

## Women's Transformative Leadership in Realizing the Vision of Education Sustainable

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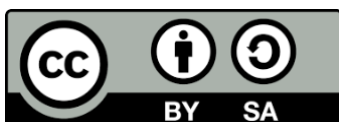
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### Abstract

The transformative leadership of female principals plays a strategic role in addressing the challenges of 21st century education, especially in an effort to realize the vision of sustainable education. This research is motivated by the increasing participation of women in school leadership positions and the need for adaptive, inclusive, and visionary leadership. The purpose of this study was to identify the transformative leadership characteristics of female principals, analyze their leadership contributions in realizing the vision of sustainable education, and explore the challenges and adaptive strategies used. This study uses a *literature review* approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct critical synthesis of various scientific studies that have been published, both conceptually and empirically. The results showed that female school principals applied transformative leadership values such as ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention. Female principals also play an active role in integrating *the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* into managerial practices and developing adaptive strategies through strengthening social-professional networks, independent personal capacity development, and local context-based innovation.

**Keywords:** transformative leadership; female principal; continuing education; ESD; Adaptive strategies



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**INTRODUCTION**

Social change and the global demand for continuing education have driven a major transformation in leadership practices in the education sector. The concept of transformative leadership is one of the dominant approaches discussed, because of its ability to drive vision, build collective motivation, and empower organizational members towards sustainable positive change. This concept was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 in his book "*Leadership*" where he differentiates between transactional and transformational leadership. Later, Bernard Bass expanded on this theory in 1985, emphasizing that transformational leaders are able to motivate their followers to transcend personal interests for the good of the organization (Bass 1985). In the context of education, transformational leadership not only emphasizes academic results, but also the sustainability of values, character, and the educational environment itself, according to (Robbins and Judge 2013) stating that transformational leadership is a behavior that inspires subordinates to prioritize organizational interests over personal interests and has a good impact on their subordinates.

At the same time, the involvement of women in strategic positions in school leadership is increasing, along with the awareness of the importance of gender equality in the world of education. Female principals show a tendency towards a more participatory, collaborative, and humanist leadership style, characteristics that are very close to transformational leadership values. According to Yukl (2008), transformational leadership is a leadership style that can attract the morality of followers as an effort to increase their awareness of morals and mobilize their resources for organizational change. Studies such as Bagherian et al. (2023) highlight the importance of the characteristics of leaders, including women, in driving the implementation of sustainable and effective organizational transformation.

However, based on previous literature review, it was found that there are several gaps that still need to be filled. First, conceptually, the linkage between transformative leadership and the practice of female principals in the context of continuing education has not been explored in depth (McNae and Vali 2016; Fitzgerald 2020). Second, empirically, although there has been a lot of research on women's leadership, few have explored specifically *how female principals translate transformational values in the local context* and the reality of education in Indonesia (Nasikhah, Maunah, and Patoni 2022).

Furthermore, the results of a review of several scientific articles related to women's transformational leadership show that women's transformational leadership has a positive influence in terms of improving school organizational culture (Alzoraiki et al. 2024), in empowering teachers and students (Rahmaditha et al. 2024) and encouraging educational innovation (Owusu-Agyeman 2021) integrating sustainability principles in school policies (Alhazemi 2024). However, in the Indonesian context, the role of female school principals still faces structural challenges, gender stereotypes, and limited access to sustainable leadership training (Haerana, Madjid, and Munandar 2023; Baiduri et al. 2023). This condition indicates a real gap between potential and practice, which requires further academic exploration.

Based on this phenomenon, it is important to conduct research that specifically examines "Transformative Leadership of Women School Principals in Realizing the Vision of Sustainable Education". This research is expected not only to contribute to the development of educational leadership theory, but also to become a practical reference in human resource development policies in the education sector. The objectives of this study are to identify the characteristics of female transformative leadership applied by school principals in the context of education, analyze the role of women's transformative leadership in encouraging the realization of the vision of sustainable education, explore the challenges and adaptive strategies faced by female principals in carrying out transformative leadership, and compile the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings in the context of development education and leadership training policies.

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**RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a literature review approach to explore in depth the concept of women's transformative leadership in realizing the vision of sustainable education. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct critical synthesis of various scientific studies that have been published, both conceptually and empirically. The literature search process is carried out through leading academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar through the Publish or Perish application. Keywords used in the search included: transformational leadership, female school leadership, sustainable education, women in educational leadership, and gender equity in school leadership. The selected articles are focused on studies that are contextually relevant, methodologically qualitative, and make significant contributions to the issues of education leadership and sustainability.

To ensure the accuracy and depth of the analysis, a critical appraisal process was carried out on each selected article, by assessing the clarity of the research objective, the accuracy of the methodology design, and the relevance of the findings to the focus of the study. In addition, the theoretical triangulation approach is used to strengthen the validity of interpretation, by comparing findings from various theoretical perspectives. The analysis was carried out thematically by grouping the findings into four main categories: the characteristics of women's transformative leadership, the strategic role in continuing education, and the adaptive strategies developed by female principals. The results of this study are expected to be the basis for strengthening the theoretical framework and policy recommendations that are contextual and applicable in the education sector.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION****Characteristics of Women's Transformative Leadership in the Context of Education**

Female principals who adopt transformative leadership display distinctive characteristics, such as high empathy, participatory approach, and a focus on developing healthy interpersonal relationships in the school environment. Women leaders are more likely to integrate emotional and social values in decision-making, as well as encourage a collaborative school culture (Massouti, Shaya, and Qareiny 2024). The core values of transformational leadership i.e. *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration* (Bass and Riggio 2006) are applied consistently in their leadership practices, but with a distinctive touch that is more inclusive and communicative.

**Idealized Influence**

Transformational leaders act as moral and ethical role models that are admired and respected by their followers. In the context of female school principals, this value is reflected in a consistent attitude in upholding integrity, justice, and commitment to educational values. Female principals generally have a strong ethical and value-oriented approach to decision-making, such as managing teacher conflicts, equitable division of duties, and creating an inclusive school culture. The personality of the female school teacher has a warm and empathetic nature that strengthens the moral legitimacy of leadership in the eyes of the school community.

**Inspirational Motivation**

This dimension relates to the leader's ability to convey a clear, engaging, and challenging vision of the future in a positive way. Female principals often demonstrate a high ability to generate collective spirit among teachers and students, through a motivating and empathetic communication approach. This sometimes happens in reflective forums, regular

meetings with teachers, or inspiration sharing sessions as a means of building a common meaning towards a sustainable and humane vision of education.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

Transformational leaders encourage innovation, critical thinking, and the courage to make decisions outside of the ordinary. Female principals encourage teachers to experiment with new learning methods, open up dynamic pedagogical discussion spaces, and give teams confidence in taking the initiative. Women leaders tend to place the value of lifelong learning as a basic principle in fostering their staff. Female principals create a work environment that stimulates creativity and a sense of ownership of innovation.

### **Individualized Consideration**

This dimension relates to the leader's attention to the development needs of each individual in the organization. Female principals tend to be more sensitive to the personal dynamics of teachers and staff, and have sensitivity in responding to their emotional and professional needs. Practices such as mentoring, personal coaching, and moral support for teachers who face personal problems are a concrete reflection of this individual's concern. This relationship-based approach strengthens the loyalty and involvement of the organization's members in achieving a common goal.

### **The Role of Women's Transformative Leadership in Realizing the Vision of Sustainable Education**

The transformative leadership run by female principals has a strong resonance with the principles of *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) as developed by UNESCO. ESD not only prepares students to become capable individuals in answering future challenges, but also demands a paradigm shift in the management and leadership of education itself, namely from *output-based* management to value-based management, collaboration, and long-term sustainability (Eliaumra 2017). The principles of ESD can be applied by women in carrying out their leadership.

### ***Transformation-Based Vision***

One of the key principles of ESD is that education must enable individuals to become *agents of change*. Female principals, through their transformative leadership, are able to synergize the vision of long-term education with sustainability values. School principals do not only manage school institutions, but encourage social transformation through continuous learning. The vision they build is inseparable from the principles of *future-oriented thinking*, *equity*, and *intergenerational responsibility*.

### ***Implementation of Holistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches***

ESD prioritizes a holistic approach in learning and school management. Female principals demonstrate the ability to integrate various dimensions of environmental, economic, and social sustainability into managerial strategies and curricula. For example, initiating *eco-school*, *zero waste school*, or *entrepreneurial-based learning* programs that develop environmental awareness as well as entrepreneurial skills. This approach is also seen in the development of cross-disciplinary curriculum, which links math, science, and social studies lessons to real issues such as climate change, poverty, or food security.

### ***Gender Justice and Inclusivity as Pillars of Sustainability***

Women's transformative leadership naturally brings a gender perspective and inclusion into continuing education practices. One of the principles of ESD is to fight for social justice and the empowerment of marginalized groups. Female principals actively encourage the

participation of all parties without discrimination, pay attention to the well-being of students from vulnerable backgrounds, and build a welcoming, equitable, and safe learning environment. This inclusivity is an integral part of school management, from teacher recruitment, work team formation, to reward and evaluation systems.

### ***Sustainability Character and Competency Building***

ESD emphasizes the development of 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving, collaboration, and global awareness. Female principals through a transformational leadership style encourage the strengthening of students' character through habituation of the values of responsibility, empathy, and environmental ethics. Its managerial strategy also provides space for students and teachers to *learn by doing* through social action projects, conservation programs, or sustainable entrepreneurship (*green entrepreneurship*), all of which are aligned with sustainability values.

### ***Leaders as Facilitators of Systemic Transformation***

Within the framework of ESD, sustainability is not only manifested in the content of education, but also in the structure, policies, and climate of the school. Female school principals are not authoritarian, but rather facilitators of systemic transformation. The principal ensures that the school system is both in planning, *monitoring*, and evaluation based on reflection and collaboration. In this case, *school governance* becomes inclusive, open to innovation, and connected to the community. This kind of leadership is in line with the principles of *whole-institution approach* in ESD.

### ***Lifelong Learning and Human Resources Capacity Building***

Women's leadership tends to emphasize the importance of *lifelong learning* as part of human resource development in schools. They encourage continuous training for teachers in the areas of sustainability pedagogy, character education, and the integration of environmentally friendly technologies. Female principals are pioneers in developing a *learning organizational learning culture*, where teachers and staff are encouraged to continue learning, experimenting, and sharing good practices.

### **Challenges and Adaptive Strategies of Female School Principals**

Women's transformational leadership certainly experiences structural and cultural challenges. Gender stereotypes, the burden of dual roles, and lack of access to ongoing leadership training are the main obstacles (Baiduri et al. 2023; Haerana, Madjid, and Munandar 2023). In response to these challenges, female principals develop adaptive strategies such as (1) strengthening social-professional networks (Diané and Diakité 2024), (2) developing personal capacity independently (De Bruyn and Mestry 2020), and (3) implementing local context-based innovations (Tamadoni, Hosseingholizadeh, and Bellibaş 2024). This strategy demonstrates their ability to manage the complexity of the work environment while adhering to transformational principles. In addition, they also leverage social capital and community-based approaches to strengthen institutional support and participation of all school residents.

### ***Strengthening Social-Professional Networks***

Female principals often face greater challenges compared to their male counterparts, especially in an educational environment that is still influenced by social norms and gender stereotypes. In facing this challenge, the development of social-professional networks is one of the most important adaptive strategies. The social-professional network built by female principals is not only limited to internal relationships within schools, but also includes relationships with various external stakeholders such as education offices, educational

professional organizations, and other educational communities.

The network provides female principals with access to up-to-date information on education policy, sharing best practices, and expanding career development opportunities. In addition, this social-professional network also serves as a source of social support that can reduce the isolation often experienced by women leaders in the world of education. Female principals connected to this network can more easily access the resources needed to improve the quality of education and strengthen the sustainability of school organizations. With a strong network, they are also able to advocate for policy changes that are more supportive of diversity and gender equality in education.

### ***Developing Personal Capacity Independently***

Female principals often take steps to develop their personal capacity independently to overcome the challenges they face. This capacity building includes aspects of personal, professional, and emotional competencies that are critical to transformative leadership. In many cases, female principals are more likely to engage in training and continuing education to improve their managerial and pedagogic competence, both through formal and informal training.

In addition, female principals also develop personal capacity by fostering skills in conflict management, evidence-based decision-making, and adaptability to change. Through this capacity building, they become better prepared to deal with the challenges that come with their position, as well as being able to manage complex school dynamics. This investment in self-development shows that female principals are not only focused on improving professional skills, but are also committed to continuing to learn and grow as individuals who can inspire and empower others.

### ***Innovate in Local Contexts***

Female principals are also known to be active in developing and implementing local context-based innovations as a strategy to improve the quality of education and school sustainability. These innovations are not always large or high-tech, but are often tailored to the specific needs and conditions that exist in the school and the surrounding community. Female principals can introduce project-based learning programs that are relevant to social or environmental issues in the local community, or create more inclusive and participatory teaching methods.

In addition, these local context-based innovations can include policies that support parental and community involvement in education, as well as make more efficient use of local resources. Female principals often see local potential as a force that can be harnessed to create sustainable solutions. By conducting innovations based on local contexts, female principals can create learning environments that are more relevant and responsive to the needs of students and the surrounding community, while strengthening the vision of inclusive and sustainable education.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The role of female school principals in realizing the vision of sustainable education has begun to be opened. As awareness of the importance of gender equality in education increases, women's leadership is increasingly showing a significant contribution in shaping more inclusive and sustainable educational policies and practices. The sustainability of education does not only depend on strengthening academic aspects, but also on the integration of sustainability values that involve social, environmental, and economic dimensions in education management. Women in implementing transformative leadership need to have *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. This

transformative leadership is not only focused on short-term results, but is oriented towards long-term change that affects sustainability in every element of education, both personally and organizationally. In addition, the role of female school principals in promoting the vision of sustainable education is not only seen from the strengthening of academic aspects, but also from the integration of *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles* in their managerial practices. Their ESD-based leadership demonstrates a commitment to a sustainable future and equips future generations with skills and understanding relevant to global challenges. Female principals develop effective adaptive strategies to address the challenges faced by strengthening social-professional networks, developing personal capacity independently, and innovating locally based on the local context.

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