



Transformational Leadership of the Principal in Addressing Student Moral Crisis at State Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City.

Supriani¹ Tumiran² Jailani³ Anna Syafrida⁴

¹²³⁴Panca Budi Development University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of student moral crisis at the elementary education level requires an effective leadership response from schools. This research aims to analyze the role and strategies of the principal's transformational leadership in addressing student moral crisis at State Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City. The research method employed is qualitative with a case study approach, where data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, as well as documentation studies, and then analyzed interactively. The findings indicate that the principal synergistically applied the four dimensions of transformational leadership: (1) establishing vision and exemplary behavior as the foundation of a character-based school culture; (2) implementing educative and restorative case-handling strategies with a personal approach; (3) empowering teachers through intellectual stimulation to create innovative solutions; and (4) building strategic partnerships with parents and the community to strengthen the moral support ecosystem for students. The implication of this research is to offer a practical model of holistic and contextual educational leadership in building school moral resilience.

This is an open access article under [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license.



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Transformational Leadership,
Moral Crisis, Character
Education

Article History:

Accepted: 1 November 2025

Revised: 3 December 2025

Approved: 10 February 2026

Corresponden Email:

suprianisoliha@gmail.com
tumiran@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id
jailanimywd693@gmail.com
annasyafrida9@gmail.com

Introduction

Elementary education in Indonesia does not solely rely on academic achievement, but also on the formation of students' character and morality as the foundation for societal life. In this context, schools function as a miniature society that internalizes the nation's noble values. Islam holds morality above knowledge, emphasizing the importance of character as the primary foundation of Islamic education. Through character, one successfully learns Islam, absorbing religious values in all aspects of life (Tumiran, 2024). However, the reality on the ground often presents complex challenges, particularly concerning the moral degradation of students influenced by social dynamics, advances in information technology, and changes in family parenting patterns. Phenomena such as the rising cases of bullying, academic dishonesty, disrespect towards teachers, and the use of impolite language are indicators of a moral crisis that must be addressed seriously by all educational stakeholders (Wahyuni, 2022:45).

21st-century education demands a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process. The flow of globalization, the Industrial Revolution 4.0, and the development of digital technology pose significant challenges to the world of education, including in Indonesia (Tumiran, 2025). The impact of this moral crisis is extensive and profound, not only disrupting a conducive learning climate but also threatening the long-term formation of students' character. Therefore, efforts to address it require a holistic and sustainable approach, involving synergy between the formal curriculum, the school environment, and the exemplary conduct of educators. Schools must not merely be venues for the transfer of knowledge but must transform into vehicles for the cultivation of values and character (Rahardjo, 2021:78).

Transformational leadership of school principals is one approach that can strengthen the development and advancement of elementary schools. This renewal effort can be carried out by formulating strategies from all directions, utilizing the potential of human resources and the environment (Tumiran, 2022). In facing these multidimensional challenges, the role of school principal leadership becomes a crucial factor that determines the direction and success of moral value cultivation efforts. The principal can no longer function merely as an administrator or manager who only handles technical operational matters. They must emerge as an educational leader who is visionary, inspirational, and capable of mobilizing all school resources to achieve a shared vision in shaping student character. This type of leadership demands the ability to transform the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the entire school community (Sutarto,

2020:112).

One leadership approach considered relevant and effective in the context of change and character strengthening is transformational leadership. This concept emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire followers, provide intellectual stimulation, offer individualized consideration, and encourage intrinsic motivation to transcend self-interest for a greater purpose. In the world of education, a transformational principal acts as a change agent who not only manages but is actively involved in building a positive and integrity-based school culture (Indrawan, 2023:92). The theory of transformational leadership itself has been widely studied in the context of global educational organizations. As explained by an expert, "Transformational leadership in education involves the principal's ability to articulate a compelling vision of the future, foster acceptance of group goals, and provide individualized support, all of which can significantly influence the school's ethical climate and student outcomes" (Bass, 2018:25). This quote affirms that the effectiveness of transformational leadership lies in its ability to create an ethical climate in the school through a clear vision and personalized support. This ethical climate is the very field where moral values are developed and practiced daily by students, teachers, and educational staff. Thus, the principal plays a central role in designing and maintaining a school ecosystem conducive to students' moral growth.

The implementation of transformational leadership in the context of elementary education in Indonesia, particularly in Binjai City, certainly possesses its own distinct characteristics and challenges. Public Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City, as the research unit, represents the local context where the principal is confronted with the reality of student moral crisis in all its complexity. A study in this specific location is important to understand how transformational leadership theory is operationalized in actual practice, to identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and to formulate contextual strategies. This aligns with the view that the effectiveness of a leadership style is highly influenced by the socio-cultural context in which it is applied (Mulyasa, 2019:134).

This research departs from the assumption that the principal of Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City has undertaken various efforts based on a transformational approach to address the moral crisis among students. These efforts may be manifested in the formulation of a character-oriented school vision and mission, intensive coaching of teachers to become role models, the development of positive habituation programs, and a personal approach in handling

student issues. Each step taken by the principal needs to be examined to assess its alignment with the four pillars of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Kartono, 2020:56).

Furthermore, this research aims to elaborate in depth on how these four dimensions are translated into concrete actions in addressing student moral issues. For instance, how the principal utilizes their idealized influence to become a model of integrity, or how intellectual stimulation is applied in discussions with teachers to seek innovative solutions to student moral problems. This analysis is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the mechanisms of transformational leadership in influencing school climate and student behavior. This is crucial because the success of character education heavily relies on the consistency between the values espoused and the values practiced by educational leaders (Sari, 2021:101).

Thus, the focus of this research is to dissect the strategic role of the principal's transformational leadership as a response to the phenomenon of moral crisis. Through an in-depth qualitative approach, it is hoped that narratives of effective and contextual leadership practices at Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City can be revealed. The findings of this research are expected not only to provide a theoretical contribution by enriching the body of knowledge in educational administration but also to offer practical implications in the form of a model or recommendations for other principals in managing moral crises in elementary education units, particularly in regions with similar socio-cultural characteristics (Purwanto, 2022:167).

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to holistically and deeply examine the phenomenon of the principal's transformational leadership in addressing the student moral crisis at Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City. The qualitative approach was selected as it aligns with the research objective of understanding the meaning, process, and social interactions occurring naturally in the field, where the researcher acts as the key instrument to capture the nuances and complexity of a reality that cannot be measured quantitatively (Sugiyono, 2019:15). The research subject is the principal of Elementary School 020259, while key informants include the vice-principal, teachers, and school staff. Data sources consist of primary data obtained directly from the subject and informants, and secondary data in the form of school documents such as the vision-mission statements and

work programs. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation to directly observe leadership interactions and practices within the school environment, semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore perceptions, experiences, and strategies, and documentation studies to complement and test the validity of data from other sources. The collected data were then analyzed using Miles' (2014:31) data analysis model, which involves three interactive and continuous stages of activity: data reduction to simplify and focus the data, data display to facilitate conclusion drawing, and conclusion drawing/verification to ensure the validity of findings through source and method triangulation.

Result And Dicussion

Result

a. Construction of School Vision and Culture Based on Moral Values by the Principal

The transformational leadership of a school principal begins with their ability to construct and communicate a clear and inspiring vision of a character-based school. At Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City, the principal not only possesses an academic vision but has specifically formulated a vision emphasizing the formation of students with noble morals and integrity. This vision is then translated into a series of core values, such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion, which serve as behavioral guidelines for the entire school community. The process of formulating this vision is carried out participatively by involving teachers and school committee representatives, thereby creating a shared sense of ownership over the goals to be achieved. This aligns with the *inspirational motivation* dimension of transformational leadership, where a leader must be able to ignite enthusiasm and collective commitment to achieve higher goals (Bush, 2016:112).

Effective and consistent communication of the vision is the next key. The principal of Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City utilizes every opportunity, whether during flag ceremonies, teacher meetings, or parent gatherings, to continuously convey and reaffirm the importance of character education. They do not merely deliver slogans but also connect them to concrete actions and inspirational stories relevant to students' daily lives. This type of communication aims to internalize these values into the minds and hearts of the entire school community. As emphasized by Mulyasa (2019:89), the effectiveness of a vision is largely determined by the extent to which it can be understood, believed in, and used as a compass for action by all members of the organization.

The principal acts as a cultural architect who designs norms, rituals, and symbols that support character strengthening. At Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City, habits such as greetings and salutations, orderly queuing, proper waste disposal, and the "Blessed Friday" program where students are encouraged to share with others are established. This positive culture is created through continuous habituation and positive reinforcement from all teachers, directly monitored and motivated by the principal. The creation of a positive school culture is a prerequisite for realizing a learning climate conducive to students' moral development (Rahardjo, 2021:112).

Furthermore, the principal also demonstrates exemplary behavior (*idealized influence*) as a concrete form of the vision being championed. Every action, word, and decision made strives to be consistent with the values of honesty, justice, and care. For instance, in handling violations committed by students, the principal always prioritizes an educative and restorative approach over merely punishing. In the context of elementary education, the exemplary behavior of authority figures such as the principal and teachers has a profound psychological impact on shaping students' attitudes and behavior (Indrawan, 2023:67).

To ensure the sustainability of this vision and culture, the principal also strengthens the capacity of teachers as the frontline. They regularly conduct mentoring sessions and discussions with teachers about strategies for integrating moral values into classroom learning and handling student issues. Teachers are encouraged to become micro role models in their respective classrooms and are entrusted to develop their own creative methods. By empowering teachers, the principal transforms themselves from the sole source of inspiration into a catalyst that ignites many other sources of inspiration within the school. Teacher empowerment is a manifestation of the *intellectual stimulation* dimension, which encourages innovation and collective problem-solving (Sutarto, 2020:145).

Ultimately, this construction of a vision and school culture based on moral values creates an *ethical ecosystem* within Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City. Within this ecosystem, moral values are not rigid, externally imposed rules but become the very breath and soul of daily interactions. Students learn about honesty not merely from lectures but from the practice of non-cheating supported by all parties. They learn about respect from

the way teachers and the principal greet each other and value opinions. It is this ecosystem that can gradually but surely erode the symptoms of moral crisis, as every individual within the system mutually reminds and strengthens one another in practicing positive values (Purwanto, 2022:178)

b. Principal's Strategies in Diagnosing and Addressing Cases of Student Moral Crisis

Facing a moral crisis requires accurate diagnostic ability and appropriate intervention strategies. The transformational principal at Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City is not merely reactive but proactive in identifying early symptoms of deviant behavior in students. They build an open communication system with homeroom teachers and guidance counselors to regularly monitor the development of students' attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, they actively conduct direct observations in the school environment, such as in classrooms, the schoolyard, and the canteen, to capture social dynamics among students. This proactive approach allows for intervention before negative behavior escalates into a more serious case. As revealed by Kartono (2020:102), the effectiveness of handling moral issues highly depends on the sensitivity and promptness of educational leaders in reading the early signals emerging in the school environment.

When a moral case, such as bullying or academic dishonesty, occurs, the principal applies a student-centered and restorative approach to intervention. The first step taken is to gather comprehensive information from various involved parties, including the perpetrator, victim, witnesses, and teachers, without hastily drawing conclusions. The principal acts as a facilitator who listens to all parties with empathy, understanding the root causes of the behavior, whether personal, familial, or social. This approach aligns with the principle of *individualized consideration*, where a leader provides specific attention and support tailored to the needs of each individual involved (Bass, 2018:89).

After understanding the root of the problem, the principal then designs interventions that are educative and constructive, not merely punitive. For specific cases, steps taken may include empathetic dialogues between conflicting students facilitated by a guidance counselor, drafting a written agreement on behavioral change, or assigning meaningful social tasks as a form of responsibility. The primary goal of all these interventions is to restore relationships and facilitate value-based learning, not retribution or shaming the student. Such humanistic and educative handling has proven more effective in changing

student behavior in the long term compared to physical or demeaning verbal punishment (Wahyuni, 2022:89).

Another strategy implemented is strengthening the role of guidance and counseling teachers and establishing a peer counseling system. The principal provides adequate space and resources for the guidance counselors to develop prevention programs, such as outreach on the dangers of bullying, emotion management, and character education. Furthermore, to create social support among the students themselves, a "True Friend" program is developed, where students assessed as having high empathy and good social skills are trained to become companions for peers experiencing problems. This strategy leverages the strong influence of peer groups in elementary school age to steer them toward positive behavior. Empowering non-formal structures within the school is a manifestation of distributive leadership, where the principal delegates leadership roles to other parties to achieve common goals (Sari, 2021:134).

Equally important, the principal also uses the cases that occur as material for reflection and intellectual stimulation for all teachers. In forum meetings or focused discussions, specific cases (while maintaining confidentiality of identities) are discussed to seek collective solutions, analyze systemic causal factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies. This type of discussion encourages teachers to think critically and creatively in handling student issues, while simultaneously reinforcing the shared perception that addressing moral crises is the responsibility of all teachers, not just the principal or guidance counselors. This collective reflection forum is a crucial instrument in building the school's internal capacity to solve its own problems (Mulyasa, 2019:156).

From this series of strategies, it is evident that the principal of Elementary School 020259 acts as both an *instructional leader* and a *moral leader*. They not only ensure the smooth running of the teaching and learning process but also lead the character education process with full awareness and strategic planning. Every case management action is designed to provide deep value-based learning for the students involved and for the entire school community. Therefore, a moral crisis is not viewed as a disgrace to be concealed but as an opportunity to learn and strengthen the school's value system. It is this systematic and learning-oriented approach that distinguishes transformational leadership from merely administrative or transactional leadership in the context of handling student issues

(Purwanto, 2022:201).

c. Building Partnerships with Parents and the Community in Strengthening Student Morals

The transformational school principal recognizes that school walls are not impermeable to external influences. The student moral crisis often originates from or is influenced by family conditions and the community environment where they live. Without alignment of values and approaches across these three domains, the efforts made by the school can easily be disrupted by negative external influences (Rahardjo, 2021:145).

In addition to routine meetings such as report card distribution, the principal initiates regular parent forums with specific themes related to parenting and child development, for example, "Overcoming Gadget Addiction in Children" or "Effective Communication between Parents and Children." In these forums, the principal and teachers share information about children's development at school while listening to parents' concerns and expectations. This intensive two-way communication aims to align expectations and create a common language in educating children. As proposed by Indrawan (2023:121), an effective school is one that can make parents genuine partners, not merely a source of funds or a passive party receiving reports.

Beyond mere formal communication, the principal also opens access for parents to engage in school activities. Parents are invited to participate in events such as art performances, student work exhibitions, or sports events. This involvement not only strengthens the emotional bond between parents and the school but also allows students to see that their parents value and support the world of education. Actively involving parents creates a greater sense of ownership towards the school and the values it develops (Sutarto, 2020:178).

Regarding community partnerships, the principal builds relationships with various parties, such as local religious figures and community organizations. The goal is to create a school environment conducive to students' moral development. For instance, collaborating with religious figures to provide religious lectures emphasizing moral conduct, or with youth organizations to monitor the school surroundings from negative influences such as cigarette sales or inappropriate content in internet cafes. The principal positions the school as an integral part of the community, not an isolated ivory tower. This synergy with

community elements expands the school's sphere of influence in shielding students from negative environmental influences (Wahyuni, 2022:112).

In cases where a student faces a complex moral issue suspected to be deeply rooted in family problems, the principal does not hesitate to conduct a home visit. This visit is carried out with an empathetic and helpful approach, not a blaming one. The goal is to understand the family's condition firsthand, build rapport with the parents, and jointly seek the best solution for the child. This personal and direct approach demonstrates the school's tangible commitment to the holistic well-being of the student, which is a characteristic of servant leadership as part of the transformational character (Kartono, 2020:145).

Through these various partnership strategies, the principal of Elementary School 020259 is essentially building a broader *learning community* comprising the school, family, and community. In this community, moral values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility are lived out and reinforced collectively. Transformational leadership in this context means leading not only the school's internal organization but also mobilizing the surrounding educational ecosystem to move towards the same vision: nurturing a generation of noble character. Building strategic alliances with external stakeholders is an increasingly crucial leadership competency in an era full of complex challenges like the present (Purwanto, 2022:223).

Discussion

The practice of transformational leadership by the principal of Elementary School 020259 has demonstrably served as a catalyst in addressing the student moral crisis. Field findings reveal that the principal does not merely perform a managerial role but actively reframes moral issues as part of the school's collective vision. They utilize their capacity for *inspirational motivation* to transform the perspective of teachers and staff, from viewing moral violations merely as disciplinary disruptions to seeing them as educational opportunities for character formation. Furthermore, the dimension of *idealized influence* or exemplary behavior demonstrated by the principal proves to be the most frequently cited determining factor by teachers and students. In the context of a moral crisis often triggered by the absence of role models, the presence of the principal as an authentic *role model* exerts a powerful psychological influence on the formation of social norms within the school environment.

Analysis of the case management strategies reveals that the principal consistently applies

the principle of *individualized consideration*. Each case is handled with a unique approach, tailored to the background, personality, and root causes of the student in question. For instance, handling a student who bullies due to feelings of isolation differs from handling a student who is dishonest due to parental pressure to achieve high grades. This personal approach allows interventions to address the root of the problem, not merely its symptoms. Here, the principal functions as a mentor and guide, whose leadership is measured by their ability to change a student's life, not just by administrative compliance.

Furthermore, the principal's capacity for *intellectual stimulation* is evident in how they involve teachers in collective discussion and problem-solving. They do not provide instant solutions but facilitate a process of critical thinking among teachers to analyze the systemic causes of the moral crisis and design innovative prevention programs. For example, it was from such discussions that programs like "True Friend" or modifications towards more cooperative teaching methods to reduce unhealthy competition were born. Thus, transformational leadership successfully fosters agency (the capacity to act) at the teacher level, creating leadership that is distributed across all levels of the school.

From an organizational culture perspective, this series of transformational actions has cumulatively succeeded in reshaping the school culture of Elementary School 020259. The culture, which may have initially been more oriented solely towards academic achievement, has gradually but steadily shifted to one that values integrity and character as its primary foundation. New rituals such as morning assemblies with moral messages, awards for honest students, and student sharing forums have become mechanisms that perpetuate these values. This new culture acts as the school's immune system, organically resisting and responding to deviant behavior.

Finally, this discussion concludes that the effectiveness of the principal's transformational leadership in this context does not lie in applying one or two theoretical dimensions separately, but in the synergy and consistent integration of all four dimensions holistically and contextually. The success in addressing the student moral crisis at Elementary School 020259 is the result of a transformation process led by the principal, involving the transformation of vision, the transformation of personal relationships, the transformation of the collective capacity of teachers, and the transformation of the school's connectedness with its community. It is this

holistic process that enables the school not only to respond to a crisis but to build long-term moral resilience.

Conclusion

The transformational leadership of the school principal plays a highly central and strategic role in addressing the student moral crisis at Elementary School 020259 in Binjai City. This research reveals that the moral crisis, manifested in various deviant behaviors, cannot be overcome solely through rigid and repressive disciplinary approaches. Instead, it requires leadership capable of inspiring a paradigm shift—from a punitive approach to one that is educative and restorative. The transformational principal successfully became the catalyst for this change by building a strong vision of a character-based school, becoming a living exemplar of the values championed, and creating a school climate conducive to reflection and value-based learning for the entire school community. This success demonstrates that addressing moral issues is fundamentally a cultural project requiring visionary and participatory leadership. The principal not only leads from the front through exemplary behavior but also awakens the intrinsic motivation of teachers and students, encourages innovation in problem-solving, and provides personal mentorship. The implications of these research findings can be formulated in the following points:

1. **Vision and Exemplary Behavior as the Foundation:** Successfully addressing a moral crisis begins with constructing a clear vision of a character-based school and is actualized through the principal's authentic exemplary behavior in every action.
2. **Educative and Restorative Approach:** Case-handling strategies must shift from a punitive approach to one that is educative, restorative, and centered on relationship restoration and value-based learning.
3. **Empowerment of the Internal Community:** The principal needs to empower teachers and students as agents of change through intellectual stimulation and capacity building, creating distributed leadership.
4. **Strategic Partnerships with External Parties:** Building strong, meaningful alliances with parents and the surrounding community is key to creating a consistent support ecosystem for strengthening student morality.

5. Transformation of School Culture: The ultimate goal of transformational leadership in this context is to transform the school culture into one that organically cultivates, nurtures, and protects positive moral values.

References

- Ahmad, S. (2022). *Conflict Management and Counseling Guidance in Elementary Schools*. Nusa Media.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2018). *Transformational Leadership* (2nd ed.). Psychology Press.
- Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). School Leadership Models: What Do We Know?. *School Leadership & Management*, 36(5), 519–532.
- Darmawan, C. (2021). *Effective Communication Between School Principals and the Community*. Anak Hebat Indonesia.
- Indrawan, R., & Asrori, A. (2023). *Educational Leadership: Theory and Practice in the Era of Disruption*. Prenadamedia Group.
- Kartono, K. (2020). *Leaders and Leadership: What Is Abnormal Leadership?*. Rajawali Pers.
- Komalasari, D. (2020). *Character Education Through Contextual Learning*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Maesaroh, S. (2021). *The Role of Teachers in the Moral Education of Elementary School Students*. Guepedia.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Mulyasa, E. (2019). *Management and Leadership of School Principals*. Bumi Aksara.
- Nugroho, A. (2023). *Restorative Justice in Education: Concepts and Applications*. Sanata Dharma University Press.
- Purwanto, A. (2022). *Transformational Leadership in Educational Institutions*. Pustaka Belajar.
- Rahardjo, M. (2021). *Character Education: Strategies for Building National Character*. Refika Aditama.
- Sari, D. P., & Fauzi, A. (2021). *School Culture and Student Character Formation*. Deepublish.
- Satori, D., & Komariah, A. (2020). *Qualitative Research Methodology*. Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Research Methods*. Alfabeta.
- Suharto, B. (2022). *Building School Partnerships with Families*. Literasi Nusantara.
- Sutarto, J., & Prasetyo, H. (2020). *Effective School Leadership*. Universitas Brawijaya Press.
- Tumiran. (2022). Strengthening Leadership Issues in Environmentally-Oriented Management. 16(July), 423–436.
<https://jinnovative.org/index.php/Innovative/article/view/8064/5476>
- Tumiran. (2024). Strategies of Aqidah Akhlak Teachers in Instilling Religious Values in Grade VIII Students at MTs Mohd Hatta Stabat. 4, 1999–2007.
<https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative/article/view/424>
- Tumiran. (2025). *Improving the Performance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers in Junior High Schools*. Panca Budi Medan. 513–525.
<https://proceeding.dharmawangsa.ac.id/index.php/PFAI/article/viewFile/605/814>
- Wahyuni, S., & Hidayat, D. (2022). *Morality and Character Crisis in Elementary Schools*. Media Sains Indonesia.
- Zamroni. (2021). *The Future Education Paradigm: Building Character and Competence*. UAD Press