

Analysis of Principal Leadership Style In Strengthening Teacher And Student Character In Elementary Schools In Cimanggung District

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ABSTRACT

The principal has a strategic role in forming a school climate that supports the strengthening of teacher and student character. This study aims to describe the principal's leadership style in strengthening character in elementary schools. The method used is qualitative with a case study design. The subjects of the study consisted of principals, grade V teachers, PJOK teachers, and grade V students in several elementary schools in Cimanggung District. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation, with data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model. The results of the study showed that the principal applied a democratic and transformational leadership style, which was reflected through open communication, involvement of school residents in decision-making, and exemplary attitudes. This style is effective in forming teacher character, such as responsibility and integrity, and student character, such as discipline, religiousness, and cooperation. This study concludes that a participatory and value-based leadership style is very relevant to supporting character education in elementary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a person's attitude or behaviour in directing and influencing a group to achieve common goals. Nurhalim et al. (2023) stated that leadership is the process of influencing a group of people to achieve certain goals. This is in line with the opinion of syahril (2019), who views leadership as an effort to influence individuals to carry out tasks according to the targets set. Nasution & Ichsan (2020) added that leadership includes the ability to direct, manage, and encourage group members to achieve organizational goals and form positive character. In the context of educational institutions, leadership is a key element of success. The principal, as the highest formal leader, has a strategic role, not only in administrative aspects, but also as an inspirator, motivator, and character builder of the school community. Effective leadership will create a positive and collaborative

school climate, while weak leadership has the potential to reduce work enthusiasm, fade vision, and hinder the formation of student character (Fadhli, 2016; Suryani et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of the principal's leadership is the main indicator in determining the direction and quality of education delivery at the elementary school level. Siahaan & Prasetya (2023) stated that the role of the principal's leadership is a crucial factor that influences the improvement of teacher performance. Leadership that not only focuses on managerial aspects but is also able to integrate pedagogical and humanistic values is needed to answer today's educational challenges. As a central figure in the school managerial system, the principal plays an important role in directing, motivating, and fostering all school residents. The leadership style applied also determines the success of the learning process and character formation. In this case, the principal is required to create a conducive and pleasant learning environment and build healthy working relationships between school elements (Ritonga, 2020).

According to Farid & Rugaiyah (2023), education has an important role in developing character and individual moral values, such as honesty, empathy, and tolerance, which are internalized through a meaningful learning process. In its implementation, the principal has the authority and structural legitimacy to direct and develop character building through the leadership style implemented. Therefore, the effectiveness of the principal's leadership has direct implications for the quality of the character of teachers and students in elementary schools.

However, the reality in the field shows that not all principals can apply leadership styles optimally in efforts to strengthen character. There are still principals who tend to be authoritarian, less communicative, and do not involve teachers and students in a participatory manner in the decision-making process. This condition has implications for the weak instillation of character values in the school environment, both for teachers as educators and students as learners. As stated by Arrasyid & Karwanto (2021), the principal is a central figure who has a great responsibility in building the future of education through character instillation that begins early in the school environment.

This study is important to identify and analyze the leadership style of the principal in strengthening the character of teachers and students, especially at the elementary school level, as the foundation of character education. The principal should ideally be a role model in attitudes and values that are consistently instilled. Aswat et al. (2022) stated that leadership that is oriented towards strengthening character is effective in preventing deviant behaviour such as intolerance, prejudice, and violence in the school environment.

The urgency of this research is based on the central role of the principal as the main actor in the transformation of school culture. Riswanto & Mulyani (2024) emphasized that the principal acts as a visionary leader who builds a positive and conducive school culture for all school members. Through the right leadership style, the principal not only manages administration, but also forms a character culture and becomes a catalyst for the implementation of the values of the Pancasila student profile in the Merdeka curriculum. Therefore, a deep understanding of the principal's leadership style is

important as a basis for developing an adaptive and value-based educational leadership model.

The rationale for this study is also based on the limitations of previous studies that have not specifically examined the relationship between the principal's leadership style and the strengthening of teacher and student character, especially at the elementary education level in the region. Mirawansya & Karwanto (2022) showed that transformational leadership can motivate school residents in forming moral values and responsibility. However, most studies still focus on secondary education levels, while elementary schools have not received adequate attention.

Theoretically, leadership style is the way a leader influences and directs members of an organization to achieve common goals (Yunianto, 2018). Kurt Lewin's classical theory identifies three main styles: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire, each with different impacts on the work climate and character formation in schools. The democratic leadership style is considered the most effective in the educational context because it encourages participation, two-way communication, and a sense of belonging. Azmi et al. (2024) stated that this style increases the professionalism and positive attitudes of teachers, while Yusup et al. (2024) emphasized its contribution in forming attitudes of tolerance and discipline in carrying out tasks.

From several descriptions, it is clear that the effectiveness of the principal in carrying out leadership tasks greatly determines the success of educational institutions, especially in creating a school culture that is characterful and professional. However, in reality, there are quite a few principals who show an indifferent attitude or have not fully implemented the characteristics of effective leadership in their daily duties. This has an impact on the weak strengthening of teacher character and the less-than-optimal internalization of character values to students. This phenomenon shows the importance of further studying how principals carry out their leadership style, especially in the context of elementary schools, which are the main foundation in the formation of student character.

Previous studies have revealed the relationship between the principal's leadership style and aspects of educational management. Woods et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of autonomy and leadership development in the British education system, but have not examined the strengthening of teacher and student character. Whitehead et al. (2018) highlight the issue of women's leadership in Australia and Malawi with a narrative approach, but focus more on gender identity than on the impact of leadership on character. In Indonesia, Nuswantoro et al. (2023) show that the principal's leadership style contributes to improving teacher professionalism in vocational schools, but have not examined its impact on character, especially at the elementary level. Likewise, Warman et al. (2021) studied leadership in high schools through supervision and training, but have not touched on the aspect of character formation of teachers and students as a whole. Thus, there is still a research gap related to the influence of the principal's leadership style on character strengthening, especially at the elementary school level.

From the four studies, it can be concluded that although many studies have discussed the leadership style of the principal, none have specifically focused on how the leadership style is applied in the context of elementary schools and its influence on strengthening the character of teachers and students simultaneously. The research conducted in this thesis is here to fill this gap. The focus on elementary schools as the earliest level of education is very relevant because the formation of strong character begins at an early age, and the principal plays a role as the main agent in realizing it. Therefore, this study is directed at analyzing how the leadership style of the principal in elementary schools can be implemented effectively as an instrument in strengthening the character of teachers and students simultaneously and contextually.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand in depth and comprehensively how the principal's leadership style plays a role in strengthening the character of teachers and students at the elementary school level. In line with the opinion of Assyakurrohim et al. (2022), a case study is an appropriate approach to examine a phenomenon in detail in a real context, whether in the form of individuals, groups, or educational organizations.

The subjects in this study consisted of principals, grade V teachers, physical education, sports and health (PJOK) teachers, and grade V students at several public elementary schools in the Cimanggung district, Sumedang regency. The determination of the subjects used a purposive sampling technique, namely by selecting informants based on certain criteria, such as the principal's leadership period, teacher experience in working with the principal, and student involvement in school activities that reflect character values.

The number of participants in this study consisted of five principals, ten teachers (two teachers each per school), and ten grade V students (male and female). The selection of fifth-grade students was based on the consideration that at that age, students have been able to express their opinions verbally and have sufficient experience interacting with the principal.

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with the principal, teachers, and students to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the principal's leadership style and its impact on character formation. Observation was used to observe the interaction of the principal with the school community in various formal and informal activities. Meanwhile, documentation includes collecting supporting documents such as school activity agendas, meeting minutes, internal policies, and relevant visual documentation.

The research was carried out through three main stages, namely planning, implementation, and data processing. The planning stage includes determining the focus of the research, determining the location, selecting participants, and compiling

instruments. The implementation stage includes the process of interviews, observations, and documentation in the field. Furthermore, the data processing stage is carried out through the interactive qualitative data analysis technique from Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

To maintain the validity of the data, the researcher applied triangulation techniques, both source triangulation (from the principal, teachers, and students) and technical triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation). In addition, researchers conducted member checking to confirm the accuracy of the data that had been collected and compared the interview results with observations and supporting documents.

Data analysis was carried out systematically to find the main themes related to the principal's leadership style and its influence on character building. The interview results were transcribed verbatim, then coded and categorized using NVivo software to facilitate the data thematization process. This process helped researchers identify patterns, meanings, and relationships between data categories.

With this method, the study is expected to be able to provide an in-depth and reflective picture of how the principal applies his leadership style in supporting the formation of teacher and student character. The qualitative case study approach is considered the most appropriate because it allows researchers to understand social reality naturally, without variable manipulation, and by paying attention to the local context as a whole.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher herself, who acted as the data collector, processor, and analyzer. To support the validity of the data, the researcher also prepared an interview guide, observation sheets, and documentation guidelines. This guide was prepared based on leadership style indicators that are relevant to the context of basic education, as stated by Akbar (2017), including decision making, communication, role models, empowerment, and interpersonal relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of qualitative research through interviews, observations, and documentation in several elementary schools in Cimanggung District show that the principal's leadership style has a significant effect on strengthening the character of teachers and students. This finding is reinforced by Tuponawati et al. (2025), who stated that the principal's leadership has a positive impact on teacher work motivation. Azis et al. (2022) also emphasized that leadership contributes to the formation of student character through role models, policies, and school culture. The majority of principals in this study applied democratic and transformational leadership styles, which are characterized by participatory decision-making, openness to input, and role models in instilling character values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and cooperation.

In general, the principals in this study showed a tendency to apply a democratic and transformational leadership style. This is reflected in the involvement of teachers in the school deliberation process, acceptance of input, and provision of space for active participation in decision-making. As conveyed by one of the principals in an interview,

"we decide every policy together through a work meeting. All teachers have the right to express their opinions, and we consider together the best decision for the school." this approach shows the principal's awareness of the importance of participatory leadership in building trust and a sense of belonging among teachers.

The results of the observation also show that the principal can be a role model in implementing character values such as discipline, responsibility, and respect. The principal is always on time, keeps promises, and is consistent in implementing the agreed-upon rules. In this context, the principal plays a role as a central figure who is used as a model by teachers and students in implementing positive values in everyday life. In line with the opinion of Anis et al. (2023), who stated that the principal plays a role as an example that must be emulated by all school residents in implementing the character values to be formed.

In strengthening teacher character, the principal applies an exemplary approach, open communication, and empowerment through training and professional development. Teachers are given space to participate in training, workshops, and are encouraged to innovate in learning. Appreciation is also given to teachers who excel or show initiative in supporting student character. One teacher stated that the principal always supports the activities they initiate, even attending and providing.

In strengthening student character, the principal integrates character values in intracurricular and extracurricular programs. Values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and religiosity are instilled through various activities, such as flag ceremonies, religious activities, competitions, and child-friendly class policies. The principal also encourages teachers to implement character in thematic learning and daily habits. For example, a grade V teacher guides students to form study groups that emphasize cooperation and mutual respect. This is in line with (Rosyad, 2019) who stated that character formation will be effective if integrated into all school activities..

Researchers also noted that the atmosphere of the school environment reflects the character values championed by the principal. The atmosphere of the principal's office, the teachers' room, and the classrooms looks neat, clean, and full of educational elements such as motivational posters, daily responsibility schedules, and student appreciation boards. The existence of this positive environment also supports the internalization of character values in all school residents. This strengthens the opinion of Rahayu & Benyamin (2020) that leaders who apply the principle of servant leadership will encourage the personal growth of school residents to be healthier, more independent, and care about others.

Data obtained from interviews with students also supports this finding. The majority of students said that their principal was friendly, easy to talk to, and set a good example in behaviour. One student stated, "The principal often greets us in the morning, gives encouragement, and doesn't get angry if we make mistakes, but gives good advice." This shows that the principal's empathetic and dialogical communication style has formed a strong emotional closeness between the principal and students. This is in line with the opinion of Rambe & Wijaya, (2025), who stated that interpersonal

communication carried out by the principal plays an important role in building harmonious and effective relationships with all school residents.

Discussion of this data shows that the principal's transformational and democratic leadership style has proven effective in building the character of school residents. This finding is consistent with the opinion of Trisnawati (2024), who stated that transformational leaders can inspire, build trust, and create positive, sustainable change. In the context of elementary schools, principals who are open, collaborative, and role models will find it easier to form a school culture with character.

Strategically, the principal also implements character building based on local culture. Values such as deliberation, cooperation, and politeness are not only taught verbally, but are also manifested in school policies and practices. For example, the habit of speaking politely, weekly cooperation activities, and coaching problem students through a family approach. This is in accordance with the findings of Effendi & Sahertian (2022) that local culture-based leadership is effective in instilling contextual and down-to-earth character values. 4. The challenges found in the field include limited resources, resistance from some teachers to change, and minimal training on character leadership for principals. However, the principal tries to overcome these obstacles with a persuasive approach and by providing real examples. As stated by one principal, "I can't force teachers to change, but I can invite them with examples and good communication."

From all the findings above, it can be concluded that principals who implement democratic, participatory, and transformational leadership styles are able to significantly strengthen the character of teachers and students. The principal is not only an administrative manager, but also a moral figure who is a role model, educator, and facilitator of character formation in the elementary school environment. With a consistent and strategic approach, the principal can create an educational ecosystem that supports the birth of a generation with strong, independent, and high-integrity characters.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the principal's leadership style plays an important role in strengthening the character of teachers and students in elementary schools. The democratic and transformational leadership style applied by the principal is reflected through exemplary behaviour, open communication, active participation, and providing space for growth for all school members. Collaborative leadership based on character values has succeeded in creating a positive school climate and supporting the development of professional teachers and the formation of student character, such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation.

The principal also acts as an agent of change who is able to bridge policies with the social reality of schools through a reflective approach and integration of local values. This study enriches the scientific treasury in the field of educational leadership, especially at the elementary school level, and strengthens the relevance of transformational and participatory leadership theories in strengthening character.

However, the limitations of this study lie in the scope of the area and the number of participants, which only cover Cimanggung District, so that the results cannot be generalized widely. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be carried out covering a wider area and a more diverse method approach to provide a more comprehensive picture.

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