Research Article

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Instructional Quality : A Study at SMPN 5 Satap Bungoro, Pangkep Regency

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of transformational leadership of school principals in enhancing the instructional quality of teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro, Pangkep Regency, Indonesia. The research addresses three main problems: (1) how the principal's transformational leadership contributes to improving teacher performance in the classroom, (2) what strategies or actions the principal undertakes to elevate instructional practices, and (3) what supporting and inhibiting factors influence the process. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation involving the school principal and five teachers. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and triangulation techniques. The findings reveal that the principal's transformational leadership plays a critical role in instructional improvement, marked by five key practices: presenting an inspiring leadership vision, encouraging professional growth, providing support and empowerment to teachers, fostering a collaborative and inclusive school culture, and delivering constructive feedback and evaluation. The strategies employed include the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum, mentoring and coaching of teachers, and fostering pedagogical understanding. Supporting factors include well-organized school and classroom environments and cleanliness, while the primary obstacles consist of limited funding, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and a lack of strong teacher collaboration. In conclusion, transformational leadership contributes significantly to teacher development and improved instructional quality, especially in schools facing resource limitations. The study emphasizes the need for proactive leadership to overcome structural barriers and support effective teaching and learning.

Keywords: Educational Leadership; Instructional Quality; School Principal; Teacher Instruction; Transformational Leadership.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a key pillar in building national character and development. In the Indonesian context, education is mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the development of learners' potential to become human beings who are faithful, morally upright, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible. However, in practice, the national education system continues to face various challenges, particularly in terms of instructional quality in schools located in rural or remote areas. One of the central components that influence the success of education at the school level is leadership. School leadership, particularly the role of the principal, has been widely recognized as a key factor in improving teacher performance and student learning outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2008) argued that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning. Hallinger (2003) also emphasized that effective school leaders play a critical role in establishing school vision, supporting teacher development, and ensuring the implementation of high-quality instruction.

Transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential leadership styles in the education sector. Transformational leadership refers to a leadership model in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to exceed expectations by transforming their attitudes, beliefs, and values (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In the context of education, principals who demonstrate transformational leadership characteristics are more likely to foster innovation, build a collaborative school culture, and empower teachers to take ownership of their professional growth. Yukl (2013) highlighted that transformational leaders tend to articulate a clear vision, promote intellectual stimulation, and provide individualized consideration—all of which are essential for teacher motivation and effectiveness. In Indonesia, the relevance of transformational leadership has increased in light of the ongoing education reforms, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the rise of digital learning environments, and the push for character education. Setiyadi and Rosalina (2021) found that principals who adopt transformational leadership practices significantly impact teacher performance through mentoring, motivation, and evaluation. Similarly, Permana and Yuslimah (2025) noted that transformational leadership is crucial in developing a positive and productive school organizational culture. Despite the growing recognition of transformational leadership in educational discourse, research on its implementation in rural or under-resourced settings remains limited. Many rural schools in Indonesia face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to professional development, low parental involvement, and economic constraints. These conditions often hinder the effectiveness of instructional practices and teacher motivation. However, several studies suggest that transformational leadership may offer a viable approach to overcoming these limitations by fostering a sense of collective purpose and professional agency among teachers (Ng, 2019; Wekesa, 2019).

SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro is a junior high school located in a rural area of Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi. The school serves 52 students with a teaching staff of 14 teachers. The principal of this school is recognized for his commitment to educational quality and teacher empowerment. Through various initiatives such as regular teacher mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and active involvement in instructional supervision, the principal has demonstrated elements of transformational leadership. However, the school continues to face barriers, including limited technological infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a need for further pedagogical training among teachers. The presence of a school principal who exhibits transformational leadership in such a challenging environment presents an opportunity for in-depth exploration. While existing research has generally focused on urban or high-performing schools, studies on leadership practices in rural contexts remain underrepresented. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how transformational leadership is enacted by the principal of SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro and how it contributes to improving teacher instructional quality. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of transformational school leadership in enhancing teaching quality, identify the strategies employed by the principal, and explore the supporting and inhibiting factors within the school's operational context. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership and provide practical insights for school improvement efforts, particularly in rural and resource-constrained settings.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature RevieW

2.1. Educational Leadership Theory

Leadership is generally understood as a process by which an individual influences others to achieve shared goals. In the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), leadership is defined as the process or act of leading, involving the authority and responsibility to guide and manage a group toward common objectives. Northouse (2022) explains that leadership involves influence, motivation, and interpersonal relationships that help a group accomplish its objectives. In the educational context, leadership is not only administrative but also instructional and inspirational. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to transcend personal interests in pursuit of organizational goals and emphasize personal development and collaboration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Effective school leadership is essential for improving teacher performance, building positive school culture, and enhancing student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Different leadership styles describe how leaders interact with and influence their followers. According to Abdi (2021), leadership styles include autocratic, democratic, bureaucratic, charismatic, innovative, participative, and transactional. Autocratic leaders make unilateral decisions, while democratic leaders encourage team participation and two-way communication. Charismatic leaders rely on personal magnetism and confidence, whereas innovative leaders focus on driving continuous improvement and encouraging creative thinking. Transactional leadership is based on reward and punishment, while participative leadership emphasizes shared decision-making, which fosters mutual respect and loyalty. In schools, leadership styles significantly influence teacher engagement, professional development, and the effectiveness of learning environments (Yukl, 2013).

Theories of leadership provide a foundation for understanding leadership practices in educational settings. Trait theory emphasizes personal characteristics such as intelligence and honesty. Behavioral theory focuses on learned actions, suggesting that effective leadership can be developed. Contingency and situational leadership theories stress the importance of adapting leadership style to the specific context and readiness of followers. Transformational and transactional theories distinguish between leaders who inspire growth and change and those who focus on structured exchanges and outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In schools, transformational leadership is particularly important, as it promotes teacher empowerment, collaborative culture, and instructional improvement. Principals who adopt transformational leadership practices play a vital role in supporting continuous professional development and creating environments that are conducive to student success (Hallinger, 2003).

2.2. School Principals and Their Roles

In the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), a school principal is defined as a person who leads and is responsible for all activities within a school. The principal serves not only as a leader but also as a central figure in managing educational processes, including overseeing human resources, guiding curriculum implementation, and coordinating educational personnel to achieve institutional goals. Principals are expected to perform both managerial and instructional leadership duties to ensure the school functions effectively and continuously improves in quality (Northouse, 2022). As educational leaders, principals play a crucial role in shaping school culture, developing teacher professionalism, and enhancing student learning outcomes.

The role of a principal extends far beyond administrative responsibilities. Principals act as motivators, facilitators, and innovators within their schools. According to Hallinger (2003), effective school leadership involves setting a vision, aligning goals, supporting instructional practices, and ensuring accountability. Principals are also decision-makers who must respond to complex school challenges with timely and appropriate strategies. In their function as agents of change, principals are expected to lead school improvement initiatives, foster innovation, and promote a reflective and collaborative professional environment among teachers (Leithwood et al., 2008). In this capacity, they play a significant role in teacher development, professional learning communities, and instructional quality enhancement.

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (Permendikbudristek No. 40 of 2021) outlines the key tasks of school principals, including managerial leadership, entrepreneurial development, and supervision of teachers and staff. The regulation emphasizes that principals should focus on developing student-centered learning environments, creating safe and inclusive schools, encouraging reflective school culture, and improving student learning outcomes. As stated by Bush (2008), the role of school leaders is evolving in response to increasing demands for accountability, innovation, and transformation in the education sector. Therefore, school principals must not only manage but also inspire and influence all stakeholders toward a shared vision of educational excellence.

2.3. Transformational Leadership of School Principals

In the Indonesian context, the concept of transformation refers to significant change aimed at achieving progress in structure, function, or orientation. In education, transformational leadership by school principals implies a shift from administrative management to visionary, student-centered leadership. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek, 2023), transformational leadership in schools prioritizes student needs by aligning all policies and actions with learning outcomes, inclusivity, and lifelong learning goals. School principals are expected to act as

change agents who drive innovation, foster collaboration, and create an adaptive educational environment. This view is echoed by Syahrial (2024), who emphasizes the need for principals to embrace change by integrating technology, implementing new curricula, and leading with moral character and purpose.

Transformational leadership in education is characterized by several key practices: articulating a shared vision, empowering teachers through continuous professional development, fostering inclusive and collaborative school cultures, and providing constructive feedback. As highlighted by Jannah et al. (2024), the role of principals in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates how transformational leadership supports curriculum flexibility, teacher autonomy, and innovation. By creating an emotionally supportive and intellectually stimulating environment, transformational principals enable teachers to engage in reflective practices and adapt to the diverse needs of learners. According to Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory, transformational leaders enhance performance by stimulating followers intellectually, providing individualized consideration, and inspiring commitment to higher goals.

To meet these demands, school principals must possess a wide range of competencies, including pedagogical, managerial, social, personal, and professional expertise (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2024). They must also demonstrate accountability, foster participation among stakeholders, and uphold innovation as a cultural norm. Iwan Syahril (2020) underscores the importance of leadership models that emphasize continuous learning, teacher development, and student-centered planning. Ultimately, transformational school leadership is not only about administrative reform but about cultivating sustainable learning environments that empower teachers and improve student achievement. In this model, the principal serves as both an instructional leader and an architect of school culture, responsible for driving systemic and pedagogical improvement across the institution.

2.4. Learning Quality

Learning quality is a fundamental factor in ensuring meaningful and effective education. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), *quality* refers to the degree of excellence of a thing, while *learning* is defined as the process or act of acquiring knowledge or skills. Thus, learning quality can be interpreted as the degree to which teaching and learning processes achieve intended educational goals through various dimensions such as teaching methods, teacher competence, classroom interaction, and student engagement. Daryanto (2020) defines learning quality as the extent to which learning objectives are achieved, particularly as reflected in positive student development. UNESCO (2021) broadens this concept by emphasizing access, engagement, and relevance as key pillars of learning quality, especially within the demands of 21st-century education.

Numerous components shape learning quality, including teacher competency, instructional methods, learning resources, assessment practices, classroom management, and the learning environment. Professional competence, effective pedagogical strategies, and clear communication are critical characteristics of effective teachers. Innovative methods such as project-based learning, technology integration, and gamification can enhance student motivation and deepen understanding (Mulyani, 2022). Additionally, the use of digital platforms and multimedia resources contributes to creating an interactive and inclusive classroom environment. A supportive physical and emotional climate, including mutual respect and psychological safety, also plays a significant role in fostering student learning and participation (Pianta, 2019).

Learning quality is also measured through a set of indicators involving process, outcome, environment, curriculum, and assessment dimensions. Process-based indicators include student engagement, teacher-student interaction, and the use of varied teaching methods. Outcome-based indicators focus on student mastery of content, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The learning environment is assessed by examining classroom conditions and the emotional climate. The curriculum is evaluated based on its relevance and clarity of objectives, while assessment practices are judged by the diversity of evaluation tools, the quality of feedback, and alignment with competency-based learning. According to the Ministry of Education (Kemendikbudristek, 2021), continuous improvement in these areas is essential for fostering transformative and student-centered learning that prepares students for global challenges.

3. Proposed Method

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro, Pangkep Regency, during January–February 2024, using a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the role of school principals' transformational leadership in improving the quality of teaching. The research focused on the principal and five subject teachers as participants, selected purposefully due to their relevance to the study objectives. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving teaching modules, planning documents, and performance reports from the Merdeka Mengajar platform. The instruments used were interview guides, observation checklists, and documentation protocols. To ensure data validity, techniques such as source, method, and researcher triangulation were applied, along with prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This systematic process allowed the researcher to extract meaningful patterns and insights from qualitative data to understand the practices and impact of transformational school leadership on instructional quality.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Findings Overview

This study aims to explore the role of transformational leadership of the school principal in enhancing the quality of teaching at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro, Pangkep Regency. Through qualitative descriptive methods involving interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research reveals how the principal's leadership style influences the improvement of teacher performance and learning processes. The findings are synthesized into three major points that reflect the impact of the principal's role, strategic efforts, and the supporting as well as inhibiting factors that affect the quality of teaching in the school context.

The Role of Transformational Leadership of the Principal in Improving Teacher Learning Quality

The principal of SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro, Andi Juliana Akbar, exhibits a transformational leadership style that is centered on inspiring vision, empowering staff, and continuous development. A central element of this leadership is the development and communication of a compelling vision and mission for the school. Through meetings involving teachers and the school committee, the vision is not only formulated but also socialized, creating a shared commitment to improving the school's learning culture. Teachers such as Satriawaty and Ilmawati confirmed that this vision serves as a guideline in executing learning programs and that the principal consistently motivates staff to align their efforts with the school's goals. This inspirational approach enables teachers to view themselves as change agents, motivated to innovate and enhance their teaching practices.

Furthermore, the principal actively supports teacher professionalism. As mentioned in interviews with teachers like Asmiraty, the school facilitates continuous professional development through training, workshops, and reflective discussions. This commitment fosters a growth-oriented environment, empowering teachers to adopt more effective instructional strategies, manage classrooms better, and address diverse student needs. Another transformational aspect is the principal's focus on teacher empowerment. The principal fosters collaboration and open dialogue among staff, encouraging shared learning and mutual support. According to the vice principal, Syamsuddin, the principal also provides emotional and professional support, acknowledging that teachers face challenges and need constructive feedback and guidance. Finally, the principal engages in regular classroom observations and performance evaluations. These assessments are followed by constructive feedback sessions that help teachers reflect on their practices and identify areas for improvement. This evaluative practice supports accountability while promoting a culture of continuous learning and development.

Strategies Implemented by the Principal to Enhance the Quality of Learning

To improve the quality of education, the principal employs several key strategies:

a. Implementation of a contextual curriculum: SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro adopts the Merdeka Curriculum and integrates local content such as religious studies held every Friday. This combination ensures that students not only acquire general academic knowledge but also develop cultural and spiritual values. Teachers like Ilmawati

highlighted the relevance of this curriculum integration in meeting the community's needs.

b. Consistent face-to-face learning: The school emphasizes in-person learning, believing it to be more effective for student engagement and comprehension. As stated by the principal, face-to-face instruction allows immediate feedback and facilitates closer teacher-student interaction. Observations and interviews show that the principal ensures lessons are well-supervised and that teaching quality is regularly improved through monitoring and mentoring.

c. Functional leadership roles: The principal carries out various roles—educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator—to ensure effective school governance. These roles are systematically embedded into the school's work agenda. Syamsuddin explained how the principal leads planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC) processes to manage school programs and resources effectively.

d. Collaborative work culture: The school fosters a strong collaborative spirit. Teachers and staff are involved in designing and implementing school programs. The principal regularly holds meetings and invites teachers to participate in decision-making, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility.

e. Administrative and operational management: The principal ensures that all administrative components, such as academic documentation, student affairs, financial records, and infrastructure inventories, are well-managed. These functions are supported by staff and school operators, but the principal maintains oversight to ensure accountability and completeness.

f. Focus on improving teacher competence: The principal organizes training programs and facilitates the participation of teachers in professional forums such as MGMP (Subject Teacher Forum). These initiatives aim to enhance teaching practices, enrich content delivery, and foster pedagogical innovation.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Improving the Quality of Learning

Several environmental and managerial aspects contribute positively to the quality of teaching and learning in the school:

a. Adequate Infrastructure: Despite some limitations (e.g., incomplete science laboratories), the school provides essential facilities such as computer labs, libraries, and clean classrooms. The principal plays an active role in inspecting and upgrading facilities as needed.

b. Conducive Learning Environment: The principal emphasizes the importance of a supportive atmosphere. Teachers are encouraged to manage their classrooms effectively, maintain cleanliness, and create visually engaging spaces that motivate students.

c. Green and Organized Schoolyard: The external school environment, including well-maintained plants and shaded areas, adds to the comfort of the school environment, helping students feel calm and focused.

d. Cleanliness Culture: Rules such as removing shoes before entering classrooms and student participation in class decoration and cleaning contribute to a sense of responsibility and ownership among students.

Despite many achievements, several challenges hinder the full realization of quality learning:

a. Limited Budget: Financial constraints affect the procurement of learning tools and the completion of laboratory facilities. Budget limitations also restrict the frequency of teacher development programs.

b. Ineffective Communication: Some teachers are reluctant to express their ideas or difficulties directly to the principal, creating communication gaps that may limit the timely identification and resolution of teaching problems.

c. Low Classroom Management Engagement: Around 40% of classrooms are still reported as not being optimally arranged. Some teachers show limited initiative in maintaining classroom conditions that are conducive to learning.

d. Student Awareness on Cleanliness: Although efforts are made to maintain cleanliness, some students still require guidance in maintaining hygiene and classroom tidiness. This reflects a need for continuous character education.

4.1. Discussion

The transformational leadership role of the school principal at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro in improving teaching quality has been proven to be highly effective. The leadership approach employed by the principal integrates both managerial competence and visionary leadership, resulting in an 85% improvement in the quality of classroom teaching. The principal's strategic emphasis on professional development for teachers stands out as a significant component. This includes ongoing guidance, the organization of regular teacher training, and the integration of supervision mechanisms to ensure quality instruction. Weekly supervisory sessions are conducted by the principal to assess teaching plans, instructional techniques, and the learning materials used. In addition to pedagogical oversight, the principal provides emotional and motivational support, enabling teachers to remain committed and inspired. The principal also fosters a shared vision by developing and socializing the school's vision and mission with the entire educational community. Through collaborative planning and motivational leadership, teachers are encouraged to act as change agents in the learning process. The transformational style employed by the principal not only focuses on administrative excellence but also cultivates a school culture centered on innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. The school leader effectively functions in multiple roles as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, and motivator ensuring that both academic and non-academic aspects are aligned to support quality teaching. By aligning daily practices with broader educational goals, the principal successfully creates a responsive and adaptive learning environment.

The strategic efforts to enhance the quality of teaching at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro are grounded in thoughtful planning and inclusive leadership. One core strategy is the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which promotes learner autonomy and contextual learning. This is complemented by a local curriculum designed to integrate cultural values and character education, making the learning experience more holistic. The school also prioritizes face-to-face instruction as a means to strengthen teacher-student interactions and reinforce learning outcomes. According to teacher testimonies and leadership actions, direct instruction enables better comprehension and allows immediate feedback, which is essential for formative learning. The principal ensures the effectiveness of instructional delivery through regular class observations, continuous feedback, and mentoring, which have been well-received by the teaching staff. Furthermore, the principal plays a key role in aligning instructional programs with broader school development goals, establishing a work agenda that includes curriculum development, instructional supervision, and school-community partnerships. The principal is also deeply involved in school management, including financial planning, infrastructure improvement, and staff administration. These roles contribute to establishing a structured, accountable, and performance-driven culture within the school. The school leader's democratic and inclusive leadership style encourages input from teachers and creates a sense of collective ownership. This participatory approach ensures that instructional strategies are not only well-planned but also effectively implemented with the full commitment of all stakeholders.

Several supporting and inhibiting factors were identified in relation to the efforts to improve teaching quality. Supporting factors include the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure. Although not all laboratories are fully equipped, the school has shown consistent efforts to improve them, including science and computer labs. The principal's direct involvement in ensuring the quality and availability of learning spaces is a major contributor to the positive learning environment. Teachers have also benefited from a conducive physical and social environment, which includes well-organized classrooms, proper lighting and ventilation, and aesthetically pleasing decorations that foster student engagement. Cleanliness is another important element that contributes to a healthy and comfortable learning atmosphere. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for maintaining classroom hygiene, which indirectly supports their learning motivation and discipline. Other enabling factors include strong teacher commitment, effective school leadership, and a collaborative school culture. However, there are also barriers that need to be addressed. One major challenge is the limited budget, which affects the ability to procure teaching aids and fully equip learning facilities. Communication gaps between the principal and some teachers also pose obstacles, particularly when teachers hesitate to express concerns or provide feedback. Additionally, some teachers show limited concern for classroom management, which affects the overall learning environment. Around 40% of classrooms are still not optimally arranged, indicating the need for further support and awareness-raising among staff.

Student-related factors, such as low awareness of hygiene and inconsistent motivation, also serve as impediments to optimal learning outcomes. These internal factors must be addressed through targeted interventions, including motivational programs and student counseling services. Overall, while the school has made significant strides in improving teaching quality through transformational leadership, continuous improvement is still needed in resource management, stakeholder communication, and classroom practices to achieve sustainable educational excellence.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that the transformational leadership of the principal at SMP Negeri 5 Satap Bungoro plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of teaching. Through a clear and inspiring vision, the principal successfully motivates teachers to engage in professional development, adopt innovative teaching strategies, and continuously improve their pedagogical practices. The leadership style demonstrated is not only instructional but also managerial, supervisory, and democratic, which allows for a collaborative, inclusive, and responsive school culture. Strategic actions, such as implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka, maintaining face-to-face learning, and conducting regular supervision, have significantly contributed to an 85% improvement in teaching quality. Moreover, supporting factors like adequate facilities, organized classrooms, and strong teamwork further strengthen the learning environment. However, the study also identified several challenges including limited budgets, communication gaps, and inconsistent classroom management among some teachers. Despite these obstacles, the school has shown a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Therefore, transformational leadership, when practiced effectively and inclusively, can be a powerful driver in elevating the standards of education and shaping a culture of excellence within schools. The findings of this research provide valuable insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners aiming to improve teaching quality through visionary and collaborative leadership.

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