

## The Role of Transformational Leadership Model of School Principals in Implementing Total Quality Management to Achieve Sustainable Quality in Vocational Schools

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

The role of school principals' transformational leadership becomes crucial. Principals who inspire and empower their staff can drive significant changes in school culture and practices.

#### Purpose

This study aims to examine the role of transformational leadership model of school principals in implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) to achieve sustainable quality in vocational schools.

#### Design/method/approach

The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study at one of the vocational schools in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and literature studies.

#### Results

The results of the study indicate that the transformational leadership of the school principal serves as a cornerstone in the implementation of TQM. Principals who adopt a transformational leadership style are able to create a clear vision, empower staff, promote a culture of continuous improvement, and manage change effectively. Effective implementation of TQM results in improved quality of learning, student satisfaction, and enhanced operational performance of the school.

#### Contribution/value

This study concludes that transformational leadership is a key factor in the successful implementation of TQM to achieve sustainable quality in vocational schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving era of globalization, the quality of education stands as a pivotal factor determining a nation's competitiveness. Vocational schools, aimed at preparing skilled and ready-to-work labor, face significant challenges in ensuring sustainable educational quality. One effective approach to achieving this is through the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is a management philosophy focusing on comprehensive quality improvement through the participation of all organizational members in continuous improvement processes (Goetsch & Davis, 2014).

Leadership plays a central role in TQM implementation, particularly in educational environments. The transformational leadership model is considered highly relevant in this context as it emphasizes fundamental cultural and organizational behavior change. Transformational leadership, defined by Bass and Avolio (1994), involves a process where leaders and followers mutually enhance motivation and morale through shared vision, inspiration, and empowerment. School principals adopting transformational leadership can create a clear vision, empower teachers and staff, and promote innovation and positive change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Previous research has shown that transformational leadership positively impacts TQM implementation across various organizational contexts. For instance, a study by Khasawneh (2011) found that transformational leadership significantly contributes to the success of TQM implementation in higher education institutions. However, research on the role of transformational leadership in vocational school contexts remains relatively limited, especially in Indonesia.

Vocational schools in Indonesia play a crucial role in providing skilled labor ready to enter the job market. Yet, these schools face complex challenges, including resource limitations, changing industry needs, and increasing quality demands. Therefore, effective management approaches are necessary to ensure vocational schools meet these expectations and deliver high-quality education.

In this context, the role of school principals' transformational leadership becomes crucial. Principals who inspire and empower their staff can drive significant changes in school culture and practices. Strong and visionary leadership can help vocational schools respond to challenges and opportunities more adaptively and innovatively.

TQM, as a quality-oriented management approach, offers a framework to support sustainable improvement in vocational schools. TQM principles, such as customer focus (in this case, students and industries), continuous improvement, and total involvement of all organizational members (Novan A.W, 2023), are highly relevant in the vocational education context. Effective TQM implementation can enhance teaching quality, student satisfaction, and overall school performance.

However, implementing TQM in vocational schools is not without challenges. It requires commitment and strong leadership to drive change and ensure active involvement of all organizational members in the improvement process. This is where transformational leadership plays a crucial role. Principals who can implement this leadership style can facilitate TQM implementation more effectively.

This research aims to examine how the transformational leadership model of school principals can support TQM implementation in vocational schools. Through a qualitative approach with a case study at vocational schools in Indonesia, this study seeks to identify key

factors influencing the success of TQM implementation. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews and literature reviews.

The findings of this research are expected to provide new insights into the role of transformational leadership in vocational education contexts. These findings are intended to assist school principals, education managers, and policymakers in formulating more effective strategies to enhance educational quality in vocational schools. Furthermore, this research aims to enrich the literature on transformational leadership and TQM in educational contexts.

Thus, this study not only contributes to theory development but also has significant practical implications. It is hoped that the findings of this research will serve as a reference for vocational schools in implementing TQM and enhancing educational quality sustainably. Through transformational leadership, vocational schools can be better prepared to face challenges and meet the needs of industries and society.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders have been found to enhance the motivation and commitment of followers, leading to higher productivity and innovation (Avolio & Bass, 2001). While transformational leadership has received widespread acclaim, it is not without its criticisms. One concern is that it places significant emphasis on the leader-follower relationship, which can lead to an overreliance on the leader and potentially create dependency. Critics also argue that transformational leaders may sometimes be overly idealistic, promoting unrealistic visions that are difficult to achieve (Kark & Shamir, 2002).

The effectiveness of transformational leadership may vary depending on the cultural and organizational context in which it is applied (Northouse, 2018). The highly charismatic nature of transformational leaders can create dependency, where followers may excessively rely on the leader rather than cultivating their own leadership skills (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996).

### **2. Total Quality Management (TQM)**

Total Quality Control (TQM) is an effective system for integrating the quality development, quality maintenance, and quality improvement efforts of various groups in an organization, so as to enable production and services at the most economical levels which allow for full customer satisfaction (Feigenbaum, 1991). A way of managing for the future that encompasses quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement, all aimed at enhancing the organization's performance to meet customer needs (Juran, 1992). A management philosophy that seeks to embed awareness of quality in all organizational processes. It involves all employees in the continuous improvement of quality at every level and in every function of the organization, ensuring that the customer's needs are met (Oakland, 2003). So, TQM is about creating a culture within an organization where quality is embedded in every process, with the goal of continuously improving to enhance customer satisfaction and organizational performance.

## **METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of the school principal's transformational leadership model in implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) in vocational schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena in real-life contexts and gain profound insights from participants. This study utilizes a case study design, which enables the researcher to conduct a

detailed analysis of vocational schools in Indonesia that have implemented or are in the process of implementing TQM. The case study method was selected as it is suitable for answering "how" and "why" questions related to complex and contextual phenomena (Yin, 2018). Data collection techniques used in this research include in-depth interviews and literature review. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal of SMKN 1 Juwangi Boyolali, chosen as a sample vocational school. This technique was employed to obtain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences regarding transformational leadership and TQM implementation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide flexibility in exploring important issues that emerged during the interview process. Interview questions were designed to delve into aspects of transformational leadership, TQM implementation, and their impacts on educational quality and school operations.

Literature review was conducted to examine relevant literature on the research topic. Sources reviewed included books, scholarly journals, and research reports related to transformational leadership and TQM in educational contexts. The literature review aimed to build a strong theoretical foundation and identify previous findings that could be compared with the results of this research. Additionally, the literature review was used to identify best practices in TQM implementation in vocational schools.

## **RESULTS**

The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) at SMKN 1 Juwangi involves various stakeholders, including district governments, local communities, education agencies, and industrial sectors. The principal emphasized that the involvement of all these parties is crucial to creating a learning environment that supports continuous improvement. This approach reflects collaborative principles essential in TQM, where active participation from all stakeholders can strengthen quality improvement processes. In addition, schools also implement strengthening projects of the character building for students and parents, as a form of recognition for the students' work. Parental involvement in the character building strengthens moral support for the students and also creates holistic involvement in the education community. Therefore, transformational leadership is required to implement TQM.

The principal interprets transformational leadership as the capacity to change learning and educational paradigms, enabling schools to provide optimal services aligned with student characteristics and contemporary demands. Transformational leadership applied by the principal at SMKN 1 Juwangi encompasses key components such as a strong vision, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention to the needs of each school member. This approach aligns with literature stating that transformational leadership can drive significant organizational changes through clear vision and empowerment of organizational members (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

The idealistic influence and inspirational motivation of the principal create a school culture focused on quality and continuous improvement. A principal who can inspire and motivate teachers and staff to work with high dedication towards common goals is crucial in TQM implementation. Empowerment is critical in the context of TQM as it ensures that every school member feels ownership and responsibility for continuous improvement processes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Effective TQM implementation requires commitment and involvement from all school members. Transformational school principals must integrate TQM principles into daily practices by promoting a culture of continuous improvement. This is evidenced by various initiatives such

as regular training, periodic evaluations, and the use of constructive feedback to enhance processes. Indicators such as student learning outcomes, student satisfaction, and operational efficiency of the school show positive improvements as a result of TQM implementation led by transformational school principals.

Overall, this research emphasizes that transformational leadership of school principals is a key factor in the successful implementation of TQM in vocational schools. These findings have significant practical implications for vocational school administrators and educational policymakers. Principals need to be trained and encouraged to adopt transformational leadership styles, given their positive impact on TQM implementation and educational quality improvement. Thus, this research contributes not only to theoretical development but also holds significant practical implications. It is hoped that these findings will serve as a reference for other vocational schools and educational policymakers in developing sustainable quality improvement strategies.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research explores the role of transformational leadership models as effective approaches in managing vocational schools (SMK) to achieve sustainable educational quality. Transformational leadership refers to a leader's ability to inspire and motivate educators and students towards achieving a higher shared vision. Through inspirational leadership, school principals can shape a culture supportive of Total Quality Management (TQM), a management approach for continuous improvement in educational quality.

An essential aspect of transformational leadership is the ability of school principals to be clear and communicative visionaries. Principals must articulate a strategic vision emphasizing the importance of quality and high standards in vocational education. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders focus on motivating their followers by presenting compelling and meaningful visions (Chow & Vivienne, 2013). This is highly relevant in vocational schools where practical skills and knowledge often constitute primary industry needs.

Transformational leadership also emphasizes the importance of supporting and developing educators. Principals should provide training and professional development that encourages SMK teachers to enhance their skills and innovate in teaching methods. Research indicates that principal support for teacher development positively impacts the success of TQM implementation and educational quality improvement (Ali, Mahdi, & Malihe, 2012).

Moreover, transformational school leaders should pave the way for stakeholder participation and involvement in school improvement processes. This includes engaging teachers, students, parents, and even industries to ensure that the programs taught are relevant and meet established quality standards. As expressed by Kanji and Moura (2002), successful TQM approaches in schools require active engagement from all school components to achieve sustainable quality improvement.

Transformational leadership is also crucial in fostering an innovative and adaptive school culture. Principals should encourage innovation in both learning activities and school administration. The ability to adapt to change and anticipate future needs is key to ensuring that vocational schools remain relevant and competitive. This cultural transformation can have a positive impact on achieving sustainable quality (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

However, the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) at SMKN 1 Juwangi faces several major challenges that require serious attention. First, there are challenges related to human resources (HR), especially in terms of changing teacher mindsets to fit TQM principles. Second, environmental factors are significant constraints, given the location of schools in rural

areas that pose various contextual challenges. Third, economic conditions of students who mostly come from middle to lower-class families also affect TQM implementation. Fourth, limited facilities and infrastructure are additional obstacles, although these issues can be addressed through strategic partnerships with industries. These constraints emphasize the need for an adaptive approach and specific strategies to address various barriers in TQM implementation in vocational school environments.

The application of TQM principles in transformational school leadership also includes effectively managing change. Principals must manage change through effective communication, clear goal-setting, and transparent policy implementation. These steps help overcome barriers and resistance in quality improvement program implementation (Hoyle, 2005).

The use of appropriate data and assessment is also crucial in transformational leadership and TQM implementation. Principals should encourage effective data use to monitor, evaluate, and make strategic decisions aimed at educational quality improvement. Research by Fullan (2014) suggests that leaders who use data for continuous improvement can achieve better and sustainable educational outcomes.

The sustainability of quality in vocational schools is also significantly influenced by the principal's commitment to integrating ethical and moral values into their leadership. Ethical and moral leadership will influence the attitudes and behaviors of all school members, ultimately contributing to the improvement and sustainability of educational quality in vocational schools (Northouse, 2016).

Total Quality Management is planned to be implemented in several schools in Indonesia, including SMKN 1 Juwangi Boyolali. The principal of SMKN 1 Juwangi Boyolali elaborated deeply on the process and challenges of implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) in vocational schools. The principal emphasized that TQM implementation requires good and comprehensive quality standards, which have been formally regulated by the government through standard quality. At present, SMKN 1 Juwangi is in the process of TQM implementation, in which quality evaluations have been carried out through accreditation mechanisms.

However, the principal acknowledged that accreditation implementation in the field, especially in vocational schools, has not yet reached an optimal level as expected. Moreover, the principal stressed that TQM implementation requires mature planning, including short-term and long-term planning, and involves various aspects such as resource allocation, curriculum development, and human resource competence improvement.

Mature planning is an essential initial step in Total Quality Management (TQM) implementation. The principal emphasized that comprehensive and strategic planning is needed at the beginning of the academic year to achieve optimal educational quality. These plans should include both short-term and long-term time frames, also materialized in Middle-Term Work Plan (RKJM). These designs then become the basis for budget allocation and learning curriculum development. This is consistent with literature stating that mature planning is one of the main components in effective TQM implementation (Oakland, 2003).

## **CONCLUSION**

Implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) at SMKN 1 Juwangi Boyolali emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership in overcoming challenges and achieving success. The school principal serves as the main driver in shaping a school culture focused on quality and continuous improvement, leading with a strong vision, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and attention to individual needs. Through this approach, the school is able to

mobilize all school members, address challenges related to human resources, the environment, students' economic backgrounds, as well as facilities and infrastructure, while continually enhancing its teaching and operational processes. The practical implications of this research underscore the need for support and training in the development of transformational leadership for vocational school administrators and educational policymakers, as a step towards sustainable improvement in educational quality.

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