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## Integrating the National And Montessori Curricula Through Transformational Leadership: a Case Study at TK Methodist 2 Palembang

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| A B S T R A C T   | A R T I C L E I N F O  |
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| <p>This study aims to examine transformational leadership strategies in integrating the National Curriculum with the Montessori method at TK Methodist 2 Palembang. A qualitative case study design was employed to explore leadership practices within the context of early childhood education. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the school principal, the deputy foundation leader, and eight teachers, supported by classroom observations and document analysis. Data analysis followed Creswell's analytical spiral and multi-stage coding to enable thematic interpretation. The findings reveal that the principal played an active role in facilitating curriculum integration by enhancing teacher capacity, providing supportive learning resources, and guiding the development of integrated lesson plans. Key challenges included limited instructional time, insufficient teacher understanding of Montessori principles, and the absence of formal technical guidelines. Nevertheless, transformational leadership offered participative and solution-oriented approaches to overcome these obstacles. The study contributes practical implications for school leaders and teachers in developing adaptive, child-centered integrated curricula responsive to contemporary educational needs.</p> | <p><b>Article History:</b><br/><i>Submitted/Received 16 Augs 2025</i><br/><i>First Revised 23 Nov 2026</i><br/><i>Accepted 3 Jan 2026</i><br/><i>First Available online 11 Feb 2026</i><br/><i>Publication Date 11 Feb 2026</i></p> <p><b>Keyword:</b><br/><i>Transformational Leadership,</i><br/><i>Curriculum Integration,</i><br/><i>Montessori, Early Childhood</i><br/><i>Education, Indonesia</i></p> |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education requires a curriculum approach that aligns with children's developmental stages while fostering independence, creativity, and engagement. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education Regulation No. 12 of 2024, a curriculum encompasses objectives, content, and instructional processes to achieve specific educational goals. Integrating the National Curriculum with the Montessori method—characterized by child autonomy, experiential learning, and self-directed exploration—can substantially enrich holistic learning experiences.

TK Methodist 2 Palembang initiated this integration model during the 2024/2025 academic year as part of an educational innovation strategy. However, the process encountered challenges, including limited teacher understanding of Montessori pedagogy and the lack of comprehensive implementation guidelines. In this context, transformational leadership emerges as a critical factor in fostering change and empowering educators.

The research gap addressed by this study lies in the scarcity of empirical investigations focusing on the integration of the National and Montessori curricula in Indonesian early childhood settings, analyzed through the lens of transformational leadership. Accordingly, this study seeks to (1) analyze transformational leadership strategies applied by the school principal, (2) identify challenges in curriculum integration, and (3) explore how transformational leadership contributes to overcoming these challenges.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, grounded in a post-positivist paradigm (Sugiyono, 2020). This approach was selected to holistically understand social realities and provide an in-depth description of participants' lived experiences (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017). The researcher functioned as the primary instrument (Saldaña, 2011), interpreting data within its natural context and focusing on rich, detailed narratives (Howitt, 2010). Qualitative inquiry was particularly relevant for exploring contextual processes and strategies of innovation implementation in educational institutions (Hamilton & Finley, 2020).

The study was conducted at TK Methodist 2 Palembang from January to April 2025. Ten participants were purposively selected, consisting of the school principal, the deputy foundation leader, and eight teachers with substantial understanding of curriculum integration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research focused on transformational leadership, teacher adaptation strategies, and institutional policies supporting curriculum innovation.

Multiple data collection techniques were used to ensure comprehensive insights: (1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews; (2) participant observation of classroom activities and teacher–student interactions; and (3) documentation analysis of school policies, curriculum frameworks, and evaluation reports. These methods adhered to triangulation principles to enhance data credibility (Patton, 2002; Denzin, 2017).

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2018) data analysis spiral, including data organization, holistic reading and memoing, coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), thematic interpretation, and final reporting. Data validation was achieved through source and

methodological triangulation, co-coding, and member checking (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020) to minimize bias and ensure analytical accuracy.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Transformational Leadership of the Principal

Transformational leadership, as conceptualized by Burns (1978), extends beyond achieving short-term organizational goals; it also nurtures followers' moral development, values, and commitment to a shared vision. Within this framework, leaders shape institutional culture and long-term educational transformation (Khoe, 2024). In educational settings, transformational leadership enhances teacher performance, drives pedagogical innovation, and cultivates a culture of trust and collaboration (Sliwka et al., 2023; Karakose et al., 2023).

At TK Methodist 2 Palembang, the principal acts as a change agent who strategically integrates the National Curriculum with the Montessori approach. Consistent with Yukl's (2013) definition, transformational leadership inspires and transforms followers through emotional engagement and shared ideals. This process operationalizes the four dimensions introduced by Bass (1985) and expanded by Northouse (2019): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

| <b>Dimension of Transformasional Leadership</b> | <b>Leadership Strategies Implemented</b>  | <b>Observed Impact on Teachers and Students</b>                          |
|---|---|--|
| Idealized Influence                             | Modeling integrity, involvement in classroom practices, and demonstration of Montessori tools | Builds trust, credibility, and professional respect toward the principal |
| Inspirational Motivation                        | Communicating a clear and collective vision of curriculum integration                         | Encourages collaboration and shared enthusiasm among teachers            |
| Intellectual Stimulation                        | Facilitating reflective discussions, innovation workshops, and problem-solving sessions       | Enhances teachers' creativity, adaptability, and self-efficacy           |
| Individualized Consideration                    | Providing mentoring, coaching, and personalized feedback                                      | Supports professional growth and emotional engagement of teachers        |

Through these four dimensions, the principal fosters a school culture grounded in trust, collaboration, and a shared sense of mission. This demonstrates that her leadership transcends administrative functions—embodying a vision-driven, relational, and capacity-building approach.

#### Integration of the National Curriculum and the Montessori Method

Findings indicate that the integration process was conducted through a complementary pedagogical model. The National Curriculum provides the framework for learning outcomes, while the Montessori method serves as the instructional mechanism for delivering competencies in contextual and experiential ways. This aligns with the “*Turkey Dinner Model*” proposed by Van Brummelen (2002), where distinct curricular components are merged into a cohesive learning experience while retaining their respective identities.

Teachers at TK Methodist 2 Palembang design learning activities that embed National Curriculum content—such as literacy, numeracy, and science—within Montessori-based experiences emphasizing hands-on, sensorial, and independent exploration. Lesson plans are adapted based on students’ readiness and available materials, ensuring flexibility and contextual relevance. Teachers maintain observation journals documenting children’s mastery of competencies through Montessori engagement, reinforcing the integration’s authenticity and depth.

This pedagogical synthesis is not merely an administrative alignment but a transformative learning process that bridges two philosophical paradigms—national educational standards and child-centered Montessori principles—to create a holistic, humanizing learning environment.

### **Gradual and Collaborative Implementation Strategy**

The integrative model was implemented gradually and collaboratively, emphasizing professional learning and reflective practice. Initial training sessions were facilitated by the principal, followed by peer observation cycles, rotational teaching, and reflective forums. This allowed teachers to internalize both conceptual and practical aspects of Montessori pedagogy.

Professional development extended beyond the school’s internal capacity; teachers participated in external workshops and training programs on Montessori and National Curriculum integration. Collaboration was evident in weekly reflective meetings, where teachers and leaders co-analyzed classroom observations and discussed pedagogical refinements. This collaborative climate positioned the principal not as a directive supervisor but as an **instructional leader** who learns alongside her team.

Cross-level collaboration between Kindergarten A and B teachers also fostered a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous professional growth. This gradual, iterative approach ensured that integration was adaptive, sustainable, and responsive to local educational contexts.

### **Transformation of Children’s Learning**

The integration of both curricula resulted in a significant transformation of children’s learning behaviors and outcomes. Students demonstrated increased independence, curiosity, and engagement in learning activities. The Montessori principle of self-directed exploration enhanced conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, children’s social interactions improved as they engaged in cooperative and observational learning—validating Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s developmental frameworks that emphasize experiential and social dimensions of cognition.

Teachers observed that previously passive students became confident, self-motivated learners. This shift redefined the teacher’s role—from knowledge transmitter to facilitator of inquiry and discovery. The integrated curriculum thus encouraged a participatory and empowering learning environment where children actively construct knowledge.

### **Novelty and Contribution**

The novelty of this study lies in its contextual application of transformational leadership within an Indonesian early childhood education setting that integrates two distinct curricular systems—the National Curriculum and Montessori method. While prior research (e.g., Lillard, 2017; Basargekar & Lillard, 2020) has explored Montessori outcomes or leadership separately, this study uniquely demonstrates how transformational leadership functions as the mediating mechanism enabling successful curriculum integration and sustained teacher development.

The study contributes both theoretically and practically by:

1. Extending transformational leadership theory to the domain of early childhood curriculum innovation in Indonesia;
2. Providing empirical evidence on leadership-driven curriculum integration;
3. Offering a replicable model for other institutions seeking to harmonize multiple curricular frameworks through strategic, collaborative leadership.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study at TK Methodist 2 Palembang, it can be concluded that transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in facilitating the integration of the National Curriculum and the Montessori method. The principal implemented various strategic efforts, including continuous teacher capacity development through internal and external professional training, enhancement of pedagogical literacy related to Montessori principles, systematic evaluations to strengthen implementation quality, and the provision of adequate learning resources and facilities. These initiatives ensured that the integrated instructional model was coherent, consistent, and aligned with holistic educational objectives.

The challenges encountered during the integration process included limited instructional time, teachers' initial unfamiliarity with Montessori pedagogy, and the absence of formal technical guidelines to support implementation. These challenges were

amplified by the uniqueness of TK Methodist 2 Palembang as the only institution in its context adopting a dual-curriculum approach. Nevertheless, transformational leadership proved effective in addressing these obstacles by articulating a clear collective vision, motivating teachers to embrace change, and modeling adaptive and innovative behavior. Through mentoring, collaboration, and reflective dialogue, the principal succeeded in transforming barriers into opportunities for institutional growth and sustainable curriculum innovation.

The findings of this study carry important practical implications for school leaders, teachers, and educational foundations. Principals can adopt transformational leadership practices—such as participatory decision-making, mentoring, and continuous professional dialogue—to foster teacher empowerment and curriculum innovation. Teachers are encouraged to engage in ongoing reflective practice to enhance their capacity for integrative instruction, while educational foundations can play a critical role in providing systemic support for leadership and professional development initiatives.

This study, however, is limited by its single-site setting and relatively short research duration, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative or mixed-method studies involving multiple institutions to explore variations in leadership practices and integration outcomes, or to employ quantitative approaches to assess the measurable impact of transformational leadership on teacher performance and children's learning achievements.

Overall, this study underscores that transformational leadership is not merely a management style but a dynamic and empowering force that enables schools to navigate complexity, foster innovation, and build an integrated educational environment responsive to the developmental needs of young learners.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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