

## A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Perceptions on Multiple Leadership Styles Among Secondary School Principals

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**Abstract:** This study explores teachers' perceptions of secondary school principal leadership practices in Indonesia, examining how transformational, instructional, distributive, and servant leadership dimensions integrate in daily practice. The research identifies specific leadership behaviors perceived as most significant by teachers and analyzes their impact on teacher well-being, motivation, and professional commitment in Indonesian secondary education contexts. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological design with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with one experienced secondary school teacher using purposive sampling. Analysis utilized Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis approach, with ATLAS.ti version 23 software facilitates systematic coding and pattern visualization. Four major themes emerged: (1) Personal Care and Attention, reflecting servant leadership through regular evaluation and crisis support; (2) Authority Delegation and Trust, demonstrating distributive leadership with structured guidance; (3) Teacher Professional Development, through weekly dissemination programs and classroom observation; and (4) Transformational Leadership, involving meaningful vision formulation, participation and multichannel communication. However, bidirectional collaborative learning between principals and teachers showed limitations. This study provides the first empirical evidence of multi-dimensional leadership integration in Indonesian secondary school contexts, advancing knowledge by demonstrating how Western leadership theories adapt within non-Western cultural frameworks. It introduces teachers' voices as a primary data source, offering insider perspectives often neglected in leadership studies and revealing authentic distributive leadership implementation challenges within hierarchical cultures. Findings inform principal training program development and educational policy formulation regarding competency standards and performance evaluation systems in Indonesian secondary education.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributive leadership, servant leadership

Principal leadership represents a crucial factor determining educational quality and school organizational effectiveness in achieving educational objectives. In the 21st-century education context, demands on principals are no longer limited to administrative and managerial functions but also encompass strategic roles as transformation agents capable of inspiring, motivating, and developing teacher capacity

sustainably (Leithwood and Sun, 2022; Harris and Jones, 2023). Global research demonstrates that principal leadership exerts significant influence on student achievement, teacher job satisfaction, school organizational climate, and educational innovation sustainability (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2023; Hallinger and Heck, 2024). However, the complexity of leadership roles in Indonesian secondary education contexts faces unique challenges requiring a deep understanding of how principals execute their leadership from teachers' perspectives as primary actors in the learning process.

Contemporary literature on educational leadership identifies various leadership dimensions contributing to school effectiveness. Transformational leadership has become the dominant paradigm in educational leadership research over the past two decades, focusing on how leaders inspire and motivate followers to transcend personal interests for organizational collective goals (Bass and Riggio, 2021; Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2022). Transformational leadership dimensions include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which have proven to correlate positively with teacher commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational performance (Liu, Bellibaş, and Gümüş, 2023; Wang, Liu, and Zhu, 2024). Furthermore, instructional leadership emphasizes principals' roles in enhancing learning quality through academic supervision, curriculum development, and creating conducive learning cultures (Shatzer *et al.*, 2022; Hallinger and Murphy, 2023).

Distributive or distributed leadership has emerged as an alternative approach, recognizing that leadership is not one individual's monopoly but can be spread among various actors within school organizations (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2021; Harris and DeFlaminis, 2024). This model emphasizes the importance of collaboration, empowerment, and collective participation in decision-making and leadership task execution (Lumby, 2023). Research indicates that distributive leadership can enhance organizational capacity, learning innovation, and educational change sustainability (Tian and Huber, 2022; Woods and Roberts, 2023). In the Indonesian context, distributive leadership implementation faces structural and cultural challenges related to traditional hierarchy and authority centralization in education systems (Raihani, 2021; Sumintono *et al.*, 2023).

Servant leadership offers a different perspective by positioning followers' needs and development as leaders' primary priority (Greenleaf, 2021; van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2023). Servant leadership characteristics include empathy, active listening, healing, self-awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and community building (Liden *et al.*, 2022; Parris and Peachey, 2024). In educational contexts, servant leadership has proven to enhance teacher well-being, organizational trust, and positive school climate (Qiu and Dooley, 2022; Cerit, 2023). However, research on servant leadership in Indonesian secondary school contexts remains extremely limited, creating understanding gaps about how servant leadership principles can be adapted and implemented in local educational cultures.

Despite rapid development in educational leadership style literature, several significant research gaps require addressing. First, most educational leadership research is conducted in Western contexts, while understanding of how these leadership principles are applied and adapted in non-Western cultural contexts,

particularly Indonesia, remains severely limited (Hallinger, 2023; Walker and Qian, 2023). Second, the majority of educational leadership research employs quantitative approaches with standard questionnaires that may not capture the nuances and complexities of leadership practices in specific contexts (Pont, Nusche, and Moorman, 2021; Brauckmann and Pashiardis, 2022). Third, teachers' perspectives as direct recipients and observers of principal leadership practices have not received adequate attention in in-depth qualitative research (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2022; Day, Gu and Sammons, 2023).

Fourth, research on the integration of various leadership dimensions (transformational, instructional, distributive, and servant) in Indonesian principal leadership practices remains rarely found (Raihani and Sumintono, 2024). Fifth, relationships between principal leadership practices and teacher professional development and well-being in Indonesian secondary education contexts have not been adequately explored (Suyatno et al., 2021; Wibowo *et al.*, 2023). Sixth, understanding of how principals handle external challenges such as relationships with communities, parents, and other stakeholders in local contexts remains limited (Sumintono and Subekti, 2022).

Significantly to understanding educational leadership in Indonesian contexts and enriching global dialogue about effective leadership practices in secondary schools. By integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and giving voice to teachers' experiences, this study attempts to bridge gaps between leadership theory and field leadership practice, while providing empirical foundations for more effective and contextual educational leadership development in the future.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of principal leadership styles in Indonesian secondary schools. The qualitative design selection was based on considerations that leadership phenomena constitute complex constructs involving interpersonal, emotional, and contextual dimensions difficult to measure quantitatively. Descriptive phenomenology was chosen for its ability to understand deep meanings from participants' lived experiences without excessive theoretical interpretation (Creswell and Poth, 2023). This study adopted a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging that reality is a product of social construction and understanding of phenomena must be obtained through the interpretation of participants' subjective experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 2013). This phenomenological study was conducted at secondary schools (SMA) in Pandeglang.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling with strict inclusion criteria. The participant was a teacher who had worked for at least two years with permanent teacher status and actively interacted with the principal in various contexts. The interview guide was developed based on a literature review of transformational, instructional, distributive, and servant leadership, encompassing open-ended questions exploring main leadership dimensions. Content validity was ensured through consultation with two educational leadership experts, while credibility was guaranteed through member checking, researcher reflexivity, and comprehensive audit trail documentation.

Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data analysis utilized thematic analysis with Braun & Clarke's (2022) six-phase approach, facilitated by ATLAS.ti version 23 software. The analysis process included: familiarization with data through repeated reading, inductive open coding to identify interesting features, theme searching by grouping similar meaningful codes, theme reviewing to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness, clear theme defining and naming, and analytical report compilation with direct quotations. ATLAS.ti enhanced research dependability through automatic audit trails, consistent coding systematicity, complex pattern visualization, and analysis transparency, enabling detailed methodological decision tracking.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

This section presents findings from the secondary school (SMA) teachers in Pandeglang. Analysis of interview data yielded four major themes: (1) Personal Care and Attention, (2) Authority Delegation and Trust, (3) Teacher Professional Development, and (4) Transformational Leadership.



**Figure 1.** Analysis Data Results

Source: Research'r, 2025

#### Personal Care and Attention

Interview results revealed that the principal demonstrates consistent care for teachers' well-being and development at the school. This care dimension manifests in several concrete forms directly experienced by the informant.

#### Regular Personal Evaluation

The principal conducts routine personal evaluations with each teacher. This evaluation process not

only focuses on performance assessment aspects but also includes appreciation and identification of areas requiring improvement. The informant stated:

*"My experience with the principal's care is that the principal regularly conducts personal evaluations with us teachers. Discussing what needs improvement and appreciating what we have done."*

This quotation indicates balanced feedback practices between constructive criticism and positive recognition, which is an important characteristic of leadership caring about subordinate development.

### **Support in Critical Situations**

The principal's care is also reflected in responses to critical situations faced by teachers. One memorable moment disclosed by the informant was the principal's support during the relocation process:

*"I am a relocating teacher from another school to my current school. There was a special memorable moment from the principal, when my old school and I were looking for a school still able to meet the minimum teaching hours. My current principal helped the entire relocation process without any obstacles in a short time."*

The principal's proactive actions in facilitating the relocation process demonstrate empathy and commitment to teacher well-being. This reflects leadership not only focused on administrative aspects but also attentive to teachers' individual needs.

### **Personal and Professional Approaches**

The principal differentiates approaches based on the nature of problems faced by teachers. For personal problems, the principal uses a one-on-one discussion approach, while for professional development, it is conducted through observation and structured feedback:

*"Personally, we usually have one-on-one discussions about decisions, actions, and so on. Professionally, the principal routinely conducts teaching observations and provides suggestions or input for future improvement."*

This approach demonstrates the principal's awareness of differences between teachers' personal and professional needs, as well as the ability to adjust communication styles according to context.

### **External Issue Management**

In facing challenges involving community environments, the principal demonstrates structured and collaborative approaches. The informant explained:

*"Usually, such matters are resolved by the vice principal for public relations first. If it is indeed an important issue that must involve the principal, then the principal will provide an open discussion space with relevant parties."*

This strategy reflects efficient and collaborative leadership, where the principal delegates tasks to competent deputies but remains available for direct involvement when necessary.

### **Authority Delegation and Trust**

Effective leadership is not only about control but also about empowerment. Interview results indicate that the principal provides trust to teachers through authority delegation accompanied by clear guidance.

### **Responsibility Delegation Experience**

The informant shared the experience of receiving trust to become a consumption coordinator in school activities:

*"I was once given the trust to become a consumption coordinator at Scout Guest Reception activities. I received direct guidance from the principal regarding job descriptions to be performed and budget management."*

This quotation reveals that authority delegation is conducted in structured ways, where teachers are not only given responsibility but also clear guidance regarding expectations and available resources. This demonstrates a balance between providing autonomy and the support necessary for success.

### **Limitations in Collaborative Participation**

However, areas where collaborative interaction is not yet optimal were also found. When asked whether the principal ever requested input or learned from teachers, the informant answered briefly: "Never." This finding indicates potential for developing more inclusive and mutually learning leadership practices, although not diminishing the quality of authority delegation already conducted.

### **Teacher Professional Development**

The principal demonstrates a strong commitment to teacher professional development through providing opportunities and space for competency growth.

### **Routine Dissemination Programs**

One applied strategy is regular dissemination program implementation:

*"Every Friday, we hold dissemination at school, the principal provides discussion space and skill development for teachers."*

Consistently scheduled dissemination programs demonstrate the principal's given priority toward continuous learning. Provision of discussion space and skill development creates an environment supporting collective professional growth.

### **Observation and Instructional Feedback**

Beyond structured programs, the principal also conducts academic supervision through routine classroom observations, as previously mentioned in the professional attention context. This practice functions not only as an evaluation mechanism but also as an opportunity for development through constructive suggestions and input.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership emphasizes leaders' ability to inspire and motivate followers toward a

shared vision. Interview results revealed that the principal applies transformational leadership principles in school contexts.

### **Participation in Vision and Mission Formulation**

The school vision and mission formulation process involves teachers' active participation:

*"Yes, teachers are meaningfully involved. The school vision and mission are the result of agreements from school members, especially the principal and teachers."*

Meaningful involvement in vision and mission formulation reflects a democratic approach, increasing teachers' sense of ownership and commitment to organizational goals. This constitutes a key characteristic of transformational leadership, emphasizing empowerment and collaboration.

### **Multifaceted Vision Communication**

The principal employs various strategies to communicate and inspire the school vision:

*"Communicating orally and in writing. Orally, when delivering speeches or messages at several opening and closing activities of events. In writing, by creating banners containing the school vision and mission, placed at several points in the school."*

This multichannel approach ensures that the school vision is not only known but also internalized by all school members. Use of oral media in important moments enables the principal to provide direct inspiration, while visual media in banner form provides constant reminders about organizational direction and goals.

Overall, this study's results reveal a principal leadership profile reflecting effective and transformational leadership characteristics. The four identified main themes are interrelated and form a leadership ecosystem supporting teacher development and organizational goal achievement. Personal care and consistent attention create a climate of trust and support, becoming the foundation for effective authority delegation. Commitment to teacher professional development demonstrates long-term investment in educational quality, while transformational approaches in leadership ensure that all school members move toward the same vision. However, this study also identifies potential areas for further development, particularly regarding bidirectional collaborative learning between principals and teachers. Although the principal has demonstrated various positive leadership practices, opportunities to create more inclusive dialogue where principals also learn from teachers can enrich leadership practices and deepen organizational learning culture.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Integration of Servant Leadership in Personal Care Practices**

This study's findings revealed that the principal demonstrates consistent care for teacher well-being and development through regular personal evaluation, support in critical situations, and approaches adjusted for personal and professional problems. These practices fundamentally reflect servant leadership

principles that position followers' needs and development as primary priorities (Greenleaf, 2022; van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2023). Servant leadership characteristics observed in this study include empathy, active listening, and commitment to others' growth, consistent with dimensions identified by Liden et al. (2022) and Parris & Peachey (2024).

Mechanisms underlying personal care practice effectiveness can be explained through social exchange theory and perceived organizational support theory. When principals demonstrate authentic care for teacher well-being, as seen in proactive support during relocation processes, teachers develop positive perceptions of organizational support that subsequently drive increased commitment, trust, and performance (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2022; Cerit, 2023). These findings strengthen arguments that servant leadership can enhance teacher well-being and organizational trust in educational contexts (Qiu and Dooley, 2022).

Regular personal evaluation practices with a balance between appreciation and constructive criticism demonstrate implementation of effective feedback principles. Contemporary research emphasizes that quality feedback must be specific, timely, and balanced between positive reinforcement and development areas (Day, Gu and Sammons, 2023; Liu, Bellibaş and Gümüş, 2023). This approach not only enhances teacher performance but also builds trust and strong interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers, which is an important foundation for effective leadership (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2022). These findings also expand understanding of how servant leadership can be adapted in Indonesian cultural contexts, emphasizing relational harmony and respected hierarchy (Raihani and Sumintono, 2024).

### **Authority Delegation and Distributive Leadership: Practices and Limitations**

Findings related to authority delegation revealed practices reflecting distributive leadership elements, but with significant limitations. The principal provides trust to teachers to lead specific tasks with clear guidance and resources, as seen in the informant's experience as a consumption coordinator. This practice aligns with distributive leadership principles emphasizing leadership spread among various actors within organizations (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2021; Harris and DeFlaminis, 2024). Structured delegation with clear guidance reflects a balance between providing autonomy and necessary support for success, which is an important characteristic of effective distributive leadership (Woods and Roberts, 2023).

However, interesting findings requiring special attention are the absence of bidirectional collaborative learning practices, where principals have never requested input or learned from teachers. These findings indicate limitations in implementing fully reciprocal distributive leadership. Lumby (2023) argues that authentic distributive leadership is not merely about task delegation but also about creating an interdependent organizational learning culture where all members, including formal leaders, learn from each other. These limitations may reflect structural and cultural challenges in Indonesian education contexts, tending to maintain traditional hierarchy and authority centralization (Raihani, 2021;

Sumintono *et al.*, 2023).

Theoretical interpretation of these findings can be explained through the distributed leadership paradox concept. Although principals distribute operational responsibilities, epistemic control—namely, who is considered to possess legitimate knowledge and expertise—remains centered on principals. Harris & DeFlaminis (2024) note that many distributive leadership implementations in practice still maintain hierarchical assumptions about expertise, which can limit the full potential of collaboration and innovation. For Indonesian contexts, these findings suggest the need for more contextual distributive leadership reconceptualization, accommodating local cultural values while still encouraging meaningful collective participation (Walker and Qian, 2023).

### **Teacher Professional Development and Instructional Leadership**

The principal's commitment to teacher professional development, reflected in routine dissemination programs and classroom observation with structured feedback, demonstrates strong instructional leadership implementation. These practices align with three main instructional leadership dimensions identified by Hallinger (2024): defining school mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting a positive learning climate. Consistently scheduled weekly dissemination programs create institutional structures for continuous professional learning, which is a key characteristic of effective schools (Shatzer *et al.*, 2022; Hallinger and Murphy, 2023).

Mechanisms underlying professional development practice effectiveness can be explained through social learning theory and professional competency development theory. Routine classroom observation with constructive feedback provides opportunities for situated learning, where teachers receive context-specific feedback that can be directly applied to improve their instructional practices (Day, Gu, and Sammons, 2023). Dissemination programs function as communities of practice, facilitating knowledge exchange, collective reflection, and shared construction of pedagogical understanding (Wibowo *et al.*, 2023).

These findings strengthen empirical evidence that instructional leadership has a significant influence on teacher competency development and, indirectly, on student achievement (Liu, Bellibaş, and Gümüş, 2023; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2023). Meta-analytic research by Hallinger & Heck (2024) indicates that instructional leadership has stronger effects on student learning compared to other leadership styles when mediated by teacher professional development and instructional practices. These research findings provide qualitative support for this argument by revealing how consistent and structured instructional leadership practices create environments supporting teachers' continuous professional growth.

### **Vision Participation and Multifaceted Communication**

Findings related to teacher participation in school vision and mission formulation and multifaceted vision communication demonstrate effective transformational leadership implementation. Observed

transformational leadership principles include inspirational motivation (through vision communication in various forums) and individualized consideration (through meaningful involvement in vision formulation processes). These practices align with transformational leadership dimensions identified by Bass & Riggio (2021) and have proven to correlate positively with teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Leithwood and Sun, 2022; Wang, Liu, and Zhu, 2024).

Psychological mechanisms underlying vision formulation participation effectiveness can be explained through the psychological ownership theory. When teachers are meaningfully involved in school vision and mission formulation, they develop ownership sense toward organizational goals, increasing intrinsic motivation and commitment to achieving those goals (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2022). This democratic approach also reflects empowerment principles, which are key components of effective transformational leadership (Harris and Jones, 2023).

Multichannel vision communication strategy—oral through speeches in various events and visual through banners at strategic locations—demonstrates the principal's understanding of redundancy and repetition in organizational communication. Organizational communication research emphasizes that messages delivered through various channels and in various contexts are more likely to be internalized by organizational members (Day, Gu, and Sammons, 2023). Using symbolic moments such as event openings and closings to communicate vision creates organizational rituals reinforcing school values and strategic directions, which is an important function of transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **CONCLUSION**

This phenomenological study provides empirical evidence that effective principal leadership in Indonesian secondary schools integrates multiple dimensions—servant leadership through personal care and support, distributive leadership via structured delegation, instructional leadership through professional development, and transformational leadership in vision articulation. These integrated dimensions form a cohesive ecosystem that enhances teacher well-being, professional commitment, and organizational effectiveness. This research contributes to cross-cultural educational leadership scholarship by demonstrating that Western leadership theories can be contextually adapted within non-Western hierarchical cultures without losing their effectiveness. While bidirectional collaborative learning remains limited, the findings offer a foundation for developing more inclusive and culturally responsive principal training programs and educational policy frameworks in Indonesian secondary education.

### **SUGGESTION**

Practically, this study offers concrete blueprints for educational leadership development in Indonesia. Principal training programs need to shift from fragmentary approaches, teaching leadership styles

separately, toward integrative approaches, developing holistic competencies. Principal performance evaluation systems must be expanded beyond administrative indicators to include broader leadership dimensions such as teacher well-being, organizational learning culture, and interpersonal relationship quality. To address collaborative learning limitations, schools need to develop structural protocols for upward feedback and equal professional dialogue, such as teacher-led professional learning communities and reverse mentoring systems.

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