

The Role of School Principal's Transformational Leadership in Achieving Quality Education

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership by the principal in enhancing the quality of educational services at Early Childhood Education Imanda. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the principal applies the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The application of this leadership style positively impacts teacher motivation, innovation in learning, and parental satisfaction with educational services. The study concludes that transformational leadership is effective as a strategy for improving the quality of early childhood education services. These findings contribute to the development of educational management practices at the early childhood education level.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; Early childhood education Imanda; Service quality; Educational management.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in the field of education plays a crucial role in determining the success of an institution. Leadership is a combination of both science and art in influencing individuals or groups to act in accordance with desired objectives in an effective and efficient manner. Leadership style, on the other hand, refers to the manner in which a leader performs their role by employing their skills and attitudes (García-Morales et al., 2008). An effective leadership style reflects the extent of a leader's responsibility toward their subordinates. Subordinates are more likely to exhibit appropriate behaviors when they observe exemplary leadership demonstrated by their leader (Chunhui et al., 2024). An ideal leader is one who is capable of addressing complex problems with the wisdom they possess (Macrides et al., 2022). One leadership approach considered effective in addressing the challenges of modern education is transformational leadership (Yanzheng Li, 2022). This leadership model

emphasizes a clear vision, motivation, innovation, and the empowerment of organizational members to achieve higher goals. A transformational leader is one who can inspire, offer innovative solutions, and address the needs of the organization (Toprak et al., 2023). A good leader is not one who merely resolves personal issues, but one who strives to help others accomplish their tasks effectively (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership is highly relevant in the context of education, as the field continuously undergoes rapid changes driven by technological advancements, policy shifts, and increasing demands to enhance the quality of teaching and student outcomes. This leadership style involves leaders who inspire and motivate their followers to achieve exceptional performance. In transformational leadership, followers experience a sense of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward their leader, who inspires them to exert effort beyond what is typically expected (Mak et al., 2021). An educational leader who adopts a transformational leadership approach is expected to inspire teachers, staff, and students to think critically, innovate, and demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the quality of education (Alanoğlu & Karabatak, 2022).

Transformational leadership encourages individuals to fulfill and develop their potential while maintaining a focus on performance, upholding high ethical and moral standards, and prioritizing dialogue in problem-solving and the pursuit of solutions (Cruz-González et al., 2021). Transformational leadership is a leadership style that centers on inspiring and motivating organizational members to achieve higher performance by transforming their values, beliefs, and attitudes. In the educational context, the application of transformational leadership by school principals has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the performance of teachers and staff (Rodrigues-Silva & Alsina, 2023). Transformational leadership is a leadership theory developed to describe how leaders can inspire and motivate their followers to achieve higher goals and exceed initial expectations (Ling et al., 2022). Transformational leadership involves a process in which leaders and followers mutually elevate each other's levels of motivation and morality. In a world characterized by dynamic complexities, this leadership style emerges as one capable of inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve collective goals (Kılınç et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership comprises four main dimensions identified by Bernard M. Bass (1985): (1) Idealized Influence, (2) Inspirational Motivation, (3) Intellectual Stimulation, and (4) Individualized Consideration. The first dimension, Idealized Influence, refers to the leader's ability to serve as a role model who is respected and emulated by subordinates. Inspirational Motivation involves the leader's capacity to inspire and provide a compelling vision to

followers. Intellectual Stimulation encompasses the leader's efforts to encourage creative and innovative thinking among subordinates. Lastly, Individualized Consideration entails a personalized approach and attention to the individual needs of followers to support their development and growth (Fitzgerald, 2009).

Numerous previous studies have examined transformational leadership in various contexts. For example, the study *Gaya Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kepala Sekolah terhadap Semangat Kerja Guru di MI Darul Ulum Batang* (2024) found that transformational leadership by principals enhances teachers' work enthusiasm through good relationships, exemplary behavior, and evaluation. Another study, *Gaya Kepemimpinan Transformasional dalam Pengembangan Kalteng Pos* (2014), concluded that the application of transformational leadership at Kalteng Pos increased employee motivation and work ethic, contributing significantly to the company's growth. Additionally, the study *Kepemimpinan Transformasional dalam Meningkatkan Inovasi Pegawai di Kantor Kelurahan Maccorawalie: Analisis Melalui NVivo* (2024) revealed that transformational leadership at the Maccorawalie Village Office effectively boosts employee innovation. Supporting factors included motivation and communication, while obstacles involved human resource quality, budget constraints, and infrastructure limitations. (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2021).

Previous studies on transformational leadership have generally focused on large organizational contexts such as corporations, universities, and primary to secondary schools (Samad, 2012). However, there is a scarcity of studies specifically examining the implementation of transformational leadership within the context of early childhood education, particularly in non-formal early childhood institutions such as playgroups. Yet, leadership at the early childhood education level plays a strategic role in shaping the foundation of character education and learning culture from an early age (Karakus et al., n.d.; Toprak et al., 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in the exploration and analysis of the application of transformational leadership style within early childhood education through a case study of the Imanda playgroup. Using a descriptive and analytical method, this research provides an in-depth examination of how the dimensions of transformational leadership, namely inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are implemented by the playgroup leader in daily leadership practices. Additionally, the study identifies the impact of such leadership on teacher performance and the learning environment in the early childhood education institution (Su et al., 2023).

This study offers a novel contribution to the development of educational leadership literature, particularly within the context of early childhood education—a domain that has been scarcely explored in transformational leadership research. The findings are expected to serve as a foundational basis for formulating a more contextualized and practical leadership model aimed at enhancing the quality of early childhood education services in Indonesia (Su & Yang, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method employed by the researcher is a case study, which falls under the qualitative research approach. The researcher seeks to explore a specific case in greater depth by collecting data from a variety of information sources (Klippen et al., 2024).

The research was conducted at an early childhood education institution named Imanda Early Childhood Education, specifically at the Imanda Playgroup, located at Jl. Halte Utara VI No. 1, RT 4 / RW 2, Dungus Cariang Sub-district, Andir District, Bandung City, West Java, with postal code 40183. The surrounding environment is a densely populated residential area with limited road infrastructure. In July 2024, a fire broke out and destroyed several houses on Halte Utara Street, Jarkasih Alley, Dungus Cariang, highlighting the area's vulnerability to fire hazards and its limited access to clean water. In terms of spirituality, despite facing economic challenges, the local community demonstrates a high level of spiritual richness. This suggests that religious and spiritual values play a significant role in the daily lives of the residents in Dungus Cariang.

In addition, the Dungus Cariang area has experienced a clean water crisis during the dry season, forcing residents to purchase water to meet their daily needs. This situation reflects the environmental challenges faced by the local community. Overall, the natural conditions surrounding the Imanda Playgroup early childhood education institution reflect common challenges encountered in densely populated urban settlements, such as fire hazards and limited access to clean water. The qualitative data collected includes insights into the implementation of transformational leadership dimensions, challenges encountered in applying transformational leadership, its impact on teacher performance, its influence on children's learning processes, and the strategies adopted to address these challenges at Imanda Playgroup Early Childhood Education, located in Ciguriang Sub-district, Andir District, Bandung City. The data collection techniques employed consist of observation, interviews, and documentation (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of transformational leadership dimensions

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that has the capacity to inspire and motivate followers to achieve beyond what they previously believed possible, by reshaping their values, perceptions, and aspirations. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), there are four core dimensions of transformational leadership, commonly referred to as the four "I"s (Goens & Giannotti, 2024).

1. Idealized Influence

The principal serves as a role model by demonstrating dedication in leading the school, setting an example in discipline, hard work, and commitment to the school's development and the well-being of teachers. This is reflected through both behavior and speech, fostering a culture of collective decision-making and enforcing rules fairly for all members of the school community (Kiviranta et al., 2024). They define Idealized Influence as a behavior that encourages subordinates to view their leader as a role model or exemplar. Initially referred to as charisma, this dimension was later renamed idealized influence or vision in response to critiques of the charisma concept. Trust and respect are cultivated through open communication during meetings and regular gatherings, the enhancement of teachers' social-emotional skills through social-emotional competence activities, and support for the development of teachers' professional abilities and skills through various training programs.

Trust and respect are fostered through open communication in every meeting agenda and routine gathering, the enhancement of teachers' social-emotional competencies through targeted activities, and consistent support for the development of professional skills through various training programs. Additionally, positive character building is promoted through a collaborative policy with the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF), which focuses on improving the quality of education and learning within the school environment by instilling the nine pillars of character. The head of the Imanda playgroup also consistently expresses appreciation for teachers who demonstrate high levels of dedication.

2. Inspirational Motivation

The school's vision and mission were developed through the involvement of all school stakeholders, including the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and the parent committee, with the intention of ensuring that every aspiration, suggestion, and input could be comprehensively accommodated. This inclusive approach reflects the unique characteristics of the school environment. The concept of Inspirational Motivation within

transformational leadership has been explored by several scholars, most notably Bernard M. Bass, who identified it as one of the four core components of transformational leadership. In this dimension, a leader is capable of articulating clear expectations regarding subordinates' performance, demonstrating strong commitment to organizational goals, and inspiring team spirit by fostering enthusiasm and optimism. Regular reflection and evaluation sessions are conducted to provide teachers with opportunities to share the progress of innovations and improvements implemented in the school, as well as the challenges they encounter in delivering instruction. In this context, the principal supports teachers by offering motivational encouragement and involving them in various professional development initiatives. These include participation in training programs, access to a comfortable learning environment, and the utilization of diverse learning resources such as interactive materials available on the Merdeka Mengajar platform, online webinars, official handbooks and electronic books provided on the Ministry's website, as well as peer discussions through professional learning communities. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to build confidence in presenting their best practices, referring to effective strategies and successful experiences that have been implemented within the school context (Pramesworo et al., 2023).

3. Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is a crucial dimension of transformational leadership that emphasizes the leader's effort to foster creativity and innovation among followers. According to Bass and Avolio (1990), leaders who implement intellectual stimulation challenge existing assumptions, encourage critical thinking, and invite subordinates to solve problems through novel approaches. The school principal grants teachers the freedom to think creatively and innovatively in seeking alternative solutions to classroom challenges, determining methods, strategies/approaches, and instructional models tailored to the characteristics and needs of students. Among the steps taken are providing innovative training or workshops, promoting collaboration among teachers, allowing autonomy in curriculum development, and recognizing and appreciating creative initiatives (Ristianti, Sofyan, et al., 2025).

4. Individualized Consideration

Individualized Consideration is a core dimension of transformational leadership that emphasizes a leader's attention to the needs, aspirations, and development of each follower. Several scholars have articulated their perspectives on this dimension. Bass (1985), in his research on American military personnel, identified individualized consideration as a critical factor in transformational leadership. He emphasized that leaders who demonstrate

special attention to members who might be overlooked, treat each subordinate as an individual, and recognize good performance exemplify individualized consideration. In practice, school principals show concern for the individual developmental needs of each teacher by conducting personal evaluations through coaching sessions every semester. They create opportunities for teachers to discuss obstacles encountered, express their desires and expectations, and provide tailored development advice according to the needs of each teacher within different age groups. Bass and Avolio (1990) described individualized consideration as a leader's reflective behavior characterized by continuously identifying the needs of their subordinates. Leaders strive to recognize employees' abilities, inspire a passion for learning, offer broad learning opportunities, listen attentively to their subordinates, and regard these actions as key to achieving successful outcomes (Ristianti, Syahindra, et al., 2025).

Challenges in Implementing Transformational Leadership

Although transformational leadership offers numerous advantages, it also faces various internal and external obstacles that can affect its effectiveness. According to experts, the internal barriers include: (1) excessive dependence on the leader; within the framework of transformational leadership, team members may become overly reliant on the leader for guidance and decision-making, which can hinder individual autonomy and innovation; (2) sustaining energy and enthusiasm; maintaining a high level of energy and enthusiasm can be a demanding task, especially when confronted with obstacles or failures; (3) balancing followers' needs; transformational leaders often encounter difficulties in managing the diverse needs and expectations of their followers (Permana et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the external obstacles include: (1) Resistance to change. Efforts to challenge the status quo often provoke resistance and criticism from organizational members or external parties. This rejection may stem from fear of the unknown, concerns about job security, or reluctance to leave the comfort zone. One significant challenge was gaining acceptance and recognition from regional authorities and the local community around the school. Establishing an early childhood education institution in a community initially unsupportive of such schools posed a major challenge for the Principal and the early childhood education team at Imanda. The perception among some community members that enrolling children in school at an early age would waste considerable time and money was gradually disproved as we demonstrated the quality of the students' graduation outcomes, particularly in character development, for which we can be held accountable. Differences in parents' educational backgrounds and the surrounding community's view—that school-based parenting styles

would not significantly impact the child—were especially pronounced among parents prioritizing academic achievement alone. (2) Facing resistance and criticism. Challenging the status quo frequently elicits resistance and criticism, which can become serious barriers. (3) Providing individualized consideration, which is a time-consuming task that demands a high level of emotional intelligence. By understanding and addressing these obstacles, transformational leaders can enhance their effectiveness in motivating and inspiring their teams, thereby achieving organizational goals more efficiently. The approach applied to overcome internal barriers in transformational leadership is a personal approach (Harits et al., 2016).

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Performance and Learning Quality

Transformational leadership has a significant impact on teacher performance and the overall quality of learning. Various scholars and studies have highlighted the positive correlation between this leadership style and improvements in educator performance as well as the quality of education.

The positive changes observed in teacher performance following the implementation of transformational leadership include a greater enjoyment of teaching and learning activities, more open communication, and increased confidence in innovation. A school principal's responsibilities extend beyond serving merely as a leader, manager, or motivator; they must also act as a mentor and a sound decision-maker. Fundamentally, educators seek acknowledgment of their professional existence. They require appreciation for their efforts to improve performance, timely responses to their needs, and encouragement to continuously develop their potential and capacity. Transformational leaders contribute to this development by demonstrating the following qualities: (a) Role modeling – serving as exemplars of professional attitudes and behaviors that teachers can emulate; (b) Motivation – inspiring teachers to strive for higher levels of achievement; (c) Democratic decision-making – involving teachers in the decision-making process, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility; (d) Recognition – providing rewards for strong performance as a form of appreciation; (e) Personal approach – nurturing strong interpersonal relationships with teachers to better understand their needs and aspirations; (f) Conducive work environment – creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere to support productivity; and (g) Guidance and supervision – conducting systematic and targeted supervision to ensure sustained teacher performance (Fua et al., 2018). These measures are expected to enhance teacher performance, which, in turn, will positively impact the overall quality of education.

Although the aforementioned studies primarily focus on teacher performance, such improvements are directly linked to the quality of learning. Teachers who are motivated and supported by transformational leadership tend to be more innovative in their teaching methods, more responsive to students' needs, and more effective in delivering instructional content. Ultimately, this contributes to enhanced learning quality and improved student outcomes (Jalongo, 2021).

Overall, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher performance and the quality of instruction. By implementing appropriate strategies, school principals can foster an educational environment conducive to both teachers' professional growth and students' academic achievement. Transformational leadership significantly influences the effectiveness of the learning process, as several factors determine whether learning is effective. One such factor is the extent to which educators understand the importance of adapting or modifying their instructional approaches; the better their understanding, the more likely they are to apply these changes directly in their teaching practices (Khalfaoui et al., 2021).

Changes in instructional methods or approaches have led to improved student learning outcomes since the implementation of transformational leadership. This improvement is reflected in students' increased enthusiasm for participating in both school and home activities. Evidence of this comes from parental feedback, gathered through evaluation forms and informal conversations, as well as from the children's own remarks. Students often express eagerness and anticipation for each school lesson. The emergence of positive behavioral changes further indicates that the learning activities offered have had a beneficial impact. Adopting a transformational leadership model entails envisioning the future; thus, school principals must possess a clear vision, mission, and set of goals to effectively lead their institutions (Undheim, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a transformational leader possesses the capability to manage schools using a leadership style that inspires and empowers. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiration, motivation, and empowering team members to reach their highest potential. In practice, this leadership style significantly impacts both individual and organizational performance. The primary characteristics of transformational leadership are: (1) Idealized Influence: Leaders serve as role models by demonstrating high integrity and ethics, thereby earning the respect and trust of their teams. (2) Inspirational Motivation: Leaders communicate an appealing and challenging vision, motivating team members to enthusiastically achieve shared goals. (3)

Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders encourage creativity and innovation by challenging assumptions and promoting new problem-solving approaches. (4) Individualized Consideration: Leaders provide personalized attention to the developmental needs of each team member, acting as mentors or coaches. The impact of transformational leadership in practice includes enhanced performance and productivity. By inspiring and motivating employees, transformational leaders can improve the performance of both individuals and teams as a whole. Additionally, higher employee satisfaction and engagement are observed, as employees feel valued and motivated when leaders attend to their needs and aspirations. This leadership style also fosters greater creativity and innovation by cultivating an environment that encourages critical thinking and novel ideas. Furthermore, transformational leadership promotes sustainability by guiding and developing employees, thereby helping to build future leaders and ensuring organizational continuity. In the educational context, transformational leadership has been proven to improve teacher performance and the quality of learning. Leaders who adopt this approach create a positive work environment, encourage collaboration, and facilitate ongoing professional development. These efforts lead to increased motivation, commitment, and productivity among teachers, ultimately enhancing the quality of education delivered to students.■

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