

SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN CHARACTER BUILDING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the lack of research on value-based leadership. The purpose of this study was to analyze symbols in the form of language, gestures, speech, and signs by examining their meaning in depth. This study used a qualitative approach and a case study research method. The data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews, observation, and document study to understand the symbols conveyed. The results of the study at SDN Cicenang 1, Cigasong Subdistrict, Majalengka Regency, indicate that the symbols conveyed by the school principal and teachers are the values of family, cooperation, democracy, and vision. These are the messages intended to be conveyed for character development among students at the elementary school level. Symbolism serves as a direct instrument, thereby becoming a role model for those around them.

Keywords: Symbolism, Educational Leadership, Character Development

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi minimnya kajian tentang kepemimpinan berbasis nilai. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis simbol berupa bahasa, gesture, ucapan, tanda dengan mengkajinya secara mendalam tentang makna yang akan disampaikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif sementara metode penelitiannya menggunakan studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumen untuk memahami simbol yang disampaikan. Hasil penelitian di SDN Cicenang 1 Kecamatan Cigasong Kabupaten Majalengka menunjukkan bahwa simbol yang disampaikan kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dan guru adalah nilai kekeluargaan, kerjasama, demokratis, visioner. Hal tersebut merupakan pesan yang ingin disampaikan untuk pembinaan karakter siswa pada satuan pendidikan sekolah dasar. Simbolisme merupakan instrumen yang akan dilihat langsung sehingga menjadi *role model* bagi orang-orang disekitarnya.

Kata Kunci: Simbolisme, Kepemimpinan Pendidikan, Pembinaan Karakter

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Introduction

Schools, as educational institutions, are responsible for character building. Therefore, character does not only grow and develop in each individual, but also in educational organisms or institutions. Students' character cannot grow and develop if the school itself lacks character (Ansori, 2020). Several studies have found positive outcomes from character education programs in schools, such as improved academic performance, reduced problem students and dropouts, and fewer instances of misbehavior among students (Bergmark, 2008; Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009; Katilmis et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2010; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). A more specific perspective arises due to the tendency of negative behavior among children in schools (Cooley, 2008, p.188; Milliren & Messer, 2009, p.19) Furthermore, the principle of character education is to instill good attitudes in children that are integrated into behavior in the form of respect, honesty, fairness, and responsibility (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006) and to become good

citizens in the future by being instructed and guided toward better things (Hoge, 2002, Pike, 2010).

To achieve this, educational leadership is needed that can influence, motivate, coordinate, guide, and direct people in the school environment (Kusmintardjo, 1989). A leader is appointed because they have greater ability in organizing, directing others, determining the success of school programs, improving the quality of learning, and being able to serve as a role model in their organization (Eikenberry, 2010; Gunawan, 2019). Leadership in schools has such a strong influence on organizational performance that it makes sense if the decline in education is partly due to leaders who cannot align with the values that serve as guidelines. Based on this, leadership plays a crucial role in the success of character development in schools. Several research findings indicate that 1) the school principal is a determining factor in the success or failure of character education (Berkowitz, 2012), and leadership involvement is the strongest differentiating factor in implementing character development (Ghamrawi and Shal, 2015), 3) the overall effect of leadership contributes a quarter of the total effect of the school (Robinson, 2010 in Suryadi and Budimansyah). Meanwhile, according to Lickona (1991), leadership plays an important role in shaping moral culture in schools because it can foster positive values, attitudes, and behaviors. Educational leadership is a pioneer in character education in the schools it leads.

In reality, there is currently a leadership crisis in schools, with several factors contributing to this crisis. First, the vision, mission, and leadership of leaders no longer align with expectations. The social system desires change, while leaders prefer the status quo (Wirawan, 2013). Second, leadership style, characterized by arrogance in making rules unilaterally without involving the human resources within the school. Third, leadership behavior that does not demonstrate standards of value and is far from exemplary. Based on this, according to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), leadership in schools must be based on the moral character of the leader, ethics, and values embedded in the leadership vision, thereby serving as a guide for teachers. A good leader does not merely influence, guide, organize, and control others but ensures that every activity in the school is imbued with values. This is realized in school leadership that prioritizes moral principles in practice, whether in interactions, performing duties, or making decisions (Brown et al. 2005).

Character building for students in schools can be successful if leaders always base their actions and decisions on values, because leadership is essentially about choosing values, and leadership is an activity that is rich in values (Hughes et al., cited in Lumkin, 2014). Therefore, a leader must have a set of values, as values serve as standards for behavior, beauty, efficiency, or the meaningfulness of a leader's actions in exercising their leadership. As a standard, values help leaders determine what is acceptable or unacceptable, and values are unchanging because they serve as a benchmark for determining the ethicality of an individual (Robbins, 2003). In a broader sense, values help leaders determine whether a specific entity (an object, a person, an idea, a behavior, etc.) or a particular category is good or bad. According to Hakam (2013), the most important standard a leader should have is the standard for considering the leader's behavior, which allows the leader to determine what types of actions are appropriate and valuable and which types of actions are inappropriate or valueless. This standard is the leader's moral values. Moral values describe guidelines for what is right and fair.

This research was conducted at Cicenang I State Elementary School in Cigasong District, Majalengka Regency. The reason for choosing this school as the research object is that its academic culture is well-maintained, enrollment continues to increase, it has non-academic

achievements, accomplished teachers, and cooperation with various parties. Of course, behind this lies the values upheld by the leader, which make the school attractive to the community. The researcher aims to understand the ideas and beliefs that leaders hold dear and use as guidelines in managing the institution, thereby bringing values into the organization to serve as a foundation and guide for those within it (Crossan et al., 2012). Leadership is seen as a credible role model and an example for followers (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Value-based leadership is seen as a representative choice as an instrument to realize these ideals. Value-based leadership will make values and norms the basis of its leadership and treat others fairly, honestly, and with respect (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Therefore, according to Suryadi (2015), character education cannot be carried out in a value-free vacuum because character is closely related (bounded) to life. The presence of character values can be seen from the symbols practiced in the form of behavior, learning activities, interacting with others, or other activities. Furthermore, according to Phenix (1964), symbols can take the form of signs, body gestures, cultural rituals/routines, graphics and object symbols, dreams, and mythology. Symbols in culture are connected to signs, where these signs have meaning and also play a role in human life in carrying out their cultural practices (Maran, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what values are embodied by educational leadership through the symbols it practices.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach, which was chosen because it aims to explore and understand meaning in depth, producing descriptive data in the form of words or notes related to the meaning or value (Creswell, 2014, Bogdan 1992) of the symbols practiced by the principal. Meanwhile, the research method uses case studies. According to Creswell (2014) Case study research is a qualitative approach that explores real-life, contemporary limited systems (cases) or diverse limited systems (various cases) through detailed and in-depth data collection involving various information sources or multiple information sources (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual materials, and various reports), and reports on case descriptions and case themes.

The research location is the Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) Insan Rabani in Majalengka Kulon Subdistrict, Majalengka Regency. This location was chosen due to the increasing number of students and the maintained academic culture. The participants in this research activity are the school principal, teachers, and students.

The data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with key informants, such as the school principal, teachers, and students. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to observe activities directly, record verbal and non-verbal interactions, and understand the social and cultural context underlying the use of symbolism in various aspects. Additionally, the document study involved reviewing texts and records related to the activities conducted. The combination of these three techniques enabled strong data triangulation and strengthened the validity of the research.

Result and Discussion

Value-based leadership always strives to ensure that every encounter is a moment for teaching values. Schools will lose this special moment if every individual within the school does not appreciate encounters with students as an opportunity to present and internalize values (Kesuma, 2012). School organizations must be value-based and use values as the foundation for

thought and action, as Schwartz (Sanusi, 2014) states that values are seen as drivers of action. People act because there are values that motivate them. The values applied by the leadership at SDN Cicenang 1 have provided motivation and influenced other school members such as teachers, students, and other staff. From a thorough analysis, there are character education values embodied in the symbols portrayed by the school principal and teachers, which carry meanings intended to be conveyed to the school community, thereby establishing values as standards for the behavior of school members. The following leadership values, identified through observation and interviews, are as follows:

Table 1. Research Results Data

No	Values embodied	Identify the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.
1	Family spirit	Do not hesitate to congratulate a teacher when they experience good fortune. Visit each other when a teacher's family member is ill. Serve on the committee for a teacher's circumcision or wedding ceremony. School meetings are for sharing. Every activity is always done through consultation There are several photo documents of activities done together When meeting, greet each other The principal pats the students on the head when meeting them
2	Cooperation	Involve outside parties in an activity The school has limited knowledge or skills To realize the school's vision, it is necessary to involve other institutions. The school has limitations in certain areas such as health issues, environmental management, and religious knowledge Documentation and interviews show that the school collaborates with the Community Health Center, BP3K, BPLH, and Islamic boarding schools. The school needs to collaborate with parents in communicating school activities At least once a semester, the school invites parents to discuss their children's progress.
3	Democratic leadership	Decisions are the result of mutual agreement. All parties are always involved in meetings. Every activity involves the school community. Every school activity is preceded by a meeting. Every activity has a committee. The committee changes for each activity and is adjusted according to capabilities. The arrangement of tables and chairs in the teachers' room is uniform.
4	Leadership	Everyone has the same right to express their opinions. This is evident in the vision it wants to achieve. It begins with planning The mission is oriented toward future success

Several collaborations have been carried out with institutions that have more expertise
 Building a good culture for students through various activities
 Encouraging teachers to participate in activities that can improve their competencies
 Training students to have skills and participating in competitions at various events, whether at the sub-district or district level
 Some activities have been carried out, with committee leadership changing according to their capabilities.
 The school principal oversees every activity
 There is a report after the activity to the committee chair and school principal.

The results of interviews with the principal, teachers, and students through symbols conveyed through sounds, gestures, and signs, along with direct observations in the school environment, were analyzed in depth. The following values were found to be offered by the principal's educational leadership in carrying out his role in character building:

Family Values

Schools as organizations are seen as “places where people work together under rules to achieve organizational goals” (Shatalebi and Yarmohammadian, 2011). To achieve the school's organizational goals, values must be embodied in educational leaders, for example in their actions, decisions, and behavior in leadership positions (Haydon, 2007; Shapiro and Gross, 2013). Therefore, according to Nawawi (Mulyasa, 2012), intimate, family-like relationships, free from rigid formalities and authoritarian procedures, have a positive effect on the work morale of educators. Schools should become “schools of love,” schools for compassion (Phillips 2000). Educational leadership must strive to create a school of love, which will foster camaraderie and strengthen bonds among teachers. This is an important condition that must be pursued by various parties, especially school principals. An atmosphere filled with family values can enhance optimal work mechanisms, even improving teachers' collective professionalism and sense of responsibility.

According to Lickona (1991), family values foster a sense of shared destiny and mutual support, mutual assistance, congratulating friends who achieve success, empathizing with friends who experience misfortune, or listening to complaints, thereby enabling schools to serve as a means of protecting their members while avoiding negative behavior (Prilleltensky, 2000). A sense of family can be cultivated through extracurricular activities or other activities that foster a sense of belonging to the larger school family. School activities such as sports competitions, art competitions, environmental cleanliness competitions, business activities, and school-based work in the form of extracurricular activities can strengthen a sense of community. The value of community among school members is created to foster a spirit of collegiality, exchange of ideas, sharing of best practices, and mutual assistance in addressing student learning challenges.

The value of cooperation

Cooperation is an activity carried out by certain groups that have the same goals/interests as other members at the same time and are closely related to each other (Maryana Devi & Wahyu Pusari, 2017). Meanwhile, according to Yulianti et al. (2016),

cooperation is an activity that can enhance interaction skills, boost self-confidence, and make it easier for students to adapt to new environments. Collaboration can be used as an activity for parents to collaborate with teachers to understand the character development of their students (Trowsdale, McKenna, and Francis 2019). This is supported by research indicating that collaboration with parents is a key factor in achieving optimal student academic performance (Perrotta 2020; Yildiz and Guler Yildiz 2021). Collaboration is the responsibility of the school to involve various parties in achieving educational goals (Bierman et al. 2021). Therefore, according to Isjoni (2010), learning that emphasizes the principle of collaboration will equip students with specific skills, namely cooperative skills, which serve to facilitate work relationships and tasks. Collaboration with various parties demonstrates a healthy moral environment and effective learning activities (Lickona, 1991). Meanwhile, according to Surakhmad (Fathurrohman, 2015), an environment where certain values have been internalized in a structured and directed manner will influence the formation of a strong character.

Through collaboration, the vision of achieving quality education can be realized. Conversely, if learning is of poor quality, the school atmosphere is not harmonious, and cooperation among school components is not well established, this will have a negative impact on the achievement of educational goals. Thus, cooperation within an organization is very important to create a conducive atmosphere where subordinates feel valued and respected, and their ideas and suggestions are always considered in every school activity. The importance of cooperation is emphasized by Arikunto (1995), who states that cooperation can provide benefits for an organization and have a positive impact on its members. Cooperation can increase productivity compared to working individually. Through cooperation, harmonious relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations can be created. And with good cooperation, all members of the organization can benefit.

Democratic leadership

In improving teacher performance, motivating teachers and optimizing teachers is very important. Leadership style in this case can be interpreted as a behavior or method that a leader can use to influence thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and how to apply good behavior in achieving desired goals within an organization (Cuban, 1988, Nawawi, 2003:113). Therefore, leaders are individuals who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. According to Robbin (Rohmat, 2010), "leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals." In this context, leaders are needed to exert influence or guide a group to ensure that agreed-upon objectives are achieved effectively.

To achieve an organizational vision, a leader must be able to exert influence, provide clarity, and guide decision-making and actions to achieve organizational goals (Eikenberry, 2010). Based on research by Sunarto (2019), democratic leadership style is quite successful in improving educator performance and educational management. Meanwhile, according to Hidayat (2019), good leadership style is democratic leadership based on professionalism by setting an example for school members. In democratic leadership, leaders cannot act without the assistance of their followers because the role of members is significant in decision-making. According to Andersen (1959), he refutes the claim that democratic leadership is associated with low productivity and high morale, and that authoritarian leadership is associated with high productivity and low morale.

Through democratic leadership, students will learn how to actively participate in the democratization process, including how to choose the right leader, how to speak in public,

improve performance, satisfaction, open communication, and how to support human rights and other democratic values (Hackman et al., 1996; Komara, 2018). Additionally, the presence of democratic leadership will help students develop skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, which are essential in community life (Rambe, 2023). Thus, democratic character education is crucial for building aware and responsible citizens who can participate effectively in democratic processes. In an increasingly complex and rapidly changing era, democratic leadership is becoming increasingly important to ensure a democratic and sustainable future. Despite its weaknesses, which include being time-consuming and involving lengthy debates, democratic leadership plays a key role in improving leadership performance (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003).

Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is leadership that has a vision for the future. M. Sashkin and M.G Sashkin (Wirawan, 2013) explain that visionary leadership encompasses behaviors and characteristics marked by communication, trust, attentiveness, creating opportunities, self-confidence, empowerment orientation, future orientation, and culture building. Visionary leaders have the ability to articulate their vision to others, apply that vision in their leadership, and expand the vision into various leadership contexts (Alexandra et al., 2023). In this way, a clearly articulated vision can inspire energy and commitment in the workplace. Meanwhile, Komariah (2004) views visionary leadership as the ability of leaders to create, formulate, communicate, transform, and implement ideal thoughts that originate from themselves or from social interactions among members of the organization. Visionary leaders view the organization's future aspirations as goals to be achieved through the commitment of all organizational members (Asmuni, 2016; Mukti, 2018).

Visionary leadership has the ability to create culture by empowering people to achieve common goals within groups and teams throughout the organization. Visionary leadership has the characteristic of promoting high identification among followers, which results in followers adopting the behaviors of visionary leaders. According to Goleman (2007), visionary leadership is a leadership style that seeks to inspire people toward shared dreams in the most positive and appropriate way, utilizing the emotional climate when change requires a new vision or when a clear direction is needed. This means that visionary leadership is necessary for transforming organizational conditions and requires a new vision or a change in vision.

For visionary leaders, the school's vision is the value that forms the foundation of the organization; the vision is shaped by each individual's personal values, which bind and influence their actions in implementing it (De Klerk and Rens, 2013). The organizational vision is developed by involving all members of the organization, not merely the desires of the leadership or a group. Personal values based on universal values form the foundation of the organizational vision, and the morality and ethics embedded in the organization reflect its organizational culture. To build character education, visionary leadership is required, which in its performance will strive to: (1) Formulate a Character Education Vision; (2) Motivate and Inspire the Team; (3) Build a Positive Organizational Culture; (4) Developing Team Leadership Skills; (5) Encouraging Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement (Husaini, 2013). Through the close relationship between visionary leadership and character education, an organization or educational institution can create an environment that supports positive character growth, producing academically and ethically outstanding students, and preparing them to face life's challenges with integrity.

Therefore, the educational process in elementary schools must be imbued with good values in its vision, mission, policies, and procedures, which are based on values considered appropriate and correct for the school (Johnson, 2012; Busch, 2007). Leaders must be able to explain their decisions in a way that is easy to understand (Eikenberry, 2010). As Johnson (2012) states: "It is impossible to be a leader without values." Values influence the attitudes individuals hold and how they act or behave (Baloglu, 2012). Leadership without moral values is leadership driven by authoritarianism, which will inevitably lead to failure in all aspects (Shatalebia, 2011). Therefore, according to Begley (2010), leaders with influence must build and communicate values to their followers to achieve the school's vision, mission, and goals. Schools need to realize that students with character are born from leadership with character. Through value-based leadership, it is hoped that students will not only be intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and spiritually intelligent and have life skills.

Conclusion

Leadership is not only about influencing, guiding, managing, interacting with, and controlling others, but also about ensuring that every activity in school is imbued with values, both in carrying out tasks and in making decisions. Character building in schools can run smoothly if leaders always base their actions and decisions on values, because leadership is essentially about choosing values. Therefore, a leader must have a set of values, as values serve as standards for behavior, beauty, efficiency, or the meaningfulness of a leader's actions. As standards, values help leaders determine what is acceptable or unacceptable, and values are unchanging because they serve as the benchmark for determining whether an action is ethical or not.

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