



## Principal's transformational leadership as a catalyst for teacher performance improvement in an Indonesian elementary school

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### Abstract

This study analyzes how a school principal's transformational leadership improves teacher performance at an elementary school in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The research is grounded in the premise that teacher performance is critical to educational quality and that principals play a strategic role in guiding teaching and learning. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving the principal and teachers as participants, to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, with methodological triangulation enhancing data validity. The principal was found to consistently practice all four dimensions of transformational leadership (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration). Through these practices, the principal served as a disciplined role model, clearly articulated an inspiring vision, fostered innovation via professional development, and provided personalized support to teachers. As a result, teachers' motivation, commitment, and performance showed significant improvement, leading to higher instructional quality and better student outcomes. These findings provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of transformational leadership in the primary education context, underscoring the crucial role of principals in creating collaborative, innovative, and quality-oriented school environments.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, principal leadership, teacher performance, elementary school

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### INTRODUCTION

Quality education is a cornerstone of human resource development, and schools play a vital role in this process. Teachers, as the frontline implementers of education, are central to improving learning quality. Beyond delivering content, teachers shape student character and maximize student potential. The quality of teacher performance directly influences the learning process and student outcomes (Hasan & Anita, 2022). Consequently, enhancing educational quality largely depends on improving teacher performance. Teacher performance can be defined as the effectiveness with which teachers execute their professional duties to achieve educational goals (Muslimin, 2020). It encompasses planning lessons, conducting engaging instruction, managing a conducive classroom environment, and evaluating student learning. In short, teacher performance is not only a measure of individual success but also a key determinant of overall

education quality and teacher professionalism.

Among the factors affecting teacher performance, the leadership of school principals is particularly influential. In the education context, the principal serves as a strategic leader who sets the direction and performance standards of the institution, including the performance of teachers as the main executors of instruction (Sitompul et al., 2025). Transformational leadership is viewed as an especially effective approach for meeting contemporary educational challenges (Kefi & Rosnelli, 2024). This leadership style centers on initiating constructive change, developing individuals' capacity, and building a collaborative work culture. Transformational principals actively inspire and motivate educators to reach their full potential in teaching and other professional responsibilities (Armiyanti et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership is grounded in key principles aimed at organizational development and improving each member's performance. One fundamental principle is the leader's capacity to create and effectively convey a vision and mission that all organization members can comprehend and internalize (Sinaga et al., 2021). In practice, this involves structured work procedures, continuous teacher professional development programs, and strengthened collaboration with external parties to support educators' welfare. An effective principal should be able to effectively manage all of these elements; in fact, Mulyasa (2014) argues that the principal's ability to coordinate the various components of education greatly influences its effectiveness. Moreover, transformational leadership emphasizes harmonious working relationships, effective communication, and attention to individual differences to maximize productivity (Rofik, 2019)

Bass and Avolio (1993) formalized transformational leadership into four core dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions represent how transformational leaders act as role models, inspire with a clear vision, stimulate innovation and creativity, and attend to individual needs. Such leadership fosters a strong leader-follower relationship built on trust and inspiration (Kefi & Rosnelli, 2024). The four dimensions provide a foundation for principals to influence, motivate, and develop teachers' competencies, enabling them to become adaptive professionals in the face of modern educational demands (Anwar et al., 2022).

Previous studies suggest that effective leadership strategies, such as leading by example, strengthening motivation, conducting academic supervision, and optimizing resource management, have a significant positive effect on teacher discipline and performance (Mulyasa, 2014). Through such approaches, principals encourage teachers to actively participate in the learning process and pursue professional growth (Trihapsari et al., 2021). Consistent with these findings, transformational leadership by principals has been shown to tangibly improve teacher performance and overall education quality. For example, Wibowo and Wakhudin (2021) found that principals' leadership contributed to better educational quality through enhanced managerial practices. Likewise, empirical research has reported positive correlations between principals' transformational leadership and teacher performance improvements (Azmiati et al., 2024; Yeni et al., 2019). These studies confirm that a principal's ability to provide inspiration, motivation, intellectual challenge, and individual support can elevate teachers' performance.

SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur exemplifies a school where quality improvements are strongly pursued. This private elementary school in Sleman, Yogyakarta, is guided by an ambitious vision of creating "a Muhammadiyah school that produces intelligent, well-mannered, cultured, skilled, enlightening, and superior future leaders in the global community," and it proudly brands itself as "the school of champions." The school emphasizes balanced attention to academic and non-academic achievements to develop students' talents and interests. Numerous student accomplishments have been attributed in part to the principal's role in guiding and motivating teachers, who are the spearhead of the learning process. Despite the school's strong performance, challenges remain in ensuring that all teachers consistently maintain and improve their performance amid continuous changes in the education system.

The school's successes are suspected to be closely linked to the principal's

transformational leadership, yet the specific strategies implemented and their effectiveness in improving teacher performance have not been deeply investigated. This represents a gap in the literature, especially given the school's bold vision and motto as a "school of champions," which demands an adaptive, innovative, and quality-oriented leadership style. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the principal's transformational leadership is implemented to improve teacher performance at SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur and to evaluate its effectiveness in addressing contemporary educational challenges. By exploring this case, the study contributes to a better understanding of transformational leadership practices in elementary schools and provides insights into how such leadership can sustain teacher performance enhancement in the face of evolving educational demands.

## METHODS

### Research Design and Context

This research utilized a qualitative approach with a single-case study design. A qualitative case study was appropriate to capture rich, in-depth information about leadership phenomena within the real-life context of a school (Abdussamad, 2021). The case selected is SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur, an urban private elementary school in Yogyakarta known for its commitment to educational quality. Focusing on this case allowed for a holistic understanding of the principal's transformational leadership strategies in practice.

### Participants and Data Sources

The key participants were the school principal and teaching staff at SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur. Using purposive sampling, the principal and several teachers (including senior and junior teachers across different grade levels) were invited to participate based on their direct involvement with the school's leadership processes. In addition, other relevant school staff who could provide insight into the principal's leadership (such as a vice principal or senior administrator) were included as informants. All participants gave informed consent to partake in the study. To protect confidentiality, teachers' responses were anonymized, although the school and principal were identified by agreement, given the nature of the case study.

### Data Collection Procedures

Multiple data collection methods were employed to enable triangulation and ensure the trustworthiness of findings. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to describe their experiences and perspectives on the principal's leadership style and its effects on their work. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Second, non-participant observations were carried out in the school environment. The researcher observed staff meetings, daily teacher-principal interactions, and classroom or school events to witness how transformational leadership behaviors manifested in practice. These observations were conducted over a period of one semester, using an observation guide aligned with the four dimensions of transformational leadership. Third, document analysis was performed on relevant school documents, such as school vision and mission statements, teacher performance reports, professional development program records, and meeting minutes. These documents provided contextual and corroborating evidence of leadership strategies and teacher performance outcomes.

Methodological triangulation, comparing and integrating data from interviews, observations, and documents, was used to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings. By examining the consistency of evidence across multiple sources, the study ensured a more robust understanding of the principal's leadership practices. For instance, statements from teacher interviews about the principal's motivational activities were cross-checked with observation notes and school records of such activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection in an iterative, inductive process. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and, along with observation field notes and documents, analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The researchers coded the data for recurring themes and patterns related to transformational leadership behaviors (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) and their impact on teachers. Codes were continually refined and grouped into thematic categories corresponding to leadership strategies, challenges, and outcomes. To bolster reliability, multiple researchers reviewed and discussed the coding scheme and interpretations of data. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and a consensus was reached on the core findings. Key emergent themes were the principal's role-modeling behavior, vision-driven motivation, support for innovation, and individualized support for teachers, all aligned with the theoretical dimensions of transformational leadership.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The results of this case study show that the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur used all four aspects of transformational leadership consistently and together to improve teacher performance. These dimensions (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) served as the framework for the principal's leadership practices. The implementation of each dimension and its observed impact on teacher performance are detailed below.

#### **Idealized Influence (Role Modeling and Integrity)**

The principal demonstrated idealized influence by embodying professionalism and acting as a positive role model for teachers. He exemplified discipline, dedication, and integrity, arriving early, being prepared for meetings, and strictly adhering to school rules. His visible presence, greeting students and staff, and active participation in school activities further amplified his commitment. Teachers expressed that the principal's discipline and passion inspired them to maintain similar standards. One teacher remarked that the principal's punctuality and dedication pushed them to be more disciplined. This modeling behavior instilled accountability and pride among the staff, leading to reported improvements in their punctuality, lesson preparation, and adherence to school programs. The principal's exemplary conduct fostered a culture of professionalism and set high performance expectations for teachers.

#### **Inspirational Motivation (Articulating Vision and Encouraging Commitment)**

Under the dimension of inspirational motivation, the principal effectively inspired teachers by articulating a clear and engaging vision for the school, which included regular staff meetings and informal gatherings. During these interactions, he emphasized the vision of "the school of champions," connecting teachers' contributions to this collective goal. Teachers described these discussions as "energizing and uplifting," as the principal often shared motivational stories and examples of student successes to showcase the impact of effective teaching. He set high expectations for instruction while expressing confidence in teachers' abilities to meet them. Additionally, the principal involved teachers in target setting and program planning, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment. For instance, in a reading improvement initiative, he solicited teacher input on strategies, making them feel valued as collaborators. This participatory approach, combined with clear direction, significantly enhanced teachers' enthusiasm and morale. Many reported feeling "more committed and passionate" about their work, recognizing its alignment with a larger purpose. The shared mission also strengthened collegial relationships, leading to increased collaboration among teachers to achieve common goals. Ultimately, the principal's inspirational motivation elevated teachers'

intrinsic motivation and commitment, while fostering a cohesive and optimistic school climate focused on ongoing improvement.

### **Intellectual Stimulation (Fostering Innovation and Professional Growth)**

The principal demonstrated effective leadership through intellectual stimulation, promoting a culture of innovation among teachers. He encouraged staff to question conventional practices and adopt new pedagogical methods, fostering a safe environment for experimentation where mistakes were viewed as learning opportunities. Monthly teacher forums were established for sharing innovative ideas, such as a project-based learning approach, which prompted school-wide reflection on teaching strategies. The principal supported continuous professional development by facilitating access to training and encouraging attendance at external seminars, leading several teachers to enroll in advanced degree programs. Informal mentorship and discussion groups were created to enhance collaborative problem-solving. As a result, teachers began implementing diverse and creative learning activities, including interactive multimedia lessons, which increased student engagement. Overall, the principal's focus on intellectual stimulation and continuous improvement significantly enriched the teaching environment and effectiveness within the school.

### **Individualized Consideration (Personalized Support and Development)**

The principal demonstrated individualized consideration by addressing the unique needs of teachers and supporting their professional growth through personal attention. This leadership style was evidenced by one-on-one mentoring, where he maintained an open-door policy that encouraged teachers to discuss work-related or personal concerns. Interviews indicated the principal frequently met with teachers privately to offer guidance, feedback, or simply listen. For instance, he assisted a novice teacher struggling with classroom management by providing regular coaching and following up on her progress. Additionally, when a teacher aimed to enhance her skills in special education, the principal facilitated her attendance at relevant workshops and supported the implementation of inclusive education practices in her classroom. He also conducted classroom observations in a supportive manner, offering constructive feedback tailored to each teacher's strengths and areas for growth. Teachers described the principal as approachable and empathetic, noting his responsiveness during personal challenges, such as adjusting a teacher's workload when she faced family health issues. This personalized approach made teachers feel valued, fostering an environment where confidence and job satisfaction improved. Many teachers proactively developed their skills, knowing they would receive backing from the principal. Targeted mentoring in lesson planning and assessment techniques resulted in significant improvements in teacher competencies as reflected in their performance appraisals. Ultimately, the principal's individualized consideration cultivated a supportive atmosphere that empowered teachers to continuously enhance their performance.

### **Discussion**

This case study's findings illustrate the profound impact of transformational leadership on teacher performance, echoing the theoretical propositions of [Bass and Avolio \(1993\)](#) that leadership can elevate followers to achieve beyond expectations. In the education context, a principal practicing transformational leadership serves not just as an administrator but as an agent of change who galvanizes the entire school community toward higher goals. The principal in this study went beyond routine management to embody the role of a visionary leader and mentor, which aligns with Burns' concept of transforming leadership as inspiring followers to transcend self-interest for the sake of the organization's mission. The successful outcomes observed, improved teacher motivation, innovation, and performance, affirm [Bass and Avolio \(1993\)](#) model of transformational leadership and its relevance to school settings. Each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership played a distinctive role in enhancing teacher

performance, and these roles can be interpreted in light of existing literature and leadership theory.

First, the idealized influence demonstrated by the principal (i.e., exemplary behavior and integrity) proved crucial in shaping teachers' attitudes and work ethic. Teachers were motivated to mirror the principal's professionalism, which led to improvements in their own discipline and commitment. This finding supports prior research emphasizing the importance of leader role modeling in education. For instance, Fitriyana (2024) noted that principals who demonstrate consistent discipline and dedication can encourage teachers and staff to mirror these professional behaviors. The moral and ethical standards upheld by the leader cultivate an environment of trust and respect, which is crucial for fostering teacher readiness to accept direction. Moreover, our observations resonate with Arfaiza et al. (2025), who noted that a principal's exemplary conduct not only serves as a behavior model but also instills a strong sense of moral responsibility in teachers. When a principal "leads by example," it cultivates an environment of accountability and high standards. The current study's context fleshes out this dynamic: teachers explicitly linked their enhanced punctuality and preparation to the principal's influence, illustrating how idealized influence operates as a catalyst for elevating teacher performance.

Second, the study highlights the role of inspirational motivation in leadership, particularly how a principal can effectively communicate a clear vision that fosters a shared sense of purpose among teachers. This method significantly enhances teachers' intrinsic motivation and collective efficacy. Transformational leadership literature, including key works by Bass and Avolio (1993) underscores the importance of such inspiring visions. Supporting this, Salam and Majid (2020) found that effective school leaders not only articulate appealing future visions but also galvanize teachers around common goals, elevating engagement and optimism. Our findings align with prior research by Agustiani et al. (2023) and Gunawan et al. (2021), which illustrates that principals who actively motivate and involve their teachers in decision-making processes empower them, thereby increasing enthusiasm and participation in initiatives. The principal in our study adopted a participatory approach in goal-setting and openly recognized teachers' contributions, which positively affected morale and teamwork. This is consistent with Tampubolon (2023), who noted that transformational leaders who value teacher input enhance empowerment and teaching quality. Moreover, the correlation between heightened teacher commitment and improved classroom practices in this study is reinforced by findings from Efendi et al. (2023), indicating that transformational leadership boosts teacher performance through enhanced work commitment. Ultimately, the principal's inspirational motivation demonstrates that by conveying a unified vision and maintaining high expectations while expressing confidence in teachers, a climate is created that drives teachers to excel for the benefit of all.

Third, in a study of an elementary school, it was found that the principal's intellectual stimulation of teachers played a crucial role in fostering instructional improvements. By encouraging innovation and critical thinking, the principal created an environment conducive to continuous learning. This aligns with the view supported by Bass and Avolio (1993) that transformational leaders enhance creativity among their followers, allowing teachers the freedom to experiment with new methods, which leads to a more dynamic learning environment. Shen (2023) also noted that transformational leadership empowers teachers to innovate. The study highlights specific examples, such as the introduction of project-based learning and technology integration, directly resulting from this intellectual stimulation. As a result, there was an observed improvement in student engagement and outcomes, reinforcing the link between innovative teaching practices and student achievement. The findings suggest that principals should foster teacher autonomy and support their professional development, acting as facilitators of teacher learning. This approach can lead to enhanced teacher capabilities and better learning experiences for students, advocating for leadership that questions norms and encourages reasonable risk-taking in instructional practices to boost performance.

Fourth, the principal's individualized consideration, demonstrated through mentoring and attention to teachers' personal and professional needs, significantly improved teacher performance and morale. This personalized support made teachers feel valued, addressing specific challenges and enhancing their effectiveness. The findings align with evidence that personalized leadership increases job satisfaction and commitment among teachers. A comprehensive review by [See et al. \(2024\)](#) indicated that school leaders who offer personal encouragement and address individual concerns can make the profession more appealing and enhance talent retention. In our study, teachers reported higher job satisfaction and loyalty, attributing these feelings to the principal's supportive leadership. Additionally, the principal's involvement in teacher development via coaching and feedback reflects the benefits of internal supervisory practices seen in other research. For example, [Indriawati et al. \(2023\)](#) found that structured internal supervision significantly improved teacher performance. Our findings further support this, showing that regular feedback and mentoring allowed teachers to enhance their skills. Moreover, [Sugianto \(2024\)](#) illustrated that transformational leadership, particularly individualized consideration, positively influences teacher performance in Indonesian elementary schools. Teachers receiving tailored support, such as targeted training and workload adjustments during personal difficulties, were increasingly motivated and better equipped to perform, underscoring the notion that caring leadership fosters teachers' potential by meeting their unique needs.

Beyond the dimension-by-dimension interpretation, the synergy of these transformational leadership behaviors created a supportive and high-performance culture at the school. The overall impact aligns with the broader theory of transformational leadership in education, which posits that such leadership not only enhances teachers' immediate performance but also contributes to sustained school improvement. [Mukaddamah \(2024\)](#) argue that transformational madrasah (Islamic school) leadership improves both teacher performance and the quality of education delivered. The present study provides empirical support for this argument: as the principal's leadership practices improved teacher performance, the school saw concurrent improvements in student learning indicators (such as engagement and achievements). This suggests a trickle-down effect where investing in teacher performance via transformational leadership yields wider gains in educational quality, a finding consistent with the notion that teachers are the primary agents through which leadership influences student outcomes. The case underscores the theoretical implication that Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership model is highly applicable to educational leadership and can be effectively used to diagnose and develop school leadership practices. It extends the evidence base of transformational leadership into the context of Indonesian primary education, which has cultural and systemic characteristics that can differ from Western settings where much leadership research originates. Notably, the results demonstrate that even in a collectivist culture with hierarchical tendencies, a collaborative and empowering leadership style can thrive and produce excellent results.

## CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the significant impact of a principal's transformational leadership on enhancing teacher performance in an elementary school setting. By effectively implementing the four key dimensions of transformational leadership (Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Condongcatur has successfully improved teachers' professional behavior, motivation, and instructional methods. The research emphasizes that teachers who are inspired by a clear vision and supported in their professional growth are more likely to perform at higher levels, leading to better student outcomes.

The findings underscore the essential role of school leadership in improving educational quality and provide empirical support for transformational leadership as an effective model in primary education. A principal who exemplifies these leadership traits fosters a unified purpose

and nurtures professional development while attending to the personal needs of teachers, collectively contributing to a dynamic and high-performing school culture. This research bridges theoretical discussions with practical applications, affirming the validity of transformational leadership theory within actual school environments and showcasing specific leadership behaviors that positively influence teacher performance

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