

BUILDING A SUPERIOR SCHOOL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER COMPETENCE IN STRENGTHENING SCHOOL BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

In an era of increasingly competitive education, schools are not only required to excel academically but also to have a strong image and identity in the community. This study used a literature review method. The results of relevant research discuss the relationship between leadership, teacher competency, and school branding strategies. The study shows that the principal's transformational leadership plays a crucial role in creating a vision and organizational culture that supports the strengthening of school identity. A visionary, inspiring, and participatory principal can increase teacher motivation and build a positive and innovative school climate. Meanwhile, teacher competency has a direct influence on the effectiveness of school branding, as teachers represent the school's values, quality, and character in the eyes of the community. Teachers who are professional, creative, and possess communication skills and mastery of information technology can significantly enhance a school's positive image.

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INTRODUCTIONS

In the context of competitive modern education, building a superior school identity (school branding) is an important need for every educational institution. School identity is not just a name or logo, but reflects the values, culture, achievements, and quality of educational services recognized by the community. Schools that have a strong identity are usually trusted by the public because of their quality consistency, visionary leadership, and teacher professionalism in serving students. The current phenomenon shows that many schools, especially at the secondary and vocational levels, are racing to strengthen their image and reputation amid rising public expectations of the quality of education. This is due to a paradigm shift in society that is now more selective in choosing schools based on the reputation and quality of measurable educational services (Budiarti et al., 2023).

The leadership of the principal plays a central role in building the image and identity of the school. Transformational leaders not only direct, but also inspire and foster the commitment of all school residents to achieve a common vision. According to Kuswaeri (2017), transformational leadership has four main elements, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, all of which

play a role in creating a positive and quality-oriented organizational culture. Principals who apply a transformational leadership style are able to build a collective spirit, encourage learning innovation, and instill integrity values that contribute to the formation of a superior school image.

In addition to leadership, the teacher competency factor is the main pillar in strengthening school branding. Teachers are the spearhead in realizing the quality of learning which is the real face of the school's reputation in the eyes of the public. Research by Zulfikasari et al., (2025) shows that strengthening teachers' competence in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) plays a significant role in the success of school branding. The results of the study noted an increase in teachers' understanding of the use of digital media for school promotion, from an average score of 2.31 to 3.65 after the training. These findings show that teachers' ability to utilize digital technology not only increases learning effectiveness, but also expands the school's positive exposure in public spaces, such as through social media, school websites, and publications of innovative activities.

Furthermore, the results of research from Budiarti et al., (2023) also show that an effective school branding strategy must be supported by competent human resources and strong leadership. Successful school branding is characterized by the compatibility between values, culture, and service quality perceived by the community. Quality-oriented schools tend to build a positive image through information transparency, community involvement, and program innovation that reflects institutional excellence. Therefore, strengthening teacher competence and transformational leadership of school principals must go hand in hand to create authentic and sustainable school branding.

Phenomena in the field show that there are still many schools in Indonesia that have not realized the importance of building institutional identity. Some schools still focus on administrative achievements or test scores, while aspects of reputation, public communication, and organizational culture are not yet priorities. In fact, in the era of globalization and digitalization of education, schools that do not have a strong identity will find it difficult to compete in attracting students' interest and public trust. Therefore, building a superior school identity requires synergy between transformational principals, competent and creative teachers, and management support that is adaptive to changing times (Chaniago et al., 2022).

Thus, research on "Building a Superior School Identity: The Role of Transformational Leadership and Teacher Competencies in Strengthening School Branding" is important to be conducted. This study is expected to contribute to understanding how the interaction between the leadership style of the principal and the competence of teachers can strengthen the image of the school, increase public trust, and encourage the birth of educational institutions that are highly competitive and have superior character.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the literature review method as the main approach. Literature review is a research method that is carried out by collecting, reading, analyzing, and concluding the results of various relevant previous studies (Asyari, 2021). The goal is to find out how the role of transformational leadership of school principals in building identity and strengthening school branding in schools and how teachers' competencies affect the effectiveness of strengthening school branding in realizing superior schools. The literature review process in this study is carried out through several stages. First, the researcher searched for and selected reference sources in the form of national journals, books, and research reports in the last 10 years (2015–2025) that discussed the topic of how to build a Superior School Identity: The Role of Transformational Leadership and Teacher Competence in Strengthening School Branding. The literature review method is considered relevant because this topic has been widely studied from various perspectives, both theoretically and empirically. By combining findings from various studies, researchers can identify general patterns, similarities, and differences from previous study results. As explained by Sahir (2022), literature review functions as a way to enrich understanding and build the basis for new research theories by utilizing existing research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Building Identity and Strengthening School Branding in Schools

The leadership of the principal is one of the most strategic factors in determining the success of an educational institution in building an identity and strengthening *the school branding*. In the context of modern education, school principals not only function as administrative managers, but also as transformational leaders who are able to inspire change, foster collective spirit, and form a superior and characterful school culture (Kasmianti, 2022). Transformational leadership has four main dimensions as explained by Kuswaeri (2017), namely: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. In the context of schools, these dimensions are translated into concrete actions of the principal who are able to be an example for teachers and students, foster a shared commitment to the school's vision, encourage innovation in learning, and pay attention to the personal development of each educator.

Research conducted by Kuswaeri (2017) shows that school principals with a transformational leadership style play an important role in creating a positive work climate, fostering a spirit of collaboration, and increasing teachers' motivation to perform optimally. Visionary principals are able to direct all school resources towards one common vision, which is to become a superior school with character, quality, and high competitiveness. When this leadership is carried out consistently, a strong school image will be formed in the eyes of the community so that it becomes a main capital in *school branding*.

In the context of strengthening the school's identity, the principal has a role as *a strategic communicator* and *cultural builder*. As *strategic communicators*, school principals become the face and main spokesperson of institutions that communicate the school's values, achievements, and excellence to the public (Ashlan and Akmaluddin, 2021). Meanwhile, as a *cultural builder*, the principal builds a school culture that reflects the values of honesty, hard work, religiosity, and collaboration that are the main attraction for the community. This positive culture then strengthens the school's *brand identity*, because the community not only judges the school by its physical facilities, but also by the values and behavior of its school residents.

The results of research conducted by Budiarti *et al.*, (2023) confirm that successful school branding is greatly influenced by the leadership of the principal who is able to integrate the school's vision and program communicatively to teachers, students, parents, and the community. School principals who actively establish external communication through social media, public activities, and cooperation with other institutions are able to increase the visibility and positive image of the school in the community. In addition, transformational leadership encourages teachers to be part of the school's branding strategy. Transformationally oriented principals do not monopolize leadership roles, but distribute them through the empowerment of teachers and education personnel. This is in line with the results of research by Akbar and Imaniyati (2019) who stated that transformational leadership practices in schools encourage increased teacher participation in learning innovations, publication activities, and active involvement in school promotion. Thus, school branding is not only the responsibility of the principal, but also a collective movement of all school residents.

In today's digital era, school principals are also required to be able to integrate information technology in school branding strategies. The visionary principal encourages teachers and students to actively manage social media, school websites, and digital documentation of school activities. The use of digital media has proven to be effective in building the school's reputation at large, because the public can see firsthand school activities and achievements through online platforms (Zulfikasari *et al.*, 2025). Thus, it can be concluded that the transformational leadership of school principals plays a comprehensive role in building identity and strengthening *school branding*. This leadership focuses not only on the administrative aspect, but also on strengthening values, culture, communication, and innovation in the school environment. Principals who are able to combine leadership vision with communication strategies and teacher empowerment will more easily form an image of a superior school that is trusted and appreciated by the community.

The Influence of Teacher Competence on the Effectiveness of Strengthening School Branding in Realizing Superior Schools

Teachers are the spearhead in the implementation of education and play an important role in shaping the image and identity of the school in the eyes of the public. In the context of strengthening *school branding*, teachers are not only teachers in the classroom, but also ambassadors of values, culture, and quality of the school. Teacher competencies that include pedagogic, professional, social, and personality competencies are the main factors that determine how effectively a school can present itself as a superior educational institution.

The quality of teacher competence reflects the extent to which schools are able to provide quality and competitive educational services. Teachers who have high pedagogic competence are able to create a meaningful, innovative, and student-centered learning process (Suryadhinigrat *et al.*, 2022). This forms a positive learning experience that directly strengthens the school's image as an institution that produces quality graduates. Meanwhile, professional competence shows mastery of materials, methods, and teachers' ability to integrate technology in learning. Professional teachers are not only oriented to academic results, but also to the development of students' character and creativity so that these two aspects are an added value in building a school's *brand image* (Wijaya *et al.*, 2023).

The results of a study by Zulfikasari *et al.*, (2025) show that increasing teachers' competence in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has a significant influence on the ability of schools to carry out digital promotion and branding. After the training, the average score of teachers' ability to manage digital media for school promotion increased from 2.31 to 3.65 on a scale of 4. This shows that skilled teachers using social media, school websites, and other digital platforms can increase public visibility and trust in schools.

In addition to digital competence, teachers' social abilities and personalities also play a very important role in building the school's reputation. Teachers who are able to communicate well with students, parents, and the community will strengthen the emotional connection between the school and its public. As stated by Akbar and Imaniyati (2019), teachers are a reflection of school values and culture which indirectly becomes the most effective branding media because of their direct interaction with students and the community. The example of teachers in attitude, ethics, and achievement are non-formal factors that also determine public perception of school quality.

In a study conducted by Budiarti *et al.*, (2023) it was found that schools with a high level of teacher competence tend to have more effective branding strategies. Innovative teachers are often involved in scientific publication activities, educational competitions, and character-based curriculum development that strengthens the school's appeal. Teachers' participation in national and local forums also increases the school's exposure and increases its reputation in the community. In today's digital and competitive era, people not only judge schools based on accreditation or facilities, but also on the quality of perceived interactions, both directly and through social media. Teachers who are active and competent in creating educational content or communicating school activities play a big role in strengthening the positive image of the institution. Schools with teachers who are highly competent in public communication and digital-based learning experience an increase in public trust of up to 40% compared to schools that are not active in the publication of activities (Kasmiati, 2022).

Thus, it can be emphasized that teacher competence has a direct and indirect influence on the effectiveness of strengthening *school branding*. Direct influence can be seen from improving the quality of learning and student achievement, while indirect influence appears through reputation, public communication, and public trust in schools. Competent teachers create superior learning, positive social interaction, and a strong professional image, thus making a real contribution to realizing superior schools that are known, trusted, and in demand by the community.

CONCLUSION

Building a superior school identity depends not only on physical facilities and academic achievement, but especially on the principal's transformational leadership strength and professional teacher competence. The transformational leadership of school principals plays a strategic role in shaping the vision, culture, and values of the school which are the basis for strengthening school branding. A school principal who is visionary, inspiring, and able to be an example will foster a spirit of collective work and a positive organizational culture in the school environment. Transformational leadership also encourages innovation, collaboration, and motivation for teachers to develop themselves, thereby creating a learning environment that is superior and adaptive to changing times. School principals

who practice value-based, empathy, and participatory leadership have been proven to be able to increase teacher loyalty and strengthen the positive image of the school in the community.

Teacher competence has a significant influence on the effectiveness of strengthening school branding in realizing superior schools. Teachers who are pedagogically competent, professionally, socially, and personality are not only able to create quality learning, but also become a representation of the values and character of the school in the eyes of the public. Teachers who are innovative in learning, actively excel, and able to utilize information technology for the publication of school activities also expand the reach of the school's positive image. Teachers' competence in building good communication with students, parents, and the community also strengthens public trust in the quality of these educational institutions.

Thus, it can be concluded that the synergy between the transformational leadership of the principal and the competence of teachers is the main foundation in building a superior school identity and strengthening school branding. These two aspects are interconnected with transformative leadership creating a professional culture and work climate that supports the improvement of teacher competence, while competent teachers reinforce the school's image through performance, creativity, and positive social relationships. Finally, schools that successfully integrate transformational leadership and teacher competency development in a sustainable manner will be able to foster public trust, increase competitiveness, and become superior educational institutions that are not only known for their achievements, but also for their character, values, and contribution to the progress of national education.

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