

Adaptive Leadership of School Principals in Improving Teacher Performance in the Archipelago: A Qualitative Study on State Junior High Schools in Simeulue Regency

Dewi Astuti^{1*}, Ismail², Suparta Rasyid³, Gusti Intan Puspita⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to analyze how school principals apply adaptive leadership to improve teacher performance in archipelagic areas with limited educational resources. This study aimed to identify adaptive leadership patterns that emerge in various geographical contexts and examine their influence on teacher motivation, professionalism, and work culture in junior high schools in Simeulue Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. **Methods:** This study used a descriptive qualitative approach involving three state junior high schools: SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah, SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur, and SMPN 2 Teupah Barat. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies of nine informants, comprising three principals and six teachers. Data analysis was carried out with an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, and was validated through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the validity of the findings. **Results:** The results of the study show that the adaptive leadership of school principals is manifested in four main contextual styles: transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual. Transformational leadership dominates the central region, democratic leadership the coastal region, and participatory-spiritual leadership the outer island region. Adaptive leadership has been proven to increase motivation, professionalism, and cohesion of teachers' work culture through innovation, collaboration, and moral commitment, even in the midst of limited facilities and administrative burden. **Novelty:** This research develops Heifetz and Yukl's adaptive leadership framework by integrating the spiritual dimension rooted in Indonesian socio-cultural values, thereby transforming adaptive leadership from a situational model to a values-based and humanistic approach that is relevant to the educational context in the archipelago.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership of the principal is a strategic factor that determines the direction and quality of education delivery in schools. The principal functions as an administrative manager and an instructional leader who plays a role in building vision, mobilizing teachers, and creating a work culture that is conducive to learning. The 21st century education demands creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). The effectiveness of the principal's adaptive leadership is a key factor in encouraging teacher performance towards innovative and sustainable learning (Boylan, 2018). However, in various regions, especially in the archipelago, there is still a gap between the ideal role of school principals and the leadership practices carried out in the field.

Teacher performance, as the spearhead of the learning process, is influenced by the extent to which the principal can motivate, guide, and direct teachers to achieve professional standards (Hafizhah, 2024). Various studies have shown that effective leadership styles, such as transformational and participatory leadership, contribute positively to improving teacher performance (Armiyanti et al., 2023); (Somech, 2005); (Saleem et al., 2020). Nevertheless, most research still focuses on the context of urban schools with adequate educational facilities. Schools in the archipelago face different challenges, such as limited infrastructure, geographical distance, and access to teacher professional development (Komari et al., 2025). This condition requires school principals to implement adaptive and contextual leadership strategies to ensure optimal teacher performance.

Previous studies have also tended to isolate one dimension of leadership style, such as transformational leadership (F. Efendi et al., 2023); (Ali, 2022) or the democratic leadership of Rachmadhani and Manafe (2023) without integrating spiritual, social, and emotional values, which are really very strong in the context of local education in Indonesia. Thus, there is a scientific gap in the form of the need for an adaptive leadership model that is holistic to the socio-cultural conditions of the community, especially in archipelago areas with minimal educational resources.

Previous studies have often examined leadership dimensions separately transformational, democratic, or participatory without integrating them into a comprehensive framework that reflects Indonesia's socio-cultural context. As a result, there remains a clear research gap: the lack of a holistic adaptive leadership model relevant to the socio-cultural values and limited educational resources of archipelagic areas. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how school principals in Simeulue Regency apply adaptive leadership to improve teacher performance within geographically dispersed and resource-constrained environments.

The focus of the research is directed to three main questions: (1) how the principal's adaptive leadership is designed and implemented in learning management; (2) how the strategy impacts teachers' motivation and performance in daily practice; and (3) what factors support and hinder the effectiveness of adaptive leadership in the archipelago.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of four leadership approaches, namely transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual, in the framework of adaptive leadership, which is applied to deal with geographical and human resource limitations in the archipelago. This approach emphasizes not only the managerial aspect but also the dimensions of values, empathy, and morality as the foundation of humanistic leadership. Thus, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of contextual leadership models in the secondary education environment, as well as a practical contribution for principals and policymakers in designing teacher performance improvement strategies that are relevant to local sociocultural conditions.

Literature Review

A. Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership focuses on a leader's capacity to adjust styles, strategies, and actions according to changing environmental dynamics (Chughtai et al., 2024). It emphasizes flexibility, contextual sensitivity, and problem-solving grounded in values and goals (Heifetz et al., 2009). In education, this means that principals are not only

administrators but also facilitators who guide teachers through social, cultural, and resource-based challenges (Yukl, 2012); (Elmanisar et al., 2024). Howell et al. (2022), describe adaptive leadership as requiring risk-taking and creativity under uncertainty, particularly relevant in schools with limited facilities, such as those in archipelagic regions. Adaptive leaders mobilize people to face challenges and thrive by promoting innovation, collaboration, and moral resilience.

B. The Role of Principals in Adaptive Leadership

The principal serves as a key agent of change in improving school performance. Effective principals integrate management, supervision, and innovation to create a collaborative and productive culture (Thessin, 2019) . In the adaptive leadership framework, this role expands to balancing institutional goals with contextual realities such as policy changes, technological developments, and socio-economic conditions (Nurhayati et al., 2025). According to Alif and Wayan (2023), successful principals combine transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual approaches to inspire and empower teachers (Danisma et al., 2025). In island settings, adaptive principals strengthen networks, utilize local resources, and promote spiritual and social values to maintain collective morale (A'yun & Muttaqin, 2025).

C. Teacher Performance

Teacher performance is the main indicator of the quality of learning in schools. Supardi (2016) defined teacher performance as the result of work achieved by teachers in carrying out their professional duties based on pedagogic, professional, social, and personality competencies. Teachers with good performance can design effective learning, adapt to the needs of students, and conduct continuous evaluations to improve learning outcomes.

Shulhan (2018) showed that teachers' performance is greatly influenced by the work environment and leadership style of school principals. Leadership that provides moral support, motivation, and rewards increases teacher enthusiasm and commitment. However, excessive administrative burden and lack of supervision can reduce teachers' focus on teaching (Joni, 2024).

In the context of schools in the archipelago, external factors such as limited facilities, Internet access, and local government policies also affect teacher performance. Therefore, school principals need to implement adaptive leadership strategies to create a supportive work environment through teacher empowerment, strengthening intrinsic motivation, and fostering academic supervision (Aini & Citriadin, 2025).

D. The Relationship Between Adaptive Leadership and Teacher Performance

Adaptive leadership is closely related to improving teacher performance, as both are rooted in the principles of empowerment and learning. Adaptive principals adjust communication patterns, decision-making styles, and feedback provision according to the teacher's condition and school characteristics. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), the combination of transformational and adaptive leadership encourages high empowerment and commitment from organizational members.

Research (N. Efendi and Sholeh, 2023) shows that adaptive leadership is able to increase teacher professionalism through motivation and collaboration mechanisms. This is reinforced by findings (Sogoni, 2017) that affirm that a work environment supported by participatory and empathetic leadership results in better teacher performance,

especially in the context of limited facilities. Thus, it can be understood that adaptive leadership functions as a catalyst in creating synergy between the principal's vision, teacher professionalism, and improving the quality of learning.

E. Theoretical Synthesis

From the various theories and empirical findings above, it can be concluded that the adaptive leadership of school principals integrates various leadership styles (transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual) that are applied contextually to answer educational challenges in the archipelago. Adaptive school principals play the roles of facilitators of change, drivers of collaboration, and coaches of teacher morals and professionalism. The success of improving teacher performance in this context depends heavily on the ability of the principal to balance managerial and humanistic aspects, as well as to turn limitations into opportunities for school development.

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the leadership strategy of school principals in improving teacher performance in the archipelago. The qualitative approach was chosen because the problems studied are related to social processes and human behavior in a complex educational context, which require interpretive and contextual explanations. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to uncover how school principals adaptively apply various leadership styles to deal with resource limitations and geographical conditions in the archipelago.

The data collected were natural without manipulation from the researcher; therefore, the results of the research are expected to provide an authentic picture of the principal's leadership practices and their influence on teacher performance. The researchers played the role of human instruments directly involved in the data collection process through interviews, observations, and documentation. To maintain objectivity, the researcher used semi-structured interview guidelines and observation sheets developed based on the four dimensions of adaptive leadership, namely, transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual (Heifetz et al., 2009); (Yukl, 2012).

B. Location and Research Subject

This research was conducted in Simeulue Regency, Aceh Province, an archipelago with challenging geographical characteristics and limited educational facilities. The research location is focused on three state junior high schools, namely SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Timur, SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Tengah, and SMP Negeri 2 Teupah Barat. The three schools were selected purposively, considering that each school has a principal who shows a different leadership character but faces relatively similar resource conditions.

The research subjects consisted of nine informants, including three principals and six teachers. The selection of informants was carried out by purposive sampling technique, which is selection based on the role, experience, and direct involvement of informants in leadership practices and learning activities. The selection of informants is expected to provide diverse but complementary data for understanding the dynamics of leadership in island schools.

Table 1. Research Subject and Informant Code

No	Informant Code	Role	School Origin
1	KS1	Principal	State Junior High School 1 Simeulue Tengah
2	KS2	Principal	State Junior High School 1 East Simeulue
3	KS3	Principal	State Junior High School 2 Teupah Barat
4	G1	Teacher	State Junior High School 1 Simeulue Tengah
5	G2	Teacher	State Junior High School 1 Simeulue Tengah
6	G3	Teacher	State Junior High School 1 East Simeulue
7	G4	Teacher	State Junior High School 1 East Simeulue
8	G5	Teacher	State Junior High School 2 Teupah Barat
9	G6	Teacher	State Junior High School 2 Teupah Barat

The use of informant codes (KS for school principals and G for teachers) was intended to maintain the confidentiality of respondents' identities and facilitate the data grouping process during the analysis stage. The three schools where the study was conducted provided a variety of leadership styles, allowing researchers to identify patterns and tendencies of adaptive leadership in the context of the archipelago.

C. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process was conducted systematically and continuously to obtain in-depth and contextual information on principals' adaptive leadership in improving teacher performance. Three integrated techniques were applied: semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies.

The interviews served as the primary method, exploring the real experiences and perceptions of principals and teachers regarding leadership practices. Semi-structured questions guided the discussion while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on contextual challenges and adaptive strategies. The open and reflective dialogue helped capture nuanced insights into leadership dynamics in resource-limited environments. All interviews were recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim for accuracy.

Participatory observations complemented the interviews by providing direct evidence of leadership behavior, interaction patterns, and learning management practices. Observations during meetings, classroom supervision, and collaborative activities enabled the researcher to verify interview data and understand the school's socio-cultural environment.

Lastly, documentation studies provided factual support through school work plans, supervision reports, and teacher evaluation records, allowing triangulation of findings across multiple data sources. The process spanned three months from pre-field coordination and data collection to verification. Data saturation was ensured through repeated interviews and observations, while triangulation of methods and sources and member checking strengthened data credibility and validity.

D. Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study refers to the four validity criteria put forward by Enworo (2023): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of the data was maintained through triangulation of methods (observation, interviews, and documentation) and triangulation of sources (principals and teachers). In addition, member checking was conducted after each stage of the interview to validate the results of the researcher's interpretation. Transferability is achieved through the presentation of a thick description of the social, cultural, and geographical characteristics of schools in the archipelago so that readers can assess the

relevance of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained by providing audit trails in the form of observation records, interview transcripts, and research documents that were stored systematically. Meanwhile, confirmability was ensured through the researcher's self-reflection (reflexive journal) to avoid subjective bias during the process of data analysis and interpretation.

E. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process using an interactive model (Huberman, 2019), which included three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. At the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and encoded data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The data obtained were grouped into three main themes according to the focus of the research: diagnostic, adaptive, and professional strengthening dimensions. The coding process was performed in stages through open, axial, and selective coding to identify relevant themes and subthemes.

The data presentation stage was carried out by compiling the findings in the form of a thematic matrix and a descriptive narrative that describes the relationship between variables in the context of the school principals' leadership. This process was complemented by direct citations from informants (K1-G6) to reinforce the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn by examining the patterns and trends that emerge from the field data. The resulting conclusions are then re-verified through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure that the findings obtained have a high level of reliability and validity.

F. Research Ethics

This research was carried out by adhering to the ethical principles of social research, which include official permission from the Simeulue Regency Education Office and the principal, informed consent from the informants, and maintaining the confidentiality of the participants' identities. All data obtained were used solely for scientific purposes and scientific development in the field of education management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aims to describe the adaptive leadership of school principals in improving teacher performance in the Indonesian archipelago. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation studies at three State Junior High Schools in Simeulue Regency, namely SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah, SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur, and SMPN 2 Teupah Barat.

The three schools have different characteristics: SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah is located in the central district area with relatively better access to technology; SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur is located in a coastal area with limited facilities; and SMPN 2 Teupah Barat is located on a separate island with challenging geographical conditions. These contextual differences are important factors that shape the variety of principals' adaptive leadership practices in the field.

A. Forms and Practices of Adaptive Leadership of School Principals

The results of the interviews, observations, and school documents show that the principals in the three study locations apply different leadership styles, adjusted to the social conditions and resources of each school. There are four prominent forms of adaptive leadership: transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual.

The principal (KS1) at SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Tengah emphasized the importance of fostering innovation and improving teacher competence. In his interview, he stated:

"I put more emphasis on transformational leadership strategies, by encouraging teachers to innovate, take training, and develop creativity in teaching." (KS1)

The results of the observation of supervision activities showed that KS1 routinely provided direct assistance to teachers in the preparation of lesson plans and the use of simple digital learning media such as PowerPoint and Canva.

Teacher (G1) reinforced the results of the observation.

"Our principal has a visionary strategy, often motivating us to dare to innovate and not get hung up on the learning routine." (G1)

The principal (KS2) at SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Timur implements democratic leadership by opening a space for teachers' participation in the preparation of school programs.

"I apply a democratic leadership strategy, where teachers are involved in school meetings, discussions, and decision-making processes." (KS2)

However, observations of school meeting documents show that teacher participation is more dominant at the discussion stage, while strategic decisions are still made by the principal. Teacher (G3) confirms this:

"We are involved in planning, but administrative burdens often reduce the focus on the quality of learning." (G3)

The Principal (KS3) at SMP Negeri 2 Teupah Barat applies a participatory spiritual style. He emphasized the value of sincerity and moral responsibility as the basis of teachers' work ethic.

"My leadership strategy is more participatory, giving teachers the opportunity to share ideas and suggestions, although the final decision is still directed collectively." (KS3)

Guru (G5) expressed the following:

"The principal uses a spiritual approach in his strategy, often reminding us to work with sincerity and responsibility for the improvement of students." (G5)

Table 2. Adaptive Leadership Forms

No	Informant Code	School	Original Quotes	Initial Category	Final Theme
1	KS1	SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah	"I put more emphasis on transformational leadership strategies..."	Teacher innovation drive	Transformational-Adaptive Leadership
2	G1	SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah	"Our principal has a visionary strategy..."	Work motivation and creativity	Transformational-Adaptive Leadership

No	Informant Code	School	Original Quotes	Initial Category	Final Theme
3	KS2	SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur	"I applied a democratic leadership strategy..."	Teacher involvement	Democratic-Adaptive Leadership
4	G3	SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur	"We are involved in planning, but the administrative burden..."	Participation and administrative constraints	Democratic-Adaptive Leadership
5	KS3	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"My leadership strategy is more participatory..."	Collaboration and collective responsibility	Participatory-Adaptive Leadership
6	G5	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"The principal uses a spiritual approach..."	Moral values and sincerity of work	Spiritual-Adaptive Leadership

Cross-school comparisons show that adaptive leadership in Simeulue Regency is contextual and situational, depending on the social, geographical, and educational facilities in each region. School principals in the central area (SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Tengah) show an orientation toward innovation and the professional development of teachers through a transformational-adaptive approach. Principals in coastal areas (SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Timur) stand out for their participatory involvement and open communication with teachers through a democratic-adaptive approach. Meanwhile, school principals in the outermost island area (SMP Negeri 2 Teupah Barat) strengthen spiritual values and collective cooperation through an adaptive participatory spiritual approach.

All three models illustrate the ability of principals to adapt their leadership styles to local challenges. In this context, adaptive leadership is not uniform but develops flexibly according to the needs and potential of each school. Thus, it can be concluded that school principals in the Simeulue Archipelago are able to translate the principles of adaptive leadership into concrete contextual actions, namely mobilizing teachers to innovate, participate, and work sincerely within limited resources.

B. The Impact of Adaptive Leadership on Teacher Performance

Adaptive leadership has been shown to improve teacher motivation, professionalism, and work culture in all three schools in this study. This impact can be seen in the results of interviews, observations, and academic supervision documents.

Teacher (G2) at SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Tengah stated:

"We have made the lesson plan according to the directions, but the limitations of facilities make teaching methods less varied." (G2)

Observation data show that teachers in this school have started to use simple digital media to teach, but it is still limited to young teachers.

Teacher (G4) added:

"We started trying digital learning media after getting encouragement from the principal." (G4)

This shows that there is a transfer of professional culture from the principal to the teacher through supervision that fosters rather than controls.

Teacher (G6) from SMP Negeri 2 Teupah Barat said:

"We actively participate in training and workshops, but the implementation in the classroom is still constrained by makeshift facilities." (G6)

Meanwhile, teachers (G5) emphasized the moral dimension that encourages commitment to work:

"The principal uses a spiritual approach in his strategy, often reminding us to work with sincerity and responsibility for the improvement of students." (G5)

School documentation shows that each teacher training activity is always reported in the principal's supervision activity book, which records the form of mentoring and evaluation of the training results.

Table 3. The Impact of Adaptive Leadership on Teacher Performance

No	Informant Code	School	Original Quotes	Initial Category	Final Theme
1	G2	SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah	"We have made a lesson plan according to the instructions..."	Adaptation to limitations	Motivational Impact
2	G4	SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah	"We started trying digital learning media..."	Use of learning technology	Impact of Professionalism
3	G6	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"We actively participate in training and workshops..."	Teacher competency development	Impact of Professionalism
4	G5	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"The principal uses a spiritual approach..."	Moral values and job responsibilities	Cultural Impact

Overall, the research findings show that the adaptive leadership of school principals has a multidimensional positive impact on the performance of teachers. These impacts include:

1. Work motivation, which grows due to the moral support and guidance of the principal
2. Professionalism, which is improved through training, academic supervision, and adoption of learning technologies
3. A spiritual work culture that strengthens responsibility and solidarity in carrying out duties.

Principals can adjust their coaching approach according to the characteristics of the school environment. In the central school (SMPN 1 Simeulue Tengah), adaptive leadership is more prominent in the aspects of professionalism and innovation, while in an island school (SMPN 2 Teupah Barat), adaptive leadership is stronger in spiritual aspects and work culture.

These results show that the success of adaptive leadership does not depend solely on the completeness of facilities but on the ability of the principal to manage the potential and social values in his school environment. Thus, adaptive leadership has been proven to maintain motivation, develop professionalism, and build a spirituality-based work ethic that is characteristic of schools in the archipelago.

C. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Adaptive Leadership

From the results of the interviews and observations, several factors were identified that affect the effectiveness of the adaptive leadership of school principals. Supporting factors include teacher loyalty, open communication, and spiritual community values. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors are the limitations of facilities and infrastructure, as well as the high administrative burden of teachers.

Guru (G3) said:

"We are involved in planning, but administrative burdens often reduce the focus on the quality of learning." (G3)

Teachers (G6) also emphasized the limitations of facilities:

"We actively participate in training and workshops, but the implementation in the classroom is still constrained by makeshift facilities." (G6)

Field observations show that many schools do not have stable Internet connections or adequate ICT equipment. However, school principals utilize local resources, such as teacher working groups (KKG), to support professional activities.

Table 4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

No	Informant Code	School	Original Quotes	Initial Category	Final Theme
1	G3	SMPN 1 Simeulue Timur	"We are involved in the planning..."	Administrative burden of teachers	Inhibiting Factors
2	G6	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"Kami aktif ikut pelatihan dan workshop..."	Facility limitations	Inhibiting Factors
3	G5	SMPN 2 Teupah Barat	"Kepala sekolah menggunakan pendekatan spiritual..."	The spiritual values of the community	Supporting Factors

Overall, these supporting and inhibiting factors interact with each other and determine the success rate of implementing adaptive leadership in the archipelago school environment. Religious values and teacher loyalty provide moral and social strength that strengthens relationships between school residents, while limited facilities and administrative burdens pose technical obstacles that need to be overcome with creative adaptation strategies.

Principals who successfully implement adaptive leadership are not those who are free from obstacles but those who are able to adapt their leadership style and strategy to the real conditions on the ground. The efforts of school principals to utilize the potential of teachers, strengthen communication, and maintain the spirit of togetherness are the main keys to the success of education management in the archipelago.

D. Data Reduction and Synthesis

The data reduction process was carried out to filter, organize, and group the results of interviews, observations, and school documents into the main categories and themes relevant to the focus of the research. Based on an interactive analysis model (Huberman, 2019), data reduction was carried out through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

In the open coding stage, all interview data from the nine informants (KS1-KS3, G1-G6) were transcribed verbatim and labeled according to their meaning. Then, at the axial coding stage, data that had a common meaning was grouped into initial categories such

as "innovation drive," "teacher engagement," "spiritual value," "professional development," and "facility limitations." Finally, at the selective coding stage, these categories were synthesized into the main themes that reflect the aspects of adaptive leadership of school principals, namely transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual, as well as their impact on teacher motivation, professionalism, and work culture.

Table 5. Data Reduction and Synthesis

No	Initial Category	Sub-Category	Final Theme	Interpretation
1	Teacher innovation drive	Coaching and work motivation	Transformational-Adaptive Leadership	The principal encourages teachers to innovate and improve their competence through fostering training and supervision.
2	Teacher involvement	Communication and collective participation	Democratic-Adaptive Leadership	The principal involves teachers in the planning and decision-making process to build a sense of shared responsibility.
3	Collaboration and moral values	Sincerity and social responsibility	Adaptive Participatory Spiritual Leadership	The principal builds cooperation based on spiritual and moral values to maintain the spirit of work in the midst of limitations.
4	Adaptation to limitations	Creativity in the use of learning media	The Impact of Teacher Motivation	The principal helps teachers adjust their teaching strategies with limited facilities without reducing morale.
5	Use of learning technology	Participation in digital training and innovation	The Impact of Teacher Professionalism	Adaptive leadership improves teachers' ability to adopt innovative technologies and learning methods.
6	Moral values and sincerity of work	Formation of a spiritual work ethic	Cultural Impact of Teachers	The principal instills the value of responsibility and sincerity that strengthens the positive work culture in the school.
7	Limitations of facilities and administrative burden	Technical and structural barriers	Factors Inhibiting Adaptive Leadership	Limited resources and administrative demands are the main challenges to the effectiveness of adaptive leadership.
8	Nilai spiritual masyarakat	Teacher loyalty and solidarity	Supporting Factors of Adaptive Leadership	The religious values of the community are the moral forces that support the harmonious relationship between the principal and the teacher.

The results of the reduction and data synthesis showed that the adaptive leadership of school principals in the archipelago was formed through their ability to adapt leadership strategies to the social, cultural, and resource conditions in each school. This reduction process shows the integration between three main aspects, namely the form of adaptive leadership, the impact on teacher performance, and the factors that affect the effectiveness of its implementation.

The form of adaptive leadership is reflected in the principal's efforts to develop innovation, motivate teachers, and build collaboration that is in harmony with the characteristics of the school. In the district's central region, principals display leadership oriented toward the professional transformation of teachers through ongoing coaching and innovative encouragement. Such leadership focuses not only on improving administrative performance but also on creating a work climate that encourages teachers' creativity to produce meaningful learning.

Meanwhile, in coastal areas, school principals prioritize open communication and the active involvement of teachers in decision-making. This democratic-adaptive leadership pattern is a strategy for building a sense of belonging and collective responsibility in the midst of limited facilities and the heterogeneity of teachers' social backgrounds.

In the outer island area, the principal practice is participatory leadership combined with spiritual values. This approach strengthens teachers' solidarity and work spirit through the habituation of sincerity and moral responsibility, which ultimately becomes the foundation of a positive work culture.

The impact of adaptive leadership is evident in the changes in teacher behavior and performance in the three schools. The principal succeeded in fostering teachers' work motivation, even though they faced limited learning facilities. Teachers continue to strive to carry out their professional duties optimally, such as compiling teaching tools, using simple media, and finding creative ways to keep teaching and learning activities effective despite the challenges. In addition, teachers' professionalism is enhanced through their involvement in training and competency development activities. Principals play an important role in ensuring that the results of training are applied to learning activities in the classroom through mentoring and fostering supervision.

In addition to improving competence, adaptive leadership fosters a work culture based on spiritual values. Teachers show a high level of mutual respect, cooperation, and responsibility for assignments, which are characteristics of the school work environment in the archipelago.

The factors that affect the success of adaptive leadership are divided into two major groups: supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include teacher loyalty, open communication, and the community's spiritual value, which fosters a sense of togetherness and sincerity at work. These factors constitute social capital that strengthens the relationships among school residents.

However, the inhibiting factors include limited infrastructure facilities and a high administrative burden on teachers. This obstacle often hinders teachers from focusing on learning development and other innovative activities. However, school principals demonstrate adaptive capacity by overcoming these barriers through creative strategies, such as utilizing local resources, forming teacher working groups (KKG), and adjusting the division of tasks to be more flexible.

Overall, the results of the data reduction and synthesis illustrate that the adaptive leadership of school principals in the archipelago is dynamic, contextual, and rooted in the local community's social and spiritual values. The principal plays the role of not only an education manager but also a moral guide and positive driver of organizational culture. Through a leadership style that adapts to school conditions, school principals can build a balance between the professional development of teachers and strengthening work ethics values.

Thus, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of adaptive leadership in the archipelago is determined by the ability of school principals to integrate rational and emotional dimensions while creatively transforming limitations such as inadequate facilities and heavy administrative demands into collective strengths through collaboration, digital improvisation, and moral encouragement. This approach makes adaptive leadership relevant and successful in the context of education faced with geographical challenges and limited resources, such as in Simeulue Regency.

E. Cross-Case Synthesis

A cross-case analysis was conducted to understand the similarities and differences in the principals' adaptive leadership practices in the three public junior high schools studied. The results of the synthesis showed that although the three schools were in the same geographical context, namely an archipelago with limited facilities, the leadership style applied by the principal showed different patterns of adaptation, depending on the social conditions and resources of each school.

At SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Tengah, located in the central district area, the principal applies transformational-adaptive leadership. A relatively modern school environment with access to learning technology allows school principals to focus on innovation and improve teachers' professional competence. The principal actively encourages teachers to participate in training and develop creativity in learning. The impact of this pattern can be seen in the increase in teacher professionalism and the use of simple digital media in classrooms.

Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 1 Simeulue Timur, located in a coastal area with limited facilities, demonstrated democratic-adaptive leadership practices. School principals strive to build collaboration by involving teachers in school meetings and decision making. Although the administrative burden is a challenge in itself, this democratic approach fosters a sense of collective belonging and responsibility among teachers. These participatory values serve as a form of social adaptation to resource scarcity and complex working conditions.

SMP Negeri 2 Teupah Barat, located on the outermost island, displays an adaptive participatory spiritual style. The principal leads by emphasizing moral values, sincerity, and solidarity among school residents. In difficult geographical conditions, the spiritual approach is an effective means of maintaining teacher motivation and strengthening a work culture based on unity. Teachers show high loyalty to the school because they feel valued and supported emotionally and morally by their principals.

Overall, the cross-case synthesis shows that

1. The adaptive leadership of school principals in the archipelago is flexible and contextual, rather than uniform.
2. Each principal adjusts their leadership strategy to social realities and the availability of educational facilities.
3. Spiritual values are a common thread in all schools, acting as a moral force that maintains the stability of work and motivates teachers.

Although limited facilities are a common barrier, the ability of school principals to utilize local resources and open communication has proven effective in increasing the spirit of professionalism and collaboration in the school environment.

Thus, the adaptive leadership of school principals in Simeulue Regency can be understood as a contextual leadership practice rooted in values, collaboration, and empathy. The principal not only plays the role of an administrative manager, but also as a moral driving force and facilitator of change who is able to maintain the sustainability of the quality of education in the archipelago, which is full of limitations.

Discussion

The study's results show that the school principals' adaptive leadership in the archipelago is dynamic, flexible, and value-oriented. This confirms the view of

Abukalusa and Oosthuizen (2025) that the essence of adaptive leadership lies in the ability of leaders to read the context, navigate change, and mobilize others to adapt to complex work environments. The principals in Simeulue Regency demonstrate this by adjusting their leadership strategies to the schools' social, geographical, and resource characteristics. Across the central, coastal, and outermost islands, adaptive leadership manifests in four main forms: transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual which complement one another depending on the challenges encountered.

In the district-center schools, principals display a transformational-adaptive leadership style that focuses on innovation, professional development, and teacher capacity building. According to (Bass and Riggio, 2006), transformational leadership encourages intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, helping leaders inspire followers to achieve beyond expectations. This theoretical principle is reflected in the findings: principals in the central region act as agents of change who motivate teachers to innovate, participate in training, and develop creative teaching practices. Their encouragement for teachers to utilize digital learning media and engage in supervision illustrates how transformational leadership fosters intrinsic motivation. This reinforces Yukl (2012) assertion that effective leadership is contextual, where transformational styles become especially relevant in driving organizational change and building human resource capacity.

In contrast, schools in coastal areas exhibit a democratic-adaptive leadership pattern characterized by collaboration and participation. The principal involves teachers in meetings, discussions, and decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership toward school programs. This aligns with Amri et al. (2025), who explain that participatory leadership enhances teachers' work commitment and collective responsibility for achieving school success. The findings also correspond with Yukl (2012) perspective that adaptive leaders promote participative communication to strengthen organizational learning in limited-resource settings. Although some teachers reported administrative burdens, the democratic approach reflects the principal's ability to adapt socially to constraints while maintaining cohesion between leaders and teachers in pursuing educational goals.

Meanwhile, principals in outer-island schools demonstrate a participatory-spiritual leadership form, which emphasizes sincerity, moral responsibility, and collective cooperation. This corresponds to Rahmadhea (2025), who asserts that in remote educational contexts, social and spiritual values are foundational for effective leadership. The empirical evidence shows that principals integrate moral guidance and teamwork to maintain teacher motivation and loyalty amid difficult geographic conditions. The spiritual approach not only strengthens the organization's moral dimension but also creates psychological meaning that deepens teachers' professional commitment. This reinforces Paul et al. (2020), who emphasize that moral and spiritual values act as stabilizing forces in educational organizations. Therefore, the ability of principals to manage both emotional and religious dimensions complements managerial competence, making spiritual intelligence a vital component of adaptive leadership effectiveness.

The impact of adaptive leadership across the three schools is evident in teachers' increased motivation, professionalism, and collaborative culture. The empowerment of teachers through continuous encouragement and supervision supports Schermuly and Meyer (2020) principle that transformational empowerment enhances intrinsic motivation and professional growth. Similarly, Boylan (2018) contends that adaptive

leadership sustains professional communities by aligning change with shared moral purpose. The study's findings affirm these theoretical perspectives: adaptive principals do not merely issue instructions but serve as role models who inspire innovation, professional learning, and collective responsibility.

Supporting factors that enhance adaptive leadership effectiveness include teacher loyalty, open communication, and the community's spiritual values. These elements form social capital that supports cohesive collaboration, consistent with Komari et al. (2025) and Didham and Ofei-Manu (2020), who highlight that adaptive capacity relies on mobilizing local resources to overcome structural limitations. Conversely, inhibiting factors such as inadequate facilities and high administrative workloads limit opportunities for teacher innovation. Nonetheless, principals demonstrated adaptive capacity by forming teacher working groups (KKG), reallocating workloads, and optimizing local resources strategies that transform challenges into developmental opportunities, as defined by Didham and Ofei-Manu (2020) in their concept of adaptive capacity.

The findings of this study expand the understanding of adaptive leadership theory by integrating a spiritual dimension as a key determinant of leadership success in the Indonesian educational context. In resource-constrained environments, spirituality functions not only as a moral foundation but also as an adaptive mechanism that sustains psychological balance and work motivation. This reinforces Heifetz's (2009) and Yukl (2012) frameworks by showing that effective adaptive leadership integrates rational and emotional dimensions focusing simultaneously on professional development and human-spiritual values.

Conceptually, these findings affirm that adaptive leadership is an integrative process that unites multiple leadership styles into a flexible, contextual framework. School principals act as facilitators of change, organizational innovators, and moral guides who uphold collective spirit amid constraints. This contextual leadership model emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is not merely measured by administrative outcomes but by the leader's ability to manage change, build commitment, and sustain a positive work culture. Consequently, educational policy and principal development programs should incorporate value-based adaptive leadership training that acknowledges local sociocultural realities.

In summary, the adaptive leadership of school principals in the archipelago represents a contextual, humanistic leadership model balancing managerial, professional, and spiritual dimensions. Successful principals are not those free from limitations but those who can adapt to change, empower teachers, and uphold moral integrity. Within the archipelagic education context of Simeulue, adaptive leadership becomes the foundation of educational sustainability transforming constraints into strengths and local values into strategic resources for school development.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study reveals that the adaptive leadership of school principals in the archipelago is a dynamic and integrative process that combines four leadership styles: transformational, democratic, participatory, and spiritual applied contextually according to each school's social and geographical conditions. These styles are not independent but form a cohesive leadership pattern that balances innovation, participation, collaboration, and moral responsibility. Such adaptive leadership

strengthens teachers' motivation, professionalism, and work culture through academic supervision, open communication, and empowerment rooted in local spiritual values. Consequently, adaptive leadership serves not only as an administrative approach but as a contextual moral framework that transforms limitations into collective strengths to improve educational quality in the archipelago. **Implication:** Theoretically, the findings enrich educational leadership literature by extending adaptive leadership theory into the Indonesian sociocultural context, where spirituality is an essential element of leader adaptability. Practically, the results recommend that the Simeulue Regency Education Office, along with national policymakers responsible for 3T (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost) areas, develop contextual adaptive leadership-based principal training programs. These programs should emphasize reflective practice, participatory supervision, and integration of local spiritual values in school management to enhance educational quality and sustainability. **Limitation:** This study was limited to three public schools in Simeulue Regency with similar geographical conditions, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, as a descriptive qualitative study, it did not quantify the strength or direction of the relationship between adaptive leadership dimensions and teacher performance outcomes. This methodological scope provided contextual richness but limited the ability to statistically validate or measure the magnitude of leadership influence across schools. The short research duration also restricted observation of long-term effects on teacher development. **Future Research:** To address this limitation, future studies should employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches that statistically test and measure the strength of relationships between adaptive leadership, motivation, and teacher performance across larger and more diverse samples. Longitudinal and comparative designs between urban, rural, and archipelagic schools are recommended to explore sustainability and contextual variations in adaptive leadership practices. In addition, further examination of the spiritual and cultural dimensions is needed to develop a holistic and empirically tested conceptual model that aligns with Indonesia's national education system and supports policy formulation for 3T areas.

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***Dewi Astuti (Corresponding Author)**

Magister Educational Administration, Post Graduate,
Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, 23111, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: theheart75@gmail.com

Ismail

Magister Educational Administration, Post Graduate,
Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, 23111, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: ismail.kutaradja@usk.ac.id

Suparta Rasyid

Magister Educational Administration, Post Graduate,
Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, 23111, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: supartarasyid@usk.ac.id

Gusti Intan Puspita

Magister Educational Administration, Post Graduate,
Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, 23111, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: intanpuspitagusti@gmail.com
