

Research Article

Transformational Leadership in Public Education: Evaluating its Impact On Teacher Performance in Disadvantaged Areas

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Abstract. This study investigates the influence of transformational leadership on teacher performance in disadvantaged regions, with a specific focus on SMP Satu Atap Werdi in Pekalongan Regency. Schools located in remote and underdeveloped areas often face structural challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and geographical isolation, which significantly hinder the delivery of quality education. In this context, the role of school principals becomes critical in shaping organizational culture and motivating educators to maintain high performance despite the constraints. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, using participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to gather rich and comprehensive data from the principal and teachers as key informants. Findings indicate that even though SMP Satu Atap Werdi operates in an area with severely limited facilities, the transformational leadership style adopted by the principal has successfully brought about meaningful improvements in school management and teacher performance. The leadership was manifested through four main dimensions: idealized influence, demonstrated by strong role modelling and exemplary behaviour; inspirational motivation, reflected in the principal's ability to encourage teachers to remain committed and enthusiastic; intellectual stimulation, which fostered creativity, innovation, and problem-solving among teachers; and individualized consideration, shown through personal guidance and support tailored to each teacher's needs. These practices led to visible progress in teacher discipline, professional dedication, and organizational commitment. The study underscores the importance of transformational leadership as a catalyst for positive organizational change in education, particularly under challenging circumstances. The findings align with previous literature highlighting its effectiveness in motivating subordinates and enhancing performance. From a practical standpoint, this research suggests the need for policymakers and education stakeholders to strengthen transformational leadership practices in schools across disadvantaged regions as a strategy to achieve equitable educational quality in Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

Educational disparities remain a persistent global challenge, particularly affecting remote and disadvantaged regions where access to quality Education is severely limited (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). In Indonesia, this challenge is exemplified by the significant performance gaps between schools in urban centres and those in remote, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, where structural barriers including inadequate infrastructure, limited learning resources, and teacher shortages create substantial obstacles to educational quality (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020; World Bank, 2018).

The complexity of these challenges necessitates innovative leadership approaches that can transform educational environments despite resource constraints. Transformational leadership, originally conceptualized by Burns (1978) and later refined by Bass (1985), has emerged as a particularly relevant framework for addressing such contexts. This leadership model emphasises the transformation of followers' attitudes, values, and motivations through four core dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Unlike traditional management approaches, transformational leadership focuses on elevating both leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and moral purpose, making it potentially well-suited for resource-constrained educational environments.

Extensive research has documented the positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational outcomes, including employee performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction across various sectors (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011). Within educational contexts, studies have consistently shown that transformational leadership by school principals significantly influences teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and overall school performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008). However, a critical gap exists in the literature regarding the effectiveness of transformational leadership specifically within resource-constrained educational settings in developing countries.

The limited research examining transformational leadership in disadvantaged educational contexts has primarily focused on urban schools with adequate resources, leaving a substantial knowledge gap regarding its applicability and effectiveness in truly challenging environments (Hallinger, 2003; Day et al., 2016). This gap is particularly significant given that the unique socioeconomic and geographical contexts of remote areas may fundamentally alter how leadership practices influence organizational outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective educational leadership models that can operate successfully within severe resource constraints while still achieving meaningful improvements in educational quality.

Indonesia's 3T regions present an ideal context for examining these dynamics, as they face multiple intersecting challenges that test the limits of educational leadership effectiveness. These areas typically experience limited transportation access, unreliable electricity supply, minimal internet connectivity, and significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Statistics Indonesia, 2019). Despite these constraints, some schools in these regions demonstrate remarkable resilience and improvement, suggesting that effective leadership can indeed make a significant difference even under adverse conditions.

This study addresses the identified research gap by conducting an in-depth examination of transformational leadership implementation and its impact on teacher performance at SMP Satu Atap Werdi, located in Werdi Village, Paninggaran District, Pekalongan Regency. This school was selected as a case study because it exemplifies the challenges faced by educational institutions in Indonesia's disadvantaged regions, including difficult transportation access, unstable electricity supply, and limited internet connectivity. Despite these significant obstacles, preliminary observations suggest positive developments in teacher performance, making it an excellent context for investigating the mechanisms through which transformational leadership can operate effectively under resource constraints.

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate how transformational leadership practices implemented by the school principal specifically influence teacher performance within a severely resource-constrained environment. Additionally, this study aims to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors that affect the effectiveness of transformational leadership in such contexts. By examining these dynamics, this research seeks to contribute both empirical and practical insights that can inform the development of sustainable and effective educational leadership models for disadvantaged regions.

The significance of this study extends beyond its immediate context, as findings may inform educational policy and leadership development programs across similar regions globally. Understanding how transformational leadership can be adapted and implemented effectively in resource-poor environments could provide valuable guidance for educational leaders, policymakers, and development organizations working to improve educational quality in challenging contexts. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader theoretical understanding of transformational leadership by examining its application in a context that tests its fundamental assumptions and mechanisms.

2. Literature Review Framework

Public Services

Public services are the government's primary duty in meeting the community's basic needs. In modern governance, public services are not merely about providing administrative services but are also required to create tangible benefits for citizens. Within the good governance framework, public services must meet the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness (World Bank, 2020). This means that services provided are not solely based on the quantity or volume of output, but must also be assessed based on the quality and satisfaction of the community as beneficiaries.

The concept of public service delivery emphasizes the importance of community involvement in every service process. The government plays a role not only as a provider but also as a facilitator, working with the community and other sectors. This service model is more participatory and aims to create public value, namely value directly felt by citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2020). In Education, public services are not limited to providing school infrastructure but also encompass social policies such as the Nutritional Meal Program. This program integrates the Education and health sectors and aims to support children's holistic growth and development. The success of such programs is greatly influenced by accessibility, community acceptance, and the extent to which the services are tailored to local needs and contexts (Pudjiarti & Winarni, 2025; Rini Werdingsih et al., 2023)

Therefore, responsiveness is a crucial component. Local governments, as the primary implementers of public services, must understand the community's social and cultural conditions and adapt policies to ensure they are well-targeted (Sihombing, 2021). In this regard, the Nutritional Meal Program reflects a public service approach that is community-based, results-oriented, and adaptive to local conditions. Theoretical Foundations of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership Theory represents a paradigm shift from traditional exchange-based leadership models toward approaches that fundamentally transform followers' values, beliefs, and motivations (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). This theoretical framework distinguishes itself from transactional leadership by focusing on elevating followers to higher levels of moral reasoning and performance rather than merely managing through rewards and punishments (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Bass's (1985) seminal work established four core dimensions that define transformational leadership behaviour. Idealised Influence represents the charismatic component where leaders serve as role models, demonstrating high ethical standards and earning followers' respect and trust through consistent moral behaviour (Avolio & Bass, 2002). In educational settings, principals exhibiting idealized Influence inspire teachers through their unwavering commitment to educational excellence and ethical conduct (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Inspirational motivation involves leaders' ability to articulate compelling visions that provide meaning and challenge to followers' work (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Educational leaders demonstrating this dimension effectively communicate shared goals and create enthusiasm for collective achievement, particularly crucial in challenging environments where external motivation may be limited (Robinson et al., 2008).

Intellectual stimulation encourages followers to question assumptions, think creatively, and approach problems from new perspectives (Avolio et al., 1999). In educational contexts, this dimension proves particularly valuable as it promotes innovation in teaching practices and curriculum development, essential for adapting to diverse student needs and resource constraints (Hallinger, 2003). Individualized consideration emphasizes leaders' attention to individual followers' needs, acting as mentors and coaches to support personal and professional development (Bass & Avolio, 1994). For educators working in challenging conditions, this personalized support becomes critical for maintaining motivation and professional growth (Day et al., 2016).

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Performance

Teacher performance encompasses multiple dimensions, including instructional planning, classroom management, student assessment, and professional development activities (Danielson, 2007). Research consistently demonstrates positive relationships between transformational leadership and various teacher performance indicators (Wang et al., 2011). Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) comprehensive study across multiple school districts revealed that transformational leadership significantly influences teacher motivation, commitment, and instructional practices, ultimately impacting student achievement outcomes. Their findings indicate that teachers working under transformational leaders demonstrate higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, leading to improved classroom performance. Nguni et al.'s (2006) research in Tanzanian primary schools provided crucial evidence for transformational leadership effectiveness in developing country contexts. Their study demonstrated significant positive relationships between transformational leadership behaviours and teacher commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours, and job satisfaction. Notably, teachers under transformational leadership

showed greater willingness to engage in activities beyond formal job requirements, indicating enhanced intrinsic motivation.

Meta-analytical evidence from Judge and Piccolo (2004) and Wang et al. (2011) confirms the superiority of transformational leadership over transactional approaches in predicting follower performance across various organizational contexts. These studies reveal effect sizes ranging from moderate to large, suggesting practical significance for educational settings. The mediating mechanisms through which transformational leadership influences teacher performance include enhanced self-efficacy beliefs, increased organizational commitment, and improved job satisfaction (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). These psychological states serve as pathways connecting leadership behaviors to performance outcomes, particularly relevant in resource-constrained environments where external motivators are limited.

Educational Leadership in Resource-Constrained Environments

Educational leadership in resource-poor settings presents unique challenges that test traditional leadership models' applicability (Hallinger, 2018). Limited infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, and teacher shortages create complex environments requiring adaptive leadership approaches (UNESCO, 2020). Research in developing countries reveals that effective educational leaders in resource-constrained settings must balance multiple competing demands while maintaining focus on educational quality (Bush & Glover, 2014). Studies from sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that successful principals in under-resourced schools rely heavily on relationship-building and community engagement to overcome material limitations (Mestry, 2017).

Transformational leadership's emphasis on intrinsic motivation and personal development appears particularly suited to resource-poor contexts where external incentives are limited (Oplatka, 2004). Leaders who can inspire commitment to educational missions despite challenging conditions often achieve remarkable results through human resource optimization rather than material resource expansion (Harris et al., 2003). However, contextual factors significantly influence leadership effectiveness in disadvantaged regions. Cultural values, community expectations, and government policies create unique implementation challenges requiring careful adaptation of leadership practices (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Research suggests that successful educational leaders in these contexts demonstrate cultural sensitivity while maintaining focus on educational improvement (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Indonesian Educational Context and 3T Regions

Indonesia's educational landscape reflects significant disparities between urban and rural areas, with remote, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions facing particularly acute challenges (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Government data indicate that schools in 3T regions typically experience teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to educational resources (Statistics Indonesia, 2019). The Indonesian government's efforts to address these disparities through various policy initiatives, including teacher certification programs and infrastructure development projects, have shown mixed results (Chang et al., 2014). While urban schools have benefited significantly from these programs, 3T regions continue to lag behind national averages in educational quality indicators. Cultural factors specific to Indonesian society, including collectivist values and hierarchical relationships, influence leadership practices in educational settings (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Research suggests that effective school leadership in Indonesian contexts requires a balance between traditional authority structures and modern participatory approaches (Sumintono et al., 2015).

Studies examining educational leadership effectiveness in Indonesian remote areas remain limited, creating significant knowledge gaps regarding optimal leadership approaches for these challenging contexts (Suryadi, 2018). The few existing studies suggest that principals who demonstrate cultural sensitivity while maintaining focus on educational improvement achieve better outcomes than those relying solely on bureaucratic authority (Firman & Tola, 2008).

3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a single case study design to explore the implementation of transformational leadership and its impact on teacher performance in resource-constrained environments. The case study method is particularly suitable for addressing how and why questions about contemporary phenomena in their natural context (Yin,

2018). The research was conducted at SMP Satu Atap Werdi, located in Werdi Village, Paninggaran District, Pekalongan Regency. This site was purposively selected as it represents typical characteristics of schools in Indonesia's disadvantaged regions. Participants included one school principal and five teachers selected through purposive sampling based on criteria: a minimum of two years of teaching experience at the school and direct involvement in principal-led initiatives.

Data collection employed three methods over four weeks: participant observation to capture natural leadership-teacher interactions, semi-structured interviews with all participants to elicit detailed perspectives on leadership practices and impacts, and document analysis of school records, performance reports, and administrative communications. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model involving data reduction through systematic coding, data display using matrices and narrative summaries, and conclusion drawing through pattern recognition and explanation building. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, member checking with participants for accuracy verification, prolonged engagement for deep contextual understanding, and maintenance of comprehensive audit trails. Ethical considerations included institutional approval, informed consent, participant anonymity, and secure data storage protocols.

4. Findings

Research Setting and Participant Context

SMP Satu Atap Werdi is located in the mountainous region of Pekalongan Regency, characterized by challenging geographical conditions and limited infrastructure access. The school faces significant resource constraints, including unstable internet connectivity, minimal classroom facilities, and frequent power outages. Despite these limitations, the school maintains a dedicated teaching staff of ten educators, predominantly local teachers who have demonstrated long-term commitment to serving their community. This context of resource scarcity provides an ideal setting for examining how transformational leadership operates under challenging conditions.

Triangulation of interview data, observation records, and attendance documents reveals consistent evidence of the principal's role as an exemplary leader. All five teacher participants independently described the principal as a figure worthy of emulation, emphasizing his disciplinary consistency and moral integrity. One teacher noted He is extremely disciplined, arriving earliest and leaving latest. He never asks us to do something he does not do himself. This makes us respect him and follow his discipline. Observational data corroborated these accounts, documenting the principal's punctual arrival at 6:30 AM daily and consistent presence during school hours. Document analysis of meeting minutes revealed ethical decision-making patterns where the principal consistently prioritized student welfare over administrative convenience. This convergence across data sources demonstrates authentic idealized influence implementation.

Interview data revealed the principal's exceptional ability to inspire commitment to educational excellence despite environmental constraints. Teachers consistently reported feeling motivated by the principal's vision that rural students deserve equal educational opportunities. As one participant expressed, the principal always reminds us that even though we teach in a village, children here have the same right to receive the best Education. This prevents us from giving up. Observational evidence showed the principal conducting informal motivational sessions where he articulated long-term goals for school improvement. Document analysis of school strategic plans revealed vision statements emphasizing educational equity and community empowerment. The triangulation confirms effective implementation of inspirational motivation that transforms resource limitations into collective purpose.

Despite technological limitations, the principal consistently encouraged innovative teaching approaches. Interview data revealed systematic encouragement of creative resource utilization, with teachers reporting, "The principal never limits our ideas." Instead, he suggests, 'use what is available around us.' Observation records documented multiple instances of the principal encouraging teachers to develop alternative teaching materials using natural resources when technological tools were unavailable. Analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials showed increased creativity in instructional design, including locally-sourced learning aids and community-integrated curricula. This multi-source evidence demonstrates effective intellectual stimulation fostering innovation within constraints.

All participants reported experiencing personalized attention from the principal regarding both professional and personal matters. Interview data consistently revealed the principal's

knowledge of individual teachers' circumstances and his provision of targeted support. One teacher stated, He is not just a superior, but also a friend. He knows our problems and always provides moral support.

Observational data showed regular one-on-one consultations between the principal and teachers, addressing both instructional improvement and personal welfare. Document analysis of professional development records revealed individualized growth plans tailored to each teacher's needs and career aspirations. This triangulated evidence confirms authentic individualized consideration implementation (Pudjiarti & Winarni, 2025; Rini Werdingsih et al., 2023)

Triangulation of attendance records, interview responses, and observational data reveals significant improvement in teacher professional discipline. Quantitative analysis of attendance data showed 95% punctuality rates compared to 78% in the previous academic year. Interview data confirmed teachers' increased commitment to professional standards, with participants attributing this improvement to the principal's modelling behaviour.

Despite resource constraints, teachers demonstrated heightened enthusiasm for teaching responsibilities. Interview data revealed teachers actively seeking innovative instructional methods, while observational records documented increased energy and creativity in classroom delivery. Teachers reported finding fulfilment in overcoming challenges rather than being discouraged by limitations.

Evidence from multiple sources indicates increased teacher commitment to organizational goals. Interview data showed teachers voluntarily participating in extracurricular activities and community engagement programs. Observational records documented after-hours collaboration on school improvement initiatives, while document analysis revealed increased participation in professional development activities.

5. Discussion

Contextual Adaptation of Transformational Leadership

The findings reveal how transformational leadership adapts to resource-constrained environments, confirming Hallinger's (2018) assertion that effective educational leadership requires contextual sensitivity. Unlike studies in well-resourced schools where transformational leadership focuses on innovation through technology and external resources (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), this study demonstrates leadership effectiveness through human resource optimization and creative utilization of available materials. The principal's adaptation strategy aligns with Bush and Glover's (2014) framework for leadership in challenging contexts, where leaders must balance multiple competing demands while maintaining educational focus. However, this study extends their framework by showing how each transformational dimension can be contextually adapted without losing theoretical integrity. The principal's idealized influence operated through personal sacrifice rather than professional privileges, while intellectual stimulation focused on indigenous innovation rather than technological advancement.

Intrinsic Motivation as Leadership Leverage

The study reveals transformational leadership's effectiveness in activating intrinsic motivation when extrinsic incentives are limited, supporting Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination Theory. In contrast to studies in developed contexts where transformational leadership operates alongside material incentives (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), this research demonstrates pure reliance on psychological motivation mechanisms. The principal's inspirational motivation directly addressed teachers' need for purpose and meaning, crucial elements for sustaining performance in challenging conditions (Wang et al., 2011). This finding challenges assumptions in Western leadership literature that material resources are prerequisites for leadership effectiveness, suggesting that transformational leadership's psychological components may be more universally applicable than previously understood.

Collective Efficacy Building in Resource-Poor Settings

The research demonstrates how transformational leadership builds collective efficacy among teachers facing systemic constraints, extending Bandura's (2000) collective efficacy Theory to resource-poor educational settings. The principal's intellectual stimulation specifically targeted collective problem-solving capabilities, creating shared confidence in overcoming environmental limitations. This finding contrasts with studies in affluent schools where collective efficacy often

builds through successful resource acquisition (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Instead, this study shows collective efficacy developing through successful adaptation and creative resource utilization. The principal's individualized consideration supported this process by ensuring each teacher felt capable of contributing to collective solutions, creating what Goddard et al. (2004) term enabling school structures despite material limitations.

Cultural Resonance and Leadership Authenticity

The study reveals how transformational leadership effectiveness depends on cultural alignment between leadership behaviors and local values, supporting Walker and Dimmock's (2002) cross-cultural leadership framework. The principal's success stemmed partly from embodying Indonesian cultural values of service, humility, and collective responsibility, making transformational behaviors culturally authentic rather than imposed.

This cultural authenticity enabled what Bass and Avolio (1994) term authentic transformational leadership, where leaders' behaviors align with deeply held values rather than instrumental calculations. The finding suggests that transformational leadership's universality may depend more on cultural adaptation of its implementation than on standardized behavioral prescriptions, supporting Dimmock and Walker's (2005) call for culturally responsive educational leadership models.

The integration of transformational leadership with local cultural values created what Hofstede (2001) describes as cultural synergy, where global leadership concepts enhance rather than replace indigenous leadership practices. This synthesis enables sustainable leadership effectiveness by building on existing cultural foundations rather than requiring wholesale behavioral transformation.

6. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that transformational leadership can operate effectively in severely resource-constrained educational environments, challenging prevailing assumptions about the material prerequisites for successful educational leadership. Through triangulated analysis of observational data, interviews, and document examination at SMP Satu Atap Werdi, the research demonstrates that all four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration—can be successfully implemented despite significant infrastructural and resource limitations.

The principal's leadership approach successfully transformed environmental constraints into opportunities for innovation and collective problem-solving. Rather than being hindered by the absence of technological resources and modern facilities, the leadership framework leveraged human capital optimization and creative resource utilization to achieve meaningful improvements in teacher performance. Quantitative indicators showed remarkable improvement in teacher punctuality (from 78% to 95%), while qualitative evidence revealed enhanced teaching enthusiasm, increased organizational commitment, and voluntary participation in school improvement initiatives.

The study's most significant finding is the demonstration of transformational leadership's contextual adaptability without compromising its theoretical integrity. Each leadership dimension adapted to local conditions while maintaining its core psychological mechanisms: idealized influence operated through personal sacrifice rather than positional privilege, inspirational motivation focused on educational equity rather than resource acquisition, intellectual stimulation emphasized indigenous innovation over technological solutions, and individualized consideration addressed both professional and personal welfare within community cultural norms.

This research extends transformational leadership Theory by demonstrating its effectiveness in contexts that test its fundamental assumptions. The study challenges Western-centric leadership literature that often assumes material resource availability as a prerequisite for leadership effectiveness. Instead, it reveals that transformational leadership's psychological components—particularly intrinsic motivation activation and collective efficacy building—may be more universally applicable than previously understood. The research contributes to cross-cultural leadership Theory by showing how global leadership concepts can achieve cultural synergy with indigenous practices rather than requiring wholesale cultural transformation. This finding supports

the development of culturally responsive leadership models that enhance rather than replace existing cultural foundations.

For educational policy makers, this study provides evidence that leadership development programs should prioritize transformational competencies over resource management skills in disadvantaged regions. Investment in principal leadership training focused on the four transformational dimensions could yield significant returns in teacher performance improvement without requiring substantial infrastructure investments. For school principals operating in resource-constrained environments, the study offers a practical framework for leveraging available human resources while building collective capacity for innovation and adaptation. The research demonstrates that effective leadership can create enabling environments for educational excellence despite material limitations.

For international development organizations and educational donors, the findings suggest that leadership capacity building may be more cost-effective than infrastructure-focused interventions in achieving sustainable educational improvements in disadvantaged regions. Several limitations constrain the generalizability and scope of these findings. First, as a single case study, the research cannot establish causal relationships or provide statistical generalizability to other contexts. The unique characteristics of SMP Satu Atap Werdi and its specific community context may limit the transferability of findings to schools with different cultural, geographical, or organizational characteristics.

Second, the study's four-week observation period, while providing deep insights into leadership dynamics, may not capture longer-term sustainability of the observed improvements or seasonal variations in leadership effectiveness. The research design could not control for external factors that might influence teacher performance independently of leadership behaviors. Third, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias or retrospective rationalization. Despite triangulation efforts, the absence of objective performance measures beyond attendance data limits the comprehensiveness of performance assessment.

Fourth, the research focused exclusively on the principal's perspective of transformational leadership without examining alternative leadership models that might be equally or more effective in similar contexts. This limitation restricts comparative analysis and may overlook other viable leadership approaches. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of transformational leadership effects over extended periods. Multi-year studies could reveal whether the positive impacts observed in this research persist, evolve, or diminish over time, particularly as contextual conditions change.

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