

Transactional Leadership of the Principal and Teacher Professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang

Ristiono Mei Eka Palguno¹ *, Usman Radiana¹, Reni Marlina¹, M. Asrori¹, Rody Putra Sartika¹

¹ Tanjungpura University, Indonesia



f2171251023@student.untan.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

Teacher professionalism is not only related to individual competence but is also supported by leadership practices within the school. Transactional leadership is important to examine because it concerns work expectations, supervision, rewards, and corrective actions in teachers' duties. This study aimed to analyze the transactional leadership practices of the principal in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of transactional leadership practices in the school context. Informants consisted of the principal, two vice principals, and five teachers selected purposively based on their involvement and relevance to the research focus. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, and were analyzed interactively through data reduction, manual coding, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was established through source triangulation involving informants and methodological triangulation by integrating interview findings with evidence from observations and documentation. The findings showed that transactional leadership was manifested through motivation, supervision, rewards, and sanctions. These practices were reinforced through communication, role modeling, guidance, appreciation, monitoring, and gradual corrective actions. The findings indicate that transactional leadership in the school context does not rely solely on rewards and sanctions but also on teacher guidance and involvement. The implication is that transactional leadership needs to be implemented contextually through clear responsibilities, monitoring, appreciation, corrective actions, communication, and guidance.

Keywords: Transactional Leadership; Teacher Professionalism; Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The successful implementation of education in schools cannot be separated from the quality of teacher professionalism. Professionalism is an important element of quality education because teachers are directly involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning (Bay&Harapan, 2021; Timpal, 2025). Professionalism encompasses not only mastery of teaching knowledge and skills but also integrity, responsibility, discipline, competency development, and the ability to perform duties in accordance with professional standards (Prasetya et al, 2022; Tully, 2022). In the context of Indonesian education, Law Number 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers stipulates that teachers are professional educators whose main duties include educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students. Thus, teacher professionalism is closely related to the school organizational environment and leadership support in carrying out professional duties.

School principals have a strategic position in creating conditions that support teacher professional development. Principal leadership is related to how schools provide support, resources, learning opportunities, collaboration, and organizational conditions that enable teachers to develop their competencies. Research in Indonesia indicates that school norms, resources, facilities, and principal leadership are among the conditions that influence teachers' learning and professional development (Habibi et al, 2025; Wiyono et al, 2020). Other studies have also shown that school leadership practices are associated with teacher professional learning, both individually and collaboratively (Amzat et al, 2022; Belliba et al, 2021). Thus, leadership practices within school organizations constitute an important context for understanding how teacher professionalism develops and is enacted in everyday practice.

One leadership approach that is relevant to examine in this context is transactional leadership. Transactional leadership positions the relationship between leaders and organizational members as an exchange process related to tasks, performance, rewards, and corrective actions (Arenas, 2019; Blokdyk, 2020). This concept is rooted in Burns's ideas and was further developed by Bass through the *Full Range Leadership Theory*, with *contingent reward* and *management-by-exception* as the main components of transactional leadership (Kristenson, 2022; Ray, 2014). In the school context, these principles can be reflected in setting work expectations, providing motivation for teachers to fulfill their responsibilities, monitoring tasks, providing *rewards* for certain achievements, and taking corrective actions in response to deviations. In this study, motivation, supervision, *reward*, and sanctions are positioned as aspects of leadership practices that are the focus of the study to understand how transactional leadership is implemented and experienced by teachers.

Previous studies have shown that principal transactional leadership is associated with various professional and behavioral aspects of teachers. Awibowo and Ramli (2025) found that *contingent reward* attributes were significantly associated with teacher motivation in student assessment tasks. Maheshwari (2022) showed that transactional leadership was associated with teacher job satisfaction and performance, with a negative direction of the relationship reported in the context of public secondary schools in Vietnam. Lefteri and Menon (2025) found that transformational and transactional leadership, as a combined factor in the research model, was a predictor of *teacher self-efficacy*. Indrawan et al. (2020) showed that transactional leadership had a smaller and less consistent effect on teacher performance and student achievement than other leadership styles examined. Meanwhile, Yousef and Eyupoglu (2022) and Daulani, Syarifuddin, and Rasid (2024) examined the relationship between transactional leadership and job satisfaction and rewards, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior among employees/teachers. Although these studies contribute to explaining the relationship between transactional leadership and various teacher *outcomes*, most employed quantitative approaches. Qualitative studies that specifically examine the implementation of motivation, supervision, *reward*, and sanctions, as well as teachers' experiences and interpretations of these practices in carrying out their day-to-day professional duties, remain limited.

Understanding these practices is important because teacher professionalism is shaped not only through formal qualifications but also through experiences and day-to-day practices within the school environment. The development of knowledge and skills, involvement in professional development activities, preparation of instructional and learning materials, integrity, discipline, and responsibility are aspects of professionalism that take place within an organizational context. The relationship between the principal and teachers, opportunities for professional growth, organizational support, as well as supervision and reward mechanisms are part of teachers' professional experiences. Therefore, transactional leadership needs to be understood not only as a theoretical concept or a relationship between variables but also as an organizational practice manifested through the actions of the principal and experienced and interpreted by teachers in carrying out their professional duties.

The empirical context at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang presents conditions that are relevant for examination. Based on a preliminary study, teacher professionalism is reflected in attendance in carrying out their duties, the preparation of instructional materials and classroom

administration, involvement in school activities, participation in Subject Teacher Deliberations (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* [MGMP]), and participation in training to improve professionalism. Professionalism is also reflected in integrity when interacting with students, parents, and fellow teachers. These conditions occur alongside the principal's leadership practices, including providing motivation, supervision, *rewards*, and *punishments*. Based on the initial research data, *rewards* are given, among other occasions, during National Teachers' Day, taking into consideration teachers' achievements, discipline, integrity, and professional aspects, while *punishment* is given as a corrective measure when violations continue to occur after a coaching process has been carried out. This condition provides an empirical picture of the implementation of reward mechanisms and corrective actions in managing teachers' duties. This context is particularly relevant because SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang is a public school that, as reported in the research proposal, received the designation of a model school and an "Excellent" accreditation rating, with a score of 97 based on the 2023 assessment by BAN-PDM. The school has 33 teaching and education personnel, consisting of 28 individuals with bachelor's degrees (S-1) and 5 with master's degrees (S-2), and all recorded teaching personnel have obtained professional certification. This condition indicates that the study is not solely directed at identifying deficiencies in teacher professionalism but also at understanding how transactional leadership practices operate within a school environment characterized by particular institutional and professional resource conditions. Thus, this school context provides an opportunity to examine in depth the implementation and perceptions of motivation, supervision, *reward*, and sanctions in the life of the school organization.

Based on the previous studies and empirical conditions described above, this study is grounded in the limitations of existing research, which has predominantly explained transactional leadership through its relationships with teacher motivation, job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and *self-efficacy*. Studies that specifically examine how transactional leadership practices through motivation, supervision, *reward*, and sanctions are implemented, as well as how these practices are experienced and interpreted by teachers in the day-to-day enactment of professionalism, remain limited. This gap indicates the need to understand processes, practices, experiences, and organizational contexts that cannot be fully explained through quantitative relationships between variables. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the principal's transactional leadership practices within the context of school life.

The *novelty* of this study lies in its focus on examining the principal's transactional leadership practices through four aspects, namely motivation, supervision, *reward*, and sanctions, and their relationship to teacher professionalism practices at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang. The study not only describes the presence of transactional leadership but also examines how these practices are implemented, experienced by teachers, and manifested in the performance of their day-to-day professional duties. A case study approach is employed to provide a more in-depth empirical account of transactional leadership practices within the Indonesian educational context. This study is also aligned with the *road map* of the vision and mission of educational administration, particularly in strengthening leadership and educational management that support educator professionalism.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to describe and analyze the principal's transactional leadership practices in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang, particularly in terms of providing motivation, supervising teachers, *reward*, and sanctions. The research questions focus on how the principal implements these four practices within the school organization and how these practices are understood and experienced by teachers in carrying out their professional duties. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, with the principal, vice principals, teachers, parents, and students serving as sources of information as required by the study, supported by observation, interviews, and documentation. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a contextual understanding of the principal's transactional leadership practices and their relationship to teacher professionalism at the school-unit level.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the principal's transactional leadership practices in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang, Kubu Raya Regency. The qualitative approach was used to understand the phenomenon in depth based on the perspectives of the informants within a naturalistic context, while the case study design enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon intensively within its real-life context (Abdussamad, 2021; Asrori&Ali, 2022; Sugiyono, 2020). This approach was employed because the phenomenon under study concerns leadership practices taking place within the natural context of the school, particularly how the principal motivates teachers, conducts supervision, provides rewards, and implements sanctions in directing the performance of teachers' professional duties.

The research informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the principal's leadership practices and the implementation of teacher professionalism. The characteristics of the informants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

No.	Participant	Qualification	Gender	Age	Number	Description
1	Principal	Master's degree (S-2)	Female	55	1	Educational personnel
2	Vice Principal for Curriculum	Master's degree (S-2)	Male	48	1	Teaching personnel
3	Vice Principal for Student Affairs	Bachelor's degree (S-1)	Male	55	1	Teaching personnel
4	Subject Teachers	Bachelor's degree (S-1)	Male/Female	32-57	5	3 senior teachers, 2 early-career teachers
Total					8 People	

Based on Table 1, this study involved eight participants consisting of the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the vice principal for student affairs, and subject teachers. The participants were purposively selected by considering their involvement, experience, and respective positions in carrying out duties and managing education at the school. This composition was intended to obtain diverse and in-depth information regarding the principal's transactional leadership practices and their implications for teacher professionalism. The principal was positioned as the main informant because of the authority to manage the school, establish policies, provide direction, conduct supervision, and implement various forms of rewards and corrective actions in the performance of teachers' duties. The vice principal for curriculum and the vice principal for student affairs were selected because of their direct involvement in managing school programs and coordinating the implementation of educators' duties. Meanwhile, five subject teachers were selected to obtain perspectives from those who directly experience and respond to the principal's leadership practices in carrying out their professional duties. The inclusion of three senior teachers and two early-career teachers also provided variation in experience in interpreting the leadership practices implemented at the school.

The researcher served as the primary instrument throughout the research process, from determining the research focus, selecting informants, and collecting data to analyzing the information and drawing conclusions. To support the data collection process, interview guides, observation guidelines, and documentation guidelines were used. These instruments were developed based on the research focus on the principal's transactional leadership in relation to

teacher professionalism, which encompasses four main aspects: motivation, supervision, rewards, and sanctions.

The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations of informants who were directly involved in leadership practices and teachers' professional duties. Secondary data were obtained from relevant school documents as supporting sources and for comparison with the primary data. The documents included school planning and program documents, teacher and educational personnel data, teacher attendance records, instructional materials, documents related to teacher competency development activities, and documentation concerning the provision of rewards and the implementation of sanctions.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher had a set of guiding questions while also having the flexibility to explore further information based on the informants' responses. Observation was conducted to obtain an understanding of leadership practices and teachers' professional behavior within the school context. Documentation was used to complement the information obtained from the interviews and observations and to provide supporting evidence for the research findings. These three techniques were used in an integrated manner so that the information obtained was not based solely on the informants' perceptions but could also be examined through observations and relevant documents.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview, observation, and documentation data were organized and sorted according to the research focus. During the reduction stage, the researcher manually coded the relevant data and then grouped the data based on similarities in meaning to identify patterns and themes related to motivation, supervision, rewards, and sanctions in the principal's transactional leadership in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang. The coding results served as the basis for data presentation and conclusion drawing, which were verified by examining the consistency of the findings across sources and supporting evidence. Observation and documentation data were used to strengthen the interview findings. Data validity was established through source triangulation and technique triangulation (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Radiana et al., 2026). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, vice principals, and teachers regarding transactional leadership practices and teacher professionalism. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation on the same research focus. This process was undertaken to enhance the credibility of the findings and ensure that the research interpretations were based on consistent information obtained from multiple sources and techniques. This study was limited to the principal's transactional leadership practices in relation to teacher professionalism within a single educational institution, with a focus on motivation, supervision, rewards, and sanctions. Therefore, the findings are intended to provide a contextual and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study rather than to make statistical generalizations to all schools. This limitation also serves as a consideration when applying the findings to other school contexts with different characteristics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings on the principal's transactional leadership in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang were obtained through interviews with eight informants consisting of the principal (KS), the vice principal for curriculum (WK), the vice principal for student affairs (WS), and five teachers (G1-G5). The interview data were analyzed through coding, category grouping, pattern identification, and triangulation with observation and documentation findings. The results showed that the principal's leadership practices were reflected in four main aspects: motivation, supervision, the provision of rewards, and the implementation of sanctions or corrective measures.

1. Principal's Motivation in Promoting Teacher Professionalism

The interview findings showed that the principal's motivation began with an effort to understand the character, abilities, experience, and circumstances of each teacher. The principal did not use the same approach with all teachers but adjusted the communication approach and assignment of responsibilities to teachers' individual characteristics. The principal explained:

"Saya mencoba menyesuaikan cara berkomunikasi dan memberikan tugas dengan karakter masing-masing guru." (Coding : MOT-KAR-KS-01)

This statement was reinforced by teachers who perceived that the assignment of responsibilities was adjusted according to their abilities. G1 stated:

"Karena sudah sering berinteraksi dengan guru, beliau mengetahui mana guru yang aktif, mana yang lebih banyak membutuhkan arahan, dan mana yang bisa diberikan tanggung jawab secara mandiri." (Coding : MOT-KAR-G1-01)

These findings indicate that understanding teachers' characteristics serves as the basis for the principal in determining communication approaches and allocating responsibilities. A similar pattern was also found among WK, WS, and G2-G5, who stated that the principal understood differences in teachers' abilities, experience, and ways of working.

Motivation was also developed through open communication and harmonious working relationships. The principal stated that communication was conducted through meetings, direct communication, and school groups, while also providing teachers with opportunities to express their difficulties and provide input:

"Jadi bukan hanya kepala sekolah yang berbicara, tetapi guru juga diberikan ruang untuk menyampaikan pendapat." (Coding : MOT-KOM-KS-02)

This was reinforced by G2, who stated:

"Saya merasa guru masih bisa menyampaikan pendapat tanpa merasa takut." (Coding : MOT-KOM-G2-01)

Thus, communication functions not only as a means of conveying instructions but also as a means of building involvement and conducive working relationships. The observation findings showed direct interactions among the principal, vice principals, teachers, and educational personnel during school activities. Teachers were also observed to have opportunities to convey information, difficulties, and work-related needs. Documentation in the form of school programs, task assignments, joint activities, and homeroom teacher documents also indicated the existence of a work structure that supported communication and the involvement of school community members.

In addition to communication, the principal provided motivation through role modeling. The principal explained:

"Menurut saya, kepala sekolah tidak cukup hanya memberikan perintah, tetapi harus menunjukkan contoh." (Coding : MOT-PTL-KS-01)

This view was consistent with G3's experience:

"Guru juga merasa harus menunjukkan tanggung jawab karena pimpinan memberikan contoh terlebih dahulu." (Coding : MOT-PTL-G3-01)

The observation findings showed that the principal was involved in school activities, monitored the implementation of activities, and demonstrated attention to discipline and responsibility. Thus, role modeling became one of the motivational mechanisms evident in the principal's leadership practices.

Motivation was also manifested through personal coaching and support for teachers. The principal stated:

"Saya berusaha agar pembinaan tidak dilakukan di depan guru lain, terutama kalau masalahnya bersifat pribadi atau menyangkut kinerja individu." (Coding : MOT-BIM-KS-01)

G5 reinforced this finding:

"Biasanya guru diberikan kesempatan menjelaskan masalahnya, kemudian kepala sekolah memberikan arahan." (Coding : MOT-BIM-G5-01)

Moral support was also found among all informants, while material support was understood as assistance provided depending on the needs, the school's capacity, and the applicable regulations governing the use of funds. The principal emphasized:

"Untuk bantuan materiil, tentu disesuaikan dengan kemampuan dan aturan yang berlaku."
(Coding : MOT-DUK-KS-02)

The observation findings showed moral support through communication, guidance, and the principal's attention to teachers. Meanwhile, documentation of task assignments, school programs, joint activities, and homeroom teacher activities supported the existence of a work structure that enabled support and coaching. However, material assistance was not treated as a main finding because it required more specific administrative evidence.

Based on source and technique triangulation, the pattern of motivation showed that the principal fostered teacher professionalism through understanding teachers' characteristics, open communication, role modeling, personal coaching, and moral support. Motivation was not provided solely through instructions but was developed through working relationships, the provision of trust, and role modeling in carrying out responsibilities.

2. Principal's Supervision of the Implementation of Teachers' Duties

The principal's supervision was reflected in the involvement of teachers in decision-making, task assignment, monitoring the implementation of responsibilities, problem-solving, evaluation, and follow-up. In decision-making, the principal did not act entirely on an individual basis. The principal explained:

"Keputusan sekolah pada prinsipnya tidak semuanya saya tentukan sendiri. Untuk keputusan yang berkaitan dengan program sekolah, kami melibatkan wakil kepala sekolah, guru dan pihak terkait."
(Coding : PWS-TGS-KS-01)

This statement was consistent with G4:

"Biasanya kepala sekolah bersama para waka dan guru yang berkaitan dengan masalah atau program yang akan dibahas." (Coding : PWS-TGS-G4-01)

This involvement was subsequently translated into the distribution of responsibilities according to areas of responsibility, abilities, and activity needs. The principal stated:

"Pembagian tugas disesuaikan dengan kemampuan dan bidang masing-masing." (Coding : PWS-TGS-KS-02)

G1 also explained:

"Biasanya kami mendapatkan pembagian tugas. Kalau ada kegiatan sekolah, guru diberitahu apa tanggung jawabnya." (Coding : PWS-TGS-G1-01)

These findings indicate that supervision was not conducted only after the completion of work but began with the assignment of responsibilities. The distribution of tasks provided clarity regarding the parties responsible for carrying out activities.

Supervision was also carried out through a gradual problem-solving process. The principal explained:

"Saya berusaha mencari masalahnya terlebih dahulu, tidak langsung menyalahkan siapa yang dianggap salah." (Coding : PWS-TDK-KS-01)

G2 reinforced this finding:

"Yang saya rasakan, kepala sekolah biasanya tidak langsung mengambil kesimpulan. Beliau mendengarkan penjelasan dari guru terlebih dahulu baru memberikan arahan." (Coding : PWS-TDK-G2-01)

This pattern indicates that supervisory follow-up was conducted through clarification, communication, and guidance before corrective action was taken. The observation findings also showed that when problems arose, the principal provided the relevant parties with an opportunity to explain the situation before providing guidance or determining a resolution.

The next aspect of supervision was reflected in program evaluation. The principal stated:

"Hasil evaluasi menjadi bahan untuk perbaikan program berikutnya." (Coding : PWS-EVL-KS-01)

G3 provided further support for this finding:

"Dibahas apakah programnya sudah berjalan sesuai rencana, apa kendalanya, dan apa yang perlu diperbaiki." (Coding : PWS-EVL-G3-01)

The observation findings showed that evaluation was conducted through discussions of activity implementation and the challenges that arose. Documentation in the form of the School Curriculum (KSP), Annual Work Plan (RKT), Medium-Term School Development Plan (RKJM), principal's program documents, task assignments, attendance records, activity evaluation documents, teacher development documents, and instructional materials supported the existence of mechanisms for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Supervision was also accompanied by providing teachers with opportunities to develop their creativity. The principal stated:

"Selama sesuai dengan aturan dan tujuan pembelajaran, saya mendukung kreativitas guru."
(Coding : MOT-DUK-KS-01)

This finding indicates that supervision did not merely serve to restrict teachers' behavior but also provided opportunities for professional development as long as it remained aligned with the school's objectives and regulations.

Based on source and technique triangulation, the principal's supervision formed a pattern of task assignment, implementation monitoring, problem-solving, evaluation, and follow-up. Supervision was carried out through communication and teacher involvement, so that it was not solely oriented toward control but also toward improving the implementation of teachers' duties.

3. Provision of Rewards in Promoting Teacher Professionalism

The research findings showed that rewards were provided as a form of recognition for teachers' performance and contributions. The criteria for rewards that consistently emerged from all informants included responsibility, discipline, involvement, task completion, and contributions to school activities.

The principal explained:

"Pertimbangannya antara lain kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, keterlibatan dalam kegiatan sekolah, hasil pekerjaan dan kontribusi terhadap program sekolah." (Coding : REW-KR-KS-01)

This statement was reinforced by G1:

"Guru yang disiplin dan mau terlibat dalam kegiatan sekolah biasanya mendapat apresiasi. Selain itu penyelesaian tugas juga menjadi pertimbangan." (Coding : REW-PRO-G1-01)

The consistency of information from the principal, vice principals, and teachers indicated that rewards were perceived as being related to work behavior and contributions to the school, rather than merely to personal proximity to the principal. This was also reflected in G1's statement:

"Jadi bukan hanya karena guru dekat dengan kepala sekolah." (Coding : REW-KR-G1-01)

The most consistently identified form of reward was verbal and interpersonal appreciation. G3 stated:

"Yang paling sering saya lihat adalah ucapan terima kasih atau pujian secara langsung."
(Coding : REW-BTK-G3-01)

G5 also stated:

"Itu memang sederhana, tetapi bagi guru tetap memberikan rasa dihargai." (Coding : REW-BTK-G5-01)

Appreciation could also be expressed during staff meetings, allowing other members of the school community to recognize teachers' contributions. This indicates the presence of an element of public recognition for teachers' performance.

Meanwhile, rewards in the form of material incentives were mentioned by informants as a form that could be provided for certain activities when funding was available and in accordance with applicable regulations. The principal stated:

"Untuk kegiatan tertentu juga bisa ada insentif atau bentuk penghargaan sesuai kemampuan sekolah dan ketentuan yang berlaku." (Coding : REW-BTK-KS-01)

This information was reinforced by WK and WS, who stated that incentives were provided when activities had an allocated budget. However, the observation findings did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that all teachers routinely received material rewards. Therefore, material rewards were positioned as a conditional form of recognition rather than the primary pattern.

Documentation of activities and task assignments supported the existence of teachers' contributions to various school programs, while specific administrative evidence concerning incentive payments would be required if material rewards were to be analyzed more specifically.

Based on source and technique triangulation, the provision of rewards showed a pattern of performance and contribution → appreciation → reinforcement of professionalism. The most evident forms of rewards were praise, expressions of gratitude, and recognition of teachers' work. Material incentives were possible for certain activities, but their provision depended on the available budget and applicable regulations.

4. Implementation of Sanctions for Failure to Fulfill Duties

The research findings showed that sanctions were implemented gradually. The forms most frequently reported or experienced by the informants were reminders and verbal warnings regarding unfulfilled duties or disciplinary issues. The principal stated:

"Biasanya dimulai dari komunikasi atau teguran secara lisan." (Coding : SAN-TGR-KS-01)

G5 reported a similar experience:

"Pernah. Biasanya berkaitan dengan tugas yang belum diselesaikan atau masalah kedisiplinan. Tetapi saya melihat kepala sekolah lebih dulu memberikan teguran dan meminta guru menjelaskan penyebabnya." (Coding : SAN-TGR-G5-01)

These findings indicate that corrective action began with communication and clarification. The purpose was not merely to impose sanctions on teachers but to encourage improvement in task performance and work behavior. The principal explained:

"Tujuannya bukan untuk menghukum guru, tetapi supaya ada perbaikan." (Coding : SAN-TKL-KS-01)

A pattern of coaching before further action was also found among the teachers. G4 stated:

"Guru diberikan kesempatan menjelaskan kendalanya, kemudian kepala sekolah memberikan arahan." (Coding : SAN-PBM-G4-01)

Thus, warnings in practice were accompanied by an element of coaching. If problems recurred, informants mentioned the possibility of a written warning or coordination with the relevant authorities. The principal explained:

"Kalau sudah berulang dan pembinaan sebelumnya tidak memberikan perubahan, dapat diberikan peringatan tertulis." (Coding : SAN-ULT-KS-01)

WK also explained:

"Kalau sudah berulang dan pembinaan belum memberikan perubahan, permasalahannya dapat disampaikan kepada kepala sekolah untuk mendapatkan penanganan lebih lanjut." (Coding : SAN-TKL-WK-02)

The observation findings supported the findings regarding warnings and reminders concerning tasks and discipline. The observations also showed that problem-solving tended to be preceded by communication and coaching. However, the observations did not identify sufficient events to demonstrate the implementation of formal sanctions at moderate or severe levels.

This was also evident from the teacher interviews. G3 stated:

"Untuk sanksi berat saya belum pernah mengalami atau melihat secara langsung." (Coding : SAN-TKL-G3-01)

G4 expressed a similar view:

"Saya belum pernah melihat secara langsung sanksi berat diberikan kepada guru." (Coding : SAN-TKL-G4-01)

G5 also stated:

"Saya belum pernah melihat langsung pemberian sanksi berat." (Coding : SAN-TKL-G5-01)

Thus, the data indicated that informants had an understanding of the formal sanction mechanism, but there was insufficient evidence to conclude that severe sanctions had actually been implemented during the period known to the informants. The principal himself emphasized that severe sanctions must comply with personnel regulations and be based on evidence of performance or violations.

Documentation could be used to strengthen administrative actions when available in the form of coaching records, warning letters, documents of coordination with supervisors, or performance assessment documents. However, based on the available data, the main findings were concentrated at the stages of reminders, warnings, coaching, and follow-up. Based on source and technique triangulation, the implementation of sanctions showed a pattern of reminder → warning → coaching → follow-up, while more severe administrative actions constituted a mechanism known to the informants but were not directly evidenced through the experiences of most teachers or the observation findings.

Overall, the research findings showed a pattern of principal leadership that connected teachers' work behavior with motivation, supervision, rewards, and corrective actions. In the aspect of motivation, the principal built working relationships through an understanding of teachers' characteristics, open communication, role modeling, coaching, and support. In the aspect of supervision, the principal employed task assignment, monitoring, problem-solving, evaluation, and follow-up. In the aspect of rewards, recognition was primarily provided through verbal appreciation and acknowledgment of teachers' responsibility, discipline, involvement, and contributions. Meanwhile, in the aspect of sanctions, corrective actions were implemented gradually through reminders, warnings, coaching, and follow-up. This pattern indicates that transactional leadership practices at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang were manifested not only through exchange relationships involving rewards and punishments but also through performance management mechanisms encompassing the assignment of responsibilities, monitoring, feedback, recognition of contributions, and correction of work that did not meet expectations. These findings were derived from the consistency of information provided by the principal, vice principals, and teachers and were further supported by observations and research documentation.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the principal's transactional leadership practices in relation to teacher professionalism at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang. The novelty of this study lies in its contextual explanation of the interrelationships among motivation, monitoring, rewards, and sanctions within the principal's day-to-day work management practices, rather than in reintroducing these four elements, which are already well established in the leadership literature. Based on interviews with the principal, vice-principal, and teachers, triangulated with observations and documentation, this study identified a series of practices encompassing an understanding of teachers' individual circumstances, the allocation of responsibilities, the monitoring of task implementation, the recognition of contributions, and the correction of work that did not meet expectations. These practices were carried out through open communication, role modeling, individualized guidance, and moral support.

The main findings can be summarized in three patterns. First, motivation was fostered not only through instructions but also through an understanding of teachers' individual characteristics, two-way communication, role modeling, and guidance. Second, monitoring took place from the assignment of responsibilities through evaluation and follow-up, while allowing teachers opportunities to explain the challenges they faced and exercise their creativity, provided that their efforts remained aligned with school objectives. Third, the most tangible forms of reward consisted of praise, expressions of gratitude, and recognition of teachers' responsibilities and contributions, whereas material rewards were conditional. The corrective actions most strongly supported by the data were reminders, verbal reprimands, guidance, and follow-up measures; the implementation of more severe formal sanctions was not directly confirmed through the experiences reported by most teachers or through observations. As this study employed a qualitative case study design in a single school, its findings explain practices and perceptions within that context rather than establish causal relationships or demonstrate effectiveness that can be generalized to all schools. These three patterns are further discussed by relating empirical evidence from the school context under investigation to the literature on motivation, communication and interpersonal support, monitoring and performance management, rewards, and corrective actions.

1. Motivation, Communication, and Interpersonal Support

The findings on motivation are consistent with Hyseni Duraku and Hoxha (2021), who reported an association between school principals' leadership attributes and teacher motivation, including the role of *contingent reward* in the performance of specific tasks. However, their study employed a survey of secondary school teachers in Kosovo, whereas the present study explored the processes and experiences of school actors using a qualitative approach. These methodological and contextual differences help explain the different emphases of the findings. While quantitative research examines relationships between variables, the present study reveals how motivation in everyday practice is also fostered through communication, trust, role modeling, and moral support, rather than solely through rewards for task achievement.

In addition to motivation, open communication and teacher involvement are important aspects of understanding how school leadership supports teacher professionalism. These findings can be discussed in relation to Hsieh, Chen, and Li (2024) and Ma and Russ (2024), which are cited in this manuscript in connection with professional teacher collaboration. Although neither study specifically examined transactional leadership, both are relevant to explaining the importance of opportunities for communication and involvement in supporting professional interactions. In the present study, teachers were given opportunities to express their opinions, communicate the challenges they faced, and provide input. Thus, communication functioned not only as a channel for conveying instructions but also as a mechanism for clarification, coordination, and problem-solving. This interpretation is consistent with Vangrieken et al.'s (2015) review of 82 studies on teacher collaboration, which showed that collaboration takes various forms and occurs at different levels of depth, being influenced by a range of facilitating and inhibiting factors. Similarly, De Jong et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of collaborative work processes, support, and organizational conditions in teacher collaboration in secondary schools. The present study extends this understanding to the level of practice by demonstrating how open communication is manifested in everyday interactions related to task assignments, problem-solving, and evaluation.

Open communication is also related to role modeling and individualized guidance, suggesting that leadership practices in schools cannot always be rigidly separated according to leadership style categories. In the context of the present study, the principal implemented structures of responsibility and monitoring that reflected the characteristics of transactional leadership, while reinforcing these practices with interpersonal support. This finding can be understood in light of Hallinger et al. (2019), whose comparative study of teachers in China and Thailand showed that instructional leadership was associated with teachers' professional learning through trust and teacher agency. Although the leadership model examined in their study differs from the focus of the present research, their findings provide a comparative perspective suggesting that trust and professional relationships can serve as important mechanisms in school environments. In the present study, role modeling and individualized guidance illustrate how the fulfillment of formal responsibilities can coexist with interpersonal support. However, because this study did not separately examine the mediating roles of trust or teacher agency, these two aspects should be understood as interpretive concepts that help explain the findings rather than as causal relationships empirically established by the data.

2. Monitoring and Evaluation as Performance Management

The findings show that monitoring was not limited to checking work after tasks had been completed. It began with the involvement of relevant parties in decision-making and the allocation of responsibilities, followed by monitoring, clarification of problems, program evaluation, and follow-up. These findings bear similarities to Abu Nasra and Arar (2020), who examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school principals' leadership styles and in-role performance, as well as Alkaabi (2023) and Rachel (2019), whose works are cited in the original manuscript in relation to supervisory and developmental approaches. However, the present study emphasizes that when problems arose, the principal tended to listen to explanations before providing guidance. Thus, monitoring in the school under investigation involved both oversight of responsibilities and efforts to resolve problems.

This interpretation is also consistent with Shen et al. (2021) and Eryilmaz and Strietholt (2025), whose works are cited in the original manuscript in relation to the relationship between school leadership development and school performance. Quantitative or longitudinal studies can examine relationships and changes between constructs, whereas the qualitative data in the present study reveal the sequence of practices experienced by school members. Because the research designs and outcome measures differ, the findings cannot be compared as equivalent measures of effectiveness. Nevertheless, both perspectives help situate leadership as a practice that needs to be examined through concrete actions rather than solely through formal positions. Through a meta-analysis of 68 quantitative studies, Hallinger et al. (2025) also found significant associations between principals' instructional leadership and various teacher attitudes, including trust, self-efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction. Because instructional leadership differs from transactional leadership, that study does not establish the same effects; its relevance lies in highlighting the importance of understanding principals' work management in relation to teachers' professional attitudes and experiences.

Accordingly, the term *performance management* is used here as an interpretation of the empirical pattern involving the assignment of responsibilities, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up, rather than as a separately measured variable. Differences in school contexts, research approaches, performance indicators, and respondent perceptions may lead to different emphases across studies. In the case examined here, the prominent feature was not punitive monitoring but an approach that combined work standards with clarification, feedback, and improvement.

3. Reward: Social Recognition and Conditional Incentives

The findings on rewards reveal a relationship between work contributions and recognition: teachers who demonstrate responsibility, discipline, engagement, and task completion receive appreciation. This pattern is consistent with the concept of contingent reward and with the studies cited in the original manuscript, namely Ghosh, Bush, and Shivhare (2024), Ge, Zhang, and Dong (2022), and Hyseni Duraku and Hoxha (2021), which examine contingent rewards and their relationship with motivation or work behavior. This similarity may arise because, across different organizational contexts, recognition of achievement can clarify the behaviors expected by the organization. However, the present study shows that the most consistently observed forms of reward were not financial incentives but expressions of gratitude, praise, and interpersonal recognition. Material rewards were mentioned only as a possibility in certain activities, depending on the available budget and applicable regulations.

The methodological distinction between observed rewards and rewards that are merely permitted by policy is important. Siverbo (2023) and Fjendbo (2021), as cited in the original manuscript, provide a context for discussing forms of reward and motivation. However, the data from the present study provide stronger support for the existence of verbal appreciation than for the routine provision of material rewards. Therefore, this study does not conclude that material rewards improve teacher professionalism. Its contribution is more specific: in this context, contingent reward appears to function as a form of social reinforcement associated with work behaviors recognized by the school. Vangrieken et al. (2017) also identified leadership support, group dynamics, trust, and mutual respect as important conditions for teacher communities. This literature helps explain why social recognition may be relevant in professional environments, but it does not eliminate the need to investigate directly how teachers interpret and respond to different forms of reward.

4. Sanctions and Corrective Actions: Evidence of Practice and Limits of Interpretation

The findings on sanctions reveal a gradual pattern involving reminders, verbal reprimands, guidance, and follow-up. This pattern is related to the concept of management-by-exception, which involves monitoring deviations from established standards and intervening when problems arise. The original manuscript relates this pattern to Sheena et al. (2025), Boies and Fiset (2019), and Alaro et al. (2025), whose studies address school principals' leadership behavior, monitoring, and corrective interventions. In the case examined here, the similarity lies in the attention given to deviations from task expectations. The distinctive feature, however, is

that corrective actions were generally initiated through communication and by providing teachers with an opportunity to explain the causes of the problem.

Nevertheless, the findings concerning the implementation of formal sanctions must be interpreted cautiously. The interviews indicate that informants were aware of the possibility of written warnings or administrative action if problems recurred. However, most teachers did not report firsthand experiences of witnessing the implementation of severe sanctions, and the observations also yielded no strong evidence of their implementation. Therefore, more severe formal sanctions cannot be presented as practices demonstrably implemented at the school. The distinction between procedures known to informants and actions directly observed constitutes one of the important findings of this study. In a different context, Mark and Sean (2018), through a review of professional learning communities, highlighted the importance of considering the types of evidence used and the limitations of studies relying on self-reports. Although their review did not specifically address sanctions, the principle of caution in assessing the strength of evidence remains relevant. Accordingly, information about policies or possible actions must be distinguished from empirical evidence that those actions have actually been implemented.

5. Research Contributions, Implications, and Future Research Directions

This study makes three main contributions. First, it conceptualizes transactional leadership as a sequence of work management practices encompassing clarity of responsibilities, monitoring, evaluation, recognition, and corrective actions, rather than merely an exchange of rewards and punishments. Second, it demonstrates that the most tangible forms of reward in the case examined were social and interpersonal, whereas material rewards were provided conditionally. Third, it distinguishes corrective actions supported by direct empirical evidence, such as reminders, reprimands, guidance, and follow-up, from formal sanctions mentioned only as possibilities. These three contributions enrich the contextual understanding of how transactional leadership practices are implemented and experienced by members of the school community, without claiming a causal relationship between these practices and improvements in teacher professionalism.

These findings can be critically compared with Abu Nasra and Arar (2020), cited in the original manuscript to explain the relationship between perceptions of more transformational leadership and teachers' in-role performance, and Hyseni Duraku and Hoxha (2021), who reported an association between contingent reward and motivation in the performance of specific tasks. Differences in findings and research focus do not necessarily indicate contradictions, because the constructs, contexts, respondents, and research methods differ. This study does not aim to determine whether transactional leadership is more effective than other leadership styles. Rather, it seeks to explain how transactional mechanisms operate alongside supportive and participatory behaviors in the context of a single school. This perspective can also be considered alongside Huang and Shen (2022) and Karadak (2020), cited in the original manuscript to emphasize the importance of context in understanding leadership effects. Thus, the findings underscore the need to understand leadership practices in terms of how they are enacted within specific organizational contexts, rather than solely through the categorization of leadership styles.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that school principals need to clarify work expectations and reward criteria, document task assignments and evaluation outcomes, and communicate appreciation fairly and specifically. Reprimands and follow-up actions should also be implemented proportionately, transparently, and in accordance with applicable regulations. In addition, schools need to strengthen opportunities for dialogue, individualized guidance, and professional collaboration without compromising accountability standards. At the school policy level, the findings underscore the importance of documented procedures for monitoring and corrective action, accompanied by recognition of teachers' contributions that does not depend solely on financial incentives.

To advance knowledge in this area, future research should involve multiple schools with different characteristics, use longitudinal data to trace changes in leadership practices over time, and examine teachers' perceptions of fairness in reward allocation and the application of

sanctions. Further studies should also link leadership practices to clearly defined indicators of teacher professionalism. A mixed-methods approach could be used to explore the experiences of school stakeholders while examining the extent to which the patterns identified in this study apply to broader contexts. In this way, the present study provides a contextual explanation that can serve as a foundation for further empirical testing and theoretical development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the principal's transactional leadership at SMP Negeri 3 Sungai Ambawang was manifested in practice through four main aspects: motivation, supervision, the provision of rewards, and the implementation of punishments or sanctions. In the aspect of motivation, the principal fostered teacher professionalism through an understanding of teachers' characteristics and abilities, open communication, harmonious working relationships, role modeling, personal coaching, and moral support. In the aspect of supervision, the principal implemented the distribution of tasks and responsibilities, monitored work implementation, facilitated problem-solving, evaluated programs, and provided follow-up on work that did not yet meet expectations. In the aspect of rewards, recognition was primarily provided in the form of verbal appreciation, expressions of gratitude, praise, and acknowledgment of teachers' contributions. The criteria for rewards were related to responsibility, discipline, involvement, task completion, and contributions to school programs. Material rewards were identified as a conditional form of recognition, depending on the activity, budget availability, and applicable regulations. Meanwhile, sanctions were implemented gradually through reminders, warnings, coaching, and follow-up. The strongest empirical evidence concerned minor sanctions and coaching actions, whereas the implementation of formal moderate and severe sanctions could not be established as an actual practice based on observations and the direct experiences of most teachers.

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