



Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Improving Teachers' Professional Competence at Public Elementary Schools in Cluster 07, Tiro, Pidie District

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformational leadership strategies of school principals in enhancing teachers' professional competence, the obstacles encountered, and the supporting factors involved. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted at SDN Tiro, SDN Lhok Igeuh, and SDN Daya Blang Keudah through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings show that principals apply transformational leadership by promoting professional development, encouraging enthusiasm for learning, and recognizing teacher efforts. Key obstacles include differences in teachers' intellectual capacity, socioeconomic status, education levels, seniority, and frequent policy changes. Supporting factors include government support, collaboration among principals, a positive work environment, internal motivation, effective supervision, and the presence of competent teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key element in the success of educational institutions. School principals play a strategic role in creating a conducive school climate and enhancing the productivity of educators and students (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Effective leadership enables schools to develop optimally, particularly in improving teachers' professional competence. One leadership approach that has gained significant attention in the literature is transformational leadership, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation, empowerment, and individual development aligned with organizational needs (Harsoyo, 2022).

Tavfelin highlighted that transformational leadership is a promising model for managing changes in social organizations, including education. This model focuses on a clear vision, effective communication, and empowering teachers to exceed their expected performance (Nafal et al., 2024). However, the implementation of transformational leadership in schools faces challenges, such as teachers' intellectual diversity, socio-economic backgrounds, seniority, and frequent policy changes (Murniati & Usman, 2021). Nonetheless, various supporting factors, including government support, collaboration among school principals, and the internal motivation of school leaders, can strengthen the implementation of transformational leadership in enhancing teachers' competencies (AR, Murniati et al., 2021).

Based on preliminary observations, school principals in SDN Gugus 07 Tiro have begun adopting transformational leadership in school management. This is evident from their efforts to collaboratively formulate the school's vision and mission and encourage teachers' professional development through various coaching and supervision strategies. Therefore, this study aims to explore how school principals implement transformational leadership to enhance teachers' professional competence.

Research Problem

This study addresses the central question: How do school principals apply transformational leadership to enhance teachers' professional competence in SDN Gugus 07 Tiro?

Research Objectives

1. Analyze transformational leadership strategies used by school principals to motivate teachers in improving their professional competence.
2. Identify challenges faced by school principals in implementing transformational leadership.
3. Explore supporting factors that help school principals enhance teachers' professional competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Concept

Leadership is the ability to influence others to cooperate and achieve set goals. Overton (Sana et al., 2023) defines leadership as the capability to secure cooperation and trust among employees. Leadership is also viewed as a power based on character, often normative in nature (Etzioni in Sana et al., 2023). Yukl

(Laksono et al., 2024) describes leadership as an essential subject in social studies, associating it with strong, dynamic individuals who guide organizations, businesses, and nations.

Burns (Laksono et al., 2024) highlights leadership as a reciprocal process where individuals mobilize resources—economic, political, and others—to achieve objectives. Hoyt and Young (Sunarso, 2023) see leadership as the art of influencing people through personal abilities and group acceptance. Terry & Rue (Suriagiri, 2020) add that leadership involves influencing others within specific situations to meet organizational goals.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style refers to the characteristics and behaviors leaders use to influence subordinates (Insan, 2016). Different leadership styles impact organizational effectiveness:

- a) Paternalistic Leadership: Common in traditional, agrarian societies where leaders act as father figures, promoting unity and mutual respect.
- b) Militaristic Leadership: Authoritarian approach emphasizing discipline, formality, and strict hierarchy.
- c) Autocratic Leadership: Leaders control decision-making without input from subordinates, focusing on obedience and authority.
- d) Charismatic Leadership: Based on the leader's personal magnetism and ability to inspire followers.
- e) Democratic Leadership: Encourages participation, feedback, and shared decision-making, fostering collaboration.

Additionally, leadership can be categorized into:

- a) Charismatic Leadership, where natural traits attract followers.
- b) Transactional Leadership, which relies on rewards and punishments.
- c) Transformational Leadership, which emphasizes trust, respect, communication, and motivation (Suriagiri, 2020).

Transformational Leadership in School Management

School principals play a crucial role in improving educational quality. Mulyasa (2022) states that effective school leadership requires strategic planning and policy implementation. Principals must manage staff effectively, supervise teachers, and enhance professional development (Sufrida et al., 2022).

Zaini & Heri (2020) emphasize that school success depends on a principal's ability to empower teachers and staff. Similarly, Kompri (2021) highlights that principals must anticipate change and drive educational institutions toward better futures. School leaders must be educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, and motivators.

Transformational leadership in schools fosters an inclusive environment, motivating teachers to exceed expectations (Murniati & Usman, 2021). The principal must create a collaborative vision, encourage innovation, and establish strong relationships with staff and students. Leadership is critical in

managing change and ensuring continuous improvement in education (Ripai et al., 2024).

Implementation of Transformational Leadership

Effective school leadership incorporates:

- a) Conceptual Skills: Analyzing trends and making informed decisions.
- b) Human Skills: Understanding teamwork dynamics.
- c) Technical Skills: Mastering educational policies and administrative functions (Alhabsyi et al., 2022).

Principals should provide professional guidance, foster motivation, and create a positive work environment (Murniati et al., 2021). Leadership effectiveness directly impacts teacher performance and student outcomes (Waliudin & Chotimah, 2023). Transformational leadership emphasizes empowerment rather than authority, ensuring teachers feel valued and motivated to improve (Mulyadi et al., 2023).

Professional Competence of Teachers

Competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective teaching (Musyoropah, 2024). Professional competence requires continuous learning and adaptation to new educational strategies (Emron, 2023). Teachers must:

- a) Master curriculum content and pedagogy.
- b) Stay updated on educational advancements.
- c) Develop engaging teaching strategies.

The Indonesian National Education Standards outline professional teacher competencies, including:

- a) Professional Development: Staying informed on technological and pedagogical advancements.
- b) Understanding Educational Frameworks: Linking theoretical knowledge to practical applications.
- c) Mastering Academic Content: Demonstrating expertise in subject areas (Zulmaulida et al., 2021).

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering active student engagement, applying multimedia tools, and creating innovative learning environments. They must adhere to professional ethics, remain disciplined, and continuously enhance their teaching strategies (Hoesny et al., 2021)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze transformational leadership among school principals in enhancing teachers' professional competence at SDN Gugus 07 Tiro. This approach allows the researcher to explore phenomena comprehensively based on empirical data from interviews, observations, and documentation (Arikunto, 2023). Descriptive research aims to systematically depict the characteristics, activities, and

relationships between variables without manipulating the studied objects (Sugiyono, 2021). The study was conducted at SDN Tiro, SDN Lhok Igeuh, and SDN Daya Blang Keudah in Gugus 07 Tiro, Pidie Regency, Aceh. These schools were selected based on data availability and accessibility. The research took place over ten months, from August 2024 to May 2025.

The study subjects included school principals and teachers. Principals were selected due to their strategic role in school management and teacher development (Nadirah et al., 2022). Teachers were also included as supporting subjects, as their involvement in school leadership significantly influences the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines, observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals and teachers to explore their perspectives on transformational leadership. Observations provided direct insights into leadership practices within schools. Document analysis involved collecting school records, policies, and reports to support the research findings (Sufrida et al., 2022).

Credibility testing was performed to ensure data accuracy and validity. Techniques used included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, source triangulation, negative case analysis, and member checking (Priadana & Sunarsi, 2021). Triangulation was applied by comparing interview results, observations, and documents to produce reliable and objective findings.

Data analysis followed an interactive model, comprising three main stages:

1. Data reduction, which involved summarizing, selecting key information, and eliminating irrelevant data to maintain research focus (Arikunto, 2023).
2. Data display, presenting findings narratively to facilitate understanding. Categorized data were analyzed based on emerging patterns and themes (Sugiyono, 2020).
3. Conclusion drawing and verification, where research findings were interpreted to ensure credibility and validity (Sugiyono, 2021).

This study provides an in-depth analysis of how transformational leadership is implemented by school principals to enhance teachers' professionalism. By employing a qualitative approach, the research contributes to understanding school leadership strategies and how internal and external factors influence their effectiveness.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Transformational Leadership Strategies in Enhancing Teachers' Professional Competence

The study revealed that school principals in SDN Gugus 07 Tiro implemented various transformational leadership strategies to improve teachers' professional competence. One of the key strategies was the "Sharing and Caring" approach, where principals created informal discussion spaces for

teachers to exchange experiences and find solutions to teaching challenges. Principals also actively encouraged teachers to participate in training and webinars, while recognizing and appreciating those who took the initiative to improve their competencies.

Some school principals applied an inspirational leadership model, where they not only provided the latest information on teacher development but also actively participated in training sessions alongside their teachers. Principals who demonstrated a strong passion for learning were more likely to inspire teachers to follow their lead in professional development.

Challenges in Implementing Transformational Leadership

Several key obstacles were identified in applying transformational leadership in schools, including:

- a) Diverse intellectual and socio-economic backgrounds of teachers, where some lacked the necessary educational background to support their professional growth.
- b) Seniority and conservative work culture, which made some teachers reluctant to embrace change or participate in new training programs.
- c) Frequent policy changes by the government, which often forced schools to adjust or even cancel teacher development programs.

Supporting Factors for Transformational Leadership

Several factors supported school principals in implementing transformational leadership, including:

- a) Government support, in the form of policies and permissions for school principals to pursue professional development.
- b) Collaboration among school principals, allowing for the exchange of experiences and solutions regarding teacher professional development.
- c) A conducive work environment, where good relationships among school principals, teachers, and education supervisors fostered a positive work atmosphere.
- d) Principals' intrinsic motivation, which drove them to continuously seek innovative ways to enhance education quality.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Competence

Transformational leadership prioritizes inspiration, motivation, and positive influence on subordinates. School principals adopting this model do not merely provide directives but also actively engage in professional development activities, create a supportive work environment, and foster a continuous learning culture.

One proven approach is the inspiration-based leadership model, where principals encourage teachers to keep learning by setting a real-life example. This aligns with Burns' (2024) theory, which emphasizes that transformational leaders must instill an awareness of the importance of change in their subordinates.

Additionally, the appreciation strategy, such as verbal recognition or acknowledgment in teacher meetings, has proven effective in boosting teacher motivation. This creates a domino effect, where recognized teachers feel encouraged to continue developing and sharing their knowledge with colleagues.

Challenges in Transformational Leadership in Primary Schools

Despite its benefits, implementing transformational leadership at the primary school level presents several challenges. One of these is teacher diversity, where some teachers are highly motivated to learn, while others prefer to stay within their comfort zones. Successful school principals are those who build open two-way communication and tailor their approach to each teacher's characteristics.

Furthermore, rapid changes in educational policies pose a significant challenge. Frequent curriculum and training policy changes often force teacher competency programs to be adjusted, requiring school principals to be highly adaptable in managing change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The transformational leadership implemented by school principals at SD Negeri Gugus 07 Tiro plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' professional competence. Strategies employed include providing motivation through *sharing and caring* activities, demonstrating a strong passion for learning as a role model for teachers, and appreciating teachers' efforts in improving their competencies.

However, the implementation of transformational leadership faces several challenges, such as intellectual diversity, teachers' socio-economic backgrounds, the emergence of seniority among teachers, and frequent changes in educational policies. Despite these challenges, various supporting factors contribute to the successful implementation of this leadership style, including government support, collaboration among school principals, a conducive work environment, principals' intrinsic motivation, competent school supervisors, and the presence of highly skilled teachers.

Based on these findings, school principals at SD Negeri Gugus 07 Tiro are encouraged to continuously innovate their leadership strategies to further enhance teachers' professionalism. Optimizing existing supporting factors and developing more adaptive approaches to various challenges can help create a more effective learning environment for both educators and students

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research on transformational leadership in education can explore its long-term impact on teacher performance and student achievement. Further studies could also examine how different school environments, cultural factors, and policy changes influence the effectiveness of transformational leadership in improving teachers' professional competence. Additionally, research comparing transformational leadership with other leadership styles in

educational settings would provide valuable insights for school management strategies.

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