



Literature Study on Transformational Leadership Style and Quality of Education Based on Child-Friendly Schools (CFS)

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Transformational Leadership, Child-Friendly Schools, Educational Quality

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This study aims to examine how transformational leadership of school principals contributes to improving educational quality within the framework of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS). A literature review method was employed by systematically analyzing relevant national and international scholarly sources that discuss transformational leadership and child-friendly education. The findings indicate that the application of the four core dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation—supports the development of high-quality school policies aligned with the fundamental principles of child-friendly schools. These leadership practices encourage the creation of safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that respect and fulfill students' rights. Furthermore, the implementation of child-friendly educational practices contributes to students' character development and enhances the overall quality of schools. The study implies that transformational leadership is a strategic approach for school principals in fostering sustainable educational improvement through child-friendly school policies and practices. Strengthening leadership capacity in this area is therefore essential to ensure the successful implementation of child-friendly education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping human capital and ensuring sustainable social development. In contemporary societies, schools are increasingly expected not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to guarantee students' rights, well-being, and holistic development. This expectation is closely linked to the global agenda emphasizing inclusive, safe, and high-quality education systems that respond to diverse learners' needs. Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) emerge as a strategic response to these demands by

integrating child protection, participation, inclusivity, and supportive learning environments into school governance and practice (Kusumawati et al., 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that school leadership strongly influences how educational values and policies are translated into daily practices that shape school culture and teaching quality (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Liljenberg & Wrethander, 2023). Moreover, transformational leadership has been widely recognized as a leadership approach capable of fostering shared vision, commitment, and professional growth among educators (Hilton et al., 2023). Therefore, examining leadership practices that support child-friendly principles is essential for ensuring that schools contribute meaningfully to social equity, student well-being, and long-term educational quality (Maisuroh & Aisyah, 2024).

Despite policy commitments to improving educational quality, many education systems continue to face persistent challenges related to school effectiveness, leadership capacity, and the fulfillment of children's rights (Maulidy & Zaini, 2025). In practice, the implementation of Child-Friendly School policies often encounters structural, managerial, and cultural obstacles that limit their impact. Studies highlight that policy frameworks alone are insufficient when school leaders lack the competence or leadership orientation to translate policy intentions into sustainable practices (Aziz et al., 2025). Weak leadership can result in fragmented school cultures, low teacher motivation, and learning environments that fail to support students' emotional and social development. Furthermore, disparities in leadership quality contribute to unequal educational experiences, undermining national and global efforts to improve learning outcomes and school accountability (Rusdiah, 2024). Research also indicates that ineffective leadership reduces teachers' professional engagement and limits opportunities for collaborative improvement (Galdames-Calderón, 2023). Consequently, leadership-related problems represent a critical barrier to realizing child-friendly, inclusive, and high-quality education, making this issue highly relevant for educational reform and research (Rahmadan & Shudiq, 2024).

In many schools, particularly within developing education systems, there is a visible gap between child-friendly policy ideals and everyday school practices (Sa'diyah & Suhermanto, 2024). While schools formally adopt child-friendly principles, classroom interactions, disciplinary approaches, and decision-making processes often remain adult-centered and authority-driven. Empirical findings show that students' participation rights and inclusive practices are frequently symbolic rather than substantive (Hastira et al., 2025). Teachers may experience limited support, professional development, or recognition, which negatively affects teaching performance and classroom

climate (Wang et al., 2023). In such contexts, principals play a decisive role in shaping whether child-friendly values are embedded into school culture or remain policy rhetoric. Transformational leadership practices have been associated with improved teaching performance, positive school culture, and stronger professional commitment among educators (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). However, observational evidence suggests that not all principals consistently apply transformational behaviors, resulting in uneven implementation of child-friendly education. This phenomenon highlights the need to explore leadership styles that effectively bridge policy and practice.

Previous studies have extensively examined school leadership and its influence on educational quality, school improvement, and teacher performance. Transformational leadership has been shown to positively affect organizational performance, job satisfaction, and professional collaboration (Hilton et al., 2023; Şahin & Bilir, 2024). Research also emphasizes leadership's role in fostering professional learning communities and sustaining school improvement over time (Liljenberg & Wrethander, 2023). Additionally, leadership practices supporting inclusive and child-centered environments are increasingly recognized as essential for effective schooling (Hastira et al., 2025). Nevertheless, much of the existing literature focuses either on leadership effectiveness or on Child-Friendly School policies as separate domains. Studies examining transformational leadership often prioritize organizational outcomes without explicitly linking them to child-friendly education principles. Conversely, research on CFS implementation frequently emphasizes policy evaluation rather than leadership processes (Aziz et al., 2025). This separation creates a research gap concerning how transformational leadership specifically contributes to improving educational quality through child-friendly frameworks.

Recent research trends increasingly call for integrated approaches that connect leadership styles, school culture, and student-centered outcomes. Studies demonstrate that leadership practices influence classroom climate, student motivation, and teacher engagement, which are critical for quality learning environments (Wang et al., 2023; Sánchez-García et al., 2024). Moreover, contemporary leadership research highlights the importance of values-driven and transformational approaches in shaping inclusive and supportive schools (Leithwood et al., 2023). However, empirical investigations that explicitly position transformational leadership as a mechanism for strengthening Child-Friendly Schools remain limited. Existing studies often overlook how specific leadership indicators—such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation—align with child-friendly principles. As a result, the state of the art indicates a need for conceptual and empirical clarification regarding the role of transformational school

leadership in advancing child-friendly education. Addressing this gap is important for developing leadership models that simultaneously enhance educational quality, teacher performance, and students' rights fulfillment.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative focus on transformational leadership as a strategic foundation for improving educational quality through the Child-Friendly School approach. Rather than examining leadership or child-friendly policies in isolation, this research positions transformational leadership as a driving force that connects school vision, teaching practices, and student-centered values. By emphasizing leadership indicators that align with child-friendly principles, this study offers a more holistic understanding of how principals can foster supportive, inclusive, and high-quality learning environments. This approach is important because educational quality is no longer defined solely by academic outcomes but also by students' well-being, participation, and protection. Addressing leadership within this framework provides practical insights for strengthening policy implementation at the school level. Furthermore, this study responds to contemporary educational challenges by proposing leadership practices that are adaptable, value-based, and responsive to children's developmental needs, making it highly relevant for ongoing educational reform efforts.

Based on the identified gaps and practical challenges, this study addresses the central problem of how transformational leadership contributes to improving educational quality within the context of Child-Friendly Schools. The main research argument is that principals who effectively apply transformational leadership behaviors are more capable of translating child-friendly values into concrete school policies and daily educational practices. Through idealized influence, principals can model ethical and child-centered values; through inspirational motivation, they can build shared commitment among teachers; through individualized consideration, they can support professional growth; and through intellectual stimulation, they can encourage reflective and innovative practices. This study argues that such leadership practices strengthen school culture, enhance teaching performance, and support students' holistic development. Consequently, this research contributes conceptually by linking transformational leadership indicators with child-friendly education principles and practically by offering guidance for school leaders seeking to improve educational quality in a sustainable and student-centered manner.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach. A qualitative case study was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts,

particularly leadership practices and school culture (Butler et al., 2021; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). This design is appropriate for exploring how transformational leadership is enacted by school principals and how it supports the implementation of Child-Friendly School principles in improving educational quality. The case study approach enables researchers to examine leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, and policy implementation holistically and contextually, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Hancock et al., 2021). The research setting was selected purposively based on its relevance to the implementation of child-friendly education policies and the presence of leadership practices aligned with transformational leadership characteristics. The selection of the research location was guided by considerations of accessibility, relevance to the research focus, and the potential to provide rich and meaningful data.

Data were collected through document analysis, in-depth interviews, and observations to ensure data triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). Documents included school policies, programs, and reports related to leadership practices and child-friendly initiatives. Interviews were conducted with key informants such as school principals and teachers to capture their perspectives on leadership and school quality improvement, while observations were used to understand daily school practices and interactions that reflect child-friendly principles. Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2021). Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying relevant information, while data display was conducted through narrative descriptions and thematic matrices. Verification was carried out through continuous comparison across data sources to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the research findings (Miles et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Idealized Influence and Educational Quality

Idealized influence represents the charismatic dimension of transformational leadership, where school leaders act as ethical role models who gain trust, respect, and admiration from their followers. Recent studies indicate that principals who demonstrate strong moral commitment, consistency in decision-making, and alignment between values and actions positively influence teachers' motivation and professional dedication (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Soim, 2024). Such leadership behaviors foster emotional attachment and identification with institutional goals, which are critical in shaping a positive school climate and strengthening collective commitment to educational quality improvement.

Empirical evidence confirms that idealized influence significantly contributes to staff performance and school effectiveness. Haryanengsi et al. (2024) and Prasetia (2024) report that this leadership dimension plays a dominant role in enhancing instructional quality, organizational discipline, and academic achievement. Quantitative findings show that idealized influence explains a substantial proportion of variance in school effectiveness, demonstrating its strategic importance in driving institutional performance. When principals consistently model integrity and professionalism, teachers are more likely to internalize shared values and perform beyond formal role expectations.

However, the effectiveness of idealized influence is not uniform across contexts. Cultural norms, organizational maturity, and institutional governance structures may shape how charismatic leadership is perceived and enacted (Aziz et al., 2024). Therefore, while idealized influence is a foundational element of transformational leadership, its impact on educational quality depends on its integration with other leadership dimensions and contextual sensitivity within educational institutions.

Individualized Consideration and Educational Quality

Individualized consideration emphasizes leaders' attention to the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations of each member of the organization. In educational settings, this dimension manifests through mentoring, professional guidance, and personal support provided by school principals to teachers and staff. Recent research highlights that leaders who prioritize individualized consideration create supportive environments that enhance teacher confidence, job satisfaction, and professional growth (Muthusi et al., 2024). Such environments are essential for sustaining high-quality teaching and learning processes.

Studies conducted in school contexts reveal that individualized consideration is strongly associated with improved performance and organizational effectiveness. Prasetia (2024) identifies individualized consideration as one of the most influential leadership dimensions affecting school effectiveness, second only to idealized influence. Teachers who feel recognized and supported are more motivated to innovate, engage in continuous professional development, and contribute actively to institutional improvement. This leadership behavior also strengthens interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for collaborative school cultures.

Nevertheless, some scholars caution that excessive dependence on leaders for guidance may limit teachers' autonomy and self-initiative if not balanced appropriately. To avoid this risk, individualized consideration should aim to empower educators rather than foster reliance. When applied strategically, this

leadership dimension not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to sustainable educational quality by developing teachers' long-term professional capacity.

Inspirational Motivation and Educational Quality

Inspirational motivation refers to leaders' ability to articulate a compelling vision that inspires enthusiasm, optimism, and collective commitment among organizational members. In educational institutions, principals who communicate clear goals and shared values effectively motivate teachers to align their efforts with institutional aspirations. Recent studies show that inspirational motivation strengthens teachers' engagement and sense of purpose, which are essential for improving academic performance and school effectiveness (Soim, 2024; Aziz et al., 2024).

Empirical findings indicate that inspirational motivation enhances organizational innovation and adaptability. By encouraging optimism and emphasizing meaningful goals, transformational leaders stimulate creative problem-solving and openness to change (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). Aziz et al. (2024) further demonstrate that integrating cultural and spiritual values into inspirational leadership practices reinforces teachers' intrinsic motivation and strengthens institutional identity. These factors collectively contribute to a positive learning environment that supports student achievement and holistic development.

However, scholars also note potential risks associated with inspirational motivation, particularly when leaders set overly ambitious goals without sufficient structural support. Unrealistic expectations may lead to emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction among educators. Therefore, effective inspirational motivation requires a balance between visionary leadership and realistic planning to ensure sustainable improvements in educational quality.

Intellectual Stimulation and Educational Quality

Intellectual stimulation encourages organizational members to question assumptions, explore new ideas, and approach problems from innovative perspectives. In educational contexts, this leadership dimension promotes critical thinking, creativity, and reflective practice among teachers and students. Recent studies confirm that intellectually stimulating leadership behaviors positively influence instructional innovation and active learning strategies, which are crucial for improving educational outcomes (Asad et al., 2022).

Research also highlights the role of intellectual stimulation in enhancing teacher development. Principals who challenge teachers intellectually and support experimentation foster higher levels of professional competence and job

satisfaction (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). James & Kitcharoen (2021) report a significant relationship between principals' intellectual stimulation and students' academic achievement, emphasizing the indirect but powerful influence of leadership on learning outcomes through teacher performance.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of intellectual stimulation may encounter resistance due to rigid organizational cultures or limited readiness for change. Some studies suggest that the impact of intellectual stimulation varies depending on contextual factors such as institutional support and teachers' openness to innovation (James & Kitcharoen (2021)). Therefore, intellectual stimulation must be accompanied by supportive structures and continuous capacity building to maximize its contribution to educational quality.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that transformational leadership serves as a strategic foundation for improving educational quality within child-friendly school frameworks. The most important finding of this research is that the consistent application of the four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation—enables school leaders to create supportive, safe, and motivating learning environments. These leadership practices not only enhance educators' performance and satisfaction but also foster policies and school cultures that respect and fulfill students' rights. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of educational leadership by integrating transformational leadership theory with child-friendly school principles, offering a conceptual understanding of how leadership behavior can simultaneously promote educational quality and character development.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. As a literature-based analysis, it relies on existing studies and does not provide empirical evidence from direct observations or field data. Future research is therefore recommended to employ empirical approaches, such as qualitative case studies or mixed-method designs, to examine how transformational leadership is enacted in diverse school contexts. Further studies may also explore additional variables, including school culture, parental engagement, and policy implementation processes, to deepen understanding of how leadership practices sustainably support child-friendly education and continuous school improvement.

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