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Transformational Leadership in Building a Collaborative Culture Among Teachers in Early Childhood Education (ECE)

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ABSTRACT
This study adopts a descriptive qualitative method to explore the implementation of transformational leadership by school principals in creating a collaborative culture in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions. Referring to the four main aspects of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, school principals play a key role in building an open, participatory, and mutually supportive work atmosphere. The findings of this study indicate that transformational leadership can increase teachers' active participation in the learning planning process, strengthen two-way communication, provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and creativity, and support teachers' continuous professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays an important role in laying the foundation for children's development, encompassing religious and ethical values, self-identity, and basic skills in literacy, mathematics, science, technology, engineering, and the arts. The success of ECE programs depends not only on the teaching methods used but also on the quality of institutional management and the leadership of the school principal. The principal is responsible for guiding, mentoring, and developing human resources in order to create a supportive and professional work environment.

Ningsih et al. (2026) explain that the effectiveness of early childhood education institutions is linked to the quality of leadership and supervision provided by the school principal—specifically through collaboration, motivation, mentoring, and the fostering of teacher innovation. However, preliminary field observations suggest a tendency toward leadership that is less collaborative and leans instead toward an authoritarian style. This is evidenced by the limited opportunities for teachers to express their opinions or contribute

ideas during the lesson-planning process. Consequently, teachers' creativity and their level of engagement in developing instructional activities remain suboptimal.

In fact, collaboration among teachers is important for improving the quality of learning. Sambella (2024) explains that collaborative learning can strengthen reflection, innovation, and a supportive work culture. In line with this, Andriastuti (2024) shows that exchanging ideas, teaching strategies, and experiences can help develop teachers' creativity. Therefore, leadership is needed that provides teachers with room to participate and work together.

One relevant approach is transformational leadership. According to Bass and Riggio (2006) in Nafal et al. (2024), transformational leadership has four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions include serving as a role model, providing motivation, developing ideas, and paying attention to teachers' needs and abilities. Research by Suhartini et al. (2025) also shows that transformational leadership can increase teacher motivation and performance, improve the quality of learning, and build a positive and collaborative organizational culture.

Nevertheless, it is important to further examine how transformational leadership is implemented in building a collaborative teacher culture in early childhood education, particularly through open communication, involvement in decision-making, the exchange of ideas, and the development of creativity. Therefore, this study aims to explore "Transformational Leadership in Building a Collaborative Culture Among Teachers in Early Childhood Education."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was selected because this study aims to understand and provide an in-depth description of the school principal's transformational leadership in building a collaborative culture among ECE teachers. Through this approach, the researchers seek to reveal how the principal implements transformational leadership in motivating teachers, building communication, providing opportunities for teachers to express their opinions, and encouraging teacher involvement in collaboration and the development of learning activities.

Data in this study were collected using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted by directly examining the school principal's leadership behavior as well as the interaction and cooperation between the principal and teachers in the daily activities of the early childhood education (ECE) institution. Interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to obtain in-depth information about their experiences, views, and the implementation of transformational leadership in building a collaborative culture. Meanwhile, documentation was carried out by collecting various documents and supporting evidence, such as school work programs, meeting schedules, discussion minutes, lesson plans, and documentation of teacher collaboration activities.

To obtain reliable data, this study used triangulation, namely comparing and checking the consistency of information collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. These three techniques were used to complement one another so that the information obtained was based not only on the informants' statements but was also supported by direct observation and documentary evidence in the field.

Furthermore, the collected data were analyzed descriptively through the stages of data consolidation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Through these stages, the researchers categorized and interpreted the data based on the research focus, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of transformational leadership by the school principal in building a collaborative teacher culture in early childhood education (ECE).

RESULT AND DISUSSION

The result findings were obtained through interviews with informants and observations conducted within the early childhood education institution. The collected data were then analyzed and categorized based on indicators of transformational leadership, which include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Table 1. Recapitulation of the Transcript Analysis of ECE Collaboration Indicators

Observation Indicator	Strategy and Behavior Categorization	Unit Code	Data Excerpt	Teacher Strategies and Actions	Interpretation
1. Collaboration Challenges	Routine communication and direct problem-solving	KB-01	"We rarely encounter difficulties... every day we are always together... Problems are addressed immediately, like 'what should we do now?'... So we do not put things off; we resolve them right away."	Teachers maintain daily communication and discuss challenges as they arise so that they can be resolved together without delay.	Daily communication helps teachers identify and resolve work-related issues directly. The informant stated that collaboration challenges are rarely experienced.
2. Expectations and Support	Support for learning facilities and school safety	HD-01	"From the beginning, the school has always supported us... when we need learning media... the school says, 'Let's provide it'... Our hope is that the facilities and infrastructure are taken care of... and that safety at	The principal responds to the need for learning media and accepts teachers' input regarding improvements to facilities and infrastructure, including the school fence.	Leadership support is evident in the provision of media and attention to environmental safety. Facility support is one of the needs mentioned by the informant.

Observation Indicator	Strategy and Behavior Categorization	Unit Code	Data Excerpt	Teacher Strategies and Actions	Interpretation
			this school is maintained."		
3. Shared Involvement	Teacher participation in planning and decision-making	KB-OBS-01	"We are included, from the beginning of the year as well... we always work together... it does not always come from the Principal herself... we have ideas... so we do it together." The informant also made suggestions regarding the arrangement of outing activities.	Teachers express ideas in deliberations, while the principal listens to and discusses proposals with relevant parties, including parents.	The informant feels that there is room to participate. Involvement is reflected in the opportunity to express ideas and in joint discussions before activity decisions are made.
4. Change and Progress	Quality improvement and innovation through joint input	PK-01	"Perhaps before, when you were not here... there were more suggestions... more improvements at this school... innovations that had not occurred to us before are now being supported by the teachers."	The principal and teachers receive and develop input to carry out innovations and improvements in the school environment.	The informant sees teachers' contributions in providing input and supporting innovation. However, the changes mentioned are still based on the informant's experiences and assessments, rather than measurable performance indicators.
5. Habits of Sharing and Discussion	Daily discussion and exchange of experiences	KBB-01	"Every day, every day... Because we communicate every day about what we are going to prepare tomorrow, what we are going to learn... we always do that."	Teachers communicate and discuss every day to prepare the next learning activities and materials.	The frequency of communication mentioned by the informant indicates that discussion has become part of the work routine and learning preparation.
6. Understan	Alignment of the vision and	PVT-01	"At the beginning of each academic	Teachers are involved in	The informant mentioned the joint process of

Observation Indicator	Strategy and Behavior Categorization	Unit Code	Data Excerpt	Teacher Strategies and Actions	Interpretation
ding the Vision and Involvement in Goals	shared commitment		year's program, we always do it together. We continuously improve our vision and mission... it is called CINTA: Intelligent, Innovative, Nationalist, Devout, and Active... so we work in synergy together."	discussing and refining the school's vision and mission as well as its annual program.	formulating the vision and mission and the CINTA values as the institution's direction. This indicates an effort to build collective understanding and commitment.
7. Openness to Sharing Ideas	Freedom to express ideas and seek consultation	KBI-01	"The principal here is always open, always receptive... when it comes to problems or learning, she is always willing to listen... we always consult with her."	The principal provides opportunities for consultation and accepts teachers' suggestions regarding school-related issues and learning.	Acceptance of suggestions creates space for two-way communication. The informant feels able to express ideas without significant restrictions.
8. Cooperative Work Environment	Mutual support and sharing of operational tasks	SK-01	"There is more mutual support... when we line up, we cannot do it alone... the teacher at the front... the second teacher monitors the children... and prepares the materials."	Teachers divide and help one another with tasks, for example, supervising children while they line up and preparing learning materials.	Cooperation is evident in the division of practical tasks. Collaboration takes place through mutual assistance so that daily activities can run smoothly.
9. Principal's Care and Support	Empathy and attention to professional and personal needs	PD-01	"For every lesson, we need media... the principal asks, 'What do you need for today's lesson?'... when we are sick... she	The principal asks about the need for learning media and shows concern when teachers	The principal's care is not only related to learning needs but also includes personal concern. The informant interprets this support as care and empathy.

Observation Indicator	Strategy and Behavior Categorization	Unit Code	Data Excerpt	Teacher Strategies and Actions	Interpretation
			is always thoughtful; she even buys something for us."	experience personal circumstances such as illness.	

Research findings on transformational leadership in building a collaborative culture among teachers in early childhood education should be understood through the relationship between the leadership behaviors of school principals and the dynamics of teachers' working relationships. Transformational leadership does not merely focus on achieving institutional goals; it also emphasizes the process of empowering organizational members through role modeling, motivation, intellectual development, and attention to individual needs.

From the perspective of Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership comprises four complementary dimensions. These four dimensions provide a basis for understanding how school principals can influence communication patterns, teacher involvement, and collaboration in an educational environment.

Idealized influence indicates that the principal's example serves as the foundation for building trust and professional relationships. When a principal is able to demonstrate consistency, openness, and responsibility, this can encourage teachers to develop positive working relationships. Trust between the principal and teachers is an important element in creating a collaborative environment because it enables more open communication and the exchange of ideas.

In addition, inspirational motivation emphasizes the importance of the principal's role in fostering a sense of direction and team spirit. Providing motivation and appreciation, as well as communicating the institution's goals, can encourage teachers to understand that educational success is a shared responsibility. In this regard, a collaborative culture is formed not only through the division of tasks but also through collective awareness in achieving educational goals.

The dimension of intellectual stimulation is closely related to the development of teachers' creativity and participation. Providing teachers with opportunities to share opinions and develop ideas can strengthen their involvement in the decision-making process, particularly in relation to learning planning and implementation. Opportunities for dialogue and discussion also enable the exchange of experiences and the development of alternative learning strategies suited to the needs of young children.

Meanwhile, individualized consideration indicates that building a collaborative culture needs to be accompanied by an understanding of each teacher's needs and potential. Guidance and mentoring tailored to individual needs can support professional development while strengthening the relationship between the principal and teaching staff.

Based on these four dimensions, it can be understood that transformational leadership is relevant to building a collaborative culture among teachers in early childhood education. A collaborative culture is not formed instantly; it develops through continuous leadership, open communication, opportunities to participate, and support for the development of teachers' competencies. In this way, the principal plays a strategic role in creating an institutional

environment that gives teachers room to contribute, collaborate, and continuously improve the quality of learning.

CONCLUSION

The head of an educational institution plays an important role in building a supportive work environment that involves all educators in ECE institutions. By applying the four elements of transformational leadership, which include setting a good example, providing motivation, stimulating critical thinking, and showing personal consideration, the principal transforms from merely an administrative manager into a role model, an inspirational figure, and a facilitator for teachers. The establishment of effective cooperation and collaboration can increase teacher participation in expressing ideas, enhance innovation in the teaching and learning process, and support professional development to improve the overall quality of early childhood education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yuli Isnaeni, Dela Fuspita Al Alam, Lola Dwi Nur Isanaini and Siti Nur Rizkia designed the study, conducted interviews and observations, analyzed the data, and prepared the manuscript. Tepi Mulyaniapi supervised the research methodology, verified the analytical framework, and critically revised the manuscript for its intellectual content. All authors discussed the findings and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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