

Core Values as a Foundation for Transformational Leadership of School Principals

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze core values as the foundation of the principal's transformational leadership in building a positive culture in schools. Core values the research topic is Al-Ibrah, an acronym for Amanah (Trustworthy), Loyalty (Loyal), Initiative (Initiative), Fit (Bugar), Responsiveness (Responsiveness), Adaptability (Adaptiveness), and Humanism, which are considered to align with the four dimensions of transformational leadership. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The research informants consisted of school principals, teachers, and educational staff selected using the technique. Purposive sampling. Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, with validity testing through triangulation and member checking the results of the study show that Core values (Trustworthy, Loyal, Initiative, Fit, Responsive, Adaptive, and Humanistic) at the Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT) are an important foundation in the principal's transformational leadership. The four transformational dimensions are implemented in the principal's leadership in the form of trustworthy and fit values that strengthen the principal's image as a role model (idealized influence), loyal and adaptive that drives collective inspiration (inspirational motivation), initiative and adaptability that stimulate creativity (intellectual stimulation), as well as responsive and humanistic which ensures personal attention (individualized consideration). Transformational leadership based on core values not only improve the performance of school organizations, but also form a sustainable positive culture.

Article History

Received : September 2025

Revised : October 2025

Accepted : November 2025

Keywords

Core values, Transformational Leadership, Principal, Positive Culture, Education.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/sedu.v1i1.000>

Cite in APA style as:

Suradji, M., In'am, A., Faridi, Khozin (2025). Core Values as a Foundation for Transformational Leadership of School Principals. *Journal of Education Management and Policy*, 1(3), 175-185.



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INTRODUCTION

The principal's leadership is a strategic factor in determining the quality of education delivery in schools. The principal acts not only as an administrative manager but also as a transformational leader capable of mobilizing, inspiring, and empowering all members of the school community to collectively achieve the educational vision. According to (ElKaleh, 2020), transformational leadership is characterized by four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions cannot function optimally without a strong foundation of values. This is where core values play an important role. Core values can be understood as a set of basic values that guide behavior, decisions, and leadership orientation (Solihin et al., 2020; Tabrani et al., 2024).

In the context of education, core values serve as a moral compass for the principal to uphold integrity, fairness, and a focus on educational quality. Values such as trustworthiness, loyalty, initiative, fitness, responsiveness, adaptability, and a humanistic attitude, if consistently internalized, will shape leadership character that is not only effective but also transformational. The challenges of education in the era of globalization require principals to adapt to rapid change, regulatory complexity, and societal demands for educational quality (Ramos et al., 2023; Giridharan, 2025; Syamsuni et al., 2025). Schools are not only learning institutions but also social ecosystems rich in values. Therefore, the principal's leadership must not stop at technical administrative aspects but must be rooted in a foundation of values capable of guiding changes in school culture. As emphasized by Ruhullah & Ushama (2024), a school's organizational culture grows from the core values instilled and exemplified by the leader.

In the context of transformational leadership, idealized influence requires the value of trust that reflects the integrity and honesty of a principal. Without trust, leadership influence will not take root. The value of loyalty supports inspirational motivation, where a principal who is consistent and loyal to the school's vision will more easily motivate teachers and students to achieve common goals. The values of initiative and adaptability are important for intellectual stimulation, because both encourage principals to open up space for innovation, take creative steps, and adapt to changes in curriculum policy. Meanwhile, responsive and humanistic values strengthen individualized consideration, by demonstrating concern, empathy, and personal attention to teachers, students, and parents. Fitness values are also important because they provide energy and emotional stability for principals in carrying out their leadership roles.

Several previous studies have shown a close relationship between core values and the effectiveness of transformational leadership. For example, research by Rogobete & Pejan (2020), confirms that transformational leadership cannot be separated from the moral and ethical aspects that form its foundation. In Indonesia, a study by Fitriasari et al (2020) found that principals with high integrity and the ability to internalize spiritual values were more successful in building a positive school culture. Similarly, research by Fache & Pauwels (2020) showed that core values contribute significantly to increasing teacher commitment to the school organization. However, in

reality, many principals still focus more on administrative aspects than on strengthening values. This results in mechanical leadership lacking inspiring transformational power. As a result, school culture tends to be devoid of values, teacher participation is limited to formalities, and students lack strong leadership role models. Yet, education is essentially a process of internalizing values as well as transferring knowledge (An-na'im et al., 2023; Syamsul et al., 2023). Therefore, a study of core values as the foundation of transformational leadership, the principal becomes very relevant and urgent.

This study attempts to describe how core values serve as a foundation in forming the transformational leadership of the principal at the Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School. The focus of the research is directed at observing the implementation of the values of trustworthiness, loyalty, initiative, fitness, responsiveness, adaptability, and humanism in daily leadership practices at the school, as well as how these values strengthen the dimensions of trustworthiness. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Thus, core values It's not just a moral slogan, but truly serves as the foundation for transformational leadership. Principals who instill the values of trustworthiness, loyalty, initiative, fitness, responsiveness, adaptability, and humanism will be able to move their schools toward a more positive, collaborative, and innovative culture. Ultimately, school success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the quality of values-based leadership that shapes the character of the entire school community.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of describing and analyzing in depth how core values become the foundation of the principal's transformational leadership. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for uncovering the meaning, understanding, and subjective experiences of the principal and school community in applying core values to daily leadership practices (Fitriasari et al., 2020). The research subjects were the principal, teachers, and educational staff at the Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT), which has implemented a leadership strengthening program. Core values in school culture. Informants were selected using the technique of purposive sampling, namely those who are considered to understand, experience, and be directly involved in the implementation of values-based leadership. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore the principal's understanding and leadership practices, observations were used to observe the implementation of values in school activities, while documents such as the school's vision and mission, regulations, and program reports were analyzed as supporting data. Data were analyzed using an interactive model Wibowo & Kurniawan (2023) which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking to ensure the accuracy of information obtained from informants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aims to reveal how core values become the foundation of the principal's transformational leadership in building a positive, innovative, and quality-oriented school culture. The research results were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis at the Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School, which has implemented a core value strengthening program (Core values).

The Principal as a Trustworthy and Healthy Role Model (Idealized Influence)

The results of the study show that the idealized influence dimension appears strong through the application of core values trustworthy and fit. Principals who are perceived as trustworthy are able to foster trust among teachers and education staff. They demonstrate consistency between words and actions, transparency in decision-making, and full responsibility for the school's successes and failures. Teachers describe trustworthy principals as exemplary moral figures, fostering collective commitment to the school's vision and mission.

Core value fitness is reflected in the principal's work ethic, discipline, and physical and mental health. A principal who maintains fitness not only has the stamina to carry out busy activities but also transmits positive energy to the school community. Observations show that fit principals are more active in interacting, greeting teachers in a friendly manner, attending student activities, and inspiring the understanding that leadership requires physical and mental toughness. Thus, trust and fitness strengthen idealized influence because the principal is seen as a role model who is consistent and full of vitality.

Loyalty as a Driver of Inspiration (Inspirational Motivation)

The inspirational dimension of motivation is realized primarily through core value loyal. The principal demonstrates strong loyalty to the school's vision, mission, and goals. This loyalty is demonstrated through commitment to educational policies, selfless dedication, and adherence to the principles of integrity. Teachers and students perceive a loyal principal as capable of fostering a spirit of togetherness in achieving school success. The principal also frequently delivers motivational messages in meetings, ceremonies, and informal activities, emphasizing the importance of adherence to the noble values of education. The principal's loyalty serves as a source of inspiration, encouraging the school community to remain steadfast in the face of challenges, and believing that educational success requires long-term dedication.

Initiative and Adaptability as Drivers of Creativity (Intellectual Stimulation)

In dimension intellectual stimulation, this study found an important role core values initiative and adaptability. A principal who takes the initiative can encourage the school community to think creatively, seek alternative solutions, and boldly innovate in both learning and school management. For example, one principal initiated a digital learning program involving young teachers as driving forces. This program stemmed from the principal's courage to take new steps, despite the risks that were not yet fully predictable.

Core value adaptability is a key factor in a principal's success in navigating the

dynamics of change. Adaptive principals are able to adapt management strategies to external challenges, such as new curriculum policies, technological developments, and student needs in the digital age. Observations show that being adaptive not only means adjusting but also instilling a flexible attitude in teachers, making them more open to change. Adaptive principals avoid rigid leadership styles and instead encourage experimentation, reflection, and continuous innovation. With initiative and adaptability, principals are able to create a school environment that supports creative and collaborative learning, in accordance with the characteristics of the students intellectual stimulation.

Responsive and Humanistic as a Form of Individual Attention (Individualized Consideration)

Dimensions individualized consideration is evident in the implementation core values responsive and humane. A responsive principal demonstrates sensitivity to the needs of teachers, students, and parents. Responsiveness is evident when the principal quickly responds to problems, such as teacher difficulties using learning media or student challenges in social adaptation. Teachers feel valued because the principal does not delay responding but instead provides solutions or support immediately.

Core value humanist principles strengthen the principal's role in building warm interpersonal relationships. Humanistic principals view teachers and students not simply as objects of policy, but as individuals with feelings, dignity, and potential. They demonstrate empathy, a willingness to listen to concerns, and strive to guide teachers and students according to their individual needs.

Interviews revealed that humanistic principals frequently visit classrooms, engage in personal dialogue with teachers, and pay special attention to students experiencing academic and non-academic challenges. This creates a school climate of respect, solidarity, and togetherness. Thus, responsiveness and humanism become the real foundation of a school individualized consideration.

Synergy Core Values in the Four Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

The results of the study show that the seven Core values does not stand alone, but rather forms a synergy that strengthens the four dimensions of transformational leadership according to Bass & Riggio (2006). Trustworthiness and fitness strengthen the image of the principal as a role model (idealized influence), loyal and adaptive encourage collective inspiration (inspirational motivation), initiative and adaptability spur creativity (intellectual stimulation), as well as responsive and humanistic ensuring personal attention (individualized consideration).

This synergy creates holistic leadership, where the principal not only directs but also inspires, empowers, and mentors the entire school community. With this foundation, core values, transformational leadership does not stop at the managerial aspect, but moves towards the formation of a school culture that is characterful, adaptive, and innovative.

Impact of Implementation Core Values in Principal Leadership

The study also found that the implementation of core values as a foundation for transformational leadership, it has a positive impact on several aspects, namely: First, a positive school culture can create an open, inclusive, and collaborative school climate.

Second, teacher performance improves by making teachers feel appreciated, motivated, and more creative in teaching. Third, higher student involvement so that students are inspired by the principal's example and more enthusiastic about participating in school activities. Fourth A harmonious relationship between schools and the community can create a leadership pattern that is trustworthy, loyal, and humanistic, and the community will have more trust in the school. This impact confirms that core values are not just a slogan, but can truly be the foundation of transformational leadership that changes the face of the school to be more advanced and meaningful.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that core values plays a significant role as the foundation of the principal's transformational leadership. The results show that the seven core values (trustworthiness, loyalty, initiative, fitness, responsiveness, adaptability, and humanism) not only serve as guidelines for individual behavior but also shape leadership patterns that align with the four main dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, dan individualized consideration (Vasconcelos, 2020; Hamdanah et al., 2025). The following discussion outlines the relationship between research and the theory of transformational leadership of school principals in the formation of a positive culture.

Trust and Fitness as a Basis Idealized Influence

A trustworthy and fit principal is perceived as an exemplary figure (role model) for school residents. This research is in line with the theory Hsieh et al (2025) that idealized influence demands that leaders demonstrate integrity, consistency, and moral courage. Amanah fosters trust, while fitness emphasizes resilience and readiness to face challenges. From an Islamic perspective, the value of amanah is one of the pillars of leadership. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of amanah in Surah An-Nisa: 58, which states that all matters must be fairly conveyed to those entitled to them. Implementing amanah in the principal's role ensures that school residents are confident that decisions are made not for personal gain, but for the common good.

The value of fitness strengthens the non-verbal role model. Leadership requires energy, physical strength, and mental resilience to enable leaders to carry out busy activities without losing enthusiasm. This study confirms research Allred & Aragon (2023) that leaders with high stamina are better able to manage stress, maintain interpersonal relationships, and positively influence their followers. Thus, trustworthiness and fitness not only shape the principal's image as a role model but also strengthen the moral and psychological legitimacy of transformational leadership (Arabi et al., 2020; Filippova et al., 2021).

Loyalty as a Source Inspirational Motivation

Core value Loyalty has proven to be the driving force inspirational motivation A principal who is loyal to the school's vision inspires teachers and students to remain committed. This research supports the notion Ashafa et al (2025) that transformational leaders must be able to articulate a clear vision, convey enthusiasm, and give meaning to the work of their followers.

Loyalty is not only emotional loyalty, but also a professional commitment to maintaining educational values despite various difficulties. This aligns with the research findings of Salter (2024), which confirmed that visionary and dedicated school leadership has a significant impact on teacher motivation and student engagement.

In the context of school culture, the principal's loyalty encourages the creation of a shared identity. Teachers and students feel part of a larger mission, fostering a collective spirit of achievement. This demonstrates that loyalty is not merely personal but also a symbolic force that builds school solidarity (Fuad et al., 2022; Mills et al., 2023; Duangmanee et al., 2024).

Initiative and Adaptive in Intellectual Stimulation

The research results show that principals who are proactive and adaptive are able to encourage the birth of creativity in the school environment. Intellectual stimulation emphasizes the courage of leaders to challenge old ways of thinking, encourage innovative solutions, and open up space for experimentation.

Principals' initiative is evident in their ability to design new programs, such as digitizing learning or innovations in project-based assessment. This aligns with Fullan, (2007) theory of educational innovation, which emphasizes the importance of leadership initiative as a catalyst for change. Furthermore, adaptive skills enable principals to respond quickly to change. For example, curriculum changes or developments in educational technology are responded to by adjusting learning strategies and school management. This confirms the view that adaptive leadership is necessary for organizations to survive and thrive amidst uncertainty (Merlo et al., 2021; Chang & Chen, 2023).

The combination of initiative and adaptability creates a school environment that is open to change, encourages teachers to be more creative, and prepares students to face the challenges of the 21st century. In other words, two core values this confirms that transformational leadership is both visionary and flexible.

Responsive and Humanistic as Implementation Individualized Consideration

Core values responsive and humanistic are important pillars in the dimension individualized consideration. A responsive principal is able to listen to the needs of both teachers and students, while a humanistic attitude reflects empathy, respect, and personal attention. This research aligns with Buchtmann et al (2023) opinion that transformational leaders pay attention to individual development, act as mentors, and provide support tailored to the unique needs of each follower. In an educational context, personal attention is crucial because teachers and students have different backgrounds, motivations, and challenges (ElKaleh, 2020; Temeljotov Salaj & Lindkvist, 2021; Ferranco, 2025).

Humanist values are also rooted in the principles of Islamic education which emphasize mercy for all the worlds, namely, a commitment to humanity and compassion. A humanistic principal creates an inclusive school atmosphere where every individual feels valued. A responsive attitude accelerates problem-solving, so that teachers and students feel supported. This increases teacher job satisfaction, strengthens student attachment to the school, and prevents the emergence of prolonged conflict (Maroofi et al., 2022; Ghosh, 2023). Thus, responsiveness and

humanism strengthen transformational leadership in the interpersonal realm.

The results of the study showed that the seven core values working synergistically, not partially. This synergy forms a values-based transformational leadership model. A trustworthy and fit principal strengthens trust, loyalty encourages inspiration, initiative and adaptability drive innovation, and responsiveness and humanism ensure continued personal attention. Transformational leadership is generally understood as a strategy to influence followers, so in this study core values emphasize that leadership is also rooted in moral and spiritual values. In the Indonesian context, where education is influenced by cultural and religious values, core values is an important key so that transformational leadership is not only managerially effective, but also culturally meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that core values (Trustworthy, Loyal, Initiative, Fit, Responsive, Adaptive, and Humanistic) at the Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School are an important foundation in the principal's transformational leadership. The four transformational dimensions are implemented in the principal's leadership in the form of trustworthy and fit values that strengthen the principal's image as a role model.(idealized influence), loyal and adaptive that drives collective inspiration(inspirational motivation), initiative and adaptability that stimulate creativity(intellectual stimulation), as well as responsive and humanistic which ensures personal attention (individualized consideration). Transformational leadership based on core values not only improve the performance of school organizations, but also form a sustainable positive culture.

Suggesting the relevant future studies; First, the principal needs to consistently internalize core values in daily leadership practice to become role model. Second, teachers and education personnel are expected to participate in strengthening core values through collaboration and instilling them in school activities. Third, the government and education offices need to provide support in the form of values-based leadership training to optimize school culture transformation. Finally, further research can expand the focus on the impact core values on student learning outcomes and parental involvement, thus creating a more comprehensive synergy in realizing a school with a superior culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the leadership, teachers, and staff of Al-Ibrah Gresik Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMPIT Al-Ibrah) for their openness and cooperation during the research process. Appreciation is also extended to Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum Lamongan and Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang for their academic guidance and institutional support throughout this study. Deep thanks are due to all informants who willingly shared their insights and experiences, enriching the depth and validity of the findings. The author also acknowledges the encouragement and constructive feedback from colleagues and reviewers, which have greatly contributed to the refinement of this work. May this

research provide meaningful contributions to the development of transformational leadership practices based on core values in Islamic educational institutions.

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