

The Role of Educational Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Performance and Learning Quality in the Digital Era

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Abstract :

his study examines the role of educational leadership in enhancing teacher performance, educational staff professionalism, and the quality of learning in the digital era. The discussion focuses on two leadership models – transformational leadership and adaptive leadership – which are considered the most relevant approaches for addressing the demands of change in modern educational management. This study employs a qualitative literature review by analyzing various scholarly sources related to educational leadership, educational management, and the advancement of digital learning technologies. The findings reveal that transformational leadership plays a significant role in inspiring teachers, strengthening motivation, fostering innovation, and promoting continuous professional development. Meanwhile, adaptive leadership enables school leaders to understand complex organizational changes, distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, and empower teachers to respond independently and effectively to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the digital transformation of education. The integration of these two leadership models has proven effective in fostering a collaborative school culture that embraces change and continuously improves learning quality. Therefore, effective educational leadership serves as a fundamental pillar in enabling schools to successfully navigate educational transformation in the digital era.

Keywords: Educational Leadership; Principal Leadership; Transformational Leadership; Adaptive Leadership; Teacher Performance; Learning Quality; Digital Era

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental foundation for the development of a progressive society. However, the success of an educational system is determined not only by curriculum design or the availability of educational facilities but also by the quality of leadership within educational institutions. Educational leaders play a crucial role in shaping school culture, establishing a clear vision for learning, and influencing the professional development of teachers as well as students' academic growth.

Beyond performing administrative responsibilities, educational leaders act as agents of change who foster innovation, inspire educational stakeholders,

and guide the continuous improvement of school performance. They are also responsible for creating inclusive learning environments, supporting students' holistic development, and encouraging the professional growth of teachers. According to **Article 31, Paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia**, every citizen has the constitutional right to receive education.

Consequently, the government is responsible for administering a national education system aimed at strengthening faith, knowledge, piety, and noble character as part of the broader effort to educate the nation (Minuchin, 2003). Within the dynamic environment of schools, leadership occupies a strategic position in directing organizational development, mobilizing human resources, and cultivating a healthy organizational culture. Educational leaders are key figures who ensure that learning environments operate effectively, teachers receive adequate professional support, and students experience meaningful learning opportunities.

In today's digital era, however, the responsibilities of school leaders have become increasingly complex due to rapid technological advancements, changing student learning behaviors, and evolving societal expectations. These conditions require school leaders to adopt leadership approaches that are responsive to continuous change.

Among the various leadership models, **transformational leadership** and **adaptive leadership** have emerged as particularly relevant frameworks for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and motivating teachers, encouraging innovation, and promoting continuous professional development. Adaptive leadership, on the other hand, equips school leaders with the ability to interpret complex organizational dynamics, distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, and mobilize educational staff to respond effectively to emerging educational demands. Rather than merely managing administrative affairs, school leaders are expected to inspire educational communities, anticipate changing circumstances, and create opportunities for teachers to continuously develop their competencies.

Consequently, educational leadership directly influences the effectiveness of leadership practices implemented within schools, ultimately determining teachers' readiness to respond to the challenges of the digital era. Appropriate leadership, supported by an appropriate leadership model, contributes to the development of an educational ecosystem that is more responsive, professional, innovative, and adaptive to continuous societal and technological transformation.

Research Method

This study employed a **qualitative approach** using a **literature review** as its primary research method. Data were collected from a wide range of relevant scholarly sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, magazines, newspapers, and encyclopedias discussing educational leadership, educational management, classroom management strategies, and learning outcomes. The literature was systematically reviewed and critically

interpreted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The study relied exclusively on **secondary data**, consisting of findings and scholarly works from previous studies that were cited in accordance with established academic conventions (Masfufah et al., 2023).

The data were analyzed using a **descriptive qualitative analysis**. This analytical process involved organizing, interpreting, synthesizing, and describing the information extracted from the selected literature to develop a scientific understanding of the issues under investigation. Through this approach, the study critically examined and re-evaluated existing theories, concepts, and empirical findings related to educational leadership and educational management in the digital era, thereby providing a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the role of leadership in improving teacher performance and learning quality.

Results and Discussion

A. The Role of Educational Leaders in Enhancing Teacher Performance, Educational Staff Performance, and Learning Quality

Leadership plays a crucial role in directing and empowering employees, particularly in today's era characterized by rapid change, openness, and organizational complexity. Consequently, organizations require leadership that not only manages human resources but also empowers individuals to maximize their potential. Effective leadership fosters employees' confidence in carrying out their responsibilities, thereby strengthening work motivation, increasing productivity, and encouraging proactive behavior.

Within educational institutions, the **principal** serves as the central leader responsible for improving the performance of teachers and educational staff. Principals are entrusted with managing educational programs, school administration, human resource development, and the effective utilization and maintenance of school facilities. Ineffective supervision and insufficient professional guidance may lead to disciplinary problems among staff members, such as absenteeism, tardiness, and reduced work commitment. These issues continue to represent significant challenges for educational institutions (Siregar, 2023).

From the perspective of **Islamic education**, leadership occupies a highly strategic position because leaders determine the direction and future development of educational institutions. Leadership within Islamic educational institutions is both a dynamic process and a key determinant of organizational success. Educational leaders function as catalysts who coordinate available resources while influencing others toward achieving institutional goals. Effective leadership is reflected in the development of educational quality, creativity, discipline, and high levels of motivation among teachers and students. Ultimately, quality education remains one of the nation's primary aspirations, as education serves as the principal means of developing competent and morally responsible human resources (Hasba, 2020).

Teacher empowerment has become an essential component of educational improvement. Empowerment should not be viewed merely as occasional professional training but rather as a systematic and continuous process aimed at developing teachers' potential, increasing their autonomy, and strengthening their decision-making capabilities. From a psychological perspective, empowerment encompasses four fundamental dimensions: **meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact** (Nopriani, Winda, Rastriana, & Sirozi, 2025).

Such empowerment cannot be achieved without effective educational leadership. School principals and university leaders play a pivotal role in creating organizational environments that support teacher empowerment. Effective leaders extend beyond administrative responsibilities by serving as mentors, facilitators, and sources of inspiration who encourage teachers to pursue continuous professional growth. Without visionary leadership and active staff participation, empowerment initiatives often remain symbolic and fail to produce meaningful improvements in teacher performance.

According to the study conducted by **Sirajuddin and Imamil**, principals significantly influence educational quality because they simultaneously perform multiple leadership roles, including those of **educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator**. These interconnected roles enable school leaders to strengthen institutional performance and improve educational outcomes.

a. The Principal as an Educator

As an educator, the principal bears the responsibility of enhancing teachers' professionalism through appropriate leadership strategies. Principals are expected to establish a supportive school environment where teachers can develop professionally and achieve higher levels of performance. This responsibility includes providing constructive guidance, continuous mentoring, and opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, principals should encourage teachers to adopt innovative teaching models and instructional methods that create engaging and effective learning experiences. Through these efforts, principals contribute significantly to improving instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

b. The Principal as a Manager

As a manager, the principal occupies a strategic position in coordinating all aspects of school management. This managerial responsibility encompasses several essential functions.

First, **planning**, which includes preparing human resources, formulating school policies, and collaboratively developing the curriculum with teachers, school committees, and other educational stakeholders.

Second, **organizing**, involving the establishment of an effective organizational structure, assigning responsibilities according to teachers' competencies, encouraging parental involvement through school committees, and forming committees for various school activities.

Third, **leading and motivating**, whereby principals inspire teachers and educational staff through exemplary leadership, recognition, professional

development opportunities, welfare improvement, and support for further education and training.

Fourth, **monitoring and evaluation**, which involve continuously supervising educational inputs, instructional processes, and learning outcomes in collaboration with vice principals, school supervisors, and counseling coordinators.

Finally, principals are responsible for **developing a positive school culture** characterized by religious values, discipline, academic excellence, and environmental cleanliness. Such a culture contributes to students' character development while simultaneously enhancing the overall quality of education (Karima, 2021).

c. The Principal as a Motivator

As a motivator, the principal creates an organizational climate that encourages teachers and educational staff to perform optimally. Effective motivational strategies include recognizing outstanding performance, providing professional development opportunities, maintaining open communication, and fostering mutual trust.

A comfortable physical environment, combined with consistent disciplinary standards, also contributes to improving employee morale. Moreover, providing adequate learning resources—including libraries, digital learning platforms, and instructional technologies—supports both teachers and students in achieving continuous academic improvement.

d. The Principal as an Innovator

As an innovator, the principal plays a central role in promoting continuous educational improvement. School leaders are expected to establish productive relationships with parents, local communities, and other stakeholders while introducing innovative ideas that improve teaching and learning processes.

Principals should also integrate educational programs effectively to create more engaging and dynamic learning environments. By demonstrating creativity and openness to change, principals inspire teachers to adopt innovative instructional practices and continuously improve their professional competencies. Such leadership contributes directly to creating enjoyable, effective, and future-oriented educational environments (Sirajuddin, Haqiqy, & Muttaqin, 2024).

Overall, the success of educational quality improvement depends largely on the effectiveness of school leadership. By fulfilling their roles as educators, managers, motivators, and innovators, principals mobilize all members of the school community to work collaboratively, professionally, and strategically toward improving learning quality. Effective educational leadership not only enhances the performance of teachers and educational staff but also establishes a positive learning culture that supports sustainable educational excellence.

B. Leadership Models for Addressing the Challenges of the Digital Era

Rapid advancements in digital technology have transformed virtually every sector of society, including business, government, education, and organizational management. These developments require educational institutions to respond proactively through continuous innovation, improved service quality, and the adoption of technology-based management systems (Hutagalung et al., 2025). As educational institutions undergo digital transformation, school principals are increasingly expected to demonstrate leadership that is flexible, innovative, and capable of responding effectively to complex organizational changes.

Within this context, leadership becomes a fundamental determinant of successful digital transformation. Among various leadership approaches, **transformational leadership** and **adaptive leadership** are widely recognized as the most appropriate models for addressing contemporary educational challenges because both emphasize inspiration, motivation, innovation, and organizational capacity building.

The rapid evolution of digital communication has fundamentally altered organizational interaction. Communication is no longer hierarchical and one-directional but has become increasingly open, interactive, and collaborative. Consequently, educational organizations require more adaptive structures capable of responding quickly to emerging challenges. Within transformational leadership, communication plays a vital role in articulating organizational vision, building trust, and encouraging active participation among all members of the school community. Digital technologies provide leaders with greater opportunities to communicate effectively, understand teachers' needs, and respond promptly to organizational challenges. Such two-way communication strengthens collaborative relationships and creates more inclusive educational environments (Hutagalung et al., 2025).

The implementation of Indonesia's **Merdeka Curriculum** further reinforces the need for innovative educational leadership. The curriculum emphasizes **student-centered learning**, encouraging students to become active participants who question, explore, discuss, and construct knowledge independently. Under this approach, teachers function primarily as facilitators rather than the sole providers of knowledge. Consequently, teachers require strong leadership support to adapt successfully to these pedagogical changes while integrating digital technologies into classroom practice.

In response to these demands, school principals must possess **e-leadership competencies**, defined as the ability to lead educational institutions effectively through the strategic use of digital technologies in school management and instructional leadership (Cahyati Wulandari & Pudjiarti, 2024).

Therefore, transformational and adaptive leadership models are particularly relevant for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and responding to the demands of digital education. Transformational leaders inspire teachers to pursue continuous innovation, promote professional development, and cultivate organizational cultures that embrace change.

Meanwhile, adaptive leaders enable schools to respond effectively to increasingly diverse student needs by encouraging flexibility, creativity, and

independent learning. The integration of these complementary leadership approaches allows educational institutions to remain responsive, effective, and aligned with the evolving demands of twenty-first-century education.

Characteristics of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is characterized by four fundamental dimensions: **idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration** (Putri Handayani et al., 2023).

Idealized Influence (Charisma). Charismatic leaders exert a strong influence by demonstrating integrity, clear vision, and shared values. Their credibility inspires trust and commitment, motivating followers to exceed expected levels of performance.

Inspirational Motivation. Transformational leaders communicate compelling visions that generate enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence. By fostering a strong sense of collective purpose, they encourage teachers and staff to work collaboratively toward achieving organizational goals.

Intellectual Stimulation. Leaders encourage followers to question traditional assumptions, explore innovative solutions, and develop creative approaches to solving organizational problems. This intellectual encouragement enhances professional competence and organizational innovation.

Individualized Consideration. Effective leaders recognize the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations of each individual. Through mentoring, coaching, and personalized support, they facilitate continuous professional growth and maximize each teacher's potential.

In the context of digital transformation, previous studies by **Bass (1998)** and **Keller (1992)**, as cited in Putri Handayani et al. (2023), highlight the increasing relevance of transformational leadership within educational organizations. Teachers and educational professionals, who generally possess relatively high educational backgrounds, tend to respond positively to leadership that promotes innovation, autonomy, creativity, and professional development.

Transformational leadership not only provides strategic direction but also motivates teachers to invest greater effort in improving instructional quality, particularly in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and integrating digital technologies into teaching practices. A supportive organizational climate characterized by trust, collaboration, and mutual respect encourages teachers to experiment with innovative instructional approaches and continuously enhance their professional competencies.

Consequently, transformational leadership has become an indispensable leadership approach for educational institutions facing the challenges of the digital era. It promotes an innovative organizational culture that enables teachers to strengthen their digital competencies, adapt to technological advancements, and deliver learning experiences that meet the demands of twenty-first-century education.

Characteristics and Nature of Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership emphasizes leaders' ability to respond effectively to uncertainty, interpret complex situations, and encourage organizational members to develop innovative solutions independently. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that primarily address technical problems, adaptive leadership focuses on challenges requiring changes in attitudes, beliefs, and organizational culture.

Adaptive leaders distinguish among **technical challenges**, **technical-adaptive challenges**, and **fully adaptive challenges**, applying appropriate responses to each situation. An essential practice of adaptive leadership is "**getting on the balcony**," whereby leaders step back from immediate operational concerns to gain a broader perspective on organizational dynamics and identify appropriate strategic responses.

According to Hikmatul Magfiroh et al. (2023), adaptive leadership addresses four essential dimensions of organizational change:

1. Bridging the gap between organizational values and actual practices;
2. Managing competing commitments within organizations;
3. Addressing previously unspoken or hidden organizational issues; and
4. Overcoming the tendency to avoid difficult but necessary organizational work.

Within educational settings, adaptive leadership has become increasingly important as schools confront rapid technological development, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the competencies required for twenty-first-century learning. School principals must move beyond administrative routines and develop the capacity to recognize complex organizational challenges, including disparities in teachers' digital literacy,

Changing student learning patterns, and evolving school cultures.

The ability to distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges is particularly valuable in educational contexts. For example, difficulties in operating digital learning platforms may represent technical problems, whereas teachers' resistance to educational technology constitutes an adaptive challenge requiring changes in beliefs, attitudes, and professional practices.

Likewise, the four pillars of adaptive change are frequently observed in schools where innovation is promoted rhetorically while instructional practices remain conventional, teachers struggle to balance administrative responsibilities with professional development, concerns regarding technological change remain unexpressed, and curriculum reforms are implemented without corresponding changes in pedagogical approaches.

Ultimately, transformational and adaptive leadership complement one another in enabling schools to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. Transformational leadership inspires teachers through vision, motivation, and intellectual stimulation, thereby fostering collaborative, innovative, and high-performing school cultures. Adaptive leadership, in contrast, equips school leaders with the capacity to interpret complex organizational challenges, distinguish between technical and adaptive issues, and empower teachers to respond independently to emerging educational

demands. The integration of these two leadership models provides schools with a comprehensive leadership framework capable of supporting sustainable educational transformation while preparing teachers and students to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven educational landscape.

Conclusion

This study concludes that educational leadership plays a pivotal role in strengthening teachers' competencies and enhancing the quality of learning, particularly in responding to the demands of the digital era and the implementation of the **Merdeka Curriculum**. The findings indicate that **transformational leadership** and **adaptive leadership** represent the most appropriate leadership approaches for addressing contemporary educational challenges.

Both models encourage innovation, facilitate teachers' professional development, and enable educational institutions to adapt effectively to rapid technological and pedagogical changes.

Transformational leadership contributes by inspiring and empowering teachers to embrace innovation, cultivate continuous professional growth, and foster a collaborative school culture that supports educational improvement. In contrast, adaptive leadership equips school leaders with the capacity to navigate uncertainty, distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, and mobilize teachers to respond proactively to organizational change. By integrating these complementary leadership models, schools can establish a resilient educational environment that promotes sustainable improvement in teacher performance and learning quality.

Future research is recommended to examine the implementation of transformational and adaptive leadership across diverse educational contexts, investigate their long-term impact on teacher performance and student learning outcomes, and explore their integration with emerging digital leadership frameworks. Such studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership practices that are responsive to the evolving demands of twenty-first-century education

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