



Challenges of School Principals' Transformational Leadership in Improving Graduate Quality at SMAN 1 Bandar Sekijang and SMAS Al-Muslimun, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the challenges faced by school principals in implementing transformational leadership to improve graduate quality at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang and SMAS Al-Muslimun, Pelalawan Regency. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a multi-site study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving principals, teachers, and education staff in both schools. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, and analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, covering data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings indicate that transformational leadership in both schools encounters internal and external challenges. To address these challenges, principals applied strategies such as strengthening vision and mission dissemination, involving school stakeholders in decision-making, conducting teacher development programs, and building partnerships with external stakeholders. The study concludes that the effectiveness of transformational leadership in improving graduate quality depends on the principal's ability to manage internal constraints, leverage external support, and build sustainable school systems.

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of senior high school graduates has become a strategic agenda in human resource development amid global competition, digital transformation, and the industrial revolution 4.0. Graduate quality determines a nation's capacity to adapt, innovate, and compete in dynamic regional and global labor markets characterized by uncertainty and rapid change. Various studies show that principals' leadership influences, directly or indirectly, the learning climate, teacher performance, parental participation, and students' academic achievement (Li & Liu, 2022; Nurabadi et al., 2021). In many countries, including Indonesia, principals are required not only to serve as administrative managers but also as instructional leaders who can mobilize teachers, manage change, and optimize school resources to achieve higher graduate competency standards (Ahmadi et al., 2025). In this context, principals' leadership effectiveness is key to bridging national policy demands with school-level realities so that graduate quality sustainably reflects societal and workforce needs.

Transformational leadership is understood as a leadership style that inspires, motivates, and empowers school communities through a clear vision of change and exemplary interpersonal relationships. This style emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration that encourage teachers to continue learning, reflecting, and developing pedagogical practices aligned with student needs and the latest national curriculum demands. A number of studies show that principals with transformational characteristics can enhance learning effectiveness, organizational commitment, and teachers' trust, thereby improving students' learning processes and outcomes (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021; Meidelina et al., 2023). Through strengthening vision, providing individualized support, and fostering intellectual stimulation, principals encourage teachers to innovate, become more prepared to manage classrooms, and assume broader professional responsibilities (Musadad et al., 2022). Thus, principals' transformational leadership becomes a catalyst that unites vision, learning practices, and resource support for continuous improvement in graduate quality at every level.

In the Indonesian context, various studies confirm that principals' transformational leadership plays an important role in improving teacher performance, work discipline, and the quality of learning services in schools (Ali, 2022). Change-oriented leadership enables principals to integrate a graduate-quality vision into human resource management, work culture, and reward systems so that teachers are motivated to deliver educational services responsive to students' and parents' needs (Fadhilah et al., 2020). Moreover, leadership that fosters motivation, trust, and a sense of belonging has been shown to correlate positively with teachers' extra-role behaviors that support a conducive school climate for improving learning achievement (Rahmansyah, 2022). Such leadership practices are reflected in setting clear learning targets, providing ongoing professional mentoring, and using evaluation data as a basis for truly accurate school decision-making. Therefore, strengthening principals'

transformational leadership capacity is a prerequisite for ensuring that quality-improvement policies are internalized in school culture and reflected in graduate profiles.

Graduate quality is closely related to the quality of educational processes and management, particularly at the school level, ranging from learning planning to the management of student development programs oriented toward strengthening character, literacy, numeracy, and creativity. Total quality management approaches in education position principals as change leaders who orchestrate a culture of quality, evaluation systems, and innovation in learning services (Almuhajir & Barus, 2021). Other studies indicate that quality-oriented principals can integrate teacher training programs, strengthened academic supervision, and internal quality assurance mechanisms to improve school quality management systems (Frihastama & Hermanto, 2022). In addition, leadership that supports collaboration and teacher empowerment contributes to classroom learning quality and teacher performance in realizing expected graduate competencies (Puspitadani et al., 2022). Accordingly, improving graduate quality requires principals' leadership that consistently places quality as the primary orientation throughout school management processes, from planning to program evaluation.

Empirical studies across educational levels show that principals' transformational leadership contributes significantly to strengthening teacher competence, professionalism, and confidence in implementing learning tasks (Belan & Niron, 2021). Leadership that provides support, clarity of goals, and role-modeling has been proven to encourage teachers to improve planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, thereby affecting their performance and job satisfaction (Masriah, 2022). These outcomes are generally measured through increased teacher performance scores, academic supervision reports, or teachers' perceptions of a school climate that supports collaboration, innovation, and responsible professional task execution aligned with graduate-quality demands. Other studies emphasize that interpersonal communication skills, the ability to build harmonious working relationships, and participatory decision-making are key factors in successful transformational leadership in schools (Melianah et al., 2021). However, many studies have not detailed the practical difficulties, role conflicts, and environmental pressures faced by principals when leading graduate-quality transformation in education units.

Recent research highlights that transformational leadership practices in schools cannot be separated from the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which schools operate. Variations in student backgrounds, parental support, and partnership networks shape principals' leadership dynamics. Studies in rural schools show that principals must adapt leadership strategies to limited facilities, local community characteristics, and crisis impacts such as the pandemic (Aziz et al., 2022). Other research underscores the importance of leadership that can integrate teacher training programs, learning technology, and a culture of innovation to strengthen teachers' motivation and commitment to change (Adriantoni et al., 2023). In addition, leadership practices that facilitate collaborative learning and strengthen religious values have been shown to

contribute to character formation and student discipline across education units (Juhji et al., 2022). Nevertheless, in-depth studies that capture the day-to-day challenges of principals leading graduate-quality improvement at the secondary-school level within national policy frameworks and global demands remain limited.

International studies show that principals' transformational leadership style is positively correlated with students' academic achievement and school success across socio-cultural contexts (Elele, 2020; González-Falcón et al., 2020; Kitur et al., 2020). However, most of these studies focus on statistical relationships and have not extensively explored principals' real experiences when facing pressure, resource constraints, and stakeholder demands regarding graduate quality. In Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province, principals at SMAN 1 Bandar Sekijang and SMAS Al Muslimun face challenges in improving graduate competence amid policy changes, local socio-economic dynamics, and developments in learning technology. This study employed a qualitative multi-site approach to comprehensively capture leadership dynamics, school culture, and stakeholder perceptions in these schools. The study aims to explore the challenges of principals' transformational leadership in improving graduate quality and to formulate recommendations for strengthening leadership capacity based on local context and current national policy in a sustainable manner.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges of principals' transformational leadership and the strategies applied to improve graduate quality across two different school contexts. The focus was directed toward identifying internal and external challenges, as well as the relationship between transformational leadership practices and efforts to improve graduate quality in each school.

Research Setting and Timeframe

The study was conducted in two educational units in Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province: (1) SMAS Al-Muslimun (Jln. Lintas Timur KM 29.5, Muda Setia) and (2) SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang (Jln. Lintas Timur KM 25, Simpang Beringin, Bandar Sei Kijang District). Data collection was carried out in July–August 2025.

Data Sources

The data sources consisted of primary data obtained directly from the field through the researcher's interaction with the research subjects. Primary data were collected from principals, teachers, and educational staff in both schools through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

1. In-depth Interviews (Semi-structured)

In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain factual information as well as the informants' interpretations regarding the implementation of transformational leadership, the challenges encountered, and the strategies used to maintain/improve graduate quality. The interviews used a semi-

structured guide containing questions about transformational leadership dimensions and indicators of graduate quality.

2. Direct Observation

Observations were conducted within the school environment to capture principals' leadership practices in daily activities. The observation focus included: (a) principals' interactions with teachers, students, and staff; and (b) supporting conditions for leadership and school services, including facilities (e.g., principal's office, laboratories, and supporting rooms). Observations were supported by an observation sheet to record relevant behaviors, activities, and situations.

3. Documentation

Documentation was used to complement and strengthen interview and observation data. Documents reviewed included relevant academic and institutional documents such as curriculum documents, academic reports, internal policies, school archives, and documents related to graduate quality (e.g., available score data/learning outcome recapitulations at the school).

4. Instruments and Supporting Tools

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument, playing a direct role in collecting, processing, and analyzing data. To support systematic data exploration and consistent recording, the researcher used supporting tools in the form of research guidelines, interview sheets, observation sheets, and documentation sheets (as listed in the thesis appendix).

Table 1. Summary of data collection techniques and instruments (based on Chapter III of the thesis)

| Technique | Target/Source | Instrument/Supporting tool | Focus of data collected |
|--------------------|--|--|---|
| In-depth interview | Principal, teachers, educational staff | Semi-structured interview guide | Challenges of transformational leadership; coping strategies; links to graduate quality |
| Observation | School environment and leadership activities | Observation sheet | Daily leadership practices; interactions; situations; supporting facilities |
| Documentation | School documents | Documentation sheet/document checklist | Curriculum, academic reports, policies, archives, documents |

| Technique | Target/Source | Instrument/Supporting tool | Focus of data collected |
|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | related to graduate quality |

Data Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness framework

Data trustworthiness was tested based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, with primary emphasis on credibility to ensure that the data reflect field realities.

Triangulation

To enhance credibility, the study applied triangulation, specifically:

- **Source triangulation**, comparing and cross-checking information from different sources/informants within the same context.
- **Technique triangulation**, checking the consistency of findings using different techniques (interviews, observation, documentation) on the same source.

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis model

Data analysis used the interactive analysis model (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña), conducted simultaneously and iteratively from data collection through the final stage. This model includes three components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation was carried out through selecting and focusing data to simplify and transform raw data into meaningful information aligned with the research focus. At this stage, the researcher performed coding, categorization, pattern identification, and theme development from interviews, observations, and documentation.

2. Data Display

Condensed data were presented systematically in descriptive narratives and, when necessary, in matrices/tables/flow diagrams or thematic charts to help the researcher read interconnections among information and guide subsequent analytical steps.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusions were drawn through meaning interpretation, identifying relationships among categories, and formulating patterns/propositions. Conclusions were provisional and verified continuously through comparison with new data, discussions with informants, and triangulation to ensure that final findings were consistent, valid, and aligned with the research questions and objectives.

Table 2. Data analysis steps using the interactive model (operational summary)

| Component | Key activities | Analytic output |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Data condensation | selecting–focusing–coding– categorizing–identifying patterns/themes | themes/clusters of findings per school |
| Data display | composing narratives, matrices/tables/thematic diagrams | mapping relationships among challenges– strategies–graduate quality |
| Drawing & verification | interpreting, checking consistency, triangulation, confirmation | validated and accountable conclusions |

RESULTS

Research Implementation Context

The study was conducted at SMAS Al-Muslimun (Jl. Lintas Timur KM 29.5, Muda Setia) and SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang (Jl. Lintas Timur KM 25, Simpang Beringin, Bandar Sei Kijang District, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province) in July–August 2025. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation (including documents on graduate quality scores, academic reports, and internal policy archives) involving principals, teachers, and educational staff in both schools.

Internal Challenges of Transformational Leadership

Internal challenges at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang

Observations showed that classrooms were relatively clean and well maintained, and vision–mission posters were displayed in classrooms as a form of institutional value internalization. During the learning process, teachers appeared to use digital media and encourage student participation through discussion, indicating efforts to adopt modern learning practices. However, interview findings indicated that internal challenges still emerged in terms of limited human resources and facilities, although teacher–staff commitment was considered fairly good. The principal emphasized the need for scheduled training and monitoring–evaluation, while teachers highlighted that facility availability was not yet fully adequate to support effective learning.

Internal challenges at SMAS Al-Muslimun

Classroom observations showed that learning spaces were managed creatively, but facilities remained limited and digital devices for learning were “very limited,” leading teachers to rely more on conventional methods and simple teaching aids. Interviews confirmed that teacher–staff readiness was uneven, requiring habituation and sustainable routine training; teachers also stated that limited capacity/resources meant some teachers had not fully adapted to new approaches. In internal governance, teacher–staff participation in internal activities was still low, and coordination across work units was hampered because work structures were not clearly defined, creating overlapping roles and work inefficiency.

Table 1. Summary of internal challenges (cross-site)

| Aspect | SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang | SMAS Al-Muslimun |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| HR readiness | Commitment is fairly good, but there are still HR limitations and the need for periodic training/monitoring. | Readiness is uneven; habituation and sustainable routine training are needed. |
| Facilities & digital media | Digital media use is visible, but facilities are not yet fully adequate. | Digital devices are very limited; learning is more conventional. |
| Participation & internal coordination | Facility/HR limitations still occur although the work climate is relatively supportive. | Participation in internal activities is low; coordination is hampered because the work structure is unclear and roles overlap. |

External Challenges of Transformational Leadership

External challenges at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang

Observations indicated that the school’s physical environment was relatively good, and the surrounding community showed involvement in social and academic activities, but most residents came from lower-middle socio-economic backgrounds. Interviews suggested that parental/community support was considered “quite good” during major activities, but participation was not always active without direct invitations. To respond to this challenge, the school encouraged parent and community involvement through open activities (e.g., parenting class/bazaar) and strengthened local networks through the school committee with neighborhood leaders (RT/RW/community figures).

External challenges at SMAS Al-Muslimun

Observations showed that the school’s physical environment was safe and conducive, but access was relatively limited and facilities still required improvement to support more optimal learning. Parent support for school activities was fairly visible, but broader community involvement remained low; socio-economic conditions that tended to be low affected access to information and educational support facilities. External strategies identified in interviews included personal approaches with community leaders, open activities (bazaar/competitions), home visits, and committee collaboration with mosques/social institutions to expand public education channels regarding the importance of education.

Strategies Applied to Address Challenges

Strategies at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang

Based on observation and documentation, the school actively implemented development programs (including P5), student competitions, and entrepreneurship activities; coordination meetings were conducted openly and participatively with well-archived documentation. The school also developed a quality roadmap and established collaboration with higher education institutions and the business sector as a long-term strategy. These findings

confirm that transformational leadership strategies were implemented through strengthening vision-mission, participatory communication, staff training, and external partnerships, although consistency in applying the vision-mission and follow-up to feedback remain areas for improvement.

Strategies at SMAS Al-Muslimun

Observations indicated that vision-mission socialization was conducted through assemblies, beginning-of-year meetings, and visual media (banners), but it remained formal and had not yet become an embedded work culture. Coordination meetings were routinely held but not always fully attended; two-way communication more often occurred when problems arose, while professional development through training was not routine and largely depended on individual initiative. Interviews further confirmed that teacher involvement in strengthening vision-mission remained limited, so its implementation had not yet been integrated into daily work behavior.

Documentation Data on Graduate Quality

School documentation (SMAS Al-Muslimun) shows that average school exam scores increased in 2022/2023, but declined again in 2023/2024, especially in the Social Sciences track, indicating that graduate quality has not been stable year to year.

Table 2. Average School Exam Scores of SMAS Al-Muslimun (School Documentation)

| Academic Year | Science (IPA) | Social Sciences (IPS) |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 2021-2022 | 85.02 | 85.13 |
| 2022-2023 | 86.63 | 87.97 |
| 2023-2024 | 87.90 | 87.72 |

DISCUSSION

The findings show that principals in both schools face complex transformational leadership challenges in efforts to improve graduate quality. Limited human resources, administrative burdens, and suboptimal internal coordination reduce principals' capacity to carry out inspirational functions and maximize teacher capacity development (Ali, 2022; Nurabadi et al., 2021). Many studies confirm that principals' transformational leadership affects teacher performance, school climate, and student learning outcomes either directly or indirectly (Yoserizal et al., 2024). This study shows that the transformation process at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang and SMAS Al Muslimun proceeds gradually and is strongly influenced by organizational structure readiness and work culture. Thus, this study affirms that transformational leadership effectiveness is always related to the ability to manage organizational complexity while maintaining a consistent and sustainable orientation toward graduate quality.

Limited numbers and capacity of teachers, uneven teaching readiness, and the need for continuous coaching emerged as major internal challenges in both schools. Research on teacher readiness indicates that principals' transformational leadership can strengthen teachers' self-efficacy and readiness to teach through

moral support, clarity of vision, and positive modeling (Musadad et al., 2022; Aziz et al., 2022). Other research emphasizes the importance of trust and mutually supportive working relationships between teachers and school leaders to sustain changes in learning practices (Musa et al., 2020). In this study, principals initiated training and habituation programs, but change outcomes still faced variations in teacher commitment and competence. Therefore, strengthening transformational leadership must be accompanied by systematic, measurable HR development management that is responsive to teachers' professional needs in both schools.

A collaborative work culture and a conducive organizational climate have not been fully established, especially at SMAS Al Muslimun, affecting the driving force of transformational leadership. Previous research shows that transformational leadership is important in developing teachers' innovative behavior and a supportive work climate through clarity of goals, emotional support, and space for initiative (Zainal & Mohd Matore, 2021; Rahmansyah, 2022). Other studies confirm that school organizational change requires consistent principal role-modeling, intensive communication, and a work system that can accommodate cross-functional collaboration (Windasari et al., 2022). The findings show that SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang has been relatively more established in building a collaborative culture than SMAS Al Muslimun, which is still at an early stage of improvement. Thus, transformational leadership success is strongly determined by principals' ability to strengthen a collaborative climate as the foundation for behavioral and cultural change among school members.

In terms of teacher performance and academic service quality, the study indicates differences in how transformational vision is translated into learning management practices across the two schools. Recent quantitative studies confirm that principals' transformational leadership serves as a catalyst for improving teacher performance through stronger goal clarity, supervisory support, and a reflective culture (Aditya et al., 2025; Andarin, 2025). Other research shows that combining academic supervision and transformational leadership can improve teacher competence and the quality of learning processes at the secondary level (Belan & Niron, 2021). In this study, SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang developed more systematic performance coaching mechanisms, whereas at SMAS Al Muslimun coaching patterns remained sporadic and highly dependent on the principal's initiative. Therefore, differences in graduate quality between the two schools are closely related to differences in the quality of transformational leadership implementation in managing teacher performance and professionalism.

External challenges such as parental support, community involvement, and infrastructure availability also influence the operating space of principals' transformational leadership. Qualitative research in madrasahs shows that value-oriented transformational leadership can strengthen school-parent synergy in character development and students' religious culture (Susrianto et al., 2024). Other studies emphasize that effective infrastructure management and school information systems are key prerequisites for learning innovation and

stakeholder collaboration (Wahyuni et al., 2025). Meanwhile, principals' inclusive decision-making patterns affect teacher commitment as well as public trust in the school (Elele, 2020). The findings confirm that SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang receives relatively stronger environmental and community support, while SMAS Al Muslimun is still working to build trust and consistent, sustainable parental participation.

The socio-economic condition of students' families, generally in lower-middle groups, creates additional challenges in meeting learning needs and home support for graduate quality. Various studies show that principals' transformational leadership can compensate for such limitations through strengthened motivation, empathetic communication, and academic services that are more adaptive to student needs (Azizah & Wahidin, 2022; Fitriyah et al., 2019). Other research confirms that transformational leadership capable of fostering work ethic and school-member discipline will improve service quality for learners in contexts of significant constraints (Fadhilah et al., 2020). This study shows that both principals sought intensive communication with committees and parents, but outcomes were still hindered by limited time, resources, and variations in parents' understanding of the importance of graduate quality.

Principals' strategies in socializing vision, mission, and graduate-quality goals are key to mobilizing change at the school level. International studies show that transformational leadership emphasizing deeper-learning visions can shape innovative practices and reflective learning cultures in schools (Sliwka et al., 2024). Other studies find that the combination of transformational leadership and a positive madrasah climate contributes significantly to improved teacher performance (Adriantoni et al., 2023). Additionally, principals' intellectual stimulation has been shown to encourage teachers to continuously strengthen professional competence through reflection and learning innovation (Sholeh, 2021). The findings indicate that vision socialization at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang is more systematic through routine meetings, documented tools, and character-strengthening programs, while at SMAS Al Muslimun it remains incidental and not fully internalized in daily practice.

Teacher professional development, habituation of reflective culture, and strengthening work commitment are important strategies pursued by principals in responding to graduate-quality challenges. Literature reviews confirm that transformational leadership improves work ethic, professional commitment, and teachers' willingness to engage in extra school tasks (Supendi et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2023). Other research indicates that teacher job satisfaction as an outcome of a supportive work environment encourages sustained teaching quality over the long term (Tentama et al., 2021). The findings show that coaching programs in both schools have contributed to improved commitment and discipline, but they have not been fully supported by structured reward systems, monitoring, and feedback. Therefore, transformational leadership sustainability requires consistent, planned, and needs-based professional development policies.

Digitalization of governance and the use of learning technology emerged as strategic needs to reduce administrative burdens and enhance learning-process

quality. Research shows that principals' transformational leadership that proactively facilitates technology use impacts teacher performance and learning quality (Utami et al., 2024). Systematic reviews also confirm that transformational leadership sensitive to teacher well-being helps minimize work pressure and emotional exhaustion amid rapid change (Meidelina et al., 2023). Other research finds that leadership practices and principals' personal characteristics, including gender sensitivity, influence teachers' innovative behavior (Ismail et al., 2021). The findings show that digitalization initiatives in both schools remain limited and are not yet supported by integrated information systems, so the potential of transformational leadership to optimize technology has not been fully utilized.

The relationship between principals' transformational leadership and graduate quality appears mainly through improved learning quality, school climate, and achievement culture. Recent research shows that principals' transformational leadership contributes to educational quality excellence through strengthening shared vision, change management, and focus on student achievement (Yakob et al., 2025). Other studies confirm that the combination of transformational leadership and supportive work environments positively affects teacher performance, particularly in uncertain contexts (El Achi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, leader integrity and behavioral consistency strengthen transformational leadership effectiveness in driving teaching effectiveness (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021). The findings show that graduate quality at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang is relatively better, aligned with more mature transformational leadership implementation than at SMAS Al Muslimun, which is still in progress.

The multi-site approach in this study shows that transformational leadership effectiveness is strongly influenced by institutional context, school development history, and stakeholder configuration. Research in elementary schools shows that principals' leadership focused on creating a conducive work climate strengthens teacher motivation and program implementation quality (Tumeko et al., 2025). Internationally, a study in Eswatini reveals that transformational leadership plays an important role in driving school culture change toward more collaborative and inclusive practices (Mudavanhu et al., 2025). Other findings emphasize that consistent transformational leadership increases teacher self-efficacy and trust in leaders (DC. Francisco, 2019). In the context of the two schools, differences in development phases and environmental support explain variations in the effectiveness of transformational strategies applied by each principal.

Overall, the study shows that principals' transformational leadership is shaped by complex interactions between internal and external factors that cannot always be controlled directly. Empirical studies indicate that strong transformational leadership can empower teachers, improve governance, and enhance performance through delegation, coaching, and role modeling (Almuhajir & Barus, 2021; Sehol, 2022). Other research emphasizes that effective communication and a healthy organizational climate are important mediators between leadership style and teacher performance (Safrul, 2022). The findings confirm that transformational leadership success depends not only on principals'

personal characteristics but also on strengthening systems, stakeholder support, and policy consistency oriented toward improving graduate quality across school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that principals at SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang and SMAS Al Muslimun face multidimensional transformational leadership challenges, including limited human resources, administrative burdens, coordination across work units, and the absence of a strong collaborative culture. These challenges are reinforced by external factors such as varying parental and community support, students' family socio-economic conditions, and infrastructure availability that does not fully support the vision of improving graduate quality.

Nevertheless, both principals have implemented a number of transformational strategies, including socializing vision and mission, involving school members in decision-making, developing teacher professionalism, and building partnerships with external stakeholders. SMAN 1 Bandar Sei Kijang demonstrates relatively more mature implementation, reflected in a stronger collaborative work culture, more structured performance coaching systems, and more positive environmental support for school programs.

SMAS Al Muslimun remains in the early phase of improvement, with key obstacles in weak teacher participation, inconsistent communication, and simple documentation and planning systems. These differences imply variations in graduate quality outcomes between the two schools, even though both operate within the same geographic and social context in Pelalawan Regency.

Conceptually, this study confirms that the success of principals' transformational leadership in improving graduate quality is strongly determined by the ability to manage internal challenges, leverage external opportunities, and build systems that promote participation, accountability, and continuous learning. Strengthening principals' capacity, policy support from stakeholders at the district office and foundation levels, and developing collaborative culture at the school level are essential prerequisites for consistent implementation of transformational leadership.

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