



# Transformational Leadership Practices of School Principals in Developing a Quality Culture in Remote Junior High Schools: A Mixed-Method Study

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the transformational leadership practices of a school principal in developing a quality culture in a remote junior high school in Indonesia. While transformational leadership has been extensively studied in urban and well-resourced contexts, limited attention has been given to how it is applied and adapted in geographically isolated and resource-constrained school environments. Using a mixed-method research design, this study combined qualitative data from interviews, observations, and document analysis with quantitative data obtained through teacher and student questionnaires. The findings revealed that the principal exhibited strong transformational leadership behaviors, including inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Despite infrastructural and logistical limitations, these practices translated into developing a collaborative, visionary, and quality-oriented school culture. A localized leadership model was formulated, emphasizing four key elements: vision-driven motivation, ethical role modeling, innovation support, and personalized empowerment. The study contributes theoretically by extending the applicability of transformational leadership theory to rural and underserved educational settings. Practically, it offers a replicable leadership framework for school principals and policymakers aiming to foster school improvement under challenging conditions. Methodologically, the study affirms the value of mixed-method inquiry in capturing the complex dynamics of leadership in education. Overall, the research underscores the strategic role of principal leadership in cultivating sustainable quality culture in remote schools.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of educational reform and school improvement, leadership remains a crucial determinant in shaping the direction and performance of educational institutions. Among various leadership paradigms, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential in promoting positive change and fostering a high-performing school culture. Transformational leaders inspire, motivate, and engage all stakeholders in pursuing shared goals, fostering innovation, and

enhancing the overall learning environment ([Adeoye & Ainnubi, 2023](#); [Yakob et al., 2025](#)). This leadership style becomes even more vital in settings where schools must constantly adapt to complex social and organizational challenges.

A growing body of literature underscores the effectiveness of transformational leadership in educational contexts. [Ghamrawi et al. \(2024\)](#) highlight how principals who demonstrate transformational traits such as articulating a clear vision, providing individualized support, and promoting intellectual stimulation significantly influence teacher motivation and organizational commitment. Similarly, [Dutta & Sahney \(2022\)](#) found that transformational leadership correlates positively with teacher performance, school climate, and student outcomes. In the Indonesian context, studies by [Rahayu et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize the importance of school leadership in shaping school culture, though most research is focused on urban and well-resourced environments.

Despite this rich discourse, a noticeable research gap exists regarding how transformational leadership operates within remote or under-resourced schools, particularly in developing countries. Studies rarely explore how principals in rural contexts navigate structural limitations to instill and sustain a culture of quality, a set of values, norms, and practices that prioritize continuous improvement, accountability, and collaboration among school stakeholders. In such schools, the principal's ability to transform visions into tangible outcomes becomes critical, especially when formal support systems are limited or inconsistent.

This study explores how a school principal implements transformational leadership in a remote junior high school to strengthen the school's quality culture. It includes examining specific leadership behaviors, practices, and strategies to inspire teachers and students toward collective excellence. Additionally, the study aims to identify an ideal model of transformational leadership that effectively promotes quality culture in under-resourced educational settings. This dual focus provides a comprehensive understanding of leadership implementation and its contextual adaptation in rural Indonesia. By addressing these aims, the paper contributes theoretically and practically to the discourse on educational leadership in marginalized regions. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for leadership development, policy formulation, and strategic planning to improve school quality, particularly in remote and resource-constrained environments.

## **METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a mixed-method research design ([Hirose & Creswell, 2023](#)), integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to generate a comprehensive understanding of the transformational leadership practices of a school principal in a remote setting. The qualitative method was prioritized as the primary strategy for exploring in-depth experiences and contextual realities, while the quantitative method served as a complementary approach to reinforce and validate the qualitative findings.

### ***Research Setting and Participants***

The research was conducted at SMPN 2 Wasuponda, a public junior high school located in a remote area of East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively due to its geographic characteristics and the perceived transformational leadership of its principal, who was recognized for initiating positive changes in its quality culture.

The participants of this study included the principal, a group of teachers and staff, and a selection of students. The principal served as the main subject of the research, while ten teachers and five school staff members were selected due to their active involvement in school management and improvement initiatives. In addition, thirty students from various grade levels were chosen using stratified random sampling to ensure diversity of perspectives across different academic levels.

### ***Instruments***

Several instruments were used to collect data in this study. First, semi-structured interview guidelines were developed to guide in-depth interviews with the school principal, teachers, and staff. These interviews explored leadership practices, stakeholder perceptions, and changes in school culture under the current leadership. Second, non-participant observation sheets were employed to

systematically record leadership behaviors, school routines, and interaction patterns between the principal, teachers, and students during instructional and administrative activities.

In addition to interviews and observations, document analysis was also conducted. School policy documents, vision and mission statements, and records of school programs and performance were examined to support the analysis and interpretation of leadership implementation. Lastly, a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was administered to teachers and students. This questionnaire assessed perceptions of transformational leadership across four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection was carried out in three sequential phases. The first phase involved classroom and school environment observations to obtain contextual understanding of the school's leadership dynamics and cultural practices. In the second phase, interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and staff members to gather rich narrative data about their lived experiences and insights on transformational leadership. The third phase involved the administration of the questionnaire to both teachers and students to capture quantitative data that could validate and reinforce the themes that emerged from qualitative findings.

All interviews were recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for analysis. Ethical considerations, including participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw during the study, were followed throughout the process.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis. It involved coding the data, identifying patterns, and grouping them into themes corresponding to transformational leadership theory. Both inductive and deductive coding strategies were applied to ensure that findings were grounded in theory and empirical evidence.

For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used to analyze questionnaire responses. Mean scores and frequency distributions were calculated for each dimension of transformational leadership to reveal general patterns and tendencies in the participants' perceptions. The results from the qualitative and quantitative analyses were then triangulated during the interpretation stage to ensure consistency, reliability, and depth of understanding in answering the research objectives.

## **RESULTS**

### **Implementation of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Quality Culture**

The implementation of transformational leadership at SMPN 2 Wasuponda was reflected in various strategic and interpersonal practices of the school principal. Through interviews and field observations, it was found that the principal prioritized social cohesion and emotional connection with the school community. His leadership was grounded in trust, openness, and collaborative dialogue. As stated by one teacher during the interview:

*"The principal always involves us in important meetings. He is not authoritarian; instead, he gives teachers space to express their ideas. We feel respected and heard." (Teacher A, Interview, October 2024)*

The principal's ability to articulate a clear and motivating vision strongly influenced the school's direction. This vision was continuously communicated in meetings, wall posters, and student assemblies. Both teachers and students recognized his charismatic leadership as a source of motivation. One student expressed:

*"He truly cares about us. He always encourages us to keep studying and dreaming big. Since he became the principal, the school feels more alive." (Student B, Interview, October 2024)*

These qualitative findings were supported by quantitative data from a teacher and student questionnaire assessing perceptions of transformational leadership dimensions. The results are presented in the following table:

**Table 1. Mean Scores of Transformational Leadership Dimensions (n = 45)**

Dimension	Mean Score	Interpretation
Idealized Influence	4.56	Very High
Inspirational Motivation	4.42	Very High
Intellectual Stimulation	4.18	High
Individualized Consideration	4.36	Very High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>Very High</b>

These scores indicate that respondents perceived the principal's leadership style as consistently transformational across all core dimensions, with the strongest aspects being idealized influence and inspirational motivation.

Field observations further confirmed the alignment between leadership practices and school culture improvement. The principal initiated collaborative teacher working groups (KKG), encouraged innovation in classroom practices, and supported student-led extracurricular programs. He also implemented a system of recognition and rewards to strengthen morale. For instance, outstanding teachers and students were publicly acknowledged during flag ceremonies and awarded certificates, which fostered a sense of pride and competition.

A visual model representing the implementation process is shown below:



**Figure 1. Leadership Practice Cycle at SMPN 2 Wasuponda**

This cycle demonstrates how the principal's leadership practices formed a continuous loop of motivation, engagement, and quality enhancement. Each component fed into the next, reinforcing a school culture oriented toward growth and collaboration.

### The Model of Transformational Leadership for Quality Culture Development

An ideal model of transformational leadership adapted to the remote school context was formulated from the collected data. This model is grounded in four interrelated pillars: vision-driven motivation, ethical role modeling, innovation stimulation, and personalized empowerment.

The principal's ability to inspire teachers and students with clear goals evidenced the vision-driven motivation. This motivation was sustained through consistent communication strategies, such as embedding school mottos into student journals and teacher lesson plans.

The second pillar, ethical role modeling, was visible in the principal's daily actions, such as arriving early, engaging in classroom walkthroughs, and handling conflicts with integrity. One teacher commented:

*"The principal doesn't just give instructions—he participates in activities with us. That motivates us to follow his example."* (Teacher C, Interview, October 2024)

The third pillar, innovation stimulation, was reflected in his encouragement of experimentation in teaching methods. Despite limited resources, teachers were supported in applying active learning models and ICT tools. When challenges arose, the principal offered guidance rather than criticism, cultivating a safe space for pedagogical innovation.

Lastly, personalized empowerment was demonstrated by the principal's attention to individual needs. He provided specific mentoring for new teachers and ensured students from low-income backgrounds received additional academic support. He regularly met with teachers to set personal development goals and monitored their progress empathetically.

The holistic model derived from this study is summarized in the diagram below:

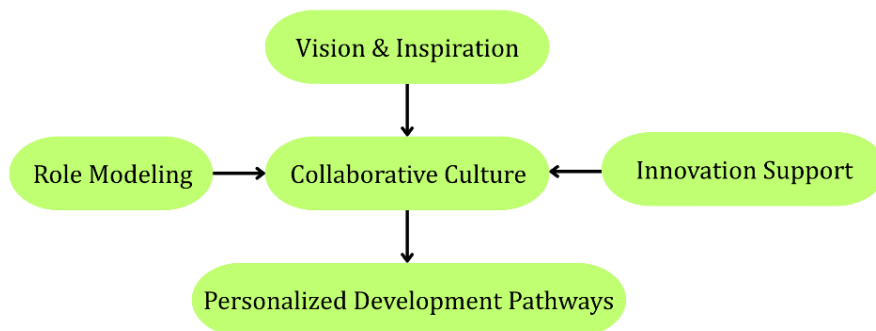


Figure 2. Ideal Transformational Leadership Model for Quality Culture

This model underscores how transformational leadership can be adapted to resource-limited schools. It centers on achieving educational outcomes and cultivating human relationships, ethical commitment, and a sustainable school culture grounded in collective growth.

## DISCUSSION

### The Implementation of Transformational Leadership

The findings regarding implementing transformational leadership at SMPN 2 Wasuponda demonstrate how school leadership can profoundly shape school culture even in contexts with limited resources. The principal's active involvement in promoting a shared vision, building relational trust, and fostering participation exemplifies the inspirational motivation and idealized influence dimensions (Hashim et al., 2021; Rahayu et al., 2024). By consistently articulating the school's goals through verbal communication, visual symbols, and participatory practices, the principal was able to align stakeholders toward a common direction, strengthening a culture of collective responsibility.

This implementation is consistent with relevant research that transformational leaders act as change agents who promote a sense of shared purpose (El-Hage & Sidani, 2023; Judson et al., 2024). The principal's open-door policy and inclusive leadership approach created psychological safety for teachers

to express ideas and participate in school development. These relational aspects are vital in rural schools, where informal relationships often replace formal structures in sustaining school operations.

The principal's commitment to classroom engagement and daily presence among students and teachers further embodies idealized influence ([Al-Husseini et al., 2021](#); [Alzoraiki et al., 2023](#)). In contrast to top-down managerial leadership, the principal in this study cultivated influence through role modeling, fairness, and moral leadership. These behaviors contributed to trust-building and professional inspiration, especially in a setting where external incentives such as promotions or material rewards are scarce.

Additionally, the principal's reward system and recognition of teacher efforts supported the development of intrinsic motivation, affirming that transformational leadership can mobilize internal commitment rather than compliance. These practices resonate with relevant research that transformational leaders foster empowerment and professional growth through non-coercive influence ([Dutta & Sahney, 2022](#); [Khan et al., 2022](#)).

Quantitative findings, showing high scores in all four dimensions of transformational leadership, especially idealized influence and inspirational motivation, further validate the qualitative interpretations. This alignment between perception and practice reinforces the credibility of transformational leadership implementation as a central mechanism for building a quality culture in the school.

### ***The Model of Transformational Leadership for Quality Culture***

The study also produced a contextually grounded model of transformational leadership, developed from the observed practices and perceived outcomes of the principal's leadership. This model is centered around four interconnected pillars: inspirational vision, ethical role modeling, innovation support, and individualized development. These elements echo the theoretical framework of transformational leadership ([Greimel et al., 2023](#)) but are adapted to the realities of a remote schooling environment.

The pillar of inspirational vision aligns with the literature that emphasizes vision as a unifying force for school improvement. In this case, the principal communicated the vision and embedded it into routine activities and symbols, transforming it from abstract rhetoric into lived experience. It confirms relevant research assertion that effective transformational leaders give meaning and purpose to collective goals by integrating them into the organization's culture ([Ghamrawi et al., 2024](#); [Shi & Zhou, 2023](#)).

Ethical role modeling emerged as another central dimension in this model. The principal's fairness, discipline, and presence created moral legitimacy that inspired emulation among teachers and students. It aligns with relevant research argument that education leadership is not merely technical but deeply ethical, especially in culturally rooted communities where trust and personal example are paramount ([Banwo et al., 2021](#); [Mincu, 2022](#)).

The pillar of intellectual stimulation in the model was expressed through the principal's encouragement of teacher creativity and experimentation. Even without sophisticated infrastructure or training opportunities, the principal supported innovation by validating efforts and reducing the fear of failure. It reflects findings by relevant research that strong instructional leadership requires both support and challenge, enabling teachers to grow professionally ([Gibbs, 2023](#); [He et al., 2024](#)).

Finally, the component of individualized consideration was evident in the principal's responsiveness to the diverse needs of students and teachers. In remote schools, where personal and academic challenges are often intertwined, such personalized leadership becomes essential. It aligns with relevant research that found that personalized support is a core practice among high-impact school leaders in challenging contexts ([Cox & Mullen, 2022](#); [Willis et al., 2022](#)).

In summary, the model developed from this study reaffirms the relevance of classical transformational leadership theory, but enriches it by demonstrating how its principles can be pragmatically and relationally applied in low-resource environments. It highlights that effective leadership in remote schools requires vision and strategy, empathy, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the community context.

### ***Contributions of the Study***

This study significantly contributes to educational leadership, particularly in under-resourced and geographically isolated school settings. Theoretically, it extends the application of transformational leadership theory by demonstrating how its core dimensions idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can be effectively adapted and operationalized in a rural school context. While much of the existing literature focuses on leadership in urban or well-resourced environments, this study offers an empirical grounding of how transformational leadership functions in disadvantaged settings, bridging a notable gap in the global discourse on school leadership.

Conceptually, the study introduces a localized and context-responsive model of transformational leadership that integrates classical leadership theory with the cultural and logistical realities of rural schooling. This model contributes a novel framework highlighting relational trust, ethical role modeling, participatory empowerment, and sustained vision alignment as key components for building a quality-driven school culture. The articulation of this model contributes to leadership theory by emphasizing the importance of cultural contextualization, which has often been overlooked in mainstream leadership models developed in Western or urban settings.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for school leaders, policymakers, and education practitioners in developing countries. The leadership behaviors and strategies identified in this study can inform leadership training programs, particularly for principals assigned to remote or resource-constrained areas. By showcasing a case where leadership compensates for material limitations through vision, motivation, and relational strategy, the study provides a replicable model for school improvement without heavy reliance on infrastructure or external funding. It encourages educational policymakers to consider leadership capacity-building a critical pathway to quality enhancement in marginalized regions.

Methodologically, this research demonstrates the value of a mixed-method approach in capturing the depth and breadth of school leadership practices. By integrating qualitative narratives with quantitative validation, the study strengthens the reliability of its findings and illustrates a robust framework for exploring complex social phenomena in educational research. It reinforces the relevance of mixed-method inquiry as a rigorous and flexible design for school leadership studies in diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Together, these contributions position the study as a meaningful addition to the academic and applied domains of transformational leadership in education. It not only reinforces existing theory but also pushes the boundaries of its relevance into new, underexplored territories, offering a foundation for future comparative studies and localized innovation in school leadership.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored transformational leadership's implementation and contextual adaptation in a remote junior high school in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the principal's leadership, characterized by vision alignment, ethical modeling, innovation support, and personalized empowerment, was instrumental in cultivating a strong quality culture within the school community. Through qualitative and quantitative data, the study demonstrated how transformational leadership, even in resource-constrained environments, can mobilize teachers and students toward collective improvement, trust, and shared responsibility.

The study contributes to leadership theory by offering a contextually grounded model that extends the classical transformational leadership framework into rural educational settings. It highlights the importance of relational leadership practices that respond to under-resourced schools' unique cultural, logistical, and socio-emotional dynamics. The localized leadership cycle proposed in this research is a practical tool for educational leaders and institutions aiming to drive improvement beyond material or policy constraints.

Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for school principals, teacher educators, and policymakers. Leadership training and development programs should incorporate elements of transformational leadership that emphasize emotional intelligence, community engagement, and contextual adaptability. Ministries of education and district-level authorities may prioritize leadership

capacity-building, particularly for schools in marginalized areas where leadership often becomes the central driver of school success.

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The authors declare no funding and conflicts of interest for this research.

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