



Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Improving Teacher Performance at Kindergarten Ypk Lahai Roi Mefkajim

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ABSTRACT

The leadership role of school principals holds a central position in the governance of Early Childhood Education (PAUD), especially in micro-scale education units in 3T areas which are marked by a record of limited resources. This study comprehensively examines how the actualization and articulation of the transformational leadership style of school principals is able to optimize the performance of educators at Kindergarten YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim, Framu Village, Ayamaru District, Maybrat Regency, Southwest Papua Province. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study framework. The data collection technique combines in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies by involving school principals, teachers, and the foundation as key informants. Furthermore, the data analysis process adopts the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (data reduction, data presentation, and verification/conclusion drawn), while the credibility of the data is verified through source triangulation, triangulation techniques, and *member checking*

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is the main foothold in shaping children's personality, thinking skills, and mental readiness before stepping into the elementary school level. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2025) Based on the results of the 2023 National Socio-Economic Survey, it is confirmed that the Gross Participation Rate (APK) at the PAUD level in Indonesia has only touched a percentage of 36.36%, much lower than the primary and secondary education levels. This condition is exacerbated by the downward trend in the number of PAUD teachers, which in 2024 will decrease by 5,805 people - the largest decrease compared to other levels of education (BPS, 2025). On the other hand, data from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education notes that more than 96% of teachers in Indonesia have met the minimum academic qualifications in the 2024/2025 school year, but this achievement is not evenly distributed, especially in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas such as parts of Papua and Southwest Papua.

This phenomenon emphasizes that the success of early childhood education is not solely determined by the availability of physical facilities, but is greatly influenced by the quality of the principal's leadership in managing and empowering his teachers. Theoretically, transformational leadership is characterized by ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention (Bass & Avolio, 1994) has been proven to be able to increase motivation, work commitment, and teacher performance at various levels of education (Lestari et al., 2025). However, the application of this leadership model to small-scale PAUD units in remote areas has not been widely revealed in depth.

TK-PAUD YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim is a private early childhood education institution located in Framu Village, Ayamaru District, Maybrat Regency, Southwest Papua Province. This school was established in 2018 under the auspices of the Christian Education Foundation (YPK) with accreditation status B, and faces the typical characteristics of PAUD institutions in the 3T area: limited number of educators, challenging distance and accessibility, limited learning support facilities, and dependence on the support of churches, parents, and local communities in the continuity of their operations.

In this condition of limited resources, the role of the principal becomes much more decisive than in schools with abundant resources. Some of the problems and challenges identified include: first, the lack of teachers makes school principals must be able to maximize the potential of each individual teacher personally; second, the limited training and access to professional development requires school principals to act as the main source of intellectual stimulation and inspiration for teachers; third, the cultural and religious context (Christian values) also shapes the way leadership is carried out and interpreted by the teachers in this school. This complexity is what makes it important to explore in depth how the transformational leadership of the principal really takes place and is interpreted in improving teacher performance in the specific context of the YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten.

(Zulkarnaen et al., 2020) confirming the positive and significant influence of school culture variables, transformational leadership styles, and work motivation on the performance optimization of educators at the vocational level. (Ilmi et al., 2025) indicates that the variables of transformational leadership and achievement motivation have been proven to have a real effect on strengthening pedagogic competence, as well as bringing positive implications for teacher performance optimization. (Efendi et al., 2023) shows that the effectiveness of transformational leadership through work commitment is able to improve teacher performance in the implementation of the Merdeka Learning curriculum. (Adestya et al., 2026) Each confirms the role of the principal in improving the professionalism and performance of teachers through work motivation and work climate. In the local context of Surabaya, (Nadhila et al., 2024) found that organizational culture and physical work environment affect teacher performance, while (Purwanti & Hikmah, 2026) shows the relationship between transformational leadership styles and employee performance through work engagement.

Although these studies make important contributions, a number of limitations are still found. First, the majority of previous studies used a quantitative approach on medium-scale schools in urban areas of Java, so that they have not captured the dynamics of leadership in small-scale educational units with very limited resources in the 3T area. Second, research at the PAUD level is still relatively small compared to the elementary, junior high, or vocational school levels, even though the leadership characteristics and performance of PAUD teachers have their own peculiarities. Third, quantitative approaches based on Likert scale questionnaires are less able to capture the meaning, cultural-religious context, and social processes behind transformational leadership practices that occur naturally in the field. Although (Gamaliel, 2024) has used a descriptive qualitative approach on adjacent topics, the research has not touched the context of small-scale PAUD units in the 3T area nor the cultural-religious contextual dimension that is the focus of this research, so that the position of this research remains different and complementary.

This research seeks to complement this gap by presenting new contributions in the form of: (1) an in-depth exploration of transformational leadership practices in small-scale early childhood education units in the Southwest Papua 3T region, a context that has not been widely researched; (2) a qualitative approach to case studies that allows for an authentic understanding of teachers' meanings and experiences, not just numerical measurements; and (3) the inclusion of local contextual dimensions – resource limitations, geographic location, and Christian religious values – as an integral part of teacher leadership and performance analysis. On this basis, this research is targeted to be able to make a real contribution to the development of education management science, especially related to transformational leadership in early childhood education institutions in isolated areas of Indonesia. Departing from this thought, the main focus of the research is oriented to dissect and comprehensively formulate how the implementation of the transformational

leadership style of school principals in encouraging the performance of teaching staff at YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership model that is oriented towards driving the positive transformation of subordinates by optimizing four essential dimensions that include ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention. (Bass & Avolio, 1994). (Kanden et al., 2025) He also argues that transformational leadership is able to lead followers to dedicate their commitment above individual interests to achieve the organization's collective goals, which in turn provides a significant excess of team motivation and productivity. When applied in the educational environment, the transformational leadership of school principals is empirically tested to be able to optimize the motivation, professional competence, and work effectiveness of educators through empowerment schemes and the provision of a mutually supportive work ecosystem (Riyadi, 2025). In this study, the concept of transformational leadership is explored through the following four dimensions (Bakhtar, 2026).

- a. Ideal Influence/Charisma. Referring to the ability of the principal to be a role model who is respected and trusted by teachers. The indicators explored include: consistency between speech and action, moral and professional examples, and teachers' trust in the vision brought by the principal (Gamaliel, 2024).
- b. Inspirational Motivation. Referring to the ability of the principal to communicate a clear vision and arouse the work spirit of teachers. The indicators explored include: convincing delivery of school vision/goals, encouragement of optimism in the midst of limited resources, and strengthening the meaning of teachers' work as part of the education mission (Efendi et al., 2023).
- c. Intellectual Stimulation. Referring to the efforts of the principal to encourage teachers to think creatively and innovatively in managing learning. The indicators explored include: encouragement to try new learning methods, openness to teachers' ideas and inputs, and facilitation of teachers' self-development despite limited access to formal training (Hafitriani, 2021).
- d. Individual Attention. Referring to the principal's attention to the needs, potentials, and conditions of each teacher personally. The indicators explored include: personal/mentoring approach, sensitivity to the condition and welfare of teachers, and the provision of responsibility according to individual potential (Nadhila et al., 2024).

Teacher Performance

Teacher performance is basically a form of the work achievements of educators in carrying out their educational and teaching roles, which is reflected through the mastery of pedagogic competencies, personality, social relations, and professional abilities (Sari et al., 2026). Teacher performance indicators explored in this study include: the quality of learning planning, the

implementation of a creative and fun learning process according to the characteristics of early childhood, the ability to evaluate child development, as well as the attitude of responsibility and social relations of teachers with fellow educators, parents, and the surrounding community (Hartina et al., 2024).

Early Childhood Institutions in the 3T Region

Early childhood education units in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas have distinctive characteristics in the form of limited numbers and qualifications of educators, lack of access to training, and dependence on community support and religious institutions (BPS, 2025). This context is a contextual factor that is important to understand in examining leadership practices and teacher performance, because effective leadership strategies in schools with abundant resources are not necessarily relevant to be applied in the context of limitations such as kindergarten YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim (Siskawati et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Approaches and Types of Research

Methodologically, this study implements a qualitative method with a descriptive framework through a case study research strategy. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in depth how transformational leadership of school principals is carried out and interpreted in improving teacher performance in a specific early childhood education institution, with researchers playing the role of the main instrument (Sugiyono, 2019).

Research Location and Time

The research was conducted at YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten, Framu Village, Ayamaru District, Maybrat Regency, Southwest Papua Province. The selection of the location was based on the characteristics of the school representing small-scale PAUD institutions in the 3T region with typical resource challenges. The time allocation for the implementation of this research is estimated to take about two to three months. The duration includes a series of processes starting from the preparation phase, the stages of data collection in the field, data processing, to the work on the final report.

Research Subject/Informant

The selection of informants in this study applies *the purposive sampling technique*, where the subject is determined based on specific criteria that are in line with the research objectives. Given the small scale of the school, all teachers who met the criteria were involved as informants (not statistical samples). The Principal of YPK Kindergarten-Early Childhood School, Lahai Roi Mefkajim, as a key informant regarding the leadership practices carried out. All teachers of Kindergarten YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim who are active in teaching, as the main informants about the experience of receiving the principal's leadership and teaching performance. Representatives of the management of the Christian

Education Foundation (YPK) and/or school committees (if necessary), as supporting informants (triangulation) to complete and confirm the data.

Data Source

The acquisition of primary data relied on comprehensive interviews and field observations involving school principals and educators. The secondary data is extracted from the school's internal documentation (profile, vision-mission, and Dapodik database), supported by national and international scientific literature, as well as official regulatory publications from early childhood education support institutions.

Data Collection Techniques

1. In-depth Interview

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with principals and teachers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings of transformational leadership practices as well as their relationship to daily teaching performance.

2. Participatory Observation

The researcher directly observed the interaction of principals with teachers in daily activities at school, including meetings, coaching, and learning processes, to see leadership practices in a naturalistic setting.

3. Documentation Studies

The researcher examined supporting documents such as school profiles, principal's work programs, supervision records, and documentation of school activities to enrich and confirm interview and observation data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis using interactive models (Miles et al., 2014) in journals (Khafifah et al., 2026) The data analysis procedure includes three continuous stages. The first stage is data reduction that focuses on sorting and simplifying information from interviews, observations, and document studies based on transformational leadership topics and teacher performance. The next stage is the presentation of data formulated in the form of descriptive narrative descriptions and thematic matrix tables in order to emphasize the pattern of conceptual relationships. In closing, conclusions were drawn and verified to explore the essence of the findings and test their validity again through confirmation to the field if necessary.

RESEARCH RESULT

The results of the research conducted at the YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten confirmed that the four dimensions of transformational leadership are reflected in the principal's daily actions towards the principal's strategic decisions. This section dissects the form of embodiment of each of these dimensions in the midst of various real obstacles experienced by the school. As an early childhood education institution, TK-PAUD YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim strives to provide quality education by applying innovative, creative,

and fun learning methods. This approach is designed to support the character formation and moral, social, and emotional development of students, while strengthening the mastery of basic skills as a foundation for their future education.

Table 1. Transformational Leadership Dimension Analysis

Transformational Leadership Dimension	Implementation of Principal Leadership	Impact on Teacher Performance	Discussion
Ideal Influence/Charisma	The principal's consistency in directing the program according to the school's vision and mission and providing an example in the application of discipline and responsibility.	Teachers' understanding of the direction of school policies is getting stronger so that the improvement of the quality of education continues to develop.	The principal strengthens the trust of teachers and builds a joint commitment in realizing educational goals.
Inspirational Motivation	Fostering teachers' work spirit through the delivery of school vision, participatory communication, and encouragement to implement creative and innovative learning.	Encourage more active teacher involvement in the implementation of school programs and create a collaborative work atmosphere.	School principals are the driving force for the formation of teachers' motivation and commitment in improving the quality of learning.
intellectual stimulus	Facilitating teacher competency development by encouraging innovation, conveying ideas, and supporting the implementation of creative learning strategies.	Designing learning and developing learning media has improved.	Support for creativity and innovation strengthens teachers' professional capacity in organizing more effective learning.
Individual Attention	Building harmonious working relationships with teachers' needs, strengthening partnerships with parents and the community, and creating a supportive work environment.	Increase comfort at work, strengthen relationships, and strengthen teachers' loyalty and responsibility to the school.	Individual attention creates a conducive work climate and contributes to the continuous improvement of teacher performance.

Source: Researcher-processed data (2026)

DISCUSSION

Ideal Influence

The ideal influence is evident in the principal's efforts to align the school program with the vision and mission, foster a disciplined work culture, and demonstrate commitment to the educational process (Selvi et al., 2024). This clarity of purpose helps teachers understand the goals they want to achieve. They not only focus on completing administrative tasks related to teaching and learning activities, but also on realizing the school's vision as a whole. In such an environment, teachers remain united in carrying out their professional duties.

The principal shows leadership both through personal actions and the exercise of structural authority. The provision of concrete examples increases teachers' trust in the leadership of the principal. This fosters a work culture that is oriented towards improving the quality of education and enforcing discipline. When principals set a good example, educators tend to show greater loyalty and commitment to their professional duties.

The success of implementing the ideal dimension of influence depends not only on how the principal formulates the school's vision, but also on how that vision is integrated into the organization's culture. Thus, transformational leadership in this context also creates a work environment that encourages teachers to continuously develop their professional competencies.

Inspirational Motivation

The principal seeks to increase teacher motivation by clearly communicating the direction and vision of the school, providing support to ensure an active, creative, innovative, and fun learning process, and building open communication during the implementation of all school programs. This approach has resulted in increased teacher motivation, greater involvement in various school activities, and the formation of a collaborative work culture.

Inspirational motivation is a key dimension in transformational leadership that emphasizes the leader's ability to move organizational members by instilling optimism, enthusiasm, and commitment to a common goal (Nuryana & Nugraha, 2025). At YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten, the principal's ability to communicate the vision effectively plays a role in harmonizing teachers' understanding of the direction of institutional development. This alignment fosters a higher morale while strengthening teachers' commitment and sense of belonging to the school, thereby encouraging them to provide the best teaching performance.

The motivation built by the principal is not something that happens by chance, but is applied as part of the school management policy that aims to improve the quality of learning. Inspirational motivation is a crucial element in forming a productive organizational culture, strengthening teachers' professional commitments, and maintaining improved teacher performance.

Intellectual Stimulus

Increasing the intellectual capacity of teachers by encouraging innovation in teaching methods, providing opportunities for teachers to share new ideas, and supporting the development of professional competencies is one of the efforts of the principal. Through these efforts, teachers become more creative in designing lesson plans and choosing teaching approaches that are more appropriate for their students.

The responsibilities of a principal are not only in the context of administrative management; They act as professional mentors, giving teachers the opportunity to experiment with new teaching strategies. An environment that allows individuals to explore a variety of teaching options reflects the application of the intellectual stimulation dimension to the characteristics of transformational leadership that focuses on developing constructive problem-solving skills, creativity, and critical thinking abilities.

The application of intellectual stimulation in early childhood education institutions is very important because the quality of learning depends on the ability of teachers to create learning experiences that meet children's developmental needs and interest them (Fitriani, 2025). The support of school principals is needed in developing learning innovations that help improve teacher performance while strengthening the values of early childhood education.

Individual Attention

Concern for teachers' needs through effective communication, increased cooperation with parents and the community, and the creation of a work environment that supports the implementation of duties have been carried out by school principals. These efforts help teachers feel more comfortable at work, build better relationships in the school environment, and foster professional responsibility in completing developmental tasks.

A leader's ability to consider each individual's needs, potentials, and challenges is known as individual concern in transformational leadership (Lamirin et al., 2023). The findings of the study show that this dimension can be applied through interaction between principals and teachers. This step also strengthens the synergy between schools, parents, and local residents as an educational ecosystem that supports each other.

A work environment supported by a positive social and professional atmosphere makes it possible for teachers to carry out their duties more effectively. School principals who pay special attention to this not only strengthen relationships with teachers, but also build an organizational culture that supports teacher development and improves educational services.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been described, it can be concluded that the transformational leadership of the principal at the YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim Kindergarten plays a significant role in improving teacher performance, even though this school operates in limited resources that are characteristic of PAUD units in the 3T area. The four dimensions of transformational leadership are actualized in a complementary manner and do not stand alone. The ideal influence is manifested through the consistency of the principal between speech and action in upholding vision, discipline, and responsibility, thereby fostering the trust and loyalty of teachers. Inspirational motivation can be seen from the ability of the principal to communicate the school's vision convincingly in the midst of limitations, which arouses the spirit of work and the teacher's sense of belonging to the institution. Intellectual stimulation is manifested through the encouragement for teachers to innovate and experiment with new learning methods, despite limited access to formal training. The individual attention is reflected in the principal's personal approach to the needs and welfare of each teacher, which strengthens work comfort and collegial relationships.

This finding confirms that in small-scale PAUD units in the 3T area, limited resources are not an absolute obstacle to leadership effectiveness, but rather encourage school principals to optimize a personal, collaborative, and religious values-based approach in leading. Transformational leadership that is carried out in a contextual manner - taking into account geographical limitations, resources, and Christian cultural-religious background - has proven to be a driving force for improving teacher performance as well as the sustainability of the quality of early childhood education in remote areas. Thus, this study answers the initial objective of describing and interpreting in depth the transformational leadership practices of school principals in improving teacher performance in the specific context of KINDERGARTEN YPK Lahai Roi Mefkajim, as well as complementing the gap in educational leadership studies in small-scale PAUD units in the 3T Indonesia region.

Suggestions

Relying on the empirical findings in this study, several strategic implications and recommendations are proposed. First, addressed to school principals and administrators of the Christian Education Foundation (YPK), transformational leadership practices that have been running well are recommended to be formalized in the form of a more structured teacher coaching and mentoring program, so that its sustainability does not depend solely on the individual principal who is currently in office. Second, for the Education Office and education policy makers in Maybrat Regency and Southwest Papua Province, special attention is needed in the form of leadership training and professional development support for school principals and PAUD teachers in the 3T area, considering the limited access faced so far. Finally, for future researchers, it is recommended to escalate this research through a multi-site approach in a number of other 3T regional PAUD units, or apply *mixed*

methods that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis, in order to test the comparability and continuity of findings in a broader context.

Research Limitations

The results of this research need to be examined by considering several existing limitations. First, because the study only focuses on one PAUD institution (*single case study*), these findings are not intended for statistical generalization, but rather emphasize the depth of contextual understanding (*analytical generalization*). Second, the geographical location of Framu Village, which is quite difficult to reach, presents its own challenges to the duration and depth of observation at the location. Third, the findings rely heavily on perceptions and interpretations from informants, so that the element of subjectivity still has the potential, even though the impact has been suppressed through data triangulation and *member checking strategies*. The existence of these various limitations provides an opportunity for future studies to explore educational leadership in the Indonesian 3T region more comprehensively.

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