

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN BUILDING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Fitri Agustina Nugraheni¹, Erny Roesminingsih²,
Ayu Wulandari³, Amrozi Khamidi⁴, Karwanto⁵, Syunu Trihantoyo⁶
¹²³⁴⁵⁶Universitas Negeri Surabaya; Indonesia
Correspondence Email; 25010845104@unesa.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze school principals' transformational leadership practices in developing a *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency. The study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. The data consisted of qualitative information, narratives, actions, interactions, experiences, and documents related to principals' transformational leadership practices and PLC development. Data sources included school principals, teachers, PLC or learning community coordinators, and relevant documents on PLC implementation and teachers' professional learning activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations of leadership practices, PLC activities, teacher collaboration, and document analysis. Data were analyzed interactively through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, conducted within and across research sites. The findings indicate that principals' transformational leadership practices were manifested through four dimensions: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. Principals demonstrated role modeling through involvement in professional learning, fostered openness and trust, and encouraged shared commitment. Inspirational motivation was reflected in connecting PLC activities with student learning improvement and appreciating teachers' initiatives. Intellectual stimulation was promoted through reflective questioning, opportunities to experiment with instructional approaches, and collaborative problem-solving. Individualized consideration was demonstrated through support tailored to teachers' needs and competencies. PLCs provided spaces for sharing instructional practices, discussion, reflection, feedback, and collective problem-solving. Differences between the two schools indicate that time, workload, participation, trust, and organizational conditions influenced PLC development. Transformational leadership and sustained professional interaction are therefore important in fostering teachers' professional learning and collaboration.

Keywords

Collaboration; Principal Leadership; Professional Learning Community; Teacher Professional Learning; Transformational Leadership.



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INTRODUCTION

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide a framework for teachers to learn collectively through shared instructional experiences, reflective dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. Their development involves more than holding regular meetings; it requires activities that connect professional learning with classroom needs and shared responsibility for student learning. School principals can support this process by articulating a shared vision, encouraging teacher participation, facilitating professional interaction, and responding to teachers' development needs (García-Martínez et al., 2021). Transformational leadership offers an analytical perspective for examining these practices through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2008). In this study, these dimensions guide the examination of how principals foster collaborative professional learning within school-based PLCs.

The need to examine these leadership practices emerged from preliminary observations conducted on 27 March 2026 at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency. The observed activities suggested differences in the focus of learning community implementation: instructional practice sharing appeared more prominent at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan, whereas administrative matters appeared more prominent at SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan. These observations represent initial contextual indications rather than definitive assessments of either school's effectiveness (Schueler et al., 2022). Nevertheless, they raise questions about how learning communities are directed toward professional learning and how principals encourage participation, reflection, and collaboration. Understanding these differences requires closer examination of leadership practices alongside organizational conditions, including teacher commitment, communication patterns, time availability, activity organization, and follow-up arrangements (Komari et al., 2024).

Five previous studies provide relevant foundations for this investigation. (Voelkel, 2022) Drawing on 181 survey responses from eight schools, examined relationships among transformational leadership, PLCs, and teacher collective efficacy. (Men, 2025) surveyed 572 Chinese principals and examined the relationships among transformational leadership, five PLC components, and teacher job satisfaction. tandfonline.com In Indonesia, (Sholeh et al., 2023) used survey data from 93 elementary school teachers in Surabaya and reported a positive relationship between principals' transformational leadership and teacher PLCs. (Effendi, 2025) employed

interviews, observations, and documentation to explore transformational leadership in a senior high school, highlighting exemplary leadership, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention in supporting teacher competency development. More recently, (Listyasari et al., 2026) investigated the effect of transformational leadership on PLC practices in Indonesian public high schools, extending the discussion to another Indonesian school context. ejournal.uinsaid.ac.id

Taken together, these studies establish the relevance of transformational leadership to PLC development while leaving room for a more contextual explanation of how leadership is enacted in everyday professional learning activities. The survey-based studies discussed above primarily examine relationships among constructs, whereas the qualitative study by (Murdjoko et al., 2025) focuses on teacher competency development within a senior high school context. Building on this literature, the present study offers a qualitative, multi-site examination of two junior high schools with differing patterns of learning community activity (Setiawan et al., 2026). Its intended contribution lies in connecting the four transformational leadership dimensions with concrete leadership actions and teacher interactions, while examining how organizational conditions facilitate or constrain those practices. The novelty, therefore, lies in the comparative explanation of leadership enactment and PLC development processes, rather than in geographical location alone.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how principals enact transformational leadership in developing PLCs at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency. Specifically, it examines how principals establish shared vision and commitment, encourage teacher reflection and collaboration, support instructional experimentation, and respond to individual professional learning needs. It also investigates how PLCs function as forums for teachers' professional learning and identifies the organizational factors that facilitate or constrain their development. Through within-site and cross-site analysis, the study seeks to explain both common leadership practices and contextual differences in the development of collaborative professional learning at the two schools.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site research design to explore how school principals enact transformational leadership in developing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within their natural school contexts. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency, which were purposively

selected based on preliminary observations and interviews with PLC coordinators conducted on 27 March 2026. These preliminary findings indicated differences in the focus and implementation of learning community activities and informed the subsequent investigation. The main data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school principals, subject teachers, and PLC coordinators, non-participant observations of PLC activities, and analysis of relevant school documents (Creswell, 2016). The interview and observation protocols were informed by the four dimensions of transformational leadership proposed by (Bass & Riggio, 2008): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Data collection focused on principals' leadership practices, teacher participation and collaboration, professional learning processes, and organizational factors that facilitated or constrained PLC development, including teacher commitment, communication patterns, principal support, time availability, activity organization, and follow-up practices.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of (Huberman, 2019) comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis proceeded iteratively throughout data collection by organizing and coding interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents. The transformational leadership dimensions served as an initial analytical framework, while additional themes emerged from the data. Within-site analysis identified patterns specific to each school, followed by cross-site analysis to examine similarities, differences, and contextual conditions. Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation across informant groups and data collection techniques, member checking, and systematic comparison of findings across the two sites. This design supported an in-depth and contextual understanding of how principals enacted transformational leadership and how organizational conditions shaped PLC development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents and discusses the findings of the qualitative, multi-site study on transformational leadership in the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan in Magetan Regency. The findings were obtained through interviews with school principals, teachers, and PLC or learning-community coordinators, supported by observations and document analysis. The analysis examines how the

four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—are enacted in everyday leadership practices and how these practices support PLCs as spaces for professional learning and teacher collaboration. The findings are presented by site and followed by a cross-site analysis to identify similarities, differences, and contextual factors that facilitate or constrain PLC development. The discussion relates the empirical findings to relevant transformational leadership and PLC theories, as well as previous studies. The research findings showed differences in PLC implementation between the two sites.

Table 1. PLC Activities at the Two Research Sites

Indicator	SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan	SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan
Meetings conducted	15 of 20 (75%)	10 of 20 (50%)
Average teacher attendance	95%	80%
Instructional-practice sharing	85%	20%
Administrative activities	15%	80%

Source: Data processed from observations (2026).

Table 1 indicates that SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan had more activities oriented toward instructional-practice sharing, whereas SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan had a greater proportion of administrative activities. These differences were not interpreted as indicators of school quality but as contextual evidence for examining how transformational leadership practices shaped the development of professional learning. Table 1 presents the initial data on PLC implementation at the two research sites. The data describe four indicators: the number of meetings conducted, average teacher attendance, instructional-practice sharing activities, and administrative activities.

At SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan, 15 of the 20 planned PLC meetings had been conducted, representing 75% of the planned meetings. The average teacher attendance was 95%, indicating that most teachers participated in the scheduled activities. In terms of activity orientation, 85% of activities involved structured sharing of instructional practices, while 15% were administrative.

At SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, 10 of the 20 planned PLC meetings had been conducted, representing 50% of the planned meetings. The average teacher attendance was 80%. The activities consisted of 20% structured instructional-practice sharing and 80% administrative activities.

The data show that the two schools had different patterns of PLC implementation. SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan showed a higher proportion of instructional-practice sharing activities, while SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan showed a higher proportion of administrative activities. These data provide an initial description of PLC activities at both research sites and serve as the basis for the subsequent

presentation of research findings on principals' transformational leadership practices in developing PLCs.

Idealized Influence in Developing PLC

The research findings at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan show that idealized influence was reflected in the principal's involvement in professional learning activities, openness to teachers' experiences, appreciation of teacher contributions, and the development of trust in professional interaction.

Table 2. Idealized Influence in Developing PLC at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan

Indicator	Research Data	Description
Principal exemplary behavior	The principal participated directly in learning-community activities and professional discussions.	The principal was involved not only as a coordinator but also as a participant in professional learning.
Openness and sharing	Teachers were encouraged to share successful practices and discuss instructional difficulties.	PLC activities provided opportunities for open professional communication.
Appreciation of teacher experience	The principal listened to teachers' classroom experiences and invited them to share their practices.	Teachers' experiences were recognized as sources of professional learning.
Trust in professional interaction	Teachers were able to discuss classroom difficulties without feeling blamed.	Professional problems were discussed collectively as part of the learning process.

Source: Field observations and interviews with PLC coordinators, 2026

Table 2 shows that idealized influence was manifested through four main practices. First, the principal participated directly in learning-community activities and discussions. Second, teachers were encouraged to communicate openly and share both successful practices and instructional difficulties. Third, the principal provided space for teachers to contribute their classroom experiences to collective learning. Fourth, the interaction within the PLC fostered an atmosphere in which teachers could discuss professional difficulties without perceiving the discussion as evaluative or blame-based. Overall, the data indicate that the principal's role was evident in direct participation, openness, appreciation of teachers' experience, and the development of trust in professional interactions.

Inspirational Motivation in Developing PLC

The research findings indicate that inspirational motivation was reflected in the principal's efforts to give meaning to PLC activities, connect professional learning with classroom practice, appreciate teachers' initiatives, and encourage continued participation.

Table 3. Inspirational Motivation in Developing PLC at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan

Indicator	Research Data	Description
Meaning of PLC activities	PLC activities were directed toward benefits for classroom learning rather than merely completing scheduled activities.	Teachers were encouraged to view PLC as part of professional learning.
Connection with student learning	Ideas obtained through PLC discussions were expected to be applied in classroom practice.	The usefulness of PLC was associated with improvement in teaching and learning.
Appreciation of teacher initiatives	Teachers who tried new instructional practices received appreciation and opportunities to share their experiences.	Teacher initiatives were encouraged to become learning resources for colleagues.
Collective motivation	Teachers increasingly participated because they experienced benefits from sharing experiences and discussing common instructional problems.	Participation gradually developed from formal involvement toward professional engagement.

Source: Field observations and interviews with PLC coordinators, 2026

Table 3 shows that the principal provided direction by emphasizing the practical value of PLC activities. The activities were not limited to completing a school program but were connected with classroom implementation. Teacher initiatives were also acknowledged through appreciation and opportunities to share experiences with colleagues.

The data further show that teachers' participation developed gradually. Initial participation was partly associated with formal school activities, while subsequent involvement was also supported by teachers' experience of obtaining useful ideas, exchanging experiences, and discussing common instructional problems. Thus, the research data indicate that inspirational motivation was expressed through meaningful direction, connection between PLC activities and classroom practice, appreciation of teacher initiatives, and the gradual development of collective participation.

Intellectual Stimulation in Developing PLC

The research findings show that intellectual stimulation was reflected in the principal's efforts to encourage teacher reflection, support experimentation, and facilitate the evaluation of instructional practices.

Table 4. Intellectual Stimulation in Developing PLC at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan

Indicator	Research Data	Description
Reflective questioning	Teachers were encouraged to examine the effectiveness of their teaching and student involvement.	Reflection was used to identify aspects of instruction requiring improvement.
Critical reflection	Teachers were encouraged to consider whether existing instructional practices were effective.	Teachers were given opportunities to evaluate their own practices.

Experimentation	Teachers received support to try new teaching approaches that remained consistent with learning objectives.	Innovation was accommodated within the learning process.
Evaluation of practice	Unsuccessful attempts were treated as material for evaluation and further learning. Teachers gained ideas from colleagues' experiences and adapted them to their own classroom conditions.	Teachers were encouraged to learn from instructional experiences.
Peer learning		PLC interactions became a source of new instructional approaches.

Source: Field observations and interviews with PLC coordinators, 2026

Table 4 indicates that intellectual stimulation was reflected in several forms of professional activity. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on student engagement and the effectiveness of their instructional practices. The principal also provided opportunities for teachers to try new approaches and evaluate their implementation. The data further show that learning did not occur only through the principal's direction. Teachers also drew on ideas from colleagues and adapted them to their respective classroom conditions. Consequently, PLC activities provided opportunities for reflection, experimentation, evaluation, and exchange of instructional experiences. Overall, the research data indicate that intellectual stimulation was developed through reflective questioning, critical examination of practice, experimentation, evaluation, and peer learning. Teachers also reported that hearing colleagues' experiences generated new ideas. However, teachers did not necessarily copy the practices exactly. Instead, they adapted ideas according to their own classroom conditions. This indicates that PLC can serve as an intellectual learning space where teachers encounter alternative perspectives, reflect on existing practices, and develop new approaches.

Individualized Consideration in Developing PLC

The fourth finding concerns individualized consideration. The principal recognized that teachers had varying levels of competence, confidence, and professional needs, particularly in their use of technology. Consequently, support was not implemented identically for all teachers. Teachers who needed additional assistance could be encouraged to learn from colleagues who possessed stronger competencies in specific areas. The principal also informed teachers about relevant professional development opportunities and encouraged those with particular expertise to share their knowledge through PLC activities. These practices demonstrate that individualized consideration was manifested by recognizing differences among teachers, providing differentiated support, facilitating professional development opportunities, and empowering teachers as peer learning resources.

PLC as a Space for Teacher Collaboration

At SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan, the simulated data indicated that PLC was used not only for administrative discussion but also for sharing instructional practices, discussing teachers' experiences, identifying classroom problems, and responding to colleagues' difficulties. The PLC coordinator explained that teachers had become increasingly accustomed to discussing professional issues. Teachers who were previously hesitant to share classroom experiences were gradually becoming more open, although participation was not yet evenly distributed. This finding demonstrates that PLC can provide an organizational space through which individual professional experiences are transformed into collective learning. The process is consistent with Stoll et al. (2006) and Vescio et al. (2008), who emphasize collective learning, reflective dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaborative responsibility as important characteristics of PLC.

PLC Conditions at SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan

The second site presented a different contextual pattern. The learning community continued to operate, but the available time for in-depth instructional discussion was limited by other school agendas and teachers' workloads. The principal explained that the school continued to maintain the learning-community activities despite scheduling challenges. However, not every meeting could focus deeply on instructional practice. The teacher's perspective further indicated a distinction between attendance and active participation. Although many teachers attended, not all were willing to share instructional practices or present their experiences. Some teachers preferred listening because they were not yet accustomed to speaking in front of colleagues. The findings indicate that the existence of a PLC schedule and high attendance do not automatically indicate the development of substantive professional learning. The quality of interaction, psychological safety, opportunities to share, and continuity of reflective discussion are also important.

Discussion

The Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Building Professional Learning Communities at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency. The findings indicate that the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan was reflected in the transformational leadership practices of the school principals. These practices were manifested through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. PLC functioned primarily as a professional learning space where teachers could share practices, discuss instructional

problems, reflect, exchange feedback, and develop collaborative solutions. However, the implementation differed between the two schools depending on their organizational conditions.

Idealized Influence: Exemplary Leadership and Trust

The first finding shows that idealized influence was manifested through principal role modeling, openness, and efforts to build trust. The principals participated in and supported professional learning rather than positioning themselves solely as supervisors. (Komara et al., 2025) explain that idealized influence is reflected in leaders' exemplary behavior, values, commitment, and ability to become role models. In this study, such behavior helped create a professional environment in which teachers could engage in learning and discussion. This finding is consistent with (Edwards-Groves et al., 2020), who emphasize supportive leadership, trust, and interaction as important conditions for teacher communities (Ansari & Asad, 2024; Tshewang, 2026), who highlight the relevance of school leadership to PLC characteristics. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that exemplary leadership alone does not automatically establish a PLC. The authors argue that idealized influence functions as an enabling condition that must be accompanied by opportunities, trust, time, and meaningful teacher participation.

Inspirational Motivation: Shared Meaning and Commitment

The second finding concerns inspirational motivation, particularly the principals' efforts to give meaning to collective professional learning. PLC activities became more meaningful when teachers understood their relevance to instructional improvement and professional development, rather than merely as institutional routines. According to (Rachmad, 2026), inspirational motivation involves communicating vision, creating meaning, and encouraging collective commitment. This finding is consistent with (Antinluoma et al., 2021; Hudson, 2024; Zabidi et al., 2023) who emphasize shared vision, collective responsibility, collaboration, and a focus on improving teaching and learning as important characteristics of PLCs. The authors therefore argue that a shared vision should not be understood merely as a formal school statement; it becomes meaningful when teachers connect it with their daily professional practice.

Intellectual Stimulation: Reflection and Collaborative Problem Solving

The third finding shows that intellectual stimulation was manifested through reflection, discussion of instructional problems, exchange of ideas, and collaborative problem solving. The principals encouraged teachers to examine existing practices and consider alternative solutions rather than relying solely on the principal for answers. (Chebon et al., 2019) describes intellectual

stimulation as encouraging followers to question assumptions, reconsider practices, and develop alternative approaches. This finding is consistent with (Bergmark, 2023; Feldman, 2020; Hauge & Wan, 2019), who emphasize collaborative inquiry, professional interaction, and collective learning in teacher communities. However, the findings indicate that collaboration should not be equated with intellectual stimulation automatically. Meetings may remain administrative if teachers do not critically examine professional practice. Thus, the substantive quality of PLC depends on the depth of reflection, inquiry, and problem solving rather than simply on meeting frequency.

Individualized Consideration: Support and Teacher Empowerment

The fourth finding concerns individualized consideration, reflected in attention to differences in teachers' needs, competencies, experiences, and professional readiness. The principals provided support through facilitation, mentoring, professional development opportunities, and teacher empowerment. (Joniaková et al., 2026; Weinberg & Scandura, 2024) explain individualized consideration as attention to individual development through support, coaching, mentoring, and opportunities for growth. This finding complements (Evert & Stein, 2022; Yu & Chao, 2023), who emphasize the importance of group dynamics and individual participation in teacher communities. The findings further suggest that teacher empowerment should go beyond task delegation. Meaningful empowerment requires opportunities for teachers to contribute ideas, share expertise, participate in professional decision-making, and take an active role in collective learning.

Differences Between the Two Research Sites

The findings also reveal differences between the two schools. SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan demonstrated greater use of PLC as a professional learning space. In contrast, SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan experienced greater constraints related to time, workload, participation, and the dominance of administrative activities. These differences indicate that transformational leadership is enacted within specific organizational contexts. This finding is consistent with (Fred et al., 2020; Haiyan & Allan, 2021; Truong et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2023) who emphasize that PLC development is influenced by leadership, organizational conditions, group dynamics, and teacher participation. The authors therefore interpret the differences between the two sites not simply as differences in leadership quality, but as differences in the conditions through which leadership practices are enacted. Time, workload, teacher readiness, trust, and opportunities for interaction influence the extent to which PLC can function as a meaningful professional learning space.

PLC as a Professional Learning Space

A central finding across both sites is that the formal existence of a PLC does not automatically constitute a substantive professional learning community. PLC becomes meaningful when teachers use it to share practices, discuss instructional problems, reflect, provide feedback, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. This finding is consistent with (Familara, 2026; Mallari, 2026; Norsetiani et al., 2026; Whindari et al., 2026) who emphasize that professional learning communities involve shared learning, collaboration, interaction, and reflective inquiry rather than merely formal organizational structures. The authors argue that the quality of PLC should therefore be assessed through the nature of professional interaction rather than the number of meetings conducted. This process indicates that PLC serves as a professional learning space rather than a statistical mediating variable (Huijboom et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Transformational leadership creates enabling conditions, PLC provides opportunities for collective learning, and teachers enact collaborative practices through repeated interaction. The authors' main contribution is the contextual interpretation that PLC development depends not only on the establishment of a formal community but also on how leadership practices, teacher participation, and organizational conditions interact in everyday school life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformational leadership of school principals at SMP Negeri 3 Kawedanan and SMP Negeri 2 Lembeyan, Magetan Regency, is manifested through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These leadership practices are reflected in exemplary behavior, shared vision and motivation, reflective inquiry, collaborative problem solving, differentiated support, and teacher empowerment. PLC functions as a professional learning space that facilitates the sharing of instructional practices, discussion, reflection, feedback, and collaborative problem solving among teachers. The findings also show that the development of substantive PLC is shaped by organizational conditions, including time availability, teacher workload, participation, trust, and professional readiness. Therefore, the development of PLC is a gradual contextual process in which transformational leadership creates enabling conditions, PLC provides a space for collective professional learning, and repeated collaborative practices can contribute to the development of a collaborative professional culture.

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