

Transformational Leadership and the Strengthening of Positive School Culture Based on Minangkabau Local Values

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Abstract

This study examines how the integration of principals' transformational leadership with Minangkabau cultural values serves as a constructive strategy for strengthening a positive school culture. The study addresses a gap in the literature, as research on transformational leadership has largely adopted a general perspective and has rarely explored its integration with local cultural values, despite the strong influence of Minangkabau traditions on leadership practices, social behavior, and character development in West Sumatra. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through classroom and school observations, in-depth interviews with 12 participants, including the principal, teachers, and students, as well as document analysis. The findings reveal that transformational leadership is reflected in the development of a shared vision, inspirational communication, moral role modeling, and participatory decision-making. Core Minangkabau values, including *bajanjang naiak*, *batanggo turun*, *duduak marundak*, *tagak maimpok*, and the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*, are meaningfully embedded in leadership practices and character education. In addition, the Local Content Program on Minangkabau Culture functions as a strategic medium for transmitting cultural values, ethical principles, and student character. The integration of transformational leadership and local wisdom fosters a collaborative school culture, strengthens discipline through moral awareness, and promotes respectful, culturally grounded student character. The novelty of this study lies in proposing a culturally grounded model of transformational leadership based on Minangkabau values, offering a contextual framework for cultivating positive school culture and informing educational leadership policies in culturally diverse settings.

Keywords: Local Cultural Values, Minangkabau Local Content; Transformational Leadership.

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Introduction

A positive school culture is a fundamental prerequisite for establishing an effective, inclusive, and character-oriented educational environment. Schools with a strong positive culture tend to demonstrate collaborative working relationships, consistent discipline, and healthy interpersonal interactions among teachers, students, and school leaders (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). A positive school culture is particularly important because educational institutions serve as the foundation for preparing future generations to respond to societal changes and global challenges (Rusdinal et al. 2025). Within this context, leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational values, behaviors, and practices within schools (Gistituati, 2021; Nellitawati & Yunistisa, 2022). Among various leadership approaches, transformational leadership has consistently been recognized as one of the most effective models for fostering organizational cultural change (Seferti, Gistituati, & Anisah, 2022). Transformational leaders inspire organizational members, demonstrate moral integrity, and encourage teachers and school communities to transcend individual interests in pursuit of shared institutional goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In educational settings, transformational leadership has been shown to enhance teachers' motivation (Maisisri & Rusdinal, 2021), strengthen organizational commitment, and cultivate a positive and productive school climate (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

In West Sumatra, the development of a positive school culture possesses unique characteristics shaped by Minangkabau cultural values, which are grounded in the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) (custom is founded upon Islamic law, and Islamic law is founded upon the Qur'an). Local cultural principles, including deliberative decision-making (*musyawarah*), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), mutual respect, collective leadership, and the principle of *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun* (hierarchical consultation and consensus), function as guiding social norms within the community, including educational institutions (Navis, 2018). These indigenous values represent valuable cultural resources that can strengthen leadership practices and reinforce organizational commitment toward achieving the school's vision and promoting positive institutional change (Setiawati, Imron, & Wiyono, 2022). Nevertheless, many schools in West Sumatra continue to encounter challenges in cultivating a positive school culture, including limited teacher collaboration, weak work discipline, ineffective communication, and the persistence of traditional instructional leadership styles. These challenges indicate the need for a leadership approach that extends beyond organizational performance and fosters comprehensive transformation in the attitudes and behaviors of all school members.

Integrating transformational leadership with Minangkabau cultural values offers a promising strategy for developing a contextually relevant positive school culture. School leaders who successfully combine a vision for organizational change with indigenous values such as wisdom (*mamakai jo rasah*), exemplary leadership (*tigo tungku sajarangan*), and collective responsibility are expected to establish harmonious, character-oriented, and high-quality educational environments. Consequently, investigating how transformational leadership can function as a constructive strategy for fostering positive school culture within the sociocultural context of West Sumatra is both timely and significant.

Several schools in West Sumatra have begun integrating transformational leadership principles with Minangkabau cultural values, including SMP Negeri 7 Padang. At this school, the development of a positive school culture originates from the institutional vision of becoming "a school characterized by piety, strong character, academic excellence, technological competence, and environmental awareness." This vision serves as the foundation for designing and implementing various school programs aimed at cultivating a positive school culture. Its implementation is achieved through collaborative participation among school stakeholders, with the principal encouraging deliberative decision-making processes that actively involve teachers and other members of the school community.

The implementation of a positive school culture grounded in Minangkabau values is reflected in several institutional programs, including deliberative decision-making based on the principle of *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun, Jumat Mubaraqah, Smart Surau*, the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture (*Muatan Lokal Keminangkabauan*), *Spenju Baradaik*, and other initiatives designed to strengthen students' character through indigenous cultural values. The principle of *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun* serves as the foundation for organizational decision-making by promoting collaboration and mutual respect among principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, and other school stakeholders. Likewise, the *Jumat Barokah* and *Smart Surau* programs reinforce the school's religious environment in accordance with the ABS-SBK philosophy. Furthermore, the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture is regularly implemented through the *Spenju Baradaik* program to introduce students to Minangkabau traditions, customs, and cultural practices that are gradually fading from the collective memory of younger generations.

These initiatives are implemented through close collaboration between the principal and teachers in integrating indigenous values into students' character development. The principal acts as a transformational leader by encouraging teachers to develop innovative approaches in implementing school programs, while teachers actively participate alongside students throughout the entire process. This practice reflects the dimension of intellectual stimulation within transformational leadership, whereby teachers are encouraged to exercise creativity and innovation without being constrained by rigid hierarchical structures. These experiences demonstrate that integrating transformational leadership with Minangkabau cultural values extends beyond theoretical discourse and can be translated into practical leadership strategies that strengthen positive school culture in West Sumatra.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how the integration of transformational leadership and Minangkabau cultural values serves as a constructive strategy for strengthening positive school culture in West Sumatra. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) identify the Minangkabau cultural values integrated into school leadership practices, particularly through the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture; (2) explain how school principals integrate transformational leadership principles with Minangkabau cultural values in their everyday leadership practices; and (3) analyze the contribution of this integration to strengthening positive school culture.

This study is significant because research examining transformational leadership within the context of indigenous cultural integration remains limited. Previous studies on transformational leadership in education have primarily focused on its effectiveness in improving teachers' motivation, organizational performance,

and school climate (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Bass & Riggio, 2006). While these studies provide substantial evidence regarding the role of transformational leadership in promoting organizational change, they generally adopt a universal perspective and pay limited attention to local cultural contexts. Similarly, studies conducted in West Sumatra have explored the implementation of Minangkabau cultural values in education, particularly through the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture, but these investigations have mainly emphasized curriculum implementation, teaching practices, and students' character development rather than the integration of indigenous values into school leadership. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its direct examination of the relationship between transformational leadership and Minangkabau cultural values in the development of positive school culture.

Furthermore, previous studies on school culture in West Sumatra have predominantly focused on the implementation of the ABS-SBK philosophy through character-building programs, integrity education, and cultural education initiatives, while the role of leadership as a key determinant of cultural transformation has received relatively little scholarly attention. Few studies have explored how school principals integrate the four dimensions of transformational leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration with the values embedded in traditional Minangkabau culture. Such integration has the potential to generate a leadership framework that is more contextually relevant, culturally responsive, and effective for schools in West Sumatra. This study offers a novel perspective by examining how indigenous cultural values are not only taught through educational programs but also employed as guiding principles for leadership practices and organizational decision-making. Conceptually, the study contributes to the understanding that local culture should not merely be regarded as the context in which leadership occurs but can instead function as a strategic instrument for strengthening transformational leadership practices. Practically, this research is expected to contribute through documenting the experiences of school principals in adapting indigenous values as leadership strategies for fostering positive school culture, thereby providing more concrete policy implications for culturally responsive school development.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine in depth how the principal's transformational leadership was integrated with Minangkabau cultural values in fostering a positive school culture through the implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture (*Muatan Lokal Keminangkabauan*). A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of leadership processes, the implementation of indigenous cultural values, and the patterns of social interaction that emerge within the school context.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 7 Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, a public junior high school recognized for its consistent integration of Minangkabau cultural values into teaching and learning practices, particularly through the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby individuals were intentionally chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. The key informants included the school principal as the central leadership actor, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers responsible for the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture, the school guidance and counseling teacher, and several students actively involved in school cultural programs. Their selection was based on their strategic roles, professional experience, and active participation in fostering the school's positive culture. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on the principal's transformational leadership practices during both routine and non-routine school activities, particularly how the principal articulated the school's vision, demonstrated exemplary behavior, inspired and motivated school members, and provided individualized support to teachers and students. In addition, observations examined the implementation of school cultural practices, including the application of the *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) philosophy, teacher-student deliberative forums, mutual respect, disciplinary practices, and the integration of Minangkabau cultural values into classroom instruction and extracurricular activities.

In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of transformational leadership in strengthening the school's positive culture. The interview protocol covered five major themes: (1) teachers' and students' perceptions of the principal's leadership style; (2) strategies employed by the principal to integrate Minangkabau cultural values into school policies and programs; (3) participants' experiences in implementing the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture; (4) the contribution of Minangkabau cultural values to students' character development and the establishment of a positive school culture; and (5) the supporting and constraining factors influencing the implementation of culturally based school programs. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of four

iterative stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). Throughout the analytical process, source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed to enhance the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings. Through these procedures, the study generated a comprehensive understanding of how transformational leadership and Minangkabau cultural values can be integrated as a constructive strategy for fostering a positive school culture in an urban school setting in Padang, West Sumatra.

Results and Discussio

The findings of this study reveal how the principal's transformational leadership at SMP Negeri 7 Padang contributes to the development of a collaborative, disciplined, and culturally grounded school environment based on Minangkabau values. The findings were derived from intensive observations, in-depth interviews with the principal and teachers, and analysis of school documents. The analysis focuses on four major themes: (1) the principal's role in developing a shared vision and motivating organizational change; (2) the integration of Minangkabau cultural values into leadership practices; (3) the implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture (*Muatan Lokal Keminangkabauan*) as a medium for strengthening a positive school culture; and (4) the impact of these initiatives on the overall transformation of school culture. The findings indicate that transformational leadership is manifested not merely through formal policies but through moral exemplification, inspirational communication, participatory leadership, and the contextualization of local cultural values throughout the change process. The integration of contemporary leadership principles with Minangkabau indigenous wisdom has enabled school cultural transformation to become more contextually relevant, socially accepted, and sustainable. The following sections elaborate on each of these findings.

Transformational Leadership in Developing a Shared Vision and Motivating Change

The establishment of a positive school culture constitutes the primary policy focus of both the principal and teachers at SMP Negeri 7 Padang. This process begins with the formulation of the school's vision: "*to cultivate students who are pious, possess strong character, achieve academic excellence, excel in science and technology, and demonstrate environmental responsibility.*" This vision serves as the foundation for developing a positive school culture and is operationalized through various programs, including the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture, digital classrooms, the Adiwiyata (environmentally friendly school) program, *Smart Surau*, Qur'an memorization (*Tahfiz Qur'an*), and *Subuh Mubaraqah*. Collectively, these initiatives provide the institutional framework for fostering students with strong character and supporting teachers' professional development.

The formulation of the school vision and its accompanying programs was conducted through a participatory process involving senior teachers, vice principals, and members of the school committee. Together, they identified the school's core cultural values, namely discipline, collaboration, and moral character grounded in the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK). The principal emphasized that the school vision should be "lived collectively rather than merely displayed on the wall," making broad stakeholder participation essential to its development. As Principal FY explained:

"I always tell the teachers that a vision is not a decoration on the wall, nor is it simply a document stored in a cabinet. A vision must be reflected in our daily actions. That is why we formulate it collectively through deliberation. Senior teachers, homeroom teachers, and even members of the school committee contribute their ideas. When the vision is created together, teachers develop a sense of ownership rather than perceiving it as merely the principal's agenda. I want everyone to feel that they share a moral and cultural responsibility for making the vision a reality." (Interview, April 20, 2026).

Once agreed upon, the vision was continuously communicated through both formal and informal forums. The principal consistently reinforced the school's direction during flag ceremonies, weekly staff meetings, and internal communication platforms. Teachers acknowledged that this sustained communication enabled them to better understand the school's objectives and strengthened their commitment to the ongoing cultural transformation. One teacher (DV) stated:

"At every staff meeting, the principal consistently reminds us of the school's core values—discipline, collaboration, and moral character. Although the message is repeated, it is always delivered in different and meaningful ways. Sometimes the principal shares Minangkabau traditional stories, while at other times real cases from the school are discussed. As a result, we

feel guided rather than simply instructed. I believe this gives us a clear direction in carrying out our work." (Interview, April 22, 2026).

With regard to motivating organizational change, the principal demonstrated the characteristic of inspirational motivation by providing moral support whenever teachers encountered challenges in implementing positive school culture initiatives or integrating Minangkabau cultural values into educational practices. Encouragement was provided both through direct interactions and personal communications, allowing teachers to feel supported throughout the change process. Rather than simply directing organizational change, the principal cultivated teachers' sense of ownership and their perception that these initiatives held meaningful educational value. This finding is consistent with Bass & Riggio (2006), who argue that transformational leaders strengthen organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation by inspiring followers and helping them attach meaning to their work.

The principal further reinforced teachers' motivation by incorporating Minangkabau cultural philosophy into leadership communication. During teachers' deliberative meetings, for example, the principal frequently referred to the traditional proverb "*duduak marundak, tagak maimpok*" as a reminder that meaningful change should be achieved through consultation, mutual respect, and collective agreement. Such practices facilitated the internalization of local cultural values while providing culturally relevant meaning to the school's transformation process. As Principal FY explained:

"Because we are part of Minangkabau society, every change should be grounded in deliberation and togetherness. I often use traditional proverbs to remind teachers that we work within our own cultural values. We want our positive school culture to be more than discipline and regulations it should also embody ethics and moral conduct in accordance with the ABS-SBK philosophy. Teachers must become the first role models in demonstrating these values." (Interview, April 25, 2026).

These findings demonstrate that the principal successfully integrated the principles of transformational leadership with indigenous Minangkabau values, making the process of organizational change more culturally meaningful and socially acceptable among members of the school community. This leadership practice supports the argument of Bass & Riggio (2006) that transformational leaders inspire intrinsic motivation through meaningful communication, moral exemplification, and a compelling shared vision. It also aligns with Leithwood & Jantzi's (2005) proposition that transformational leadership in educational settings is most effective when school leaders establish strong emotional and moral relationships with teachers while connecting organizational change to values that are deeply respected by the school community.

Integrating Minangkabau Cultural Values into Leadership Practices

The successful realization of the school's vision of becoming an institution characterized by piety, academic excellence, strong character, and environmental responsibility is closely associated with a leadership approach that aligns organizational practices with this vision. School management is deliberately directed toward initiatives that promote a positive school culture grounded in local cultural values. As the central managerial figure, the principal integrates Minangkabau cultural values into leadership practices, particularly in communication, decision-making, and character development among members of the school community. One of the most prominent guiding principles is *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun*, which emphasizes orderly communication, respect for organizational hierarchy, and collective deliberation. As Principal FY explained:

"In this school, I always uphold the principle of *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun*. It means that every decision should follow the appropriate procedures, but it must also be discussed collectively. We cannot simply issue orders. We must first sit together and deliberate because this is part of our Minangkabau culture. If we want to cultivate character based on culture, then the way we manage the school must also reflect the principles taught by our own cultural traditions." (Interview, April 20, 2026).

The Minangkabau tradition of deliberative consultation (*musyawarah*) also shapes communication between the principal and teachers. Teachers reported that this communicative approach fosters psychological safety because they feel respected as integral members of both the Minangkabau social structure and the school community responsible for cultivating students' character. This perception was articulated by one teacher (WS):

"Whenever problems arise, the principal never begins by identifying who is at fault. Instead, she invites us to discuss the issue together. She often says, '*Kito rundingkan, duduak marundak, tagak maimpok*' (let us deliberate together through mutual respect). As a result, we feel comfortable rather than pressured. She consistently demonstrates exemplary leadership by arriving at school before everyone else, greeting students every morning, and correcting mistakes gently. She often reminds us that the school is like a *Rumah Gadang* (traditional Minangkabau house), where every child deserves proper guidance and care." (Interview, April 30, 2026).

Field observations further revealed that deliberative consultation constitutes the dominant mechanism for school decision-making. When disagreements emerged among teachers regarding cultural habituation programs, the principal refrained from making unilateral decisions. Instead, she invited every stakeholder to express their perspectives before facilitating collective agreement. These observations demonstrate that the Minangkabau value of *musyawarah* functions not merely as a symbolic cultural reference but as a practical governance mechanism embedded within everyday school management.

Beyond communication and decision-making, the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) was strongly reflected in the principal's moral leadership. The principal consistently arrived at school early, greeted students personally, and demonstrated courtesy and humility in every interaction. The school's guidance and counseling teacher further described the principal's approach to handling student disciplinary issues:

"When students violate school regulations, the principal never immediately imposes punishment. She first invites them to talk, asks about the reasons behind their behavior, and seeks to understand their family circumstances. She combines school regulations with educational values rooted in syarak justice, wisdom, and compassion. Consequently, students feel respected rather than intimidated. This approach also encourages us, as teachers, to educate students more wisely and compassionately." (Interview, April 27, 2026).

These interview findings were corroborated by classroom and school observations, which indicated that the principal was perceived not merely as an administrative leader but also as a cultural leader within the school community. Her methods of mediating conflicts among teachers, providing guidance, and upholding ethical standards closely resembled the traditional role of the *ninik mamak*—respected Minangkabau customary leaders responsible for maintaining moral order within the *Rumah Gadang*. This finding suggests that Minangkabau cultural values extend beyond curriculum content and function as an organizational framework guiding leadership practices.

The integration of indigenous cultural values also strengthened the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership. Teachers consistently viewed the principal as a moral role model whose actions reflected both customary (*adat*) and religious (*syarak*) values. This congruence significantly enhanced the principal's legitimacy and credibility as a leader. Field evidence further indicated that teachers were more willing to embrace school policies and organizational changes because they believed that leadership decisions were grounded in values collectively shared by the school community.

The researcher's interpretation of the observational data suggests that the principal's dialogical leadership style, respectful communication, and consistent adherence to Minangkabau cultural values contributed substantially to the development of a harmonious working environment characterized by mutual respect and trust. Regular deliberative practices encouraged teachers' active participation, fostered a stronger sense of ownership, and reinforced social cohesion among members of the school community. Consequently, the process of organizational cultural change unfolded more smoothly than would likely have occurred under a command-and-control leadership model. Overall, the integration of Minangkabau cultural values not only enriched the principal's leadership practices but also made transformational leadership more contextually relevant, culturally responsive, and widely accepted by teachers and students at SMP Negeri 7 Padang.

The Implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture as a Strategy for Strengthening a Positive School Culture

At SMP Negeri 7 Padang, the development of a positive school culture is supported through several institutional initiatives, one of the most significant being the implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture (*Muatan Lokal Keminangkabauan*). Rather than functioning solely as a formal subject or extracurricular activity, this curriculum has been strategically designed as a medium for character education and the internalization of Minangkabau cultural values into students' everyday school experiences. Its implementation is most visibly manifested through the *Spenju Baradaik* program, which is conducted regularly as a school-wide cultural habituation initiative involving teachers, students, and school leaders.

An interview with DH, the teacher responsible for the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture, revealed that *Spenju Baradaik* extends well beyond ceremonial activities and serves as a meaningful space for cultural reflection and character development. As the teacher explained:

"Every Tuesday we conduct the *Spenju Baradaik* program. We do not simply wear traditional Minangkabau attire; we encourage students to understand the cultural meanings behind these traditions. I usually begin by sharing stories about traditional Minangkabau society and how previous generations educated children through courtesy, respect, and a strong sense of personal honor. Afterwards, I invite students to relate these values to their own lives. Some tell stories about speaking more politely to their parents, while others describe helping their families without being asked. The principal almost always attends these sessions, sitting together with us and the students. This creates a warm atmosphere and makes students feel appreciated. From my perspective, I can see that these cultural values gradually become part of who they are rather than something they simply memorize." (Interview, April 23, 2026).

This testimony indicates that cultural values are internalized through reflective dialogue rather than through indoctrination. Students are encouraged not only to acquire cognitive knowledge of Minangkabau culture but also to interpret and apply these values within their everyday lives. The principal's consistent participation further reinforces the legitimacy of the program while demonstrating transformational leadership through visible moral exemplification.

School leaders also perceive the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture as a strategic instrument for contextualized character education. This perspective was clearly expressed by the vice principal (DS):

"The Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture is far more than an additional subject. It represents the heart of our students' character development. Through this program, students learn how to interact respectfully with teachers, peers, and older people. Through *Spenju Baradaik*, traditional proverbs, and everyday practices such as greeting others properly and demonstrating appropriate manners, we hope our students will develop a strong identity as Minangkabau individuals with good moral character. Once character is firmly established, academic achievement will naturally follow. That is why I always participate in these cultural activities—so students understand that this is not merely the teachers' responsibility but a collective commitment shared by the entire school community." (Interview, April 30, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that school leaders function not only as policy makers but also as role models who actively embody cultural values in their daily leadership practices. Such leadership reflects two essential dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence and inspirational motivation, through which leaders strengthen organizational commitment by consistently modeling the values they seek to cultivate. Teachers likewise reported observable changes in students' behavior following the implementation of *Spenju Baradaik*. One teacher (WS) explained:

"Before *Spenju Baradaik* became a regular program, students with disciplinary problems were usually handled through conventional disciplinary measures. Now our approach emphasizes values instead. Students begin to feel ashamed of violating school norms. They have become more respectful toward teachers and are more willing to apologize when they make mistakes. For me, this represents a significant transformation because discipline is no longer driven by fear of punishment but by self-awareness. We teachers have also changed. During *Spenju Baradaik*, all of us wear traditional attire, communicate more politely, and become more conscious of our own behavior. Students carefully observe how teachers act. If teachers are inconsistent, students will not take the program seriously." (Interview, April 25, 2026).

These findings indicate that the program has gradually transformed students' disciplinary orientation from external regulation toward internally regulated behavior grounded in shared cultural values. Simultaneously, teachers have become increasingly aware of their own professional responsibility as moral role models, recognizing that successful character education depends upon consistency between what educators teach and how they behave.

Students themselves similarly perceived *Spenju Baradaik* not merely as a ceremonial school activity but as a meaningful opportunity to learn Minangkabau ethics, cultural identity, and moral values. They acknowledged that participation in the program had reshaped their understanding of what it means to become young members of the Minangkabau community in a rapidly changing society. One student (AB) reflected:

"When I first joined *Spenju Baradaik*, I thought it was simply about wearing traditional clothing and gathering in the schoolyard. Gradually, I realized that the clothing is not the most important part the values behind it are. We often listen to stories about traditional proverbs and learn how to communicate respectfully with teachers, parents, and friends. Now I think more carefully before speaking instead of responding impulsively as I used to. My parents have also noticed that I have become more polite at home. I now feel prouder of being Minangkabau because I finally understand the deeper meaning of our customs and traditions." (Interview, April 30, 2026).

These findings suggest that the implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture has transformed disciplinary practices from external behavioral control into internal self-regulation grounded in moral values and personal dignity (*marwah*). In this context, Minangkabau cultural values function as subtle yet powerful mechanisms of behavioral regulation based on ethical awareness rather than coercive authority. Moreover, the evidence demonstrates that the program influences not only students but also teachers by strengthening their professional and moral consciousness as agents of character education. Through *Spenju Baradaik*, the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture has become an effective institutional mechanism for reinforcing a positive school culture at SMP Negeri 7 Padang. The program has successfully revitalized Minangkabau cultural values while fostering students' character development, promoting respectful interpersonal relationships, and cultivating discipline based on internalized moral responsibility. These achievements have been made possible through the active involvement of the principal as a transformational leader who consistently integrates a vision for educational change with the wisdom of local cultural traditions.

Constructing a Positive School Culture: Collaboration, Discipline, and Minangkabau Character

The findings demonstrate that integrating Minangkabau cultural values into various school activities has generated a comprehensive transformation of the school's organizational culture. This transformation is reflected primarily in strengthened collaboration among teachers, improved discipline grounded in moral commitment, and the reinforcement of Minangkabau identity within the social interactions and daily practices of the school community. Cultural principles such as *bajanjang naiak*, *batanggo turun*, *duduak marundak*, *tagak maimpok*, and *bulek aia dek pambuluah*, *bulek kato dek mufakat* are no longer treated as symbolic slogans but have become embedded in staff meetings, professional development sessions, school ceremonies, extracurricular activities, and everyday communication. Teachers described how these indigenous values have reshaped collaborative relationships, making them more open and egalitarian while maintaining respect for organizational hierarchy and seniority.

One teacher described this transformation as follows:

"We have experienced significant changes since the school began consistently emphasizing Minangkabau cultural values in its activities. During meetings, professional development sessions, and even program evaluations, the principal often begins by referring to traditional proverbs to create a positive atmosphere. For example, she reminds us that '*when disagreements occur, relationships should never be broken; when we deliberate, consensus should always prevail.*' Immediately, the atmosphere becomes calmer, and everyone feels safe expressing their opinions. There is no longer excessive hesitation in speaking. We discuss issues as members of one extended family while continuing to respect those who are older or more experienced. It truly feels as though our cultural values have come alive throughout the school rather than remaining confined to cultural education classes." (Interview, April 23, 2026).

This testimony illustrates how the integration of Minangkabau cultural values has strengthened a collaborative organizational culture. The finding aligns with the concept of idealized influence within transformational leadership, whereby leaders cultivate trust through moral exemplification and culturally meaningful symbols that resonate with members of the organization. Hallinger (2018) argues that school leaders who communicate through culturally familiar values are more likely to establish organizational legitimacy because these values already constitute part of the community's collective identity.

In addition to strengthening collaboration, substantial changes were also observed in teachers' understanding of professional discipline. Rather than viewing discipline as an administrative obligation, teachers increasingly perceived it as a moral responsibility rooted in personal integrity and social accountability—values that occupy a central place within Minangkabau culture. One teacher explained:

"Before cultural values became fully integrated into school activities, we sometimes completed our responsibilities simply because they were required. Now, however, the principal frequently reminds us that teachers represent '*limbago nan ditinggikan, adat nan dipakai*' (institutions worthy of respect that embody customary values). Whenever I arrive late or fail to prepare my lessons properly, I feel a moral burden. It is no longer about fearing formal sanctions but about preserving my *marwah* (personal dignity) as a Minangkabau educator. I have become more disciplined because I feel that if I neglect my responsibilities, I not only disappoint the school but also diminish the cultural values we collectively uphold." (Interview, April 16, 2026).

This transformation reflects a shift from externally imposed discipline toward internally regulated professional responsibility, a defining characteristic of transformational leadership as described by Bass and Riggio (2006). Within the Minangkabau cultural context, intrinsic motivation is reinforced by the concept of *marwah* (personal dignity and honor), making behavioral change more sustainable and deeply internalized than compliance based solely on external supervision.

The strengthening of Minangkabau cultural identity was equally evident in both formal and informal school activities. The principal consistently incorporated indigenous values into school ceremonies, teacher meetings, character-building sessions, and everyday interactions with students. A senior teacher explained:

"The principal consistently demonstrates how cultural values should be practiced in everyday situations. For example, whenever minor conflicts arise among teachers or students, she reminds us of the proverb '*bulek aia dek pambuluah, bulek kato dek mufakat*' (just as bamboo shapes flowing water, consensus shapes collective decisions). More importantly, she does not simply quote the proverb; she facilitates dialogue so that everyone has an opportunity to listen to one another. Gradually, we realized that these traditional sayings are not merely cultural ornaments but genuine principles guiding the way we work together. Even students have begun using Minangkabau proverbs during classroom discussions. The school has become like a *Rumah Gadang*, where customary values are practiced naturally rather than artificially imposed." (Interview, April 18, 2026).

The consistent integration of Minangkabau cultural values across multiple dimensions of school life has resulted in a holistic transformation of organizational culture. Teachers reported feeling more respected, communication became more humane and dialogical, and interpersonal relationships increasingly reflected mutual respect without diminishing openness and collaboration. Consequently, the school has evolved into a social environment that successfully integrates contemporary educational professionalism with indigenous cultural wisdom.

These findings are consistent with Khalifa's (2018) concept of culturally responsive school leadership, which argues that leaders who authentically embody and express the cultural values of their communities are better positioned to inspire organizational change because they communicate through meanings that resonate deeply with community members. In the context of SMP Negeri 7 Padang, Minangkabau cultural values have functioned not merely as cultural heritage to be preserved but as strategic organizational resources that shape leadership, professional practice, and institutional culture. Overall, the integration of Minangkabau cultural values has strengthened the school's collective identity while fundamentally transforming how teachers perform their professional roles, collaborate with colleagues, and interpret their educational responsibilities. These changes have fostered a school culture characterized by stronger collaboration, greater moral discipline, and a more deeply rooted Minangkabau identity, a form of organizational transformation that remains firmly grounded in local cultural wisdom while embracing innovation in educational leadership and school development

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the principal's transformational leadership at SMP Negeri 7 Padang plays a significant role in cultivating a collaborative, disciplined, and culturally grounded school environment through the systematic integration of Minangkabau cultural values into leadership and school management practices. These findings suggest that transformational leadership should not be understood solely as a modern organizational leadership model; rather, its effectiveness can be enhanced when embedded within local cultural wisdom, thereby generating organizational change that is more contextually relevant, socially meaningful, and sustainable. The principal exhibited the core dimensions of transformational leadership by articulating a shared vision, consistently communicating the direction of organizational change, and fostering teachers' intrinsic motivation to perform their professional responsibilities. These practices reflect the dimensions of inspirational motivation and idealized influence proposed by Bass & Riggio (2006), who argue that transformational leaders inspire followers through compelling visions and moral exemplification. The findings also support the work of Leithwood & Jantzi (2005), who contend that successful school

improvement largely depends on leaders' ability to cultivate teachers' collective commitment toward shared organizational goals. In this study, the principal's consistent efforts to reinforce the school's vision through both formal and informal communication strengthened the internalization of shared cultural values, enabling these values to function as moral and professional guidelines for members of the school community.

One of the most distinctive contributions of this study lies in demonstrating how Minangkabau cultural values are integrated into everyday leadership practices. Indigenous principles such as *bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun, duduak marundak, tagak maimpok*, and the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) were not merely preserved as cultural symbols but functioned as operational frameworks for decision-making, organizational communication, and character development. This integration substantially strengthened the principal's leadership legitimacy because leadership practices aligned closely with the collective values of the surrounding community. These findings resonate with [Khalifa's \(2018\)](#) concept of culturally responsive school leadership, which emphasizes that leaders who authentically embody community values are better positioned to establish trust, encourage participation, and strengthen social cohesion within schools. From a broader cultural perspective, the findings also support [Hofstede's \(2011\)](#) argument that collectivist societies tend to respond more positively to participatory, dialogical, and consensus-oriented leadership than to hierarchical or coercive forms of administration.

The implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture through the *Spenju Baradaik* program emerged as a strategic mechanism for strengthening positive school culture. Rather than functioning merely as a formal curricular component, the program became a reflective space through which students continuously practiced indigenous values, ethical behavior, and character development. The internalization process observed in this study demonstrates that character education is most effective when it is cultivated through moral exemplification, repeated habituation, and reflective experiences rather than through the transmission of cultural knowledge alone. This finding reinforces [Lickona's \(2012\)](#) theory of character education, which argues that effective moral education requires the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within students' everyday experiences. Furthermore, the observed shift in students' disciplinary behavior—from externally enforced compliance to internally regulated self-discipline grounded in *marwah* (personal dignity and honor) provides empirical evidence that culturally embedded values can function as subtle yet powerful mechanisms of behavioral regulation. This interpretation is consistent with [Nucci & Narvaez \(2008\)](#), who argue that moral education based on ethical awareness produces more enduring behavioral change than disciplinary systems relying primarily on punishment. The principal's active participation in school cultural programs, particularly *Spenju Baradaik*, further strengthened the dimensions of idealized influence and inspirational motivation within transformational leadership. Rather than acting solely as an administrator or policy maker, the principal consistently embodied the cultural values promoted throughout the school. Such leadership behavior illustrates the importance of visible moral exemplification in organizational transformation. [Bush \(2014\)](#) similarly argues that principals' personal example constitutes one of the most influential factors in successful school cultural change. When organizational leaders consistently align their actions with the values they advocate, organizational members are more likely to perceive change initiatives as authentic and worthy of commitment.

The integration of transformational leadership and Minangkabau cultural values also generated substantial organizational outcomes. Collaboration among teachers became increasingly characterized by dialogue, mutual respect, and collective deliberation while maintaining appropriate organizational structures. These findings support [Harris's \(2013\)](#) proposition that participatory leadership strengthens professional trust, social cohesion, and teachers' organizational commitment. Likewise, teachers' understanding of professional discipline evolved from compliance with administrative requirements toward a deeper sense of moral responsibility rooted in shared cultural values and personal dignity as members of the Minangkabau community. This transformation closely reflects the defining characteristics of transformational leadership, which emphasize intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and value-based behavioral change ([Bass & Riggio, 2006](#)).

Overall, this study demonstrates that integrating transformational leadership with Minangkabau cultural values extends beyond improving the technical effectiveness of school leadership. More fundamentally, it establishes a robust cultural foundation that supports the sustainability of a positive school culture. The resulting organizational culture is neither artificially imposed nor sustained merely through formal regulations; instead, it emerges from the collective awareness of school members who recognize these cultural values as integral to their shared identity and *marwah* ([Indrasari, 2017; Yiing, Zaman, & Ahmad, 2009](#)). Consequently, this study contributes to the growing body of educational leadership literature by demonstrating that indigenous cultural wisdom should not simply be regarded as the contextual backdrop of leadership. Rather, it can serve as a strategic organizational resource that strengthens transformational leadership, enhances leadership legitimacy, and promotes organizational resilience in responding to the evolving challenges of contemporary education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the principal's transformational leadership at SMP Negeri 7 Padang plays a pivotal role in fostering a collaborative, disciplined, and culturally grounded school environment through the integration of contemporary leadership practices with Minangkabau cultural values. Transformational leadership was enacted through moral exemplification, inspirational communication, participatory decision-making, and the consistent internalization of the *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) philosophy, which collectively shaped organizational communication, governance processes, and character development across the school community. The implementation of the Local Content Curriculum on Minangkabau Culture through the *Spenju Baradaik* program emerged as a strategic mechanism for cultivating indigenous values, ethical behavior, social responsibility, and cultural identity among students. Rather than functioning solely as a curricular initiative, the program became an effective medium for promoting self-discipline, respectful interpersonal relationships, and character development grounded in Minangkabau cultural wisdom. These findings demonstrate that the synergy between transformational leadership, indigenous cultural values, and the active participation of the entire school community can establish a sustainable positive school culture.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of educational leadership literature by demonstrating that indigenous cultural values can function not merely as the contextual backdrop of leadership but as strategic organizational resources that strengthen transformational leadership practices and enhance leadership legitimacy. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of integrating local cultural values into school leadership as a means of developing culturally responsive, contextually relevant, and sustainable approaches to school improvement. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. As a single-case qualitative study conducted in one junior high school, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized to all educational settings. Furthermore, the study did not quantitatively examine the influence of transformational leadership on educational quality, organizational performance, or students' academic achievement. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ multiple-case designs or mixed-methods approaches to examine the transferability of these findings across different educational contexts. Comparative studies involving diverse indigenous cultures across Indonesia would also provide valuable insights for advancing a more comprehensive and culturally grounded theory of educational leadership.

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