Strategic Leadership of School Principals in Enhancing Educational Quality Through Transformational Management and Collaborative Governance

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Abstract

The quality of education is largely influenced by the strategic leadership of school principals. However, many schools still struggle with ineffective leadership models that hinder educational innovation and stakeholder collaboration. This study aims to analyze how strategic leadership, incorporating transformational management and collaborative governance, enhances educational quality. Using a qualitative multi-site case study approach, data were collected from 15 schools in urban and suburban areas of Bogor through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that principals who implement transformational leadership strategies create more dynamic learning environments, foster teacher motivation, and enhance student achievement. Schools with strong collaborative governance models demonstrate higher stakeholder involvement, particularly from teachers, parents, and community members, leading to better educational outcomes. The study also reveals that leadership effectiveness varies across different school contexts, with financial and structural limitations impacting implementation success. These results contribute to the field by offering a practical leadership framework that integrates transformational management and collaborative governance to improve educational quality. The study underscores the necessity of equipping school principals with innovative leadership skills and strengthening partnerships between schools and external stakeholders. Future research should explore the impact of leadership strategies in broader educational settings and assess their long-term sustainability. By adopting a strategic leadership approach, schools can create a more adaptable, innovative, and inclusive learning environment that meets the demands of modern education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main factors in building quality and competitive human resources. Improving the quality of education significantly contributes to economic growth and national competitiveness (Arman et al., 2020). Quality education fosters skilled and innovative human resources, which are essential for sustaining industrial and technological advancements (Zehri et al., 2024). In addition, education directly impacts the socio-economic development of a country by equipping individuals with relevant competencies that are aligned with the needs of global industries (Chentukov et al., 2021). Investment in education leads to higher levels of knowledge intensity in the workforce, driving increased productivity and economic stability (Deffinika et al., 2021).

However, various studies highlight the challenges of education quality, especially the weak leadership strategies of school principals that are still conventional and less adaptive to modern demands (Robinson & Gray, 2019). Effective leadership is the second most significant school factor in student achievement after classroom instruction (Bush, 2021), while principals without a strategic vision tend to fail to implement impactful changes (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė & Strazdauskienė, 2023) hence the need for a stronger leadership model (Darwis et al., 2024).

The lack of collaboration between school

principals and stakeholders also hinders the improvement of the quality of education (Fadila et al., 2024). Weak collaboration, coupled with socio-economic challenges, limits the effectiveness of school principals (Heystek & Shula, 2024), although inclusive leadership and policy support can drive positive transformation (Al-Kubaisi & Shahbal, 2024).

Many schools have not implemented transformational leadership and collaborative governance effectively, leading to innovation stagnation, low educator motivation, and a lack of professional culture. In fact, transformational leadership increases teacher commitment and innovation with a shared vision and collaboration (Kareem et al., 2023). Schools that adopt digital transformation experience improved performance (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). while innovative practices based on transformational leadership have been proven to improve learning and systemic change (Sliwka et al., 2024).

And the weak governance structure is still an obstacle, limiting the capacity development of teachers and education personnel (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021). The absence of innovative leadership strategies contributes to low student academic achievement, emphasizing the importance of transformative and collaborative management approaches for educator effectiveness and better learning outcomes.

The role of school principals outside of administration, must position them as agents of change that encourage innovation and a forward-looking vision of education (Kareem et al., 2023). This approach increases teacher commitment by encouraging collaboration, professional development, and shared goals. Additionally, collaborative governance ensures that all stakeholders-teachers, parents, and local communities-are actively involved in decision-making, contributing to a more inclusive and adaptive education system (Heenan et al., 2024). Schools with transformational leadership practices are experiencing increased innovation, deeper learning environments, and a cultural shift towards sustainable educational improvement (Sliwka et al., 2023). Schools that integrate transformational leadership and collaborative governance are better equipped to create a dynamic and high-quality learning environment where educators and students thrive through continuous improvement and shared accountability (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021).

For this reason, this research offers solutions through transformational management and collaborative governance approaches in the strategic leadership of school principals. Transformational management focuses on changing the leadership paradigm, where the principal not only acts as an administrator, but also as an agent of change who is able to create a better educational vision and innovation. Meanwhile, collaborative governance encourages the active involvement of all stakeholders in school management, so as to create a more dynamic, innovative, and quality learning environment. Because the integration of *transformational management* and *collaborative governance* can create a more adaptive, innovative, and participatory school management system, which ultimately improves the quality of education. Transformational leadership fosters a shared vision, empowers teachers, and fosters an innovation-driven school culture, leading to higher educator commitment and improved learning outcomes (Kareem et al., 2023). Collaborative governance, on the other hand, ensures that all stakeholders are actively involved in school management, facilitating an inclusive decision-making process that drives meaningful change (Sliwka et al., 2023).

This research contributes to integrating transformational management and collaborative governance in school leadership. First, this study emphasizes a holistic leadership approach that combines both managerial strategies to improve school leadership effectiveness, something that is still rarely explored (Sliwka et al., 2023). Second, this research is not only theoretical, but also develops a practical implementation model that can be applied in a real educational environment. The integration of transformational leadership and teacher leadership has been shown to improve teachers' self-efficacy and student performance (Li & Liu, 2022).

Third, this research is conducted in the context of contemporary education, where school principals must be more adaptive to technological developments, educational policies, and the needs of 21st century students. Transformational leadership plays an important role in sustainable education reform (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). By bridging this gap, this study enriches the theoretical and practical discourse on school leadership transformation and offers sustainable implementation strategies to improve the quality of education.

The research highlights the urgency of this research due to its relevance in addressing the challenges of education quality, where strategic

principal leadership plays a crucial role in improving learning outcomes and school management. that effective school leadership has a direct and significant impact on teacher performance, which in turn improves student achievement (Pardosi & Utari, 2022). School principals must be equipped with strategic management skills to increase teacher motivation, optimize human resources, and create a more conducive learning environment (Mugwaze & Smith, 2024). However, many principals still lack understanding of how to implement innovative and collaborative leadership strategies, which hinder school improvement efforts, to principals is essential to increase their capacity in instructional and transformational leadership (Corrigan & Merry, 2022). School leadership struggles to drive significant organizational change, reinforcing the need for more structured leadership models and supported by research (Mahmud & Malik, 2024). Therefore, this research serves as an important reference for improving the professionalism of school principals and leadership capacity, ensuring that school leaders are well-equipped to meet the challenges of contemporary education.

This study aims to analyze how the strategic leadership of school principals can contribute to improving the quality of education in schools. In addition, this study also examines the implementation of transformational management in school management and its impact on improving the quality of education. Furthermore, this study explores the effectiveness of collaborative governance in strengthening the involvement of various stakeholders in school management. As a final result, this study seeks to design a strategic leadership model for school principals based on transformational management and collaborative governance as an innovative solution in an effort to improve the quality of education.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study method to understand the application of strategic leadership, transformational management, and collaborative governance by school principals in improving the quality of education. This approach allows for a more in-depth exploration of leadership dynamics in a variety of educational contexts. This study was conducted on 15 schools in Bogor City and Regency that have implemented innovations in strategic leadership to improve the quality of education. The selected schools cover various

levels of education, ranging from elementary, junior high, to high school/vocational school, thus providing a broader insight into the effectiveness of school principals' leadership at various levels of education.

Participants in this study consisted of 15 principals as the main actors in the implementation of strategic leadership, 30 teachers and education staff (2 per school) to explore the impact of principal leadership on the work environment and learning quality, and 15 school committees (1 per school) representing parents and the community in understanding stakeholder involvement in school management. In addition, 5 representatives from the Bogor City and Regency Education Office were also involved to provide policy perspectives related to the implementation of school principals' leadership in improving the quality of education

To answer the research objectives, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals to understand their leadership strategies in improving the quality of education, as well as with teachers and education staff to explore the impact of principal leadership on the work environment and learning quality. In addition, interviews also involve school committees and representatives of the education office to understand the effectiveness of collaborative governance in increasing stakeholder engagement. Participatory observation was carried out in 15 schools to directly observe the principal's leadership practices, interactions with teachers and stakeholders, and the application of transformational management in school management. Meanwhile, documentation is used to collect various related documents, such as school policies, performance reports, accreditation results, and leadership innovation program documents that have been implemented.

The data in this study was analyzed using thematic analysis with the Miles & Huberman (1994) approach which consisted of three main stages. Data reduction is carried out by categorizing the data that has been collected based on relevant themes, such as strategic leadership strategies, transformational management implementation, and collaborative governance. Furthermore, the presentation of data is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or conceptual models to identify emerging patterns. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions, where interpretation is carried out to understand

how the principal applies strategic leadership in improving the quality of education and develops an implementation model that can be adopted by other schools.

This study applies several validation techniques for data wetness, namely source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews from school principals, teachers, and other stakeholders to obtain more diverse perspectives. Triangulation methods are carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure more objective and comprehensive data. Meanwhile, member checking was carried out by asking participants to provide feedback on the results of the research findings to ensure the suitability of interpretation and increase the validity of the data.

DISCUSSION

This study produced findings based on data obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation from 15 schools in Bogor City and Regency. These results are compiled to answer research objectives related to the application of strategic leadership, transformational management, and collaborative governance in improving the quality of education.

Based on interviews with 15 school principals, the majority stated that strategic leadership plays a very important role in improving the quality of education. They mentioned that the school's strategic planning is oriented towards a long-term vision, improving teacher competence, and learning innovation.

Table 1: Interview Results on the Principal's Strategy

Aspects	Findings
Implementation of Strategic Leadership	The majority of school principals stated that strategic leadership plays a role in improving the quality of education.
Implementation of Strategic Leadership	Some school principals face constraints of limited funds and stakeholder support.
Implementasi Transformational Management	School principals who implement transformational management are more effective in building a positive and innovative work environment.
Implementasi Transformational Management	Some school principals still use a bureaucratic approach that is less flexible, hindering teacher participation.
Efektivitas Collaborative Governance	Collaborative governance increases stakeholder involvement in school management.
Efektivitas Collaborative Governance	Some schools are still having difficulty building collaborations with industry and higher education institutions.

Observations were carried out in 15 schools to see firsthand the principal's leadership practices, interactions with teachers and stakeholders, and the implementation of strategies to improve the quality of education. The results of the observation showed:

Table 2: Observation Results of the Principal's Interaction with Various Parties

Aspects	Findings
Implementation of Strategic Leadership	The majority of school principals stated that strategic leadership plays a role in improving the quality of education.
Implementation of Strategic Leadership	Some school principals face constraints of limited funds and stakeholder support.
Implementasi Transformational Management	School principals who implement transformational management are more effective in building a positive and innovative work environment.
Implementasi Transformational Management	Some school principals still use a bureaucratic approach that is less flexible, hindering teacher participation.
Efektivitas Collaborative Governance	Collaborative governance increases stakeholder involvement in school management.
Efektivitas Collaborative Governance	Some schools are still having difficulty building collaborations with industry and higher education institutions.

The documentation collected is in the form of school policies, accreditation reports, teacher development programs, and school performance reports. The results of the documentation analysis showed:

Table 3: Documentation on School Policies, Accreditation Reports, Teacher Development Programs, and School Performance Reports

Documentation Aspects	Findings
Strategic Planning	Schools that implement strategic leadership have clearer and more structured planning documents, such as the School Strategic Plan and the Annual Work Plan.
Teacher Development	Schools that implement transformational management have more active teacher development programs, including digital learning training, project-based learning, and improving teachers' soft skills.
Stakeholder Engagement	Schools that practice collaborative governance well have stakeholder engagement reports, such as discussion forums with parents, cooperation with industry, and partnerships with higher education institutions.
Funding for Educational Innovation	Some schools in Bogor Regency still face obstacles in funding for educational innovation, as seen from budget documents and school financial statements.

The strategic leadership of school principals has a significant impact on improving the quality of education, particularly in strategic planning, learning innovation, and teacher human resource development. Principals who can formulate a clear vision and mission and implement educational policies aligned with the school's needs can create a more effective and conducive learning environment. With the right leadership strategies, schools can more easily adapt to the ever-evolving demands of education and increasingly complex challenges. In this context, strategic leadership is not only an administrative function but also a policymaking role capable of motivating, organizing, and developing institutions to achieve set goals (Mjaku &c, 2020).

Additionally, transformational management has proven effective in creating a more collaborative and innovative work environment. This leadership model allows teachers and educational staff to be more actively involved in providing input and participating in decision-making. Schools that adopt this approach demonstrate higher levels of innovation and a more collaborative and inclusive learning environment (Maslahah et al., 2023). Transformational leadership also helps cultivate a growth mindset among teachers, ultimately enhancing teaching and learning quality (Guavis et al., 2023). However, there are still challenges in its implementation, especially in schools that maintain rigid and inflexible bureaucratic leadership styles. In such cases, principals must balance a more structured managerial approach with a more participatory approach to create a dynamic school culture that is responsive to change.

Furthermore, collaborative governance plays a crucial role in encouraging the involvement of various stakeholders in school management. Studies show that cooperation between principals, teachers, and school committees can create an effective strategic collaboration model for joint planning and sustainable educational service innovation (Sofiah & Azizah, 2024). Through this approach, schools can build broader partnerships with industries, universities, and other educational communities to support the improvement of learning quality. However, some schools have yet to optimize their external partnerships, limiting their ability to fully leverage resources and innovations in education. Therefore, a more systematic strategy is needed to build and strengthen collaborative networks to enhance the quality of education in schools.

In the context of modern developments, strategic leadership in education increasingly relies on the adoption of digital technology. Digital transformation in education requires visionary and adaptive leaders who can integrate technology into the curriculum and create a more flexible and innovative learning environment (Munthe et al., 2024). Principals with adaptive and collaborative leadership styles tend to achieve better academic performance, have more motivated teachers, and gain stronger stakeholder support. Principals who can adapt to change and communicate effectively with teachers, students, parents, and the broader community can create a healthier and more productive educational ecosystem. In this regard, principals act as change catalysts, driving all school elements toward achieving educational goals more effectively.

However, various challenges arise in implementing strategic and transformational leadership models, particularly in responding to changes in educational policies and structures. With a more adaptive and collaborative leadership model, educational institutions can develop more

rapidly and better navigate future global challenges (Sartini et al., 2024). One major gap in previous research is the lack of empirical evidence on how transformational management is practically applied in schools. While many studies discuss its theoretical importance, few have examined its implementation in real school contexts, especially in Indonesia. This study addresses that gap by showing that principals who motivate teachers, promote continuous professional development, and encourage innovation can create more engaged educators and improve student learning outcomes.

Observations indicate that schools where teachers are actively involved in decision-making and receive continuous training are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies. This confirms that transformational management is a key factor in school improvement but requires structured implementation to be effective. Research by Sultana et al. (2024) shows that transformational leadership significantly impacts the academic environment and teacher engagement by fostering collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity in schools. Additionally, transformational leadership directly correlates with improved student academic outcomes and their engagement in the learning process.

Furthermore, research by Utami et al. (2024) found that principals who apply transformational leadership can enhance teacher morale, staff job satisfaction, and student engagement in education. Schools with such leadership tend to have a more positive, inclusive, and collaborative culture, contributing to the achievement of educational goals more effectively. Another study by Ninković et al. (2023) revealed that transformational leadership positively affects teachers' academic optimism, including their self-confidence, trust in parents and students, and academic motivation. Teachers working under transformational leadership are more emotionally and professionally engaged, enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools.

From a practical perspective, research by Muktamar B et al. (2023) emphasizes that teacher involvement in decision-making and continuous professional training play a crucial role in the successful implementation of transformational leadership. Aligning with Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) and *Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving School) programs, this study bridges the gap between policy objectives and real-world implementation. Although these programs emphasize school autonomy and innovation, there is still a lack of empirical data on how schools interpret and effectively implement these policies. The findings illustrate that principals who align their leadership strategies with national policies experience more successful and sustainable school reforms.

Additionally, research by Fuad et al. (2022) indicates that the success of school autonomy policy implementation heavily depends on the principal's leadership capacity. Schools with innovative leaders are more capable of managing autonomy policies effectively and creating more flexible, student-centered learning environments. Research by Saputra & Hadikusuma (2023) highlights that the democratic leadership style employed by principals plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. This study found that principals who involve teachers and the school community in decision-making and provide space for teacher innovation are more successful in implementing these policies compared to those who still use an authoritarian approach.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully addresses the main objectives, namely analyzing the role of strategic leadership of school principals in improving the quality of education, exploring the implementation of transformational management and collaborative governance, and designing an effective strategic leadership model. The findings indicate that school principals who implement transformational-based strategic leadership can enhance teacher motivation, create a more innovative learning environment, and strengthen stakeholder involvement in school management. The implementation of collaborative governance has also been proven to increase the involvement of parents, the community, and the industrial sector in supporting higher-quality education. These findings confirm that the leadership of school principals is not merely administrative but must also serve as a change agent in creating an educational ecosystem that is more adaptive to the times. Principals who foster a culture of innovation and empower teachers have the potential to improve the quality of learning and students' academic achievements. From an academic and practical perspective, this study offers an implementation model for transformational and collaborative leadership that can serve as a reference for education policy

development, particularly in the Independent Learning and Driving Schools programs. However, this study has limitations as it only focuses on 15 schools in Bogor City and Regency, making it not fully representative of other regions. Additionally, external factors such as government policies, socio-economic conditions, and school culture can influence the effectiveness of strategic leadership. Therefore, further research is needed to explore these variables more deeply to enhance the sustainable quality of education.

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