APPRECIATIVE LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION: CULTIVATING POSITIVE CULTURE AND ENHANCING COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Riwayat Artikel	Abstract
	This study aims to explore the practice of appreciative leadership in school settings and its impact on the development of a positive culture and the enhancement of collective performance. Employing a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, the research involved principals and teachers from primary and secondary education institutions in Jakarta, Indonesia, as research subjects. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and were analysed using inductive thematic techniques. The findings revealed five key themes: (1) appreciation functions as a driver of a positive school culture; (2) reflective and empathic communication serves as the foundation of effective leadership; (3) teacher empowerment is carried out through trust and the delegation of strategic responsibilities; (4) appreciative social relations foster collective teacher efficacy; and (5) the alignment between leaders' personal values and the school's organizational culture strengthens leadership effectiveness. These findings reinforce previous literature on appreciative leadership, compassionate leadership, and emotional regulation in educational leadership. The study contributes to the development of a contextual, reflective, and well-being-oriented conceptual framework of appreciative leadership in education. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal and quantitative approaches to enhance the validity of findings and examine the broader impact of leadership on student learning outcomes. **Keywords:** appreciative leadership, positive school culture, collective performance, teacher efficacy, educational well-being
	Abstrak
	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi praktik kepemimpinan apresiatif di lingkungan sekolah serta dampaknya terhadap pembentukan budaya positif dan peningkatan kinerja kolektif. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus intrinsik, melibatkan kepala sekolah dan guru dari satuan pendidikan dasar dan menengah di Kota Jakarta, Indonesia sebagai subjek penelitian. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik tematik-induktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan lima temuan utama: (1) apresiasi berperan sebagai penggerak budaya positif; (2) komunikasi reflektif dan empatik menjadi fondasi kepemimpinan yang efektif; (3) pemberdayaan guru dilakukan melalui kepercayaan dan pelimpahan tanggung jawab strategis; (4) relasi sosial apresiatif membentuk efikasi kolektif; dan (5) keselarasan nilai pribadi pemimpin dengan budaya organisasi menjadi faktor penguat dalam keberhasilan kepemimpinan. Temuan ini memperkuat literatur sebelumnya mengenai appreciative leadership, compassionate leadership, dan regulasi emosi dalam kepemimpinan pendidikan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kerangka konseptual kepemimpinan apresiatif yang kontekstual, reflektif, dan berorientasi kesejahteraan dalam dunia pendidikan. Saran penelitian selanjutnya mencakup pendekatan longitudinal dan kuantitatif untuk memperluas validitas temuan dan dampak kepemimpinan terhadap hasil belajar peserta didik.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of educational complexity, school leadership can no longer be understood merely as an administrative function. Instead, it must be transformed into an organizational force capable of fostering a healthy, inclusive, and adaptive school culture (Schophuizen et al., 2023; Dai, et al., 2025). Social, technological, and psychological shifts triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic have redirected leadership orientation toward approaches that are more empathetic, appreciative, and well-being-oriented (Muss et al., 2025). In this context, appreciative leadership emerges as a new paradigm that emphasizes strengths, potential, and the recognition of accomplishments and contributions within the school community (Orr & Innes, 2015; Saleh et al., 2024; Okçu et al., 2025). This leadership approach is believed to foster more meaningful and sustainable collective performance. Amidst the global trend of performativity and managerialism in educational leadership, the appreciative approach offers a strategic alternative to building constructive and empowering relationships among leaders, teachers, and all school stakeholders.

Recent studies affirm that the central challenge in post-crisis leadership lies in balancing organizational structural demands with the emotional and psychological needs of educators. Jambarsang et al. (2025) assert that post-pandemic educational leaders must strengthen constructive communication, honesty, and professional accountability in responding to the growing complexity of the education system. This supports the need for leadership approaches that go beyond outcomes, focusing instead on the human dimension of educational practice. The concept of compassionate leadership, as reviewed by Ramachandran et al. (2023), highlights the importance of empathy, open communication, and respect for human dignity within leadership practice. These dimensions are inherently aligned with the principles of appreciative leadership, which views the school community as a social-emotional ecosystem to be nurtured and empowered.

Furthermore, in the context of digitalization and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, the role of school leaders has become increasingly complex. According to Sposato (2025), educational leaders are now required to manage not only pedagogical dimensions, but also the ethical, strategic, and technological aspects of the institutions they lead. Strength-based appreciative leadership grounded in trust and collective vision can serve as a foundation for adaptive and ethical decision-making amidst digital transformation in schools. By critically understanding and integrating technology, appreciative leaders ensure that innovation remains aligned with teacher well-being and student learning. This is crucial, as digitalization often blurs the boundaries between work and non-work life, introducing new pressures on teachers' work-life balance (Granville-Chapman et al., 2024).

As teaching becomes increasingly complex, leadership that supports educators' emotional and psychological well-being is imperative. Czakert and Berger (2024) reveal that the relationship between leadership and teacher well-being remains underexplored, particularly in terms of spillover and recovery processes between work and non-work domains. Their study emphasizes that leaders who serve both as a buffer to workplace stress and as an energizing force for the school community demonstrate strong positive leadership competencies. In this regard, appreciative leadership is not merely an

alternative—it is a necessary approach to address the dual challenges of well-being and professional resilience among teachers.

From a practical standpoint, Eyal et al. (2024) illustrate that school leaders who are attuned to teachers' interpersonal emotional processes—especially through emotional reframing mechanisms—are more likely to enhance organizational commitment and foster positive collective emotions within the school environment. Such leaders are often described as "under-estimators" or "in-agreement/good leaders," characterized by humility, reflection, and sensitivity to teachers' emotional dynamics, as well as a continuous drive for self-improvement. This empirical evidence affirms that the positive impact of leadership lies not only in communication style or managerial policy but in the relational capacity and emotional awareness leaders hold within their school communities.

As Morrison (2024) notes, educational leadership cannot be separated from the socio-political realities that shape educational spaces and practices. Integrating political dimensions into education leadership broadens leaders' critical awareness of power dynamics, neoliberal policies, and performative pressures that often erode teacher autonomy and well-being. Within this context, appreciative leadership should be understood not merely as a positive management technique, but as a liberatory strategy that enables school communities to reclaim the true meaning of education: relational, collaborative, and humanizing (Whitacre, 2025).

Thus, studying appreciative leadership in schools is of high importance both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches leadership literature by offering a strength-based, emotionally relational, and socially just perspective. Practically, it provides concrete guidance for principals and educational stakeholders in fostering a positive working climate and enhancing collective teacher efficacy. Moreover, the appreciative approach offers an ethical and reflective decision-making framework, especially relevant amidst digital transformation and evolving socio-political pressures in education.

Based on the conceptual and empirical foundation presented, the research question guiding this study is: "How does the implementation of appreciative leadership in schools shape a positive culture and enhance the collective performance of educational communities?". This question will be addressed through a systematic exploration of the literature and an in-depth understanding of emotional dynamics, leadership values, teacher well-being, and school organizational structures as transformative arenas of practice.

METOHOD

This study employed a qualitative exploratory approach with an intrinsic case study design, aiming to deeply explore the practice of appreciative leadership within the school context. This design was selected as it allows the researcher to understand the meaning, processes, and sociocultural dynamics underlying leadership actions in complex and contextual situations, particularly in the post-pandemic setting as highlighted in the longitudinal study by Jambarsang et al. (2025). The research subjects included principals and teachers from primary and secondary education institutions in Jakarta, Indonesia, identified as practicing appreciative-based leadership. The sample was selected purposively, based on criteria of principals who demonstrated collaborative, empathetic, and transformative leadership styles, as recommended in the literature on emotional-based leadership and collective teacher efficacy.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation within the school environment, and document analysis, including

school policies, teacher team meeting notes, and documentation of recognition programs and school culture-building initiatives. The research instruments were developed with reference to principles of professional behaviour assessment and leadership practices in crisis contexts as outlined by Jambarsang et al. (2025), as well as the dimensions of empathy, communication, and commitment elaborated in the compassionate leadership framework by Ramachandran et al. (2023). Data collection was carried out over a three-month period using a triangulated procedure, with weekly visits and layered tracking to capture the longitudinal dynamics of leadership in decision-making processes and collective cultural formation within the school.

All data were analysed using an inductive thematic approach, including the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as commonly applied in systematic and scoping reviews in leadership studies. Data validation was ensured through member checking, audit trails, and collaborative discussions among researchers to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The analysis process was directed at uncovering consistent patterns of appreciative leadership practices, as well as the structural and psychosocial factors that mediate the success of implementing appreciative values within the educational community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals five key findings related to appreciative leadership practices in schools: (1) appreciation as a driver of positive culture, (2) reflective and empathetic communication as the foundation of leadership, (3) teacher empowerment based on trust and recognition, (4) the development of collective efficacy through the strengthening of social relations, and (5) the alignment between the leader's personal values and the school's organizational culture.

1. Appreciation as a Driver of Positive Culture

The majority of respondents indicated that expressions of appreciation—both verbal and symbolic—are essential elements in creating a conducive work atmosphere and fostering collective morale. Appreciation was given through open praise during meetings, certificates of recognition, or name mentions in school newsletters. The principal consistently used affirmative approaches to foster teachers' sense of belonging to the institution. One teacher shared:

"When I successfully developed a teaching module that was distributed to all classes, the principal mentioned my name during the morning assembly and gave me a certificate of appreciation. It made me feel valued as an important part of this school." (Interview, T-2)

Observational data showed that recognition was given not only for end results, but also for processes, small initiatives, and informal social roles—such as teachers helping colleagues with technical challenges during online learning.

2. Reflective and Empathetic Communication as the Foundation of Leadership

All school principals involved in the study emphasized open communication and active listening as the foundation of their leadership. They provided weekly informal forums where teachers could express feelings, ideas, or concerns without fear of being corrected or dismissed. One principal explained:

"I don't just listen to technical issues, but also to teachers' personal stories. Once, a teacher was stressed due to family problems, so I gave them time to talk and take a break. That's how I build trust." (Interview, P-1)

Field notes revealed that two-way communication fostered a more inclusive and open work environment. Additionally, the regular use of positive and symbolic language—such as "thank you," "I'm proud of this team," and "this is the result of our joint effort"—became a recurring pattern in daily interactions.

3. Teacher Empowerment Based on Trust and Recognition

Another key finding shows that appreciative leaders tend to delegate tasks based on teachers' potential and provide space for personal initiative. There was no excessive control; instead, the supervisory system encouraged professional autonomy. A teacher noted:

"I was given full trust to design a science project-based learning approach. The principal just said, 'I believe in you, feel free to experiment, and let me know if you need technical support.' That was really encouraging." (Interview, T-4)

The data also showed that assigning responsibilities was not intended as an added burden, but as a form of acknowledgment of the teacher's competence.

4. Building Collective Efficacy Through Appreciative Social Relations

Several respondents stated that appreciation-based leadership successfully fostered teacher solidarity and a shared sense of ownership toward the school's goals. Teachers felt that the school's success was a collective achievement. A senior teacher shared:

"*Whenever a teacher succeeds, everyone celebrates. There's no envy—just mutual encouragement. That's because the principal always says, 'One teacher's success reflects a strong team.*" (Interview, T-5)

During an observation of a weekly staff meeting, it was noted that the principal created space for spontaneous peer-to-peer appreciation. One teacher publicly thanked a colleague for helping create a video-based learning module.

5. Alignment Between the Leader's Personal Values and Organizational Culture

Effective appreciative leadership was found to occur when the leader's personal values aligned with the school's vision, mission, and cultural norms. In this case, the principals held value orientations such as trust, empathy, and fairness, which were internalized into organizational practices. A principal stated:

"*I believe that every teacher here wants to do their best. I don't feel the need for strict control. What matters is that we all know where we're headed and trust each other along the way.*" (Interview, P-2)

This alignment was also evident in school policies that allowed space for reflection, self-development, and collective learning.

Table 1. *Forms of Appreciation Found in Schools*

| Form of Appreciation	Frequency of Occurrence	Primary Subjects
Verbal praise during meetings	17 out of 20 informants	Teachers and administrative staff
Certificates of recognition	12 out of 20 informants	Program-implementing teachers
Public acknowledgment in school media	13 out of 20 informants	High-achieving teachers
Assignment of strategic responsibilities	16 out of 20 informants	Innovative teachers
Form of Appreciation	Frequency of Occurrence	Primary Subjects
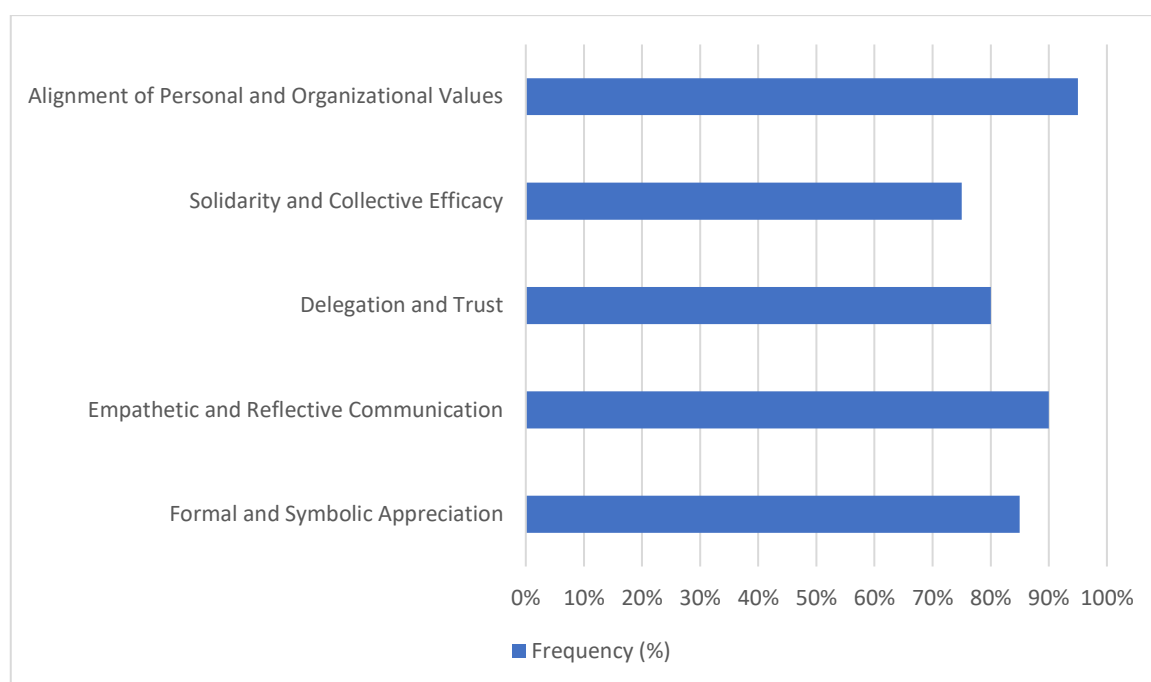
Figure 1. *Key Themes of the Findings by Frequency*

This study makes a significant contribution to expanding the understanding of appreciative leadership practices in schools, particularly in relation to organizational cultural transformation, collective performance enhancement, and teacher well-being. The five key findings—appreciation as a driver of positive culture, reflective and empathetic communication, empowerment through trust, the formation of collective efficacy, and the alignment between personal leadership values and organizational culture—demonstrate that appreciative leadership is not merely normative but is actively practiced and yields a meaningful impact in educational settings. These findings closely align with the existing literature you have referenced.

The first finding, that appreciation serves as a driver of positive culture, aligns with Armstrong et al. (2020), who assert that appreciative inquiry (AI) is not just a motivational technique but an organizational paradigm that focuses on strengths, achievements, and potential as the basis for collective growth. In educational contexts, appreciation not only boosts morale but also shapes a positive professional identity for teachers. This is supported by Whitacre (2025), who found that AI enhances participants' confidence and sense of belonging in capacity-building programs. Therefore, this study affirms the validity of using an appreciative approach in schools as a means to build a productive and supportive organizational culture.

The second finding, regarding the importance of reflective and empathetic communication in leadership, resonates with the concept of compassionate leadership as elaborated by Ramachandran et al. (2023). Their study suggests that leadership grounded in empathy, openness, and respect for human dignity fosters a psychologically safe work environment. The present study demonstrates that principals who engage in empathetic two-way communication are able to build interpersonal trust and emotional connection with their teachers—factors that significantly strengthen teacher loyalty, motivation, and engagement with the school's mission (Wang et al., 2025).

The third finding, teacher empowerment through trust-based delegation and appreciation, is consistent with Eyal et al. (2024), who emphasized that leaders who provide space and psychological support through emotional reframing have a positive influence on organizational commitment and collective emotional well-being. When principals express confidence in teachers' potential, teachers tend to demonstrate greater initiative and experience a stronger sense of purpose within the organization (Chiriac et al., 2024). Zadok et al. (2025) further reinforce this by showing that leaders with open, optimistic, and supportive personalities positively impact teachers' collective efficacy, especially when supported by adequate resources. These findings

bolster the theoreticalss position that appreciative leadership is not merely about fostering "good feelings," but rather has concrete effects on teacher performance by enhancing agency and self-efficacy (Zheng et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2023).

The fourth finding, the formation of collective efficacy through appreciative social relationships, aligns with Mincu (2022), who argued that educational transformation requires collective leadership that fosters a culture of collaboration, trust, and shared learning. An appreciative culture within the school community functions as a form of social glue, uniting different organizational elements around a shared vision. In the broader context of global educational challenges, this highlights the need for change driven by collaboration and collective learning, rather than top-down decision-making (Al-Zu'bi et al., 2024; Thien & Liu, 2024).

The fifth finding, concerning the alignment of personal values with organizational culture, highlights a crucial dimension of value integrity in leadership. This aligns with Morrison (2024), who emphasized the importance of political, historical, and ethical awareness in educational leadership. When school leaders' personal values align with the organizational culture, their leadership feels authentic and carries moral legitimacy in the eyes of teachers (Gomes, 2023; Soomro et al., 2024; Agazu et al., 2025). This supports reflective and critical approaches to leadership that go beyond technocratic narratives and take into account the humanistic and social justice dimensions of education.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study enriches the conceptual framework of appreciative leadership by integrating elements from compassionate leadership, emotional leadership, and transformational leadership into school-based leadership practices. In the context of digitalization and artificial intelligence, these findings are also crucial for balancing the technocratic tendencies of modern educational leadership. As Sposato (2025) suggested, leadership in the AI era requires a balance between administrative efficiency and ethical-relational sensitivity. The appreciative leadership identified in this study demonstrates an ability to meet those demands while preserving humanity and collectivity in decision-making (Choong & Ng, 2024).

Another significant contribution of this study is its relevance to the development of a contextual, empathetic, and values-based leadership model for post-pandemic educational institutions. Czakert and Berger (2024) emphasized the importance of leadership that attends to the balance between work and non-work domains to ensure teacher well-being. This study illustrates how appreciative leadership can function both as a buffer against workplace stress and as a booster for teachers' psychological recovery through social mechanisms such as team support and symbolic recognition. In other words, appreciative leadership produces a dual effect: enhancing performance while promoting well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that appreciative leadership in schools plays a central role in fostering a positive culture, enhancing teachers' collective efficacy, and creating a work climate conducive to the emotional well-being of the educational community. The five key findings—appreciation as a cultural driver, reflective and empathetic communication, trust-based teacher empowerment, the development of collective efficacy through social relationships, and the alignment of leaders' personal values with organizational culture—demonstrate that appreciative leadership is not merely symbolic, but can be practically enacted in the everyday life of schools. This approach reinforces prior literature suggesting that strength-based and recognition-driven leadership has a significant impact on internal organizational dynamics, including improved performance, teacher loyalty, and the achievement of shared goals.

The primary scholarly contribution of this study lies in its integration of conceptual frameworks from appreciative leadership, compassionate leadership, and emotional regulation into the micro-context of school organizations. This expands the discourse on educational leadership by emphasizing the importance of affective and relational dimensions, while also addressing the contextual needs of post-pandemic schools. The findings further strengthen the notion that school leaders are not only structural managers but also facilitators of relationships,

regulators of collective emotions, and stewards of workplace cultural values. This study is limited to exploring appreciative leadership practices within primary and secondary schools in Jakarta, Indonesia, using an intrinsic case study design. The findings may not be generalized to all educational contexts, as the research focuses on the perceptions and experiences of principals and teachers within the selected institutions. For future research, it is recommended that studies be conducted on a broader scale using a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive and holistic understanding. Quantitative research could be undertaken to examine the relationships between appreciative leadership and indicators such as student performance, teacher efficacy, and educator retention. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to explore how appreciative values become internalized within school cultures over time. Future research may also investigate the role of technology and digital media in either enhancing or hindering appreciative leadership practices in the era of digital transformation in education.

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