



Transformational Leadership in Developing Student Character through Extracurricular Activities: A Case Study in an Indonesian Elementary School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to construct a model of principal leadership in developing student character through extracurricular activities in resource-limited elementary schools. The method used was qualitative with an intrinsic case study design at SD Negeri Mendala 01, Brebes. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentary studies, then analyzed interactively. The results show that: (1) The principal's transformational leadership demonstrated through exemplary behavior, inspirational vision, teacher empowerment, and clinical supervision is the main driver of the character ecosystem; (2) Extracurricular activities (Scouting, Volleyball, Arts, Theater, Painting) function as a "field of practice" and "living laboratory" that integrates Lickona's character education trilogy (moral knowing, feeling, action) through experiential learning; (3) A transformational impact is evident in the significant improvement of student character (such as discipline, responsibility, self-confidence, cooperation, creativity, patience), proven by the transfer of values to academic and home contexts, and a shift in school culture towards greater collaboration and value orientation. In conclusion, this study reconstructs a synergistic character development ecosystem model, driven by transformational leadership and effectively mediated through value-based extracurricular activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian national education has a mandate to educate the nation's life, which includes not only the cognitive dimension but also the holistic development of character (Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System). The educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasizes liberating education and

places educators as role models. The elementary school period, as a golden age, is a critical period for character formation, in line with Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Mulyasa, 2021). However, contemporary reality shows a worrying character crisis, marked by an increase in cases of bullying, inter-student violence, and technology misuse (KPAI Data, 2020-2023).

In this context, principal leadership emerges as a critical variable. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) positions the principal as an *architect of school culture and a moral agent who can inspire and transform values. A study by Leithwood & Jantzi (2006) proves the significant contribution of principal leadership to educational outcomes, including character.

Extracurricular activities, from the perspective of Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and Kolb's experiential learning (1984), function as a unique "moral laboratory." Extracurricular activities provide a contextual space for students to internalize character values through direct experience, which aligns with Lickona's (1991) character education trilogy covering moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

Despite its great potential, a research gap remains in understanding the specific mechanisms of how principal leadership utilizes extracurricular activities as a strategic medium for character development. Previous research has focused more on managerial and correlational aspects, not yet touching upon the transformative dimension of value-based leadership. Therefore, this study aims to construct a theoretical model of principal leadership in developing student character through extracurricular activities that is contextual with the reality of Indonesian basic education, especially in resource-limited schools like SD Negeri Mendala 01, Brebes.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a post-positivist philosophical foundation. The design used is a single intrinsic case study, chosen to understand in depth the phenomenon of principal leadership in its natural context at SD Negeri Mendala 01 (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The research location was selected purposively based on criteria as an information-rich case that has a strong commitment to implementing extracurricular activities despite limited resources.

Research participants included the principal, extracurricular supervising teachers, classroom teachers (grades IV-VI), students (grades V and VI), and parents/guardians. Participant selection used purposive sampling technique with specific inclusion criteria, such as a minimum principal tenure of 3 years and minimum student participation of one year. The estimated number of participants was 15-20 people until data saturation was reached.

Data collection was conducted through method triangulation, consisting of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation study. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using an interview guide to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and meanings. Participant observation involved the researcher's direct participation in school activities to observe behaviors, interactions, and social contexts, supported by descriptive and reflective field notes. Furthermore, documentation study was conducted by analyzing policy documents, such as the School Work Plan (RKS) and the School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS), extracurricular work programs, attitude assessment documents, and other relevant artifacts to strengthen and confirm the research data.

Data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), which includes: Data Reduction: The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting raw data through coding, categorization, and thematization. Data Presentation: Presenting the reduced data in the form of a matrix, diagram, or organized narrative to facilitate drawing conclusions. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Extracting meaning from the presented data, then verifying initial conclusions through triangulation, member checking, and seeking alternative explanations.

Data validity (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, and the creation of an audit trail. Research ethics were upheld by

applying the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, non-maleficence, and justice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULT

1. The Dynamics of the Principal's Transformational Leadership

The research findings reveal that the leadership of Mrs. Eli Haryani, S.Pd.SD., as the principal, is the main driver of the character ecosystem. Her leadership is a real manifestation of Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), characterized by:

- a) **Idealized Influence & Inspirational Motivation:** The principal acts as a visionary and moral agent who consistently embodies values in action. Her vision of students who are "faithful, pious, noble character, achievers, and globally minded" becomes an ethical compass for all school members, communicated intensively on various occasions and outlined in RKS/RKAS documents.
- b) **Intellectual Stimulation:** The principal creates a safe space for teachers to innovate in designing extracurricular activities. Granting trust accompanied by real resource support, such as allocating BOS funds for innovative projects, sparks teacher enthusiasm and responsibility.
- c) **Individualized Consideration:** Sincere and personal concern for the development of every teacher and student creates a warm, supportive, and trusting school climate, which is a prerequisite for effective character education (Lickona, 1991).

At the operational level, the principal implements key strategies:

- a) **Developmental Clinical Supervision:** Supervision is reflective and solution-oriented, following the cycle of pre-observation, observation, and post-observation, with a focus on improving the quality of value learning.
- b) **Sustainable Infrastructure Strengthening:** Commitment to character development is realized through a planned and continuously increasing extracurricular budget allocation in

the RKAS for three consecutive years, from IDR 10 million (2022/2023) to IDR 15 million (2024/2025).

2. Extracurricular Activities as a Field of Practice and Value Internalization

Extracurricular activities at SD Negeri Mendala 01 are designed as a "field of practice" and "living laboratory" that systematically integrates character values:

- a) **Scouting (Pramuka):** Serves as the backbone of character development by emphasizing discipline, responsibility, leadership, independence, and cooperation through the patrol system and camping activities.
- b) **Volleyball:** Teaches sportsmanship, teamwork, discipline, commitment, and perseverance in simulated competitive situations.
- c) **Arts (Dance, Theater, Painting):** Not only develop skills but also shape character. Traditional dance instills cultural appreciation, discipline, and teamwork. Theater functions as a social laboratory to build self-confidence, empathy, and intensive cooperation. The newly developed Painting extracurricular proves unique in fostering creativity, patience, thoroughness, self-confidence, and aesthetic appreciation through a creative process that requires perseverance.

The process of learning values in these extracurricular activities effectively actualizes Lickona's (1991) trilogy:

- a) **Moral Knowing:** Values are taught explicitly through syllabi and discussions.
- b) **Moral Feeling:** Values are brought to life through authentic emotional experiences (pride, solidarity, managed disappointment).
- c) **Moral Action:** Students repeatedly practice values in real and challenging contexts.

The role of supervising teachers as role models and critical facilitators is central. They not only teach skills but also consistently model values and design challenging learning situations to facilitate value internalization.

3. Transformational Impact on Student Character and School Culture

The impact of the synergy between leadership and extracurricular activities is transformational and confirmed through data triangulation (students, teachers, parents, documents):

- a) **Strengthening Individual Student Character:** A significant improvement occurred in aspects of discipline, responsibility, self-confidence, cooperation, independence, creativity, and patience. Students reported increased courage to speak in front of the class after joining theater, and discipline in tidying up belongings after joining Scouting.
- b) **Value Transfer:** The values learned in extracurricular activities were successfully transferred to other contexts. Classroom teachers reported that students active in extracurricular activities were easier to manage, more initiative, and skilled in academic group work. Parents confirmed behavioral changes at home, such as children becoming more independent and caring about cleanliness.
- c) **Transformation of School Culture:** Overall, the school transformed into a more positive, collaborative, supportive, and value-driven learning environment, where all school members feel valued and encouraged to grow.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study successfully reconstruct a synergistic character development ecosystem model at SD Negeri Mendala 01. This model strengthens and sharpens the underlying theories.

First, the principal's transformational leadership functions as the foundation and catalyst. These findings confirm and enrich the theory of Bass & Riggio (2006) by showing the micro-mechanisms of how leadership works in a real context, not only through commands but by creating a shared vision, empowering teachers, and providing strategic support. This leadership style is effective because it builds intrinsic commitment and a sense of ownership among teachers.

Second, the implementation of extracurricular activities as a "field of practice" is successful because it adopts Lickona's (1991) holistic approach and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning. The process of value internalization occurs deeply because students not only know and feel, but also actively act in meaningful situations. The findings on the unique contribution of arts extracurricular activities (painting) broaden the understanding that character education can be delivered through various modalities to reach students' multiple intelligences.

Third, the phenomenon of value transfer from the extracurricular context to academic and home contexts becomes the strongest indicator of the success of character education. This shows that the values have been internalized into transferable character competencies, which is the ultimate goal of character education.

Fourth, the constructed model provides a theoretical contribution in the form of enriching an integrative and contextual model of educational leadership in character education. Practically, this study provides an operational blueprint for principals, especially in resource-limited areas, to lead character education effectively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it is concluded that the development of student character at SD Negeri Mendala 01 is the result of a synergistic educational ecosystem. This ecosystem is driven by the principal's transformational leadership which is visionary, exemplary, empowering, and nurturing and is effectively mediated through extracurricular activities designed as a "living laboratory" for the internalization of character values. This synergy results in a transformational impact in the form of strengthening individual student character, the transfer of values to various life contexts, and a change in school culture to be more collaborative and value-oriented.

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