

Character Education Based on Religious Values in Early Childhood: A School Principal's Leadership Perspective



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ABSTRACT: This research aims to describe the leadership of the Principal at an Early Childhood Education Institution in strengthening the character of students. The method used in this research is qualitative phenomenology. The subjects of this research were school principals, teachers and education staff at PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah, Banjarmasin. The data collection techniques used were interviews, observation and documentation studies. Test the validity of the data using the Triangulation Technique. Data analysis uses the Miles & Huberman analysis technique which consists of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The conclusion of this research is that the principal's leadership model is a transformational leadership model in implementing religious values, including internalizing religious values in the school's vision and mission, internalizing religious values in learning, facilitating supporting facilities and infrastructure, creating a school culture that has religious values. and empowering teachers and staff.

KEYWORDS: leadership, school principal, character education, religious, early childhood

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, interaction and dependence between countries, communities and individuals in various parts of the world has increased significantly. This process includes the exchange of information, ideas, culture, technology and economics more quickly and intensively than before. Globalization does not only involve economic aspects, but also includes political, social, cultural and educational fields [1]. In facing this era of globalization, human resources are needed that are intelligent, tough and have character to be able to survive in the present and the future. There are 16 skills needed to become an individual who is able to face the challenges in this era of globalization. These skills are divided into 3 large groups, namely foundational literacies (basic literacy), competencies, and character qualities (character education). These character values include curiosity, initiative, persistence, adaptability, leadership, social and cultural awareness [2], [3].

Globalization and technology also have a significant impact on traditional values. Mass media and the internet introduce lifestyles, values and cultural norms from various parts of the world. This can expose individuals to values that conflict with traditional values. However, more frequent interactions via digital platforms may change traditional social norms, influencing the way people communicate and form relationships. This has an impact on cultural changes and new values, causing a shift in views on morality [4]–[6].

The increase in crime every year shows changes in the culture and morality of Indonesian society. Statistical data shows a significant increase in the number of criminal incidents in Indonesia between 2020 and 2022. The number of criminal incidents decreased from 247,218 cases in 2020 to 239,481 cases in 2021. However, in 2022, the number of crime cases increased significantly to 372,965 cases [7].

In facing this decline in morality, character education is a necessary foundation for maintaining the moral integrity of Indonesian society. Through character education, it helps students understand and strengthen their own identity. In this way, it will form a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has high morals and ethics [6], [8].

Character education has become an important issue in the world of education and is instilled starting from the lowest level of education, namely in PAUD units. This is done because this age level is a critical period where children's thought patterns, values and attitudes are formed quickly. This is a very critical time to build positive character foundations that will guide their future behavior and decisions.

PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah Banjarmasin is one of the schools that applies character education in its learning. Islamic religious character values based on the Koran and integrated with Pancasila values are the foundation for character cultivation in the school. By implementing character education based on religious values, graduates can be produced who have noble character in

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accordance with the values of the Islamic religion. Apart from that, most alumni are able to carry out both obligatory and sunnah worship independently. This is the advantage of this PAUD unit so that it has become one of the favorite schools in the city of Banjarmasin. This is proven by the increase in students in each new academic year.

In the context of character education in PAUD units, the role of the principal as the main leader in the school environment is very important. The leadership of the school principal has a big impact in determining the direction and effectiveness of character education in an educational institution [9]–[12]. The principal is not only an administrative figure, but also a moral leader in the school. The school principal's ability to guide, motivate and inspire teachers and students greatly influences the effectiveness of strengthening character education. School principals who have a strong vision regarding character education are able to create a school culture that supports students' moral development [13], [14].

There are a number of challenges in implementing character education, such as differences in cultural values, student diversity, and academic pressure. Principals need to understand these complex dynamics and design leadership strategies that can overcome these obstacles. School principals who are able to align character education with the academic curriculum can create a holistic and empowering learning environment so as to produce students who are not only academically intelligent but also morally intelligent [15]–[17].

Based on this background, this research aims to describe the leadership model of school principals in implementing character education based on religious values at PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah Banjarmasin.

II. METHOD

The research method used was descriptive qualitative research with a principal leadership approach in religious-based character education at PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah, Banjarmasin. The research subjects were the Principal, Teachers and education staff at PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah located on Jl. Bumi Mas Raya No.12A, RT.33/RW.02, Pemurus Dalam, Kec. Banjarmasin Sel., Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan 70249.

The data source in this research uses the "purpose sampling" technique. According to [18] "purposive sampling is a sampling technique of data sources for certain considerations." The reason for using a purposive sampling technique is because not all samples have criteria that match the phenomenon being studied. Apart from that, the sample was chosen because it is a source and rich in information about the phenomenon you want to research. The subject of this research is

Data collection techniques in this research are interviews, observation and documentation studies. This is in accordance with the opinion of Sugiyono who stated that, in general, there are four types of data collection techniques in qualitative research, namely: (1) observation, (2) interviews, (3) documentation, and (4) combination / triangulation [18]. Meanwhile, the research instruments used were interview guidelines and observation guidelines. According to Arikunto [19], research instruments are tools for researchers in collecting data. To test the validity of the data, researchers used the triangulation technique. Data triangulation is a data inspection technique that utilizes something other than the data for checking purposes or as a comparison of the data [20].

According to Miles and Huberman, the methods used in data analysis include data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

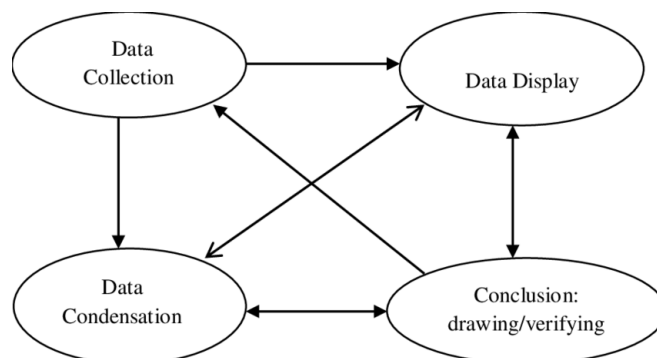


Figure 1. Data Analysis Miles & Huberman [21]

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, information was obtained that strengthening religious character values in Ukhuwah Islamiyah PAUD is internalized in the school's vision, mission and goals. According to [22] in [23] states that the vision is "The vision statement should incorporate the future state and should be a positive, aspirational view of how the future will be better". According to Danim [24]. Vision and Mission are the most basic statements regarding values, hopes and goals for the future success of the school. Therefore, the school's vision and mission are the key to the success of a professionally managed school and color the behavior of all school members.

As is the vision of PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah, namely "Graduating students who have good character, achievement, independence and environmental insight". And through missions, namely 1) Instilling noble character from an early age; 2)

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Preparing students to enter basic education; 3) Training children's independence from an early age and 4) Building the habit of caring for the environment. It is hoped that through this vision and mission we can create students who are superior, able to compete in the future and have noble character in accordance with Islamic teachings.

The preparation of the vision and mission is carried out by the school principal together with teachers, staff, representatives of the Foundation and representatives of parents through the school committee. This includes identifying character values, academic goals, and desired expectations to achieve educational excellence, one of which is the realization of students who have moral character. Every new academic year an evaluation is carried out to assess the suitability of the vision and mission with current educational demands.

In preparing the vision and mission, the school principal ensures that the vision and mission prepared are integrated with the school's values and culture. This helps create consistency and continuity in efforts to achieve Educational goals. Apart from that, identifying priorities and strategic focus. This may involve identifying unique student needs, curriculum choices, developing specific skills, or empowering the educational community. Thus, the results of the prepared vision and mission will reflect the uniqueness and special goals of the school [25]–[28].

Furthermore, the vision and mission are socialized to all members of the organization, in this case teachers, staff, the Foundation, and parents of students. The aim is for all parties to understand and be committed to supporting the achievement of the expected educational goals. This is in accordance with the opinion of Fiandi [29] who states that there are several things that need to be considered in formulating a school vision, including 1) Examining the meaning of the school's vision in other places to use as a reference 2) Inventorying the formulation of school tasks listed in structure and work procedures of the school concerned 3) The school's task formulation is summarized and reformulated into a school vision formulation concept 4) The school vision formulation concept is discussed with all members in the school to obtain input, clarification and suggestions 5) Vision formulation in an institution education is put forward with all stakeholders in order to obtain improvements 6) The formulation of the vision of an educational institution which has become an agreement is determined by the School Leadership Decree, so that the vision becomes shared property, has the support and commitment of all members in the school [23], [30], [31].

Furthermore, character education based on religious values is internalized in learning and daily activities at school. In this case, the school principal acts directly by holding curriculum preparation workshops, observing teachers during the learning process and holding teacher and staff performance evaluation meetings. Through observing learning and evaluating teacher performance, the principal ensures that the quality of learning is as expected [32], [33]. Apart from that, you can find out the obstacles and challenges during learning, especially in strengthening religious values. Based on this, school principals together with teachers can work together to find good and creative solutions [34], [35].

The principal acts indirectly by giving freedom to teachers to lead their own learning, namely by determining models, approaches and learning media that suit the needs and characteristics of students. Apart from that, the principal also helps in managing the internal and external environment of the school to support the implementation of character education based on religious values. This is in line with the opinion of Kleine-Kracht [36], [37] in Logho [38], 2016) which states that the principal's leadership in learning can occur directly and indirectly [39].

A conducive environment is also a supporting factor in implementing religious values in learning and student activities at school. This environment consists of the physical environment in the form of facilities and infrastructure prepared by the school principal together with teachers and staff. For example, in every corner of the school there are always trash bins and posters encouraging people to throw rubbish in the right place with the aim of teaching children to always maintain cleanliness, because cleanliness is part of faith. Another thing is to put up posters urging you to say hello when you enter a room, posters for reading short prayers, posters urging you to dress politely and cover your intimate parts, story books with Islamic nuances, and many others. For prayer facilities, use the classroom and prayer room facilities at the school.

The principal also participates in preparing the non-physical environment to support the successful implementation of religious values in children's learning and activities at school. The non-physical environment in question is creating a school culture that accustoms children and the entire school community to behavior that reflects religious values. For example, by implementing a welcome to school program every morning, where picket teachers are assigned to welcome children who come to school. When welcoming, the teacher must say hello, greet and smile, then the children must respond to the greeting, greet and smile. This is done to teach children to always be friendly, respect and appreciate each other.

Another culture is to get children and the entire school community used to saying the 3 magic words in daily conversation, namely "sorry", "please" and "thank you". Furthermore, a school culture based on religious values is also created through religious activities such as Hajj rituals, Isra' Mi'raj, Muharram 1st commemoration parades and sacrificing during Eid al-Adha. Through these religious activities, it is hoped that it can help instill Islamic religious values in all students and school residents. This activity is a routine activity that is always included in the annual program at PAUD Ukhuwah Islamiyah, Banjarmasin.

Apart from annual activities, there are also routine monthly activities that support the implementation of instilling religious values in the Ukhuwah Islamiyah PAUD environment, Banjarmasin. This activity takes the form of a monthly recitation which is held every Friday at the beginning of each month. Regular recitations are planned by the Principal together with the school

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Committee by inviting Ustadz/ Ustadzah. The recitation agenda consists of reading verses from the holy Qur'an and lectures by resource persons. This activity was carried out to strengthen ties between the principal, teachers and parents of students, as well as increase religious knowledge as a foundation for parents and teachers to behave in a way that reflects Islamic religious values [40].

It is very important to prepare adults (teachers and parents) to behave in a way that reflects Islamic religious values, because basically young children are great imitators, so to make children want to behave well, as adults they are obliged to behave well too. As the opinion of (Hasanah & Deiniatur [41] in [42]–[44] states that one strategy for instilling character values for early childhood is through providing examples or An example. The school principal also acts as a role model for all members of his school. For example, by always being present at monthly and annual submission events. Apart from that, the school principal is also always present at welcome to school activities teachers and other school residents [45].

Apart from creating a religious school culture through these activities, the principal also provides support to teachers and staff to improve their competence through national or international seminar activities and carrying out comparative studies in other schools. This is done so that teachers have the opportunity for teachers and staff to learn and update on the current situation, especially those related to early childhood character education [46], [47].

In other words, building school culture by building cultural behavior which refers to cultural aspects of leadership. The principal's function as a cultural leader is as a high priest in the school [48]). In playing his role as a cultural leader, the principal identifies himself with the strength of the values and beliefs about the school that make the school unique. The cultural behavior intended in this case is creating a school culture and climate that is conducive to religious-based character education [48]–[50].

Based on the strategy implemented by the school principal in implementing character education based on religious values, it is known that the school principal uses a transformational leadership model. Transformational leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and change subordinates and the organization towards achieving higher goals. Transformational leaders do not only focus on routine or operational tasks, but also strive to move and change the culture, values and vision of the organization [50]–[55].

Bass [56] expanded the concept of transformational leadership in his book entitled "Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations". In this book, he formulates four key behaviors of transformational leadership: 1) Creating a Vision (Idealized Influence); 2) Inspirational Motivation; 3) Intellectual Stimulation and 4) Empowerment (Individualized Consideration).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the Principal of PAUD Ukhuwah Banjarmasin uses a transformational leadership model by implementing several strategies in implementing character education based on religious values, including 1) Internalizing religious values in the formulation of the school's vision and mission, 2) Internalizing values religion in learning and daily activities at school, 3) Providing support in creating a school culture based on religious values, 4) Facilitating character education through the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and 5) Providing opportunities for teachers and staff to improve competence and develop his career.

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