

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEVELOPING THE PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the transformational leadership model of school principals in developing the performance of educational human resources (HR). This leadership style is considered relevant in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education, which is characterized by rapid change and high complexity. A literature review approach was employed in this research by analyzing 20 scholarly sources that discuss transformational leadership within primary and secondary education settings. The findings indicate that school principals who implement transformational leadership are able to create a positive work environment, enhance teacher motivation and performance, and foster collaboration among educational stakeholders. Key elements such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are essential in developing competent, innovative, and integrity-driven human resources. Furthermore, Islamic values and character strengthening also reinforce the role of leaders in creating an adaptive and meaningful learning ecosystem. These findings highlight the importance of developing the transformational leadership capacity of school principals as a strategic effort to improve the quality of education.

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1. Introduction

In the era of rapid globalization and digitalization, the world of education is facing increasingly complex challenges. School principals, as key actors in managing educational institutions, can no longer rely solely on administrative competencies. They are now required to be visionary leaders capable of inspiring and mobilizing all elements of the school to adapt to change, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which demands high flexibility and creativity in the learning process (Umami & Wahyudi, 2025).

The demand for educational quality today is not limited to academic achievement alone, but also includes character development, spiritual values, and 21st-century skills. Principals must become agents of change who can shape a school culture that supports the holistic development of students' potential (Komala, 2023). Transformational leadership is considered the most relevant approach to meet these challenges, as it

emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration for subordinates.

Social facts show that many schools in Indonesia still suffer from declining education quality due to low teacher motivation, lack of innovation in learning, and weak collaboration among educational stakeholders. In this context, communicative and inspiring school leadership has proven effective in boosting teacher morale and encouraging positive change within the school environment (Sugito, 2025). In the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the role of the school principal is crucial in guiding the team to innovate and adapt to external dynamics (Mardizal et al., 2023).

The literature supports the effectiveness of transformational leadership in improving educational quality. Variani et al. (2024) assert that this leadership style fosters an inclusive, learning-oriented work environment and strengthens human resource development. A study by Efendi et al. (2023) also revealed that transformational leadership significantly influences teacher performance, particularly in supporting the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) paradigm by enhancing work commitment.

Transformational leadership also strengthens interpersonal relationships between leaders and teachers. Principals who provide inspiration, emotional support, and clear direction encourage teachers to develop their professional competencies independently (Sahri et al., 2023). Other studies have shown that this leadership style plays a vital role in increasing teacher motivation, self-confidence, and work discipline (Bumay et al., 2022; Anas, 2025). This highlights the importance of psychological and emotional aspects in leadership to improve the performance of educational human resources.

This approach can also be applied by integrating cultural and religious values into leadership practices, as demonstrated by Putri et al. (2024) and Ihsan & Masruroh (2025). Principals in Islamic-based schools, for instance, are expected not only to be professional leaders but also role models in the application of religious values. By managing human resources optimally and developing spiritually and contextually relevant curricula, principals can create a conducive and meaningful learning environment.

In several cases, as outlined by Daheri & Fransiska (2022), transformational leadership has enabled schools to shift from stagnation to becoming reputable institutions favored by the community. This demonstrates that transformative leadership has the power to reshape organizational culture and significantly enhance the reputation of educational institutions. Principals who are able to set a strong vision and empower teachers will create sustainable momentum for change (Agustina et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the implementation of this leadership style must be supported by strong managerial capabilities and a balanced approach to human resources, facilities, and institutional goals (Gunawan, 2025). This underscores the importance of continuous leadership training and development for principals so they can perform their roles effectively in various situations. Leadership based on up-to-date knowledge and skills enables principals to guide schools toward measurable and well-planned transformation (Rohaeni, 2023).

Other studies show that principals who adopt a transformational approach also promote external collaboration, such as partnerships with businesses and universities, to create a dynamic and adaptive educational ecosystem (Ihsan & Masruroh, 2025). Thus, educational transformation occurs not only within the school environment but also through inter-institutional relationships that enrich the learning experience of students and teachers.

Based on this foundation, developing transformational leadership capacity among school principals is a strategic necessity in improving the quality of national education. This leadership style has proven effective not only in enhancing teacher performance but also in fostering an innovative and sustainable organizational culture. Therefore, an in-depth study of the transformational leadership model in the context of Indonesian education is crucial to contribute meaningfully to improving the quality of education today and in the future.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the library research method. The choice of this method is based on the main objective of the research, which is to describe and analyze in depth the transformational leadership model of school principals in developing the performance of educational human resources (HR). Given the conceptual and theoretical nature of the topic, library research is considered the most relevant method as it allows the researcher to construct a scientific synthesis based on existing references without conducting direct field data collection.

The qualitative approach in this study focuses on the interpretation of meaning, the narrative presentation of findings, and the contextual understanding of transformational leadership practices as described in various academic literatures. In other words, this research does not aim to test hypotheses statistically but rather seeks to explore the depth of meaning and the relationships between concepts through textual and document analysis. Data collection was carried out by reviewing scholarly sources from Google Scholar. The literature reviewed includes academic journals published between 2021 and 2025, academic books, and relevant articles related to transformational leadership, teacher performance, educational management, and the development of school human resources.

From the search results, 20 key references were selected based on specific criteria: thematic relevance, high methodological quality, publication by credible academic sources, and inclusion of diverse perspectives within the context of Indonesian education. These references then served as the primary sources for constructing the theoretical framework and conducting the analysis in this study.

Each piece of literature was analyzed using content analysis techniques, by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories within the texts and findings of the selected references. This analysis aimed to uncover the characteristics of the transformational leadership model, the role of school principals in influencing teacher performance, and effective managerial strategies within the context of educational institutions. This technique enabled the researcher to construct a coherent narrative structure based on systematically organized secondary data.

To facilitate the analysis and deepen understanding, the data from the literature were grouped into four major themes: leadership vision and values, motivational strategies and interpersonal communication, innovation and learning development, and management and development of educational human resources. Each of these themes was explored to describe how the elements of transformational leadership are implemented in schools by principals acting as change leaders. As a means of verifying the reliability of the information, source triangulation was conducted by comparing and cross-checking findings from various references to avoid interpretative bias. This step aimed to ensure that the findings represent a comprehensive understanding from multiple perspectives. In addition, the researcher considered the contextual background of each source to maintain its relevance to the educational environment in Indonesia. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution in the form of a contextual mapping of the transformational leadership model, as well as a practical contribution in the form of recommendations for school principals to perform their leadership functions more effectively. This study not only emphasizes the importance of leadership from a theoretical perspective but also illustrates how its implementation has a direct impact on the quality of education and the concrete development of human resources.

3. Result and Discussion

Transformational leadership has proven to be the most effective leadership style in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education. In a world marked by digital disruption and the demands of curriculum reform, school principals must go beyond administrative functions to become inspirational, innovative, and collaborative leaders (Ratna et al., 2025). Mardizal et al. (2023) argue that transformational leadership, when combined with visionary and authentic leadership styles, can significantly enhance education quality in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Principals who successfully lead change are those who inspire teachers and students to step out of their comfort zones and respond to societal developments with new strategies.

Komala (2023) supports this view by showing that the implementation of transformational leadership through its four core elements idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—is effective in shaping students' character. At MI Al Huda Mangli, this approach fostered a culture of discipline and religious values through the principal's example. Sahri et al. (2023) add that in educational organizations, transformational leaders can build trust and collective awareness among teachers and staff. As role models and motivators, principals can transform teachers' behavior to become more productive and outcome-oriented.

Efendi et al. (2023) link transformational leadership with the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Principals adopting this style can build teacher commitment through collaboration and a strong understanding of the new, student-centered, and flexible learning paradigm. From a religious perspective, Putri et al. (2024) demonstrate that transformational leadership based on Islamic principles can

simultaneously improve both spiritual and academic quality. At SDN 044 Karya Indah, the principal acted not only as a manager but also as a moral guide for the school community.

Ihsan and Masruroh (2025) emphasize the importance of school management strategies in shaping Islamic-based excellent schools. Transformational leadership has been shown to create collaborative, humanistic, and inclusive learning environments, while also promoting teacher professionalism through ongoing training. In the context of human resource development, Varihani et al. (2024) highlight that transformational leaders are capable of creating dynamic work environments that foster the personal growth of teachers and educational staff. This approach allows teachers to actively participate in decision-making and institutional development.

Ratna et al. (2025) also underscore the crucial role of principals in responding to 21st-century learning challenges such as technological and curriculum transformation. Transformational leaders must identify and respond to the urgent needs of modern education. Sugito (2025) shows that communicative transformational leadership paired with motivation and high work discipline can significantly improve staff performance. This demonstrates the synergy between leadership style and a productive work culture in educational settings.

Umami and Wahyudi (2025) explain that in facing the Merdeka Curriculum, principals must create supportive environments and reduce resistance to change. Transformational leadership becomes the main strategy that enables teachers to embrace reform with a spirit of collaboration. A success story presented by Daheri and Fransiska (2022) at MIN 01 Dusun Curup strengthens the argument that institutional transformation can be achieved through transformational leadership. A previously underperforming school became a leading institution following a leadership change.

Agustina et al. (2024), in their research on vocational high schools (SMKs), show that transformational principals play a vital role in fostering innovation and the professional development of teachers. By giving teachers the freedom to take initiative, principals help them confidently design curricula aligned with industry needs. Wasito (2021) emphasizes that transformational leadership acts as a moderator in the relationship between organizational commitment and teacher performance. With strong leadership support, teachers are better able to meet educational goals.

Anas (2025) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance. Principals who encourage teachers to grow and innovate contribute to the achievement of higher educational standards. Bumay et al. (2022) affirm the importance of transformational leadership in shaping a positive work culture. Leaders who can instill enthusiasm and confidence in teachers create productive and supportive environments. Setiawan (2021) reminds us that a principal's success is not only determined by administrative abilities but also by their capacity to motivate and mobilize others. A true leader stimulates change from within the teachers and staff.

Rohaeni (2023) outlines five pillars of quality leadership: power, competence, credibility, willingness, and courage. These pillars align with the core values of

transformational leadership, which prioritize role modeling and the courage to drive change.

Gunawan (2025) stresses the importance of balancing human resources, facilities, and institutional goals. Principals must manage these elements harmoniously to realize a holistic and sustainable educational vision. Makmuriana (2022) describes the principal as the driving force behind education quality. Leadership plays a central role in directing and determining the success of school programs. Saifullah et al. (2025) conclude that empowering teachers through inspiration and a shared vision is at the heart of transformational leadership. Empowered teachers will have a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the school's progress.

Across all these findings, it is evident that transformational leadership not only impacts individual teachers but also influences the overall organizational culture of the school. A healthy, innovative, and collaborative learning environment can only be achieved when the leader acts as a facilitator of change. Transformational leadership is also adaptive and responsive to developments in technology and curriculum. Effective principals are those who align national policies with local needs through participatory and inclusive approaches. Ultimately, the comprehensive analysis shows that strengthening transformational leadership capacity among school principals is a strategic investment in the development of national education. Through this approach, principals are not just bureaucratic managers but also agents of change, driving improved and relevant education quality in response to contemporary demands.

Based on the in-depth review of twenty academic references, it can be concluded that transformational leadership among school principals serves as a fundamental foundation for enhancing the performance of educational human resources. This leadership style is not only relevant to the dynamics of modern education but has also proven effective in promoting positive change in managerial, pedagogical, and professional aspects. Principals who adopt a transformational attitude become inspirational role models and successfully create a supportive and collaborative work climate.

The key elements of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration enable principals to build strong interpersonal relationships with teachers and staff. This approach encourages teachers to be more innovative, responsible, and motivated to improve their teaching practices. Ultimately, it leads to improved learning quality and the establishment of a work culture focused on continuous improvement. The findings also demonstrate that transformational principals play a crucial role in the successful implementation of education policies such as the Merdeka Curriculum. Adaptive and communicative leadership reduces resistance to change and instead fosters enthusiasm among teachers for embracing a more flexible and contextual educational paradigm. In many cases, this approach has transformed stagnant schools into high-performing institutions embraced by the community.

Beyond technical and professional aspects, transformational leadership also shows its effectiveness when combined with local and spiritual values. The integration of

Islamic and local cultural values into leadership practices brings a strong ethical and moral dimension, shaping not only students' academic performance but also their character and values. Principals who balance a vision for change with a foundation in religious values have proven successful in creating a more rooted and holistic educational ecosystem.

Transformational leadership also creates broad opportunities for participation among teachers, students, and the wider community in developing the school as a center for knowledge and character development. An open environment that welcomes innovation and collaboration can only emerge when principals are capable of inspiring, empowering, and guiding all school stakeholders toward shared goals. Thus, this leadership model is not merely a style but a comprehensive strategy for educational advancement. Therefore, strengthening transformational leadership capacity must be a primary focus of national education policy. Leadership training, ongoing professional development, and reflective spaces for school principals should be expanded and systematically supported. By positioning principals as strategic agents of change, Indonesia's education system stands a better chance of evolving into a more adaptive, inclusive, and high-quality system for the future.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership has proven to be the most effective leadership model in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education. In the Indonesian context, school principals who adopt this leadership style are able to enhance the performance of educational human resources, particularly teachers, through an inspirational, collaborative, and adaptive approach to changes such as the Merdeka Curriculum and digital transformation.

The four core components of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—enable principals to build strong interpersonal relationships, foster instructional innovation, strengthen teacher commitment, and cultivate a productive work culture focused on continuous improvement.

The findings indicate that transformational school principals function not only as administrative managers but also as agents of change capable of mobilizing the entire school ecosystem toward sustainable improvement. This leadership model also demonstrates its effectiveness when integrated with local and religious values—as in Islamic-based schools—where principals serve as both moral and spiritual role models.

Transformational leadership has successfully transformed underperforming schools into high-quality institutions trusted by the community. This underscores the importance of equipping school leaders with ongoing professional development and leadership training, enabling them to fulfill their strategic roles in advancing the quality of national education.

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