

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF SD NEGERI 01 DORO

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the school principal in transforming school culture through the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro, a primary school in Doro District, Pekalongan Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research reveals that the school principal plays a pivotal role in integrating character education into the school's curriculum, extracurricular activities, and daily routines. Through strategic planning, the principal has successfully embedded values such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation into the school's culture. The study highlights the importance of leadership in creating a positive school environment that supports character development, while also identifying challenges such as limited time and resources for teachers. The findings suggest that with consistent leadership and involvement of the entire school community, significant improvements in both student behavior and academic performance can be achieved. This case study provides valuable insights into how character education can be a powerful tool in reshaping school culture and enhancing the holistic development of students.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals, societies, and nations. Beyond the transmission of academic knowledge, contemporary education emphasizes the importance of character formation to develop well-rounded individuals who possess integrity, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness. In Indonesia, this paradigm shift has been formally reinforced through national education policies that place character education as a central component of schooling (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). Character education is viewed as a strategic effort to prepare future citizens who are not only intellectually competent but also morally grounded and socially responsible.

Despite strong policy support, the implementation of character education at the school level remains a significant challenge, particularly in elementary schools where foundational values are formed. Integrating character

values into daily school life requires more than curriculum alignment; it demands the transformation of school culture so that character education is practiced consistently through routines, interactions, and institutional norms. Previous studies indicate that many schools struggle to move character education beyond formal instruction into lived experiences due to limited teacher preparedness, insufficient resources, and rigid academic demands (Setya et al., 2024).

In this context, the school principal plays a pivotal role. As the instructional and managerial leader, the principal is responsible not only for academic administration but also for shaping a school culture that supports character development. Effective principals integrate character education into the school's vision, mission, policies, and daily practices, ensuring that values are embedded in both formal and informal learning environments (Isnaini et al., 2023). Leadership that prioritizes character education contributes to a school climate where values such as discipline, cooperation, and responsibility are consistently modeled and reinforced (Lustiawati & Haryati, 2023).

Character education in Indonesia has gained renewed momentum through the implementation of the Penguanan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) program, which seeks to integrate character values across all levels of education (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional, 2010). However, research suggests that the success of this initiative largely depends on school-level leadership. Mulyanto et al. (2021) emphasize that educational leadership extends beyond administrative competence to include the ability to inspire teachers and students in cultivating moral and social values. Similarly, Mirawansya and Karwanto (2022) argue that principals who actively manage school culture play a decisive role in ensuring that character education is internalized by students rather than treated as a symbolic program.

From a managerial perspective, the principal functions as a planner, implementer, and evaluator of character education initiatives. This role involves integrating character values into curricular activities, extracurricular programs, and school regulations while aligning them with broader educational goals (Savitri & Miyono, 2022). Leadership that is strategic and value-oriented enables schools to develop a cohesive culture that supports character formation (Sakban & Saryati, 2020).

At SD Negeri 01 Doro, located in Doro District, Pekalongan Regency, character education has been systematically integrated into the school's daily routines and institutional practices. Programs such as *Jumat Bersih*, character-focused discussions, and collaborative school activities encourage students to practice values including *gotong royong*, discipline, respect, and responsibility (Nasriah et al., 2024). These initiatives have contributed to the development of a positive school culture characterized by mutual respect, collective responsibility, and empathy among students (Sabila et al., 2023). The principal's active involvement in monitoring and evaluating these programs ensures continuous improvement and alignment with students' developmental needs (Rachman et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro is not without challenges. One major issue is the limited and inconsistent professional development provided to teachers regarding the integration of character education into classroom instruction. As noted by Maisaro et al. (2018), insufficient training often leaves teachers ill-equipped to embed character values effectively within pedagogical practices. This concern aligns with the findings of Muslim et al. (2023), who highlight that teachers tend to prioritize academic achievement over character development due to systemic pressures.

Another challenge relates to the limited involvement of parents and the wider community. Many parents still perceive character education as the sole responsibility of schools, resulting in a lack of reinforcement at home (Mirawansya & Karwanto, 2022). This disconnect can weaken the impact of school-based character education, as values taught at school are not consistently supported in students' home environments (Murni et al., 2024). Strengthening school-community partnerships therefore becomes essential to sustaining character development.

Despite these challenges, the integration of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro has yielded positive outcomes. Improvements have been observed in students' discipline, cooperation, and learning engagement, alongside enhanced academic performance. These findings support earlier studies demonstrating a positive relationship between character education, improved student behavior, and academic success (Mulyanto et al., 2021; Setya et al., 2024). A school culture grounded in strong character values fosters a learning environment that enhances students' motivation, responsibility, and focus.

Based on this context, the present study aims to examine how school leadership, particularly the managerial role of the principal, contributes to transforming school culture through character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro. By adopting a case study approach, this research seeks to provide empirical insights into the processes, challenges, and impacts of character education implementation at the elementary school level. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the discourse on educational leadership and character education, and practically to school leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen school culture through value-based education.

METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and analyze the role of the school principal in transforming school culture through the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro. A qualitative approach was selected because the researcher sought to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the character education phenomenon as it occurs in the real school context, with particular attention to social dynamics, interpersonal interactions, and cultural changes within the school environment. This research focused not only on outcomes but also on the processes and lived experiences that shape school culture at SD Negeri 01 Doro.

Qualitative methods enabled the researcher to explore rich and detailed information through interviews, observations, and documentation, providing a holistic understanding of how character education is implemented and how it influences school culture and student development (Mulyanto et al., 2021). This approach aligns with the study by Hidayat and Nurhayati (2022), which emphasizes the importance of qualitative analysis in understanding cultural transformation related to character education in elementary schools.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted at SD Negeri 01 Doro, located in Doro District, Pekalongan Regency. The site was selected based on the school's success in integrating character education into students' daily activities and in fostering a school culture that supports character development. SD Negeri 01 Doro is recognized for its achievements in implementing character education programs, making it a relevant and meaningful case for in-depth analysis.

The research participants consisted of the school principal, teachers, and students of SD Negeri 01 Doro. The principal was selected due to his/her central role in planning, implementing, and evaluating character education programs. Teachers were involved because they directly engage in instructional and habituation processes related to character development both inside and outside the classroom. Students, as the primary beneficiaries of character education programs, were included to gain insights into how their character development is influenced by the implemented initiatives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques: (1) In-Depth Interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with the school principal, teachers, and selected student representatives to explore their perspectives on the principal's role in implementing character education. The interviews were designed to obtain information regarding participants' understanding of the importance of character education, challenges encountered during implementation, and perceived impacts on students. Interviews also provided insights into how character education is integrated across various aspects of school activities. (2) Participant Observation. The researcher conducted direct observations at SD Negeri 01 Doro by observing interactions between teachers and students and examining how character values were practiced in daily school activities. Observations were carried out both inside and outside the classroom, including extracurricular activities and students' social interactions. The researcher also documented how the school environment influenced character formation and how school culture either supported or constrained character development. (3) Documentation. Documentary data were collected from various sources, including school documents, institutional policies, character education programs, and annual reports that documented achievements related to character education. These documents provided written evidence of policies and strategies implemented by the principal and teachers in applying character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was the **researcher**, who acted as the main data collector and analyst. To support data collection, the researcher used structured interview guides and field notes for observations. Audio recordings of interviews and relevant documents were also utilized to ensure data accuracy. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument capable of directly interacting with participants and interpreting the meaning of observed phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using **thematic analysis**. The data analysis process consisted of the following stages: (1) Data Reduction. Collected data were selected, focused, and simplified to identify information relevant to the research objectives. Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain analytical focus. (2) Data Display. Reduced data were organized into narrative and thematic forms to illustrate the process of school culture transformation through character education. Data presentation included descriptions of how character education programs were implemented, how students responded, and how the principal and teachers supported program implementation. (3) Conclusion Drawing. Conclusions were drawn based on the analyzed data by linking the findings to relevant theories and addressing the research questions regarding the role of the school principal in transforming school culture through character education.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed **triangulation techniques**. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from multiple sources and methods, including interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, direct field observations, and supporting documentation. This process enhanced the credibility and validity of the research findings by examining them from multiple perspectives.

Research Ethics

This study adhered to established research ethics principles. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement in interviews. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and the collected data were used solely for research purposes. The researcher also maintained objectivity and transparency throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aims to analyze how the school principal, in the role of a manager, contributes to transforming school culture through the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro. Based on data collected through interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, as well as direct observations conducted at the school, the following key findings were identified.

Planning of Character Education by the School Principal

The findings indicate that the school principal at SD Negeri 01 Doro has developed a highly structured plan for the implementation of character education. Character education programs are designed not as episodic or stand-alone activities but are systematically integrated into all aspects of school life. The planning includes routine activities such as *Friday Clean-Up*, *Character Literacy*, and the habituation of Pancasila values across all subjects. The principal also ensures that every teacher understands and consistently integrates character values into daily instructional practices.

For example, the *Friday Clean-Up* program involves students, teachers, and school staff working collaboratively to maintain the school environment. This activity not only aims to promote cleanliness but also instills values such as responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. These findings demonstrate that the principal's planning has successfully embedded character education into the daily culture of the school.

Implementation of Character Education at SD Negeri 01 Doro

The implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro has been carried out effectively. The principal ensures that the planned programs are consistently implemented and actively involve all school stakeholders.

Interviews with teachers revealed that most of them consciously engage students in activities aimed at fostering character values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility.

A concrete example of this implementation is the reinforcement of honesty during tests and examinations. Teachers not only focus on academic content but also emphasize the importance of integrity throughout the assessment process. In addition, extracurricular activities serve as important platforms for character development, particularly through sports and arts activities that promote teamwork and sportsmanship.

Observations conducted by the researcher further indicate that students demonstrate improved behavior in both social interactions and academic activities. Students appear more disciplined and more willing to support one another, reflecting the consistent application of character education by both the principal and teachers.

Supervision and Evaluation of Character Education Programs

The school principal at SD Negeri 01 Doro conducts regular supervision of the character education programs. Monthly evaluation meetings are held with teachers to discuss the progress of program implementation and to identify challenges encountered in practice. Furthermore, the principal frequently conducts direct observations of daily school activities to ensure that character values are properly applied.

During observations, the principal was seen actively monitoring student behavior and providing feedback to teachers regarding the integration of character education into instructional practices. The principal also encourages teachers to be more creative in embedding character values into their lessons and provides recognition to students who demonstrate positive behavior. This evaluation process plays a crucial role in ensuring that character education programs are not merely symbolic but genuinely influence students' behavior.

Supporting Factors in School Culture Transformation

One of the main supporting factors in the successful implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro is the strong commitment of both the principal and teachers. The principal acts not only as an administrator but also as a role model who exemplifies character values in daily practice. Teachers strongly support character education programs, recognizing their importance in shaping students' attitudes and behavior.

Parental involvement also emerges as a significant supporting factor. The principal actively encourages parents to participate in character education initiatives, such as parent meetings and inter-class character competitions. This involvement demonstrates that school culture transformation extends beyond teachers and students and includes parents as key partners in supporting character development at home.

Inhibiting Factors in School Culture Transformation

Despite the overall success of character education implementation, several inhibiting factors were identified. One major challenge faced by the principal is limited time availability to implement character education comprehensively. Dense schedules and administrative demands often reduce the time allocated for character-based activities.

Additionally, although training related to character education has been provided, some teachers expressed the need for more continuous professional development to enhance their skills in effectively teaching character values. Several teachers noted the need for additional resources and instructional materials to support the integration of character education in classroom learning.

Impact of Character Education on Students

One of the most significant impacts of character education implementation is the observable positive change in student behavior. Students demonstrate improvements in discipline, mutual respect, and cooperation across various activities. Interviews with teachers revealed that students have become more responsible in completing their tasks, both at school and in their daily lives.

Improvements in academic achievement were also identified and are believed to be closely related to changes in students' attitudes. Students who exhibit higher levels of discipline and responsibility in learning activities tend to demonstrate better academic performance. These findings suggest that character education not only influences students' behavior but also contributes to enhanced academic quality.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the transformation of school culture through character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro has generated significant positive outcomes. The school principal plays an active role

in planning, implementing, and supervising character education programs. Although challenges remain, particularly related to time constraints and the need for continuous teacher training, character education has successfully fostered a more positive school culture and supported students' social and academic development.

Discussion

Planning of Character Education and Its Influence on School Culture

The findings indicate that character education planning at SD Negeri 01 Doro has been carried out systematically and comprehensively by the school principal. Character education is not positioned merely as an additional program but is integrated into all aspects of school life, including the instructional curriculum and extracurricular activities. Programs such as *Friday Clean-Up* and *Character Literacy* demonstrate that character education at this school extends beyond classroom instruction and is embedded in daily practices that shape the school culture.

This comprehensive planning aligns closely with educational management theories emphasizing that a positive school culture can be developed through effective and well-structured planning (Kurniawati, 2020; Mulyanto et al., 2021). These findings also support the study by Hidayat and Nurhayati (2022), who argue that school principals, as educational leaders, play a pivotal role in designing and implementing character education programs that can transform school culture into one that better supports students' moral development.

However, despite well-developed planning, challenges remain in its implementation, particularly in ensuring that all teachers consistently apply character education programs in their classrooms. This finding is consistent with Rachman et al. (2023), who reported that the success of character education planning largely depends on the shared understanding and active involvement of all school stakeholders, especially teachers and instructional staff.

Implementation of Character Education and Its Impact on Students

The implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro demonstrates highly positive outcomes, with character values such as discipline, honesty, and cooperation being successfully integrated into students' daily lives. Programs such as *Friday Clean-Up* and other habituation activities not only promote cleanliness but also foster cooperation and a sense of responsibility among students. This indicates that character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro does not focus solely on academic achievement but also emphasizes character formation through everyday practices.

These findings are in line with Yanto and Fitriana (2021), who found that character education implemented through routine daily activities has a more substantial impact on students' character development. Similarly, Sabila et al. (2023) emphasize that the success of character education implementation within school life is strongly influenced by the consistency of the principal in facilitating and supporting such activities.

Nevertheless, despite the significant positive impact on students' social behavior, challenges persist due to limited time availability for character-based activities, given the demanding academic workload. Therefore, the school principal is required to continuously innovate by integrating character education into instructional activities without reducing students' academic learning time (Setya et al., 2024).

Supervision and Evaluation as Key Factors in Program Success

The findings also reveal that the school principal at SD Negeri 01 Doro conducts active supervision of character education implementation. Regular evaluation meetings between the principal and teachers serve as an effective mechanism to ensure that character education programs are implemented according to established objectives. Importantly, evaluation focuses not only on outcomes but also on the ongoing processes within the school.

Kurniawati (2021) highlights that systematic supervision and evaluation by school principals significantly influence the effectiveness of character education, particularly in monitoring student behavior and providing continuous feedback. These findings are consistent with Fauzi (2023), who reported that regular supervision enables schools to adjust and refine their character education approaches based on evaluative feedback.

However, supervision efforts are sometimes constrained by limited time, as principals and teachers must balance administrative responsibilities with instructional supervision. Consequently, the sustainability of character education programs depends on the principal's ability to manage time and resources effectively to ensure continuous monitoring of character-based activities within the school.

Supporting Factors in School Culture Transformation

One of the primary supporting factors in the successful transformation of school culture through character education is the strong commitment demonstrated by both the school principal and teachers. The principal at SD Negeri 01 Doro exhibits inspirational leadership in implementing character education initiatives. Additionally, the active involvement of parents and the community serves as an important supporting factor. The principal actively engages parents through activities such as parent meetings and inter-class character competitions, which help reinforce character education at home.

This finding is supported by Purnama and Gunawan (2022), who assert that parental involvement plays a crucial role in strengthening character education in schools. Similarly, Sari (2021) found that collaboration between schools and parents accelerates the development of a school culture that supports character education.

Nevertheless, parental involvement remains largely limited to formal meetings and has not yet been fully integrated into daily character education practices. Therefore, further efforts are needed to deepen parental engagement in supporting students' character development on a more consistent basis.

Impact of Character Education on Students' Behavior and Academic Achievement

One of the most significant impacts of character education implementation is the improvement in students' social behavior. Observations indicate that students demonstrate increased discipline, cooperation, and mutual respect. In addition, improvements in academic achievement were also identified and are believed to be associated with students' enhanced focus and sense of responsibility in learning activities.

Setya et al. (2024) reported that character education implementation in elementary schools contributes to positive attitudinal changes among students, which subsequently enhance academic outcomes. These findings align with Kurniawati (2021), who concluded that character education improves academic quality by fostering discipline and responsibility toward learning tasks. However, this study also indicates that the positive influence on academic achievement requires a longer period to become fully evident, as character education emphasizes gradual behavioral change, which may affect students' long-term academic outcomes.

The discussion demonstrates that the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro has resulted in positive changes in school culture and student behavior. The school principal, acting as an educational manager, plays a central role in planning, implementing, and supervising character education programs. Although several challenges persist, including time constraints and the need for improved teacher training, overall character education has successfully fostered a school culture that supports students' character development and positively influences their academic achievement. These findings indicate that character education can serve as an effective instrument for transforming school culture and creating a learning environment conducive to students' personal and academic growth.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the school principal plays a decisive role in transforming school culture through the systematic implementation of character education at SD Negeri 01 Doro. By functioning as an educational manager, the principal successfully integrates character values into school planning, daily routines, instructional practices, and extracurricular activities, thereby embedding character education as an integral component of school culture rather than a supplementary program.

The findings demonstrate that well-structured planning, consistent implementation, and continuous supervision of character education programs contribute significantly to positive changes in students' behavior, including increased discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual respect. These behavioral improvements are also associated with enhanced academic engagement and performance, indicating that character education supports not only moral development but also academic success by fostering a more conducive learning environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges remain, particularly related to time constraints, the need for sustained teacher professional development, and limited parental involvement in daily character education practices. Nevertheless, the case of SD Negeri 01 Doro illustrates that effective school leadership, supported by teacher commitment and stakeholder collaboration, can successfully transform school culture through character education.

This study therefore provides valuable insights for elementary schools seeking to strengthen character education as a strategic approach to fostering holistic student development and sustainable school culture improvement.

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