

Determining Graduate Quality through School Principals' Transformational Leadership, Teachers' Professional Competence, and Work Motivation: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of school principals' transformational leadership, teachers' professional competence, and work motivation on the quality of graduates in public junior high schools in Rembang Regency. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method involving 289 teachers as respondents. The research instrument used a Likert-scale questionnaire tested for validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression techniques. The results revealed that both partially and simultaneously, the three independent variables had a positive and significant influence on the quality of graduates. Transformational leadership fosters a supportive school climate, professional competence enhances teaching effectiveness, and work motivation increases teachers' dedication in the educational process. Simultaneously, these variables contribute 20.6% to the variance in graduate quality. The findings highlight the importance of synergy between principals and teachers in building a high-quality education system. This study offers practical implications for policymakers and school leaders to strengthen leadership dimensions, professional development, and work motivation in order to sustainably improve graduate outcomes.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; teachers' professional competence; work motivation; graduate quality; Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a national priority in Indonesia, aiming to provide equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. The implementation of inclusive education is supported by various policies, such as Permendikbud No. 70 of 2009, which emphasize the obligation of all schools to accommodate diverse learners. In this context, the quality of education must be assessed not only in terms of access but also in terms of outcomes particularly the quality of graduates. Ensuring graduate quality in inclusive settings requires school leadership, teaching competence, and teacher motivation that are responsive to student diversity. Although this study does not specifically measure inclusive education practices, it aligns with the broader goal of inclusive education by analyzing the foundational factors that support equitable learning outcomes for all students.

The quality of graduates reflects the overall effectiveness of education delivery and serves as a benchmark for evaluating the success of the educational system. In the context of national education, graduate quality is assessed through three key dimensions: literacy, numeracy, and character, as stated in the Education Report Card and the Decree of the Head of BSKAP No. 018/H/M/2024. These three dimensions represent students' mastery of knowledge, critical thinking skills, and character values aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. However, data from the Education Report Card in Rembang Regency indicates that the quality of graduates at public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) has not yet met the established standards. The achievement data is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Graduate Quality Based on the Education Report Card Public Junior High Schools in Rembang Regency, 2024

No	Indicator	Achievement Score
1	Literacy Ability	85,08
2	Numeracy Ability	80,20
3	Character	60,34
Average		75,21

Source: Rembang Regency Office of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2024

The average score remains below the minimum competency standard of 85. The character indicator, in particular, shows a low achievement score, indicating a deficiency in students' attitudes and values related to national identity. This points to internal challenges in school management that affect the quality of graduates. Three key contributing factors to this issue are the transformational leadership of school principals, teachers' professional competence, and teacher work motivation.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that inspires, motivates, and stimulates creativity and innovation among school members (Bass, 2015; Rukmana, Wiguna & Muchtar, 2022). In the educational context, transformational principals act as catalysts for change and the development of a quality culture within schools (Soetopo, 2020).

Nevertheless, an initial survey of 39 public junior high schools in Rembang Regency showed that only 16 schools had optimally implemented transformational leadership, while 10 schools still relied on conventional administrative approaches. This highlights an uneven role of leadership in driving graduate quality.

Furthermore, teacher professional competence is also a critical factor in supporting graduate quality. According to the Director General of GTK Regulation No. 2626/B/HK.04.01/2023, teacher professional competence includes mastery of learning content, understanding of student characteristics, and the ability to implement curricula. Danuhari (2022) and Fransisca (2016) argue that teacher competence has a direct impact on learning quality and graduate outcomes.

Preliminary observations found that many teachers have not yet mastered instructional content effectively or adapted it to students' needs. Participation in training via the Merdeka Mengajar Platform remains low: only 48.07% have engaged in subject-specific training, and 59.85% in general professional development. This contributes to stagnation in learning quality improvement.

The next factor is teacher work motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Teacher motivation enhances enthusiasm, creativity, and responsibility in performing professional duties (Uno, 2023). Jumali, Yuliejantiningasih, and Haryati (2022) reported that teacher motivation contributes 22.3% to school quality improvement.

In practice, however, many teachers in Rembang Regency exhibit low motivation for career advancement or achievement. Data from the local education office and PGRI shows minimal teacher participation in competitions: only 23 teachers joined the "Outstanding Teacher" competition, and 5 participated in the "Dedicated Teacher" competition in 2024. This low motivation is compounded by a lack of support and incentives from schools.

Although various studies have explored the effects of school leadership, teacher competence, and work motivation on educational quality, most have taken a partial approach, focusing only on one or two variables. For instance, Fransisca (2018) emphasized professional competence without accounting for the role of leadership. Similarly, Anggraeni et al. (2022) studied work motivation in relation to general school quality, without specifically examining its impact on graduate outcomes.

Moreover, there is a lack of quantitative studies that simultaneously examine the influence of transformational leadership, professional competence, and work motivation on graduate quality in the context of public junior high schools, particularly in Rembang Regency. Graduate quality is now a key performance indicator in the Education Report Card, forming the basis for nationwide school evaluations. Therefore, a significant research gap remains, particularly in terms of variable integration and exploration of local contexts.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the success of graduate quality is also linked to Indonesia's broader inclusive education mandate. The government's commitment to inclusive education through regulations such as Permendikbud No. 70 of 2009 and the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2020) underscores the expectation that all learners, including those with diverse backgrounds and abilities, must be served equitably. The graduate quality indicators of literacy, numeracy, and character are not exclusive to mainstream students, but are intended to be inclusive of students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and other diverse needs.

Therefore, while this study does not directly investigate inclusive education practices, the variables it examines transformational leadership, teacher professional competence, and work motivation are highly relevant to creating inclusive school environments that support graduate quality for all students. Leadership that embraces diversity, teacher competence that adapts to learner variability, and motivation to serve all students are essential foundations for achieving inclusive education goals and equitable graduate outcomes.

This study offers novelty in three primary areas. First, it integrates three major variables transformational leadership, professional competence, and work motivation and examines their simultaneous influence on graduate quality, measured by the Education Report Card indicators (literacy, numeracy, and character). Second, it utilizes quantitative data based on the actual conditions of schools in Rembang Regency in 2024, contributing updated data for local education policymaking. Third, the study highlights not only cognitive aspects but also emphasizes character dimensions in graduate quality, which have often been overlooked in similar research.

Based on the background described above, several theoretical variables may affect graduate quality: transformational leadership, professional teacher competence, and teacher work motivation. These three variables are theoretically grounded and interconnected with the success of the educational process in producing graduates who are academically, socially, and morally competent.

Graduate quality reflects students' learning outcomes as aligned with the Graduate Competency Standards, encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These aspects are assessed through the National Assessment, which consists of literacy, numeracy, and character surveys. The literacy indicator involves the ability to understand, evaluate, and reflect on texts; numeracy includes understanding numbers, geometry, and data; while the character dimension reflects the values of the Pancasila Student Profile. Thus, graduate quality is no longer measured by academic performance alone but also by moral integrity and adaptability in facing 21st-century challenges.

Transformational leadership builds a vision, inspires others, and encourages innovation to enhance organizational performance. Bass (2015) outlines four key dimensions of this leadership style: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Rukmana et al. (2024) affirm that transformational leadership significantly affects school quality and has a direct impact on graduate outcomes. In the school context, transformational principals foster a collaborative work culture, encourage teachers to innovate, and maintain a strong focus on learning quality (Mulyono, 2022).

Teacher professional competence includes mastery of content, understanding of students, and instructional implementation aligned with educational standards. Danuhari (2024) emphasizes that professionally competent teachers significantly improve students' literacy and numeracy achievements. However, the low participation of teachers in training through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform reveals that this area still requires strengthening. Therefore, teacher competence must be developed continuously through training and context-based reflective practices.

Teacher work motivation is the internal and external psychological drive that influences their performance in fulfilling professional duties (Uno, 2023). Motivation comprises intrinsic (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, pride) and extrinsic (e.g., managerial support, facilities, rewards) dimensions. Anggraeni et al. (2022) state that teacher motivation contributes 22.3% to overall school quality. Highly motivated teachers demonstrate greater enthusiasm in teaching, are more innovative in methodology, and consistent in guiding student character development all of which directly impact graduate quality.

Referring to the aforementioned theories and empirical findings, it can be concluded that transformational leadership, teacher professional competence, and teacher motivation are significant determinants of graduate quality. These variables are not only grounded in theory but are also highly relevant to current challenges in the education sector. Therefore, this study aims to examine the simultaneous influence of these three variables on graduate quality in the context of public junior high schools in Rembang Regency.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative associative approach using a survey method. This approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic, objective, and measurable identification of relationships between variables. According to Sugiyono (2021), the quantitative approach is suitable for testing hypotheses and analyzing variable relationships using numerical data. This aligns with Sanjaya (2022), who asserts that quantitative research aims to identify causal relationships among variables using statistical analysis techniques. This type of research is explanatory in nature, aiming to explain the influence of school principals' transformational leadership, teachers' professional competence, and teacher work motivation on the quality of graduates in public junior high schools in Rembang Regency.

The population in this study comprised all teachers working in public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) across Rembang Regency. The sample was selected using proportional random sampling to ensure representation across the diverse regions. The sample consisted of 289 teachers, determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error. According to Arikunto (2020), a representative sample must consider both proportion and the number of analysis units to obtain valid results. This is supported by Fitriani (2021), who states that proportional sampling is intended to avoid bias caused by the dominance of certain groups within a heterogeneous population.

The quality of graduates, as the dependent variable in this study, was measured through three dimensions: literacy, numeracy, and character. The blueprint of the graduate quality instrument is presented as follows:

Table 2. Blueprint of the Instrument for Graduate Quality Variables

No	Dimensions	Indicators
1	Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the content or information in learning materials - Interpreting the contextual meaning of written material - Ability to access and select learning resources - Evaluating and reflecting on acquired information
2	Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to understand, use, and apply numbers or quantitative values in daily learning contexts - Competence in algebraic domains - Ability to recognize patterns and construct logical relationships - Understanding basic quantitative terms and concepts - Application of quantitative thinking in real life - Ability to draw conclusions and reason based on information
3	Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith in God Almighty and noble character - Global diversity awareness - Collaboration - Independence - Critical thinking - Creativity

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, developed based on the operational indicators of each variable. This scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions quantitatively. Sugiyono (2021) argues that the Likert scale is well-suited for social research as it reveals respondents' attitudinal tendencies toward specific phenomena. The instrument was validated through validity testing using the Pearson Product Moment technique and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. According to Notoatmodjo (2021), a valid and reliable instrument is essential for ensuring that the collected data has scientific value. Furthermore, Fadillah (2023) notes that reliability is considered high when the Alpha coefficient is ≥ 0.60 , indicating consistent measurement across items.

Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine both simultaneous and partial influences of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Prior to this, classical assumption tests were conducted, including tests for normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. The analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25 software. Priyatno (2021) states that multiple linear regression is a statistical technique used to predict the value of a dependent variable based on more than one independent variable. According to Huda (2022), regression analysis provides insights into the extent to which independent variables affect the dependent variable, both simultaneously and partially, and also measures the contribution of each variable within the model.

It is important to note that this study did not collect disaggregated data related to the disability status of students or the inclusive education experience of teachers. Additionally, the surveyed schools were not selected based on their involvement in inclusive education programs or their enrollment of students with special needs. This represents a limitation of the research, especially considering the national agenda on inclusive education. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate inclusive education indicators, explore the role of teachers in inclusive classrooms, and involve more diverse educational settings to better reflect inclusive practices and student diversity.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding(s)

This study analyzed four main variables: school principals' transformational leadership, teachers' professional competence, teacher work motivation, and graduate quality. The data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to 289 teachers from public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Rembang Regency. Each variable is described based on the mean score, standard deviation, and tendency category.

Descriptive Data of Research Variables

The transformational leadership variable recorded a mean score of 100.5 out of a maximum of 125, with a standard deviation of 6.78. This indicates that most teachers perceive their principals as applying an inspiring leadership style, fostering innovation, and establishing effective communication. A majority of 58.5% of respondents categorized the principal's leadership as high, 39.8% as moderate, and only 1.6% as low. These findings suggest that school principals play a strategic role in influencing the work environment and school culture.

The professional competence of teachers showed a mean score of 96.8 out of a maximum of 120, with a standard deviation of 7.15. This result indicates that teachers generally possess good subject matter knowledge, understand student characteristics, and can manage the learning process effectively. A total of 56.1% of teachers were in the high category, 40.7% in the moderate category, and only 3.3% in the low category. This reflects that most teachers have adequate competencies to support the quality of classroom learning.

Teacher work motivation recorded a mean score of 92.4 out of a maximum of 115, with a standard deviation of 6.24. Teachers demonstrated high levels of motivation, both intrinsically such as commitment and responsibility and extrinsically such as support from principals and the availability of facilities. A total of 52.8% of teachers showed high motivation, 44.7% were in the moderate category, and only 2.4% were in the low category. This indicates that most teachers have a strong drive to carry out their professional duties.

Graduate quality, the dependent variable in this study, had a mean score of 83.1 out of a maximum of 105, with a standard deviation of 5.89. It was measured through three key indicators: literacy, numeracy, and character. Most teachers assessed that students' literacy and numeracy achievements were relatively good, but challenges remained in character development, particularly in discipline, responsibility, and self-confidence. The distribution showed that 48.8% of respondents rated graduate quality as high, 46.3% as moderate, and 4.9% as low. These findings suggest that, in general, graduate quality in public junior high schools in Rembang Regency is fairly good, though there is room for improvement, especially in strengthening student character:

Table 3. Statistical Description of Each Variable

No	Variable	Min Score	Max Score	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
1	Transformational Leadership	85	120	58.5	39.8	1.6
2	Teachers' Professional Competence	81	115	56.1	40.7	3.3
3	Teacher Work Motivation	78	111	52.8	44.7	2.4
4	Graduate Quality	69	101	48.8	46.3	4.9

The statistical description of each variable is also illustrated in the following figure:

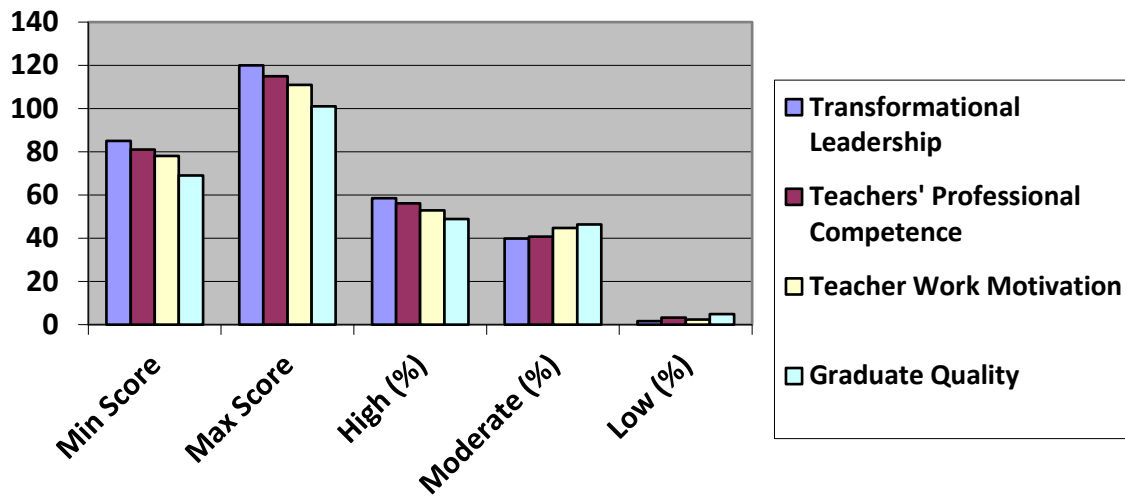


Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Results of Dimensional Analysis

Dimensional analysis was conducted to determine the achievement of each indicator forming the research variables. For transformational leadership, the dimension with the highest extraction value was intellectual stimulation (0.955), followed by idealized influence (0.922), inspirational motivation (0.921), and individualized consideration (0.889). All dimensions were categorized as high, indicating that school principals apply an inspirational, open, and supportive leadership style that fosters teacher development.

Teachers' professional competence consisted of three dimensions, all of which were categorized as high. The highest was understanding student characteristics and learning styles (0.951), followed by mastery of content and teaching methods (0.919), and understanding curriculum and its implementation (0.901). These findings show that teachers possess mastery over the subject matter, can design learning effectively, and understand students well. Teacher motivation was divided into intrinsic motivation (0.877) and extrinsic motivation (0.877), both categorized as high. The equal extraction values suggest that internal drive among teachers is as strong as external incentives such as rewards or facilities. Graduate quality was measured through literacy (0.851), numeracy (0.904), and character (0.862). Numeracy had the highest dimension score, while literacy was the lowest. This suggests the need to strengthen student literacy programs, even though numeracy and character achievements are already relatively good. Overall, dimensional analysis shows high achievement across most indicators, although certain aspects such as student character and teachers' extrinsic motivation still need to be enhanced through more focused policies and coaching programs.

Results of Prerequisite Tests for Analysis

Before conducting multiple linear regression analysis, prerequisite tests were carried out to ensure that the data met basic regression assumptions. These tests included normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check normality. The result showed a significance value of 0.88, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed and suitable for regression analysis. Second, multicollinearity was tested to identify any strong linear relationships between independent variables. The analysis showed that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 10 and Tolerance values above 0.10, indicating no multicollinearity between independent variables. Third, the Glejser test was conducted to examine heteroscedasticity. The results indicated that the significance values of all independent variables against residuals were greater than 0.05, suggesting that there was no heteroscedasticity, and the residuals were homogeneously distributed. Thus, all prerequisite tests were fulfilled. The data met the assumptions of normality, non-multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, making it appropriate for further analysis using multiple linear regression.

Results of Regression Analysis

Further analysis was conducted to examine the relationship and influence of the independent variables transformational leadership, professional competence, and work motivation on graduate quality. The steps included correlation analysis, partial regression (t-test), simultaneous regression (F-test), and coefficient of determination (R^2). The correlation analysis showed that all independent variables had a positive and significant relationship with graduate quality. The correlation coefficients were 0.352 for transformational leadership, 0.377 for professional competence, and 0.378 for work motivation, all of which fall under the moderate category. This indicates that higher scores in each independent variable correlate with better graduate outcomes.

The partial regression or t-test was conducted to determine the individual influence of each independent variable. The results showed significant effects for all three variables. The regression coefficient for transformational leadership was $\beta = 0.352$, with $t = 6.380$ and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$. Teachers' professional competence had a coefficient of $\beta = 0.377$, $t = 6.903$, and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$. Teacher work motivation had a coefficient of $\beta = 0.378$, $t = 6.925$, and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$. Since all significance values are below 0.05, each independent variable has a positive and significant effect on graduate quality. Simultaneously, the F-test result showed that the regression model was significant, with $F = 24.698$ and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$. This indicates that the three independent variables collectively have a significant influence on graduate quality. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.206, meaning that 20.6% of the variation in graduate quality is explained by the three independent variables in the model, while the remaining 79.4% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study:

Table 4. Results of Correlation and Regression Tests

Independent Variable	Correlation (r)	Coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig. (t)
Transformational Leadership	0.352	0.352	6.380	0.000
Teachers' Professional Competence	0.377	0.377	6.903	0.000
Teacher Work Motivation	0.378	0.378	6.925	0.000

Source: SPSS Data Analysis ($F = 24.698$, $\text{Sig. (F)} = 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.206$)

While the study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing graduate quality in public junior high schools, it is important to note that the current analysis does not differentiate outcomes based on students' diverse learning needs, particularly those requiring accommodations. In inclusive classrooms where students with disabilities are integrated into the general education setting the impact of transformational leadership, teacher competence, and motivation may manifest differently. For example, graduate quality indicators such as literacy and character development might require differentiated instruction, assistive technology, or individualized support strategies that were not specifically captured in this study. As such, the improvements in graduate quality observed here may not fully reflect the challenges and achievements of students with disabilities. Future research should consider disaggregating student outcome data and exploring how inclusive pedagogical practices affect the attainment of graduate competencies, particularly for learners who face physical, cognitive, or behavioral barriers. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of graduate quality within the inclusive education framework.

Discussion(s)

This section discusses the research findings on the influence of school principals' transformational leadership, teachers' professional competence, and teacher work motivation on the quality of junior high school graduates. The analysis revealed that all three variables exert a positive and significant influence, both partially and simultaneously. These findings align with existing theories and previous studies that emphasize the importance of synergy between leadership, teacher competence, and motivation in improving graduate quality. Thus, educational success is not dependent on a single factor but rather on the integration of all components within the school system.

The Influence of School Principals' Transformational Leadership on Graduate Quality

The study found that principals' transformational leadership positively and significantly affects graduate quality, with a regression coefficient of 0.352 and a significance value of 0.000, indicating that this variable accounts for 12.4% of the variance in graduate quality.

This finding supports Bass's (2015) theory, which identifies four core dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Principals who apply transformational leadership tend to establish a shared vision, inspire others, and pay attention to individual teacher development. This aligns with findings by Sulaiman & Prasetyo (2022) and Fayza (2024), which show that this leadership style enhances teacher enthusiasm and student achievement. Rahmawati, Nugroho, and Lestari (2024) also argue that transformational leadership indirectly improves graduate quality through a strengthened school climate and teacher performance. Moreover, transformational leadership has been shown to promote teacher performance and foster a positive learning culture, as evidenced by studies by Mukaddamah (2024) and Rifa'i (2020). Principals who practice this leadership style are perceived to increase teacher engagement and professional responsibility for student success (Rahayu & Iskandar, 2023; Adzkiya, 2022). Other studies have found a strong correlation between transformational leadership and improvements in learning quality and student academic performance (Maris, Komariah & Bakar, 2016; Taufiq & Darmawan, 2020). These findings are consistent with evidence that transformational leadership encourages collective teacher participation in school quality improvement (Riduansyah & Cinantya, 2025; Sari & Herlina, 2021). In secondary school contexts, this leadership style has been proven effective

in fostering innovation and a strong work ethic among teachers (Fairy, Yudana & Divayana, 2023; Raman et al., 2022).

However, field data also reveal that the dimensions of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration have not yet been optimally implemented. This underscores the need for principals to continue enhancing their leadership capacities through training, professional discussions, and ongoing supervision.

The Influence of Teachers' Professional Competence on Graduate Quality

This study found that teachers' professional competence significantly influences graduate quality, with a regression coefficient of 0.377 and a contribution of 14.2%. This competence encompassing content mastery, understanding of student characteristics, and classroom management is a foundational pillar in improving student learning outcomes.

The result supports Widyastuti (2020), who stated that professional teachers can shape both student character and performance comprehensively. Similarly, Rakim et al. (2023) assert that teachers who master subject matter and adapt instruction to contemporary contexts are more effective in increasing student engagement and achievement. Mukhtar and Luqman (2022) found that teacher quality is a dominant internal factor influencing graduate outcomes. Furthermore, professional competence impacts not only academic aspects but also fosters student confidence through meaningful learning (Wijayanti & Kurniawan, 2022; Arifin & Sulastri, 2021). Teachers' preparedness in designing adaptive learning strategies significantly contributes to improved learning outcomes (Lestari & Kurnia, 2023; Aryani et al., 2021). Highly competent teachers are capable of building a constructive and participatory learning environment (Ma'ruf & Syaifin, 2022; Marlina & Bahar, 2020). Additionally, professional teacher quality correlates with the effectiveness of assessment and feedback processes (Fauzi, 2023; Ramdhan & Nuraini, 2022). Mastery of content and pedagogy has also been proven to significantly enhance students' literacy and numeracy (Lubis & Wulandari, 2024; Nursyam & Setiawan, 2021). In this regard, school principals must support ongoing teacher professional development through academic supervision, training, and optimized use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. Improving teacher quality contributes not only to academic success but also to the development of character and skills relevant to future needs.

The Influence of Teacher Work Motivation on Graduate Quality

The analysis shows that teacher work motivation has a positive and significant effect on graduate quality, with a regression coefficient of 0.378 and an R^2 of 0.143. Both intrinsic factors (e.g., responsibility, pride) and extrinsic factors (e.g., incentives, work environment) play a role in driving teachers' professional performance.

Data show that while intrinsic motivation is high, extrinsic motivation remains relatively low, creating an imbalance in teachers' work energy that can lower the quality of learning services. Studies by Ratmini, Natajaya & Sunu (2021) and Hartini & Wahyuni (2023) confirm that good motivation especially when supported by a conducive work environment improves teaching quality, ultimately enhancing graduate outcomes.

Furthermore, highly motivated teachers tend to be more innovative and consistent in applying effective teaching methods (Wulandari & Nisrina, 2021; Abdullah & Munir, 2020). Motivation also strengthens the emotional bond between teachers and students, contributing to improved character and academic achievement (Fadli & Zulaikha, 2023; Hilda, 2022). Other studies suggest that motivational support from school leadership enhances teachers' sense of ownership and accountability for student achievement (Gaol & Siburian, 2018; Sudibjo & Ananta, 2021). Moreover, teachers who feel professionally valued demonstrate

higher levels of dedication and enthusiasm in guiding students (Anggraini & Utama, 2024; Fitria & Lestari, 2020). The balance between recognition, workload, and role clarity is crucial for sustaining teacher motivation in the long term (Rohman & Sari, 2023; Wulandari & Maulida, 2021). These findings highlight the need to pay attention to factors affecting teacher motivation, such as recognition, career development, and psychologically healthy work conditions. A positive work environment and fair management systems are essential foundations for sustaining teacher commitment and enthusiasm.

The Simultaneous Influence of Transformational Leadership, Professional Competence, and Teacher Work Motivation on Graduate Quality

Simultaneously, the results of multiple regression analysis indicate that transformational leadership, teacher professional competence, and teacher work motivation significantly affect graduate quality, with a combined contribution of 20.6% ($R^2 = 0.206$). The t-values for all variables were significant at the 95% confidence level. These findings imply that graduate quality is not determined by a single factor but by the integration of leadership style, instructional quality, and teachers' psychological drive. Schools led by visionary principals, supported by competent and motivated teachers, tend to produce graduates with literacy, numeracy, and character scores above the district average. Studies by Handayani & Wibowo (2022), Hanif (2023), and Astuti & Suryani (2023) emphasize that synergy among educational organization components is critical to student success. Ramadhan (2023) also highlights that a combination of leadership, organizational culture, and work motivation simultaneously influences education quality. In line with these findings, collaboration between leadership quality and teacher professionalism strengthens the academic culture, which directly impacts graduate quality (Suryanto, Hendrowati & Badrun, 2025; Hidayah & Sari, 2020). Student learning outcomes tend to improve when teacher motivation is integrated with collectively developed pedagogical skills (Munawaroh & Rifa'i, 2022; Susilowati & Zakaria, 2021). Moreover, the principal's role as facilitator and driver of quality improvement becomes more effective when supported by adaptive and dedicated teachers (Yulianto & Rachmawati, 2023; Ibrahim & Mubarak, 2020).

Institutional context also shapes the integrative strength of these variables in forming competitive graduate quality (Amalia & Wijayanti, 2024; Damanik & Suyatno, 2021). In fact, the synergy among leadership, motivation, and teacher competence is a key indicator of achieving graduate profile-based education standards (Hasibuan & Rizki, 2023; Indana, 2022). Therefore, improving graduate quality requires collaborative strategies that do not focus solely on a single educational actor but involve all elements within the school system. The collaboration of school leaders, teachers, and policy support is the key to developing intelligent, resilient, and character-driven graduates.

Although this study confirms the positive influence of transformational leadership, professional competence, and teacher work motivation on graduate quality, it is necessary to critically reflect on how these variables operate in inclusive school settings. In schools implementing inclusive education, leadership behaviors must be more adaptive, empathetic, and policy-responsive to the needs of students with disabilities. Principals are expected not only to foster innovation and motivation but also to ensure the provision of resources, accommodations, and professional development that equip teachers to serve diverse learners effectively. Similarly, teacher competencies must go beyond content mastery and include differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and the ability to collaborate with special educators or support staff. These inclusive pedagogical competencies are crucial in enabling equitable access to learning for all students. Therefore, while this study did not

specifically focus on inclusive classrooms, the findings suggest that future research should explore how transformational leadership and teacher competence can be optimized to support inclusive graduate quality outcomes particularly in relation to character development, which is often shaped by how well diversity is managed in the classroom

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the transformational leadership of school principals, teachers' professional competence, and teacher work motivation have a positive and significant influence on the quality of graduates in public junior high schools in Rembang Regency, both partially and simultaneously. Principals who apply a transformational leadership style are able to create an inspiring and collaborative work climate, which directly contributes to improved teacher performance and student learning outcomes. On the other hand, teachers with a high level of professional competence can effectively and adaptively conduct the teaching and learning process, thereby supporting the achievement of optimal learning results. Furthermore, teacher work motivation whether intrinsic or influenced by the work environment has been proven to encourage high levels of dedication and responsibility in guiding students.

Together, these three variables contribute 20,6 % to graduate quality, which includes aspects of literacy, numeracy, and character. These findings underscore that improving the quality of graduates cannot be achieved through isolated efforts, but requires an integrated synergy between principal leadership, teacher professionalism, and sustained work motivation. Therefore, a systematic and collaborative managerial strategy is needed to strengthen these three aspects in order to enhance the overall quality of education.

To achieve more equitable outcomes, future research should extend this framework by incorporating inclusive strategies that address the needs of students with disabilities. Integrating leadership and teaching competencies that are responsive to diverse learners is essential to ensure that graduate quality reflects the principles of inclusive education.

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