The Implementation of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Improving the Quality of Learning in State Vocational High Schools in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province

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Abstract

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method aimed at exploring and analyzing the implementation of transformational leadership by school principals in improving the quality of learning at State Vocational High Schools (SMK Negeri) in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, attitudes, and their impact on teaching and learning processes. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation studies. Participants in the study consisted of school principals, teachers, and administrative staff selected through purposive sampling, based on their roles and relevance to the research objectives. Data analysis was conducted using interactive model analysis consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as developed by Miles and Huberman. The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, prolonged engagement, and member checking to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability of findings. This methodological approach enabled the researchers to interpret the transformational leadership behaviors practiced by the principals, identify their strategic efforts to improve learning quality, and understand the contextual challenges they face within the school environment.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis media online Tempo.co dan Antaranews dalam membingkai pemberitaan mengenai kasus dugaan korupsi oleh PT Pertamina Patra Niaga pada Maret 2025. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis framing model Robert N. Entman yang mencakup empat elemen utama, yaitu pendefinisian masalah (define problems), diagnosis penyebab (diagnose causes), penilaian moral (make moral judgement), dan rekomendasi penanganan (treatment recommendation). Data diperoleh melalui purposive sampling terhadap enam berita dari masing-masing media, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Tempo.co membingkai kasus ini secara kritis sebagai bagian dari persoalan struktural dalam tata kelola BUMN dengan penekanan pada kerugian negara, lemahnya sistem pengawasan, dan seruan reformasi menyeluruh. Sebaliknya, Antaranews cenderung menyajikan berita secara prosedural dan netral, membingkai kasus sebagai proses hukum biasa tanpa penilaian moral atau tuntutan reformasi kelembagaan. Perbedaan ini mencerminkan konstruksi realitas yang berbeda dan menunjukkan bahwa media berperan aktif dalam membentuk persepsi publik terhadap isu-isu strategis. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya literasi media agar masyarakat mampu memahami framing media secara kritis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the quality of learning remains a central objective in the advancement of national education, as part of the broader mission to develop human resources that are both skilled and adaptable to global demands. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, along with Ministerial Regulation No. 19 of 2007, highlights the necessity for educational institutions to manage teaching and learning activities effectively and efficiently to align with national education standards. In this regard, school leadership particularly that of principals plays a pivotal role in realizing institutional goals and visions. According to Kartono (2011), a leader is someone who possesses the capability to influence others in pursuit of shared objectives. Likewise, Robbins, as cited in Subekti (2013), defines leadership as the capacity to guide a group toward goal achievement. Suryo (2010) further elaborates on transformational leadership as the ability to inspire and drive individuals to exceed expected outcomes. This leadership style is especially critical in times of

change, particularly for vocational schools, which are tasked with producing graduates who are industry-ready and globally competitive. Starratt (2007) reinforces the idea that school principals should function as visionary leaders not only handling administrative tasks but also fostering a school-wide culture of learning transformation. In this role, principals are expected to empower teaching staff, strategically manage school resources, and spearhead continuous improvement initiatives to optimize educational outcomes.

State Vocational High Schools (SMK Negeri) in Palangka Raya City, located in Central Kalimantan Province, serve as vital institutions for equipping students with practical skills that align with industry requirements. Despite this important role, efforts to enhance learning quality are often hindered by various challenges, including limited hands-on facilities, a mismatch between curriculum content and labor market needs, and the diverse backgrounds of the student population. Addressing these issues requires more than administrative leadership it demands a transformational approach capable of mobilizing the school's full potential for sustained development. Given this context, the present study seeks to explore how principals implement transformational leadership to elevate the quality of learning in SMK Negeri across Palangka Raya City. The outcomes of this research aim to contribute theoretically to the discourse on educational leadership and offer practical recommendations for principals in leading change and nurturing innovation in vocational education settings.

II. METHOD

This research utilized a qualitative method with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deep and detailed understanding of complex phenomena specifically the application of transformational leadership by school principals to enhance learning quality. As Moleong (2017:6) explains, qualitative research seeks to comprehend social phenomena from the participants' perspectives through direct interaction with data sources. A case study was deemed appropriate because it enables holistic exploration of a particular case within its real-world setting (Yin, 2011:1). Therefore, this study centered on vocational high schools in Palangka Raya City as the main unit of analysis.

The research took place at three public vocational high schools (SMK) in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province: SMK Negeri 1, SMK Negeri 2, and SMK Negeri 3 Palangka Raya. These institutions were selected because they were known to have actively implemented transformational leadership principles through various educational policies and learning innovations. The study was conducted over a span of three months, starting with initial observations and continuing through data collection and analysis.

The research drew on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected directly from key informants such as school principals, teachers, administrative personnel, and students. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance and involvement in school leadership activities (Sugiyono, 2017:156). Secondary data were gathered from institutional documents, including the schools' vision and mission statements, principals' strategic plans, school reports, and other relevant materials.

Three primary techniques were used for data collection: observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted in an active and participatory manner to examine leadership practices within the school environment. In-depth interviews provided detailed insights into informants' experiences and viewpoints. Document analysis offered supporting evidence to complement the findings from observations and interviews. As Creswell (2015, p. 264) states, the integration of these techniques allows for the acquisition of rich, contextual, and credible data.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994:10), which includes three key components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, information gathered from the field was selected and simplified. The display stage involved organizing this data into charts or patterns to facilitate interpretation. The final stage consisted of drawing conclusions, which were continuously refined through reflection and validation. This approach is well-suited to qualitative research due to its adaptability and interactive nature.

To ensure data credibility, the study applied triangulation and member checking techniques. Triangulation involved cross-verifying data from different sources and methods, in line with Patton's (2002:247) recommendation for strengthening the validity of findings. Member checking was carried out by presenting interpretations back to the informants, ensuring

that the researcher's analysis accurately reflected the participants' real-life experiences.

Through these comprehensive strategies, the study aimed to produce valid and meaningful insights into how transformational leadership is enacted by school principals to improve learning quality in public vocational high schools in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Principal's Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leadership places strong emphasis on inspirational motivation as a means to build emotional involvement and dedication among school stakeholders. At State Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province, principals aim to uplift the morale of both teachers and students by clearly articulating the school's vision and mission and setting purposeful, challenging objectives. This approach highlights the principal's role not only as an administrator but also as a catalyst for change who fosters collective enthusiasm throughout the school. Fitriani, Anwar, and Rusdinal (2021:248) identify inspirational motivation as a central component of transformational leadership, capable of instilling hope and optimism for the educational institution's future. A principal with inspirational qualities can cultivate an environment of enthusiasm and encourage all individuals to make their best contributions.

At the vocational schools observed, principals routinely hold meetings to inspire, recognize achievement, and promote innovation among staff and students. Furthermore, Maulidiyah and Warsono (2020:52) argue that transformational leaders who provide inspiring motivation can enhance teacher loyalty and performance by delivering clear communication and a compelling vision. This is reflected in the teachers' active participation in various development programs, including internal training workshops, lesson planning sessions, and collaborative project-based learning (PjBL) initiatives. Sari and Rasyid (2022:334) also point out that inspirational leadership cultivates a culture focused on achievement and positivity. Observations showed that such leadership leads to improved discipline and stronger interpersonal relationships among school members. The principal's moral and spiritual guidance further deepens the community's sense of responsibility and shared ownership for school advancement.

2. Intellectual Stimulation in the Teaching Process

Transformational leadership also involves fostering a learning environment where teachers are encouraged to think critically and explore innovative solutions. At SMK schools in Palangka Raya, principals actively support teacher development by organizing internal training sessions and continuous academic mentoring. Teachers are motivated to go beyond traditional methods and implement student-centered strategies. According to Simbolon, Suryana, and Hamid (2022:98), intellectual stimulation challenges educators to adopt creative teaching methods and integrate digital technologies into their instruction. This is demonstrated by the growing use of tools like Google Classroom, Canva, and subject-specific simulation applications, particularly for technical and design-oriented courses. Improvements in digital literacy among the teaching staff reflect the positive impact of such stimulation.

Astuti and Sofyan (2021:172) note that when principals intellectually challenge their teachers, they foster reflective and innovative mindsets. At the schools studied, principals often ask teachers to submit reflective teaching reports, which are then used as feedback to improve instructional strategies. This encourages educators to analyze their teaching strengths and weaknesses and collaborate to identify improvements. Research by Lestari, Hardianti, and Putra (2023:191) also highlights that when principals recognize and support teacher creativity, it boosts intrinsic motivation and self-confidence. The sustained intellectual stimulation within the schools has led to more innovative student projects, greater teacher involvement in instructional competitions, and the formation of interdisciplinary teacher learning communities.

3. Individual Consideration and Teacher Empowerment

Transformational leadership requires school principals to acknowledge and support the unique needs and development of each teacher and staff member. In the case of the State Vocational High School (SMK) in Palangka Raya City, the principal demonstrates genuine concern for both the

professional growth and personal well-being of educators. This is shown through moral encouragement, access to training opportunities, and informal conversations that promote transparency and trust between leadership and staff. According to Yuliana and Wahyudin (2023:317), individual attention is a key trait of effective transformational leadership in schools, as it strengthens trust and nurtures collaborative relationships. A leader who understands the individual strengths and challenges of each teacher can implement more targeted and effective human resource strategies. At the school, newly appointed teachers benefit from mentoring by experienced colleagues, along with hands-on guidance from the principal during their adjustment period.

Hapsari and Rohmadi (2021:212) note that transformational leaders should create opportunities for teachers to grow independently and shape their own professional trajectories. This principle is evident in the school's policy that encourages teachers to take the initiative in professional development through participation in national seminars, certified training programs, and academic publications. The principal also offers support in the form of constructive feedback and letters of recommendation to help advance teachers' careers. Siregar and Alif (2022:289) add that empowering teachers on an individual level enhances their competence while also cultivating a sense of appreciation and belonging within the institution. At this school, the results of this empowerment strategy are visible in stronger teacher commitment, a healthier workplace atmosphere, and the establishment of teacher learning communities focused on elevating instructional quality.

4. Supportive School Culture and Collaborative Leadership

An enabling school culture is essential for the successful execution of transformational leadership. At the SMK in Palangka Raya, the principal has fostered an inclusive and collaborative working environment where every school member has a voice. By involving teachers and staff in decision-making processes, the principal promotes shared responsibility and collective ownership of school initiatives and policies. As Rahmat, Prasojo, and Nurabadi (2021:111) observe, a strong organizational culture arises when

leaders encourage openness, mutual trust, and recognition of active participation. This aligns with what is seen in the field, where teachers feel respected and are invited to contribute to key forums such as the subject teacher working groups (MGMP) and curriculum development sessions. The principal's encouragement has also strengthened collaboration across departments, enhancing team cohesion.

Kurniawan and Puspitasari (2022:56) argue that collaborative leadership fosters innovation by creating a safe and supportive environment for the exchange of new ideas. Rather than simply issuing top-down directives, the principal at the school acts as a dialogue facilitator who enables open communication and cross-functional cooperation. This leadership style is evident in initiatives like the interdepartmental teaching clinics and the creation of a school improvement team composed of both veteran and newer teachers from diverse academic backgrounds. Furthermore, Herlina, Muslimin, and Fauzan (2023:234) emphasize that a participatory school culture motivates teachers to take greater responsibility for improving the quality of instruction. Teachers at the school have shown initiative by developing more authentic forms of student assessment, such as portfolios and project-based evaluations. This demonstrates that a collaborative culture not only strengthens teamwork but also leads to measurable improvements in the teaching and learning experience.

5. Challenges in Implementation

Despite the principal's initiatives to implement transformational leadership principles, several obstacles continue to hinder optimal execution. One of the foremost issues is the limited access to adequate practical facilities, which are essential for vocational students to hone their technical abilities. Many specialized departments still depend on outdated or insufficient equipment, thereby diminishing the quality of hands-on learning experiences. Nasution, Effendi, and Surur (2022:160) point out that a major barrier to effective leadership in vocational education is the shortage of physical infrastructure and modern technology, which often restricts pedagogical innovation. While the principal at the vocational school in Palangka Raya City has taken steps to form

collaborations with industry partners (DUDI), these partnerships are not yet fully developed or formalized, making long-term support uncertain.

Apart from infrastructure constraints, another pressing issue is the gap between the existing curriculum and the dynamic requirements of the job market. As a result, students often graduate lacking the competencies needed to meet current industry expectations. This finding aligns with research by Aditya, Hasbullah, and Purwanto (2021:43), who highlight the difficulty vocational school leaders face in balancing compliance with national curriculum standards while remaining responsive to evolving labor market trends. To address this, the principal must be adaptive by incorporating locally relevant content and supplementary practical sessions to better align student competencies with real-world demands.

Additionally, the heavy administrative workload borne by school principals poses a significant barrier to fully realizing the goals of transformational leadership. Wulandari and Mahmud (2023:201) observe that principals in Indonesia frequently spend a substantial amount of time managing bureaucratic duties, which limits their opportunities to engage directly with teachers and students. This concern is also echoed by the principal of the SMK in Palangka Raya, who noted the importance of establishing a more systematic delegation of responsibilities in order to remain focused on academic improvement initiatives.

A. Research Results

The research findings reveal that the implementation of transformational leadership by school principals in State Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province, has significantly contributed to improving the quality of learning. Principals demonstrated key components of transformational leadership, including inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the cultivation of a collaborative school culture. These leadership practices encouraged teacher innovation, increased student engagement, and enhanced overall instructional quality. Despite several challenges such as limited practical facilities, curriculum-industry misalignment, and administrative burdens principals continued to foster a professional and inclusive environment through strategic initiatives, partnerships, and teacher empowerment. The findings underscore the pivotal role of transformational leadership in promoting sustainable educational improvement in vocational education settings.

B. Discussion

Inspirational motivation is a central aspect of transformational leadership at SMK schools in Palangka Raya, where principals motivate teachers and students by communicating clear visions, setting ambitious goals, and fostering shared purpose. This leadership style boosts morale, encourages innovation, enhances teacher commitment, and strengthens school culture through regular meetings, training programs, and moral guidance, leading to continuous school improvement.

Transformational leadership at SMK schools in Palangka Raya emphasizes intellectual stimulation by encouraging teachers to think critically and adopt innovative, student-centered approaches. Principals support this by providing training, mentoring, and promoting the use of digital tools like Google Classroom and Canva. This stimulation fosters reflective practices, enhances creativity, and boosts teacher motivation, resulting in improved instructional strategies, increased digital literacy, and active participation in educational innovation and collaboration.

Transformational leadership at SMK in Palangka Raya emphasizes individual consideration by addressing each teacher's unique needs and supporting their professional growth. Principals foster trust through moral support, mentoring, and open communication, while also encouraging independent development through seminars, training, and academic contributions. This personalized approach enhances teacher competence, boosts motivation, and promotes a collaborative school environment.

A supportive school culture plays a vital role in enabling transformational leadership, as seen at SMK in Palangka Raya. The principal promotes collaboration, shared decision-making, and cross-departmental teamwork, creating a sense of ownership among staff. This participatory environment enhances innovation and improves instructional practices. However, challenges

such as limited practical facilities, outdated equipment, and curriculum-industry mismatches hinder the full implementation of transformational leadership. Additionally, the principal's heavy administrative workload limits direct engagement with teachers and students, highlighting the need for better delegation and adaptive strategies to align with evolving educational demands.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

This study finds that transformational leadership by principals at public vocational high schools in Palangka Raya City significantly enhances learning quality. Through inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and a collaborative school culture, principals effectively foster commitment, innovation, and professional growth. Despite challenges like limited facilities and curriculum-industry gaps, principals adaptively manage resources and partnerships. Overall, consistent and contextual transformational leadership contributes greatly to educational improvement and offers valuable insights for leadership development in vocational education.

B. Suggestion

To improve the quality of learning in State Vocational High Schools in Palangka Raya, principals should strengthen transformational leadership practices and delegate administrative tasks to focus on academic leadership. Teachers are encouraged to actively pursue professional development and apply innovative teaching aligned with industry needs. Education authorities should provide better support through funding, infrastructure, and flexible policies, while also fostering partnerships with industry. Future researchers are advised to explore the long-term effects of transformational leadership and its application in other educational settings.

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