
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING THE INTERESTS AND TALENTS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategies, constraints, and challenges of transformational leadership exercised by the school principal in developing the interests and talents of students with special needs (ABK) at the Special Education School (SLB) Sri Soedewi Jambi amid limited facilities and infrastructure. This research is qualitative with a case study design. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the principal's leadership practices within the context of special education. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the principal as the key informant, as well as vice principals responsible for facilities and infrastructure, student affairs, and curriculum. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, matrix development, coding, theme construction, and alignment with relevant theories. The findings indicate that the principal implements transformational leadership through four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leadership strategies reflected in these dimensions include idealized influence demonstrated through consistency, commitment, and exemplary behavior in building trust among school members. Inspirational motivation is realized by fostering optimism and collective spirit despite the school's limited facilities following a fire incident. Intellectual stimulation is evident in the encouragement of teachers' creativity and innovation in utilizing available resources. Meanwhile, individualized consideration is reflected in mentoring practices tailored to students' abilities and interests. The study also reveals challenges such as limited facilities and infrastructure, budget constraints, and increasing demands on teachers' creativity. Nevertheless, the principal's transformational leadership has proven effective in sustaining programs for developing the interests and talents of students with special needs through adaptive strategies and the strengthening of shared motivation and commitment.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership, Development of Interests and Talents, Students with Special Needs, Special School.



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INTRODUCTION

The fulfillment of the basic rights of children with special needs (ABK), particularly the right to education, continues to face various challenges at multiple levels. Children with disabilities are less likely to receive proper education compared to other children and often experience limitations in educational services that match their needs (Aprilia et al., 2025). Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2023 revealed that out of approximately 1.6 million children with special needs in Indonesia, only 30% had access to formal education. This figure illustrates a substantial gap in fulfilling the educational rights of ABK (Putri et al., 2025).

Education serves as a bridge for individuals to develop their potential through learning, as mandated by Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution, which states: "Every citizen has the right to education" (Indonesia et al., 1945). It is clear that education is a right for every individual, including children with special needs. As human beings, children with special needs have the same rights as other children to obtain education, grow, and develop within their families, communities, and the nation (Qurrota et al., 2024).

This condition is evident from initial observations at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi, which functions as a special education institution accommodating ABK students with diverse characteristics. However, the school faces limitations in facilities, funding, and human resources, directly affecting efforts to develop students' interests and talents. There is a gap between the reality of fulfilling the educational rights of ABK students and the ideal vision of education. Although special needs students' education is designed to develop students' potential, in reality, it still faces limited access and facilities, resulting in less-than-optimal development of interests and talents. This gap shows that fulfilling the educational rights of ABK cannot rely solely on regulations but requires school leadership capable of translating policy into action.

Initial observations at the SLB revealed inadequate facilities for guiding ABK's interests and talents, especially after a fire in March 2023 destroyed much of the infrastructure. Only a few art-related tools remained to support talent development. Despite these limitations, the SLB is still expected to guide and nurture ABK's interests and talents. This situation presents a challenge for school leaders, who must continue to provide guidance despite limited resources. In such crises, leadership becomes a determining factor. Transformational leaders are expected to inspire enthusiasm among staff and students to remain productive and exceed expectations despite constraints.

Children with special needs require more intensive educational services (Fakhiratunnisa et al., 2022). These services are usually provided through special schools (SLB) or extraordinary education programs, designed to meet the unique needs of children with physical or developmental differences (Beno et al., 2022; Dacholfany et al., 2023). The presence of SLB reflects a commitment to providing adaptive education for students with specific conditions.

Learning for special needs students (ABK) is not only about theoretical knowledge, but also about skills (Munandar et al., 2024). Skill-based learning is typically aligned with students' interests and talents according to their abilities (Hakim & Iskandar, 2023). At Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi, skill development based on interests and talents is also practiced. In this context, the role of the principal is highly significant. The principal encourages student potential through well-planned programs, short, medium, and long-term, all outlined in the Operational Curriculum of the Education Unit (KOSP) (Ginanto et al., 2024; Rambe & Fadhli, 2024). Interests and talents can only grow if their needs are met, meaning that complete facilities are essential for students to fully develop their abilities. The principal is the backbone of school dynamics and the main pillar driving school life, with the school's existence and progress highly dependent on their leadership (Julaiha, 2019; Maris et al., 2017). Therefore, principals are required to be active, innovative, resilient, and visionary leaders.

Transformational leaders are charismatic figures with central and strategic roles in guiding organizations toward their goals (Sofiah Sinaga et al., 2021; Soim, 2024). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and mentoring subordinates to become proactive problem-solvers, develop leadership capacity, and align with institutional goals (Utami et al., 2024; Yakob & Sahudra, 2025; Yufita & Sihotang, 2020). This leadership style positively impacts individual commitment to the organization. It is increasingly recognized as effective in navigating organizational change (Azhari & Sutisna, 2016; Aziziyah, 2024).

Bass and Avolio explain that transformational leadership consists of several dimensions that enable leaders to motivate members to achieve shared goals and adapt to change (B. Bass & Avolio, 1994). These dimensions include: 1. Idealized Influence: leaders with strong self-confidence, clear vision, consistency, and the ability to convey important ideas, instill pride, and build trust (Mustofa et al., 2024); (2) Inspirational Motivation: leaders who act as coaches or mentors, paying attention to individual needs and growth, while confidently communicating their vision (Khan et al., 2022); (3) Intellectual Stimulation: leaders who encourage creativity and

innovation, pushing subordinates to find new approaches to old problems (Sukatin et al., 2023); (4) Individualized Consideration: leaders who listen attentively and respond to staff concerns, ideas, and aspirations (Indarti, 2017).

Strong leadership is especially needed in SLB settings, as these schools require leaders with vision and skills. SLBs in Jambi Province deserve serious attention, given the growing population of ABK. In the 2023–2024 academic year, Jambi had 890 special needs students (ABK) spread across several SLBs. With such numbers, school leadership is crucial to ensuring SLBs produce quality graduates.

Previous studies have widely discussed transformational leadership in general school contexts (Khasanah, 2019; Nazilatul et al., 2024; Sulistyowati et al., 2026). Most focused on general learning strategies for ABK students or other needs. This study, however, focuses specifically on principals' strategies in managing limitations within SLBs. The aim is to explore transformational leadership strategies principals use to foster ABK students' interests and talents, and to identify challenges and obstacles faced amid limited facilities.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the transformational leadership of the principal and the strategies implemented in fostering the interests and talents of children with special needs at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on analyzing the strategies, challenges, and obstacles faced by the principal's transformational leadership in developing the interests and talents of students with special needs (ABK) at Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi amid limitations in facilities and infrastructure.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of participants based on their relevance to the research objectives. The principal of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi served as the key informant, while the vice principals for facilities and infrastructure, student affairs, curriculum, and other teaching staff were chosen as supporting informants due to their direct involvement in developing ABK students' interests and talents. Subject selection was conducted gradually based on recommendations from the key informant, and data collection continued until saturation was reached.

The sources of data consisted of primary data in the form of interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted by the researcher at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi. Direct observation was carried out at the school from June 15, 2025, to November 29, 2025. During this period, the researcher engaged in school activities to observe firsthand the conditions of interest and talent development among ABK students and the practice of transformational leadership by the principal. These observations provided a comprehensive picture of the strategies, challenges, and leadership practices applied in fostering ABK students' interests and talents amid limitations in facilities, funding, and human resources. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding transformational leadership strategies, forms of student development, and the challenges and obstacles encountered. The interviews involved the principal, vice principal for facilities and infrastructure, vice principal for curriculum, and vice principal for student affairs. In addition, documentation techniques were used to strengthen the data.

Data analysis was carried out by systematically organizing information from field notes, interviews, and documentation. The process included data reduction, matrix development, coding, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, ensuring that the findings were structured and aligned with the objectives of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Transformational Leadership Strategies of the Principal in Fostering Students' Interests and Talents

The results of this study show that the principal of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi has been fairly effective in implementing transformational leadership strategies in fostering the interests and talents of children with special needs (ABK). This includes efforts to overcome existing limitations and manage the school effectively. The main strategy applied is the implementation of weekly interest and talent development programs every Friday, conducted routinely, along with extracurricular activities outside regular class hours. These programs serve as a platform for developing the non-academic potential of ABK students at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi. The principal ensures that these activities continue by involving teachers and educators according to their respective areas of expertise. In addition, the principal entrusts teachers with the freedom to innovate in designing and implementing interest and talent activities

tailored to the needs and characteristics of students. An assessment-based and mentoring approach is also applied, aligning activities with students' interests and potential. This strategy reflects the essence of transformational leadership, embodied in its four dimensions.

Based on interview data, the researcher found that the principal of Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi has implemented the four dimensions of transformational leadership: (1) Idealized Influence: demonstrating confidence, vision, and consistency that inspire trust and pride; (2) Inspirational Motivation: encouraging staff and students with enthusiasm and clear communication of vision; (3) Intellectual Stimulation: fostering creativity and innovation among teachers to find new approaches to challenges; (4) Individualized Consideration: showing attentiveness to staff and students by listening to concerns, ideas, and aspirations. These dimensions are evident in the principal's leadership behavior and interactions with staff and the wider school community, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

No	Dimensions of Leadership	Principal's Strategies	Overall Findings
1.	Idealized Influence	Role Model and Trust	The principal demonstrates exemplary leadership through discipline, responsibility, and consistency in leading, while also fostering trust and enthusiasm among the school community in carrying out programs for developing the interests and talents of students with special needs (ABK), despite the limitations faced after the fire.
2.	Inspirational Motivation	Motivation, shared vision, and optimism	The principal instills a vision of the importance of developing students' interests and talents, while also building the enthusiasm of teachers and students to carry out talent development programs despite the limitations of available facilities.
3.	Intellectual Stimulation	Creativity and Innovation	The principal encourages teachers to think creatively and innovatively in utilizing alternative media. Teachers are also given the freedom to develop methods for fostering students' interests and talents in accordance with the school's conditions and the needs of the students.
4.	Individualized Consideration	Assessment and Mentoring	The school conducts assessments to identify the potential of students with special needs (ABK). These students are then directed toward fields that match their interests and abilities, and are provided with continuous guidance according to their needs.

(Bass & Avolio, 1994., *Dimensi Kepemimpinan Transformasional*)

Idealized Influence

Based on documents, interviews, and observations conducted, the researcher found that the principal of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi has demonstrated idealized influence, as presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the principal exhibits idealized influence through disciplined and responsible behavior, as well as a strong commitment to school development. The principal embodies this dimension through exemplary conduct, consistency, and the ability to foster trust and loyalty among the entire school community. From the observations, the principal was actively present in student interest and talent development activities, providing direct guidance and showing optimism despite the school's limited facilities following the fire. School documentation also highlights the principal's involvement in various competitions at provincial, national, and even international levels, as a form of concrete support for the development of ABK students' potential.

This finding is reinforced by interview data with the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, who stated: "Kepala sekolah memberikan motivasi dan semangat-semangat bagi kami para bawahannya. Memberi semangat serta menasihati ketika ada kesalahan ataupun yang kurang berkenan. Beliau mendorong mengedepankan dan memajukan sekolah agar dikenal baik dimasyarakat, baik nasional maupun Internasional" (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, interview, 2025).

This statement reflects the principal's exemplary character and charisma, which build confidence in carrying out ABK students' talent development programs. The principal provides motivation, advice, and moral support to the entire team, ensuring that the school's progress remains a priority and that limitations in facilities do not hinder its advancement.

The leadership of the principal at Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi has successfully fostered collective spirit and confidence among the student affairs team, enabling the school to gain recognition not only nationally but also internationally. According to the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, the principal's attitude has strengthened teachers' trust and enthusiasm in implementing talent development programs. This demonstrates that the strategies applied by the principal of Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi within this dimension highlight charisma and exemplary leadership, serving as the foundation for building collective commitment in fostering the interests and talents of ABK.

Inspirational Motivation

The research findings reveal that the principal of Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi provides

inspirational motivation to subordinates, encouraging them to remain enthusiastic in fostering students' interests and talents despite limited facilities, as presented in Table 1. The study shows that the dimension of inspirational motivation is reflected in the principal's ability to build a shared vision and instill perseverance among teachers and ABK students.

Based on observations, the principal routinely delivers motivational messages to teachers and students on various occasions, both during official school activities and in informal daily interactions. Documentation also indicates the existence of regular talent development programs, such as weekly Friday activities and extracurricular programs outside class hours. These programs continue to run even though facilities are not fully available, demonstrating the principal's consistency in sustaining student development.

The principal emphasized during interviews: "Latihan tetap kita kerjakan walaupun dengan alat seadanya. Dari kejadian kebakaran kemarin tentu tidak membuat kita rasa pesimis, kita tetap yakin bisa membimbing mereka walaupun dengan kondisi seadanya dengan tegar untuk mengembangkan minat bakat ABK" (Principal, interview, 2025).

This statement reflects the belief that ABK students can still grow and achieve when guided with determination and optimism, as limited facilities are not an obstacle to success. Furthermore, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs stated: "Ekstrakurikuler minat bakat anak tetap dilaksanakan, kami tetap mendorong siswa agar mengikuti kegiatan-kegiatan tersebut sesuai minat bakat anak, karena di sini tidak hanya belajar akademik, 80% itu adalah keterampilan" (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, interview, 2025).

The principal's strategy within this dimension is to build a shared vision of the importance of developing the interests and talents of students with special needs, while instilling the conviction that every student has potential that can be nurtured through cooperation, perseverance, and resilience. This demonstrates that the principal's inspirational motivation is a crucial factor in sustaining the continuity of talent development programs for ABK.

Intellectual Stimulation

Based on documentation, interviews, and observations, the researcher found that the principal of Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi also demonstrates the dimension of intellectual stimulation by encouraging the school community to continue developing creativity and innovation in both learning activities and extracurricular programs for ABK students, as presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the principal fosters creativity and innovation in talent development by providing

space for critical thinking and granting freedom of initiative to the school community. Intellectual stimulation is applied by motivating teachers and staff to think creatively and innovatively in overcoming existing limitations.

From observations and documentation, the school was given the freedom to explore alternative learning media and methods of talent development suited to the conditions and abilities of ABK students. Innovation was evident in the use of alternative activities to address facility constraints, such as reusing available media, recycling painting tools, and adapting training methods when primary facilities were unavailable. Documentation also recorded facility needs and reports of usage. This finding is reinforced by an interview with the Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, who stated: “Media yang masih bisa digunakan tetap kami manfaatkan, termasuk mendaur ulang alat dan bahan yang ada” (Vice Principal for Facilities, interview, 2025).

The statement shows that the school encourages the facilities team to be creative in maximizing remaining resources, such as reprocessing paint or reusing items still suitable from the school’s storage, while also documenting needs for future budget planning. According to the Vice Principal, the trust given by the principal motivates teachers to be more creative in implementing talent development programs. This demonstrates that the strategy applied by the principal of Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi within the dimension of intellectual stimulation is the ability to provide trust and space for critical and creative thinking among the entire team in seeking solutions to existing limitations.

Individualized Consideration

The research findings also show that the principal applies individualized consideration by paying attention to the personal needs of both teachers and students. Table 1 illustrates that this dimension is reflected in the principal’s concern for the needs and potential of each teacher and ABK students. Based on observations, the school conducts initial assessments of students’ abilities and potential upon entry, which then serve as the basis for placing students in interest and talent development activities. Guidance is provided gradually and continuously by supervising teachers. School program documentation demonstrates continuity between assessment results, Friday talent development activities, and subsequent extracurricular programs.

In interviews, the principal stated: “Melalui asesmen awal, kami mengetahui kemampuan anak dan menentukan potensi yang bisa dikembangkan” (Principal, interview, 2025). This was

reinforced by the Vice Principal for Curriculum, who explained: “Jika ada anak ABK tersebut tidak cocok di satu bidang, maka diarahkan ke bidang lain sesuai dengan minatnya” (Vice Principal for Curriculum, interview, 2025).

These statements clearly show that the principal of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi entrusts educators to carry out development programs according to their competencies, while accompanying ABK students from the initial stages of training through to participation in competitions. Teachers are not only guided but also encouraged to learn alongside students if they lack certain skills. According to the Vice Principal for Curriculum, the principal emphasizes the importance of a personal and collaborative approach so that each ABK student can grow according to their individual potential and needs.

Thus, the strategy applied by the principal of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi within this dimension of individualized consideration is to provide personal support, trust, and flexibility to subordinates such as teachers, while tailoring student development to the characteristics and individual needs of ABK students.

Challenges and Obstacles in Fostering the Interests and Talents of Children with Special Needs at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi

The research found that there are challenges and obstacles faced by Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi in fostering the interests and talents of students with special needs. These challenges arise from various aspects, including facilities and infrastructure, budget constraints, and human resources, particularly the demand for teachers’ creativity in their work. Such limitations require the school to manage and adjust accordingly. The findings regarding challenges and obstacles in fostering the interests and talents of ABK students at Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Challenges and Obstacles

No	Challenges	Theme	General Findings
1.	Limitations of Facilities and Infrastructure	Facility damage in the aftermath of the fire	The school faces limitations in facilities supporting the development of students’ talents and interests due to damage caused by the fire, particularly to development equipment.
2.	Budget Constraints	Limited Fund Allocation	Budget constraints have required funds to be allocated to various other priority needs, so the development of students’ talents and interests has not yet been fully realized.
3.	Human Resources	Demands for Teacher Creativity	Teachers are required to possess creativity and skills in guiding students with special needs,

even though the available facilities do not fully support them.

Adapted from (Suhendri, 2020)

As presented in Table 2, one of the challenges faced is the limitation of facilities for talent development, which were damaged after the fire. The Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure explained that to this day, some facilities have not yet been replaced, particularly musical instruments. He stated, “Tantangannya bagaimana kita bisa mengembalikan atau mencari dana-dana untuk mengembalikan alat-alat musik yang hangus terbakar, karena sampai sekarang belum terealisasi.” (Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, interview, 2025).

In addition to limited facilities, another obstacle encountered at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi is the school’s budget constraints. Funds sourced from the School Operational Assistance (BOS) must be allocated to various school needs; not only for talent and interest development, but also for curriculum, student affairs, facilities and infrastructure, and dormitory operations. The Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure further emphasized that these limitations require the school to collectively establish a scale of priorities.

Beyond physical and structural barriers, another challenge lies in sustaining teacher and student motivation under conditions of limitation. Teachers are required to remain creative and active in guiding students with special needs, even though facilities do not fully support them. This situation demands strong role modeling and support from the principal of SLB to ensure teachers and staff do not lose enthusiasm in carrying out their responsibilities. As the Vice Principal for Curriculum stressed, SLB teachers are indeed required to have a higher level of creativity compared to those in general schools. He stated, “Kalau guru SLB tidak aktif dan kreatif, maka anak-anak akan lebih pasif lagi. Jadi guru SLB itu tidak hanya mengajar, tapi mereka juga harus punya keterampilan lain dan mau belajar bersama siswa.” (Vice Principal for Curriculum, interview, 2025).

From the various challenges and obstacles faced by SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi, the findings of this study show that the principal has been able to respond to these conditions by applying a transformational leadership approach. The principal encourages all members of the school community to remain optimistic, creative, and committed to nurturing the talents and interests of students with special needs.

Discussion

Transformational Leadership Strategies of the Principal at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi

Based on the research findings, the concept of transformational leadership as presented by (Aminah et al., 2025) shows that the principal's leadership is a strategic factor determining the quality of education in a school. Principals are required to exercise leadership that is not merely administrative but also transformative. This aligns with the perspective of (Bass & Avolio, 1994), who emphasize four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions enable leaders to motivate organizational members to achieve shared goals and adapt to change.

This is consistent with the findings of Rahmawati et al. (2024), who define transformational leadership as a process that raises subordinates' awareness and enhances moral motivation. The context of SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi illustrates a similar reality, where the principal functions not only as an administrative manager but also as a mobilizer of the entire school community to remain committed to talent development despite limitations. This resonates with (Qoribah et al., n.d.), who highlight the role of principals in achieving educational quality through transformative approaches.

The dimension of idealized influence is evident in the principal's role modeling, consistency, and commitment to sustaining the vision of talent development. (R. A. Mustofa et al., 2024) affirm that transformational leaders instill shared values and beliefs through integrity, encouraging followers to work beyond personal interests. (Yakob & Sahudra, 2025) also demonstrate that principals' transformational leadership influences teacher performance and school quality. At SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi, this influence is crucial given the complexity of student needs, requiring adaptive, empathetic, and visionary leadership. Idealized influence not only enhances performance but also sustains stability and commitment in the aftermath of the fire. Thus, transformational leadership at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi serves as the foundation for maintaining the continuity of talent development programs for students with special needs.

The principal's strategies under the dimension of inspirational motivation align with (Bass et al., 1993) and (Khasanah, 2019), who stress the importance of inspirational motivation in driving individuals toward shared goals. Findings show that the principal fosters optimism and confidence that facility limitations are not barriers to talent development. As noted by the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, the principal not only provides direction but also builds positive

expectations and resilience across the school community. This is consistent with Andriadi and (Andriadi & Sulistiyo, 2024), who found that transformational leadership positively impacts teacher motivation and student achievement.

Transformational leadership strategies are also manifested through intellectual stimulation. The principal encourages teachers and staff to think creatively and innovatively in overcoming facility limitations. This finding aligns with (Sukatin et al., 2023), who emphasize the role of intellectual stimulation in enhancing organizational innovation. However, (Rahmawati et al., 2024) argue that innovation is more effective when supported by formal training and sustainable policies. In contrast, innovation at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi largely stems from internal initiatives rather than external support. Teachers are given space to utilize available media, recycle learning tools, and adapt training methods to existing conditions.

Meanwhile, the dimension of individualized consideration is reflected in the principal's attention to the abilities and potential of students with special needs through initial assessments and continuous mentoring. This approach directs students toward talent areas suited to their characteristics. (Indarti, 2017) highlights individualized attention as key to developing student potential, particularly in special schools. In this study, individualized consideration extends not only to students but also to teachers, who are entrusted with autonomy and confidence in designing development strategies.

Thus, the transformational leadership strategies of the principal at Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi demonstrate integration between the theories of (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass et al., 1993) and contemporary research findings (Aminah et al., 2025; Andriadi & Sulistiyo, 2024; Indarti, 2017; Khasanah, 2019; A. Mustofa et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2024; Sukatin et al., 2023; Yakob & Sahudra, 2025). This leadership serves as the foundation for sustaining talent development programs for students with special needs amid limitations in facilities, funding, and human resources.

In the current educational landscape, teachers are increasingly required to be proficient in providing strategies for talent development. The uniqueness of leadership strategies at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi lies in the principal's integrity, transformational values, and adaptive approach to challenges. This indicates that students' talents can be maximized according to their individual capacities. Special needs students present unique challenges for teachers in recognizing and nurturing their talents. As (Asdar, 2024) notes, these challenges stem from both physical and non-

physical limitations. This is reflected in the present study, where teachers, through the principal's transformational leadership, are given space, trust, and support to explore flexible strategies for talent development.

Challenges and Obstacles of the Principal in Developing the Talents and Interests of Special Needs Students at a Special Education School

This study reveals that the limitations of facilities and infrastructure after the fire became the main challenge in fostering the talents and interests of ABK students. According to statements from the principal and vice principals, this condition initially affected the availability of media and spaces for talent development. However, the principal emphasized that such limitations should not halt the process of student potential development, but rather be addressed through adaptive strategies.

Furthermore, findings at Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi show that the limitations of facilities after the fire did not completely stop talent development programs for ABK, but instead encouraged the school to adapt strategies more flexibly. Innovation emerged from the crisis, as teachers were given the freedom to develop alternative methods and media, such as reusing learning materials and utilizing tools that remained functional. This demonstrates that the dimension of intellectual stimulation is contextual and rooted in organizational resilience. These findings align with (Sukatin et al., 2023), who emphasize the role of intellectual stimulation in enhancing educational innovation, and (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999), who highlight that transformational leadership creates organizational conditions that support student engagement despite limitations. However, this differs from (Dacholfany et al., 2023), who argue that facility limitations are the primary challenge in special education.

Unlike those findings, research at Sri Soedewi SLB Jambi shows that limitations did not entirely halt programs but instead encouraged the school to adapt talent development strategies more flexibly, with innovation growing out of crisis situations. According to the vice principal for facilities and infrastructure, teachers were given freedom to develop alternative methods and media tailored to ABK students' conditions, such as reusing learning materials and repurposing usable tools. This illustrates that intellectual stimulation at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi is contextual and based on organizational resilience.

The dimension of individualized consideration is reflected in the principal's attention to the personal needs of teachers and students. This approach allows teachers to provide more

personalized guidance oriented toward individual needs. These findings support (Indarti, 2017) and (Khan et al., 2022), who emphasize that individualized attention in transformational leadership contributes to motivation and personal development. In the context of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi, individualized consideration ensures that each ABK receives guidance aligned with their characteristics and potential, as highlighted by the vice principal for curriculum. This shows a higher intensity compared to general schools, which are primarily oriented toward academic achievement.

Beyond facility limitations, another obstacle identified through interviews is the school's budget constraints in sustaining talent development programs. This condition aligns with Pratama et al. (2020), who note that budget limitations weaken program quality. It also resonates with (Nguni et al., 2006), who found that transformational leadership enhances teacher satisfaction and commitment, and (Philip, 2010), who emphasizes the role of transformational leadership in driving educational change. However, this study shows that transformational leadership can sustain programs through collective strategies and commitment, with leadership serving as a moral and motivational driver to overcome limitations.

Thus, the uniqueness of leadership strategies at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi lies in the ability to transform situations despite structural obstacles. The principal has been able to maintain the continuity and quality of talent development programs for ABK students through transformational leadership. These challenges did not directly weaken program implementation but instead reinforced the importance of transformational leadership in sustaining and improving educational services for special needs students (ABK). As (J, 2018) asserts that transformational leadership is oriented toward enhancing collective morality and motivation, which in the context of Sri Soedewi Special School (SLB) Jambi becomes the key to successfully addressing structural challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the principal's transformational leadership plays a strategic role in ensuring the sustainability of talent and interest development programs for students with special needs (ABK) at SLB Sri Soedewi Jambi, through the application of transformational leadership characteristics, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The strategies are realized in the form of

routine talent development programs, teacher empowerment according to competencies, provision of space for innovation despite facility limitations, and the implementation of assessments and mentoring tailored to the potential and needs of ABK students.

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of transformational leadership in the context of special education schools, particularly in SLB that face challenges and obstacles in developing the talents and interests of special needs students. These challenges include limited facilities after the fire, budget constraints, and demands for teacher creativity. The study also demonstrates that talent and interest development for ABK can remain effective when supported by leadership that is visionary, adaptive, and oriented toward individual potential. Therefore, transformational leadership should be considered one of the main approaches in managing special schools to enhance the quality of educational services and the sustainable development of students' potential.

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