

INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ENCOURAGING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study explores the role of inspirational leadership, often identified with transformational leadership, in enhancing academic achievement within vocational high schools. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with PRISMA methodology, the research synthesizes findings from 40 articles published between 2018 and 2024. The PRISMA approach is utilized for analysis. Data in systematic reviews that aim to screen, evaluate, and transparently report literature. The steps of data analysis with PRISMA involve a process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant literature. The analysis highlights the capacity of transformational leadership to foster collaboration, innovation, and motivation among school stakeholders. It underscores the influence of leadership in integrating entrepreneurial values, developing innovative teaching methods, and creating an inclusive school culture. The study also identifies a significant research gap in understanding the direct application of transformational leadership in vocational contexts. Recommendations are made for school leaders to implement transformational leadership practices aligned with contemporary educational challenges, focusing on equipping students with both academic and practical skills for the workforce.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership, Inspirational Leadership, Vocational High Schools.



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INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership, particularly its application in vocational schools, is critical for fostering academic achievement and preparing students for workforce demands (Anugerah Izzati et al., 2020). However, a clear understanding of how such leadership styles directly influence educational outcomes in vocational settings remains underexplored. This study addresses the gap by examining the specific impact of inspirational leadership in vocational high schools, emphasizing its role in overcoming unique challenges these institutions face (Armiyanti et al., 2023). Vocational schools are increasingly recognized for bridging education and industry demands. With the global push towards educational innovation, transformational leadership emerges as a relevant strategy to enhance student outcomes. Studies (Efendi et al., 2023)(Akhmad et al., 2024) Indicate that this leadership style promotes collaboration, innovative teaching practices, and a positive school culture, all of which align with the evolving needs of vocational education (Bantam et al., 2024).

Previous studies have explored transformational leadership in general school settings (Hartawan, 2022)(Saputra et al., 2021), but limited research focuses on its specific impact on vocational high schools. Unlike prior studies that primarily evaluate general leadership efficacy, this research delves into the nuanced effects of inspirational leadership styles in vocational contexts, addressing gaps in curriculum integration and practical application. Other research from (Fitrah, 2017)(Haudi, 2022) Explained that principals have a central role in determining the quality of schools through their leadership, which includes transformational vision into reality, multifunctional roles, program evaluation, and focus on the quality of education through quality processes and competency-based teacher recruitment. Similar results were also conveyed by (Ismunandar & Hasan, 2022) Stated that transformational leadership is the process of influencing and motivating others to achieve higher goals by building confidence, improving performance, and encouraging renewal in led institutions, including the role of school principals in realizing changes in the educational environment.

This study introduces a fresh perspective by linking transformational leadership directly to vocational school outcomes, highlighting the role of principals in fostering an innovative and collaborative learning environment (Alfiani & Fauziyah, 2020). It uniquely emphasizes strategies for integrating leadership-driven initiatives into academic and skill-based curricula, thus providing actionable insights for educational practitioners.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of inspirational leadership in enhancing academic achievement within vocational high schools. It seeks to identify effective strategies for overcoming challenges in implementing such leadership and explores its influence on fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration among school stakeholders. By focusing on the transformational leadership model, this research offers valuable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to improve the quality of vocational education. It underscores the importance of leadership in shaping student success and adapting to industry needs, thus contributing to the broader discourse on educational reform.

METHOD

This study aims to review various relevant literature to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Role of Inspirational Leadership Style in Improving Academic Achievement in Vocational High Schools. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method aims to systematically identify, review, and synthesize research relevant to a particular topic. In this study, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method was used to ensure transparency and rigor in the review process. PRISMA helps reduce bias and provides clear guidance in reporting research results. PRISMA consists of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In this stage, the first step was to identify literature related to technology-based pneumatic and hydraulic learning. This was done by accessing the academic database on Google Scholar. Through literature review, it is expected to find research gaps, major trends, and various approaches that have been used in related studies. Thus, this study not only provides a strong theoretical foundation but also offers new insights that can support further development in this field. This process was done by accessing academic databases on Google Scholar. Keywords used for the search included: "leadership," 'inspirational,' 'transformational,' 'school,' 'secondary school,' 'vocational,' and 'principal.'

With the help of the Harzing Publish and Perish search engine, more than 100 articles with the above search keywords were obtained. Then, the inclusion criteria were re-specialized to include research published in the last 5 years from 2018-2024, and articles that focus on leadership styles in vocational schools. At this stage, the remaining articles were further evaluated by reading the abstract and methodology sections to ensure the relevance of the research. Only articles that met the following criteria were retained, and 40 articles that met the desired criteria were obtained. The

selection criteria for articles from Google Scholar were based on the relevance and alignment of the content with the specified keywords: "leadership," "inspirational," "transformational," "school," "secondary school," "vocational," and "principal." Articles were chosen if they explored topics related to leadership styles, particularly inspirational and transformational leadership, within the context of educational institutions, specifically secondary and vocational schools. Preference was given to peer-reviewed studies, articles published in reputable journals, and research that focused on the roles and impacts of school principals in driving organizational change, fostering innovation, and improving school performance. The search also prioritized recent publications to ensure the inclusion of contemporary insights and trends in the field. Once relevant articles have been identified, analysis is conducted by examining the methodology, results, and conclusions of each study. The data will be organized based on key themes and then summarized in the form of a narrative that describes the trends and contributions of each study to the research topic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

To achieve a quality school, the role of principals in managing and encouraging schools professionally is essential. As teachers entrusted with additional responsibilities to lead schools, principals bear significant tasks and roles in improving the quality of education (Syunu Trihantoyo, Windasari, Ayu Wulandari, Rezki Nurma Fitria, Rengga Aprilia, Feby Eka Listiani, Tri Lailatulqodar Riswati, Mujiono, 2024). The success of an educational institution is closely tied to the effectiveness of the principal's leadership. Principals are expected to adopt managerial-oriented leadership to foster a supportive environment for educational excellence. Additionally, teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' knowledge, skills, and character (Komara et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership, characterized by its focus on building a clear vision and empowering others, is vital in education. Leaders with this style inspire through compelling visions, provide individual attention to team members, and encourage innovation and creative thinking. (Sugianto, 2024). They emphasize values, commitment, and collaboration to achieve shared goals. In the educational context, transformational leaders act not only as directors but also as role models who motivate students and colleagues while fostering integrity and responsibility. (Wiyono, 2019). Such leadership significantly impacts the school culture and drives improvement in various aspects.

The creative and innovative abilities of school principals are pivotal in promoting effective school management. These abilities include starting new ventures, being creative, seizing opportunities, taking risks, and developing innovative ideas to support the school's production units (Suhartini et al., 2022). These initiatives not only provide additional income but also serve as valuable learning resources to enhance students' skills, creativity, and overall quality. Moreover, the principal's work indirectly influences teachers by fostering collaboration and communication, which improves teaching practices and student outcomes (Sumarsih, 2023). In vocational high schools, transformational leadership can create an inclusive and collaborative school culture, further supporting educational excellence.

The results of e-journal tracking in this SLR research are represented in curves using VOSviewer, and the image represents a visualization of the network map of relationships between terms related to leadership in research, created using VOSviewer software. Terms such as *"transformational leadership," "teacher," "school," "guru,"* and *"kepemimpinan"* serve as the central nodes in the network, with various connections to other relevant terms. Larger nodes indicate terms that appear more frequently in research, while the thickness of the lines between nodes signifies the strength of the relationships between those terms.

The colors of the nodes and lines in the image represent temporal distribution based on the year of publication, with blue indicating terms that were more prominent in earlier publications (around 2021), while yellow highlights terms that became more relevant in more recent years (2022–2023). For example, terms like *"school," "leadership,"* and *"teacher performance"* are more dominant and consistently appear across various studies over time.

This network illustrates the research focus on the role of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance, students, and schools. Terms such as *"intellectual stimulation," "organization," "goal,"* and *"student"* highlight various aspects of interest in these studies, encompassing dimensions of implementation, motivation, and the impact of leadership on the educational environment.

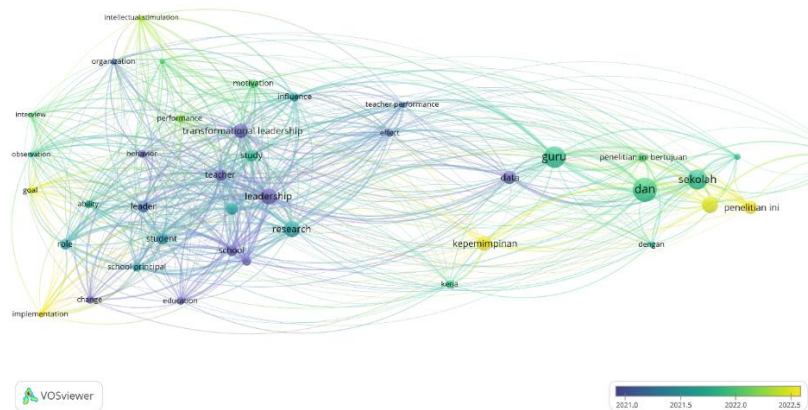


Figure 1. E-journal Tracking by Utilizing VosViewer

In a vocational high school environment, transformational leadership can be implemented through the development of an inclusive and collaborative school culture, as stated in the following research:

Table 1. Results of Literature Study on the Characteristics of Inspirational Leadership Style (Transformational Leadership) and its Implementation in Vocational High Schools.

No.	Researcher	Title			Results
1.	(Saputra et al., 2021)	Democratic Principals in Vocational Schools	Leadership of		The principal's leadership at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Padang is democratic and participatory, involving all staff in collective decision-making. Creativity and innovation are encouraged through delegated authority, supported by guidance and motivation. Discipline is enforced gradually, prioritizing joint resolutions, while achievements are recognized with awards. This approach fosters a conducive work environment and motivates the entire school community to perform optimally.
2.	(Hafitriani, 2021)	The Influence of the Principal's Transformational Leadership and Achievement Motivation on Teachers' Pedagogical Competence and Its Implications for Teacher Performance			Transformational leadership and achievement motivation at SMKN 13 Bandung are excellent, with a significant impact on teachers' pedagogical competence at 43.2% and 53.5%, respectively. However, pedagogical competence does not significantly affect teacher performance, indicating the

			influence of other factors such as job satisfaction and commitment. Synergy among all school components is essential to maintain teacher performance and education quality.
3.	(Sutopo, Bambang Sumardjoko, 2024)	The Importance of Transformational Leadership Aspects of School Principals in Vocational High Schools.	The success of transformational leadership is supported by role modeling and cross-sectoral support. The principal serves as a role model in management, social relations, and external networking. This leadership plays a significant role in building a positive work culture, enhancing professionalism, and advancing the school, although improvements in communication and motivation development are still needed.
4.	(Aziz & Zakir, 2022)	Literature Study on the Influence of Principal's Leadership Style on the Quality of Vocational High School Teachers	The literature review shows that principals' leadership has a significant impact on educators' proficiency in vocational schools. Transformational and charismatic styles proved to be most effective, with transformational promoting innovation and professionalism, while charismatic increased motivation and discipline. The selection of the right leadership style is crucial to creating a conducive work environment, supporting professional development, and producing competitive SMK graduates.
5.	(Mushthofa et al., 2022)	The Role of School Principal Leadership in Shaping the Religious Character of Students at SMK Cendekia Madiun	The principal acts as an educator, providing knowledge, guidance, and direction to teachers, staff, and students. This is based on the belief that shaping religious character in students encourages positive behaviors. As a manager, the principal plans and utilizes school resources to achieve the school's vision and mission. The principal also serves as an administrator, managing activities, finances, and documentation for school

			programs, including religious activities. The principal leads by setting goals and planning religious character-building activities with input from teachers, staff, and student organizations. Additionally, the principal motivates, supervises, and ensures the smooth implementation of character-building programs.
6.	(Suhardi et al., 2022)	The effect of leadership and motivation on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Bangkinang	Both leadership and motivation significantly impact the performance of honorary teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Bangkinang. Individually, both factors also have a significant effect on teacher performance. The independent variables contribute 85.90% to the dependent variable, while the remaining 14.10% is influenced by factors outside the study.
7.	(Jamil, 2023)	The Role of School Principal Leadership in Improving the Effectiveness of the Teaching Team at SMKN Taman Fajar	The analysis concludes that the principal at SMKN Taman Fajar, has effectively enhanced teacher performance through transformational leadership. This includes a democratic, clear, and open style, regular communication with staff, emphasis on discipline, meetings on key issues, guidance, problem-solving support, skill development training, and class visits.
8.	(Anfaur Roja, 2019)	Principal leadership improves the quality of learners: An Analysis of Achievement Models and Strategies.	SMK Nusaputera 2 Semarang applies a transformational leadership model, focusing on inspiring, motivating, and developing the team's potential to achieve shared goals. Transformational leaders foster positive change through strong relationships, a shared vision, and creativity while supporting personal development, promoting innovation, and creating an inclusive work environment. The strategies used to achieve these goals

			include curriculum development, improving teaching quality, monitoring learning processes, class management and discipline, parent involvement, educational technology use, life skills development, and student well-being monitoring.
9.	(Arief Juneirul Pratama, M. Giatman, 2023)	Analysis of Principal Leadership Style on Teacher Performance in Vocational High School: A Literature Study	Teacher performance in vocational schools is strongly influenced by the principal's leadership style. A better leadership style results in better teacher performance and vice versa. In this literature study, the most dominant leadership style applied by principals in various vocational schools is democratic leadership, which positively impacts teacher performance. Democratic principals encourage teacher and staff participation in decision-making and prioritize self-improvement and social skills development, both within the school and in the broader community.
10.	(Yulianto et al., 2023)	The impact of teacher job satisfaction, teacher creativity, and principal leadership on teacher work ethic in Ma'arif Nahdatul Ulama vocational high schools in Pekalongan district.	Job satisfaction, creativity, and principal leadership significantly impact teacher work ethic at Ma'arif Nahdatul Ulama Vocational Schools in Pekalongan. Job satisfaction contributes 27%, creativity 62.1%, and principal leadership 35.8%. Together, these factors account for 65% of the work ethic, with a very strong correlation ($R = 0.806$). The remaining 35% is influenced by other untested factors.

The research that has been conducted in Table 1 confirms that leaders in educational institutions must be able to mobilize organizational resources and adapt to change through a transformational leadership model to achieve educational goals. The role of transformational leadership in increasing subordinate trust has an impact on improving organizational performance, increasing trust, loyalty, and teacher motivation in facing the transformation of education 4.0. The

principal's leadership is a democratic style that involves all staff in decision-making and gives them space to innovate. Discipline is enforced with a gradual and solution-based approach, while achievements are rewarded to create a conducive work environment.

Inspirational and transformational leadership styles have a significant impact on improving students' academic achievement (Munir, 2023). Leaders who use this approach can create a positive learning environment through motivation, emotional support, and providing clear direction to teachers and students.(Yufita & Sihotang, 2020). By providing inspiration and a strong vision, the principal or teacher as a transformational leader can encourage students to reach their full potential (Kurnia Mira Lestari, Junaidi, Supriadi, 2022). In addition, this approach also improves teacher performance, resulting in more innovative and effective teaching methods (Efendi et al., 2023). Through collaboration, recognition of achievement, and collaborative problem-solving, transformational leadership creates a school culture that is conducive to learning so that students are more motivated and achieve in both academic and non-academic areas.(Anan Marliansyah, 2024). The principal's leadership role is important in making teachers the driving force of the learning process to realize independent learning in schools. The principal is an important element that plays a role in realizing the independent learning policy in schools. This is to support the learning process that can produce graduates with competence and character by the demands and needs of industry and the world of work (Kholifatul Husna Asri, Aan Komariah, Danny Meirawan, 2020)

Table 2. The Impact of Inspirational Leadership Style (Transformational Leadership) on Students' Academic Achievement

No.	Researcher	Title	Results
1.	(Hartawan, 2022)	Principal Leadership To Increase Student Affordability Competencies (Case Study at SMKN 1 and SMKN 4 Metro Lampung)	The principal applies transformational leadership with a high entrepreneurial ethos, mobilizing the school community to build an entrepreneurial culture inside and outside the school. Entrepreneurship education has been integrated into the syllabus, lesson plans, and local content that equips students with life skills as well as curriculum innovation, although this strategy has not been specifically listed in the School Work Plan (RKS).

2.	(Eka Prasetya, Wulida 2018)	Mulya Tri Afrianty,	The Impact Of Leadership And Teacher Innovation On Quality Of Education, Learning Achievements, And Employment Opportunities (Study on Employees of PT PLN (Persero) Development Master Unit VIII Surabaya)	Leadership has a big role in running an educational organization. The role of managing schools can have an impact on improving the quality of education. Not only principals but also teachers who have innovative behavior in improving the quality of learning can run well because every teacher always has the right effort in transferring their knowledge according to the character of students and teaching time. National education standards can affect students' learning achievement. The existence of academic standards can have an impact on the employment opportunities of graduates.
3.	(Yudo 2019)	Dwiyono,	The Principal's Role as a Transformational Leader in Vocational High School	Principals as transformational leaders in SMK play an important role in driving educational innovation and preparing students for the world of work. By formulating a shared vision, encouraging collaboration, and managing resources efficiently, principals create an environment that supports teachers' professional development and improves the quality of education.
4.	(Budiono et al., 2021)		Transformational Leadership Style Education On Work Culture For The Student Council of SMK Mutiara Bangsa Tiga	The transformational leadership applied to the student council of SMK Mutiara Bangsa Tiga succeeded in shaping a better work culture by increasing students' creativity, solidarity, and enthusiasm in running the organization's work program. Education about transformational leadership styles, which involves training and discussion, helps students understand leadership concepts and practice them effectively in organizational management. Support from the school principal and collaboration

			between student council members create a working environment that supports the achievement of organizational goals despite the challenges of the pandemic situation and limited facilities.
5.	(Akbar, 2023)	Principal Leadership Strategy in Improving Student Learning Achievement at SMK Negeri 1 Mojosongo	Principal leadership at SMK N 1 Mojosongo has proven effective in improving student learning achievement through planned strategies, such as improving student grades, achieving competition championships, and collaborating with leading DU/DI. The principal also continues to maintain and improve school quality by holding regular briefings, coordination meetings, training, and evaluations. The role of the principal is very important in supporting the school's progress both in the short and long term.
6.	(Komalasari, 2023)	Actualization Of Transformational Leadership In Improving School Quality At Nahdlatul Ulama SMK In Tasikmalaya City	Transformational leadership at SMK Nahdlatul Ulama Tasikmalaya City improves school quality through idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation approaches. Improvement is achieved through the management of human resources, facilities, regulations, vision and mission, and students' academic and non-academic achievements. The school achieved the status of SMK Center of Excellence and Center of Excellence, with the absorption rate of graduates in the world of work reaching 59%.
7.	(Mimin Acep Nurlaeli, 2024)	Visionary Leadership of Principal at SMK Dinamika Pembangunan 2 Jakarta	The principal's visionary leadership at SMK Dinamika Pembangunan 2 Jakarta has succeeded in improving the quality of education through innovative programs that are relevant to industry needs and global challenges. The strategic,

			innovative, and collaborative approach applied has an impact on improving student achievement, teacher professionalism, and partnerships with industry. Despite facing challenges, this leadership is able to transform the school into a superior and competitive vocational education institution.
8.	(Simanjuntak et al., 2024)	Principal management in improving teachers' work ethic in private vocational high schools	Careful planning ensures that the goals and strategies for improving work ethic at SMK Swasta Kampus Kota Padangsidempuan are clear, with appropriate organization of resources and educational priorities. Effective implementation is done through active supervision of the principal, providing direct support, as well as periodic evaluation to ensure expected results. Principals serve as role models, encourage active participation, and build a positive work culture, which contributes to improving the quality of education and positively impacts the entire school community.
9.	(Aulia et al., 2024)	Leadership Strategies And Approaches In Improving Education Quality	Leadership in education involves the ability to influence and direct individuals and groups toward a common goal, focusing on vision, communication, motivation, and management. Effective educational leaders must have interpersonal skills, and adaptability and encourage innovation and continuous professional development. Leadership styles such as transformational, instructional, and collaborative provide unique approaches that can be tailored to the needs of educational institutions, creating an environment that supports

		student success and development.
10.	(Cahyani, 2019)	The Effect of Infrastructure and Principal Leadership on Student Learning Achievement at SMK Farmasi Surabaya and SMK Al-Irsyad Surabaya
		The research shows that infrastructure and principal leadership each have an effect on student learning achievement at SMK Farmasi Surabaya and SMK Al-Irsyad Surabaya. In addition, both simultaneously also influence student learning achievement.

The principal, as a transformational leader, acts as an agent of change who directs teachers to innovate and improve the quality of educational services according to environmental demands. Transformational leadership focuses on improving student academic achievement by implementing three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and visionary, to improve the quality of education (Suhaedin et al., 2024). These various leadership styles have a significant impact on improving educational standards. Regular monitoring and evaluation are also part of the strategy to improve the quality of education. Transformational leadership plays a major role in improving student learning achievement.

School culture as a supporting factor also makes an important contribution to educational success. Education in Vocational High Schools (SMK) has a strategic role in preparing students to enter the world of work. However, many SMKs face various problems, such as low learning quality, lack of student engagement, and limited resources. Principals in this context play a key role as leaders who must be able to overcome these challenges. Effective leadership from a principal can have a significant positive impact on the whole school environment (Miftah et al., 2024).

Discussion

Transformational leadership in vocational high schools significantly influences academic achievement by fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and motivation among teachers and students. The findings highlight that leaders with clear visions and strong emotional connections with school stakeholders empower teachers to implement innovative teaching methods, thereby enhancing the learning environment. The research aligns with the theory that transformational leadership promotes intrinsic motivation and goal alignment, as proposed by (BASS & AVOLIO, 1993), and demonstrates the practical impact of these principles in educational settings.

The influence of transformational leadership on academic success corroborates findings from studies such as those by (Hafitriani, 2021), which emphasizes its role in improving teacher competence and motivation. However, contrary to prior research that suggested a limited direct effect on student outcomes, this study reveals a stronger correlation, especially in the vocational context where industry-relevant skills and innovative pedagogy are prioritized. The ability of leaders to integrate entrepreneurial ethos into the curriculum further distinguishes this research from earlier general educational studies.

The integration of entrepreneurial values and practical skills within the leadership framework illustrates the adaptability of transformational leadership in vocational education. This synthesis underscores the need for a proactive leadership approach that not only aligns with academic goals but also equips students with life skills for the workforce. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on transformational leadership, reinforcing its application in diverse educational contexts and supporting the view that effective leadership is pivotal in bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that transformational leadership in vocational high schools significantly enhances academic achievements. By fostering innovation and empowering students and teachers, such leadership creates a supportive environment for educational excellence. This approach emphasizes building a shared vision, emotional connection, and collaborative culture, contributing to both academic and non-academic improvements. It is recommended that school principals adopt transformational leadership practices to nurture a culture of continuous innovation and learning. Training and mentoring programs for school leaders should focus on embedding these principles into their leadership styles. Moreover, incorporating specific strategies into school work plans and monitoring their execution can enhance the long-term impact of transformational leadership.

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