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## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN SHAPING SCHOOL CULTURE AND IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of the principal's transformational leadership in shaping school culture and improving student achievement at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung. The study is grounded in the need to understand how school leadership can create a conducive learning environment and directly influence students' academic outcomes, particularly within the context of private primary schools, which remain relatively under-researched. Diverse human resources, unequal teacher capacity, and a school culture that is not yet fully adaptive to change often become obstacles in achieving optimal educational outcomes. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing interactively. The practices implemented by the principal successfully fostered a safe, welcoming, collaborative, and achievement-oriented school culture. This strong school culture directly contributed to increased learning motivation, discipline, and student participation in both academic and non-academic activities. The study concludes that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping a positive school culture and directly enhancing student achievement at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung. Within the dimension of intellectual stimulation, the implementation of Project-Based Learning, the use of learning corners, and opportunities for classroom experimentation demonstrate that innovation has become an integral part of the school culture. This support has improved instructional effectiveness and heightened student enthusiasm for academic activities. Meanwhile, the dimension of individualized consideration is reflected through mentoring, coaching, and clinical supervision provided by the principal to teachers. This personalized approach has increased teacher confidence, reduced emotional barriers in teaching, and strengthened interpersonal relationships within the school environment.

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### Keywords

Transformational Leadership, School Culture, Student Achievement.

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## INTRODUCTION

National education reports in recent years have shown that school culture has a significant influence on the quality of learning and academic achievement of elementary school students. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Kemendikbudristek, in (2023) revealed that more than 40% of primary education institutions still face issues such as discipline problems, low teacher collaboration, and a weak learning environment that supports student well-being. Various media publications also highlight the prevalence of bullying cases, classroom disorder, and a lack of innovative teaching practices, which ultimately affect students' academic performance. In addition, national assessment reports indicate a learning outcome gap between schools, primarily influenced by the quality of school culture and the leadership style of the school principal.

School leadership is a determining factor in the success of educational implementation. In the context of modern educational transformation, transformational leadership is viewed as the most relevant approach to driving change, improving the quality of instruction, and building a positive school culture. Within this reality, the concept of transformational leadership has become an ideal model for fostering a healthy and quality-oriented school culture (Komara et al., 2025). Principals who adopt this leadership style have been shown to act as catalysts in enhancing teacher motivation, improving instructional quality, and strengthening organizational culture and stability.

Theoretically, transformational leadership emphasizes a strong vision, inspirational motivation, role modeling, and encouragement of innovation that can mobilize teachers and students toward positive change. This model is believed to be effective in creating a conducive learning environment, fostering collaboration, and enhancing students' learning motivation. Furthermore, research by Al Faruq & Supriyanto (2020) asserts that transformational leadership not only improves teacher performance but also plays an important role in developing a school climate that is conducive, collaborative, and inclusive (Ponting, 2023). Also highlights that visionary and participatory leadership can activate all members of the school community, teachers, staff, parents, and the wider community to be actively involved in improving the overall quality of education.

However, challenges in the implementation of transformational leadership are still felt, especially at the elementary school level. The diverse human resource conditions, uneven teacher capacities, and a school culture that is not yet fully adaptive to change often serve as obstacles (Windasari et al., 2022). This phenomenon is reflected in the variation of student achievement,

inconsistencies in teacher collaboration, and the low prevalence of innovative teaching practices (Efendi et al., 2023). This condition indicates that the role of the principal as an agent of change is very necessary to ensure the development of a strong, productive school culture that is oriented towards improving student achievement.

The school principal plays a crucial role in shaping the school culture and guiding the quality of learning. Observations and interviews (2024) with the principal and teachers of SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung indicate that the school has established a positive academic culture. The “15-Minute Literacy” program runs every morning quite consistently and helps instill the habit of reading among students before learning. Additionally, a culture of academic discipline, such as punctuality and completing assignments, is reinforced through the supervision and exemplary behavior of the principal. All these habits reflect a developing learning culture driven by the principal's active leadership in motivating teachers. Furthermore, school documentation and interviews with the curriculum coordinator show that student achievements at SD Pelangi have also progressed. Report card grades in core subjects are generally in the good category, and some students stand out in literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to academic achievements, the school also won awards in the Mathematics, Indonesian Language, and Science Olympics at the city level. These accomplishments are seen as the result of a more focused learning environment and increasingly structured guidance for gifted students.

Transformational leadership of the school principal has been proven to play a crucial role in shaping a positive, collaborative, and achievement-oriented school culture, as the interview results indicate that the principal possesses a vision for change, encourages learning innovation, and provides individual motivation to teachers. However, its implementation has not been uniform across all classes, so further research is needed to examine how this transformational leadership influences the strengthening of academic culture and the improvement of student achievement at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung.

Although various studies have shown that transformational leadership positively impacts learning culture and educational quality, most studies still focus on secondary levels, such as junior high and senior high schools. Furthermore, most studies (Sasan et al., 2023) focus more on the influence of transformational leadership on teacher motivation, learning culture, and teaching performance, but few have directly linked the impact of principals' transformational leadership on student achievement. (Yakob et al., 2025) Emphasized the role of transformational leadership in

driving improvements in educational quality in general, but did not explicitly examine how changes in leadership style lead to improved student learning outcomes, the primary indicator of school success. This gap indicates that student outcomes remain underexplored in the literature. Meanwhile, (McNichols (2020) focused primarily on social and emotional learning and school community involvement in decision making. The leadership model used refers to Kouzes and Posner, with five leadership practices: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, dan Encourage the Heart. The results indicate that relationship-focused leadership reflection and transformation can enhance supportive school environments and academic success.

Another difference lies in the lack of research that places school culture as a connecting variable between transformational leadership and student achievement. School culture is the foundation for forming a learning climate, teacher behavior, and social interactions that indirectly shape student academic achievement (Lijun & Te, 2024). Research by Wilson Heenan et al. (2023) separates the discussion between leadership and school culture or between school culture and student achievement, so the synergistic relationship between the three has not been studied comprehensively. Further, Ermita's (2025) study found that transformational leadership significantly enhances teachers' motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and school performance, including aspects of leadership that are clear, collaborative, trusting of teachers, providing guidance, and effectively managing change. In contrast to the findings of Alzoraiki et al. (2024), transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on school culture, school culture has a positive effect on teacher performance, and school culture mediates the positive relationship between leadership and teaching performance.

Contextual studies in private elementary schools are still very limited. Most previous research has been conducted in public schools or schools with substantial resources, and therefore does not reflect how transformational leadership is applied in the context of private schools with different characteristics, challenges, and patterns of parental participation. This situation opens up new research opportunities to understand how transformational leadership can be effectively implemented to build a strong school culture and enhance student achievement in the context of private elementary schools. Based on these initial findings, the researcher is interested in conducting a study on the transformational leadership of the principal of SD Pelangi Bandar Lampung, as this leadership style is considered relevant for establishing a shared vision, increasing the motivation of

school members, and creating a productive learning culture that is ultimately expected to improve student achievement.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (*case study*) to understand in depth how the principal's transformational leadership shapes school culture and impacts student achievement at Pelangi Elementary School, Bandar Lampung. This research is based on the paradigm interpretivist constructivist, which views social reality as something constructed through the experiences and interpretations of research subjects (Peribadi, 2021). This paradigm aligns with the research objectives, which focus on teachers', principals', and school members' interpretations of transformational leadership and the formation of school culture, including how these dynamics contribute to student academic achievement.

This research was conducted at Pelangi Elementary School in Bandar Lampung, a private elementary school characterized by a dynamic school culture and a strong commitment to improving the quality of learning and student achievement. The principal who is the main focus of this research is Mrs. Siti Hanifah, who is known as a Principal leader with a transformational leadership style and plays an important role in developing school culture, teacher development, and improving student academic quality. Pelangi Elementary School was selected purposively, based on the consideration that this school is working to strengthen school culture and improve student achievement through various innovative programs, making it relevant as a case study location.

The data collection techniques in this study were conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out directly at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung on September 9–13, 2024, to observe the implementation of the school's academic culture, morning literacy practices, student discipline, classroom teaching methods, as well as the principal's leadership behavior in guiding teachers and students. Observations were conducted using a structured guide to ensure that the data obtained were accurate and relevant. In addition to observation, the researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with several informants. The principal was the main respondent to explain the leadership vision, academic policies, and strategies for improving student achievement. Interviews were also conducted with the vice principal in charge of curriculum, teachers from several grade levels, as well as some students, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning culture, school program implementation, and their

perceptions of the principal's leadership practices. The interview data were recorded in the form of transcripts for analysis.

Data collection was also strengthened through concrete school documentation, such as curriculum documents, morning literacy programs, supervisory notes from the principal, report cards, and summaries of student grades for the 2023/2024 academic year, student achievement data, attendance and discipline records, as well as photos of school activities. All of these documents were used to complement and validate the data from observations and interviews, resulting in an objective and comprehensive picture of the academic culture and principal leadership at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung.

All data collection techniques were validated through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The data analysis process followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of three main stages: (1) data reduction, involving selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation; (2) data display in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or thematic tables to facilitate meaning-making; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification conducted repeatedly to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings. This analytical approach ensures that the data obtained are accurate, credible, and capable of comprehensively representing the phenomenon of transformational leadership at SDI Pelangi.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The principal's transformational leadership has been shown to play a crucial role in shaping a positive, collaborative, and achievement-oriented school culture at Pelangi Elementary School in Bandar Lampung. Through exemplary behavior, strengthening the school's vision, providing emotional support, and encouraging innovation, the principal is able to build a conducive learning environment for both teachers and students. This strengthened school culture significantly impacts student achievement, both academically and non-academically. Research findings indicate that transformationally led changes in school culture not only improve the quality of teaching but also encourage student engagement, discipline, and motivation to learn, resulting in improved achievement year after year.

## Transformational Leadership Practices of School Principals

### Idealized Influence (Exemplary Behavior and Integrity)

Observations and interviews revealed that the principal is a central figure in building an ethical and professional work culture. He arrives earlier than the teachers, greets students every morning, and actively participates in character-building activities. Teachers stated that the principal's exemplary behavior increases motivation, discipline, and a sense of belonging to the school.

**Table 1.** Transformational Leadership Behavior (*Idealized Influence*)

Indicators	Field Findings	Impact on Teachers
<b>Exemplary behavior</b>	The principal is present 15–20 minutes before the bell rings, supervising the school environment.	Teachers show increased time discipline
<b>Consistency of values</b>	Resolving teacher conflicts impartially, based on data	Teachers feel appreciated and trust their leaders
<b>Integrity</b>	Transparency of activity funds, presented in routine meetings	Building a culture of openness and accountability

*Source: Results of Observations and Interviews at SDI Pelangi*

In the aspect of idealized influence, the principal provides a real example through Discipline, integrity, and a strong work ethic. This example sets the standard of behavior for teachers to follow and contributes to their increased discipline and professionalism. The principal's consistent behavior also builds trust and commitment within the school community.

### Inspirational Motivation (Shared Motivation and Vision)

The principal instills the vision of a "Friendly, High-Achieving, and Character-Building School" through a persuasive approach. Teachers mentioned that every meeting always begins with a strengthening of the vision and sharing of good practices. Children are also frequently given small tokens of appreciation through the reward corner (Palembangan & Sihotang, 2023). Through inspirational motivation, the principal effectively instilled the vision of "A Friendly, High-Achieving, and Character-Based School" throughout the school community. The vision was reinforced continuously through teacher meetings, morning talks, and a reward system that increases teacher and student motivation. This shared vision creates a unified direction in developing the quality of learning and school culture.

### Intellectual Stimulation (Learning Innovation)

The principal actively encourages teachers to try new methods, such as Project-Based Learning, STEAM, and the use of learning corners in each classroom. Observations show that some

teachers have implemented simple project-based learning. In the intellectual stimulation dimension, the principal encourages teachers to continue being creative and innovative in the learning process (Ambawani et al., 2024). The implementation of the Project-Based Learning method, the use of the learning corner, and providing experimental space in classroom activities demonstrate that innovation is part of the school culture. This support has an impact on increasing learning effectiveness and student enthusiasm for participating in academic activities.

### **Individualized Consideration (Assistance and Mentoring)**

A personal approach is a leadership strength. The principal provides biweekly individual mentoring sessions for teachers who need support in classroom management or competency improvement (Mudatsir, 2021). The individualized consideration dimension is evident through the principal's mentoring, coaching, and clinical supervision practices for teachers. This personal approach increases teacher confidence, reduces emotional barriers in the teaching process, and strengthens interpersonal relationships within the school environment. Teachers feel valued, listened to, and facilitated to develop according to their individual needs.

**Table 2.** Individual Teacher Mentoring Patterns

<b>Mentoring Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>Coaching teaches</b>	2x/month	Grade I–III teachers	Teachers are more confident and less use of methods talk
<b>Clinical supervision</b>	1x/month	All teachers	Improving the quality of lesson plans and formative assessments
<b>Consultation emotional emosional</b>	In accordance need	Teachers with high workloads	Increase teacher psychological well-being

*Source: Results of Observations and Interviews at SDI Pelangi*

### **School Culture Formation**

The development of school culture at Pelangi Elementary School in Bandar Lampung is one of the most visible impacts of the principal's transformational leadership. Based on observations, interviews, and document analysis, it appears that school culture is built through a structured, consistent process involving the entire school community. This culture encompasses aspects of a safe and child-friendly culture, a collaborative culture, and a culture of achievement, which then becomes a strong school identity. The principal shapes school culture through three main strategies: (a) a safe and child-friendly culture, (b) a collaborative culture, and (c) a culture of achievement.



### Safe and Child-Friendly Culture

A safe and child-friendly culture is evident in the clean, well-organized school environment, which is managed participatory by students and teachers (Restu Rahayu & Sofyan Iskandar, 2023). The principal consistently emphasizes the importance of an environment that supports character development and comfortable learning. Observations show a clean school environment, jointly managed by students and teachers through the "Pelangi Sehat" program. Teachers and students implement the 5S culture (Smile, Greet, Greet, Be Polite, and Courteous).

### Teacher Collaborative Culture

The principal fosters a teacher learning community (KBG) culture. Teachers gather every Friday to discuss teaching practices, classroom challenges, and share innovations. The focused discussions, the principal's involvement, and the humanistic approach to facilitating the meetings make teachers feel valued and motivated to improve their professionalism (Permatasari et al., 2023). This strong collaborative culture creates a mutually supportive work environment, minimizes internal conflict, and improves the quality of classroom learning.

### Culture of Achievement

School document data shows an increase in student achievement in academic and non-academic areas over the past two years.

**Table 3.** Summary of Student Achievements at Pelangi Elementary School, Bandar Lampung

Year	Academic	Non-Academic	Information
2023	2nd Place in Mathematics Olympiad	1st Place Dance Competition	Increased motivation
2024	1st Place in City Science	2nd Place FLS2N	Implementation of culture collaborative
2025	1st Place in Language Indonesia	1st Place Pencak Silat	Impact of strengthening school culture

*Source: Interview Results and Documentation at SDI Pelangi*

The principal actively recognizes high-achieving students through announcements during assembly, certificate presentations, and presentations of their work at designated events. Teachers are also encouraged to prepare students for city- and provincial-level competitions. This recognition is given not only to students who win, but also to those who demonstrate commitment and effort in specific activities. This fosters a culture of hard work, appreciation for the learning process, and intrinsic motivation for students to continue developing.

### **The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Student Achievement**

One of the most noticeable changes is the increase in student discipline and engagement in the learning process. Students have shown greater awareness of arriving on time, preparing their learning materials, and following classroom rules more consistently. When all components of the school culture, teachers, the learning process, and the student environment operate harmoniously, an improvement in student achievement becomes a logical consequence. This is reflected in the rise of Mid-Semester Assessment scores, the growth in student participation in school activities from 12 to 19 programs, and the consistent increase in both academic and non-academic achievements over the past three years.

Data triangulation results indicate that improved student achievement is closely linked to changes in school culture and transformational leadership. Key findings:

1. Student discipline increased from an average of 78% to 91%.
2. Student involvement in school activities increased from 12 activities to 19 activities in a year.
3. The results of the Mid-Semester Assessment (PTS) show an increase in the average scores of core subjects (Science, Mathematics, and Indonesian).
4. Teachers reported that students were more enthusiastic about participating in project-based learning.

Thus, the relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement is not merely correlational, but is evident through a sequential chain of impact: transformational leadership → strengthening of school culture → improvement in instructional quality → increased student engagement → enhanced student achievement.

### **Discussion**

The research findings on the role of transformational leadership of the principal at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung indicate that this leadership style plays a crucial role in building a healthy, collaborative, and achievement-oriented organizational culture. The principal can provide exemplary behavior, motivation, and a clear vision, encouraging both teachers and students to improve their performance. These findings align with the concept of transformational leadership proposed by Bass dan Avolio (1994), which suggests that leaders who demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration will foster positive changes within educational organizations. The principal's exemplary role in the context of SD Pelangi not only strengthens the integrity of teachers and students but also creates a

school climate that supports innovative learning, as also emphasized by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), stating that transformational leadership has a direct impact on the quality of learning.

The sensitivity of school principals to the social context and characteristics of private schools in urban areas shows that transformational leadership is not generic but must be adaptive to the conditions and culture of the school. Adaptation to limited infrastructure, parents' socio-economic backgrounds, and school community relationships demonstrates a principal's ability to implement contextual strategies. This aligns with the findings of Hallinger (2011) and Day et al. (2016), who emphasize that the effectiveness of educational leadership heavily depends on a leader's ability to understand the socio-cultural context. In the Indonesian context, research by Mulyasa (2022) and Zuhri (2025) also affirms that innovative leadership can optimize the support of school stakeholders even in situations of significant limitation.

The collaborative culture established through teacher learning communities (TLCs) has become a crucial factor in reinforcing the findings of this research. Teacher collaboration has been proven to promote the improvement of teaching quality as teachers share best practices, engage in reflection, and collectively resolve instructional issues. These results align with Kasmawati (2020), who emphasizes that teacher collaboration is a significant mediator between school leadership and the enhancement of teaching quality. Similar findings can also be seen in the studies by Stoll and Louis (2007), Hord (2009), and Vescio et al. (2008), which indicate that professional learning communities are capable of sustainably improving teacher performance.

In addition, individual development practices through coaching and clinical supervision contribute directly to enhancing the pedagogical skills of teachers at Pelangi Elementary School. The principal provides structured guidance and constructive feedback so that teachers are able to improve both lesson planning and classroom management. These findings are consistent with Soro et al. (2024), who assert that coaching by the principal has a significant impact on improving teacher professionalism. Research by Darling Hammond et al. (2017) and Knight (2012) also reinforces that ongoing coaching accelerates the development of teacher competence.

School culture has also been proven to serve as a mediating mechanism that connects transformational leadership with student achievement. A safe, collaborative, and achievement-oriented culture creates a psychological climate that supports students in learning optimally. This is consistent with the research of Hoy and Miskel (2005) as well as Cohen et al. (2009), which states that a positive school culture and climate enhance students' learning motivation and engagement.

When teachers work in an atmosphere of mutual trust and support, the quality of learning improves, impacting students' involvement in the learning process, as also stated by Freiberg (2005) and Bryk et al. (2010).

Another important aspect is the reward system implemented by the principal for both teachers and students. Such appreciation has been shown to foster intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and a healthy achievement culture. Teachers feel encouraged to innovate, while students exhibit improvement in performance and learning participation. These findings align with the educational motivation theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020), which states that positive reinforcement can enhance students' autonomous motivation. Wentzel (2015) and Tohidi and Jabbari (2012) also support that the appreciation of teachers and students plays a crucial role in creating a productive school climate.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that transformational leadership has a chain implication: building a collaborative culture → enhancing teacher capacity → strengthening learning practices → leading to improved student achievement. This sequence of findings aligns with the educational leadership model proposed by Robinson et al. (2008), which places teacher development and quality learning at the core of effective leadership.

This study confirms that the transformational leadership of the principal at SDI Pelangi Bandar Lampung not only plays a role in inspiring teachers and students but also in shaping a strong, collaborative, and achievement-oriented school culture. The principal is capable of adjusting leadership strategies to the actual conditions of the school, and it is this adaptation that makes transformational leadership effective. The school culture has been proven to be an important mediator between leadership and student achievement, while teachers' professional learning serves as the main pathway that enhances the quality of instruction. Thus, transformational leadership brings about systemic impacts that contribute significantly to the improvement of education quality in elementary schools.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the principal's transformational leadership plays a strategic and significant role in shaping school culture and improving student achievement at Pelangi Elementary School in Bandar Lampung. This is achieved through the application of four main dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation,

and individualized consideration. The principal can create a school environment that is conducive, collaborative, and oriented towards positive change. The findings also indicate that the development of a strong school culture serves as a crucial foundation linking transformational leadership to improved student achievement. This condition is directly reflected in the continuous increase in both academic and non-academic student outcomes from year to year. Thus, the objective of this study, to understand how transformational leadership contributes to the formation of school culture and the enhancement of student achievement, has been comprehensively fulfilled. The child-friendly and safe environment, collaborative culture, and achievement-oriented ethos fostered by the principal have had a direct impact on students' learning behavior, their engagement in school activities, and their academic and non-academic performance.

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