to the development of innovative learning, increased teacher involvement in the decisionmaking process, and encouraged collaboration among the school community at SDN 01 Sastrodirjan. This study underscores the importance of the principal's role as a transformational leader in managing and advancing education in the modern era, which is fraught with challenges. This conclusion not only presents the research findings but also offers insights for further development and improvement in the effort to create schools that are adaptive, inclusive, and ready to face challenges. The potential for improving the quality of education and the relevance of madrasahs in the modern era is a reality that can be achieved through the effective and sustainable application of transformational leadership. This conclusion not only presents the research findings but also offers insights for further development and improvement in the effort to create schools that are adaptive, inclusive, and ready to face future challenges.

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