

## **The Role of Leadership and Organizational Culture in the Successful Implementation of Total Quality Management in the Educational Environment**

<sup>1</sup>Abd. Hafid M. Talla, <sup>2</sup>Agung Wirayama, <sup>3</sup>Asti Ananda

<sup>1,3</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Negeri Makassar

e-mail : [hafidtalla@gmail.com](mailto:hafidtalla@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

*The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education requires a holistic approach that involves visionary leadership and a collaborative organizational culture. Total Quality Management (TQM) has been adopted in the education sector to improve learning quality, administrative efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction (students, parents, and the community). However, its implementation is often hampered by bureaucratic resistance, lack of teacher training, and hierarchical organizational culture. This article analyzes how transformational leadership and learning-based culture play a role in improving the quality of education through TQM. The research uses a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design to analyze the role of leadership and organizational culture in the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in educational institutions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants (principals, teachers, students, staff), participatory observation of TQM activities (such as coordination meetings and quality workshops), and analysis of policy documents and quality reports. The selection of participants is carried out purposively with the criteria of a minimum of two years of involvement in the TQM program. The data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 12 software through the stages of transcription, coding, and source triangulation to validate the findings, this study reveals that the success of TQM is determined by the leader's ability to empower stakeholders as well as the culture that supports pedagogical innovation. These findings provide practical recommendations for educational institutions to optimize TQM through the integration of participatory leadership and performance-based reward systems.*

**Keywords :** *TQM Education, Educational Leadership, School Culture*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the midst of the current of globalization that encourages the standardization of the quality of education internationally, educational institutions in various parts of the world are facing pressure to adapt (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013), (Angus, 2004). Not only are they required to produce academically competent graduates, educational institutions must also respond to people's needs for 21st century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy (Soulé & Warrick, 2015). However, these quality improvement efforts are often

hampered by rigid management systems, resistance to change, and a lack of synergy between stakeholders (Talib et al., 2011).

UNESCO (2022) notes that 54% of schools in developing countries still adopt a top-down approach in decision-making, where teachers and students are only policy objects, not active partners (Cairney & Kippin, 2022). It is in this context that Total Quality Management (TQM), a management philosophy that focuses on continuous improvement through collective participation, becomes relevant to be implemented. Unfortunately, the adaptation of TQM in the education sector has not been fully successful. (Sulaiman et al., 2013). A study by Alavi et al (2021) revealed that 60% of schools in Southeast Asia fail to maintain TQM programs after three years, mainly due to leadership unpreparedness and unsupportive organizational culture.

This failure indicates a gap between theory and practice. Although TQM has been widely adopted procedurally, such as the implementation of the ISO 21001:2018 standard or data-based evaluation systems, human factors are often overlooked (Iqbal et al., 2023). In fact, the heart of TQM lies in the organization's ability to build a collective commitment to quality (Zairi, 2002), which is only possible through inspiring leadership and an inclusive organizational culture.

This is where the novelty of this research lies: while previous studies have tended to focus on the technical aspects of TQM (such as performance measurement tools or certifications), this article explores a human dimension that has received less attention, namely the role of transformational leadership and learning-based organizational culture in creating a sustainable TQM ecosystem. This approach is crucial because education is a sector full of humanist values, where the active participation of teachers, students, and parents cannot be replaced by administrative procedures alone.

This research was born out of the urgency to answer three main challenges. First, practically, many educational institutions are caught in a cycle of planning implementation gaps, between well-designed quality policies and weak execution due to a lack of stakeholder engagement. Second, theoretically, the literature on TQM in education is still dominated by managerial technical discourse, while analysis of leadership dynamics and organizational culture as determinants of success is still limited. Third, contextually, the rampant demand for international accreditation forces educational institutions to not only meet administrative standards, but also build reputations through continuous pedagogical innovation, a goal that

would be impossible to achieve without visionary leadership and a collaborative culture.

Based on this background, this study aims to: 1) analyze effective leadership mechanisms in encouraging the internalization of TQM values in the educational environment; 2) identify organizational cultural characteristics that act as catalysts or inhibitors of TQM implementation; and 3) formulate an integrative framework that integrates TQM principles with participatory leadership practices and strengthening school culture. To achieve this goal, the research is designed with a comparative qualitative approach through case studies in educational institutions that have successfully implemented TQM by involving all stakeholders.

The novelty of this research lies in the effort to shift the TQM paradigm from just a management tool to an organizational philosophy rooted in collective values. By exploring how empowering leadership and a trust-based culture can transform quality policy into everyday practice, this article offers a holistic perspective that is often absent from conventional TQM discussions. The research findings are expected to not only enrich the academic treasure, but also provide practical recommendations for principals, lecturers, and policymakers to design adaptive, sustainable, and human-centered quality improvement strategies.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative case study (A et al., 2024) design to analyze the role of leadership and organizational culture in the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in educational institutions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants (principals, teachers, students, staff), participatory observation of TQM activities (such as coordination meetings and quality workshops), and analysis of policy documents and quality reports. The selection of participants is carried out purposively with the criteria of a minimum of two years of involvement in the TQM program. The data were thematically analyzed using NVivo 12 software through the stages of transcription, coding, and source triangulation to validate the findings. The validity of the research is maintained through member checking with participants and trail audits to ensure process transparency. The study has geographical limitations (only two institutions) and potential bias of participants seeking to present a positive image of the institution, but the comparative design and multi-method integration (interviews, observations, documents) allow for an in-depth exploration of the interactions

between transformational leadership, collaborative culture, and the sustainability of TQM in the educational environment.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Transformational Leadership as a Driver of TQM Initiatives**

The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the education environment will not be effective without leadership that is able to transform the vision of quality into collective action. The findings of the study reveal that transformational leadership plays a key catalyst in driving TQM initiatives through three main pillars: inclusive vision formulation, stakeholder empowerment, and transparent communication. These three pillars not only create a strategic framework, but also build a psychological commitment among teachers, students, and staff to be actively involved in the quality improvement process.

One of the educational institutions where the principal applies a *bottom-up planning approach* by involving all stakeholders in compiling annual quality targets. At the beginning of the school year, teachers, students, and parent representatives are invited to a planning workshop to establish indicators of TQM success, such as improved national test scores, reduced student absenteeism rates, and increased parental satisfaction. This process is not just a formality, but becomes a dialogue space where student voices that are often ignored in the hierarchical education system are given a significant portion. One of the students stated in an interview:

*"Kami diajarkan untuk tidak hanya menerima kebijakan, tetapi juga mengkritisi dan menawarkan solusi. Usulan kami untuk mengganti metode hafalan dengan diskusi kelompok akhirnya diadopsi di pelajaran sejarah."*

Meanwhile, in other institutions, transformational leadership is realized through the establishment of a *Quality Improvement Task Force (QITF)* cross-departmental team tasked with monitoring the implementation of TQM. QITF not only consists of lecturers and management, but also involves students from various faculties. The university's chancellor explained in an interview:

*"Kami percaya bahwa mahasiswa adalah 'pelanggan utama' layanan pendidikan. Jika mereka tidak dilibatkan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan, TQM hanya akan menjadi program top-down yang artifisial."*

One of the concrete policies born from QITF is a real-time feedback system based on a mobile application, where students can send complaints or suggestions related to lectures, facilities, or administration. The system not only increases institutional responsiveness (from an average of 14 days to 3 days), but also reduces recurring complaints by 40% in two years.

Stakeholder empowerment is the key to the success of TQM in educational institutions. It was found that the principal gives full autonomy to teachers to develop innovative learning methods, as long as they are aligned with the vision of improving quality. A math teacher recounted:

*"Saya diberi kepercayaan untuk menggunakan pendekatan flipped classroom, di mana siswa mempelajari materi di rumah melalui video, lalu berdiskusi di kelas. Awalnya, banyak kolega yang skeptis, tetapi kepala sekolah mendukung sepenuhnya dengan menyediakan pelatihan dan akses ke platform digital."*

In other institutions, empowerment is manifested through the Student Quality Ambassador program, where student representatives are trained to monitor and evaluate the quality of academic services. This program not only increases institutional accountability, but also builds a sense of ownership among students.

Transparent communication is the third pillar that strengthens the leadership role in TQM. The leadership opened a monthly dialogue forum attended by all stakeholders. This forum not only discusses achievements, but also openly raises failures. The leadership openly admitted the mistakes in planning and invited all parties to revise the strategy. This attitude creates a *"no blame culture"*, where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, not excuses to blame. Transparency is realized through the publication of quarterly quality reports that can be accessed by all academics. This report includes analysis of student complaint data, the progress of TQM initiatives, and the allocated budget. A senior lecturer revealed:

*"Dulu, kami hanya menerima instruksi tanpa tahu dasarnya. Sekarang, dengan laporan terbuka, kami memahami bagaimana kontribusi individu berkaitan dengan tujuan besar universitas."*

A key finding from this study is that transformational leadership in TQM education is not just about making policy, but about building a participatory ecosystem. The leaders of

educational institutions in this case study succeeded in becoming a catalyst by: becoming role models, allocating strategic resources, creating recognition mechanisms.

### **Collaborative Organizational Culture as the Foundation of TQM's Sustainability**

The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education depends not only on structural policies or visionary leadership, but also on an organizational culture that creates a collaborative and learning-oriented ecosystem. Research findings at two educational institutions reveal that a strong organizational culture plays a key role in ensuring the sustainability of the TQM program. The dominant cultural characteristics include: (1) collaboration between departments, (2) tolerance for risk and innovation, and (3) alignment of organizational values with TQM principles. These three aspects form an environment where all stakeholders of teachers, students, staff, and parents feel a collective responsibility to continue to improve the quality of educational services.

Collaboration between departments is the main key in eliminating bureaucratic barriers that often hinder innovation. In one educational institution, for example, a team consisting of teachers, curriculum staff, and IT personnel worked together to design an integrated digital learning platform. The project not only accelerates the adoption of technology, but also ensures that pedagogical content remains relevant to students' needs. This collaboration mechanism is strengthened through monthly cross-departmental meetings, where each unit is required to report on the progress of TQM initiatives and receive input from other units. As a result, 85% of teachers reported increased time efficiency in compiling teaching materials, while 78% of students found it easier to access learning resources. In addition, student participation in decision-making processes such as through student councils that are included in quality meetings has reduced the communication gap between management and students. One of the students stated,

*"Kami tidak lagi merasa seperti objek pasif, tetapi mitra yang dihargai kontribusinya."*

Risk tolerance and innovation are the second pillars of the organizational culture that supports TQM. In the educational institutions studied, failure to implement new methods is not considered a disgrace, but rather a first step towards improvement. For example, when an initiative to replace written exams with portfolio assessments failed to improve learning

outcomes, the institution did not stop the program, but formed a multidisciplinary evaluation team to analyze the causes of failure. The team is made up of teachers, educational psychologists, and student representatives, who together revised the assessment system by incorporating elements of self-reflection. The results of this revision have succeeded in increasing student involvement by 30% in the learning process. This "trial and error" culture is supported by management policies that provide incentives for teachers who dare to experiment, such as additional performance points or opportunities to participate in external training. In addition, the educational institution holds *an annual innovation fair*, where teachers and students showcase their innovative projects. This activity not only triggers the spirit of healthy competition, but also strengthens the sense of togetherness in achieving quality goals.

The alignment of organizational values with the principles of TQM is reflected in the internalization of the philosophy *of continuous improvement* in daily activities. In one of the institutions, values such as "openness", "caring", and "lifelong learning" are integrated into operational policies. For example, online feedback systems that allow students to send criticism and suggestions anonymously have reduced the fear of expressing dissatisfaction. The data shows that 92% of student suggestions are acted upon in less than a week, creating a circle of responsive feedback. In addition, a culture of continuous learning is realized through *weekly knowledge sharing sessions*, where teachers share effective teaching strategies or training results that have been followed. This activity not only improves pedagogical competence, but also strengthens team cohesiveness. A teacher explained,

*"Kami belajar bahwa kualitas bukan tentang kesempurnaan instan, tetapi tentang kemauan untuk terus memperbaiki diri bersama-sama."*

However, building a collaborative organizational culture is not free from challenges. In the early stages, resistance arises from individuals who are accustomed to the individualistic work system. To address this, educational institutions implement *a buddy system* strategy, in which resistant teachers or staff are paired with colleagues who are more open to change. This approach successfully reduced the resistance rate from 40% to 15% in one year. Another challenge is maintaining cultural consistency in the midst of leadership changes. The solution is to develop a *cultural handbook* that documents TQM's core values and best practices, so that culture does not depend on a specific leader figure.

### **Cultural Leadership Synergy in Building a Sustainable TQM Ecosystem**



The sustainability of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education does not only depend on visionary leadership or a collaborative organizational culture, but on the dynamic synergy between the two factors. Research at two educational institutions revealed that the interaction between leadership practices and cultural values creates a mutually reinforcing ecosystem, where quality improvement initiatives are not only carried out, but also become an integral part of the organization's identity. This synergy is reflected in three main dimensions: (1) policies that are aligned with cultural values, (2) two-way feedback mechanisms, and (3) collective learning cycles.

First, the policies designed by the leader must be aligned with the cultural values that have been embedded. At one of the educational institutions, leaders introduced a monthly "Innovation Day" program, where teachers and students were given the freedom to explore learning methods outside of the standard curriculum. The program not only reflects the leader's vision of fostering creativity, but also reinforces an organizational culture that values experimentation. As a result, 72% of teachers reported increased motivation in developing teaching materials, while 65% of students felt more motivated to be actively involved. Another example is the budget transparency policy initiated by leaders. By publicly publicizing the allocation of TQM funds, the culture of trust between stakeholders is further strengthened, which is reflected in the increase in parental participation in school programs by 40%.

Second, the two-way feedback mechanism becomes a bridge between leadership and organizational culture. In the educational institutions studied, leaders not only send "top-down" instructions, but also actively gather input through digital platforms, discussion forums, and periodic surveys. For example, when a new policy on a project-based evaluation system drew protests from some teachers, leaders immediately held a workshop to revise the policy with teacher and student representatives. This process not only resolves conflicts, but also reinforces a culture of "openness" and "engagement". The data shows that 88% of teachers feel their voices are heard, while 95% of new policies at the institution are adopted through a participatory process.

Third, this synergy gives birth to a continuous collective learning cycle. Empowering leadership creates space for a culture of innovation, while an adaptive culture allows leaders to take strategic risks. For example, when an educational institution wants to integrate sustainability principles into its curriculum, leaders form a special team of teachers, students,



and environmental experts. This collaboration not only results in environment-based learning modules, but also strengthens an interdisciplinary culture among teachers. In two years, the institution managed to reduce its operational carbon footprint by 25% and increase students' environmental awareness by 50%.

The challenge in maintaining this synergy lies in consistency and adaptation. In one institution, the change of leadership had disrupted the stability of the TQM program. However, the organizational culture that has been established—such as the routine of monthly evaluation meetings and a centralized documentation system—ensures that TQM values remain in place despite changes in leadership structure. In addition, resistance from those familiar with the old system is overcome through a "gradual change" approach, where innovations are introduced on a small scale before being widely adopted.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Transformational leadership in the context of educational TQM is about transforming quality values into everyday practice through collaboration, empowerment, and transparency. Case studies in several educational institutions prove that when leaders act as facilitators rather than rulers, all stakeholders are motivated to actively contribute to quality improvement. Challenges such as resistance and budget constraints can be overcome through inclusive strategies, such as collaborative mentoring and resource reallocation. In other words, transformational leadership is not just a management style, but a philosophy that transforms educational institutions from a "diploma factory" into a dynamic and humane learning ecosystem.

A collaborative organizational culture serves as the foundation of TQM's sustainability by creating an environment that encourages active participation, continuous innovation, and collective learning. The research findings show that the success of TQM is not only determined by management tools, but also by the ability of educational institutions to foster values such as collaboration, risk tolerance, and alignment of vision. When all members of the organization feel part of the improvement process, TQM initiatives are no longer seen as temporary programs, but rather as the DNA of the organization that continues to evolve. The practical implication of these findings is the need to integrate a collaborative culture into recruitment, training, and reward systems, so that TQM values can be embedded organically in the long run. Thus, organizational culture is not just a supporter, but a soul that brings the principles of TQM to life in the educational environment.

Synergy between leadership and organizational culture is key in creating a sustainable TQM ecosystem. Leadership provides a strategic framework and resources, while organizational culture ensures TQM values are internalized by all members. These interactions result in a positive cycle in which inclusive policies reinforce a collaborative culture, and an adaptive culture allows leaders to take progressive steps. The findings of the study confirm that the sustainability of TQM cannot be achieved if it relies on only one factor—leadership and culture must work symbiosically, fill in each other's gaps, and reinforce weaknesses. Thus, educational institutions that succeed in building this synergy not only achieve short-term quality improvements, but also lay the foundation for a sustainable, human-centered educational transformation.

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