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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE PRINCIPAL IN PROMOTING DEEP LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY AT MUARA TIGA PUBLIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 2

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ABSTRAK

Implementasi pembelajaran mendalam (*deep learning*) membutuhkan perubahan pedagogis, kesiapan guru, dan dukungan organisasi, khususnya pada sekolah rural yang menghadapi keterbatasan akses terhadap inovasi pendidikan dan sumber daya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah diterapkan dalam mendukung implementasi pembelajaran mendalam di SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. Penelitian dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus tunggal. Data diperoleh dari delapan informan melalui teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Adapun proses analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan yang terstruktur yaitu dari reduksi dan pengodean data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data penelitian ini diperkuat melalui triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional mendukung implementasi pembelajaran mendalam melalui empat dimensi utama, yaitu *idealized influence*; *inspirational motivation*; *intellectual stimulation*; serta *individualized consideration*. Praktik tersebut didukung dengan adanya pengembangan kompetensi guru, perencanaan kolaboratif, fleksibilitas organisasi, dan pendekatan dialogis dalam menghadapi resistensi. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa praktik tersebut mendukung terciptanya proses implementasi pembelajaran mendalam yang lebih adaptif, kolaboratif, dan reflektif di SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional berfungsi sebagai mekanisme dalam mengelola perubahan pedagogis dan mendukung kesiapan guru dalam implementasi pembelajaran mendalam pada konteks sekolah rural.

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Keywords:

Transformational Leadership;
Deep Learning;
Pedagogical Change;
Teacher Readiness;
Rural School;

ABSTRACT

Implementing deep learning requires pedagogical shifts, teacher readiness, and organizational support, particularly in rural schools facing limited access to educational innovations and resources. This study aims to explore how the principal's transformational leadership supports the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. A qualitative approach with a single-case study design was employed. Data were gathered from eight informants using interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data analysis process followed a structured sequence: data reduction and coding, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation. The findings indicate that transformational leadership supports deep learning implementation through four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These practices were reinforced by teacher competency development, collaborative planning, organizational flexibility, and a dialogic approach to addressing resistance. The findings also reveal that these practices fostered a more adaptive, collaborative, and reflective deep learning implementation process at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. The study concludes that transformational leadership serves as a mechanism for managing pedagogical change and supporting teacher readiness for deep learning implementation within a rural school context.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial aspect of human life, requiring various efforts to implement effectively (Anggreni and Suartini 2019). A report published by Statistics Indonesia (BPS 2025) indicates that efforts to improve access to education are ongoing in order to address existing disparities and inequalities. In quantitative terms, BPS notes that the school participation rate for students aged 13 to 15 has reached 95.7%; however, for the 16–17 age group, participation rates show a significant decline, particularly in certain rural areas. This trend stems from an unequal distribution of educational facilities and infrastructure, as well as low student motivation, leading many to drop out of school.

Recent studies suggest that to address ongoing challenges regarding access and equity in education, the prevailing paradigm within the education system is shifting toward learning that is more relevant, flexible, and contextual. Research by Akbar et al. (2023) indicates that this paradigm shift brings both innovations and increasingly complex challenges to the education system. Consequently, schools must be prepared to adapt and improve—ranging from the implementation of precise policies and the adjustment of curricula or instructional guidelines to the upgrading of facilities and the enhancement of educator competencies.

Research (Aulia et al. 2025) states that the 21st century learning system as the current educational paradigm has a more creative character and emphasizes several things, including changing learning patterns that tend to be dominated by teachers, towards a system that is more centered on students and their independence in understanding the material. Furthermore, this paradigm requires schools to integrate digital media and technology into instruction and to implement learning approaches that are relevant and cultivate students' critical thinking skills. One contemporary learning approach capable of fostering students' logical and critical thinking skills is the "deep learning" approach. According to Fitriani and Santiani (2025), deep learning is the latest learning approach that aims to develop the quality of education in Indonesia by creating a learning experience that is enjoyable, meaningful, and based on students' awareness to understand and internalize various materials presented by the teacher.

In addition, according to Isnayanti et al., (2025) deep learning is a learning approach that tries to build active participation of students by optimizing existing facilities and infrastructure, starting from media, whether integrated with digital technology such as online learning platforms or not, to teacher competence in implementing learning in the classroom. Thus, within the context of this study, the term "deep learning" does not refer to the fields of artificial intelligence or machine learning; rather, it denotes a learning approach that emphasizes conscious, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences for students.

Regarding its development, previous research (Harris et al., 2020) indicates that deep learning is closely linked to curriculum transformation. Its implementation involves pedagogical innovation and inquiry-based activities that build a profound understanding among students. In addition, several important components that have long needed to be considered in learning, such as problem solving, reflection and collaboration, are all the main focus of this approach.

The deep learning approach requires a productive learning ecosystem and support from various stakeholders, including school principals, educators, and parents. Research by Tuningsih (2026) explains that, alongside facilities and the learning ecosystem, the school principal plays a strategic role in supporting the implementation of the deep learning approach. Principals must ensure and facilitate the implementation

of all academic policies, instructional supervision, and spaces for innovation required by the education system.

Previous studies indicate that school principals have often been viewed as leaders focused solely on educational management and administrative order, with no connection to classroom instruction. Research by Fatwa and Sutaman (2025) notes that in the pre-modern era, access to education was limited to specific groups, and leadership tended to serve personal interests.

These findings are reinforced by earlier studies (Chen and Bos 2023; Tan 2024), which highlight two long-standing characteristics of principal leadership: the administrator role and the instructional leader role. Historically, principals' roles were dominated by administrative responsibilities and issuing directives to academic staff. However, in the current era of evolving education, there is a greater need for principals capable of fostering an academic culture, managing resources effectively, and providing appropriate supervision. Such capabilities help shape school policies that positively impact student academic achievement and empower teachers as skilled professionals.

According to Isvihani et al., (2026) in the current era, educational leadership, which means the embodiment of the role of the principal, has shifted to a stronger responsibility, namely as an agent of change. The goal of this shift is to drive innovation in instruction, curricular paradigms, technological advancement, and student competency development. Ultimately, this enables learning experiences to hold deeper meaning for students. Recent research (Pamuji and Habik 2026) confirms that curriculum flexibility, supported by school principal leadership, is a fundamental necessity in modern education. Such flexibility fosters a more open educational system, enabling educators to develop innovative teaching methods and adjust pedagogical strategies to meet students' specific needs.

Furthermore, support from the principal facilitates the creation of a meaningful learning environment grounded in humanistic values. Therefore, it can be said that the implementation of the curriculum and deep learning approach is very much determined by the principal's ability to build a school culture that is supportive, reflective, and oriented towards the continuous professional development of teaching staff (Silvani and Sari 2026).

A principal's willingness to foster a positive school climate conducive to achieving educational goals is a hallmark of transformational leadership. Drawing on the transformational leadership concept developed by Bernard Morris Bass (cited in Violeta and Suwadi 2023), educational institutions play a pivotal role in shaping a future generation that integrates knowledge, action, and moral character. Thus, leaders within these institutions are crucial in boosting educators' interest, motivation, and awareness regarding the pursuit of superior educational goals and visions.

The preceding discussion demonstrates that earlier studies have highlighted the need to shift prevailing school leadership models. While past research focused on the conceptual framework of the "deep learning" approach, more recent studies have delved deeper into its practical application and the principal's role in ensuring its effective implementation. Ultimately, the current educational landscape underscores the importance of adaptive leadership transformation as a prerequisite for improving the education system.

SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is a formal educational institution located in Muara Tiga District, Pidie Regency, Aceh Province. Established in 1998, the school has undergone orderly transitions in leadership over the years. Preliminary observations

indicate that since its inception, the institution has demonstrated adaptability in addressing various challenges within the education system and has implemented effective instructional practices. These efforts aim to equip students with competencies aligned with the demands of the times, enabling them to compete successfully and pursue higher levels of education. In the existing study (Fahri 2025), this adaptation is a form of alignment of views held by the principal, that educational institutions are learning organizations that require quality improvement and the development of a culture of innovation so that they continue to develop, even in limited conditions.

Despite limitations regarding professional staff competencies and available facilities, the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga has implemented the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) to enhance instructional quality. This initiative employs various approaches, including "deep learning" and transformational leadership, with the aim of realizing the school's vision, mission, and educational goals for the future. According to Zailani et al. (2024), transformational leadership rests on a foundation of strong values. In the context of Islamic management, leadership has four core values that align with the attitudes of leaders, even the prophets. These include exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah), honesty (sidq), trustworthiness (amanah), wisdom (hikmah), and justice. These principles are affirmed in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah An-Nisa', verse 58.

While extensive research has been conducted on the role of school principals in improving instructional quality, the evolving focus and context of these studies reveal areas that remain underexplored. Several studies (Harsoyo 2022a; Violeta and Suwadi 2023) have focused on Islamic value-based transformational leadership to improve educational management, yet they have not specifically linked this to the implementation of deep learning. Meanwhile, other studies (Angga and Iskandar 2022; Falah 2023; Fitrah 2017) have specifically examined the role of principal leadership in quality improvement.

Research (Tuningsih 2026; Silvani and Sari 2026) has demonstrated that principals hold a strategic position in supporting the adoption of deep learning. However, the focus of the study is more on the instructional leadership perspective, and has not yet outlined the dimensions of transformational leadership such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as leadership mechanisms in facing the pedagogical change process. Furthermore, the schools studied lacked specific contextual characteristics, such as being located in rural areas.

Based on the above review, a gap was found in how the relationship between transformational leadership patterns and the implementation of in-depth learning is examined in the context of secondary schools in regions with unique characteristics, such as rural schools with inadequate teacher preparedness and resources, access to innovation, and resistance to changes in learning practices. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by deeply examining how principal transformational leadership is applied to the implementation of deep learning within the context of a rural secondary school: SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. The rationale for selecting SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga lies in its local context as a previously unstudied rural school, implying that its internal characteristics and dynamics possess unique qualities. Therefore, this research is expected to be able to provide theoretical contributions in the development of leadership studies, especially in the context of educational management and become a practical framework that can be used to organize up-to-date learning.

B. METHOD

Based on the previous explanation, it is known that the purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of transformational leadership carried out by the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, and his role in implementing in-depth learning. Consequently, the research methodology employed to address this objective is a qualitative approach utilizing a case study design. According to Sugiyono (2014), a qualitative approach involves a series of scientific efforts to examine a social object or phenomenon in its natural setting, resulting in descriptive data that emphasizes meaning. In the context of this study, the social object or phenomenon under examination comprises the transformational leadership patterns and the deep learning approach present at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga.

Meanwhile, Yin (2014) defines the case study as a qualitative method generally used to investigate social phenomena that are unique, contemporary, and occur in real-life settings. To obtain accurate and holistic information regarding the phenomenon, the researcher must employ various data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews, observation, and the analysis of documentation and archives. Yin (2014) further categorizes case studies into two types: single-case and multi-case studies. Single case is research that focuses on one case, individual, group and institution to be studied in depth. it is characterized by the absence of cross-case comparisons and an emphasis on the uniqueness of the phenomenon being studied. Conversely, a multi-case study involves a comparative process and examines two or more cases. In the context of this research, the type of case study used is a single case, this is because the observed phenomenon focuses on one location, namely SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, which has unique characteristics and cases in the form of a school with geographical conditions in a rural area and requires in-depth study.

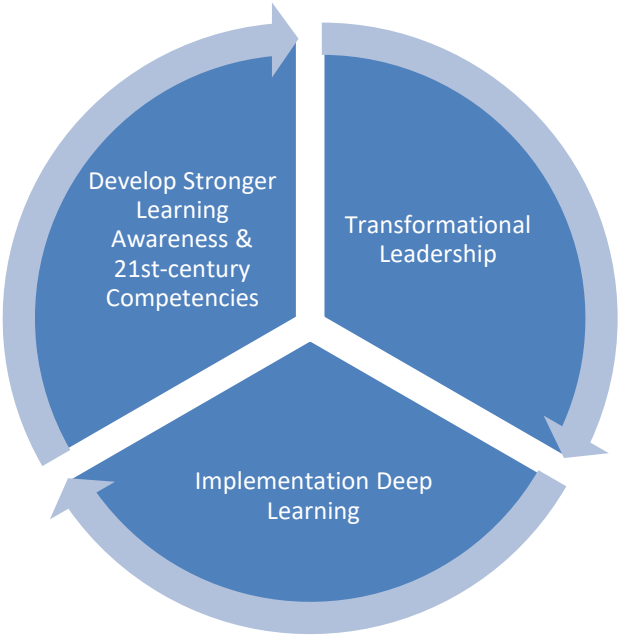

Figure 1, Research Framework

This case study research has been conducted from March to the end of April 2026. The series of data collection began with an in-depth interview process with 8 key

informants, which in this case consisted of 1 principal, 1 vice principal, 2 teachers who implemented deep learning, 1 TU staff, and 3 students selected based on class level, namely from grades VII to IX, also participating in deep learning. Subsequently, observational data collection was carried out on three occasions, focusing on the school's learning environment and culture; facilities and infrastructure supporting deep learning implementation; and the interaction patterns and leadership styles among the principal, staff, teachers, and students. Finally, to ensure a comprehensive dataset, the researchers employed a documentation review, focusing on relevant reports and written records such as curriculum documents, instructional programs, and educational assessment or evaluation reports.

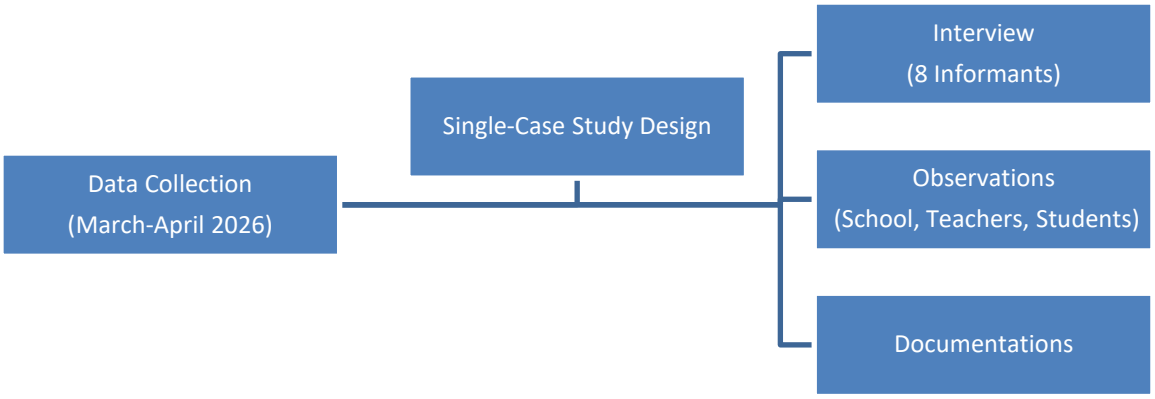

Figure 2, Data Collection

Following data collection, the next phase is data analysis. Based on the explanation provided in the study by Qomaruddin and Sa'diyah (2024), data analysis is understood as a multi-cycle, continuous process extending from data reduction to the drawing of conclusions; these stages are interconnected and inseparable. The data analysis process in this study begins with the data reduction stage, namely the process of summarizing reports from key informant interviews, observations at the research location and documentation.

All data are coded according to themes or the research problem statements. The second stage is data presentation, where the coded data are systematically organized for the subsequent phase: verification. Verification, the third stage, involves deriving meaning from the data; the resulting insights inform the process of drawing research conclusions.

To ensure the credibility of the research data, the researcher conducted a data validity assessment. Data validity in this study encompasses four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through methodological triangulation, wherein the researcher compared the findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic coding. Initial codes were grouped by shared meaning into categories, which were subsequently

synthesized into research themes. Coding results were cross-referenced with observation notes and school documents to ensure consistency of interpretation. Regarding transferability, the researcher provided a detailed account of the school context, informant characteristics, geographical conditions, and the research process in accordance with the established timeline. Dependability was addressed by systematically documenting the research stages and analysis process, while confirmability was reinforced by ensuring the traceability of the relationships between empirical data, the coding process, interpretations, and the research conclusions.

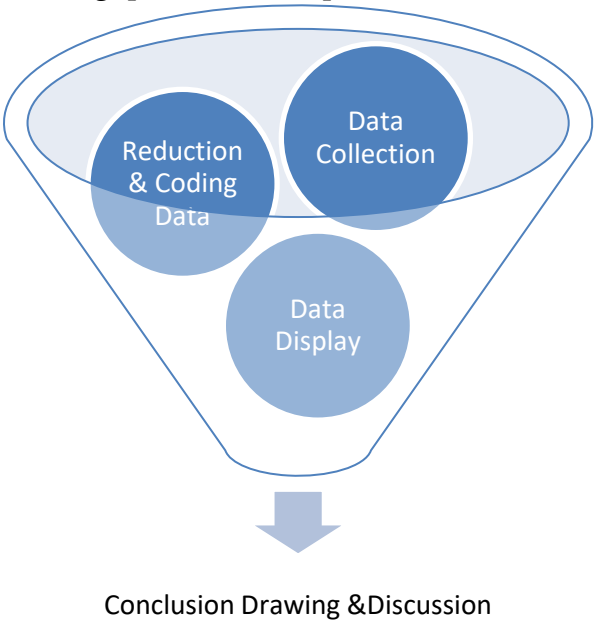

Figure 3, Data Analysis

Following the data analysis process described above, the researcher draws conclusions and correlates the findings with relevant theoretical perspectives. Thus, the application of the research methods is substantiated, ensuring the credibility of the study.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the findings in the field, it is known that SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is an educational institution that has been established since the monetary crisis era, precisely on January 19, 1998. Until now, this formal educational institution has been managed with various efforts that have been able to build facilities in the form of 16 classrooms, then facilitate students with a laboratory that is divided into 2 rooms, as well as 1 library building that stands firmly, containing a variety of reading or learning materials. These facilities and infrastructure represent the institution's commitment to fostering sustainable education and achieving national educational goals.

In addition, based on the analysis of the school profile documents conducted by the researcher, it is known that SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga has a fairly large number of students, namely 221 students, consisting of 91 boys and 130 girls, for all levels from grades VII to IX. This figure reflects the school's strong determination to facilitate

community access to education, despite its rural location.

Regarding human resources, SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga has a total staff of 57 people. This includes 48 teachers (12 male and 36 female) and 9 support staff members (4 male and 5 female). They share a unified commitment to the educational system: helping students develop optimally and ensuring that all children in Ujong Pie, Aceh, have access to education.

Furthermore, based on interviews conducted by researchers with the principal, it was discovered that SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga has a high commitment to organizing quality teaching and learning activities in accordance with the standards set by the national education system. Consequently, the prevailing leadership dynamics and established policy orientations fully support the development of existing human resources; they encourage teachers and educators to continuously evaluate instructional practices, update their understanding of educational paradigms, and participate in training sessions designed to enhance their pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies.

More specifically, the principal noted that the instructional system at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga integrates internet technology to facilitate modern, creative approaches that help students more easily grasp classroom material. Over the course of a six-day week, students engage in lessons that combine auditory, visual, and kinesthetic techniques, ensuring that the knowledge imparted by teachers stimulates growth across cognitive/pedagogical, affective/emotional, and spiritual/psychomotor dimensions. These findings align with the following statement from the principal:

> "We realize that today, learning orientation isn't just about showing up, giving lectures, and delivering materials until the end of school. It's more than that; teachers must be able to help students discover the essence of the learning they're doing at school. This includes presenting learning in a fun and engaging way".
>
> Regarding learning techniques or approaches, the research findings obtained, particularly through interviews with two teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, indicate that the school has now implemented the independent learning curriculum as a guideline for classroom activities and combines various approaches or methods for delivering engaging material. This involves integrating various engaging approaches and methods for delivering material, one of which is "deep learning," in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Basic and Secondary Education (Permendikdasmen) Number 13 of 2025.

Instruction at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is not limited to the deep learning approach alone. However, due to the increasingly strong legal umbrella underlying this approach, in the form of instructions from the government as explained above, the principals and teachers involved have begun to conduct a comprehensive review of the techniques and strategies for implementing a better deep learning approach in the future.

The vice principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga confirmed during an interview with the researcher that the teachers have taken the initiative and are independently aware of the need to innovate their teaching methods. Examples of this include the use of digital media (such as online learning platforms), in-class practical sessions, and creative group assignments designed to enhance students' communication skills and ability to articulate knowledge in ways appropriate to their respective developmental stages.

Nevertheless, the teaching initiatives and creative approaches adopted by the teachers have not always met with a positive response. This is because the student body is diverse, with varying local circumstances and backgrounds. So that in this way, the existing teachers

decided to agree together on learning innovation, and proposed this to the leader, namely the principal.

As the authority responsible for policy, the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga chose to facilitate open dialogue and expressed a willingness to issue measures that support easier access to learning and encourage teachers to innovate their classroom methods. Thus, in the context of the existence and dynamics of the management of the education system at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, it can be said that it has found its own unique pattern, and is based on a joint initiative to make the school institution a forum for actual education providers and support better educational transformation in the future.

As previously noted, the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga consistently considers the input of all teachers and educational staff under their leadership to facilitate enjoyable learning experiences and help students achieve a comprehensive understanding of the material. Consequently, the interaction patterns within the school's educational system and management are highly structured and reflect a style of transformational leadership. Interviews conducted by the researcher with the vice-principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga highlight the crucial role of the principal. If the school is likened to a ship, the principal acts as the captain, steering the vessel to ensure a smooth journey toward its destination. In this context, the principal's directives and decisions shape the institution's actions in achieving educational goals and driving positive systemic change; for this reason, the current transformational leadership model is considered highly appropriate.

> "We recognize that our role is crucial to the school's advancement. The principal and vice-principal act as helmsmen, while the teaching staff are the crew members we must guide. Consequently, leading and mentoring require wisdom, the ability to lead by example, and the capacity to motivate the staff. This ensures that teachers remain enthusiastic and unpressured in their creative efforts, ultimately fostering a positive environment where students are happy and able to learn effectively at school".

In a more detailed explanation, the vice principal defines the transformational leadership practiced at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga as the ability to inspire and empower the entire school community to transcend personal interests for the sake of the common good. This leadership model operates beyond a mere focus on school administration; instead, the principal acts as an agent of change, working collaboratively with students, teachers, and other staff to realize the school's shared vision. The principal and vice principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga also state that, in fulfilling their leadership roles, they prioritize policies geared toward the school's advancement.

Consequently, the established rules are designed to foster a harmonious and pleasant work environment. Furthermore, they acknowledge a significant responsibility in leading the school community: serving as a compass and setting the institution's direction. Therefore, all decisions must remain aligned with the educational transformation process and the latest innovations in school operations.

Regarding the application of professional leadership, the principal has devised crucial, empirical leadership practices to better prepare SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga and its personnel for various instructional challenges. The first involves redesigning the instructional curriculum. To this end, the principal engages teachers in analyzing classroom learning outcomes and identifying factors that hinder the learning process. The principal then organizes the teachers into groups and asks them to take turns presenting their analyses of their respective classroom conditions. Subsequently, the principal leads a discussion forum to explore potential solutions. This strategy culminates in a collective decision that serves as a comprehensive guideline for improving instructional activities and informs curriculum

enhancements. In line with the statement above, an interview with the deputy principal revealed that SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga consistently engages in the evaluation and assessment of two key areas: student learning outcomes and teacher instructional capabilities. These activities provide insight into school supervision practices and the competency development of the human resources involved. Consequently, teachers and staff at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga are empowered to redesign the existing curriculum to enhance its impact, particularly regarding the orientation toward sustainable education.

The second employed to implement transformational leadership at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga involves strengthening authentic and reflective assessments conducted each semester. In this regard, the principal oversees the design of learning evaluation instruments to ensure they go beyond mere written tests. Instead, the assessment tools are crafted to foster comprehensive reflection for both students and the teachers instructing them. This enables the principal to identify the specific improvements needed for effective school management.

The third is the flexibility demonstrated by the principal. This approach ensures that teachers, educational staff, and students do not feel pressured by the principal's presence. On the other hand, all existing human resources show openness to be involved in several activities, such as monitoring, directing, even assessing and evaluating the performance of each resource in the school. Finally, the fourth centers on the principal's role as a leader who serves as a role model, inspiring teachers and staff in the execution of their duties. A summary of four dimensions of transformational leadership is presented in the following chart.

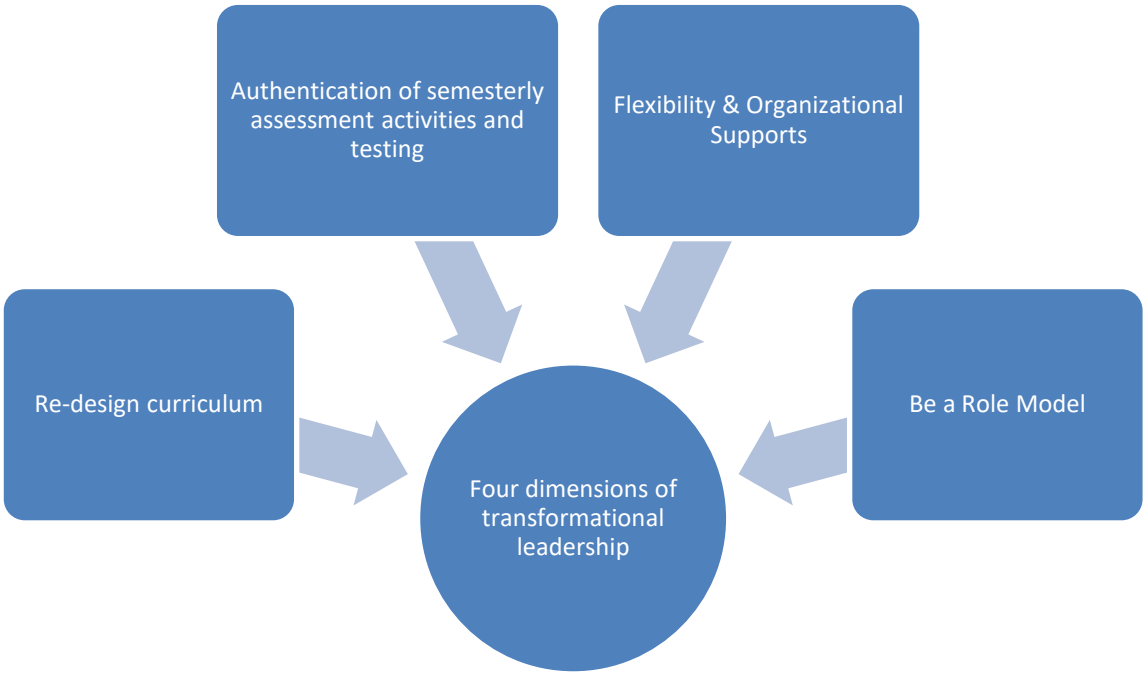

Figure 4, Four dimensions of transformational leadership SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga Principal

Fundamentally, a school principal serves as a role model whose behavior, attitude, and personality influence the responses of their subordinates. With the existence of a transformational leadership pattern that inspires and raises the work spirit of teachers, the treatment of students will also be shown in the same way. This extends to the implementation of "deep learning," an approach currently being adopted at SMP Negeri 2

Muara Tiga.

Findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga follows a structured sequence: planning, preparation, execution, and evaluation. Regarding the planning and preparation phases, the school utilizes the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum). This was confirmed by the vice principal, who noted that the curriculum integrates three key approaches: Problem-Based Learning, Inquiry, and Deep Learning. These approaches are employed to grant teachers the freedom to explore and innovate in their instructional techniques, particularly when teaching essential concepts. Consequently, the planning and preparation for the deep learning approach were established through mutual agreement and grounded in a comprehensive analysis of the curriculum content for grades VII through IX.

Furthermore, the vice principal emphasized that SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga supports the implementation of deep learning because its methodological components align with the values enshrined in the school's vision and mission. Specifically, the school's vision explicitly prioritizes the development of lifelong learners, making the deep learning approach a highly suitable fit. This means that the existence of regulations that require the implementation of deep learning in elementary and secondary schools does not become an administrative burden for SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga because the school's compass, in this case in the form of transformational leadership, vision and mission, all run hand in hand. Furthermore, the principal explained that the institution provides tangible, systematic support to teachers for the implementation of deep learning. These forms of support include training that improves teachers' teaching competencies, and clinical supervision that is not oriented towards resolving errors, but rather towards consultation sessions to solve learning problems. Additionally, the school allows teachers to allocate time for collaborating with colleagues on lesson delivery. Finally, the school ensures the availability of necessary facilities and infrastructure, such as digital devices and flexible classroom spaces. These measures aim to alleviate the burden teachers might feel regarding existing regulations and to encourage their active participation in educational management.

According to the vice-principal, some teachers were initially apathetic or resistant to the deep learning approach. Interviews with two teachers from SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga revealed the reasons behind this stance: fear, the perception that deep learning created an additional workload, and discomfort with changing their teaching methods. In response, the principal and vice-principal engaged in persuasive dialogue and listened to the teachers' individual concerns. This strategy is also strengthened through the implementation of pilot projects or early adaptations as concrete evidence that there are several teachers who are finally willing to carry out deep learning, even though they initially felt afraid or worried, and all of them can adopt such a pattern.

> “From the moment we were first informed about this approach, we felt pressured, as if we were facing yet another burden to shoulder. Some of us are no longer at an age where adapting to new things comes easily, but thankfully, the school provided a straightforward path and helped us quickly grasp the nature of these ‘deep learning’ instructional patterns.”

Following the aforementioned support and resolution of issues, the next stage in the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is evaluation. Interviews with two teachers and one educator revealed that they have been reporting the impact of deep learning through various means: final grades; classroom observations to assess student engagement and participation; monthly discussions to review student portfolio data; and the solicitation of student feedback regarding their learning experiences.

Regarding student feedback on the deep learning approach, the researcher also interviewed three students at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. All three unanimously stated that this approach differs significantly from others, as it provides an enjoyable learning experience. Not only that, because of the variety of existing methods, especially those based on online platforms, it makes it easier for them to understand abstract but meaningful material concepts.

In this context, the researcher observed that students became more vocal and academically critical, while their complex problem-solving skills were progressively honed. Moreover, the students noted an increased level of self-awareness regarding the purpose and essence of their school activities, as well as the impact these activities have on their future self-concept. Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga fosters student motivation to learn. Additionally, the principal's support through transformational leadership has further expanded the potential of this approach.

Finally, as an effort to maximize the implementation of deep learning for learning innovation at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, a strategy was implemented by the principal and vice principal, namely comprehensive cooperation from various parties, starting from education administrators, teachers, students and parents or guardians of students. The school actively conducts outreach and educational initiatives to support the deep learning approach and to foster a consistent academic ecosystem, both within the school environment and at home. When parents understand this matter, the process of monitoring student activities can be aligned within a shared context. This means that parents become active tutors for the implementation of deep learning from the child's closest environment, namely the family. Consequently, the school holds high hopes of fostering an organic learning culture that engages all stakeholders through transformational leadership and practical learning grounded in a deep-learning approach. Moving forward, a key priority for building upon the current situation is to strengthen collaborative networks with various industries, thereby enriching the students' learning experience. A summary of these findings is presented in the following chart.

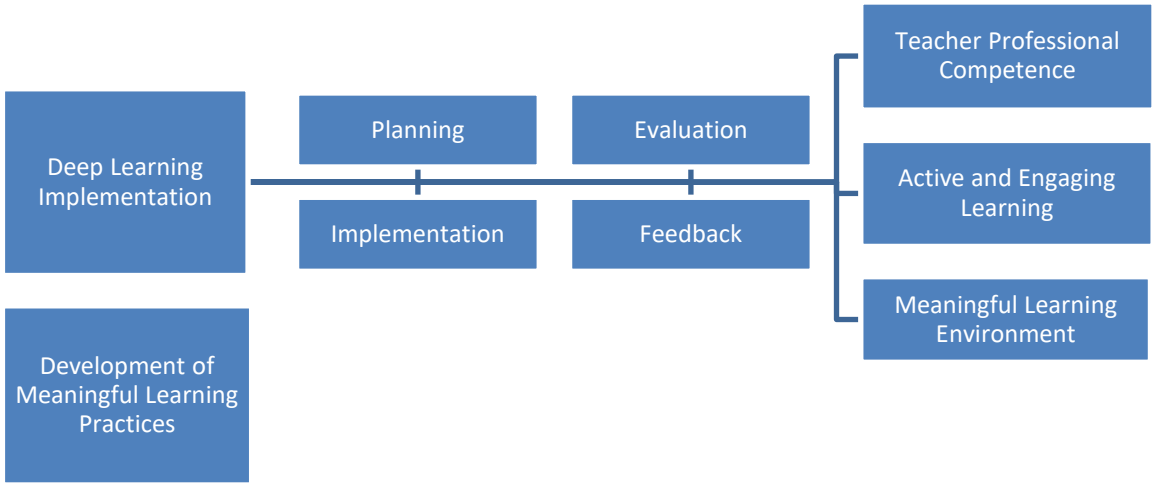

Figure 5, Deep Learning Implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga Principal

Analysis/Discussion

Research findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is inextricably linked to the pivotal role played by the principal, particularly in fostering leadership that is adaptive, collaborative, and change-oriented. Based on these findings, the principal has effectively fulfilled functions in two crucial areas: the distribution of leadership and school administration. As previously noted, the principal consistently provides guidance and direction to the entire school community, especially teachers regarding the evaluation of learning processes, curriculum redesign, the development of innovative approaches, and the resolution of classroom-based challenges. These findings demonstrate that the drive for change and the implementation of a high-quality education system can originate with the principal, provided they are willing to adopt a leadership style that prioritizes cooperation with the entire school community. When viewed through the lens of Bernard M. Bass's concept of transformational leadership, the principal's practices at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga reflect four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Harsoyo 2022b). The dimension of idealized influence is evident in the principal's role-modeling and sense of responsibility for cultivating a positive work culture and harmony among the school community. Meanwhile, the inspirational motivation dimension is evident in the growing awareness and encouragement from the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga to the teachers involved to remain resilient and continually experiment with learning innovations. This way, the school and students can thrive and have meaningful learning experiences. Finally, intellectual stimulation is manifested through the principal's interactive style, which consistently fosters opportunities for discussion, evaluation, and the collaborative redesign of instruction, all with the aim of school improvement. This is significant because the rural location of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga and the characteristics of its existing educational system require special attention. Meanwhile, the last dimension, namely individualized consideration, was successfully demonstrated by the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga through his sensitivity to always provide attention and a clinical supervision process to each teacher. Consequently, teachers gradually accept the changes taking place and become willing to overcome their own resistance. Thus, transformational leadership in this case operates through values of empowerment and the building of shared commitment.

The empirical findings indicate that the principal's transformational leadership practices can be understood through Bass's four dimensions of transformational leadership. Rather than representing separate leadership strategies, these dimensions provide a theoretical lens for interpreting how the principal's practices—such as role modeling, curriculum redesign, collaborative discussion, coaching, and clinical supervision—operate as mechanisms that support teacher readiness and the implementation of deep learning.

A summary illustrating the mechanism linking transformational leadership to deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, as described above, is presented in the following figure.

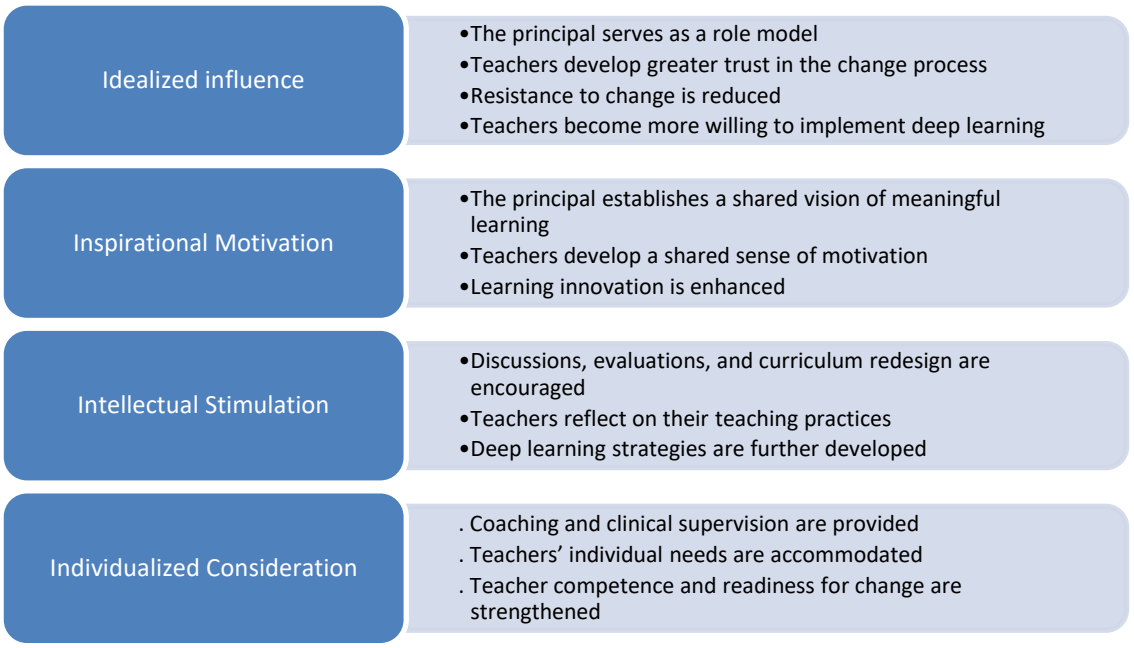

Figure 6, Transformational Leadership Mechanisms in Promoting Deep Learning Implementation

More specifically, research by Violeta and Suwadi (2023) indicates that the aforementioned transformational leadership competencies represent characteristics directly observable in school principals. Personality traits reflecting these competencies include openness and a willingness to respond to teachers' aspirations; a readiness to encourage innovative teaching practices; the provision of space for discussion and communication that is not strictly top-down; and the cultivation of a school culture that reflects on the continuity of the learning process. These characteristics highlight the unique nature of transformational leadership, which consistently prioritizes building collective awareness and achieving shared goals over personal interests.

According to Sahertian and Effend (2022), from the perspective of Islamic educational management, character development is the fundamental goal of every level of education. This objective is inextricably linked to the role and leadership of the school principal. Its existence must direct the education carried out so that it is oriented towards developing the personality (syakhṣiyyah), morals (khuluq), spirituality, and social responsibility of students as caliphs on earth. Thus, the principal acts as a murabbi (nurturer), muaddib (cultivator of manners), and mu'allim (teacher), guiding the entire school community toward the formation of individuals with strong character. The existence of a school principal is required to be an inspiring leader, provide an example (idealized influence), build collective motivation (inspirational motivation), encourage innovation (intellectual stimulation), and provide individual attention to all school members (individualized consideration). Thus, it can be understood that as a manifestation of good character due to the legitimacy of his leadership, the principal has a great responsibility to not only build structural authority, but also through moral example that can be observed by teachers and all the people around him.

According to Cao, Huang, Shao, and Zhong (2025), these research findings also align with the characteristics of distributed leadership. This is because the principal acts as a partner, providing teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga with opportunities to communicate teaching challenges, offer suggestions or ideas for innovation, and contribute to curriculum

development. These roles indicate that the principal distributes responsibilities equitably and fosters a collaborative work culture. In the context of deep learning implementation, the above conditions are important capital.

Regarding the implementation of deep learning at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, significant challenges were identified. Initially, some teachers expressed apprehension and resistance, viewing the deep learning approach as an added burden that complicated the teaching process. However, the principal's response, which prioritized persuasive dialogue, mentoring, training, clinical supervision, and providing opportunities for teachers who were better prepared to become early adapters of this approach, meant that existing challenges could slowly be overcome. These findings illustrate that resistance is an inevitable obstacle in the field; therefore, the ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead by example plays a crucial role in transforming the situation. Furthermore, the deep learning implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga was developed using an integrative approach that leverages digital media. Additionally, the principal and teachers agreed to incorporate problem-based learning, inquiry, collaborative activities, and reflection on learning experiences as a core operational framework.

These findings align with research (Lubis, 2025) indicating that deep learning holds great potential for fostering students' metacognition, participation, creativity, and 21st-century skills. Consequently, the experiences facilitated by this approach tend to be more enjoyable, emphasize student participation, and promote a holistic understanding of the subject matter. However, based on the character of this case study research, the existing findings are more appropriate to understand that transformational leadership does not causally increase the effectiveness of deep learning, but rather a deep understanding and experience of the dynamics of the implementation process of this approach, especially at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga with the characteristics of a school located in a rural area.

As previously explained, SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga is located in a rural area; consequently, challenges such as limited access to innovation, issues regarding teacher readiness, and resource constraints are inevitable. Therefore, to implement deep learning, the principal devised various adaptationempirical leadership practicesdeemed appropriate. Therefore, when correlated with transformational leadership, the principal needs to carry out their duties clearly and meet existing needs, particularly those related to facilities and infrastructure, as well as providing a learning space for clear roles for organizational members. Ultimately, this enables the realization of collaboration and harmony among the school community.

In the context of Islamic educational management, these findings reveal a clear link between transformational leadership and the principle of uswah hasanah (exemplary conduct). The principal acts not only as a holder of structural authority but also as a figure who provides moral guidance, sets an example, and offers the motivation necessary to drive the school community toward noble educational goals. According to Sahertian & Effend (2022), the principal carries out his role as murabbi, muaddib, and mu'allim, namely a leader who is willing to develop academic abilities, while also fostering character, morals, spirituality, and social responsibility. Thus, the implementation of deep learning in this school context encompasses two vital dimensions: the mastery of knowledge and the cultivation of learning awareness, reflection, character, and a lifelong learning orientation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that the application of transformational leadership by the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga represents a crucial effort to improve the institution's educational management systems and governance. Not only that, through a transformational leadership pattern that is identical to the visionary, flexible, inspiring and collaborative character of the principal, it can help teachers to start opening up and adapting to the implementation of the deep learning approach at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga.

Moreover, the principal's policy of implementing deep learning, combined with transformational leadership, indicates that students engage in a learning process that is meaningful, creative, adaptive, and reflective, despite the constraints imposed by the local conditions at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga. Consequently, the principal's transformational leadership serves as a vital mechanism for managing pedagogical change and addressing teacher resistance during the implementation of deep learning in a rural school context.

Finally, this study has limitations regarding the empirical proof of the transformational leadership style's effectiveness in enhancing educational management and deep learning approaches. Therefore, significant opportunities exist for future research to objectively and quantitatively examine the effectiveness of transformational leadership in implementing deep learning, as well as the influence of the institution's geographical location on this process.

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