



The Role of Transformational Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance in the Implementation of Character-Based Learning in Elementary Schools: Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance in the implementation of character-based learning in Elementary Schools through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Optimal teacher performance is one of the key factors in the success of character education, and transformational leadership is believed to be able to create a supportive, visionary work climate, and motivate teachers to innovate and commit to character values. This study collected and analyzed 20 national journal articles published between 2015 and 2024, using databases such as Google Scholar. The results of the review indicate that transformational leadership, through the dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, is significantly positively correlated with improving teacher performance, especially in designing, implementing, and evaluating character learning. Thus, principals who apply a transformational leadership style can be an important catalyst in strengthening character education practices at the Elementary School level. This study recommends transformational leadership training for principals as part of a strategy to improve the quality of character education.



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INTRODUCTION

Basic education is an important foundation in forming the character of students who have integrity, are responsible, and have strong moral values. In the midst of the dynamics of social change and globalization, the need for education that is not only oriented towards cognitive aspects, but also towards character formation, is becoming increasingly urgent (Lickona, 1991). For that reason, the implementation of character-based learning in elementary schools is a relevant strategy in building a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally. Learning does not only depend

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on individual experience but is also influenced by social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) introduced by Vygotsky shows that learners can achieve higher understanding with the help of others, such as teachers or peers. Based on Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which mandates continuous improvement in the quality of education (Undang-Undang No 20, 2003). In this context, improving the quality of education is the main thing, especially in elementary schools which are the foundation in forming the character of students. Given the importance of this, improving teacher performance in elementary schools plays a very important role. In improving teacher performance, of course, it cannot be separated from the influence of the principal's leadership. So that effective principal leadership will have a significant impact on improving the quality of education in elementary schools. Government Regulation Number 4 of 2022 concerning Amendments to Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards (Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 04 Tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan, 2022). One of the contents of this regulation is the determination of Graduate Competency Standards at the elementary education level which emphasizes character building in accordance with Pancasila values. Therefore, character-based learning is very important to be implemented in elementary schools in order to achieve these graduate competencies. The role of teachers in character building in elementary schools is very important because teachers are role models for students.

The success of implementing character-based learning is highly dependent on the performance of teachers as the main implementers of learning activities. Teacher performance is the ability of a teacher to carry out an action in accordance with the objectives that have been set, which include aspects of planning the teaching and learning process, implementing the teaching and learning process, creating and maintaining optimal classes, controlling optimal learning conditions, and assessing learning outcomes (Widdy H.F, 2020). Low teacher performance can reduce the quality of education and hinder the achievement of a school's vision. Therefore, teacher performance must be managed well and maintained so that it does not decline. In fact, it should always be considered so that it continues to increase (Masrum, 2015). Teacher performance is the work results that can be achieved by teachers at school, in accordance with the authority and responsibility given to the school in an effort to achieve the vision, mission and goals of the school in question legally, without violating the law and in accordance with morals and ethics (Joel, 2022). From the various definitions above, it can be concluded that teacher performance is the main factor in determining the effectiveness of the learning process in schools. Teacher performance reflects how an educator carries out his duties and responsibilities in teaching, guiding, and evaluating the development of students. Increasing the capacity of human resources in the field of education can overcome solutions in facing obstacles to curriculum implementation including character-based learning (Putri, Muhimmah, Istiqfaroh, 2024).

Inspirational leadership has several values that are the basis for building and managing inclusive higher education. A proactive mindset in leadership is important for building inclusive institutions (Muhimmah et al., 2022). In the context of educational organizations, principal leadership is an important element that influences teacher performance. Transformational leadership style, which is characterized by the ability to inspire, motivate, and guide positive changes in the organization, has been proven to be able to increase the effectiveness of teacher work (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders are able to create a supportive work environment, empower teachers, and encourage innovation and commitment to a vision of character-based education (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The role of the Principal through the dimension of transformational

leadership in building a school culture can be demonstrated through several actions such as involving stakeholders in the preparation of the school's vision, mission and goals, socializing the draft vision, mission and goals of the school to all school personnel, providing motivation for the principal to his employees, delegating his authority to elected representatives as a form of the principal's trust in the abilities of his employees, and manifested through inspiring behavior that can be emulated by his employees, activities that hone creativity for teachers and students, involving teachers in training/workshops/trainings that can improve teacher professionalism (Nia Islamiah, 2020).

However, although there have been many studies discussing the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance, there is still a gap in the literature that specifically discusses the role of this leadership style in the context of implementing character-based learning in elementary schools. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a systematic review of the existing literature to explore in depth how the role of transformational leadership affects teacher performance in implementing character-based learning at the elementary school level.

Through this systematic literature review, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture of research trends, key findings, and practical and theoretical implications related to the topic can be obtained. The results of this study are also expected to be a reference for policy makers, school principals, and education practitioners in designing more effective leadership strategies to support character education in elementary schools.

METHOD

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant literature on the role of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance in implementing character-based learning in Elementary Schools. The review process is carried out systematically through several stages, namely: formulating research questions, determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, literature search, article selection, data extraction, and thematic analysis.

1. Research Questions

This study focuses on the question "How is the role of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance in character-based learning in elementary schools?".

2. Sources and Search Strategies

Data were obtained from the Google Scholar scientific database using the keywords "transformational leadership, teacher performance, and character-based learning" published between 2020 and 2024 in Indonesian.

3. Criteria

The criteria used are empirical research articles (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed). Focus on transformational leadership and teacher performance, the context of character education in elementary schools and published in accredited journals.

4. Data Selection and Analysis

From the initial search results, 14,200 articles were found. After going through a selection process based on abstracts and full texts and the application of criteria, 30 articles were selected for analysis. Data from each article was coded based on:

- a. Title, author name, and year of publication
- b. Abstract summary
- c. Main findings
- d. Measured outcomes

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on an analysis of 30 national scientific articles published between 2020 and 2024, it was found that transformational leadership plays a critical role in improving teacher performance, particularly in the implementation of character-based learning at the elementary school level. The findings of this review are categorized into three main themes:

1. The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Performance

Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and guide individuals toward positive change. In elementary schools, principals who apply transformational leadership are able to create an effective work environment, encourage innovation, and value teachers' contributions, which ultimately leads to improved teacher performance and school progress.

Bass and Riggio (2006) explain that transformational leaders exhibit four key dimensions:

- a. Idealized Influence (serving as a role model),
- b. Inspirational Motivation (providing inspiration),
- c. Intellectual Stimulation (encouraging creative thinking), and
- d. Individualized Consideration (showing personal concern).

These four dimensions are positively associated with increased work motivation and teaching quality. For example, Multazam (2017) demonstrated that principals who practice transformational leadership significantly enhance teacher attendance, lesson plan quality, and positive classroom interactions (Multazam, 2017). Teachers feel more appreciated and are encouraged to carry out their duties to the fullest.

2. Teacher Performance in Character-Based Learning

Character education requires teachers not only to deliver academic content but also to instill core values such as responsibility, discipline, honesty, and tolerance. Therefore, teacher competence and performance are key factors in the success of character education.

Rahardjo (2013) found that teachers working under transformational leadership exhibited higher performance in designing character-based learning strategies and were more consistent in integrating moral values throughout the teaching process (Rahardjo, 2013).

Furthermore, Mirawansya & Karwanto (2022) emphasized that principals who actively provide feedback and emotional support contribute significantly to enhancing teachers' ability to address the challenges of character education (Mirawansya & Karwanto, 2022).

3. The Relationship Between Leadership and Character Education

Transformational leadership affects not only individual teachers but also shapes the school's organizational culture to support the internalization of character values. Principals serve as change agents who guide all school members toward a shared vision of shaping student character.

Hallinger (2011) notes that principals play a strategic role in fostering a character-based school culture through policies, role modeling, and ongoing mentorship (Hallinger, 2011). This leadership support encourages teachers to feel a moral responsibility for student character formation. Additionally, Mulyasa (2013) explains that strong leadership acts as a cohesive force linking curriculum policy to the actual implementation of character education in classrooms (Mulyasa, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This review confirms that transformational leadership significantly enhances teacher performance, which directly strengthens character education in elementary schools. The relationship

between leadership and character-building is both strategic and mutually reinforcing, as transformational leaders help embed moral values into school culture. Therefore, principals must be equipped with transformational leadership skills to meet the demands of the National Curriculum.

To support this, professional development through training, mentoring, and peer collaboration is vital for school leaders. Teachers should respond by increasing their commitment and ability to integrate character values into teaching. Policymakers are encouraged to promote transformational leadership programs as part of national education reform. Future studies should explore the causal link between leadership and character education using broader and more empirical approaches.

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