



# Implementation of transformational leadership and organizational culture in improving the quality of education in public elementary schools in Walantaka District, Serang City

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research is motivated by the importance of improving the quality of basic education through effective leadership of school principals and a conducive organizational culture. Public Elementary Schools in Walantaka District, Serang City, face challenges in improving the quality of learning, necessitating the implementation of transformational leadership integrated with a positive organizational culture. This study aims to describe and analyze the implementation of transformational leadership and organizational culture to improve the quality of education, particularly by strengthening teacher professionalism, learning innovation, and active student involvement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observations involving 75 purposively selected participants. Data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Findings** – The results reveal five main themes: visionary and exemplary leadership, motivational and innovative teaching, individualized professional support, collaborative organizational culture, and positive impact on student engagement. Transformational leadership—through a clear vision, inspirational motivation, individualized attention, and learning innovation—drives significant improvements in teaching quality.

**Research limitations** – This study is limited to theoretical literature analysis and does not involve primary empirical data collection; therefore, causal relationships among variables cannot be statistically verified, and the findings have not been tested on a specific population sample.

**Implications** – A collaborative, disciplined, and professional organizational culture strengthens its impact, resulting in continuous improvement in education quality. The implementation of transformational leadership, supported by a positive organizational culture, contributes significantly to improving the quality of education at State Elementary Schools in the Walantaka District, Serang City.

**Originality** – A unique contextual finding is the role of the local gotong royong (collective cooperation) cultural value as an organic amplifier of leadership effects.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Organizational Culture, Quality of Education

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## INTRODUCTION

The quality of education at the elementary school level is the foundation of sustainable human resource development, as well as an indicator of the success of education management at the local level. In Walantaka District, Serang City, State Elementary Schools such as SDN Walantaka 1, SDN Walantaka 2, SDN Pabuaran, and SDN Kepuren 1 face challenges in improving the quality of learning, especially in terms of students' academic competence, character, and social skills. The phenomenon observed shows that even though curriculum and facilities are available, the quality of school management and the effectiveness of school principals' leadership are determining factors for the achievement of quality education (Besse, 2026; Hidayat et al., 2025). This is in line with the findings of Nugroho and Santoso (2025), which stated that in several State Elementary Schools in other regions, school principals who are active as agents of change have succeeded in encouraging teacher motivation and student involvement, resulting in significant academic achievement gains.

Transformational leadership is considered effective in this context because it is able to inspire and motivate teachers and school staff to exceed set standards. Dimensions such as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation have been proven to encourage teachers to innovate in learning strategies, increase student involvement, and develop problem-based pedagogical practices (Widijastuti, 2026; Lestari et al., 2025). A similar phenomenon was also found by Fikri (2025), who showed that elementary schools with transformational principals experienced increased teacher creativity, student participation, and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process compared to schools with traditional leadership styles. Hallinger (2003) further affirms that these leadership dimensions are most directly associated with changes in classroom instructional practices across diverse school contexts.

In addition to leadership, school organizational culture plays an important role as a reinforcement of education quality. A strong culture, in the form of values, norms, and collaborative practices that are applied consistently, supports teacher professionalism, active student engagement, and quality of learning (Idialita et al., 2024; Mahmudah et al., 2025). Previous research confirms that the combination of transformational leadership and organizational culture plays a synergistic role in improving student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of school management (Ahmad Saepi et al., 2024; Putra & Fadhilah, 2025). Robinson et al. (2008) further demonstrated that different types of leadership have differential impacts on student outcomes, with transformational approaches yielding the strongest indirect effects through teacher professional culture. This phenomenon emphasizes that a strategy aligning leadership and school culture is the key in efforts to improve education quality, and therefore this study focuses on analyzing the implementation of both in State Elementary Schools in Walantaka District.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that is able to inspire, motivate, and encourage positive change in the school environment, so that teachers and staff are empowered to exceed standard expectations. At Walantaka District State Elementary School, Serang City, the implementation of transformational leadership is an important strategy to improve education quality. Principals who lead by example (Idealized Influence) are able to foster discipline, integrity, and professional commitment of teachers, while creating a work climate that supports collaboration and innovation.

Other dimensions of transformational leadership, such as Inspirational Motivation, encourage teachers to clearly understand the school's vision and mission, so that they are motivated to develop innovative learning methods that suit students' needs. Intellectual

Stimulation enhances teachers' ability to design and implement project- and problem-based learning, which not only enhances teacher creativity but also students' active involvement in the learning process. Meanwhile, Individualized Consideration ensures attention to teachers' individual needs and their professional development, so that job satisfaction increases and the quality of teaching can be maintained consistently. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) demonstrated that these dimensions collectively produce significant effects on school-wide instructional practices and organizational conditions.

The implementation of transformational leadership in SD Negeri Walantaka District has been proven to increase teacher involvement in academic decision-making, intrinsic motivation, and learning effectiveness (Widijastuti, 2026; Ahmad Saepi et al., 2024). This inspiring leadership of the principal, when supported by a collaborative and professional organizational culture, creates a synergy that strengthens the quality of education in a sustainable manner. Thus, the implementation of transformational leadership is one of the main keys in the strategy to improve the quality of learning and student learning outcomes in the region's elementary schools.

### **School Organizational Culture**

School organizational culture is a collection of values, norms, and practices that shape character, collaboration, and professionalism in the school environment (Mahmudah et al., 2025; Mutsaqofah & Yohamintin, 2025). At Walantaka District State Elementary School, Serang City, a strong school culture creates an important foundation for improving education quality. A well-established culture encourages teachers to work together effectively, share experiences, and support each other in the learning process, thereby creating a conducive and productive learning environment.

In addition to collaboration, organizational culture also encourages innovation in teaching, active student engagement, and the creation of a positive work climate. Teachers are motivated to develop creative learning strategies, students become more active in learning activities, and all school residents feel encouraged to contribute to educational goals. Thus, school culture not only shapes individual behavior, but also strengthens the quality of school management as a whole, which has a direct impact on education quality at SD Negeri Walantaka District.

Furthermore, school culture plays the role of mediator that strengthens the effect of the transformational leadership of school principals on education quality (Hayati et al., 2026; Mastura et al., 2025). The integration of organizational culture into leadership practices ensures that the school's vision, values, and goals can be internalized by all school residents, thereby encouraging teacher professionalism and the achievement of optimal learning outcomes. Sun and Leithwood (2012) similarly found that school culture partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement. Therefore, strengthening school culture is an important strategy in line with the implementation of transformational leadership in efforts to improve education quality at State Elementary Schools in Walantaka District, Serang City.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach to understand the implementation of transformational leadership and organizational culture in State Elementary Schools in Walantaka District, Serang City. Three data collection instruments were used: (1) a semi-structured interview guide comprising 15 open-ended questions covering principals' leadership practices, teachers' perceptions of school culture, and the quality of teaching and learning; (2) a document analysis checklist examining school program plans, annual evaluation reports, vision-mission statements,

and teacher supervision records; and (3) a structured observation sheet recording school activities, teacher coordination meetings, and classroom interaction dynamics.

The research participants consisted of 75 individuals purposively selected from four schools—SDN Walantaka 1, SDN Walantaka 2, SDN Pabuaran, and SDN Kepuren 1—comprising school principals ( $n = 4$ ), senior teachers with more than five years of service ( $n = 28$ ), junior teachers ( $n = 33$ ), and administrative staff ( $n = 10$ ). Purposive sampling criteria included: (a) a minimum of two years of active service at the respective school; (b) direct involvement in leadership activities, teaching, or school administration; and (c) willingness to participate and consent to audio recording. Interviews were conducted individually in a semi-structured format, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing with data through repeated reading and note-taking on interview transcripts and field notes; (2) generating initial codes from participants' statements related to leadership practices, cultural values, and teaching quality; (3) searching for themes by clustering related codes into broader patterns; (4) reviewing themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and coverage; (5) defining and naming themes to capture their essential character; and (6) producing the final report with representative quotations. To enhance trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by cross-verifying interview findings with document analysis results and observational field notes. Thick description and member checking with selected participants were also employed to strengthen credibility and confirmability of the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Transformational Leadership

The thematic analysis yielded five main themes reflecting the implementation of transformational leadership and organizational culture in State Elementary Schools in Walantaka District (see Table 1). These themes were generated through systematic coding of interview transcripts, triangulated with document and observation data.

**Table 1.** Summary of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Code Examples from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code Examples
1. Visionary and Exemplary Leadership	Role modeling, integrity, and discipline	"The principal arrives first," "sets an example of diligence and commitment."
2. Motivational and Innovative Teaching	Encouragement of pedagogical innovation	"encouraged to try new methods," "supported in developing project-based learning."
3. Individualized Professional Support	Personal attention to teacher needs	"Principal listens to my challenges," "feels personally valued as a professional."
4. Collaborative Organizational Culture	Peer collaboration and experience sharing	"Share lesson plans and teaching materials," "discuss student progress together."
5. Impact on Student Engagement	Increased student involvement and learning quality	"Students are more active in class," "learning feels more meaningful and purposeful."

Source: Primary data (2024)

The transformational leadership of school principals at Walantaka District State Elementary School plays a strategic role in improving education quality. In the dimension of idealized influence, principals demonstrate discipline, integrity, and professional commitment, creating a positive work culture and encouraging teacher seriousness. This example not only strengthens adherence to academic standards but also builds trust and internal cohesion of the school. A teacher at SDN Walantaka 1 reflected:

*"The principal always arrives early and never asks teachers to do something he himself would not do. This makes us feel obligated to maintain the same level of professionalism."*

*(Teacher, SDN Walantaka 1, personal communication, March 2024)*

The dimensions of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation showed a real impact on learning practices. Teachers reported feeling consistently encouraged to develop innovative learning methods through purposeful direction from the principal. The school's vision and mission are understood more clearly, enabling teachers to design creative learning strategies relevant to students' needs. The encouragement of project-based and problem-solving learning increases student engagement and critical thinking skills. A teacher at SDN Walantaka 2 shared:

*"Since the principal began emphasizing the importance of creative teaching in our weekly coordination meetings, I have started using project-based learning more regularly. The students' enthusiasm has noticeably increased, and they ask more questions now."*

*(Teacher, SDN Walantaka 2, personal communication, March 2024)*

These findings align with Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), who demonstrated that transformational school leadership significantly influences classroom instructional practices and teacher innovation. Similarly, Hallinger (2003) affirms that inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation are the dimensions most directly associated with pedagogical change. In the Walantaka context, this is particularly evident in the observable shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning approaches—a characteristic not prominently reported in studies from urban school settings (Robinson et al., 2008), suggesting that in smaller, community-oriented schools, leadership influence operates more directly through interpersonal channels. Individualized consideration also emerged as a critical dimension. The principal's personal attention to teachers' professional development strengthened commitment and a sense of belonging. A teacher from SDN Pabuaran stated:

*"Every semester, the principal invites each of us individually to discuss our professional goals and the difficulties we face. This makes me feel that my growth matters to the school, not just my teaching hours."*

*(Teacher, SDN Pabuaran, personal communication, March 2024)*

This finding is consistent with Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), who found that trust and individualized support from principals are pivotal in sustaining teacher professional efficacy. However, unlike findings from large urban schools where leadership support tends to be more formal and structured, in Walantaka this support manifests through informal, relational interactions—a contextual distinction that reflects the community-based character of rural elementary school management and represents a contribution of this study to the existing literature.

### School Organizational Culture

A collaborative and professional organizational culture was identified as a significant mediator between transformational leadership and educational quality. Teachers described an environment that actively encouraged knowledge sharing, co-planning, and peer support. As one teacher from SDN Kepuren 1 described:

*"Here, we regularly share lesson plans and discuss what works and what does not. This collective approach makes our teaching more consistent and effective for all students."*

*(Teacher, SDN Kepuren 1, personal communication, March 2024)*

These findings support Mahmudah et al. (2025) and Putra and Fadhilah (2025), who emphasized that a strong organizational culture reinforces the effects of transformational leadership in improving education quality. In comparison to Sun and Leithwood (2012), who found that transformational leadership effects are partially mediated by school culture at the secondary level, this study demonstrates a similar mediating mechanism at the primary level within the Indonesian context—thereby extending their model to a new educational level and cultural setting.

A unique finding specific to the Walantaka context is the role of gotong royong (collective community cooperation) as a cultural value embedded in the school's daily practices. Unlike findings from urban Indonesian schools where organizational culture tends to be more formal and hierarchical (Ahmad Saepi et al., 2024), in Walantaka the collective, community-oriented work ethic functions as an organic cultural resource that amplifies leadership effects on teaching quality. Documents reviewed, including teacher coordination meeting minutes and community involvement records, corroborated this cultural dynamic. This contextual specificity represents a distinct contribution of this study beyond existing findings in the transformational leadership literature.

The transformational leadership of the principal functions as the primary driver of teacher innovation, student involvement, and improvement of teaching quality. Organizational culture functions as a mediator that strengthens the effect of leadership, so that both create synergies that support teacher professionalism, inter-staff collaboration, and continuous improvement of education quality. The combination of inspirational leadership and a strong school culture builds the foundation for a conducive and effective learning environment for all school residents—consistent with the broader conclusion of Gurr et al. (2005) that successful principals actively shape both leadership practices and cultural conditions simultaneously.

### CONCLUSION

The transformational leadership of the school principal has proven to play a significant role in improving the quality of education at the State Elementary School of Walantaka District, Serang City. Through the ability to inspire, motivate, and facilitate the professional development of teachers, school principals encourage the birth of more creative, innovative, and student-centered teaching practices. Consistent motivation and support for pedagogical experiments make teachers more confident in developing learning strategies relevant to students' needs. The impact is visible in increasing active student involvement in the learning process, improving the quality of classroom interaction, and continuously improving learning outcomes.

In addition, the school's organizational culture serves as a mediator, strengthening the influence of leadership on educational quality. A collaborative, disciplined, and professional work environment creates synergy between the principal's vision and teachers' classroom practice. The combination of transformational leadership and a positive organizational culture—particularly

through the embedded gotong royong cultural value—builds a collective commitment to pedagogical innovation and performance improvement, ensuring that quality improvement strategies are not temporary, but institutionalized within school systems and practices.

### Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at four State Elementary Schools within a single district (Walantaka), which limits the generalizability of findings to other regional, urban, or private school contexts in Indonesia. Second, as a purely qualitative study, the findings are context-specific and reflect participants' perceptions at the time of data collection; longitudinal changes in leadership or culture are not captured. Third, social desirability bias may have influenced participants' responses, particularly in self-reported perceptions of principal leadership effectiveness, despite measures such as assurances of anonymity and member checking.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to: (a) extend the scope to include multiple districts or provinces to enable comparative analysis across different geographic, urban-rural, and socioeconomic contexts; (b) employ longitudinal research designs to trace the long-term impact of transformational leadership and organizational culture on educational quality indicators; (c) integrate quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to provide complementary statistical evidence for the qualitative findings reported here; and (d) explore the role of digital and technology-mediated leadership within the post-pandemic elementary school environment, a context increasingly relevant to school improvement in Indonesia.

### Practical and Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to transformational leadership theory in the context of Indonesian elementary education by demonstrating how local cultural values—particularly gotong royong—interact with leadership practices to shape school culture and educational quality. This extends existing models (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Sun & Leithwood, 2012) to non-Western, community-based school contexts. In practical terms, the findings have implications for school principals, education offices (Dinas Pendidikan), and policymakers. School principals are encouraged to adopt individualized, relational leadership approaches that attend to teachers' professional needs through regular dialogue and mentoring. Education offices may consider developing leadership training programs that explicitly integrate school culture development strategies, particularly in rural and peri-urban settings. Policymakers should recognize the significance of organizational culture in education quality improvement policies and allocate support for structured culture-building initiatives at the school level, complementing existing curriculum and infrastructure investments.

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