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Transformational Leadership Of School Principals In Strengthening Students' Discipline Character

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Abstract

This study analyzes the principal's transformational leadership in strengthening students' discipline character, the strategies used, and the supporting and inhibiting factors at SD Juara Semarang. A qualitative descriptive approach was applied, with the principal, teachers, students, and parents as informants chosen through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model with source triangulation. Results show the principal applies idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration by integrating discipline values into the character-based curriculum, supported by teacher commitment and parental involvement, though habituation at home remains a constraint.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, School Principal, Discipline Character, Character-Based Curriculum, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious and planned effort aimed at creating a learning environment that allows students to actively develop their potential. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that education is directed at developing spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by students, society, the nation, and the state (Baba et al., 2021). Education,

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therefore, is not merely the transfer of knowledge but also the process of inheriting and developing the nation's culture and character for the younger generation (Breevaart & Bakker, 2021).

As formal educational institutions, schools are required to continuously change and develop to meet the community's need for quality education. Educational institutions require leaders who not only function as budget and administrative managers but also as capable of creating a shared vision and mobilizing all school components. The principal plays a crucial role in determining the direction, climate, and quality of education delivery within their educational unit (Purwanto et al., 2021).

Principal leadership is a key determinant of successful educational delivery in schools (Purwanto & Sulaiman, 2023). Principals serve not only as administrators but also as educational leaders who mobilize all school resources to achieve learning goals. Various findings indicate that school leadership significantly impacts student learning outcomes and is the second most influential factor after classroom learning quality. Principal leadership also positively impacts teacher performance, which is closely related to school culture, an internal organizational factor (Judijanto et al., 2024).

One leadership style that has been widely researched and considered relevant in the educational context is transformational leadership, a leadership style that emphasizes a clear vision, the ability to inspire, individual attention, and staff empowerment in achieving organizational goals (Boamah et al., 2021). Recent studies confirm that transformational leadership is positively related to teacher performance, school climate, and organizational commitment in various educational contexts in Indonesia, including in encouraging the implementation of a character-based curriculum.

Initial observations at Juara Elementary School in Semarang City indicate that the principal possesses the ability to mobilize various school resources to achieve organizational goals. The principal encourages all school members to realize the school's vision, provides opportunities for further study and training for teachers, and pays attention to the welfare of teachers and staff (NOFITA, 2023). This leadership style aligns with Juara Elementary School's achievements as one of the favorite private schools in its neighborhood, marked by a high number of new student enrollments, improved educational quality, a 100 percent graduation rate, A accreditation, and a number of academic and non-academic achievements at the city, provincial, and national levels (Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2023).

Character education plays a crucial role in shaping students who excel not only

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academically but also possess strong morals and ethics. One fundamental character trait that needs to be instilled is discipline. Disciplinary character education instilled through school culture has a positive impact on the development of students' discipline and academic success (Madi Odeh et al., 2023). Improving students' discipline is also inseparable from the principal's leadership role in building school culture and overseeing the implementation of disciplinary policies (Alrowwad et al., 2020). Discipline is an important foundation in developing student character because through discipline, students learn responsibility, independence, and adherence to rules, which have a direct impact on academic success (Juyumaya & Torres, 2023).

Juara Elementary School in Semarang City, as a religious-based educational institution, has formulated a vision of producing a Qur'anic generation that excels in achievement, is competitive, and has noble morals. To realize this vision, the school implements a unique curriculum known as the Langit curriculum, which is the development of a national curriculum that focuses on Islamic character values sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith and integrates spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects in learning so that students become intelligent and noble individuals (Yue et al., 2022). This curriculum is implemented through the values of 7 Champion Habits and 12 Champion Manners, supported by student modules, teacher handbooks, and the KOMPAK book (Children's Communication and Achievement), with methods of exemplary behavior, understanding values, habituation, and enforcement of rules.

Transformational school leaders are able to motivate and empower the entire school community to collaborate toward shared goals and create an organizational culture oriented toward progress and sustainability (Wiyono, 2017). Transformational leadership not only increases teacher engagement and performance but also fosters the internalization of disciplinary values through the implementation of a character-based curriculum, which in turn contributes to improved student academic achievement through the integration of disciplinary values into daily learning (Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020).

Previous studies on principal leadership have generally focused on the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation at various levels of education (Atik et al., 2023) and on school management in general (Andriani et al., 2018). These studies emphasize the principal's role as the primary driver of the curriculum's success, but have not specifically examined how the principal's transformational leadership plays a role in strengthening students' discipline through an Islamic-values-based curriculum at the elementary school level. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the integration of transformational leadership with a spiritual-Islamic value-based character curriculum at Juara Elementary School in Semarang City, which represents a

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model of a religious-based private elementary school with strong academic and non-academic achievements (Wiyono, 2022).

Based on the description, this study aims to analyze and describe the principal's transformational leadership in strengthening students' disciplinary character, the strategies used by the principal, and the supporting and inhibiting factors of the principal's transformational leadership in strengthening students' disciplinary character at Juara Elementary School, Semarang City. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of educational management science, particularly regarding the influence of transformational leadership on character education in elementary schools, as well as practical contributions for principals, teachers, students, and educational institutions in designing strategies for strengthening students' disciplinary character in a sustainable manner

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. This approach was chosen because the principal's transformational leadership in strengthening students' disciplinary character is a contextual social phenomenon, making it more appropriate to understand it through the perspectives and experiences of actors in the field rather than measuring it numerically (Campbell, 2018). Descriptive qualitative research emphasizes understanding the meaning, experiences, and subjective perspectives of participants within a specific social context and produces a holistic and comprehensive picture through in-depth data collection from various sources (Author38 & Coauthor38, 2022).

The research was conducted at Juara Elementary School in Semarang City, located at Jalan Pucung, RT 02/RW 09, Plamongansari, Pedurungan District, Semarang City. The research lasted eight months, encompassing a preliminary study, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, and the preparation of a final report.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling techniques, namely the selection of informants based on the consideration that they have knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with school leadership and the formation of student disciplinary character (N. Sugeng et al., 2021). The research subjects consisted of the principal as the main informant because he plays a central role in transformational leadership and determines character-based curriculum policies; the vice principal in charge of curriculum who is directly involved in the planning and coordination of curriculum implementation; teachers as partners in implementing school policies in implementing disciplinary values through daily learning and habits; students as

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direct recipients of the impact of leadership policies and practices; and parents as supplementary informants to validate the consistency of disciplinary habits between school and home.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument due to their direct involvement in data collection, interpretation, and analysis in the field. The supporting instruments used include semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, and a documentation study format that is systematically compiled yet flexible enough to adapt to field dynamics (Zafeiti & Mohamad, 2015).

Data collection techniques were conducted in three ways. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the principal, vice principal, teachers, students, and parents to gather information on the characteristics of transformational leadership, discipline strengthening strategies, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Second, passive participant observation, in which researchers were present at school activities to observe the coaching process, student engagement, and the condition of facilities and infrastructure without being directly involved in the activities (Author9 & Coauthor9, 2023). Third, documentation studies were conducted on the school profile, the principal's work program, curriculum documents, regulations, habituation activity reports, and student achievement records.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (Lasrado & Kassem, 2020) interactive model, which consists of three stages: data condensation/reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were sorted and focused on the dimensions of transformational leadership and strategies for strengthening discipline. The data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives, thematic tables, and intercategory relationship matrices to facilitate pattern identification. Conclusions were drawn reflectively and verified by linking the findings to the initial data, relevant theories, and validation from informants (Author50 & Coauthor50, 2022).

Data validity was maintained through triangulation techniques of sources, methods, and theories. Triangulation is an important strategy in qualitative research to ensure the credibility and consistency of data (Rojak et al., 2024). In this study, this was done by comparing interview results between informants, confirming interview findings with observation results, and verifying both with official school documents.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Strengthening Students' Disciplinary Character

The results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies show that the principal of Juara Elementary School, Semarang City, applies the four dimensions of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in an integrated manner in daily leadership practices.

In the idealized influence dimension, principals demonstrate exemplary behavior by striving to be a good example before giving instructions to teachers and staff. This finding aligns with the view that leaders who exemplify integrity, moral courage, and commitment to organizational values will foster respect and trust among their followers (S. Sugeng, 2022). Principals who demonstrate honesty, discipline, and a commitment to educational values are more respected by teachers and staff, and this exemplary behavior forms an important foundation for collaboration within the elementary school community involving teachers, students, and parents. This exemplary behavior also triggers normative imitation or modeling, thus triggering the internalization of disciplinary rules among teachers and students (Alzoraiki et al., 2023).

In the inspirational motivation dimension, the principal invites all members of the school community to collectively realize the school's vision, namely to produce a Qur'anic generation that excels in achievement, is competitive, and possesses noble character. The principal consistently conveys this vision on various occasions, thereby fostering optimism among teachers and staff in facing the challenges of basic education. This is relevant to the view that a principal who is able to present a clear, meaningful vision, and is delivered with enthusiasm, will mobilize the collective commitment of the school community (Febrian et al., 2023). In the context of strengthening discipline, the principal specifically communicates the school's vision, emphasizing discipline as an integral part of achieving achievement and noble character, thereby increasing collective commitment to obeying rules (Komala & Patra, 2023).

In the intellectual stimulation dimension, principals provide opportunities for teachers to participate in training and further study according to their competencies, and encourage the development of more creative learning methods. This support aligns with the principle that principals should encourage teachers to think creatively in their learning methods through regular discussions, workshops, and opportunities to share good practices (Arokiasamy et al., 2016). In practice, principals encourage teachers to experiment with classroom management and character-building strategies, thus creating learning practices that maintain discipline through the

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relevance of everyday learning (Sahertian & Rustan Effendi, 2022).

In the individualized consideration dimension, the principal cares about the welfare of teachers and staff and builds close relationships between the principal, teachers, and staff. Problems that arise in the school are resolved through deliberation, and the principal acts as a supervisor to improve the learning process. This personal attention is also extended to students, particularly through individual coaching for students experiencing disciplinary problems, which is considered effective in changing behavior by strengthening students' self-regulation (Riyanto et al., 2021).

These four dimensions complement each other and form a leadership mechanism that not only encourages teachers and students to "do their jobs" but also to grow into agents of change in the school's disciplinary culture (Rustan Effendi, 2020). This finding reinforces the research findings of Nguyen (2023) which shows that principals who apply a transformational leadership style—capable of inspiring, motivating, and paying attention to individual needs—successfully increase teacher engagement and a collaborative atmosphere in schools, which in turn contributes to more effective character education practices.

The Principal's Strategy in Strengthening Students' Disciplined Character

The principal's strategy in strengthening the disciplined character of students at Juara Elementary School, Semarang City can be mapped through four stages, namely program planning, organizing, implementing and coaching, as well as evaluation and reflection.

In the planning stage, the principal develops strategic plans in various areas, including faith, noble character, intellectual, skills, student affairs, personnel, teaching, and community participation. The core of this planning is the implementation of the school's unique curriculum called the Langit curriculum, namely the development of a national curriculum that focuses on Islamic character values from the Qur'an and Hadith and integrates student activities with religious values (Agus, 2024). This curriculum is comprehensively implemented in three domains: school, home, and the environment, using methods of role modeling, understanding values, habituation, and enforcement of rules. The character values developed are contained in the 7 Champion Habits and 12 Champion Manners, supported by student modules, teacher handouts, and the KOMPAK (Children's Communication and Achievement) book as an instrument for monitoring student character development on an ongoing basis.

During the organizational stage, the principal divides roles and responsibilities among the vice principal for curriculum and teachers. The vice principal is responsible for developing a

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schedule of habituation activities, coordinating implementation with teachers, and ensuring that activities align with the school's vision and mission. Teachers, as implementing partners at the classroom level, are responsible for translating the values of the character-based curriculum into daily learning and habituation activities, ensuring that the values of discipline are not only conveyed cognitively but also consistently practiced (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020a).

In the implementation and development phase, disciplinary character building is carried out through repeated practices, such as morning assembly, group prayer, and the implementation of rules regarding attendance, neatness of dress, and orderliness during learning. This practice is combined with teacher role models and the reinforcement of disciplinary values through a coaching and reward-punishment system (Kouni et al., 2022). This approach includes both preventive discipline, namely efforts to motivate students to follow and comply with applicable regulations, and corrective discipline, namely the imposition of educational sanctions on students who violate the rules so that they continue to follow the applicable rules (Suhartono et al., 2023). Discipline indicators targeted for development include attendance and punctuality, compliance with regulations, completion of academic assignments, neatness and orderliness, self-control during learning, procedural compliance, participation in school activities, and honesty and accountability (Hussain & Khayat, 2021).

During the evaluation and reflection stage, the principal monitors program implementation through learning supervision and regular evaluations of the achievement of character-based curriculum targets. The KOMPAK book serves as an evaluative instrument that allows teachers and parents to continuously monitor the development of students' discipline and character at school and at home. This type of evaluation is crucial because the success of a character-based curriculum implementation is significantly influenced by the principal's ability to motivate teachers, oversee implementation, provide supporting facilities, and build a school culture consistent with the curriculum's values (Idris et al., 2022).

This strategy emphasizes that curriculum implementation is a key pathway to fostering student discipline, consistent with findings that a character-oriented curriculum excels because it not only develops students' intellectual abilities but also shapes attitudes, morals, and spirituality through the inculcation of religious values in school life. In other words, the principal's transformational leadership serves as the primary driver integrating character values into curriculum implementation, ensuring that discipline is not implemented in isolation but becomes an integral part of the school's character education ecosystem.

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Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Principals' Transformational Leadership

The research identified several factors supporting the success of the principal's transformational leadership in strengthening students' disciplinary character at Juara Elementary School in Semarang City. First, the commitment and involvement of teachers as partners in implementing school policies. Teachers, who interact directly with students every day, play a crucial role in translating the values of the character-based curriculum into practices and exemplary discipline in the classroom. Second, parental involvement supports consistent disciplinary practices between school and home. Collaboration between parents and teachers in fostering students' discipline and responsibility demonstrates that the involvement of both parties is crucial for the overall development of students' character (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020b). Third, a religious and supportive school culture, reflected in the close relationship between the principal, teachers, and staff, as well as the resolution of problems through deliberation. Fourth, institutional support in the form of student modules, teacher modules, and the KOMPAK book, provides structured guidance for the consistent implementation of the character-based curriculum.

The identified inhibiting factors include, first, the challenge of maintaining consistent discipline in students at home, given that not all parents have the same capacity or time to support the implementation of discipline outside of school (Weiner et al., 2021). Second, the limited supervisory capacity of principals and teachers to monitor the development of discipline individually in each student, especially considering the increasing number of students as the community trusts schools. Third, the need for adaptation for new students who are not yet accustomed to the culture of discipline and the values of the character-based curriculum implemented by the school, thus requiring more time and intensive support during the initial period of school entry (Prahmana & D'Ambrosio, 2020).

These findings regarding supporting and inhibiting factors reinforce the view that the success of principal leadership in implementing education policies is highly dependent on external support factors such as school facilities, parental involvement, and teacher collaboration (Mwesiga & Okendo, 2022). Principals who act as transformational leaders are able to build an innovative and collaborative school culture, although they still require improvements in aspects of reflection, evaluation, and broader school community involvement (Endah Retno Suci & Aris Widodo, 2022). Therefore, strengthening students' disciplinary character through the principal's transformational leadership is an ongoing process and requires synergy between the principal, teachers, students, and parents, not the result of a single party (Restu Rahayu & Sofyan Iskandar,

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2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the principal of Juara Elementary School in Semarang City implements transformational leadership through four complementary dimensions: idealized influence, manifested through exemplary behavior and integrity; inspirational motivation, demonstrated through consistent delivery of the school's vision; intellectual stimulation, fostering innovative learning for teachers; and individualized consideration, fostering personal attention to teachers and students. These four dimensions collectively form the foundation for strengthening students' disciplined character at the school.

The principal's strategy in strengthening students' disciplined character is implemented through four stages, namely planning a program based on the Langit curriculum with the values of 7 Champion Habits and 12 Champion Manners, organizing the roles of vice principals and teachers, implementation and coaching through daily habits and a reward-punishment system, and continuous evaluation through supervision and the KOMPAK book instrument. This strategy emphasizes that the implementation of a character-based curriculum is a strategic path in forming student discipline consistently and sustainably.

Factors supporting the principal's transformational leadership include teacher commitment, parental involvement, a religious and supportive school culture, and institutional support. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include challenges in consistently implementing discipline at home, limited supervisory capacity, and the need for new students to adapt to the school's disciplinary culture. These findings confirm that strengthening students' disciplinary character requires ongoing synergy between the principal's leadership, the role of teachers, and parental support within a character-based curriculum framework.

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456

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