

## Exploring the Relationship between Village Head Leadership Styles and Community Engagement in Village Education

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### ABSTRACT

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Community participation is critical for the success of village education programs, particularly in rural areas. However, the role of village head leadership styles in shaping such participation remains underexplored. This study investigates how different leadership styles—particularly participatory, transformational, and authoritarian—influence community engagement in education initiatives at the village level. A mixed methods approach was employed using an exploratory-sequential design. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with village heads, officials, and residents from six villages. The findings from this phase informed the design of a structured survey, which was distributed to 150 respondents across diverse village settings. Quantitative data were analyzed using correlation and regression techniques. The study found that participatory leadership is strongly associated with higher levels of community involvement in village education programs. Villages led by participatory or transformational leaders demonstrated more inclusive planning and stronger program ownership. Conversely, authoritarian leadership correlated with lower participation rates. Socio-economic conditions were found to moderate these relationships; for example, economically disadvantaged villages showed lower participation even under participatory leadership. These results highlight the effectiveness of participatory leadership in fostering educational engagement but also underscore the influence of contextual factors such as income levels and cultural norms. The study confirms that leadership style alone is insufficient without parallel support structures. Leadership development strategies emphasizing inclusivity and empowerment are essential for improving education outcomes in rural communities. Future programs should integrate leadership training with socio-economic support mechanisms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Village head leadership is vital in mobilising community participation across diverse aspects of village development, including education (Sabet & Khaksar, 2024; Heri, 2024; Muhi, 2024). While leadership has been widely recognised in facilitating infrastructure, governance, and economic growth, education programs in rural areas often receive less focused attention. Previous studies treat educational empowerment as an ancillary outcome of development, leaving its relationship to village leadership styles inadequately addressed (Masithah & Rodiyah, 2024; Villaver Jr et al., 2024).

The low level of community participation in village education programs due to varying leadership styles remains underexplored, particularly within contexts characterised by limited educational access and diverse sociocultural conditions (Firdaus & Ritonga, 2024; Jasmin et al., 2024). This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how leadership styles, especially participatory, transformational, and authoritarian, affect community engagement in educational initiatives.

Participatory leadership has been shown to effectively enhance development outcomes by involving the community in planning and implementation (Wang et al., 2022; Prasetyo, 2022). It fosters a sense of ownership and responsiveness in educational programs. Conversely, authoritarian leadership still prominent in villages with traditional, paternalistic social structures can ensure compliance and swift implementation, especially in urgent situations (Wahyuni et al., 2022; Darwis et al., 2021). These contrasting models reflect the nuanced leadership dynamics that exist across rural Indonesia.

Several researchers have emphasised integrating local wisdom into village leadership practices to ensure cultural relevance and community acceptance (Hermawan et al., 2024; Siahaan & Komariah, 2022). However, studies rarely link these culturally embedded leadership practices directly to educational outcomes. Furthermore, the digital transformation of village governance introduces new leadership competencies, especially in utilising technology to expand access to education (H. Utomo et al., 2024; S. B. Utomo et al., 2024).

Education-based village leadership can transform literacy and lifelong learning at the community level. Prominent ideas such as literacy-based leadership (Darwis et al., 2021), digital facilitation, and the inclusion of marginalised groups highlight key strategic roles village heads can assume. Inclusive leadership approaches, for instance, can empower vulnerable populations, including women, children, and economically disadvantaged groups, and foster equitable access to both formal and non-formal education (Jasmin et al., 2024; Ismail & Junus, 2019; Syuhada et al., 2020).

Three theoretical perspectives are adopted to guide this study. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating communities to pursue shared goals, which is ideal for stimulating educational innovation. Participatory Development Theory (Chambers, 1997) posits that sustainable development requires meaningful community involvement, aligning with grassroots-based educational approaches. Community Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000) highlights enhancing individual and collective agency, linking access to education with resilience and social capital.

By integrating these frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how leadership styles promote or hinder educational participation in rural settings. It also addresses external variables such as socioeconomic disparities and cultural norms that shape the outcomes of leadership interventions.

This study is guided by four interrelated research questions that frame the analysis per the objectives outlined. First, it investigates how the leadership style of village heads influences community participation in educational programs within rural contexts. This includes exploring whether inclusive, transformational, or authoritarian leadership approaches foster different levels of engagement. Second, the study seeks to identify which leadership style is most prevalent

among village heads in the selected regions, providing a contextual understanding of current governance practices. Third, it examines the extent to which specific leadership styles correlate with the success and inclusivity of village education programs, particularly in terms of outreach, relevance, and community empowerment. Finally, the research analyses how external factors such as the village community's socioeconomic status and cultural characteristics moderate the relationship between leadership style and educational participation. These questions are designed to uncover nuanced insights into how leadership can drive educational equity and sustainability in rural areas.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopts a mixed methods approach using an exploratory-sequential design to thoroughly investigate how village head leadership styles influence community participation in educational programs (Azhari et al., 2023; Suji et al., 2023). The rationale for this approach lies in the issue's complexity, which requires both qualitative depth and quantitative generalizability. The first phase involves qualitative exploration to uncover contextual leadership patterns, while the second phase applies quantitative methods to test and confirm these findings across a broader population. This design allows the study to move beyond descriptive insights toward empirical validation and theory-building (Khabibullah & Sholahuddin, 2024).

In the qualitative phase, data are collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participatory observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interview guide is divided into three thematic areas: leadership behaviour and decision-making; implementation of educational programs; and community responses. Questions were piloted with two non-sample village officials to ensure clarity and thematic alignment but were not subjected to formal psychometric testing due to their exploratory nature. FGDs were conducted in six villages, each involving six participants—community leaders, educators, and residents—selected through purposive sampling based on gender, age, educational background, and involvement in village education programs. FGD discussions followed a structured guide and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data from both interviews and FGDs were analysed thematically using NVivo or ATLAS.ti (Ronzani et al., 2020), allowing recurring patterns and categories to emerge organically.

The insights gathered from the qualitative stage informed the development of survey instruments used in the quantitative phase. Questionnaires included items based on identified themes and were designed to measure leadership style (e.g., transformational, participatory, authoritarian) and levels of community engagement. Likert-scale items were used for standardised responses (Kurniawati & Judisseno, 2022). Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys distributed to village heads and residents. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation to assess linear associations, and regression analysis to evaluate the predictive relationship between leadership styles and community participation (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The assumptions for each statistical test, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity, were checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Q-Q plots, scatterplots, and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). Analysis was conducted using SPSS v26 and RStudio v2023.06.

Sampling procedures were aligned with the study's mixed methods design. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select six villages based on geographic, socioeconomic, and educational variation. Each village contributed six informants: one village head, two village officials, and three community members, totalling 36 respondents. This sample size is appropriate for achieving thematic saturation across comparative case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the quantitative phase, stratified random sampling was used to select 30 village heads and 120 community members, 150 respondents in total distributed across the classified village types (urban, semi-urban, and inland; high-, middle-, and low-income; high-, medium-,

and low-education development). The sample size of 150 for the quantitative phase was calculated based on established guidelines for correlation and regression analysis in social science research, ensuring adequate statistical power (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013; Hair et al., 2010).

Multiple safeguards were implemented to ensure validity and reliability. Qualitative validity was ensured through data triangulation interviews, FGDs, observations, document analysis, member checks, and reflexivity. Quantitative reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency (Taber, 2018). Ethical integrity was maintained by securing informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, and ensuring researcher neutrality throughout the data collection (Putra et al., 2023).

This integrated methodology strengthens the study by combining context-sensitive insights with empirical analysis. The results are expected to inform leadership practices and educational policies tailored to rural communities across diverse regions in Indonesia.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

##### 3.1.1. Identifying Main Themes

Qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, and document reviews were analysed using NVivo 12 software. The data were coded thematically using a deductive-inductive approach. Six major themes emerged from the qualitative coding.

**Table 1.** Main Themes Related to Village Head Leadership Style and Community Participation in Education Programs

Main Theme	Description
Participative Leadership Style	Characterised by open communication, shared decision-making, and community involvement in program planning.
Transformational Leadership Style	Centered on motivation, innovation, and long-term vision for educational progress.
Authoritarian Leadership Style	Marked by top-down instructions and low community engagement.
Barriers to Participation	Including socio-economic burdens, cultural norms, and lack of infrastructure.
Community Participation Patterns	Describing types of involvement such as attending literacy workshops, joining program evaluations, or assisting in logistical support.
Village Education Strategies	Such as school partnerships, literacy campaigns, and incentive-based volunteerism.

##### 3.1.2. Relationship Between Themes

The results of the analysis with NVivo show a strong relationship between leadership style and the level of community participation.

1. Participative leadership style has a positive correlation with high levels of participation, with residents being more involved in village education programs.
2. Transformational leadership style also shows increased participation, especially in educational program innovation.
3. Authoritarian leadership style is associated with lower levels of participation due to minimal citizen involvement in the planning and implementation of educational programs.

The following is a diagram of the relationships between themes visualized using a network diagram from NVivo:

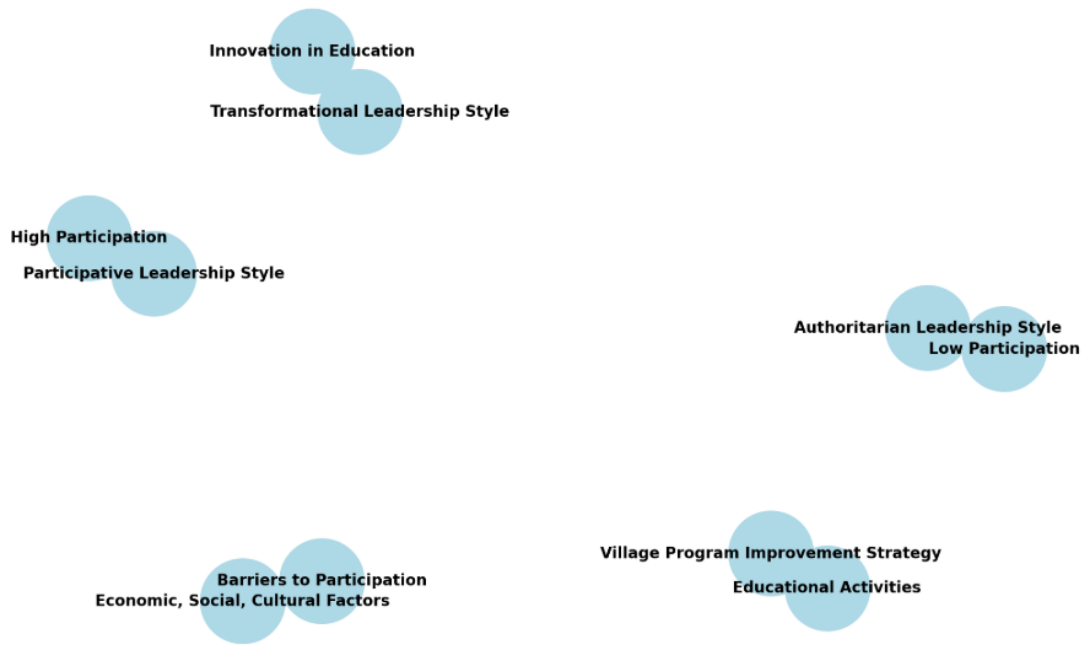


Figure 1. Relationship diagram between themes

### 3.1.3. Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 186 respondents, including 30 village heads, 12 village officials, and 144 residents selected from various village categories. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on geographical zones.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents Based on Geographical Zones

Geographical Zone	Village Heads	Village Officials	Residents	Total
Urban	10	4	48	62
Semi-Urban	10	4	48	62
Rural	10	4	48	62
Total	30	12	144	186

### 3.1.4. Village Head Leadership Style

The questionnaire results, measured using a Likert scale (1–5), show that the majority of village heads apply participatory leadership (47%), followed by transformational leadership (33%) and authoritarian leadership (20%).

Table 3. Distribution of Village Head Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Percentage (%)
Participative	47%
Transformational	33%
Authoritarian	20%

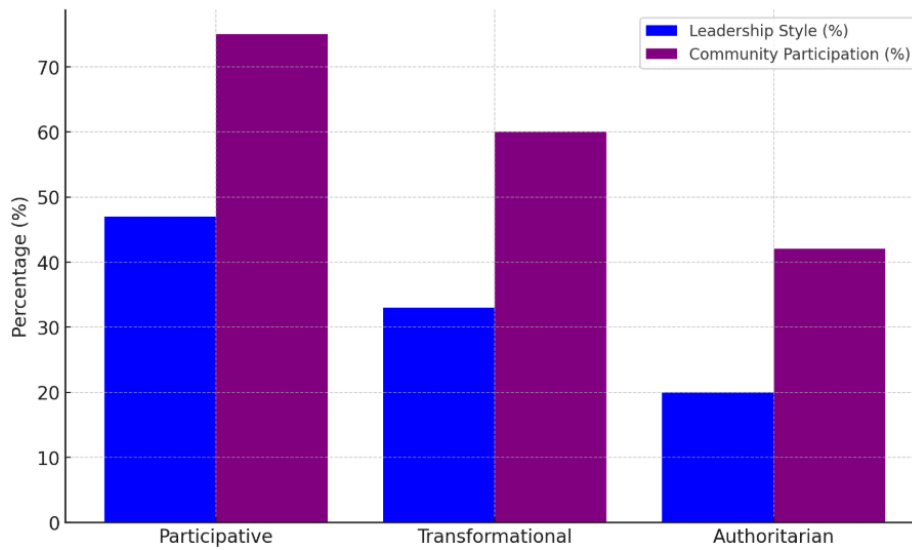


Figure 2. Bar graph of leadership style and level of community participation

### 3.1.5. Level of Community Participation in Education Programs

The results of this study are structured to directly address the four research questions by presenting both qualitative and quantitative findings in an integrated manner. As shown in Table 4, communities in villages with participatory leadership demonstrated the highest rate of engagement in educational programs (75%), followed by transformational leadership (60%), and authoritarian leadership (41%). These findings directly respond to the first and third research questions, which explore how leadership style affects community participation and which style correlates with higher levels of educational engagement..

Table 4. Level of community participation based on the leadership style of the village head

Leadership style	level of community participation (%)
Participatory	75%
Transformational	60%
Authoritarian	41%

These data show that participative leadership has the highest level of community participation, while authoritarian leadership has the lowest.

Table 5. The Influence of Leadership Style and Economic Conditions on Community Participation

Economics Condition	Leadership Style	Community Participation Rate (%)
High	Participative	85%
High	Transformational	75%
High	Authoritarian	55%
Low	Participative	60%
Low	Transformational	50%
Low	Authoritarian	30%

Regression analysis also revealed that economic conditions moderated the relationship between leadership style and participation rates. For example, in high-income villages with participatory leadership, the participation rate reached 85%, while in low-income villages with

similar leadership, it dropped to 60%. These findings suggest that economic factors influence but do not completely determine participation outcomes, responding directly to the fourth research question.

This study's main findings indicate that the village head's leadership style significantly influences community participation in village education. Villages led with a participatory and transformational leadership style showed a higher level of community participation than villages led in an authoritarian manner. However, the main barriers to community participation were economic, social, and cultural factors that prevented residents from actively engaging in education programs. To increase participation, the strategies implemented involved developing more inclusive village programs and policies that encouraged community involvement in the planning and implementation of education activities.

### **3.1.6. The Relationship between Leadership Style and Community Participation**

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. The Pearson correlation test assessed the relationship between leadership style and community participation. The results showed a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that more participatory leadership is significantly associated with higher community involvement.

## **3.2. Discussion**

### **3.2.1. Interpretation of research results**

The results showed that the majority of village heads applied a participative leadership style (47%), followed by transformational (33%) and authoritarian (20%). This finding indicates that participative and transformational leadership are more dominant in village governance than authoritarian leadership. In addition, the results also showed that the level of community participation in village education programs was higher in villages led by village heads with a participatory style (75%). In comparison, villages with authoritarian leadership had a lower level of participation (41%). The correlation analysis also showed a significant relationship between leadership style and the level of community participation ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which means that more open and collaborative leadership contributes to increased community involvement in village education.

Economic factors have also significantly influenced community participation in village education programs. Villages with low economic levels show limitations in community participation due to daily workloads and limited financial resources. Even when led with a participatory or transformational style, residents in villages with weak economies tend to have lower involvement because they must prioritize meeting basic needs. In contrast, villages with more stable economic conditions show higher levels of participation, where residents have more time and resources to participate in education programs. This indicates that the effectiveness of leadership style in increasing community participation cannot be separated from local economic conditions. Therefore, village education programs must consider adaptive strategies, such as providing incentives or time flexibility, to accommodate residents in villages with economic limitations.

### **3.2.2. Relationships to research questions and hypotheses**

While leadership style emerged as a primary variable influencing participation, it is essential to acknowledge alternative explanations. For example, socio-economic factors, such as household income, parental education level, and access to digital tools, also affect community engagement in education. In several cases, participation remained low in economically disadvantaged communities even with participatory leadership. This indicates that structural support, including

infrastructure, training, and financial assistance, must complement leadership to maximize educational inclusion.

Additionally, the study revealed that cultural alignment is crucial. Leadership incorporating local wisdom and community norms tends to gain higher legitimacy, as seen in villages where traditional values were blended with modern leadership approaches. This finding aligns with Hermawan et al. (2024) and Siahaan & Komariah (2022), who argue that culturally grounded leadership fosters deeper community connection and trust.

### 3.2.3. Comparison with previous research

The findings of this study confirm that participatory and transformational leadership styles are more effective in encouraging community participation in village education programs. This supports prior research by Wang et al. (2022) and Prasetyo (2022), who highlight how inclusive decision-making and shared vision among leaders and villagers lead to greater trust and program ownership. Through NVivo-assisted thematic analysis, community members repeatedly emphasised that open communication, transparency, and involvement in education-related planning improved their motivation to participate.

Conversely, while generally less effective in encouraging participation, authoritarian leadership showed relative strength in specific contexts—particularly in villages with traditional, hierarchical social structures. In these communities, strong paternalistic cultural norms often encourage deference to authority. Wahyuni et al. (2022) noted that top-down leadership can be effective in situations requiring swift decision-making, such as during emergencies or when clear direction is urgently needed. However, this style often lacks mechanisms for feedback and long-term engagement, which are essential for sustained educational development.

However, leadership style alone may not fully account for variations in educational participation. Alternative explanations such as socioeconomic conditions also played a critical role. Villages with lower economic resources showed consistently reduced participation across all leadership styles, suggesting that financial insecurity, time constraints, and competing survival priorities can limit community involvement regardless of leadership approach. This supports the assertion by Firdaus & Ritonga (2024) that addressing educational infrastructure and economic access is essential alongside leadership reform.

### 3.2.4. Cause-and-effect relationship found

The results of this study indicate a strong causal relationship between leadership style and the level of community participation in village education. Village heads who apply participatory and transformational styles are more likely to involve the community in the planning and implementation of education programs, thereby increasing residents' sense of ownership and involvement. In contrast, an authoritarian leadership style, which tends to be more top-down, limits community involvement and leads to low participation in education activities.

### 3.2.5. Research limitations

Regarding limitations, several factors must be considered. First, using purposive sampling in the qualitative phase, while appropriate for exploratory studies, introduces potential selection bias, as participants were chosen based on predefined criteria rather than randomised techniques. Second, although stratified random sampling was used in the quantitative phase to increase representativeness, the small sample size, particularly the 30 village heads, limits generalizability across Indonesia's diverse regional profiles. Third, researcher bias may have influenced data interpretation, especially during qualitative coding and interviews. To mitigate this, all interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and data triangulation was employed through cross-checking with policy documents and participatory observations.

(Hammer et al., 2017; Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021). Additionally, reflexive memos were used during coding to assess researcher assumptions and maintain analytical transparency critically.

In sum, while the findings offer compelling evidence that participatory and transformational leadership styles enhance community involvement in village education, they also highlight the importance of contextual factors and the need for adaptive leadership models that consider local traditions, economic realities, and infrastructure challenges.

### 3.2.6. Research contribution

This study significantly contributes to public leadership and community participation, particularly in the village context. Its main contributions include affirming the importance of participatory and transformational leadership in increasing community involvement in education. In addition, this study provides a strong empirical basis for village head capacity development policies to adopt a more inclusive leadership approach. Finally, the results of this study can be a valuable reference for village empowerment programs to improve the effectiveness of community-based education programs and support the creation of more independent and educated villages.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that participatory leadership positively correlates with community participation in village education programs. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research revealed that village heads who apply participatory and transformational leadership styles tend to foster higher levels of engagement from community members. In contrast, authoritarian leadership styles, while occasionally effective in hierarchical or traditional settings, were generally associated with lower community involvement in education-related activities. The findings also underscore the moderating role of socio-economic conditions, where participatory leadership consistently produced better outcomes across diverse village contexts. The practical implications of this research are highly relevant for village governance and education policy. Training programs that enhance participatory leadership skills among village heads could significantly improve the implementation and sustainability of education programs at the village level. Policymakers are encouraged to develop capacity-building initiatives incorporating leadership development, community facilitation techniques, and inclusive planning processes to ensure equitable access to education. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of different leadership styles on educational development and broader community empowerment. Further research could also expand the geographical scope or examine how digital leadership and the integration of local wisdom influence education access in rural areas.

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