

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Performance: A Qualitative Case Study in Indonesian Secondary Education

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Abstract: This study explores how transformational leadership supports teacher performance at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit, a public junior high school in South Sumatra, Indonesia. A qualitative case study design was used to examine leadership practices within their organizational and instructional context. Data were obtained from 16 purposively selected participants, comprising the principal, three vice principals, and twelve teachers, through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed interactively through condensation, coding, thematic categorization, data display, and continuous verification. The findings show that the principal enacted four interconnected dimensions of transformational leadership. Idealized influence strengthened punctuality, responsibility, and instructional preparedness through consistent role modeling. Inspirational motivation increased teachers' enthusiasm and commitment through vision communication, encouragement, and recognition. Intellectual stimulation supported pedagogical experimentation, technology integration, and collaborative professional learning through supervision and development activities. Individualized consideration increased teachers' confidence and reflective practice through mentoring and constructive feedback. These practices were associated with a more disciplined, collaborative, and innovation-oriented work culture, although the pace of change varied among teachers. The study contributes a process-based explanation of how transformational leadership operates in a regional Indonesian school and highlights practical priorities for principal development, teacher mentoring, and school-based professional learning.

Keywords: Instructional Innovation, Professional Development, Teacher Performance, Transformational Leadership, Work Culture

A. Introduction

Educational quality depends not only on curriculum, infrastructure, and policy but also on the capacity of school leaders to mobilize teachers toward sustained instructional improvement. Contemporary principals are therefore expected to move beyond administrative coordination and create organizational conditions that

strengthen teacher commitment, professional learning, and responsiveness to change. A recent systematic review identifies leadership as a central influence on the functioning of educational institutions and highlights transformational leadership as particularly relevant to school improvement (Huangal-scheineder et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership explains how leaders elevate members' motivation and professional commitment by connecting daily work with shared values and collective goals (Lai et al., 2020). The approach is conceptualized through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In schools, these dimensions are expressed when principals model professional standards, communicate a compelling educational vision, encourage teachers to question routine practices, and provide support that responds to individual development needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The dimensions are analytically distinct but function most effectively as an integrated leadership pattern rather than as isolated techniques.

Teacher performance is reflected in the quality of instructional planning, classroom implementation, assessment, professional responsibility, and participation in collaborative development (Nordgren et al., 2021). Leadership can influence these practices indirectly by shaping teacher motivation, self-efficacy, trust, and access to professional learning. Transformational leadership can strengthen autonomous work motivation, support demanding forms of technology integration, and improve pedagogical readiness. In the Indonesian context, it is also relevant to teacher performance through job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the work environment.

The relevance of transformational leadership has increased as teachers respond to curriculum reform, differentiated learning, technology integration, and competency-based assessment (Suwanmanee et al., 2023). These reforms require more than formal compliance. Teachers need opportunities to interpret change, experiment with new practices, receive feedback, and learn with colleagues. Professional development is more effective when school leaders create supportive structures for collaboration and reflection. Similarly, observation and supervision are more likely to support teacher learning when they are developmental rather than narrowly evaluative.

Preliminary observation at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit on January 20, 2026 indicated uneven teacher performance in instructional planning, classroom innovation, punctuality, and professional collaboration. Some teachers had developed learning modules and used project-based or differentiated approaches, whereas others relied largely on conventional materials and lecture-oriented teaching. Teachers also expressed a need for clearer inspirational direction, sustained feedback, and support tailored to their instructional difficulties. These conditions made the school an informative case for examining how a principal's leadership practices were experienced in everyday organizational life (Meyer et al., 2023).

Existing studies have provided valuable evidence about the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher outcomes, but much of the literature is based on surveys and statistical models. Such designs clarify patterns of association but provide limited explanation of how leadership practices are enacted, interpreted, and translated into changes in teachers' work. Qualitative evidence from regional Indonesian secondary schools remains comparatively limited, particularly evidence that connects the four dimensions of transformational leadership with specific mechanisms of teacher development. This study addresses that gap through a context-sensitive case analysis (Nyrup & Robinson, 2022).

Accordingly, this study aims to explain the implementation, perceived outcomes, and operating mechanisms of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit. The study is guided by three research questions: (1) How does the principal enact idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration? (2) What changes in teacher performance are associated with these leadership practices? and (3) Through what mechanisms and contextual conditions do transformational leadership practices support or constrain teacher improvement?

B. Method

This research employed a qualitative case study design (Mishra & Dey, 2022). A case study was appropriate because the research examined a bounded leadership phenomenon within one school and sought to integrate participants' interpretations with observations and institutional documents. Fieldwork was conducted in 2026 and began with a preliminary observation on January 20, 2026. The unit of analysis was the principal's transformational leadership as enacted in relation to teacher performance at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in school leadership, supervision, instructional implementation, and professional development. The 16 participants comprised one principal, three vice principals responsible for curriculum, student affairs, and facilities, and twelve teachers representing different subjects and levels of teaching experience. The principal served as the key informant, while vice principals and teachers provided complementary perspectives that enabled comparison across organizational roles.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Participant Group	Code	Number	Role in the Study
School principal	P-01	1	Key informant; school vision, leadership practices, supervision, and teacher development
Vice principals	VP-01-VP-03	3	Supporting informants; curriculum, student affairs, facilities, and leadership implementation
Teachers	T-01-T-12	12	Experiences of leadership, instructional practice, professional learning, and performance change
Total	—	16	Purposively selected participants

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Interviews examined the communication of school vision, leadership role modeling, motivational practices, supervision, support for instructional innovation, mentoring, and perceived changes in teacher performance. Observations focused on the principal's daily conduct, meetings, supervisory interactions, teacher preparedness, classroom practices, and professional collaboration. Documents included the school vision and mission, attendance records, supervision schedules and reports, lesson plans, teaching modules, meeting records, annual work programs, and professional development documentation (Marey et al., 2020). Using multiple sources supported methodological triangulation and reduced dependence on a single perspective. The researchers functioned as the primary instruments and used interview guides, observation sheets, and document checklists aligned with the research questions. The instrument framework combined deductive indicators derived from the four dimensions of transformational leadership with observable indicators of teacher performance. Questions remained flexible so that participants could elaborate on unexpected experiences while the inquiry remained focused on the study objectives (Dahlin, 2021; Tuthill et al., 2020).

Table 2. Research Instrument Framework

Research Focus	Leadership Dimension	Specific Indicators	Techniques	Sources
Professional standards and commitment	Idealized influence	Punctuality; consistency; ethical conduct; participation; direct supervision; instructional preparedness	Interview; observation; documents	Principal; vice principals; teachers; attendance and supervision records
Motivation and shared direction	Inspirational motivation	Vision communication; encouragement; recognition; collective goals; meaning	Interview; observation; documents	Principal; vice principals; teachers; meeting and work-program records
Innovation and professional learning	Intellectual stimulation	Reflective supervision; workshops; peer discussion; technology use; experimentation; problem solving	Interview; observation; documents	Principal; curriculum vice principal; teachers; modules and training records
Individual professional support	Individualized consideration	Mentoring; feedback; consultation; differentiated assistance; confidence; reflective practice	Interview; observation; documents	Principal; vice principals; teachers; supervision follow-up records

Data analysis followed an interactive process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Sibarani et al., 2021). First, interview notes, observation records, and documents were organized by source and participant role. Second, meaningful units were coded using both deductive codes based on the four leadership dimensions and inductive codes related to changes, tensions, and enabling conditions. Third, related codes were grouped into thematic categories and compared across the principal, vice principals, teachers, observations, and documents. Fourth, thematic matrices were used to display convergent and divergent evidence. Finally, conclusions were developed and repeatedly checked against the full data set. Figure 1 emphasizes that data collection, condensation, display, and verification were iterative rather than strictly sequential.



Figure 1. Interactive Data Analysis Model

Trustworthiness was addressed through source and technique triangulation, member checking of preliminary interpretations with participants, persistent engagement with the school context, and maintenance of an audit trail documenting data collection and coding decisions. Thick description was used to support transferability, while the inclusion of convergent and contrasting evidence strengthened confirmability. Participants were informed of the study purpose, participation was voluntary, and identities were protected in reporting.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Result

SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit is a public junior high school in North Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. During the research period, the school had 37 teachers, two administrative staff members, and 336 students. The school had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and was managing simultaneous demands related to instructional planning, differentiated learning, digital media, and teacher administration. This context created both a need and an opportunity for leadership that combined direction with professional support (Pak et al., 2020). Analysis produced five themes: four themes corresponded to the dimensions of transformational leadership, and a fifth theme explained the mechanisms through which the dimensions interacted. The evidence indicated broad improvement in discipline, motivation, innovation, and reflective practice, but it also showed that teachers adopted new expectations at different rates. Thus, the findings are presented as contextually grounded associations rather than claims of uniform or statistically significant effects (Adomako & Tran, 2026).

Idealized Influence: Role Modeling and Professional Standards

The principal enacted idealized influence primarily through visible consistency. Interviews across participant groups described the principal as punctual, present during key school activities, willing to participate in routine tasks, and consistent in applying institutional expectations (Mtitu, 2025). Observation records similarly showed direct monitoring of classroom readiness, attendance, and scheduled academic activities. Attendance lists, supervision schedules, and meeting records supported these accounts.

Teachers associated this visible conduct with stronger expectations for punctuality, lesson preparation, and participation in school programs. Several teachers who had previously completed instructional documents close to the teaching date became more systematic in preparing modules and supporting materials (Wondem, 2022). The mechanism was not only formal monitoring. Teachers reported that the principal's willingness to demonstrate the expected standards made requests for discipline appear more legitimate and reduced the perception that rules were imposed only on subordinates. Nevertheless, the evidence also showed a boundary condition. Some improvements in punctuality initially reflected compliance with closer monitoring rather than full internalization of professional values. This suggests that role modeling was most sustainable when reinforced by dialogue, recognition, and opportunities for teachers to understand the educational purpose of the standards.

Inspirational Motivation: Shared Direction and Recognition

Inspirational motivation was enacted through communication of the school vision, moral encouragement, recognition of teacher effort, and emphasis on the significance of teachers' work for student development (Nadeem, 2024). These messages were delivered in formal meetings, coaching sessions, and informal interactions. Annual work-program documents also included teacher motivation and development activities, indicating that encouragement was not limited to spontaneous communication.

Teachers described increased enthusiasm when expectations were linked to a shared educational purpose rather than presented as administrative demands (Abedi, 2024). Recognition of teacher contributions, including acknowledgement during meetings, strengthened confidence and willingness to participate in school initiatives. The principal's open communication also helped teachers discuss concerns about the Merdeka Curriculum and classroom management without immediately framing those concerns as personal failure. The motivational effect was not identical for all teachers. Administrative workload and uncertainty about new teaching approaches continued to reduce the enthusiasm of some participants. Inspirational messages were therefore most effective when accompanied by practical support, manageable follow-up tasks, and opportunities to learn from colleagues (Lillekroken et al., 2024).

Intellectual Stimulation: Innovation and Collaborative Professional Learning

The principal promoted intellectual stimulation through academic supervision, internal discussions, workshops, opportunities to attend external training, and encouragement to use varied learning media (X. Zhang et al., 2021). Supervision was increasingly followed by reflective conversation about classroom problems rather than ending with a compliance score. School documents confirmed scheduled supervision and professional development activities, while observations showed greater use of digital presentations, learning media, and student participation in several classrooms.

Teachers reported becoming more willing to modify learning activities, experiment with project-based and differentiated strategies, and discuss instructional challenges with peers. Professional development was gradually reframed from an administrative obligation into a resource for classroom improvement. This finding is important because the change involved both individual experimentation and a developing culture of knowledge sharing (Setini et al., 2020). Innovation, however, remained uneven. Teachers with greater technological confidence adapted more quickly, whereas others required repeated modeling and assistance. Limited time and competing administrative tasks also constrained experimentation. Intellectual stimulation therefore depended on access to structured learning opportunities and psychological safety, not merely on verbal encouragement to be innovative.

Individualized Consideration: Mentoring, Feedback, and Confidence

Individualized consideration was evident in the principal's direct communication, post-observation feedback, informal consultation, and assistance with specific classroom difficulties. Teachers emphasized that the tone of supervision changed when feedback focused on problem solving and future improvement rather than solely identifying deficiencies. This approach encouraged teachers to disclose difficulties in classroom management, lesson design, and technology use. As the mentoring relationship became more supportive, teachers showed greater openness to evaluation and more confidence in trying new practices. Follow-up conversations helped teachers translate general expectations into manageable actions, such as revising a module, varying a learning activity, or using a particular medium. The evidence suggests that individualized support strengthened reflective practice by making feedback specific, relational, and actionable (Efthymiou, 2025). A remaining challenge was the principal's limited time to provide equally intensive mentoring to all teachers. Informal support was valuable but depended heavily on availability. This condition points to the need for distributed mentoring through vice principals, senior teachers, and professional learning groups.

Integrated Mechanisms and Changes in Teacher Performance

Across the four dimensions, three mechanisms explained how leadership was associated with teacher performance. First, role modeling established credible professional norms (E. Y. H. Koh et al., 2023). Second, meaning-making and recognition strengthened motivation and organizational belonging. Third, supervision, mentoring, and collaborative learning converted motivation into specific instructional capabilities. These mechanisms were mutually reinforcing: expectations without support risked compliance, while support without clear standards risked fragmented improvement.

The combined changes were visible in improved punctuality, more consistent instructional preparation, greater use of varied media and student-centered methods, increased participation in professional discussions, and greater openness to feedback. Figure 2 summarizes these relationships. The figure should be read as an analytical synthesis rather than a linear causal sequence; the four dimensions interacted recursively and their influence depended on workload, teacher readiness, access to learning opportunities, and the quality of follow-up support (Mirsanjari, 2026).



Figure 2. Analytical Synthesis of Transformational Leadership and Teacher Performance

Table 3. Summary of Transformational Leadership Practices and Teacher Performance

Dimension	Observed Leadership Practices	Associated Teacher Performance Changes	Contextual Qualification
Idealized influence	Punctuality, consistency, participation, monitoring, responsibility	Discipline, preparedness, participation, professional commitment	Some early change reflected compliance with monitoring
Inspirational motivation	Vision communication, encouragement, recognition, open dialogue	Enthusiasm, meaning, confidence, organizational commitment	Workload reduced motivation for some teachers
Intellectual stimulation	Developmental supervision, workshops, peer discussion, technology and method experimentation	Instructional variety, technology integration, collaboration, reflective problem solving	Adoption varied by confidence, time, and access to support
Individualized consideration	Mentoring, constructive feedback, consultation, differentiated assistance	Openness to evaluation, confidence, reflective practice, continuous improvement	Principal time limited the intensity of individual mentoring

2. Discussion

Enacting Transformational Leadership as an Integrated Practice

The first research question concerned how the principal enacted the four dimensions of transformational leadership. The findings show that the dimensions were

expressed through ordinary organizational practices rather than isolated charismatic actions. Idealized influence appeared in punctuality, participation, and consistency; inspirational motivation in vision communication and recognition; intellectual stimulation in developmental supervision and professional learning; and individualized consideration in mentoring and constructive feedback. This pattern demonstrates that transformational leadership involves complementary behaviors that strengthen both shared purpose and professional capacity.

The integration of the dimensions is theoretically important. Role modeling established credibility, but credibility alone did not explain instructional change. Teachers also needed a meaningful reason to change, access to knowledge, and support tailored to their needs. The findings therefore extend a trait-oriented interpretation of transformational leadership by showing it as a process that combines normative, motivational, cognitive, and relational work. School culture, environmental support, and psychological conditions helped determine how strongly leadership practices were translated into teacher performance (Vermeulen et al., 2022).

Teacher Performance Outcomes and the Mechanisms of Change

The second research question examined changes in teacher performance associated with the leadership practices (Berhanu, 2025). Improvements were most evident in discipline, instructional preparedness, participation, experimentation, technology use, collaboration, and openness to feedback. These outcomes indicate that transformational leadership can strengthen autonomous teacher motivation, encourage more demanding uses of educational technology, and support change-oriented instructional behavior when teachers feel that their efforts are recognized.

The case adds detail about how these outcomes developed. Motivation was translated into performance through concrete organizational routines: scheduled supervision, follow-up dialogue, opportunities for training, peer discussion, and recognition. This process-based explanation addresses a limitation of correlational studies, which often identify relationships without describing the daily interactions that produce them. Professional learning opportunities require strategic guidance, collegial support, and connection to school priorities. The present findings show that the principal helped create those connections by linking supervision and mentoring with current classroom problems (Colognesi et al., 2020).

Individualized consideration was especially important in changing teachers' perceptions of supervision. When observation was experienced as punitive, teachers were reluctant to disclose difficulties. When feedback became developmental, teachers were more willing to reflect and seek assistance. Observation systems can support teacher learning more effectively when they do not merely classify performance. Likewise, clinical supervision can strengthen professional competence when it includes constructive dialogue and follow-up (Chaula et al., 2024).

Contextual Conditions, Tensions, and Non-Uniform Change

The third research question focused on mechanisms and contextual conditions. The findings identify credibility, shared meaning, psychological safety, structured professional learning, and actionable feedback as enabling mechanisms (Jongsma et al., 2024). They also reveal constraints: administrative workload, unequal technological confidence, limited mentoring time, and initial compliance driven by monitoring. These tensions qualify any simple claim that transformational leadership automatically improves performance. The uneven adoption of innovation shows that leadership for technological change requires sense-making and practical support, not only vision communication. Professional development also improves teaching quality more effectively when leadership creates an environment for collaboration and reflection. In this case, teachers who received repeated modeling and collegial assistance progressed more quickly than those who encountered expectations without sufficient practice opportunities (Scholz et al., 2023). The findings also suggest that transformational leadership should not replace administrative systems. Attendance monitoring, schedules, and performance documentation remained necessary. The stronger pattern emerged when administrative clarity was combined with professional trust and development. This balance helps explain why some disciplinary improvement began as compliance but became more internally motivated when expectations were connected to purpose, recognition, and support.

Theoretical Contribution

This study makes three contributions. First, it provides qualitative evidence that transformational leadership influences teacher performance through the combined operation of normative, motivational, cognitive, and relational mechanisms. Second, it clarifies the translation process between leadership and performance: role modeling establishes standards, inspirational communication gives those standards meaning, intellectual stimulation develops new capabilities, and individualized consideration sustains reflection and confidence. Third, the study contextualizes these mechanisms in a regional Indonesian public school implementing curriculum and digital reforms, thereby extending a literature dominated by cross-sectional surveys. The case also cautions against treating the four dimensions as a checklist. Their effects were interdependent and contingent. Idealized influence without individualized support risked producing compliance; intellectual stimulation without sufficient time and mentoring risked uneven adoption; and inspirational motivation without practical structures risked remaining rhetorical. A process model therefore provides a more useful explanation than a simple direct-effect model (Rohrer et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

For school principals, the findings suggest four priorities: demonstrate the standards expected from teachers; communicate a clear and educationally meaningful direction;

connect supervision with experimentation and collaborative learning; and provide differentiated follow-up support. Recognition should be specific to professional effort, while feedback should identify a manageable next step rather than only describe deficiencies (J. Zhang et al., 2023). For schools and education authorities, leadership development should include coaching, feedback literacy, facilitation of professional learning communities, technology-related sense-making, and strategies for distributing mentoring responsibilities. Professional development should be connected to observed classroom needs and followed by opportunities for practice, peer exchange, and reflection. Continuous professional development and leadership support should therefore be designed as complementary strategies for improving teaching quality (G. A. Koh et al., 2023).

Limitations

The study was conducted in one school with 16 participants, so the findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable. The evidence relied mainly on leadership practices, participant perceptions, observations, and institutional documents; it did not include longitudinal student-outcome measures or an independent quantitative assessment of teacher performance. The cross-sectional fieldwork also limits conclusions about the durability of the reported changes. Future studies should compare multiple schools, follow leadership and teacher performance over time, include student and parent perspectives, and combine qualitative evidence with validated performance measures.

D. Conclusions

This qualitative case study examined how transformational leadership supported teacher performance at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Rupit. The findings answer the three research questions by showing how the principal enacted the four leadership dimensions, what changes were associated with those practices, and which mechanisms and conditions shaped the process. Idealized influence was expressed through punctuality, responsibility, participation, and supervision. These practices strengthened professional standards and were associated with better teacher discipline, instructional preparedness, and institutional participation. Inspirational motivation operated through communication of the school vision, encouragement, recognition, and open dialogue. It strengthened teachers' meaning, enthusiasm, and commitment, although administrative workload continued to limit motivation for some participants. Intellectual stimulation was enacted through developmental supervision, workshops, peer discussion, and support for pedagogical and technological experimentation. It encouraged more varied instructional methods, technology use, and collaborative learning, but adoption remained uneven because teachers differed in confidence, time, and readiness. Individualized consideration was evident in mentoring, constructive feedback, informal consultation, and assistance with classroom problems. It increased openness to evaluation, reflective practice, and

confidence in implementing change. The study contributes a process-based explanation of transformational leadership. Teacher performance improved not through authority alone but through the interaction of role modeling, shared meaning, psychologically safe dialogue, structured professional learning, and actionable support. The findings also show that the four dimensions should not be implemented as separate techniques. Their influence was strongest when expectations were combined with motivation, capability development, and relational support. Practically, principals should connect supervision to coaching, recognize professional effort, provide differentiated follow-up, and distribute mentoring through vice principals and teachers. Education authorities should strengthen principal preparation in feedback, professional learning facilitation, and change management. Because this study involved one school and cross-sectional evidence, future research should use multisite, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs and include independent measures of teacher and student outcomes.

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