

Chapter 6

Effective Leadership for Turnaround Schools: An Indonesian Perspective

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Leadership is pivotal in the success of a school, particularly when it undergoes a transformation from a low-performing school to an effective one, referred to as a turnaround school. However, little is understood about the notion of turnaround school, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. This research aims to reveal the leadership strategies implemented in Indonesian primary schools that have successfully executed a turnaround from unfavourable conditions. Employing a qualitative interpretive approach to deeply explore the intricate dynamics of educational leadership in Indonesian schools, we conducted in-depth interviews with three principals recognised for bringing about significant change in their institutions as well as ten teachers who worked in those schools. Findings revealed that transformational leadership, collaboration with the local community, and optimal resource utilisation were the linchpins to their success. However, the research also identified unique challenges faced by principals in Indonesia, including limited resources and a dearth of access to technology. The findings on turnaround school leadership are juxtaposed with Western literature in the discussion, highlighting salient similarities and differences. While certain universal leadership principles apply, Indonesia's cultural and social context necessitates a slightly nuanced approach to leading schools needing change.

5.1 Introduction

Education in Indonesia faces numerous challenges, one of which is the perceived subpar quality of education in some schools (Bangay, 2005; Helda & Syahrani, 2022; OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015; Shaturaev, 2021; Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020). Improving students' learning at the school level is a necessity that requires significant changes. Within the international literature context, the term 'turnaround schools' refers to schools that had previously exhibited poor performance across several educational indicators but subsequently

showed notable performance improvements within a relatively short timeframe by enacting significant changes (Murphy & Meyers, 2007). Specifically, in Indonesia, the term ‘turnaround schools’ is still unfamiliar (see Sumintono et al., 2023); the closest to it is ‘effective schools,’ defined as institutions that initially performed below average based on national evaluations but succeeded in enhancing student learning outcomes and educational quality through strategic interventions (Riswandi et al., 2021).

In parallel, ‘turnaround principals’ are school leaders with the capacity to drive, inspire, and implement the necessary interventions to transform low-performing schools into dramatically improved institutions (Duke, 2006b). In the Indonesian context, the term used is similar to ‘effective school principals’; these principals are not merely administrative heads but also emerge as educational leaders playing a crucial role in school reforms by collaborating with teachers, students, and the community to establish conducive and effective learning environments (Al Faruq & Supriyanto, 2020).

Researchers have revealed findings of research related to turnaround school leadership. For example, assertions have been made that transformational leadership (Bush, 2020), transactional leadership (Mette & Scribner, 2014), and shared and instructional leadership (De Lisle et al., 2020) can assist low-performing schools. Leadership style and practices are crucial for the success of turnaround schools because they are the main drivers of change and key determinants of a school’s ability to sustain improvements (Leithwood et al., 2020). In Indonesia, unique cultural and socioeconomic educational challenges impact the effectiveness of the implemented school turnaround strategies (Bush, 2020; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). For instance, transformational leadership has proven to create an environment that supports significant and rapid changes by inspiring staff to exceed conventional expectations and commit to a shared vision of improved educational outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 1994), if adopted by Indonesian principals has potential to smooth the changing process. Additionally, collaborative leadership integrates the support of the local community, which is crucial in settings with limited resources (Bryk et al., 2010).

Furthermore, while school leadership is acknowledged as a primary factor of educational quality in Indonesia (Hasmirati et al., 2020), research on the principles and practices of school leadership, especially in the Indonesian context (Dixon et al., 2022; Sumintono et al., 2015; Sumintono et al., 2019), and the determinants of low-performing schools (Harris et al., 2017a; Harris et al., 2018) remains scarce. Additionally, an ambiguous definition of what constitutes a turnaround principal may lead to difficulties in investigating turnaround schools (Hitt et al., 2018), and there is, in fact, no consensus among scholars on

how to measure turnaround schools (Huberman et al., 2011). A significant factor is that knowledge about turnaround schools has been predominantly derived from North America and the United Kingdom (e.g., Meyers & Darwin, 2017; Meyers & Murphy, 2007; Muijs et al., 2004; Murphy, 2008), with minimal empirical research conducted in Asia and developing nations.

Liu (2020) asserted that the international literature indicates that the cross-cultural contexts of leadership for turnaround schools remain underexplored with limited insights into Asian situations. This is an important gap because “leaders successful in one context may not be as effective in another, especially if they differ significantly” (Bush, 2018). Though the global literature provides extensive knowledge about turnaround schools and leadership in the Western context, the Indonesian local context has distinctive nuances that set it apart from the global perspective. Firstly, the education system in Indonesia is influenced by profound local culture, values, and traditions, often differing from those found in Western countries (Ahmad, 2013). For instance, the mode of communication among principals, teachers, students, and parents is frequently grounded in the principle of familial ties, a concept deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture (Nurfajrina et al., 2022; Yuniarti, 2022). Secondly, the challenges faced by schools in Indonesia often differ from those in developed countries. Issues such as educational accessibility in remote areas, resource constraints, and educational disparities across regions demand specific leadership approaches (Ilmiyah et al., 2021). Consequently, this study aimed to fill this knowledge gap, focusing on the Indonesian context. In response to the critical gap identified above, this research investigated one primary research question: What are the effective leadership practices demonstrated by principals in turnaround schools in Indonesia?

5.2 Literature Review

5.2.1 Fundamental Concepts of Turnaround Leadership

Turnaround leadership is defined as the process by which leaders mobilise resources and strategies to transform previously low-performing schools into successful, high-quality institutions within a relatively short time frame (Murphy & Meyers, 2007). Unlike other leadership styles, turnaround leadership requires the ability to quickly identify problems, formulate solutions, and effectively implement changes (Duke, 2006a). This leadership often involves making bold and innovative decisions, focusing on drastic changes rather than gradual improvements (Harris et al., 2017a).

Turnaround schools are those that have experienced significant improvements in both academic and non-academic performance after periods of low performance (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). During their low-performing phases, these schools are typically identified by distinctive characteristics, such as low standardised test scores, disciplinary issues, and poor attendance rates (Meyers & Murphy, 2007). Factors driving this change include the need for improved educational quality, pressure from stakeholders, and changes in educational policies or leadership (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009).

The focus of leadership in this context lies in enhancing school performance through strategic interventions targeted at areas most in need of improvement. This includes improvements in teaching and learning, increased student engagement, and the development of a positive and results-oriented organisational culture (Kurnia et al., 2021).

It is, thus, crucial to define what constitutes “low-performing schools” in Indonesia. These refer to schools scoring below the minimum competency assessment (<1.79 out of a maximum of 3.00) in national literacy and numeracy tests (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). While the term ‘turnaround’ is not widely recognised in Indonesia (Harris et al., 2020), for this study, ‘turnaround’ schools are those meeting criteria such as increasing numeracy and literacy scores and rising enrolment over three years, which are used as indication of successful school principalship.

5.2.2 Turnaround Leadership Styles: Transformational, Instructional, and Distributed

The varying styles of leadership in turnaround schools are distinct and effective in exacting the change needed to create success. They are categorised as transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1994), instructional (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), and distributed leadership (Harris et al. 2017a). Transformational leadership in turnaround schools involves leaders who inspire and motivate staff to exceed conventional expectations, fostering commitment to an enhanced vision of the school. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders influence staff with four main components: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) found that transformational leadership has a positive impact on school performance, including in turnaround contexts. This is particularly applicable in overcoming challenges to reverse negative trends, which requires radical changes. Recent studies also have shown the positive impact of transformational leadership on work performance (Khan et al., 2020) and trust in the principal (Lee et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, instructional leadership focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as the professional development of teachers. Hallinger and Heck (2010) emphasised the importance of instructional leadership in improving student outcomes. In turnaround schools, instructional leadership involves leaders who are proactive in guiding and supporting pedagogical innovations, monitoring and evaluating learning, and developing curricula responsive to student needs. Research by Robinson et al. (2008) showed that instructional leadership has the greatest impact on student outcomes compared to other leadership styles. Mette and Riegel (2018) found that instructional leadership with a supervision approach focused on formative feedback helps teachers grow as instructors, rather than just providing summative evaluation for employment decisions. This approach also aids teachers in better understanding and implementing more rigorous teaching standards (Rigby et al., 2018).

Distributed leadership involves the sharing of leadership responsibilities, empowering staff, and team collaboration. Spillane (2005) defined distributed leadership as a practice where leadership is executed through interactions among leaders, followers, and the situation. In the context of turnaround schools, this means delegating responsibilities and allowing staff to contribute to decision-making processes. Research by Harris et al. (2017a) indicated that distributed leadership is effective in building organisational capacity and driving positive change in low-performing schools. Research by Tejeiro (2024) also found that distributed leadership significantly contributes to the development of inclusive schools.

Recent studies also have emphasised the importance of contextual adaptation in implementing leadership styles in turnaround schools. For instance, Liu (2022) highlighted the role of expert teacher workshops in building teacher capacity in turnaround primary schools in Shanghai, showing that continuous training and development are crucial in this context. Additionally, research by De Lisle et al. (2020) showed that leadership focused on collaboration and community participation can significantly impact the improvement of school performance in disadvantaged environments.

5.2.3 Characteristics of Effective Turnaround Leaders

Effective turnaround leaders are crucial for revitalising schools, with their success hinging on several key abilities. Leithwood and Sun (2012) and Leithwood et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of a clear, collaborative vision that inspires and unites the school community. Operational management skills, such as resource allocation and strategy implementation, are

also vital (Duke, 2006b; Meyers & Hitt, 2017; Koomson, 2022). These leaders excel in communication, fostering strong partnerships with stakeholders, and encouraging open dialogue to support turnaround efforts (Spillane et al., 2004; Bryk et al., 2010).

Flexibility and adaptability are necessary traits, as leaders must respond to evolving needs and unexpected challenges (Harris et al., 2017b; Fullan, 2005). Their strategic initiatives significantly enhance school performance, impacting student outcomes, attendance, and behaviour (Robinson et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005).

Moreover, sustaining change post-turnaround requires leaders to build organisational capacity and maintain a supportive culture that fosters continuous improvement (Fullan, 2015; Meyers & Hitt, 2017). This includes not only academic gains but also enhancing staff satisfaction, student engagement, and community relations, with an emphasis on measurable results to assess the effectiveness of such initiatives (Liu, 2022; Liu, 2020).

5.2.4 Turnaround Strategies within Cultural and Resource Contexts

Successful school turnaround strategies must be holistic, involving both internal practices and an understanding of external contexts. Improving teaching quality is fundamental, necessitating continuous professional development focused on content knowledge and innovative teaching methodologies (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knight, 2013). These improvements include integrating technology and student-centred learning, which are essential for enhancing student outcomes.

Building a positive school culture that supports learning and innovation is also crucial (Schein, 2010; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Olanrewaju & Tinuke, 2022). Effective leadership is vital in shaping this culture, creating a supportive environment where all school members feel valued and part of the school's mission. This involves fostering a sense of belonging and commitment, which is particularly important in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts where understanding and integrating community values and social norms are essential (Fullan, 2001; Gay, 2018).

Utilising data to inform decisions is another key strategy, enabling leaders to identify issues, track progress, and tailor interventions (Wayman et al., 2012; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016). Data-driven decision-making ensures that school strategies are based on evidence, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions. External involvement, including parental and community engagement, significantly strengthens turnaround efforts. Active community participation not only supports resource allocation but also enhances the educational process's

relevance to community needs (Epstein, 2018; Bryk et al., 2010). Leaders must navigate these relationships carefully, considering the local cultural and socio-economic contexts, to align school improvements with community expectations and resources.

Moreover, managing and optimising resources is critical, requiring leaders to be adept in leveraging both internal and external resources (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Bryk et al., 2010). This includes developing strong networks with external stakeholders like local governments and educational bodies, which can provide additional support and expand the school's capacity for improvement.

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Research Design

This study embraced a qualitative interpretive approach to deeply explore the intricate dynamics of educational leadership in Indonesian schools, particularly through the lens of principals who were steering low-performing institutions towards significant improvements. Drawing on the foundational principles of Saldana (2011) and incorporating insights from Clarke et al. (2015) and Saldaña and Omasta (2016), this approach allowed for an immersion into the natural settings of schools. It aimed to interpret the lived experiences, challenges, and strategies of principals within their everyday environments, offering a rich, contextually grounded understanding of school turnaround processes.

The research adopted a case-study design, which does not always imply a single site but depends on the unit of analysis. In this study, the unit of analysis was a turnaround school at the public primary school level. While the case represents a single phenomenon, it is present across multiple sites. The study focused on public primary schools in the Lampung province of Indonesia that had demonstrated significant improvement. The selection was based on criteria like socio-economic status, school enrolment, academic performance, peer recognition, value-added data, reputation, and community involvement. After a thorough data-driven selection process, three schools demonstrating turnaround situations were chosen.

5.3.2 Sampling Procedure

Three public primary schools from Lampung province on Sumatra Island were selected for the study. These schools, coded as Lampung Primary School 1, 2, and 3, were chosen to represent

a diverse range of leadership styles and practices. The selection criteria were multifaceted, focusing on geographical location, socio-economic background, demographic composition, and accreditation status, all of which provided a comprehensive context for analysing turnaround leadership.

Firstly, geographical location played a crucial role in the selection process. Lampung Primary School 1 and 2 are located in rural areas more than 20 kilometres from the nearest urban centre that are predominantly involved in agriculture, which impacts resource access and infrastructure. In contrast, Lampung Primary School 3 is situated in a suburban area less than 20 kilometres from an urban centre, benefiting from better accessibility and a more diverse economic environment. These differences allowed for a detailed exploration of how geographical context influences leadership styles and school improvement strategies.

Secondly, the schools were chosen to reflect a range of socio-economic statuses and ethnic diversities, from lower to middle-income families, representing the predominant ethnic groups in Lampung. This selection aimed to shed light on how socio-economic and demographic factors shape the challenges and opportunities in leadership and the execution of turnaround strategies. Furthermore, all selected schools shared a 'B' accreditation status, indicating a good but not excellent level of educational quality. This commonality ensured that each school started from a similar baseline but may have followed different trajectories for improvement.

The study of these schools revealed significant differences in their operational dynamics, approaches to leadership, and school improvement strategies due to their distinct geographical settings. Schools 1 and 2, in rural areas, faced challenges related to limited access to resources and connectivity, while School 3, in a suburban setting, enjoyed better infrastructure but still encountered challenges typical of rural environments. Despite these differences, all schools adhered to the Indonesian national curriculum and used *Bahasa Indonesia* (the Indonesian national language) as the medium of instruction, ensuring consistency in educational content. Additionally, the level of community engagement in these schools varied, with rural schools experiencing strong local involvement, while the suburban school benefitted from a more diverse community background. These variances highlight the need for context-specific approaches to school leadership and improvement, reflecting the unique environmental, community, and leadership dynamics of each school. The informants in this study consisted of three school principals and 10 teachers, with their complete profiles presented in Table 5.1 below. Teacher participants in this study had bachelor's degrees and had been teaching experiences for more than 10 years.

Table 5.1 Informants' demographic information

Name	Post	Age	Gender	Years of working experience
Mr. Abdi	Lampung Primary School Principal 1	58	Male	8
Mr. Budi	Lampung Primary School Principal 2	36	Male	4
Mr. Catur	Lampung Primary School Principal 3	48	Male	8
Mrs. Rahayu	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1	35	Female	10
Mr. Santoso	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1	40	Male	15
Mrs. Dewi	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1	30	Female	7
Mr. Slamet	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1	50	Male	25
Mrs. Nurhayati	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2	45	Female	20
Mr. Hendra	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2	38	Male	12
Mr. Putra	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2	28	Male	5
Mr. Darmadi	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3	48	Male	22
Mrs. Wulan	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3	27	Female	4
Mrs. Ratna	Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3	42	Female	17

Note: School, principal, and teacher names are pseudonyms.

5.3.3 Interview Protocol

The interview protocol for this study was developed with a focus on extracting insights about leadership styles and effective leadership practices demonstrated by principals in Indonesian turnaround schools. The development of this protocol was informed by Liu's (2020) framework, which served as the basis for designing questions that explored the nuances of leadership across various cultural and educational contexts, particularly in Indonesia. The interview protocol encompassed the understanding of strategies, challenges, and the impact of leadership practices during the turnaround process. Key themes derived from this research included transformational leadership, community engagement, and strategic resource management. Questions were crafted to elicit detailed responses on how principals navigated these themes within the context of educational challenges and opportunities in Indonesia.

5.3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was initiated with visits to the selected schools where in-depth interviews were conducted with the principals to gather primary data on their leadership performance. Following these interviews, focused group interviews (FGIs) were held with school teachers to collect supplementary information regarding the principals' leadership from the staff's perspective. This supplementary data from FGIs served to enrich the primary data obtained from the interviews with the principals. Additionally, school performance reports

issued by the local education department were utilised as secondary data to provide a broader perspective on school performance. This procedure was uniformly applied across the three schools under study, Lampung Primary School 1, 2, and 3, ensuring consistency in data collection and facilitating accurate comparison and analysis of leadership performance across different school settings.

In the process of data collection for this study, we adhered strictly to ethical guidelines, which included obtaining permission from local authorities and the principals of the schools involved. To protect the privacy of our participants and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were employed for both the schools and the individuals participating in the research.

5.3.5 *Thematic Analysis*

The data underwent thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015; Saldaña, 2021), following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. This process involved selecting, sorting, and merging codes to construct themes, ensuring they aligned with the research's theoretical framework. An iterative process was conducted to check the consistency between the themes and coded data, identifying coherent patterns.

The research team read all data transcripts multiple times for a comprehensive understanding, followed by initial coding using qualitative analysis software to identify recurring patterns or ideas. These codes were then grouped into potential themes based on similarities and relationships. Themes were reviewed, re-examined, and aligned with the theoretical framework, ensuring relevance and contribution to addressing the research objectives. The relationships between themes, and their impact on the study's goals, were thoroughly analysed.

5.4 Findings

5.4.1 *Principal Leadership Styles*

5.4.1.1 Family-oriented leadership

Family-oriented leadership style is particularly effective in Indonesia due to its alignment with cultural values. By treating the school community as an extended family, the principal can

create a supportive and cohesive environment where trust and mutual respect thrive, facilitating a smoother and more effective implementation of change initiatives.

In the first school, the principal adopted a family-oriented leadership approach. This resonates with the Indonesian cultural norm of emphasising familial ties. Leaders build trust and commitment by fostering close, familial relationships within the school environment, which are foundational to a successful turnaround, as Principal Abdi and a teacher stated:

“Wherever I am assigned, I bring a family-oriented approach.” (Principal Abdi)

“I feel that the family-oriented approach implemented by the principal greatly helps in creating a supportive and respectful environment. We feel like one big family, which makes the changes easier to accept.” (Mrs. Rahayu, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1)

5.4.1.2 Collaborative leadership

Schools do not exist in isolation, and collaboration with the surrounding community is crucial for garnering support, resources, and achieving mutual goals. All three principals recognised the importance of this collaboration. For example, Principal Abdi of Lampung Primary School 1 highlighted the community’s involvement in the school’s initiatives, particularly in its efforts to become an ‘adhiyata’ school, known for its excellence in sustainable environmental programs. He noted the significant investment required and the extensive community participation, where residents sometimes took a week off work or stayed up late to help with activities like designing and planting flowers; he emphasised that this was a collective effort not limited to teachers but involving the entire community for the school’s advancement. Similarly, Principal Catur from Lampung State Primary School 3 emphasised the integration of school initiatives with community input as a key strategy. He pointed out the transformation in parental engagement, which had significantly increased from forming class committees to active participation in parades and other activities to promote the school’s programs. This marked a shift in how the community interacted and supported the school’s turnaround efforts. Mr. Santoso, a teacher at Lampung Primary School 1, further reinforced this notion by stating that the principal often engaged local residents in school programmes, ranging from environmental initiatives to educational activities. This collaborative approach made the teachers and the school members feel fully supported by the community, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual benefit.

“To note, to become an ‘adiwiyata’ school requires a significant investment. We must collaborate closely with the residents. Sometimes they take a week off their jobs. Occasionally, they stay up late at night... Helping us work, designing everything... planting flowers... It’s not just the teachers; it’s all for our school’s advancement.” (Principal Abdi)

“At our school, collaboration with the community is crucial. The principal often involves local residents in various school programmes, ranging from environmental activities to educational initiatives. This makes us feel fully supported by the community.” (Mr. Santoso, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1)

5.4.1.3 Visionary and motivational leadership

Visionary and motivational leadership is essential in creating a clear and compelling direction for the school. By articulating a strong vision and motivating the staff, the principal can align the efforts of all stakeholders towards common goals, ensuring that everyone is working cohesively towards the school’s success. This approach also inspires confidence and commitment among the staff, which is crucial for driving and sustaining change.

Principal Budi of Lampung Primary School 2 described his role as both administrative and inspirational, likening himself to a ship’s captain with a clear vision and motivation to steer the institution towards excellence. Similarly, Mrs. Dewi, a teacher from Lampung Primary School 1, emphasised the central role of her principal in providing clear direction and unity, underlining the critical importance of a defined vision and mission in guiding the school’s collective efforts.

“As the school’s principal, I feel like a captain on a ship. My duty isn’t just to oversee but also to provide direction and motivation to ensure this school moves towards success.” (Principal Budi)

“Our principal always provides a clear vision of where the school is heading. He is able to motivate all of us to work better and be enthusiastic about achieving our shared goals.” (Mrs. Dewi, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1)

5.4.1.4 Democratic leadership

Democratic leadership fosters an environment of inclusion and participation, which can enhance teacher satisfaction and morale. By involving teachers in decision-making processes, the principal not only gains valuable insights and ideas but also builds a sense of ownership and accountability among the staff. This approach can lead to more effective and widely supported decisions, as well as a stronger commitment to implementing and sustaining change initiatives. Particularly highlighted by the principal of Lampung Primary School 2, an inclusive and democratic decision-making process ensures that all voices are listened to, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. Responses from a teachers' FGI illustrate the issue:

“Through evaluations, the principal listens to our suggestions and ideas, ensuring decisions aren't made unilaterally. If there's disagreement, they first listen to the reasons.” (Mrs. Nurhayati, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2)

5.4.2 Leadership Practices for School Turnaround

5.4.2.1 Relationship building

Building strong relationships is critical in the context of school turnaround. By adopting a family-oriented approach, principals leverage cultural values to create a supportive and trusting environment. This approach helps in engaging both staff and members of the broader school community, making them feel valued and connected to the school's mission. The three principals emphasised the significance of establishing profound relationships. For the principal of Lampung Primary School 1, Principal Abdi, it was about fostering a familial approach to build trust and engagement. Mr. Hendra, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2, emphasised how the principal's family-oriented approach fostered strong relationships between teachers, students, and the community. This approach cultivated a sense of togetherness and support, making all parties feel connected to the school's mission and creating a more collaborative and inclusive environment. This aligns with the deeply embedded Indonesian cultural value of familial ties. They commented on such a relationship:

“Of course, our approach is grounded. We first observe where we stand, and then we determine what needs to emerge from our standpoint.” (Principal Abdi)

“The family-oriented approach has been very helpful in building strong relationships between teachers, students, and the community. We feel like we are part of a larger, supportive community.” (Mr. Hendra, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 2)

5.4.2.2 Teacher empowerment

Empowering teachers by aligning their roles with their strengths and interests can significantly enhance job satisfaction and performance. This practice not only fosters professional growth but also leads to more effective teaching, as teachers are more likely to be motivated and engaged when they are working in areas where they feel competent and passionate.

The emphasis on teacher development and autonomy resonated across the schools. Lampung Primary School 1’s Principal Abdi stood out by ensuring that his teachers were positioned in roles that matched their expertise and interests. He noted that while one might be weak in scouting, another was likely to excel in the arts. The teacher participants also supported the principal’s statement, saying:

“With Mr. Abdi’s leadership, his approach is extraordinary. We are never forced to work outside our areas of expertise. We are given the freedom to develop.”
(Mr. Putra, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 1)

5.4.2.3 Holistic approach to education

A holistic approach to education, which includes character and value development, is essential for nurturing well-rounded students. By prioritising cleanliness and religiosity, principals ensured that students not only excelled academically but also developed important personal and social values, contributing to their overall growth and preparation for life beyond school. The principal of Lampung Primary School 3 made a notable emphasis on cleanliness and religiosity, signifying a comprehensive approach that went beyond academics to focus on character and value development. This is evident in interview excerpts from Principal Catur and Mr. Darmadi, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3:

“The most dominant focus here is on cleanliness and religiosity; that’s where I concentrate.” (Principal Catur)

“Our approach does not only focus on academics but also on character development. We place great emphasis on cleanliness and religious values at school, which are important for shaping well-rounded students.” (Mr. Darmadi, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3)

5.4.2.4 Effective communication

Transparent and communicative leadership fosters a culture of trust and collaboration. Regular communication with teachers and parents ensures that everyone is informed and involved in the school’s progress. This practice promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective effort, which is vital for the success of turnaround initiatives. Prioritising open communication was a highlighted approach of the principal of Lampung Primary School 2. By keeping channels of communication open with all stakeholders, there was shared ownership in the school’s progress, as Principal Budi and Mrs. Wulan, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3, stated:

“I always prioritise communication. I discuss with the teachers every week, and every month we meet with the students’ guardians. This is crucial to ensure everyone is involved and receives the information they need about the school’s development.” (Principal Budi)

“Open communication between the principal, teachers, and parents is very important. Every month, we meet with the students’ guardians to discuss the school’s progress, and this makes us all feel involved in the process.” (Mrs. Wulan, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3)

5.4.2.5 Effective problem-solving skills

Problem-solving and realistic leadership are crucial for addressing the specific challenges faced by schools. By developing and implementing practical solutions that resonate with the community, principals effectively address local needs and gains community support. This approach ensures that the initiatives are not only feasible but also have a positive and lasting impact. The leadership of Lampung Primary School 3 emphasised understanding the inherent challenges of the school and tailoring realistic and relevant solutions to them. This leadership style was geared towards creating tangible improvements through slogans and community

engagement methods, as mentioned by Principal Catur and Mrs. Ratna, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3:

“We offer realistic programmes to the community. Like ‘free school, realistic programme’—this has received much positive feedback.” (Principal Catur)

“The principal always seeks realistic and applicable solutions. He involves us in every stage of the process to ensure that the decisions made align with the school’s needs.” (Mrs. Ratna, Teacher at Lampung Primary School 3)

5.5 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that transformational leadership, collaboration with the local community, and optimal resource utilisation are crucial for the success of turnaround efforts in Indonesian primary schools. These leadership approaches are not only instrumental in changing the operational dynamics of schools but also in achieving substantial improvements in school performance.

The similarities and differences in leadership practices across the case schools highlight the critical role of cultural, geographical, and socio-economic contexts in shaping effective leadership strategies for school turnarounds. Adapting leadership styles to local conditions is essential for addressing unique challenges and leveraging the strengths of each school community (Hariri et al., 2024). Recent literature has underscored the importance of contextual adaptation in leadership practices. Studies by Tejeiro (2024) and De Lisle et al. (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of distributed leadership and community involvement in improving school performance, especially in resource-constrained environments. These findings align with observed practices in the case schools, where principals tailored their strategies to fit local contexts and community needs. For instance, the emphasis on religious and cleanliness values at Lampung Primary School 3 reflected an adaptation to the local socio-cultural environment, supporting holistic educational approaches (Schein, 2010; Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Recent studies have further validated these observations. Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013) asserted that leadership practices must be tailored to the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts of schools to be effective. Gurr (2017) highlighted that successful leadership in diverse contexts requires a deep understanding of local culture and socio-economic conditions. Hallinger and Walker (2017) emphasised that culturally responsive leadership practices are

critical for addressing the specific needs and challenges of schools in different settings. Liu (2020) found that leadership practices involving community participation and distributed leadership are particularly effective in improving school outcomes in challenging environments. Harris et al. (2013) also stressed the importance of adapting leadership styles to local contexts to leverage community strengths and address specific challenges.

5.5.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is pivotal in turnaround school contexts, where change is not only necessary but urgent. Principals who adopt this leadership style play an essential role in mobilising their teams and instilling a sense of purpose that transcends daily challenges. They achieve this by embodying four specific components: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). These components help leaders to create a vision that is deeply resonant with their staff, encouraging innovation and a collective effort towards school improvement.

Moreover, the effectiveness of transformational leadership in Indonesian schools can be particularly attributed to its alignment with the cultural context. Indonesian cultural norms highly value community and familial relationships, which harmonise well with the transformational leadership style. This style's focus on motivation and support builds on existing cultural strengths, making it more effective in the Indonesian educational setting (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Furthermore, empirical studies support the notion that transformational leadership not only impacts staff morale and motivation but also leads to tangible improvements in student outcomes and school performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). These leaders' ability to challenge the status quo and encourage personal growth in their staff leads to a dynamic educational environment where continuous improvement is the norm. This discussion reiterates the importance of cultural and contextual understanding in applying leadership theories. While transformational leadership is universally recognised, its implementation in Indonesian turnaround schools exemplifies how cultural adaptation can enhance its impact, fostering environments that support significant and rapid changes in school dynamics.

5.5.2 Community Engagement

Community engagement in the context of turnaround schools involves more than occasional cooperation; it requires a deep, strategic integration of community resources and capabilities to support the school's transformation objectives. Effective turnaround schools leverage this engagement by aligning school improvement strategies with community needs and strengths, creating a shared responsibility for student success (Epstein, 2018).

Moreover, in Indonesian turnaround schools, community engagement is not only strategic but also culturally ingrained. The communal nature of Indonesian society, with its emphasis on mutual help (*gotong royong*) and communal harmony, provides a conducive environment for collaborative efforts between schools and their surrounding communities. This cultural propensity enhances the effectiveness of community engagement practices, facilitating a more integrated and holistic approach to school turnaround efforts.

Empirical studies have suggested that community engagement in educational settings can lead to improved student outcomes, enhanced parental involvement, and increased resource mobilisation, which are critical in the context of turnaround schools (Sheldon, 2002; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). These findings align with the current study's observations, where community members not only contributed to resource development but also participated in school governance and decision-making processes, reflecting a comprehensive approach to community involvement.

5.5.3 Resource Optimisation

Resource optimisation in Indonesian turnaround schools involves a strategic approach where school leaders prioritise and allocate resources in a manner that maximises educational outcomes. This encompasses not only physical resources like textbooks and technology but also intangible assets such as teacher expertise and community goodwill. The research findings indicate that effective resource management directly correlates with improved school performance, echoing the sentiments of earlier studies (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the application of resource optimisation in these schools often requires innovative approaches due to the unique challenges they face, such as limited access to technology and geographical isolation. Leaders have adopted creative solutions, such as community partnerships, to supplement resource constraints and have leveraged professional development programs aimed at maximising teacher efficacy within available means.

The importance of resource optimisation is highlighted by its impact on several aspects of school functioning, from enhancing instructional quality to ensuring the sustainability of

improvement efforts. Successful resource management not only supports immediate educational needs but also builds a foundation for long-term success, as noted in the broader literature on educational leadership (Robinson et al., 2008).

5.5.4 Family-Oriented Leadership as a Cultural Adaptation in School Turnaround in Indonesia

In Indonesian turnaround schools, the family-oriented leadership style is a crucial strategy, deeply ingrained in the nation's cultural focus on familial ties and community collaboration. This cultural adaptation in leadership, which emphasises family bonds, reflects the principles of "Leadership as Practice" (LAP), recognising social and cultural contexts as important factors in leadership practices (Raelin, 2016). Family-oriented leadership supports this theory by adapting leadership styles to meet the socio-cultural values of Indonesia, which prioritise family and community cohesion. According to Hofstede (2001), Indonesia scores high on the collectivism dimension, underscoring the importance of group and strong interpersonal relationships. The emphasis on family relationships within school leadership reflects this adaptation and has been proven effective in previous research, showing that social support is key to improving organisational performance in collectivist contexts (Chhokar, et al., 2007; Raihani, 2008).

Distinct from the transformational leadership commonly found in Western contexts, as noted by Leithwood et al. (2020), family-oriented leadership in Indonesia underscores the significance of personal connections and collective well-being. This approach highlights the importance of cultural congruence in leadership practices, demonstrating that the effectiveness of leadership in turnaround schools is significantly influenced by cultural values and social norms. By integrating these strategies, Indonesian school leaders can effectively navigate the complexities of school turnaround efforts. Improving teaching quality, building a positive school culture, utilising data for informed decision-making, engaging with the community, and managing resources are all enhanced when contextualised within the local cultural and socio-economic landscape. The family-oriented leadership approach not only aligns with cultural values but also ensures that leadership practices are relevant and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by Indonesian schools. This integrated approach is essential for fostering sustainable improvements and achieving long-term success in school turnarounds.

5.6 Conclusions and Implications

The study illuminates pivotal elements that significantly contribute to the success of turnaround strategies in Indonesian primary schools. Key findings underscore the effectiveness of transformational leadership, which not only boosts staff morale and performance but also aligns closely with the cultural values prevalent in Indonesia. This alignment enhances its effectiveness within this specific context. Moreover, community engagement emerges as a crucial strategy, necessitating deep, strategic integration with local resources and needs to foster a supportive environment for sustainable school improvements. Additionally, resource optimisation is highlighted as essential, particularly in resource-scarce settings, where innovative management of both human and material resources can significantly enhance educational outcomes. These insights suggest that, for policy and practice, a focus on developing leadership capacities that are transformational and culturally attuned, as well as strategies for robust community involvement and resource management, are crucial. The study also suggests the need for further research into the cultural adaptation of leadership practices in varying contexts, which could inform more tailored and effective educational policies and practices not only in Indonesia but also in other developing countries with similar challenges.

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