Transformational Leadership Construction of High School Principals in Raja Ampat Regency: A Grounded-Theory Case Study in an Archipelagic Context

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ABSTRACT

This study describes and analyzes the construction of transformational leadership among high school (SMA) principals in Raja Ampat Regency and identifies determinant factors shaping that construction within an archipelagic and remote-area setting. The research employs a qualitative case study design and applies grounded-theory procedures to generate an empirically grounded leadership construction model. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, involving principals as main informants and teachers as supporting informants. Findings show that transformational leadership is constructed through eight interrelated dimensions manifested in daily leadership practices: (1) work direction, (2) communication of vision and mission, (3) trust building, (4) creativity development, (5) motivation provision, (6) role modeling, (7) optimism cultivation, and (8) instilling pride in the school. The construction of transformational leadership is influenced by two groups of determinant factors: internal factors (personal values, motivation, experience, competence, and self-reflection) and external factors (training, teacher support, professional interactions, educational policy, and the socio-cultural context of the archipelago). The study contributes a contextual leadership construction model relevant for remote and island-based education systems and offers implications for principal capacity development and policies to improve educational quality in geographically constrained regions.

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INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how leaders mobilize collective commitment, inspire change, and strengthen organizational performance. Burns (1978) positions transformational leadership as a process that elevates followers' motivations and values, while Bass (1985) extends the concept into organizational contexts by emphasizing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In education, these concepts have been widely used to explain how school principals shape teacher professionalism, school climate, organizational learning, and improvement trajectories especially in contexts where schools face limited resources and persistent environmental constraints.

Raja Ampat Regency presents an educational leadership context shaped by archipelagic geography, access barriers, and uneven resource distribution. In such a setting, leadership is not only a matter of applying universal leadership "styles," but also a process of constructing meaning and practices through lived experience, social interactions, and situational demands. This study is built on the premise that principal leadership can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, in which leadership practices emerge from an ongoing interplay between internal values and external context. The dissertation explicitly frames the inquiry in a constructivist orientation and uses grounded theory to produce a model that fits local conditions and needs.

Accordingly, the study addresses two main questions:
1) How is transformational leadership constructed by high school principals in Raja Ampat Regency?
2) What determinant factors (internal and external) underlie the construction of transformational leadership in this archipelagic context?

The key analytical contribution is not merely identifying whether transformational leadership exists, but describing *how* it is constructed, stabilized, and enacted in practice, as well as *why* certain dimensions become salient in a remote, socio-culturally diverse island environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Transformational Leadership in Educational Organizations

Transformational leadership research in education has expanded to incorporate contemporary challenges, including digital transformation, sustainability, and adaptive capacity. Avolio and Yammarino (2019) emphasize that transformational leadership continues to evolve, requiring deeper understanding of contextual influences and emergent leadership processes. Leadership scholarship in the 21st century also highlights theoretical diversification and the growing importance of context in explaining leadership effectiveness (Dinh et al., 2020).

In educational settings, transformational leadership has been associated with improved teacher motivation, school climate, and innovation especially when leaders communicate a compelling vision and build relational trust. Recent studies link transformational leadership with digital transformation in education, suggesting that effective school leaders facilitate not only pedagogical change but also

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technology-enabled organizational learning (Antonopoulou et al., 2021). This is highly relevant for remote areas where digital access, infrastructure, and capacity vary widely.

Constructivism and the Social Construction of Leadership

A constructivist perspective assumes that leadership realities are not fixed objects but are constructed through interaction, language, shared meanings, and reflective practice. In this study, leadership construction is treated as a gradual process through internalization of values, professional experience, and social interaction in the school environment. Such a stance aligns with qualitative inquiry that focuses on meaning-making and context-sensitive interpretation, rather than solely measuring leadership traits or outcomes.

Grounded Theory as a Model-Building Strategy

Grounded theory is widely used to generate conceptual categories and models that emerge from empirical data rather than being imposed from pre-existing theory alone. In education research, grounded theory is frequently used when the aim is to explain processes, patterns, and constructions particularly in under-researched contexts. The dissertation explicitly states grounded theory use (with references to Sugiyono and Creswell) to produce a model suited to local conditions.

Determinant Factors: Internal and External Conditions

Transformational leadership construction, particularly in remote education settings, is shaped by both internal factors (values, motivation, competence, reflection) and external factors (training systems, institutional support, policies, and socio-cultural environment). The dissertation specifies that institutional support includes three forms: school supervisors, the education office, and training institutions providing leadership materials.

These supports interact with the principal's personal characteristics to shape daily leadership practice and the stability of the leadership construction.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study approach, positioning principals as key informants and teachers as supporting informants. Data collection relied on three primary techniques: (1) in-depth interviews to capture subjective meanings and leadership narratives; (2) observation to identify patterns of practice and interaction; and (3) document analysis to confirm formal leadership artifacts (vision statements, school programs, meeting notes, supervision records). The analysis applied grounded-theory logic to identify categories, connect them into a conceptual structure, and produce a contextual model of transformational leadership construction. The analytic goal was to move beyond descriptive listing of leadership behaviors by identifying (a) core dimensions of leadership construction and (b) determinant factors that explain why those dimensions become central in Raja Ampat's archipelagic school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Construction of Transformational Leadership Is Multi-Dimensional

The study's core finding is that transformational leadership construction among high school principals in Raja Ampat is multi-dimensional. This multidimensionality indicates that principals do not operate with a single leadership "style," but construct leadership gradually through internalization of values, professional experience, and social interactions at school.

Eight Dimensions of Transformational Leadership Construction

The multi-dimensional construction consists of eight interrelated dimensions that appear consistently in principals' daily leadership practices.

1. Work Direction
   Principals provide clear work direction as a foundational leadership practice, ensuring that teachers and staff understand priorities, responsibilities, and expected standards. In remote and archipelagic contexts where coordination and resource distribution are challenging, clarity of direction becomes an efficiency mechanism: it reduces ambiguity, aligns efforts, and supports consistent implementation of school programs.

2. Communication of Vision and Mission
   Principals actively communicate school vision and mission to unify understanding and strengthen collective commitment. Vision communication functions as a cultural instrument, shaping shared meaning and anchoring daily work to longer-term school identity. In contexts where professional interaction networks may be limited by geography, internal communication becomes an especially important leadership channel.

3. Building Trust
   Trust building is constructed through consistent communication, fairness, transparency, and demonstrated reliability. The study identifies trust as an essential relational resource for archipelagic schools, where collaboration is necessary to overcome resource constraints and limited access to external support.

4. Developing Creativity
   Principals foster creativity among teachers and students, encouraging innovations in learning and school programs. This dimension reflects the need for adaptive solutions under constraints (limited facilities, geographical barriers), requiring principals to promote flexible thinking and problem-solving.

5. Providing Motivation
   Principals provide motivation to teachers and students to sustain effort and resilience. Motivation becomes particularly salient in remote settings where professional challenges can undermine morale; leadership motivation helps stabilize performance and maintain engagement with school improvement goals.

6. Role Modeling (Exemplary Leadership)
   Principals emphasize leadership by example, demonstrating discipline, commitment, and ethical behavior. Role modeling is critical in school leadership because it becomes a visible

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reference for professional norms. When institutional supervision is limited by geography, internal role modeling becomes even more influential as a day-to-day governance mechanism.

7. Cultivating Optimism

    Principals cultivate optimism to help school communities remain future-oriented despite constraints. Optimism supports psychological resilience, helping teachers and students perceive challenges as manageable and improvement as possible.

8. Instilling Pride in the School

    Principals instill pride in school identity and community membership. Pride functions as a social glue: it strengthens belonging, reduces withdrawal, and supports collective responsibility for school reputation and outcomes.

Collectively, these eight dimensions represent a leadership construction that integrates managerial clarity (direction), meaning-making (vision), relational capital (trust), innovation capacity (creativity), psychological reinforcement (motivation and optimism), moral legitimacy (role modeling), and identity-building (pride).

Determinant Factors Underlying Leadership Construction

The study identifies two groups of determinant factors shaping the construction of transformational leadership: internal factors and external factors.

Internal factors include personal values, motivation, professional experience, competence, and self-reflection. These internal factors explain why different principals may construct leadership differently even under similar environmental constraints: values shape priorities; motivation sustains effort; experience and competence shape problem-solving; reflection supports learning and leadership adaptation.

External factors include training, teacher support, professional interactions, education policies, and the archipelagic socio-cultural context. The study also clarifies that institutional support has three main forms school supervisors, the local education office, and training institutions (diklat) that provide leadership development materials. These supports contribute to leadership construction by shaping knowledge access, providing feedback, legitimizing practices, and enabling professional learning.

Propositions Derived From the Findings

As a grounded-theory output, the study formulates propositions: transformational leadership construction is multi-dimensional; it consists of eight dimensions; and it is determined by internal and external factors. These propositions position leadership construction as a process outcome shaped by both the principal's internal resources and the external support and cultural environment.

This study advances an understanding of transformational leadership not as a fixed trait set but as a constructed, context-shaped practice. The eight dimensions identified show a synthesis between classic transformational leadership expectations (vision, motivation, role modeling) and the practical demands of archipelagic school governance (work direction, trust building, optimism, pride, and creativity for adaptation). This synthesis is especially significant for remote regions where formal systems may be constrained by geography and where leadership practices must compensate for limited infrastructure and external supervision.

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Leadership as a Constructed Practice in Archipelagic Contexts

The finding that leadership construction is multi-dimensional supports the argument that principals draw from multiple leadership resources managerial, relational, cultural, and psychological to sustain school functioning and improvement. In Raja Ampat, where schools operate across islands and face structural constraints, a leadership model that is purely managerial would likely be insufficient; similarly, a model that is purely inspirational without operational direction would risk symbolic leadership without performance alignment. The eight-dimension model reflects the integration of both.

Internal–External Interaction: Why Support Systems Matter

The determinant factors highlight that leadership construction is not only "inside the leader." Institutional supports supervisors, education offices, and training institutions reinforce leadership learning and practice legitimacy. This is consistent with contemporary leadership development thinking: leaders learn through reflective practice and feedback, and formal professional systems shape which leadership practices become stable and replicable. In remote contexts, strengthening external supports may be one of the most efficient policy levers because it amplifies the principal's internal capacities.

Digital Transformation and Leadership Capacity

The dissertation's reference base includes work connecting transformational leadership to digital transformation in education (Antonopoulou et al., 2021) and broader leadership trends in the 21st century (Dinh et al., 2020). In archipelagic settings, digital capacity is often uneven; therefore, leadership that promotes creativity and optimism can help schools experiment with feasible technology use, while work direction and trust building can reduce resistance and confusion during change.

Implications for Principal Development and Policy

The study's own recommendations emphasize sustaining and developing transformational leadership construction through democratic and inspiring practice, and strengthening professional development programs that consider both cognitive (psychological) and socio-cultural dimensions. This suggests that principal training should not only teach leadership concepts but also support reflective competence and context-sensitive adaptation especially for remote areas with unique cultural and geographic conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that transformational leadership among high school principals in Raja Ampat Regency is best understood as a constructed and contextually shaped phenomenon rather than a single leadership style. Transformational leadership is constructed through a multi-dimensional set of practices that interact and manifest in the principal's daily leadership. The construction consists of eight dimensions: work direction, communication of vision and mission, trust building, creativity

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development, motivation provision, role modeling, optimism cultivation, and instilling pride in the school. These dimensions collectively represent a leadership structure that integrates operational governance with meaning-making, relational capital, psychological reinforcement, and identity-building an integration that is especially relevant in archipelagic and remote education systems.

The study also confirms that leadership construction is determined by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include personal values, motivation, experience, professional competence, and self-reflection, which together shape the principal's leadership orientation and capacity to adapt. External factors include training experiences, teacher support, professional interaction networks, education policies, and the socio-cultural environment of the archipelago. Institutional support plays a direct reinforcing role, particularly through school supervisors, the local education office, and training institutions that provide leadership development materials. From a practical perspective, the eight-dimension model provides a contextual framework for strengthening principal performance in remote areas. First, strengthening work direction and vision communication can improve organizational coherence in schools facing logistical constraints. Second, trust building and role modeling provide governance stability by shaping professional norms and sustaining collaboration. Third, creativity development and optimism cultivation support adaptive capacity, enabling schools to respond to limitations through innovation and resilience. Finally, instilling pride helps build identity-based commitment that is critical for sustaining collective effort in challenging environments.

Policy implications follow directly from the determinant factors: principal development programs should not only focus on technical training but also support reflective leadership capacity and the ability to read socio-cultural contexts. Consistent with the study's recommendations, professional development should integrate psychological and socio-cultural dimensions, ensuring that leadership construction is reinforced through continuous learning, mentoring, and institutional feedback. In summary, this study contributes a grounded, contextual model of transformational leadership construction that is relevant for archipelagic education systems. It offers a practical reference for improving principal capacity-building and a policy foundation for strengthening leadership systems to support educational quality improvement in remote and geographically constrained regions.

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