

Literature Review Transformative, Servant, and Digital Leadership: Shaping the Future of Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically examine the leadership principles applied in educational institutions in Indonesia and their impact on the quality of education. The study used the conducted using the *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) approach on 15 scientific articles from SINTA-indexed journals 1 to 3 published between 2018-2024. The analysis was conducted thematically using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model. The results show that *transformational leadership* and servant leadership are the most dominant approaches in educational leadership studies, followed by *digital leadership*, which has begun to develop in recent studies. These leadership practices have been proven to contribute to improvements in teacher performance, learning innovation and the effectiveness of education policy implementation. However, most of the studies remain descriptive and qualitative, lacking optimal integration of leadership theory with national policy directions. This study emphasizes the need to develop a contextualized, adaptive to technological developments and based on data, as a strategic effort to support the transformation of education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Digital, Education in Indonesia, Servant, Transformative Leadership

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk secara sistematis mengkaji prinsip-prinsip kepemimpinan yang diterapkan di lembaga pendidikan di Indonesia dan dampaknya terhadap kualitas pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) pada 15 artikel ilmiah dari jurnal yang terindeks SINTA 1 hingga 3 yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2018 hingga 2024. Analisis dilakukan secara tematis menggunakan model PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*). Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional dan kepemimpinan pelayan merupakan pendekatan yang paling dominan dalam studi kepemimpinan pendidikan, diikuti oleh kepemimpinan digital yang mulai berkembang dalam studi-studi terbaru. Praktik kepemimpinan ini telah terbukti berkontribusi pada peningkatan kinerja guru, inovasi pembelajaran, dan efektivitas implementasi kebijakan pendidikan. Namun, sebagian besar studi masih bersifat deskriptif dan kualitatif, kurang mengintegrasikan teori kepemimpinan dengan arah kebijakan nasional secara optimal. Studi ini menekankan perlunya mengembangkan kepemimpinan yang kontekstual, adaptif terhadap perkembangan teknologi, dan berbasis data, sebagai upaya strategis untuk mendukung transformasi pendidikan di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Digital, Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Pendidikan di Indonesia, Pelayan

A. Introduction

Educational leadership plays a central role in determining the direction, quality, and culture of educational institutions. As strategic leaders, school principals not only bear administrative responsibilities but also serve as agents of change who can inspire vision, develop human resource potential, and create a conducive learning environment. In the context of Indonesia's evolving education system, particularly following the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, expectations regarding the quality and capacity of school leadership have significantly increased. This aligns with the view that transformational leadership by school principals, which encourages all school elements to work based on noble values to achieve ideal goals and improve educational quality, is key to educational adaptation and innovation in the current era (Azmi et al., 2023). Furthermore, school principals as transformational leaders are required to motivate the school community, encourage innovation, and manage resources effectively to achieve common goals and enhance educational effectiveness (Agustina, 2019).

Various leadership models have been applied in educational practice, such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and most recently, digital leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes motivation, vision, and school culture change. As highlighted by (Chkheidze, 2025), this approach is effective in inspiring staff, fostering a shared vision, and cultivating an adaptive and innovative school culture. (Bass, 1911) early work also laid foundational principles for transformational leadership, focusing on inspiring followers and driving commitment to organizational goals. Servant leadership positions leaders as servants who empower teachers and value role models, a concept famously introduced by (Greenleaf, n.d.). Recently, digital leadership has emerged, focusing on the use of technology to address the challenges of disruption and transformation in learning. "In this ever-changing digital age, educational leaders must be able to adapt quickly and drive innovation in teaching and learning practices," (Ehlers, 2021). Additionally, "Digital leadership focuses on leveraging technology to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and accessibility of education," (Yirci et al., 2023). Therefore, "Effective digital leadership requires a clear vision of how technology can enhance learning and teaching, as well as a comprehensive strategy to achieve that vision," (Fullan, 2014). Although these three models are widely found in global literature, they have not been systematically studied in the context of education in Indonesia.

Currently, research on educational leadership in Indonesia tends to be fragmented in terms of methods, institutional contexts, and substantive focus. Most studies use a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on narratives, while only a few measure the impact of leadership quantitatively based on numerical data. Additionally, most leadership theories used remain normative and have not been fully integrated with local contexts such as the characteristics of religious-based schools, *pesantren*, or non-formal educational institutions.

Several relevant studies have highlighted aspects of leadership in Indonesia: (Hasiholan, 2024) examined visionary, participatory, and transformational leadership in *pesantren*; (Ahlun Ansar et al, 2020) discussed strategic and inspirational leadership strategies of school principals in improving teachers' pedagogical competencies; (Saputra, 2019) found that leadership with a spiritual, participatory, and exemplary approach enhances teachers' work commitment; (Lahagu, A., & Hidayat, 2023) highlight the role of visionary, transformational, and servant leadership in realizing *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) in Christian schools; (Gaol, 2018) demonstrate that instructional, transformational, and collaborative leadership by school principals plays a role in improving teacher performance; (Fau, 2022) conducted quantitative research examining the influence of school principal leadership on teacher performance; (Saputra, B. R., 2021) researched school leadership in religious-scientific learning innovation, highlighting visionary and collaborative aspects in a specific context; (Liana, L., & Hidayat, 2021) quantitatively analyzed the influence of servant leadership on teacher performance; (Rahman, M. A., 2020) reviewed the influence of visionary and communicative leadership of

school principals on educational quality; and (Adriantoni, 2023) were among the few studies discussing digital leadership, including e-communication and e-change in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*.

Although various studies have been conducted, issues of digital and adaptive leadership, which are highly relevant to the demands of the 21st century and the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, remain relatively unexplored in research. In an era of technological disruption and national policy dynamics, educational leaders are required to innovate and develop agile and highly competitive learning organizations. This highlights the need for systematic studies that can map trends, principles, and the impact of educational leadership models in the Indonesian context. Therefore, this research is designed as a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) by analyzing 15 scientific articles from journals indexed in SINTA 2 and 3, published between 2018 and 2024. It is hoped that this study will enrich understanding of educational leadership practices in Indonesia, identify emerging leadership patterns and trends, and recommend more contextual and transformative directions for future research and policy. “In the context of 21st-century education, educational leaders must innovate and develop adaptive learning organizations to address the challenges of the modern era” (Siswanto, 2025).

B. Literature Review

The landscape of educational leadership has consistently evolved, adapting to social changes and technological advances. This section provides a comprehensive review of key leadership theories relevant to the educational context, particularly transformational leadership, servant leadership, and digital leadership, as well as examining their empirical applications and theoretical foundations in both global and Indonesian contexts. In this context, the era of information technology disruption has brought about massive changes that demand adaptive capabilities from human resources across various fields (Rahman et al., 2024), underscoring the urgency for educational leaders to not only manage but also lead in digital adaptation. Additionally, the effectiveness of educational institution management is highly dependent on leadership that is responsive to dynamics and changes, as well as the ability to introduce new ideas to achieve organizational goals.

1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, pioneered by (Bass, 1911) and further developed, is characterized by leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their followers towards shared goals and a collective vision. Transformational leaders act as role models, articulating a compelling vision for the future, fostering creativity and innovation, and paying individualized attention to the needs and development of their team members (Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, 1992). In educational settings, transformational leadership has been consistently linked to improved teacher performance, enhanced school climate, and positive student outcomes (Hallinger, P., & Heck, n.d.). Specifically in Indonesia, research has demonstrated the effectiveness of transformational leadership in various educational institutions. For instance, (Gaol, 2018) highlighted its role in improving teacher performance, while (Ahlun Ansar et al, 2020) showcased its strategic and inspirational qualities in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies. Furthermore, studies by (Lahagu, A., & Hidayat, 2023) and (Hasiholan, 2024) affirm the relevance of transformational leadership in achieving educational goals, including the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy and fostering adaptive leadership in religious contexts like pesantren.

2. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, conceptualized by (Greenleaf, n.d.), offers a distinct paradigm where the leader's primary motivation is to serve others. This approach emphasizes empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. (Joo & Galbraith, 2023)

found that empowering leadership is positively correlated with organizational trust and negatively correlated with group conflict through the mediation of psychological safety. This supports the idea that leadership focused on empowering followers can increase trust and reduce conflict, which is the result of an environment that prioritizes psychological well-being. In the Indonesian educational landscape, servant leadership resonates deeply with local cultural and spiritual values. Bagus Rachmad (Saputra, 2019) found that a leadership approach characterized by spirituality, participation, and role modeling significantly enhances teacher work commitment. Similarly, (Liana, L., & Hidayat, 2021) provided quantitative evidence for the positive influence of servant leadership on teacher performance, underscoring its applicability and impact within the Indonesian educational context. This leadership style is crucial for fostering a supportive and collaborative school environment, aligning with the principles of human resource development in schools.

3. Digital Leadership

The rapid pace of technological advancement has necessitated the emergence of digital leadership, a paradigm that focuses on leveraging technology to drive innovation, improve learning processes, and manage educational institutions effectively in the 21st century (Hidayat et al., 2024). Digital leaders must have a holistic understanding of technology integration, pioneer a culture of innovation, collaborate with stakeholders, empower educators, and advocate for digital equity. This leadership style is particularly vital in an era of educational disruption and online learning, requiring principals and educational managers to integrate Learning Management Systems (LMS) and utilize data analytics for transformative and participatory decision-making. Despite its growing importance globally, digital leadership in Indonesia remains a relatively underexplored area in academic research. (Adriantoni, 2023) are among the few who have initiated studies on digital leadership in the Indonesian context, specifically examining its role in e-communication and e-change during the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*. The limited focus on this area highlights a significant gap, especially given the national push for technology integration and data-driven education under the *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

4. Intersections and Gaps in Indonesian Context

While transformational and servant leadership have a stronger empirical presence in Indonesian educational research, digital leadership is still in its nascent stages. Many existing studies tend to be descriptive and qualitative, often lacking robust quantitative methodologies or longitudinal designs to measure the tangible impact of these leadership styles on educational quality. For instance, studies by (Fau, 2022) predominantly offer qualitative insights into leadership practices without extensive quantitative analysis of their outcomes. Similarly, (Nilawati, 2020) provides qualitative observations on leadership in educational settings. Also points to the descriptive nature of much of the current research, highlighting the need for more rigorous empirical approaches to establish causal relationships and measure impact over time.

Furthermore, there is a real need to integrate these leadership theories more optimally with national policy directions, particularly *Merdeka Belajar*, and to explore their contextual relevance in various Indonesian educational institutions, including religious schools and non-formal settings (Hasiholan, 2024). (Lahagu, A., & Hidayat, 2023) also emphasize the importance of understanding these leadership principles in various educational contexts. Current literature often overlooks the complex interactions between these leadership styles and how they collectively contribute to building agile and highly competitive learning organizations capable of navigating technological disruption and dynamic national policies. (Ningsih & Mesiono, 2024) highlight this gap, emphasizing the need to consider the synergistic effects of various leadership approaches. Similarly, point to limited exploration of how these styles work together to foster a resilient and adaptive educational environment. Therefore, a systematic review is crucial to map existing trends,

identify critical gaps, and pave the way for more contextual, adaptive, and transformative future research and policy recommendations within Indonesia's educational landscape.

C. Research Method

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to collect, analyze and synthesize findings from various studies relevant to educational leadership practices in Indonesia. The review stages were organized based on the principles of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, which includes the process of identification, filtering, eligibility, quality assessment, and data extraction.

1. Identification

The initial stage in this study was the process of identifying articles relevant to the topic of leadership in the context of education in Indonesia. Literature searches were conducted systematically through several databases commonly used in national scientific publications, including: Google Scholar, Garuda, Neliti, DOAJ. The keywords used in the search process included: "*educational leadership*", "*school principal*", "*transformational leadership*", "*servant leadership*", "*digital leadership*", and "*education quality*", in combination with conjunctions such as "and", "or", and relevant English terms (*educational leadership*, *school principal leadership*, etc). The article identification criteria used include: Articles were published between 2018 and 2024; Articles are from SINTA indexed journals 1-3; Articles are available in full-text access; The main focus is on leadership in educational institutions in Indonesia; Articles use explicit research methods and include leadership findings. From the initial search process, 130 scientific articles were found that met the search keywords. Next, a screening stage was carried out to ensure compliance with the predetermined inclusion criteria.

2. Filtering

After the initial identification process resulted in 130 articles, the next stage was screening to ensure that only articles that were truly relevant and fit the criteria were analyzed further. This process was carried out by reviewing the title and abstract of each article to assess the suitability of the topic and substance coverage with the focus of this study, namely leadership in educational institutions in Indonesia. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, such as: does not address leadership directly, focuses on the foreign context, or do not have full text access, were immediately eliminated from further processing. Of the 130 articles identified, 30 were eliminated due to duplication or access limitations, while 60 were eliminated due to irrelevant focus (e.g., only discussing general management, student motivation, or education policy with no link to leadership). Thus, only 40 articles were deemed eligible for eligibility based on full-text review.

3. Eligibility

The eligibility stage is carried out by thoroughly reviewing the full-text content of 40 articles that have passed the screening process. This stage can be clarified through figure 1 below.

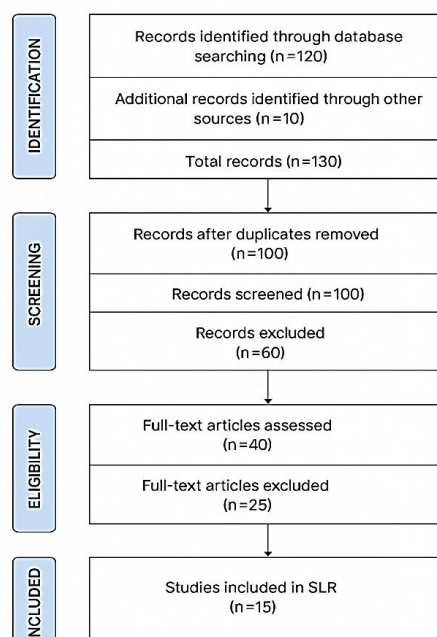


Figure 1. PRISMA Research

The goal is to ensure that the articles:

- Explicitly examines leadership in educational institutions (elementary, junior high, high school, vocational school, boarding school, or college);
- Include a clear and valid explanation of the research method (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed);
- Contains empirical or analytical findings on leadership practices and their impact;
- Using or referring to the theoretical framework of educational leadership.

During this process, 25 articles were excluded because they did not meet the following criteria:

- The main focus is not on the leadership aspect (e.g. only on planning or school quality in general),
- There is no explicit discussion of leadership theory,
- The structure of the article does not meet scientific standards (does not include methods or results in full).

Thus, the final 15 articles met all eligibility criteria and were used as the primary source in this systematic literature review.

4. Article Quality Assessment

The quality assessment was conducted to ensure that the articles analyzed in this review meet appropriate scientific standards and can be accounted for. This process aims to evaluate the credibility of the methodology, clarity of findings, and theoretical and practical contributions of each article that has passed the eligibility stage. The criteria for assessing the quality of articles in this study include:

Table 1. Research Article Quality Criteria

No.	Criteria	Yes	No
1	Journal indexation status	Journal indexed by SINTA 1 to SINTA 3	Journal indexed by SINTA 4 to SINTA 6

2	Clarity of research methods	List the method approach explicitly	Methods are limited to personal interviews
3	Completeness of scientific structure	Has an introduction, method, results, discussion, and conclusion section that is intact	Direct writing to discussion and conclusion
4	Strength of theoretical argumentation	Refers to academically recognized educational leadership theories or models	Argumentation only compares with the situation without clarity of theory
5	Relevance to SLR topics	Should be directly related to leadership practices in education in Indonesia	The discussion of leadership is too broad to cover the global level

Each article was reviewed using an internal assessment sheet referring to the above criteria, with a simple classification scheme (Eligible/Ineligible). As a result, all 15 articles met the quality criteria and were suitable for further analysis at the data extraction and synthesis stage.

5. Data Extraction and Analysis

This stage aims to extract key information (extractive data) from each article that has passed the selection process, and analyze it systematically to answer the research questions. Data extraction is done by organizing key information from each article into a systematic analysis table which can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. Data Extraction and Analysis of Impacts

No	Article Title	Author, Year	SINTA Accreditation	Research Methods	Leadership Principles Discovered	Impact on Education Quality	
						Y	N
1	Rais Aam Pesantren Leadership	Ahmad Paruqi Hasiholan, et al. (2024)	3	Descriptive Qualitative	Visionary, participatory, transformational, evaluative, collaborative, directive, mobilizing, communicative, empowering, strategic	✓	
2	Principal Leadership Strategy	Ahlun Ansar, et al. (2020)	3	Descriptive Qualitative	Strategic, participatory, nurturing, supervisory, inspirational, transformational	✓	
3	Leader and Family Role Approach Strategy	Bagus Rachmad Saputra, et al. (2019)	3	Multisite Qualitative	Spiritual, participatory, persuasive, humanistic, relational, exemplary (role-model)	✓	

4	The Principal's Leadership Role in Realizing Free Learning in Christian Schools	Atozanolo Lahagu, Dylmoon Hidayat (2023)	3	Literature Study	Visionary, transformational, servant, motivational, participatory, organizational culture activator, director, evaluator, spiritual.	✓	
5	The Principal's Role in Improving Teacher Performance	The Fate of Tua Lumban Gaol, Paningkat Siburian (2018)	3	Literature Study	Instructional, transformational, motivational, participatory, reward-based, collaborative, organizational culture driver	✓	
6	The Influence of Principal Leadership and Work Motivation	Markus W. Fau, et al. (2022)	3	Quantitative correlation	Transformational and democratic styles, but not significant influence		✓
7	Principal Leadership in Religious-Scientific Learning Innovation	Bagus R. Saputra, et al. (2021)	3	Qualitative, multi-site study	Learning, visionary, collaborative, spiritual value-based leadership	✓	
8	The Effects of Servant Leadership, Organizational Climate, and Work Motivation	Linda Liana & Dylmoon Hidayat (2021)	3	Quantitative (multiple linear regression, SmartPLS)	Servant leadership: serving, modeling, empowering teachers	✓	

9	The Influence of Principal's Leadership, Teacher Performance and Internal Quality Assurance System	M. Abdul Rahman, et al. (2020)	3	Quantitative (multiple linear regression)	Visionary, communicative, quality driver, strategic managerial	✓	
10	Analysis of Leadership Behavior Differences	Fransiska F.K. Sari, Sri Marmoah (2022)	3	Qualitative (Comparative Case Study)	Team Management (9.9 - participatory & relational) vs Authority-Compliance (9.1 - instructional & authoritarian)	✓	
11	The Impact of Principal Leadership on the Effectiveness of Learning	Junihot M. Simanjuntak (2021)	3	Qualitative + Quantitative (Mixed)	Transformational, humanistic, motivational, innovative, collaborative, evaluative	✓	
12	Reconstructing Progressive Educational Leadership	Efi M. Faridli, et al. (2024)	3	Mixed Methods (Literature, Survey, Interview, Case Study)	Progressive, collaborative, participatory, inclusive, innovative, transformative, humanistic	✓	
13	Principal's Leadership Model in School Drivers	Euis I.K. Ningsih, et al. (2024)	3	Qualitative descriptive	Servant leadership, authentic, adaptive, distributive, spiritual	✓	
14	The Principal's Role in Improving Teacher Task Implementation	Nilawati (2020)	3	Descriptive Quantitative	Coordinative, motivational, supervision, coaching, less innovative	✓	

15	Digital leadership Influence	Adriantoni, Alfiyandri, G. Kenedi (2023)	3	Mixed method (Exploratory Sequential, SEM)	Digital leadership: E-communication, E-social, E-change, E-trust, adaptive, collaborative, innovative	✓	
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The extracted data were then analyzed thematically and descriptively qualitatively, with a narrative synthesis approach. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify the emergence of patterns and trends in terms of the dominant leadership model, the impact on the quality of education, the most used theories, as well as the distribution by education level and research method. This process allowed the author to systematically categorize and compare the findings from each article, and draw general conclusions that can be used as a basis for developing the theory and practice of educational leadership in Indonesia.

D. Results

This study analyzes 15 SINTA-indexed scientific articles relevant to the topic of educational leadership in Indonesia within the period 2018-2024. The analysis was conducted to answer three research questions that have been formulated, each of which will be explained gradually in the following description.

RQ1: *What are the dominant leadership principles applied in Indonesian educational institutions according to recent studies?*

Dominant Leadership Principles in Educational Leadership Studies in Indonesia

Analysis of the reviewed articles shows that the principle of *transformational leadership* is the most dominant approach in educational leadership studies in Indonesia. A total of 10 out of 15 articles explicitly apply or refer to the concept of *transformational leadership* as proposed by (Bass, 1911) and (Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, 1992), which emphasizes aspects of inspiration, collective motivation and organizational culture change. In addition, the principle of servant leadership appeared in six articles, especially in the context of faith-based schools, private schools and pesantren. This type of leadership emphasizes moral exemplification, teacher empowerment, and humanistic and spiritual approaches in fostering learning communities. This shows that the servant leadership approach is considered relevant in the Indonesian socio-religious context that prioritizes collective and family values. Meanwhile, the *digital leadership* approach was only found in 2 articles, which appeared in the latest study in 2023-2024. Principles such as e-leadership, adaptive leadership, and the use of technology for decision-making and learning management are the main focus of this model, especially in the digital age.

learning management are the main focus in this model. The low number of articles on digital leadership indicates that this field is still new and under-explored in Indonesia (Adriantoni, 2023), despite its relevance to post-pandemic learning challenges and the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. Other principles that were also found, although not dominant, were collaborative, participatory, visionary, spiritual, authentic, and reward-based leadership. The presence of these principles shows that educational leadership practices in Indonesia are pluralistic and contextual, adapting to the characteristics of institutions, school cultures, and community backgrounds.

RQ2: *In addition to the dominant leadership principles, the impact of these practices on the quality of education also needs to be examined. How do these leadership practices affect the quality of education at various levels of educational institutions?*

Impact of Leadership Practices on Education Quality

Most of the articles reviewed reported that leadership practices have a significant contribution to improving the quality of education, both directly and indirectly. This contribution is reflected in indicators such as improved teacher competence and performance, reported in 10 articles, mainly through training, academic supervision and discipline coaching. Improved learning innovation, reported in 7 articles, mainly through the principal's encouragement in designing scientific-religious learning programs and contextual curriculum. The creation of a conducive organizational culture, found in 5 articles, includes increasing work motivation, teacher participation in decision making, and strengthening professional relationships based on family values. The effectiveness of implementing *Merdeka Belajar* policy, discussed in 3 recent articles, shows that strategic and adaptive leadership styles support the implementation of a more flexible and student-needs-based curriculum. Interestingly, only 4 articles use a quantitative or mixed methods approach to statistically measure the effect of leadership on educational quality. The reported contribution ranges from 23.40% to 29.57%, as found in the studies of (Rahman, M. A., 2020). This finding indicates that although the effect of leadership on education quality is often claimed to be significant, there are still limitations in quantitative and objective evidence in many studies.

RQ3: *What leadership theories or models are most often used in these studies, and how are they relevant to the context of national education policies such as Merdeka Belajar?*

Leadership Theories Used and Their Relevance to the National Policy Context

Most of the articles analyzed refer to classical and normative leadership theories, such as:

1. *Transformational leadership* by Bass and Leithwood;
2. *Servant Leadership* by Greenleaf;
3. *Instructional Leadership* by Hallinger; and
4. Robbins and Gibson's managerial and motivational approaches.

On the other hand, there are also theories developed by Indonesian researchers such as Mulyasa, Wahjosumidjo, and Sugiyono, which are more contextual to the conditions of national education. However, only a small number of articles explicitly link these leadership theories to national education policy directions, such as the *Merdeka Curriculum*, driving schools, or digital disruption. The lack of integration between the theoretical framework and policy directions indicates a gap in the literature, where the leadership theories used are still generic and less adapted to contemporary policy challenges in Indonesia. This creates an urgency for future studies to build leadership models that are not only theoretical but also based on the actual context and policies of national education.

E. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review indicate that *transformational leadership* principles are the most dominant approach in educational leadership studies in Indonesia. This aligns with foundational leadership theories by (Bass, 1911) and (Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, 1992), who emphasize transformational leadership's effectiveness in shaping an organizational culture that supports change. In the dynamic Indonesian educational environment, characterized by ongoing policy and curriculum reforms like *Merdeka Belajar*, the transformational approach appears highly relevant. Recent studies by (Lahagu, A., & Hidayat, 2023) and (Faridli et al.,

2024) further reinforce this, demonstrating how leaders who foster a collective vision, provide motivation, and empower teachers are crucial for successful policy implementation and progressive learning. This highlights a consistent pattern where Indonesian research mirrors global understanding of transformational leadership's importance in fostering change.

In addition to transformational leadership, the principle of *servant leadership* has also received significant attention, particularly in religious based educational institutions and pesantren. This underscores that in the context of Indonesia's collective culture and strong social relations, a leadership approach that prioritizes serving others is considered more grounded and effective. (Greenleaf, n.d.) emphasizes that servant leaders not only foster trust but also strengthen the sense of belonging within the educational community. This finding is consistently supported by contemporary Indonesian research; for instance, (Liana, L., & Hidayat, 2021) quantitatively showed the positive influence of servant leadership on teacher performance, while (Saputra, 2019) found that a spiritual, participatory, and exemplary leadership style significantly enhances teacher work commitment. This contrasts with purely hierarchical models by fostering a more supportive and collaborative school environment.

Digital leadership plays an important role in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of distance and hybrid learning by providing the technological support, training, and resources needed by teachers and students" (Hodges et al., 2020). The limited representation of digital leadership in Indonesian studies (Adriantoni, 2023) indicates a significant gap between the urgency of digital transformation in education and the current focus of academic research. This review highlights that while the need is evident, empirical exploration into digital leadership's specific mechanisms and impacts in Indonesia is still nascent compared to more established leadership paradigms. Therefore, strengthening digital leadership capacity is an urgent agenda for the professional development of school principals, as also noted by (Ningsih & Mesiono, 2024) in their discussion of contemporary principal leadership models.

Regarding the impact of leadership on the quality of education, the majority of analyzed articles emphasize that the role of school principals is profoundly influential on various aspects, ranging from improving teacher performance, fostering learning innovation, to enhancing the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. (Hallinger, P., & Heck, n.d.) earlier posited that the influence of leadership on learning outcomes is indirect but decisive in creating an environment that supports teacher performance and effective learning processes. More recent Indonesian studies align with this, such as (Fau, 2022) who conducted quantitative research on the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance, and (Rahman, M. A., 2020) who reviewed the influence of visionary and communicative leadership on educational quality. These findings collectively reinforce the view that adaptive, collaborative, and strategic leadership is essential for creating schools as dynamic learning organizations.

However, a critical observation from this review is that most of the studies analyzed are still dominated by descriptive qualitative approaches. While these provide rich contextual insights, they have not yet been able to measurably describe the magnitude of leadership's contribution to educational quality with quantitative rigor. Stressed the importance of utilizing performance indicators and quantitative approaches for a more accurate assessment of leadership effectiveness. This methodological gap is significant for future research, as it calls for a shift towards empirical data-driven measurements of leadership impact, which can serve as a stronger basis for evidence-based policy decision-making.

Within the theoretical framework, most articles still refer to classical theories such as transformational leadership and servant leadership. However, the direct relationship between these theories and national policy directions such as Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning), the digitization of learning, or the push for driving schools has not been explicitly and optimally explained. This indicates a significant gap between theoretical discourse and the practical realities of educational policy implementation on the ground. Therefore, there is a clear need to develop an Indonesian-based leadership model that is not only theoretically sound but also

capable of responding to specific local challenges while remaining aligned with the transformative direction of national education policy. In this context, research shows that school leadership plays a crucial role in efforts to improve education quality at the school level (A'yun, 2020). However, various challenges in facing changes and transformations in educational institutions require an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of different leadership styles, such as charismatic leadership, to drive positive change and overcome obstacles (Kurniawan, 2024). Overall, the findings of this study further emphasize the importance of educational leadership as a determining factor in building school quality and competitiveness, while also highlighting the need for a more contextual leadership approach that is adept at adapting to technology and more deeply integrated with national education policies to achieve tangible impacts on educational transformation in Indonesia.

F. Conclusion

This study concludes that transformational and servant leadership are the most dominant approaches in educational leadership studies in Indonesia, both proven to contribute positively to improving learning quality, teacher performance, and strengthening school organizational culture. However, there remain limitations in exploring digital leadership models and contextualizing theories to national policies such as *Merdeka Belajar*. Furthermore, most of the analyzed studies predominantly employ qualitative approaches, with few presenting quantitative measurements of leadership impact systemically. This indicates the pressing need for more in-depth, data-based research relevant to the dynamics of educational transformation in Indonesia.

Based on these findings, several important recommendations emerge for key stakeholders. For *researchers*, further exploration is needed regarding digital, adaptive, and distributed leadership, particularly in the context of learning technology implementation, curriculum transformation, and data-driven education. Future studies should not only describe leadership practices but also develop conceptual models relevant to the Indonesian context using robust methodological approaches, including quantitative and longitudinal studies to measure the actual impact on educational quality. For *educational practitioners* such as school principals, supervisors, and managers, it is crucial to integrate digital leadership training into principal certification curricula, encompassing the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and transformative data analysis. Emphasis should also be placed on cultivating servant leadership, which prioritizes moral example, personal connection, and spiritual orientation, highly relevant to the Indonesian socio-cultural context. Practical examples could include simulations of LMS management for the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and workshops on student performance data analysis. Finally, for *education policymakers*, developing leadership development programs based on institutional characteristics is advised. Training and certification for school principals should shift from a single model approach to one that strengthens adaptive leadership for digitalization, integrates local cultural values, and aligns with national policy directions. Additionally, the school principal performance evaluation system needs reform, moving beyond administrative reports to integrate indicators of school culture, teacher satisfaction, and learning outcomes. Overall, this study underscores that effective educational leadership is leadership that is able to transform according to the demands of the times, is rooted in values, and remains open to innovation. Efforts to strengthen this leadership capacity are not only the responsibility of individual principals but require systemic support from all stakeholders in the Indonesian education ecosystem.

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