

Principal's Transformational Leadership for Strengthening Religious Values at SD Negeri Banyuraden Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leadership has attracted various attention as one of the appropriate leadership styles applied by school principals to improve religious values as proven from previous studies on the transformational leadership paradigm of school principals at the Senior High School (SMA) level. Therefore, further research on the application of these principles at the primary education level is essential. The current research aims to investigate the application of transformational leadership at the elementary school (SD) level to strengthen religious values. The research was carried out at SDN Banyuraden, Gamping, Sleman, Yogyakarta for two months, from October to December 2023, using a descriptive qualitative approach with two subjects consisting of the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher. The instruments used were interview transcripts and documentation instruments which were prepared based on leadership, transformational and religious value variables. Data analysis was carried out in three stages: 1) data reduction, 2) data presentation and 3) drawing conclusions. Based on the results found in this research, leadership practices at SDN Banyuraden show a strong commitment to implementing transformational leadership principles to build a school environment based on religious values. The Principal of SDN Banyuraden provides an example and conveys religious messages to students and school staff. The consistency and commitment shown by the principal is an important step towards the vision of a more religious school with a commitment to religious values. However, challenges in growing student morale and efforts to expand innovation in education remain the focus of improvement. In conclusion, this article highlights the importance of implementing transformational leadership in strengthening religious aspects in the educational environment. However, achieving optimal results will require significant effort and unwavering support from all individuals involved in the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of modern education, the role of leadership within the educational environment has risen to prominence as a decisive and pivotal factor, leadership within the educational environment has emerged as a pivotal factor driving substantial transformation within the realm of modern education, as highlighted by González-Falcón et al. (2020) The profound impact of the principal's role in enhancing school quality cannot be denied, as it exerts a significant and far-reaching influence on the overall progress and advancement of educational levels. This assertion is underscored by the insightful observations made by Kurniawati et al. (2020), who have extensively noted and elaborated upon the multifaceted ways in which the principal's involvement and leadership contribute to the qualitative improvement of educational institutions.

In examining the nuanced dimensions of the principal's impact, Kurniawati et al. (2020) provide compelling evidence supporting the notion that effective leadership at the helm of a school is pivotal in fostering a conducive environment for academic excellence and the holistic development of students. The robust influence of a school principal in various aspects of school leadership and management directly correlates with the enhancement of education quality. Consequently, it can be inferred that the active and influential engagement of school principals in leadership and management plays a crucial role in advancing education comprehensively. Beyond mere academic improvements, their contributions extend to fostering a conducive school environment, thereby creating a holistic framework that nurtures not only academic excellence but also the overall well-being of students and the educational community. In essence, the multifaceted impact of effective leadership, as exemplified by proactive school principals, ripples through the educational landscape, positively shaping the educational experience for all stakeholders involved.

The incorporation of humanistic and inspiring elements stands as pivotal focal points that warrant earnest consideration when endeavoring to establish a robust and comprehensive school environment (Effendi, 2020). Acknowledging the presence of a spiritual dimension within the educational setting holds significant recognition for its paramount role in molding the character and identity of the school. Effendi (2020) underscores the critical importance of acknowledging the inherent strength encapsulated in religious values, positioning them as the primary bedrock for character formation. As expounded by Ilmi & Sholeh (2021), the school principal assumes a central and indispensable role in cultivating a religious culture within the school environment. This responsibility extends beyond merely imparting a consistent understanding of religious values; it encompasses the deep integration of these ideals into every facet of the lives of individuals within the school community.

The role of leadership in schools is vital in shaping students' character and moral values, which aims to build a school environment that upholds religious principles. Implementing transformational leadership is an approach that has proven effective in strengthening and enriching religious values in schools (Malla et al., 2020). Transformational leadership positively

and significantly influences organizational learning (Waruwu et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is an appropriate approach used in leadership to build spiritual values by enabling the development of an inspirational vision, driving solid motivation and building meaningful relationships between leaders and followers (Smith et al., 2018). The transformational leadership style is known to stimulate fundamental change in educational organizations.

Within the current context, the significance of evaluating the application and appropriateness of transformational leadership in reinforcing religious values within schools cannot be overstated. Previous research, such as the study conducted by Malla, Yusuf, Sapsuha & Misnah (2022), has delved into the examination of the transformational leadership paradigm among school principals specifically at the Senior High School (SMA) level. However, it is noteworthy that the application of transformational principles has yet to be systematically evaluated at the elementary school level. Recognizing this gap in the existing literature, the present research seeks to address and extend the understanding of these principles by shifting the focus to the realm of primary education.

An illustrative instance of an elementary school in Indonesia that has adeptly implemented a transformative leadership style is Banyuraden State Elementary School. In a preliminary investigation, it was discerned that the school principal spearheaded a specialized program aimed at fortifying religious values within the institution, employing a motivational and inspirational approach emblematic of transformational leadership. This innovative strategy yielded tangible results, as evidenced by SDN Banyuraden's heightened achievements, including triumphs in the MTQ Competition at the sub-district level. Additionally, there was a noteworthy surge in the percentage of SDN Banyuraden graduates proficient in performing prayers, escalating from 25% to an impressive 95%. Acknowledging these promising outcomes, it becomes evident that a more in-depth and comprehensive research endeavor is imperative. Such research should involve extensive observations to delve into the nuanced application and integration of religious values within the broader school community at SDN Banyuraden, offering a thorough exploration of the transformative leadership's impact on various facets of the educational environment.

METHOD

The current research was conducted at SDN Banyuraden which is located in Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta and lasted for two months, from October to December 2023. The research was conducted based on descriptive research methods with a qualitative approach. This research uses interview and documentation techniques to collect data. To get in-depth information, the subjects involved are school principals and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Apart from that, data documentation of photos of relevant school activities is also taken as part of the data source. The current research was carried out in several analytical steps to gain a comprehensive

understanding of the context and religious values applied in the Banyuraden Elementary School educational environment. Data triangulation tests were carried out to ensure the validity of the data obtained. There are two steps of credibility testing involved: source triangulation and technical triangulation. After data validation, data analysis is processed in three stages of analysis techniques: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformational leadership theory

James Macgregor Burns, an important figure in the evolution of transformational leadership, articulated his ideas in the book "Leadership". Through an analysis of the work, Burns (1979) highlights several key points in transformational leadership. The first theory underscores the importance of leaders, who will sometimes put aside their personal interests for the greater good, moral values, or a compelling vision of the future. Key points emphasize the role of leaders in driving goals that transcend their personal interests. Second, transformational leaders can motivate those under their guidance to reach their maximum potential, urging them to complete current tasks and innovate and instigate substantial change. This can increase follower satisfaction, effort and performance (Abdullah et al., 2018; Munir & Aboidullah, 2018). The final key point states that authentic transformational leadership engages all stakeholders in the organization's collective growth and holistic progress. Specifically, this point emphasizes the leader's responsibility to foster strong interpersonal relationships in the workplace (R The final point addresses factors in transformational leadership that support subordinate motivation, including charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

Apart from James Goerge Burns, Bernard M. Bass is a modern figure in transformational leadership theory, summarizing his ideas in "Transformational Leadership". Bass and Riggio's (2005) analysis and work reveal several important points in this domain. First, Bass underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation and positive evolution of followers as critical components in transformational leadership. Several studies support the approach not only has a positive impact on empowerment in the workplace but also increases individual job satisfaction and significantly improves overall individual, team and organizational performance (Boamah et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2022). The second point highlights that transformational leaders actively encourage the growth of their followers into future leaders by thoughtfully addressing individual needs, delegating power, and aligning personal goals with broader organizational goals. The following key points state that the essence of transformational leadership lies in inspiring and cultivating a shared vision among followers to achieve organizational or unitary goals. The transformational leadership style motivates and involves subordinates to actively take part in achieving imagined goals, encouraging them to exceed standard performance expectations (Andriani et al., 2018).

Finally, Bass identified four fundamental dimensions of transformational leadership, often referred to as the "4Is", consisting of Ideal Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. These dimensions collectively shape and foster effective leadership dynamics, as proven by previous studies by Normianti et al. (2019).

Banyuraden Elementary School Principal Leadership Strategy

The principal has acknowledged that, academically, Banyuraden Elementary School students have not achieved the expected level of excellence. Therefore, efforts to strengthen their potential are very necessary. The aspect that is the focus of attention is learning about religion and good morals, and by emphasizing these aspects in the curriculum and learning approach, students are expected to have a better understanding and practice positive religious and moral values, as conveyed by the school principal as follows:

"Our school is in a rural area, so we admit it is still lacking academically. However, we try to highlight the potential of other students and for branding by focusing more on morals, especially religion, because it covers everything from behavior, worship and so on."

To realize this target, the principal revealed two key strategies used to achieve the target of religiosity at school. The school principal actively promotes worship, such as congregational duha and dhuhr prayers, and routinely plays short surahs, asmaul husna, and murotal every morning before learning begins as the first strategy. His statement was quoted as saying, "First, we invite the entire school community to worship together. To be precise, yes, it is an obligatory prayer, such as the midday, sunnah and duha prayers. We play the short letters murotal and asmaul husna early in the morning so that the students can improve their memory."

Apart from that, school principals and teachers try to create celebration programs for every religious holiday to create an atmosphere that prioritizes religious values. As the principal said, "Later in preparing the program, we will not forget to think about religious programs, ma'am. Such as celebrating Islamic holidays and Ramadan." The principal receives support from fellow teachers, especially PAI teachers, to achieve this target. Quoted from the statement, "So far the teachers have been quite helpful, especially PAI teachers who are responsible for every religious event. Meanwhile other teachers remind students to contribute to meetings." The principal said that it was necessary to set an example and convey religious messages gently and patiently to students and school staff by increasing target achievement. As stated by the principal below:

"We as leaders have to set an example first, ma'am. We can't just make the program continue as a mere discussion without implementing it too. For example, when praying Duha or Dhuhr in congregation, I will start the prayer and invite the children. I also think that I "try to set an example of positive behavior, ma'am, so that all school members can emulate. However, this behavior also needs to be used to, ma'am. This can be very challenging at first,

but over time, it can become easier."

All of these strategies show strong commitment and efforts to create a school based on religiosity. The reason for choosing this strategy was because the principal highlighted the importance of habituation in achieving a school based on religiosity. The principal said that the first step is getting used to achieving this target, especially in daily worship. Apart from that, the principal also emphasized the importance of setting an example as the best way to influence children, teachers and school staff. The principal believes that by providing an excellent and consistent example, all school members can apply and adopt religious values more effectively. Thus, habituation and example are very important in realizing a religious school's commitment to religious values.

The principal sees positive developments in efforts to increase religiosity at SDN Banyuraden. According to the Principal, these changes are extraordinary, especially regarding the habits of congregational prayer and duha which more and more students are doing. Regarding memorization, the order in children's prayers also improved. Previously, prayers were often irregular and shifted to more regular ones, with students memorizing short surahs more quickly. As the following statement shows:

"During this time, Alhamdulillah, I think there have been many changes. Initially, the children were tough when it came time to pray in congregation. Students don't need to be told anymore because they are self-aware when entering prayer time. In the early days, they were also told when they prayed "loudly or jokingly while praying. They were just children who previously joked around, but now they have become more orderly and serious in praying. Apart from that, PAI teachers also report that students' memorization of short surahs now, Alhamdulillah, has increased significantly".

However, the principal recognizes that challenges still need to be overcome, especially when cultivating student morale regarding behavior. He stated, "But we still need to work hard on the behavior of children who may often fight, behave rudely, make fun of their friends, be impolite and so on". The principal emphasized the importance of building better student morale and that efforts to achieve this goal are ongoing at SDN Banyuraden. As he stated, "the development of moral behavior is significant. Students must be moral and provide exemplary behavior regardless of their religious beliefs." Thus, the school continues to strive to improve the spiritual and moral aspects of students as part of their journey towards a more religious school.

Transformational Leadership at SDN Banyuraden

Based on the results of field studies at SDN Banyuraden, there is a close relationship between transformational leadership theory and the principal's leadership practices in achieving school religiosity goals. Transformational leadership theory, introduced by Burns and Bass, highlights several key aspects that are also reflected in leadership practices in schools.

First, the concepts of altruism and self-sacrifice which are important points in transformational leadership theory are consistently reflected in the practice of the principal at

SDN Banyuraden. Principals there demonstrate a strong commitment to creating an educational environment rooted in religious, ethical and moral values. As Burns (1997) points out, transformational leaders often emphasize the importance of the common good and have a strong moral vision. This understanding is reflected in various active efforts made by the school principal, such as promoting the practice of worship, including congregational prayers and reading short surahs, as well as carrying out murotal every morning before the learning process begins. These steps not only have an impact on strengthening the spiritual dimension in the school environment, but also build a collective sense of attachment to religious values which is the main foundation in forming positive character and behavior among members of the school community. Through this initiative, the school principal not only becomes a driver of spirituality, but also acts as a consistent example in encouraging the application of religious values into everyday life in the educational environment. Thus, the role of the school principal in forming a religious school environment that is full of moral values is very important in shaping the character of students and bringing a positive impact to the entire world of education.

Secondly, the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass & Riggio (2005) and the higher-level need activation theory by Burns (1979) underscore the significance of intrinsic motivation and the potential development of followers. Evidently, the leadership practices at SDN Banyuraden echo these principles, as the principal dedicates efforts to serve as an exemplary figure, patiently conveying religious messages to both students and staff. In this context, the principal actively supports followers (students and teachers) in their spiritual and moral development, aiming for an enhancement in overall performance (Boamah et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2022). Beyond this, there is an explicit focus on fostering innovation and instigating meaningful change (Abdullah et al., 2018; Munir & Aboidullah, 2018; More et al., 2020). Furthermore, Bass & Riggio (2005) stress the importance of inspiring and cultivating a shared vision, a principle consistently upheld at SDN Banyuraden. The principal consistently reinforces the importance of leading a life rooted in religiosity and encourages active participation in religious holiday celebrations. This concerted effort is aimed at fostering a shared vision regarding the significance of a religiously infused school environment, aligning with the principles laid out in transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2005).

However, when delving into the comparative analysis between field practice and the foundational tenets of transformational leadership theory, a multitude of significant distinctions comes to the forefront. An illustrative instance is discerned within the framework of transformational leadership theory, where Intellectual Stimulation is posited as a pivotal component (Bass & Riggio, 2005). This component mandates leaders to actively champion innovation and creativity as integral facets contributing to the attainment of transformative success. Nevertheless, it is imperative to underscore that the findings derived from meticulous field observations have yet to comprehensively shed light on the pervasive utilization of

innovation within learning contexts or the adoption of creative strategies that could substantially exert a significant influence on augmenting the quality of education.

Moreover, despite the emphasis laid by transformational leadership theory on individual development and the responsiveness to followers' needs (Burns, 1979), there persist challenges in the cultivation of student morality, a focal point that remains paramount at SDN Banyuraden. While noteworthy strides have been made in several aspects, it remains evident that certain needs necessitate further attention, particularly in the holistic enhancement of students' character and morality. Therefore, an imperative arises for a heightened emphasis on initiatives that not only embrace the comprehensive development of students' character and ethics but also seamlessly integrate robust religious values and morality within the educational milieu. In this context, the study by Bass and Riggio (2005) and the insights derived from field observations collectively underscore the importance of aligning theoretical constructs with on-the-ground realities to shape more nuanced and effective educational strategies.

CONCLUSION

The leadership practices at SDN Banyuraden manifest a strong resonance with transformational leadership theory, particularly evident in the conscientious efforts to foster an educational environment steeped in spirituality and religious values. The school principal actively champions the integration of daily religious customs, such as orchestrating congregational prayers and encouraging the recitation of short surahs, while also promoting the observance of religious holidays. These initiatives yield positive outcomes, fostering heightened levels of worship obedience and enhancing students' ability to memorize surahs. However, observed disparities between field practices and transformational leadership theory include a limited integration of innovation in the educational process and persistent challenges in fully cultivating student morality at SDN Banyuraden. While transformational leadership theory underscores the importance of innovation and responsiveness to followers' needs, the practical implementation in the field necessitates intensified efforts. Nevertheless, the overall leadership practices at SDN Banyuraden underscore an unwavering commitment to applying the foundational principles of transformational leadership, shaping an educational environment firmly grounded in religious values. Despite the existing differences and ongoing challenges, the persistent dedication and commitment displayed by school principals reflect noteworthy strides toward establishing a school deeply rooted in religious and spiritual principles. This comprehensive approach aligns with the broader objective of nurturing a learning environment that not only imparts knowledge but also instills moral values and spirituality in students, thereby cultivating a more enriched and purposeful educational experience.

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