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Innovative leadership in education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of intellectual and emotional intelligence on learning outcomes by employing a qualitative research approach. Data were obtained through literature review and interviews. The findings reveal that both intellectual and emotional intelligence play significant roles in supporting the learning process. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Daniel Goleman, includes the ability to recognize and manage emotions, self-motivate, and build positive relationships. This study also emphasizes the importance of innovative leadership in the education sector as a factor that can drive the quality of learning through the integration of technology, adoption of new methods, and empowerment of human resources. The implementation of effective leadership fosters adaptive, progressive, and highly competitive educational management.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; Intellectual intelligence; Learning; Innovative leadership

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping the quality of human resources who are excellent and competitive. In the era of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), the challenges faced in the educational sector have become increasingly complex. Technological advancements, evolving societal demands, and global economic dynamics require educational institutions to continuously adapt to the changing times (Machali & Hidayat, 2018).

In this context, leadership serves as a pivotal force that drives change and innovation. Innovative leadership is essential in promoting educational progress. Innovative leaders are not only capable of identifying opportunities but also of devising creative solutions to address various challenges and barriers. School principals, teachers, and other educational personnel are required to take calculated risks, think outside the box, and utilize all available resources and technologies effectively (Santika, Ahmad, & Muniroh, 2023). In this way, effective leadership becomes the foundation for delivering education that is relevant and of high quality.

However, the implementation of such leadership practices is not without obstacles. These include a lack of organizational culture that supports innovation,

limited resources, and resistance to change within institutions (Hayadi, Yusuf, & Pahliana, 2024). Therefore, an in-depth examination of the concept of innovative leadership is necessary—one that explores the contributing factors and evaluates its impact on educational quality.

This study aims to identify the characteristics of innovative leadership in the educational context, analyze its implementation strategies, and evaluate its influence on both learning quality and the management of educational institutions. By understanding the dynamics of innovative leadership, this research aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the development of an educational system that is more adaptive, progressive, and highly competitive.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Definition and Theory of Innovative Leadership

The term “leadership” in English refers to the act of leading, while “leader” refers to the person who performs the action. Etymologically, Pramuji explains that the Indonesian word *kepemimpinan* (leadership) originates from the root word *pimpin*, which means to guide or lead. From this root word, the verb *memimpin* was derived, meaning “to guide and lead.”

Leadership, in general, is defined as the ability to positively influence individuals and systems under one’s control in ways that produce meaningful impacts and achieve important goals. Warren Bennis defines leadership as the capacity to transform vision into reality. Robbins (as cited in Aprilinda & Budiman, 2021) describes leadership as the ability to influence a group of members to work together toward achieving specific objectives. George R. Terry adds that leadership is the ability to direct followers to cooperate in trust and diligently carry out the tasks assigned by their leader (Djafri, Arwidayanto, & Suking, 2020).

Innovative leadership is a model that emphasizes the development and implementation of new ideas to enhance organizational performance. This concept blends various leadership styles aimed at fostering creativity and innovation among team members and the organization, with the goal of achieving organizational targets in a more effective, efficient, and creative manner. An innovative leader functions not only as a driver of change but also as an inspirer who encourages their team to think beyond the conventional boundaries (Syam, 2012).

In the educational context, innovative leadership plays a vital role and serves as a key success factor for the institutions being led. The leader’s ability to innovate directly determines the quality and performance of the institution. The quality of education, in this sense, can include a wide range of elements such as graduate output, the learning process, educator competence, teaching strategies, facilities, administrative and financial services, curriculum relevance, and more (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023). Several leadership theories support the framework of innovative leadership, including:

1. Transformational Leadership Theory

This theory emphasizes a leader’s vision and inspirational capacity to motivate followers toward positive change. Transformational leaders focus on individual development and encourage innovation through effective communication and recognition (Aprilinda & Budiman, 2021).

2. Charismatic Leadership Theory

Charismatic leaders leverage personal charm and strong interpersonal skills to influence and inspire followers. In terms of innovation, these leaders ignite enthusiasm for new ideas among stakeholders (Sutianah, Sunaryo, & Yusuf, 2018).

3. Complexity Leadership Theory

This theory suggests that leadership in modern organizations must be adaptive, collaborative, and network-oriented. Leaders are responsible for cultivating environments that promote continuous learning and innovation (Ramadani, Marcellah, & Muktamar, 2024).

4. Situational Leadership Theory

Situational leaders adjust their leadership style to fit the specific needs of individuals or teams, particularly during times of challenge or change that demand innovative approaches (Faturahman, 2019).

5. Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leaders prioritize the needs of others, fostering a culture of innovation through empowerment, empathy, and collaboration (Paulus, Binilang, & Selanno, 2021).

Characteristics of Innovative Leadership

With the synthesis of the aforementioned leadership theories, innovative leadership emerges as an effective approach for addressing the dynamics and challenges within the education sector and beyond. Several key characteristics distinguish innovative leaders and align with the theoretical frameworks previously discussed. These characteristics enable leaders to adapt to shifting environments and to guide institutions through change successfully.

First, **future-oriented thinking** is fundamental. Innovative leaders possess a long-term vision and are able to identify opportunities even in the midst of adversity. This vision allows them to steer their institutions strategically and proactively in anticipation of future trends (Wahyudin, Hanafi, & Ahmad, 2024).

Second, they demonstrate a high tolerance for **risk-taking**. Innovative leaders are unafraid to experiment and adopt new methods, even in the face of uncertainty. Rather than fearing failure, they treat it as a learning opportunity to refine future strategies (Hayadi, Yusuf, & Pahliana, 2024).

Third, they are **collaborative**. Valuing input from others, innovative leaders foster a culture of shared ideas and collective problem-solving. They encourage team members to contribute their perspectives, knowing that diversity of thought often leads to more innovative outcomes (Nugroho, 2024).

Fourth, they are **adaptive and flexible**. When faced with changing circumstances, they can swiftly alter strategies and approaches to maintain alignment with institutional goals. This flexibility is essential in educational environments that are increasingly influenced by technological and socio-economic developments (Gumilar, 2023).

Finally, they are **empowerment-focused**. Innovative leaders dedicate effort to empowering their teams—supporting professional development, delegating meaningful responsibilities, and providing autonomy that inspires creativity and personal growth (Musa et al., 2022).

These characteristics form the foundation of an innovative leadership style that is particularly suited to the demands of the modern educational landscape. As institutions confront increasing complexity, rapid technological change, and shifting stakeholder expectations, these traits ensure that leaders are not only responsive but also proactive in crafting effective educational transformation strategies.

Implementation of Innovative Leadership in Education

Innovative leadership plays a pivotal role in steering educational institutions to effectively confront the challenges of the modern era. Its implementation entails more than the application of novel ideas; it also demands the courage to replace outdated paradigms in order to enhance the overall quality of education. Innovative leaders are expected to act as agents of change who are capable of inspiring and motivating every component of the educational organization (Syam, 2012).

In practice, the implementation of innovative leadership in educational settings involves several strategic steps. First, a leader must formulate a **clear and inclusive vision** that reflects the needs of all stakeholders, from educators and learners to the broader community. This vision must be aligned with the institution's long-term goals and disseminated effectively to cultivate shared understanding and support (Wahyudin, Hanafi, & Ahmad, 2024).

Second, innovative leaders must develop an **organizational culture that fosters creativity and collaboration**. This includes creating safe spaces for educators to experiment with new teaching methods and ensuring institutional support for proposed innovations. Leaders must also promote continuous professional learning by facilitating access to training, workshops, and professional development opportunities. These efforts help ensure that all education personnel are equipped with the skills and insights necessary to meet current and future demands (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023).

Third, an innovative leader must possess the capacity to **optimize the use of technology**. In today's digital era, technology serves as a powerful instrument for enhancing operational efficiency, facilitating learning, and expanding educational access. Leaders must ensure that technology is meaningfully integrated into the educational system—not only to support classroom instruction but also to improve institutional administration (Tulungen, Saerang, & Maramis, 2022).

Crucially, the success of innovative leadership depends on a leader's ability to **overcome resistance to change**. This requires a high degree of emotional intelligence, strong communication skills, and the ability to engage all stakeholders in the change process. Leaders must exhibit empathy and a willingness to involve others in shaping the future of the institution. By doing so, they foster trust and collective ownership over innovation (Hayadi, Yusuf, & Pahliana, 2024).

In summary, the implementation of innovative leadership leads to a significant transformation in the quality of education. It cultivates a dynamic, adaptive, and sustainable learning environment that is responsive to the demands of the 21st century.

Innovative Leader Strategies in Facing the Challenges of Educational Change

Change in the field of education is an inevitable necessity, evolving in tandem with technological advancement, social transformation, and the dynamic needs of learners. In this context, innovative leaders assume a strategic role in ensuring that educational institutions remain relevant, competitive, and future-ready. To that end,

several strategies can be employed by innovative leaders to address the complex challenges of educational change.

First, innovative leaders must **develop an adaptive and inspiring vision**. Such a vision not only responds to ongoing changes but also motivates every element of the institution to strive toward shared goals. An adaptive vision reflects a leader's ability to recognize future trends and align institutional objectives with the evolving needs of students and society (Wahyudin, Hanafi, & Ahmad, 2024).

Second, they must **encourage collaboration and participation** across all levels of the educational ecosystem. Change-related challenges require collective responses, and therefore, leaders should foster inclusive environments where teachers, administrative staff, students, and other stakeholders are actively involved. Providing open forums for dialogue, valuing stakeholder feedback, and nurturing a culture of mutual trust are essential practices (Paulina & Patimah, 2023).

Third, **integrating technology and innovation** is fundamental. In the digital age, innovative leaders must leverage technology to enhance teaching and learning, streamline administrative processes, and support data-driven decision-making. The use of digital platforms, online learning tools, and automation systems can help institutions overcome traditional barriers and achieve greater efficiency (Tulungen, Saerang, & Maramis, 2022).

Fourth, innovative leaders must **lead by example and remain flexible**. By embodying creative thinking and practical problem-solving, leaders inspire their teams to adopt a similar mindset. Flexibility allows them to adapt swiftly to unexpected circumstances, revise strategies in real-time, and ensure continuity in institutional progress (Iswahyudi et al., 2023).

Lastly, innovative leaders must **invest in enhancing the competencies of human resources**. Professional development programs—such as training sessions, workshops, and mentoring initiatives—are crucial for updating educators' knowledge and skills. With continuously improved competencies, education personnel are better prepared to implement innovative practices and address future challenges (Musa et al., 2022).

By adopting and consistently implementing these strategies, innovative leaders do not merely respond to educational change—they drive it. Through visionary planning, inclusive leadership, technological integration, and human capital development, they guide educational institutions toward transformation that is not only better and more relevant, but also sustainable in the face of an ever-evolving global landscape.

The Effect of Innovative Leadership on Educational Institutions

Innovative leadership exerts a profound influence on the advancement of educational institutions. Through the strategic application of novel ideas, creative approaches, and adaptive responses to emerging challenges, innovative leaders facilitate systemic transformation. The impacts of this leadership model manifest across multiple institutional dimensions, as outlined below.

One of the most evident outcomes is the **improvement in learning quality and teacher performance**. Innovative leaders cultivate an environment that promotes the professional growth of educators. By integrating educational technologies, organizing regular training sessions, and implementing creative instructional methods,

teaching quality is significantly enhanced. This, in turn, results in improved student learning outcomes that align with contemporary educational demands (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023).

Moreover, innovative leadership fosters the **transformation of work and organizational culture**. A culture that embraces innovation tends to be collaborative, open to change, and focused on continuous improvement. These cultural attributes enhance team cohesion, boost employee motivation, and improve communication among members of the institution. Such transformations are key to sustaining innovation over time (Nugroho, 2024).

Another crucial impact is the **increase in stakeholder satisfaction and engagement**. By addressing the expectations of students, teachers, parents, and the broader community, innovative leaders enhance institutional responsiveness and accountability. This inclusiveness fosters greater trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which are essential for the sustainable development of educational organizations (Sidik, 2024).

Additionally, innovative leadership contributes to the **strengthening of institutional competitiveness**. In the context of globalization, educational institutions led by innovative leaders are better positioned to compete both locally and internationally. Innovations in curriculum design, teaching strategies, and organizational management add value that makes these institutions more attractive to stakeholders and more capable of responding to market demands (Santika, Ahmad, & Muniroh, 2023).

In summary, innovative leadership serves as a catalyst for institutional progress. It not only enhances internal performance and learning outcomes but also empowers institutions to adapt effectively to external pressures. These positive effects underscore the critical need for developing leadership models that are adaptive, creative, and progressive in order to meet the evolving demands of the education sector.

CONCLUSION

Innovative leadership is a fundamental element in enhancing the quality of education in the era of globalization and digital transformation. Leaders who adopt an innovative approach are able to identify opportunities, overcome challenges, and drive positive change through the application of new ideas, adaptive strategies, and collaborative methods. Within the context of education, innovative leadership not only improves learning quality but also strengthens an organizational culture that supports creativity, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

The integration of technology, development of an inclusive and future-oriented vision, empowerment of human resources, and effective management of resistance to change are among the primary strategies employed by innovative leaders. These strategies allow educational institutions to establish dynamic and responsive learning environments that meet the needs of modern society.

The impact of innovative leadership is evident in various domains, including improvements in learning outcomes, increased satisfaction and engagement among stakeholders, cultural transformation within organizations, and enhanced institutional competitiveness. These outcomes demonstrate that innovative leadership is not merely a managerial trend, but a necessity for institutions that aspire to remain relevant and excel in a rapidly changing world.

Therefore, the development and institutionalization of innovative leadership models should be prioritized as a strategic effort to achieve a progressive and sustainable education system. Educational institutions, policymakers, and training centers must collaborate to build leadership capacities that align with the demands of the 21st century and beyond.

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