

Implementation of Value-Based Leadership by the School Principal through Building a Character-Based School Culture at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of Value-Based Leadership by the principal in building a character-based school culture at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji and to examine its contribution to strengthening organizational values. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach involving one principal, four vice principals, twelve teachers, and four educational staff selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing supported by source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings indicate that Value-Based Leadership was implemented through seven core values: integrity, responsibility, discipline, communication, cooperation, care, and deliberation, which were consistently institutionalized through role modelling, habituation, coaching, and supervision. These practices significantly strengthened teachers' professionalism, students' discipline, collaborative organizational culture, and stakeholder participation. The study contributes theoretically by proposing an empirical framework explaining how leadership values are transformed into sustainable school culture within Indonesian vocational education. Practically, the findings provide guidance for principals and policymakers in strengthening character education through value-oriented leadership.

Keywords: *Value Based Leadership; Principal Leadership; Character-Based School Culture; Character Education; School Leadership; Vocational School.*

A. Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in developing high-quality human resources with strong knowledge, skills, and character. In the current era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, educational institutions are expected to prepare students who are not only academically competent but also possess integrity, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and ethical behavior. Therefore, character education has become one of the primary priorities in improving the quality of education, particularly in vocational schools where graduates are expected to be ready to enter the workforce with both technical competence and strong moral values (Iksal et al., 2024).

Despite continuous efforts to strengthen character education, many schools still experience problems related to declining student discipline, responsibility, respect for school regulations, and collaborative attitudes (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023). These conditions indicate that character values have not been fully internalized in everyday school life. Consequently, schools need effective leadership capable of creating a positive organizational culture that consistently promotes character development among all members of the school community (Berkowitz, 2021).

Although character education has become a national priority in Indonesia, reports from schools indicate that disciplinary violations, weak responsibility, declining collaborative behaviour, and inconsistent implementation of school values remain common challenges in vocational education. These conditions suggest that character education programs often emphasize curricular activities while providing limited attention to leadership practices that shape school culture. Consequently, there is a need for empirical studies investigating how principals translate organizational values into everyday leadership practices that influence teachers, staff, and students.

The school principal plays a strategic role in shaping school culture because the principal is responsible not only for managing the institution but also for influencing teachers, staff, and students through leadership practices that emphasize integrity, responsibility, communication, cooperation, and ethical decision-making (Agus et al., 2021). Leadership based on values is considered an appropriate approach for creating a sustainable character-based school culture because it encourages all school members to practice shared values in their daily activities (Cholifah, 2024).

Previous studies have generally focused on leadership styles such as transformational leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership in improving school effectiveness and educational quality. Other studies have examined the influence of school culture on student character development or teacher performance. Although these studies have provided valuable contributions, most of them have investigated leadership approaches separately and have paid limited attention to the comprehensive implementation of Value Based Leadership in vocational schools (Pasaribu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, previous research has primarily emphasized leadership effectiveness and organizational performance rather than explaining how leadership values are translated into daily school activities that gradually establish a sustainable character-based school culture. Empirical studies specifically examining the implementation of Value Based Leadership within Indonesian vocational high schools also remain limited. These conditions indicate the existence of a research gap that requires further investigation (Eryong & Li, 2021).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Value Based Leadership by the principal in building a character-based school culture at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji. The study focuses on identifying the leadership values implemented by the principal, describing how these values are integrated into school culture, and examining their impact on strengthening the character of teachers, staff, and students (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023).

The originality of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of Value Based Leadership implementation within the context of Indonesian vocational education. Unlike previous studies that focused on individual leadership models or organizational outcomes, this study explains how value-based leadership is translated into everyday educational practices and contributes to the development of a sustainable character-based school culture. The findings are expected to enrich educational leadership literature and provide practical recommendations for school principals and educational policymakers in strengthening character education through value-oriented leadership (Suandi, 2023).

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation of Value Based Leadership by the principal in building a character-based school culture at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, value implementation, and the experiences of school members within their natural setting.

Participants consisted of one principal, four vice principals, twelve teachers, and four educational staff who were purposively selected because of their direct involvement in school leadership and character education implementation. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that each participant possessed sufficient experience and information relevant to the research objectives.

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji. The participants consisted of the principal, vice principals, teachers, and educational staff who were selected as key informants based on their involvement in school leadership and character education activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and documentation. The interview guide, observation checklist, and document review sheet were used as the primary research instruments to obtain comprehensive information regarding leadership practices and school culture (Marmoah & Jenny Indrastoeti Siti Poerwanti, 2022).

The research was conducted in four stages. First, preliminary observations and document reviews were undertaken to understand the school's leadership context. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. Third, classroom activities, school meetings, and character education programs were observed to validate interview findings. Finally, all qualitative data were coded, categorized, interpreted, and verified through triangulation before conclusions were drawn.

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis process consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation to improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Throughout the research process, the principles of Value Based Leadership and character-based school culture served as the theoretical foundation for interpreting the data (Ralebese et al., 2025).

The study was conducted under natural school conditions without manipulating variables or implementing experimental treatments. All participants voluntarily provided information based on their experiences and responsibilities within the school. This methodological approach enables other researchers to replicate the study in similar educational settings by applying the same research design, participant selection, data collection techniques, and qualitative data analysis procedures (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

C. Results and Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Value Based Leadership at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji has played a significant role in establishing a sustainable character-based school culture. The findings reveal that the principal consistently integrated leadership values into every aspect of school management, including planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating educational activities. Rather than relying solely on administrative authority, the principal emphasized moral values, ethical behavior, and collaborative leadership practices that encouraged all members of the school community to actively contribute to achieving educational goals. This leadership approach gradually created an organizational culture characterized by discipline, responsibility, mutual respect, cooperation, and continuous improvement (Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023).

One of the most prominent findings is the implementation of integrity as the foundation of school leadership. Integrity was reflected in the principal's commitment to honesty, transparency, fairness, and accountability in every managerial decision. Financial management, academic planning, staff evaluation, and school development programs were carried out transparently while involving teachers and educational staff in decision-making processes (Rokhim, 2025). This practice strengthened mutual trust among school members and created an atmosphere in which everyone felt respected and responsible for achieving common objectives. The principal also demonstrated consistency between words and actions, making integrity not merely a written policy but a value practiced in everyday school activities. As a result, teachers and staff developed stronger organizational commitment and greater confidence in school leadership (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

Another important finding concerns the implementation of responsibility as a shared organizational value. The principal continuously encouraged teachers, educational staff, and students to perform their respective duties professionally and responsibly. Clear distribution of responsibilities, regular monitoring, and constructive feedback enabled school members to understand their roles while maintaining accountability for their performance (Hadi, 2026). Teachers demonstrated greater commitment in preparing learning materials, conducting classroom instruction, and evaluating student achievement. Administrative staff improved the quality of educational services, while students became more responsible for completing academic tasks and participating actively in school programs. These conditions indicate that responsibility was successfully internalized as a collective value rather than an individual obligation (Yakin et al., 2025).

Discipline also emerged as one of the strongest characteristics of the school's organizational culture. The principal consistently implemented school regulations through clear communication, regular supervision, and exemplary behavior. Attendance, punctuality, classroom management, and compliance with school rules became routine practices supported by continuous monitoring and evaluation. Rather than emphasizing punishment, the principal adopted a persuasive approach by explaining the importance of discipline for both personal development and organizational success (Alghamdi, 2025). Teachers and staff consequently demonstrated greater punctuality and professionalism, while students became more aware of the importance of respecting school regulations and maintaining positive learning behavior. This finding suggests that sustainable discipline can be achieved through value internalization instead of coercive control (Dumitrescu & Stanescu, 2024).

The study further reveals that communication played a central role in strengthening Value Based Leadership. Open communication between the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, and parents created opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and organizational learning (Fadila et al., 2024). Regular coordination meetings, informal discussions, and participatory planning sessions encouraged school members to express ideas, provide constructive suggestions, and participate actively in school decision-making. Such communication practices reduced misunderstandings, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and promoted a culture of transparency throughout the institution. Teachers reported feeling more appreciated because their opinions were considered in developing school policies, thereby increasing motivation and professional commitment (Verschueren et al., 2023).

Cooperation became another important component of the leadership model implemented at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji. The principal encouraged teamwork by involving teachers and staff in planning educational programs, organizing school events, evaluating learning activities, and solving organizational challenges collectively. Collaborative work was viewed not only as an operational necessity but also as an opportunity to strengthen interpersonal relationships and develop mutual responsibility among school members. The findings indicate that this collaborative culture enhanced organizational effectiveness by encouraging knowledge sharing, collective decision-making, and continuous professional learning. Consequently, educational activities became more coordinated, and school objectives were achieved more efficiently (Wiśniewska & Grudowski, 2024).

Role modeling represented one of the most influential leadership strategies identified in this study. The principal consistently demonstrated ethical behavior, professionalism, discipline, commitment, and respect in everyday interactions with teachers, students, and staff. Instead of relying primarily on verbal instructions, leadership values were communicated through direct actions that could easily be observed and imitated by others. Teachers subsequently adopted similar attitudes in classroom instruction and interactions with students, while students gradually developed positive behavioral habits through continuous observation of exemplary conduct demonstrated by school leaders and teachers. This process of modeling contributed substantially to the internalization of character values across the school community (Sakti et al., 2024).

The implementation of Value Based Leadership also generated positive changes in student character development. Students demonstrated improved discipline, responsibility, cooperation, honesty, and respect toward teachers, peers, and school regulations. Participation in academic programs, extracurricular activities, religious events, and community service initiatives increased as students became more actively involved in school life. Character education was no longer confined to classroom instruction but became integrated into daily school routines and organizational culture. Teachers consistently reinforced positive behavior through guidance, appreciation, and constructive feedback, enabling students to understand the practical importance of ethical values in both educational and social contexts (Alfarezel, 2025).

From an organizational perspective, the implementation of Value Based Leadership strengthened institutional commitment and organizational harmony. Teachers and educational staff developed stronger relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Organizational conflicts were generally resolved through discussion and consensus rather than hierarchical decision-making. This participatory leadership approach created a positive working environment in which school members felt valued, motivated, and committed to continuous institutional improvement. Such conditions also encouraged innovation in educational activities because teachers were more willing to share ideas and collaborate in improving learning quality.

This finding supports Berkowitz (2021), who argues that integrity serves as the moral foundation of school leadership. However, unlike previous studies emphasizing integrity merely as ethical behaviour, the present study demonstrates that integrity becomes institutionalized through transparent financial management, participatory decision-making, and continuous supervision.

The findings further indicate that the successful implementation of Value Based Leadership depended on consistency between leadership values and organizational practices. Leadership values were integrated into strategic planning, daily management, teacher supervision, student development programs, and school evaluation systems. Rather than functioning as abstract concepts, integrity, responsibility, discipline, communication, cooperation, and respect became practical guidelines influencing daily behavior throughout the school. This consistency strengthened organizational culture because school members experienced the direct application of shared values in routine educational activities.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Value Based Leadership provides an effective framework for strengthening character-based school culture in vocational education. The leadership practices implemented by the principal successfully encouraged ethical behavior, collaborative relationships, organizational commitment, and sustainable character development among teachers, staff, and students. The study also shows that leadership effectiveness is determined not merely by managerial competence but by the leader's ability to integrate moral values into every aspect of educational management. Through continuous role modeling, open communication, collaborative decision-making, and consistent implementation of organizational values, the principal successfully transformed leadership into a driving force for organizational development and character

formation. These findings indicate that Value Based Leadership can serve as an effective model for educational institutions seeking to improve school quality while simultaneously strengthening character education through a sustainable value-oriented organizational culture.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the implementation of Value Based Leadership by the principal at SMK Negeri 1 Mesuji has been successfully integrated into the management and daily activities of the school, contributing significantly to the development of a sustainable character-based school culture. The leadership values of integrity, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, communication, and exemplary behavior were consistently practiced through planning, decision-making, supervision, and interactions among school members. These values were not only communicated as organizational principles but were also demonstrated through the principal's daily leadership practices, enabling teachers, educational staff, and students to internalize them in their respective roles and responsibilities.

The findings further indicate that Value Based Leadership positively influenced organizational culture by strengthening collaboration, trust, commitment, and shared responsibility among all members of the school community. The implementation of these leadership values created a positive learning environment characterized by discipline, mutual respect, transparency, and effective communication. As a result, teachers demonstrated greater professionalism and commitment, educational staff improved the quality of administrative services, and students showed stronger character through responsible behavior, active participation, and compliance with school regulations.

Theoretically, this study enriches educational leadership literature by demonstrating that Value-Based Leadership functions not merely as a leadership style but as an integrated mechanism for transforming organizational values into sustainable character-based school culture. Practically, the findings provide school principals and educational policymakers with evidence-based strategies for strengthening character education through value-oriented leadership practices. Future research is recommended to investigate the implementation of Value-Based Leadership in different educational levels and regions using mixed-method or comparative approaches to validate and expand the present findings.

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