



Beyond Styles: An Integrative Framework of Educational Leadership Theories and Models

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to clarify which leadership configurations most effectively enhance teaching quality and student outcomes in schools. Using a structured literature review guided by PRISMA, we searched Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, Garuda, and Google Scholar (2014–2024) with Indonesian/English keywords on instructional, transformational, servant/teacher, distributed/visionary, and transactional leadership. Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles in educational contexts with clear theoretical grounding and/or empirical evidence; records were screened, full texts appraised (JBI/MMAT), and findings synthesized thematically. Results indicate that no single style is sufficient. The most consistent gains arise from an integrated configuration: (a) instructional leadership to set academic goals, conduct classroom observation–feedback, and align curriculum–assessment; (b) transformational leadership—especially idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation to build commitment and innovation; (c) servant/teacher leadership to strengthen psychological safety and professional ownership; and (d) distributed/visionary structures to secure continuity and strategic direction, with transactional elements used to maintain procedural reliability. This configuration converts trust into classroom practice via data-informed coaching and protected time for PLCs. Implications include designing leadership development that couples moral–relational competencies with auditable instructional routines, revising accreditation to value classroom practice evidence, and investing in data literacy and digital tools to support evidence-based instructional decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership is a determinant of school quality because it intersects directly with learning culture, teaching quality, and accountability of learning outcomes (Nadeem, 2024; White et al., 2025). The reason is simple: teachers' strategies, work climates, and instructional practices usually follow the

direction of leadership (Jentsch et al., 2023; Veletić et al., 2023). Comparative evidence in a variety of contexts suggests schools with strong leadership tend to have more consistent teaching, clear performance monitoring, and ongoing professional development support (Brauckmann et al., 2023). In Indonesia, digital acceleration, the Independent Curriculum, and the demand for equal distribution of services add weight to the role of school principals as drivers of change. In conclusion, building a scientific argument about the most relevant leadership models is not only important for the academic community, but also crucial for society at large because it impacts generational readiness of learning, efficiency of public funding, and parental trust in schools. This study places leadership not as a mere personal attribute, but as a system of practice that can be replicated and measured, so that its findings have the potential to become a reference for policies, competency improvement programs, and school managerial guidelines.

A common problem behind this research is that there is still a long gap between policy expectations and leadership practices in schools. Many schools do not have adequate instructional monitoring mechanisms, reliable pedagogical feedback instruments, and protected time for teacher coaching (Rismita et al., 2024). Principals' capacity is often absorbed in administrative burdens, while system support for learning data, academic supervision, and professional learning communities is uneven. Inequality of resources between regions, variations in students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and accreditation demands also add to the complexity of decision-making. As a result, learning innovations often run sporadically, undocumented, and difficult to replicate. This study views the problem as a problem of leadership design and governance, not just an individual weakness. The focus is shifted to practice models that are proven to foster teacher motivation, data literacy, and cross-role collaboration so that quality improvement can occur in a sustainable manner.

The phenomenon of the field shows the dominance of traditional bureaucratic leadership styles one-way instruction, an emphasis on administration, and supervision that is obedience, not developmental. This lowers the autonomy of teachers to experiment, reduces the frequency of collaborative learning, and takes feedback away from the classroom where the core process takes place (Hoy et al., 2013). In some schools, academic meetings have turned into administrative forums, fragmented and non-instructional needs-based professional development programs and success indicators still rely on documents, not the quality of teaching and student learning progress. On the other hand, pockets of good practice emerge: principals who provide structured coaching, use formative data for curriculum decisions, and build a teacher-

learning community. This inequality shows the urgency of a leadership model that is clear, replicable, and adaptive to the context of Indonesia's socially, geographically, and infrastructurally diverse schools.

A synthesis of literature shows instructional leadership is strongly associated with teaching quality and learning outcomes because it puts the instructional process at the core. Studies such as Dwiyono et al. (2022) confirm that principals who actively provide direction, supervision, and feedback are able to create a positive classroom climate. Werdiningsih et al. (2023) in the context of vocational high schools found a significant influence of instructional leadership on teacher performance through coaching, monitoring, and evaluation of teaching practices. In general, the key mechanisms that recur are clarity of academic vision, high expectations of teaching, the use of data for improvement, and the support of resources for the curriculum. However, some studies were limited to cross-cutting designs, heterogeneous outcome sizes, and minimal reporting of implementation processes, making it difficult to assess impact resilience in the long term and in diverse contexts.

On the other hand, the literature on transformational leadership highlights the role of inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention as drivers of teacher commitment and innovation. Marliyani (2023) shows that this style is effective in overcoming bureaucratic impasse by strengthening teacher participation and curriculum development collaboration. Fauziana et al. (2024) found that transformational leadership has a positive influence on the implementation of education, especially in fostering innovation and work commitment. Nonetheless, there are gaps: few studies have not linked transformational practices directly to indicators of classroom teaching quality; variable measurement instruments are sometimes diverse; and little longitudinal research assessing the sustainability of school culture change. In addition, the relationship between the transformational dimension and daily instructional practice is sometimes treated as if separate, even though in the field the two are often intertwined and reinforce each other.

The novelty offered by this research is an integrative framework that integrates instructional practices, transformational dimensions, service principles, and the distribution of leadership roles to answer Indonesia's contextual challenges. Instead of placing the model in a dichotomous manner, we propose "transformationally inspired instructional intensity", which is leadership that maintains a focus on the teaching-learning process while driving shared meaning, trust, and well-being at work. This framework is tied together by two accelerators: learning data literacy (for evidence-based decisions) and structured collaboration through professional learning communities. The state of

the art aspect lies in the orientation of implementation: connecting daily practices (class observations, feedback, curriculum improvements) with organizational mechanisms (protected schedules, team accountability, digital support), so that leadership becomes a system of practice that can be monitored, assessed, and replicated across contexts.

Based on the methodological gaps in the previous study, this study places contributions on two domains. First, theoretical contributions: offering an integrative model that bridges instructional and transformational traditions, while operationalizing the principles of servant and distributed leadership into practical procedures (coaching, PLC, the use of formative data). Second, practical-policy contribution: compiling design recommendations for principals and teacher development programs that are in sync with the needs of the class, including time protection for coaching, reliable observation rubrics, and data reflection tools. Thus, this research not only enriches conceptual discourse, but also provides a measurable implementation tool. The focus is placed on Indonesia's diverse context, so that the model considers resource limitations, variations in digital infrastructure, and the inclusion needs of students with special needs in leadership practice.

The research problem posed is: how do the most effective leadership practice configurations improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes in diverse Indonesian schools? Its derivative questions include: (1) what instructional practices have the most impact when combined with the transformational dimension; (2) what collaboration mechanisms make the distribution of roles accountable; and (3) how data literacy mediates changes in teacher practice. Our tentative argument: a combination of instructional focus (academic goal setting, observation-feedback, use of data) with transformational drivers (vision, affective support, intellectual stimulation) will improve the quality of teaching through teacher motivation, clarity of expectations, and evidence-based curriculum improvement. PLC-supported role distribution and work protocols expand organizational capacity, while data literacy accelerates the improvement cycle. The contribution of this research is expected in the form of an operational framework and implementation indicators that can be adopted by schools and policy stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a structured literature review design guided by PRISMA 2020 to ensure the transparency of the search and evidence selection process. This design choice is based on the heterogeneity of educational leadership studies including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches so that the synthesis

of thematic narratives is more appropriate than meta-analysis. The primary goal is to map and integrate the core practices of instructional, transformational, servant, teacher leadership, and distributed leadership models, while linking them to implementive implications in diverse school contexts. Thus, the expected output is not just a summary of concepts, but a replicable and auditable thematic framework from the stage of literature identification to the withdrawal of policy and practice implications.

Data collection was carried out through systematic searches on Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, Garuda, and Google Scholar in the period 2014 - 2024 using a combination of Indonesian and English keywords, (For example, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, distributed/shared leadership, principal, coaching/supervision/feedback, learning outcomes). Inclusion criteria include fully published peer-reviewed journal articles in an educational context with a clear theoretical framework and/or empirical findings; While editorial, proceedings without peer-review are clear, duplication, and studies outside of educational leadership are excluded. The entire track record was imported into the reference manager for deduplication, followed by title-abstract screening by two independent reviewers, full-text reading, and consensus-based inclusion decisions (with adjudicators when required). Data are extracted through standardized forms (author-year, context, design, leadership model, output indicators, instruments, key findings) and synthesized narrative-thematic into clusters of practices and work mechanisms, while mapping the moderator conditions and implementation consequences.

Validity and reliability are maintained through a series of methodological procedures. The reliability of the screening and extraction was tested with two independent reviewers and Cohen's estimate of the initial sample (target ≥ 0.70), as well as a pilot testing of the form to equalize the category. The methodological quality and risk of bias of each study were assessed using the JBI (study type-adjusted) tool or MMAT for mixed methods, and narrative weight was given greater to the high-quality studies. The credibility of the synthesis was strengthened through a complete trail audit (search string, date, reason for exclusion, extraction form), peer debriefing to test the consistency of inference, and sensitivity analysis by excluding high-risk studies to assess the stability of the theme. The transferability is facilitated by a detailed table of study characteristics, while reporting compliance is ensured through the attachment of the PRISMA 2020 checklist and flowchart; When possible, the protocol is linked to OSF/PROSPERO to improve process integrity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This literature review defines effective educational leadership as a configuration of practice that combines instructional intensity (academic goal setting, observation-feedback, curriculum-assessment alignment), transformational dimensions (ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual attention), servant teacher leadership principles (empowerment, trust, autonomy support), and role distribution (PLC, curriculum team, accountability mechanism) (Mulyasa, 2019). The operational definitions are there are tangible policy artifacts (instructional work plans, observation rubrics, PLC protocols), repetitive practices in the school's work rhythm (protected coaching schedules), learning data-driven decision-making, and visible outcomes in teacher behavior (teaching quality, collaboration, innovation) and student learning outcomes. Unit analysis is the practice and mechanism of the organization, not just the individual character of the leader.

Ideal influence as a transformational core works when leaders hold consistent moral standards, set professional examples, and maintain trust (Bush, 2020; Aljawi & Alwali, 2025). However, the impact of ideal influence on learning quality is significant only when linked to structured instructional practice. This means that example and integrity strengthen the legitimacy of leaders, but the improvement becomes measurable when translated into classroom coaching, assessment reviews, and the use of formative data (McKenzie, 2024). This pattern explains why schools with strong cultures but without instructional architecture are often stagnant a shared meaning exists, but the implementation machinery is weak. In contrast, instructional systems without ideal influence often result in fragile administrative compliance: there are forms and schedules, but teacher commitment and initiative are low.

The integration of four approaches instructional, transformational, servant teacher leadership, and role distribution creates a layered effect (Athanasios, 2024; Bufalino, 2025). Ideal influences add to the glue of the culture, while instructional ensures thrust into the classroom servants and teacher leadership expand practice ownership, and role distribution to maintain sustainability in the event of a change of figures. These synergistic effects are seen when schools implement data-driven PLC protocols, the presence of exemplary leaders makes professional standards acceptable, instructional procedures make concrete improvements in the classroom, and distribution structures ensure practice doesn't stop at one person (Sergiovanni, 2015; Robbins & Coulter, 2018;). Thus, the findings validate that long-lasting quality improvement is more likely to be born from a system of mutually reinforcing practices, rather than from a single style.

Reviewing the pattern of findings, the researchers observed that schools

that achieved consistency of quality improvement had three operational characteristics: first, protected time for instructional coaching that was not sacrificed by the administrative agenda; second, the clarity of teaching performance indicators that teachers understand and use in feedback; Third, moral leadership is shown in difficult decisions (e.g., prioritizing learning over ceremony). By interpretation, the ideal influence smooths resistance to change, while instructional structures guide daily actions. This combination reduces quality variation between classes and encourages the adoption of innovations (LMS, formative assessments).

Effective leadership is a system that combines moral exemplars (ideal influences) with a clear instructional architecture, expanded by teacher empowerment and role distribution for good practice to endure (Tenha & Makamure, 2024; Tsarkos, 2025). Description ideal influence increases trust and commitment, instructional practice transforms commitment into better teaching behavior, teacher leadership multiplies hotspots of improvement at the classroom level, and role distribution stabilizes change at the organizational level. This pattern repeats itself in diverse contexts, when one of the elements is absent, the impact is weakened when all four are present, quality improvement is more consistent and scalable.

Table 1. Indicators and Impacts of Idealized Influence in School Leadership

Behavioral indicators	Definition of operations in schools	Examples of principals' actions	Auditable evidence of practice	Expected impact
Integrity and consistency	The decision is in line with the academic vision despite the political cost	Rejecting a non-learning agenda that disrupts teachers' coaching schedules	Meeting minutes, school calendars that prioritize coaching	Increased teacher trust and commitment
Professional role model	Leaders practice student-centered learning	Model classroom observations and rubric-based feedback	Observational recordings, rubrics, written feedback	More uniform teaching quality
Values and ethics orientation	Policy emphasizes psychological justice and safety	Safe grade protocol, PLC time protection	SOP, PLC protocol, follow-up report	Collaborative climate and teacher initiatives are on the rise
Courage to take measurable risks	Trying innovation with risk mitigation	LMS/formative assessment pilot with evaluation cycle	Pilot plan, evaluation metrics, improvements	Faster and more precise adoption of innovation

Credible vision communication	Academic vision translates into instructional KPIs	Set teaching KPIs and monitor achievement	Dashboard indicators, review meetings	Clear work direction, increased accountability
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Table 1 shows that the ideal influence is not just charisma, but an auditable package of behaviors: integrity seen in the priority calendar, instructional exemplary recorded in rubrics, and value orientation embodied in psychological safety SOPs. When these indicators run simultaneously, the leader transforms moral legitimacy into technical legitimacy: the teacher not only trusts the leader, but also follows the practices indicated, because there is clarity of tools and expectations. This is the bridge that connects culture with practice.

Credible vision communication gives direction; the courage to take measurable risks initiating change in a small space; metric-based evaluation improves design; and escalation locks practices into the system. At this point, the ideal influence serves as a catalyst for social permission to try, while instructional instruments ensure experiments produce repeatable improvements. Indicators that are values (integrity, ethics, vision) are effective when attached to indicators that are procedural (rubrics, SOPs, KPIs). Without this pair, the value stops as a slogan, or conversely the procedure becomes a formality. The combination of the two results in leadership that simultaneously moves the heart (commitment) and hands (actions).

These findings are in line with the transformational leadership literature that places ideal influence as a prop of trust and commitment, but adds to the explanation of how it works in schools: the greatest impact appears when ideal influence is linked to auditable instructional practice. Thus, this study brings together two often separated traditions – transformational and instructional – by showing that example and integrity strengthen professional compliance only when there is a clear architecture of daily practice (observation, feedback, formative assessment).

The difference with some of the earlier studies lies in the emphasis on systems of practice rather than single styles. Studies that focus on transformational styles often report increased commitment but do not always show improvements in classroom indicators. Here, the results show that commitment becomes a better teaching behavior when guided by instructional protocols. In contrast, highly procedural reports with no basis in trust often give rise to superficial compliance. This synthesis explains the variation in findings across studies and provides reasons why model combinations are more stable than the dominance of one style.

The theoretical implication is the need to model educational leadership as a multi-component system with chain causal relationships: ideal influence elevates trust, trust facilitates the adoption of instructional protocols, and the success of protocols reinforces the legitimacy of leaders—creating positive feedback. Conceptually, this suggests the development of an integrative model that combines transformational constructs (idealized influence) with instructional constructs (coaching, curriculum monitoring) and climate constructs (psychological safety, PLC collaboration).

The practical implications are concrete: schools need to design a calendar that protects coaching time; adopt an accountable observation rubric; build a data-driven PLC; and ensure that leadership decisions are consistent with academic vision. Training investment must touch on two sides at once—instructional competencies (providing feedback, analysis of assessments) and relational-moral competencies (communication of vision, justice, data ethics)—in order for the ideal influence to have a container for implementation. At the policy level, accreditation indicators should assess instructional practices and evidence of a learning culture, not just the completeness of documents.

Finally, these findings mark a further research agenda testing the chain causal model longitudinally, assessing when and in what context the ideal influences are most effective (e.g. schools with high resource inequality), and measuring how much each component contributes to learning outcomes. With a more rigorous evaluation approach and richer classroom data, the field of educational leadership can move from correlational claims to evidence closer to causality, while maintaining its practical relevance to schools.

CONCLUSION

Effective educational leadership is not the product of a single style but of a mutually reinforcing configuration of practices: instructional intensity (clear academic goals, observation–feedback cycles, and formative data use); transformational dimensions (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration); servant/teacher leadership (empowerment and psychological safety); and distributed structures (PLCs, clear mandates, and accountability). A genuine leader can lead from the front, stand with the team, and energize from behind—embodying participatory leadership that facilitates growth rather than dominates. Moral exemplarity and trust translate into better teaching quality only when housed within a well-designed instructional architecture; conversely, procedural systems become effective only when grounded in ethical legitimacy and shared meaning. This combination bridges culture, classroom practice, and sustainability, steering

schools toward consistent, measurable improvement. The paper offers an integrative framework linking transformational constructs especially idealized influence to auditable instructional routines, while embedding teacher empowerment and role distribution as safeguards for continuity. Its scientific contribution lies in articulating a testable causal chain from trust to protocol adoption to improved teaching, operationalizing leadership behaviors into school artifacts and procedures (rubrics, SOPs, instructional KPIs, protected coaching time), and situating the framework within Indonesia's diverse contexts for policy design, principal development, and data-driven PLCs.

The main limitations involve heterogeneous study designs and outcomes, the absence of quantitative meta-analysis, and potential language/database bias. Much of the existing evidence is correlational and seldom reports implementation processes in depth. Future research should test the proposed causal chain using longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs; estimate the relative contribution of each component (instructional, transformational, servant, distributed) to learning outcomes; and incorporate high-resolution classroom data e.g., lesson-study video, LMS logs, and formative assessments to capture objective changes in teaching practice. Evaluating the vision-pilot-evaluate-scale strategy across varied school types (urban/rural, low/high resources, inclusive settings) will help map moderating factors. Pre-registration and PRISMA/JBI-aligned reporting are also recommended to strengthen transparency and replicability, advancing the field from descriptive claims to robust, transferable evidence.

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