

Collaborative Roles in Character Education: Contributions and Challenges of Principals, Teachers, and Parents in Elementary Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Character Development;
Stakeholder Collaboration;
Leadership in Education;
Cultural and Religious
Integration

Article history:

Received 2024-12-17

Revised 2025-04-21

Accepted 2025-06-30

ABSTRACT

Character education is a fundamental objective at the elementary level, with principals, teachers, and parents playing interconnected roles. This study investigates how these stakeholders collaboratively shape students' character at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Kota Gorontalo, through leadership initiatives and the integration of cultural and religious values. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing observation, interviews, and document analysis to gather comprehensive data from school leaders, teachers, and parents. Findings reveal that principals significantly contribute to character formation by promoting discipline, modeling positive behavior, and organizing both academic and non-academic initiatives—such as congregational prayers, call-to-prayer competitions, and scouting programs—that emphasize moral and leadership development. Teachers reinforce these efforts by incorporating cultural and religious elements into instruction and encouraging collaboration, social skills, and personal responsibility. Parents support character development by instilling core moral values, practicing fairness at home, and serving as behavioral role models. However, several challenges were identified, including low student motivation, limited parental engagement, family-related issues, and inadequate school facilities. The study emphasizes that effective character development requires strong collaboration among principals, teachers, and parents. It also highlights the influence of leadership and community involvement in overcoming internal and external barriers. This research offers valuable insights for similar educational contexts, demonstrating that the synergy between leadership, instructional strategies, and parental involvement is essential in cultivating responsible, moral, and independent students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The leadership of school principals plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character within formal education settings. Principals function not only as administrative leaders but also as moral

exemplars whose behavior directly influences the school culture and the values internalized by both students and teachers. In the Indonesian context, where moral and character development are fundamental components of the national education agenda, the leadership of principals becomes even more critical. Their role is increasingly significant in an era marked by globalization and the rapid erosion of moral values, where schools are tasked with preparing a generation that upholds ethical integrity and contributes positively to society and nation-building.

Character education in Indonesia has gained substantial policy support, particularly through the enactment of Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, and Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20 of 2018. These frameworks position school principals as the primary agents responsible for supervising and implementing character education programs at the school level. The government emphasizes that moral development must be embedded in the curriculum and daily school activities and that it should be led directly by the principal as the head of the educational unit. Despite the existence of these policies, character education remains inadequately implemented. Reports of declining student discipline, increasing moral ambiguity, and deviant behaviors suggest a gap between the intended outcomes of these policies and actual school practices (Hidayat & Suryana, 2018).

This gap highlights the urgent need to develop and adopt more effective leadership strategies aimed at strengthening character education. Specifically, strategies that are interactive, student-centered, and grounded in cultural and religious values are increasingly seen as critical to this effort. Traditional didactic methods—often referred to as teacher-centered approaches—tend to limit student engagement and restrict the development of moral reasoning and leadership skills. In contrast, contemporary educational research supports learning environments that promote student autonomy, active participation, and critical reflection, which are essential for nurturing moral character and personal responsibility (Lickona, 1991; Nucci, 2001).

Interactive and student-focused learning fosters a more conducive environment for sustainable character development. Learning experiences that are deeply meaningful and involve real-world application allow students to develop virtues such as empathy, resilience, cooperation, and leadership. Within this paradigm, principals must go beyond administrative duties and actively shape the moral and ethical direction of their schools. Their leadership strategies should encourage collaboration among teachers, students, and parents to form a unified approach toward character formation.

The debate on the most effective methods for character development continues among educators and scholars. Some argue for the relevance of traditional, discipline-based approaches, while others advocate for the integration of modern, experience-based pedagogies. However, the inconsistency in the application of these methods often undermines the effectiveness of school-based character education initiatives. The disconnect between theory and practice—between the curriculum's intended moral goals and the actual experiences of students in schools—presents a challenge that requires urgent attention (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

This study investigates the leadership strategies employed by school principals in developing leadership character among students at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Kota Gorontalo. The primary objective is to explore how school leaders implement character education programs that promote leadership qualities among students. In particular, the study focuses on the integration of culturally and religiously grounded activities, including congregational prayers, call-to-prayer competitions, and scouting programs, as well as the use of educational games and interactive learning strategies. These efforts aim to foster moral development and leadership potential in young learners.

Using a qualitative research design, the study gathers data through observation, interviews, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, and parents. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of how leadership character is cultivated in a real-world school setting and how various stakeholders contribute to this process. The findings highlight the central role of principals in modeling positive behavior, enforcing discipline, and creating an educational environment that supports both academic and character development.

Furthermore, the study reveals the collaborative role played by teachers and parents in reinforcing character education. Teachers incorporate cultural and religious values into classroom instruction and promote traits such as empathy, teamwork, and social responsibility. Parents, on the other hand, contribute by modeling ethical behavior at home and instilling core moral values, creating consistency between school and home environments. However, the research also identifies persistent challenges, including low student motivation, limited parental involvement, family-related issues, and insufficient school infrastructure. These obstacles underscore the importance of coordinated efforts and strategic leadership to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of character education.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on character education by focusing specifically on leadership character, an area that is often subsumed under broader discussions of moral or ethical education. By distinguishing leadership character as a distinct domain within character development, the study emphasizes the importance of cultivating traits such as initiative, accountability, empathy, and public-mindedness in students. These qualities are essential not only for personal growth but also for preparing future leaders who can contribute meaningfully to society.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws from both character education theory and transformational leadership theory, offering a comprehensive lens through which to examine the influence of school leadership on student character development. Through this lens, the study aims to offer practical recommendations for principals, educators, and policy-makers seeking to enhance the moral and leadership qualities of students in Indonesian primary schools.

Ultimately, this research aspires to support the creation of a generation that is not only academically competent but also morally upright and capable of leading with integrity. By showcasing the interconnected roles of school leaders, teachers, and parents in character formation, the study reinforces the idea that effective leadership, cultural values, and community involvement are vital to the success of character education initiatives.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method to systematically explore and present the phenomena under investigation. As defined by Suryabrata (in Sumadi, 2004), the descriptive approach involves accurately portraying the facts and characteristics of a given population. The research aims to gain a holistic understanding of the experiences of the study subjects by examining their motivations, perceptions, and behaviors. Conducted within a natural setting, the study utilizes a combination of structured scientific methods—such as observation, interviews, and document analysis—to collect in-depth and comprehensive data.

2.1 Informants and Selection Criteria

The research subjects included various stakeholders at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Kota Gorontalo, who were selected based on their relevance and direct involvement in character-building strategies for students. The informants consisted of the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, several teachers, students, and parents. Specifically, the principal and vice principal were selected due to their leadership roles in the implementation of character-building programs; teachers were included based on their direct involvement in educational strategies; students were chosen to understand their perceptions of character development activities, and parents were selected for their role in supporting and reinforcing character education at home.

A total of 15 informants were selected: 1 principal, 1 vice principal, 5 teachers, 5 students, and 3 parents. These informants were chosen purposefully to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the processes and challenges associated with shaping leadership character.

2.2 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researcher to immerse in school activities to

observe firsthand the interactions between teachers and students in shaping leadership character. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principal, teachers, students, and parents to gather qualitative insights about the strategies used to foster leadership character and evaluate their effectiveness. Documentation analysis included reviewing school-related documents such as the school profile, vision and mission statements, and photos of activities relevant to the research. These documents helped to contextualize the observed and interview data.

Before commencing the research, the researcher obtained the necessary research permits from relevant authorities and ensured informed consent from all participants. Participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, their role, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality was guaranteed by anonymizing the identities of all informants, and any identifying information was removed from the data to maintain privacy. Participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

2.3 Data Analysis: Miles and Huberman Model

Data analysis in this study followed the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three interconnected stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis began with data reduction, where the researcher reviewed all collected materials, including interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. This phase focused on selecting and condensing the most relevant information related to the research questions. Irrelevant or redundant data were eliminated, and the remaining data were organized into meaningful categories to facilitate further analysis.

Once the data were reduced, the next step was to present the findings in a coherent and structured narrative. The information was organized thematically according to the research objectives, particularly highlighting the strategies employed by principals, teachers, and parents in cultivating leadership character in students. This thematic presentation allowed the core issues to emerge clearly, enabling readers to better understand both the methods used and the challenges faced in character-building efforts.

In the final stage, the researcher drew conclusions by synthesizing the data through inductive reasoning. Patterns and themes were identified, leading to insights into the effectiveness of various strategies for character development, with a particular focus on nurturing leadership character in students. This process helped to illuminate how different stakeholders contribute to student character formation and which leadership practices are most impactful.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the study employed triangulation by cross-checking data gathered from multiple sources—observations, interviews, and documents. This approach helped verify the consistency of the information and minimized the risk of bias, enhancing the reliability of the research outcomes.

Overall, the results of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the character-building strategies implemented by school principals and educators. Furthermore, the study offers valuable recommendations for improving leadership character development in primary schools, emphasizing the importance of strategic collaboration among all educational stakeholders.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of the Principal in Shaping Leadership Character

3.1.1 The Role of the Principal in Shaping Students' Character Through Academic Activities

The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role of the principal at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Kota Gorontalo, in shaping students' character through a combination of academic and non-academic initiatives. Based on observations and interviews with the principal, teachers, students, and parents,

the principal is recognized as a role model who actively motivates all school stakeholders. Their leadership is demonstrated through consistent participation in school routines, such as delivering motivational speeches during flag ceremonies, monitoring the teaching and learning process, and promoting discipline by arriving punctually and ensuring adherence to school rules.

Character education is seamlessly integrated into various school activities, including flag ceremonies, collaborative learning, and the implementation of the *Pancasila Student Profile*, all of which emphasize values such as teamwork, discipline, empathy, and effective communication (Andriani et al., 2022). The principal adopts a direct and consistent approach to discipline, modeling expected behaviors and reinforcing school norms through daily practices (Andriani et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2020).

These efforts have proven effective in fostering a positive school environment, supporting character development, and enhancing overall educational quality (Andriani et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2017). Furthermore, the principal's instructional leadership—encompassing the supervision and evaluation of teaching practices, coordination of curriculum implementation, and monitoring of student progress—plays a crucial role in improving both teaching and learning outcomes (Andriani et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2017; Mwanza & Musyoka, 2018).

3.1.2 The Role of the Principal in Shaping Students' Leadership Character Through Non-Academic Activities

This study emphasizes the vital role of the principal at SDN 7 Kota Barat in fostering students' leadership character through a range of non-academic activities. Programs such as scouting, sports, arts, drill practices, and religious activities—including *dhuha* and *dzuhur* congregational prayers—offer students meaningful opportunities to develop leadership, responsibility, and teamwork. Through these activities, students are trained to lead groups, serve as prayer leaders (*imam*), and build essential soft skills such as communication and collaboration (Budimansyah et al., 2018). These experiences help students practice leadership independently, aligning with the school's vision of creating a holistic and inclusive educational environment that nurtures a more self-reliant and capable younger generation.

The principal adopts a democratic leadership style, empowering students to take initiative and assume leadership roles while also fostering engagement with parents to support character-building efforts (Robinson, 2017; Efremov, 2018). Interviews with teachers, students, and parents confirm that this leadership approach effectively promotes the consistent development of leadership qualities among students (Efremov, 2018). Activities such as scouting camps, school sports events, and environmental projects like tree planting further reinforce leadership values by encouraging students to work independently and collaboratively (Budimansyah et al., 2018).

Parental involvement also plays a key role in enhancing the effectiveness of character education. The principal actively organizes regular meetings and collaborative forums to involve parents in school initiatives and ensure their support (Robinson, 2017; Efremov, 2018). This partnership between the school and families strengthens the educational ecosystem, creating a more supportive and nurturing environment for students' moral and leadership development (Diana et al., 2019; Bettencourt et al., 2020; Khan, 2023).

3.1.3 The Role of the Principal in Shaping Students' Character Through Habit Formation

This study reveals that character development at SDN 7 Kota Barat is systematically fostered through routine and programmed activities aimed at cultivating positive behaviors and attitudes that become habitual. Daily practices such as greeting teachers and peers, shaking hands, praying before and after lessons, attending morning assemblies, and participating in *dhuha* and *dzuhur* congregational prayers play a central role in shaping students' discipline, politeness, and sense of responsibility (Meraksa et al., 2022; Juminah, 2023; Utami et al., 2019). These routines not only reinforce moral conduct but also align with the school's vision of creating a holistic and inclusive educational environment that nurtures self-reliant and well-rounded students.

Additional habits, such as maintaining classroom cleanliness, practicing personal hygiene, and displaying courtesy—like disposing of trash properly—further support early character formation (Meraksa et al., 2022; Juminah, 2023; Utami et al., 2019). Alongside these routines, the school implements programmed activities such as national holiday commemorations, year-end camping events, and drill practices to instill leadership qualities, patriotism, and a disciplined mindset (Juminah, 2023; Utami et al., 2019).

A key aspect of this character education approach is active collaboration between the school, teachers, students, and parents. Through regular meetings and socialization efforts, parents are engaged in reinforcing school-based values at home, fostering a unified commitment to national character education and behavioral consistency (Fasikhi, 2023; Jallow, 2023; Afriani et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2022; Rahmawati, 2023; Herman et al., 2022; Adawiyah, 2023). This collaborative partnership helps build a supportive learning environment that promotes the consistent application of positive behaviors both in and out of school.

Structured habit formation thus plays a fundamental role in cultivating students’ integrity, leadership, and personal responsibility. These sustained efforts contribute to the development of strong and enduring character competencies (Meraksa et al., 2022; Juminah, 2023; Utami et al., 2019; Hanafi, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Asyhar, 2023; Mardi, 2023). Supporting this process is the principal’s instructional leadership, which involves monitoring and evaluating teaching practices, overseeing curriculum implementation, and tracking students’ academic and behavioral progress. Such leadership is instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and learning while reinforcing character development within the school community (Sebastian et al., 2016; Sufyarma et al., 2019; Huri & Marwanto, 2019).

Based on the Research Findings, the Contextual Diagram Can Be Explained as Follows:

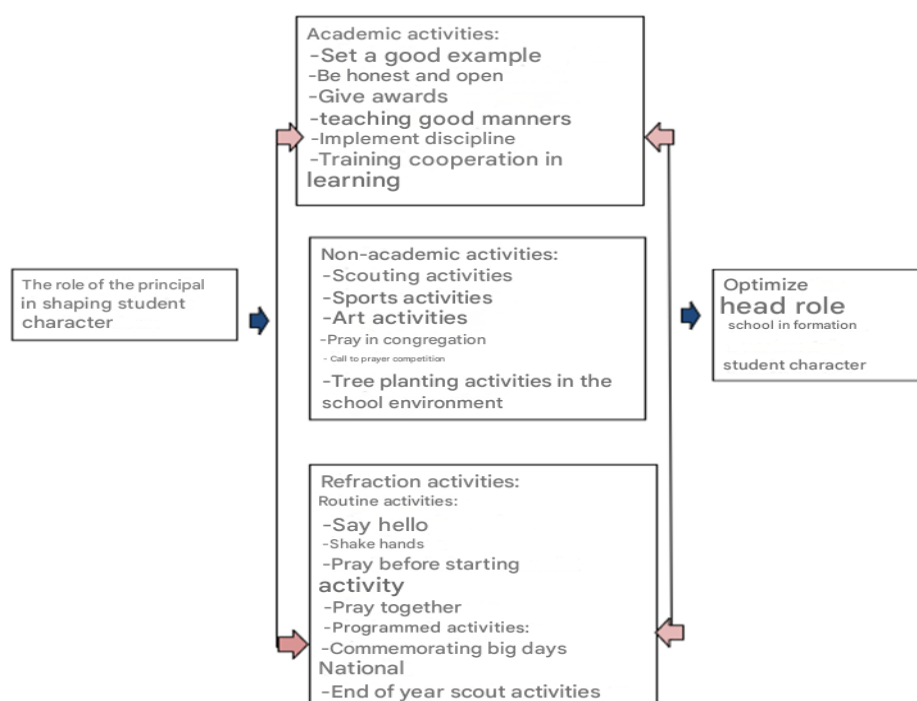


Figure 1. The Role of Teachers in Shaping Student Character

The findings of this study reveal several key ways in which leadership character traits, such as decision-making, teamwork, and responsibility, were observed and nurtured in students at SDN 7

Kota Barat, Kota Gorontalo. These traits were not only promoted through direct academic activities but also through extracurricular programs initiated by the school leadership.

For instance, the principal and teachers integrated decision-making skills into student activities by involving them in school planning processes. Students were given opportunities to participate in discussions regarding school events, where they were encouraged to voice their opinions and make decisions in group settings. One notable example was during the planning of the annual school cultural event, where students were assigned leadership roles, such as coordinating teams for different performances and overseeing logistical arrangements. This involvement not only empowered students but also allowed them to practice making decisions that impacted their peers and the wider school community.

Teamwork was another prominent leadership character trait fostered in students. This was particularly evident in the school's implementation of group-based learning strategies, where students worked together to solve problems and complete tasks. For example, during group assignments in science and social studies, students were encouraged to collaborate, dividing responsibilities to ensure the completion of projects. The collaborative nature of these tasks enabled students to develop interpersonal skills, learn the value of diverse perspectives, and understand the importance of supporting one another to achieve common goals.

In addition to these skills, responsibility was emphasized through various school-led initiatives. Students were entrusted with roles such as managing the school's recycling program or taking responsibility for younger students during recess. These roles not only helped students build a sense of accountability but also highlighted the importance of contributing to the well-being of the community. Through these activities, students learned that leadership involves taking responsibility for one's actions and serving the greater good.

These findings align with the broader goals of leadership character development, which emphasize the importance of shaping students into responsible, independent, and morally sound individuals. By engaging students in real-life situations that require decision-making, teamwork, and responsibility, the school was able to nurture leadership qualities that go beyond academic achievement. This approach is consistent with the overarching goal of leadership character development, which seeks to equip students with the skills necessary for effective leadership in both their personal lives and future careers.

Moreover, the integration of cultural and religious activities, as facilitated by the principal and teachers, further supported the development of leadership traits in a holistic manner. For example, the practice of congregational prayers and participation in call-to-prayer competitions not only instilled discipline but also reinforced values such as empathy, respect, and service to others—all essential components of strong leadership. By fostering these leadership character traits in students, SDN 7 Kota Barat effectively contributed to the broader educational objectives of creating a generation of students who are not only academically proficient but also capable of becoming ethical leaders in their communities.

3.2. The Role of Teachers in Shaping Student Character

3.2.1 Through Teaching and Learning Activities

Teachers play a significant role in shaping students' character through teaching and learning activities. Interviews with various informants reveal that group-based learning is one of the effective strategies. Each group is led by a leader who functions as the organizer and coordinator of tasks within the group. This provides students with experience in leadership, teamwork, and responsibility. The learning model employed in several schools, including SDN 7 Kota Barat, adopts a differentiated learning approach, where students are grouped based on their knowledge levels. Each group member is trained to respect opinions, collaborate, and take responsibility for completing assigned tasks. Additionally, this approach helps students develop good communication skills during the learning

process. Teachers also emphasize the importance of discipline and honesty during learning activities, training students to respect differing opinions and accept mistakes during discussions.

3.2.2 Developing Social and Emotional Skills

The development of social and emotional skills is another primary focus in shaping students' character. According to interviews with the principal and teachers, this development is facilitated through fostering good relationships between teachers, students, and parents. The principal emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment that supports positive social interactions, empathy, and appreciation for good behavior. Additionally, the school implements a curriculum that includes Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), covering aspects such as emotional regulation, problem-solving, and decision-making. Harmonious relationships among all school members, including teachers and parents, serve as a crucial foundation for developing students' social skills, which are expected to positively impact their daily lives in the community positively.

3.2.3 Understanding Diversity

In addition to social and emotional skills, understanding diversity is a key component of character education at SDN 7 Kota Barat. Teachers aim to instill values of tolerance, respect for differences, and mutual respect among students from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Diversity education is integrated into classroom lessons as well as extracurricular activities that involve diverse social interactions. Students are taught to have empathy, care for friends from different backgrounds, and actively participate in social activities such as communal work and tree planting in the school environment. These efforts aim to foster mutual respect and develop a sense of love for the nation and country.

3.2.4 Building Independence and Responsibility

Education in independence and responsibility is another aspect emphasized in shaping students' character. Teachers implement various strategies to build students' independence, both through in-class and extracurricular activities. Each student is given responsibilities such as completing assignments, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and carrying out other tasks independently. The principal and teachers emphasize the importance of building students' confidence through training in responsibility. By successfully performing tasks independently, students are expected to develop strong self-confidence to face future challenges. Experiences in practicing responsibility also help students become more disciplined and appreciate their obligations, forming a vital foundation for strong and independent character development.

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the role of teachers is crucial in shaping students' character through various educational approaches. Group-based learning, the development of social and emotional skills, fostering an understanding of diversity, and nurturing independence and responsibility are the main strategies implemented by the school to support students' character development. Consistent implementation of these approaches is expected to produce students who are not only academically competent but also possess strong character, empathy, and the ability to adapt to diverse social situations in broader environments.

Based on the Explanations from the Informants, the Research Findings on the Role of Teachers in Shaping Leadership Character Can Be Explained Through the Context Diagram Below:

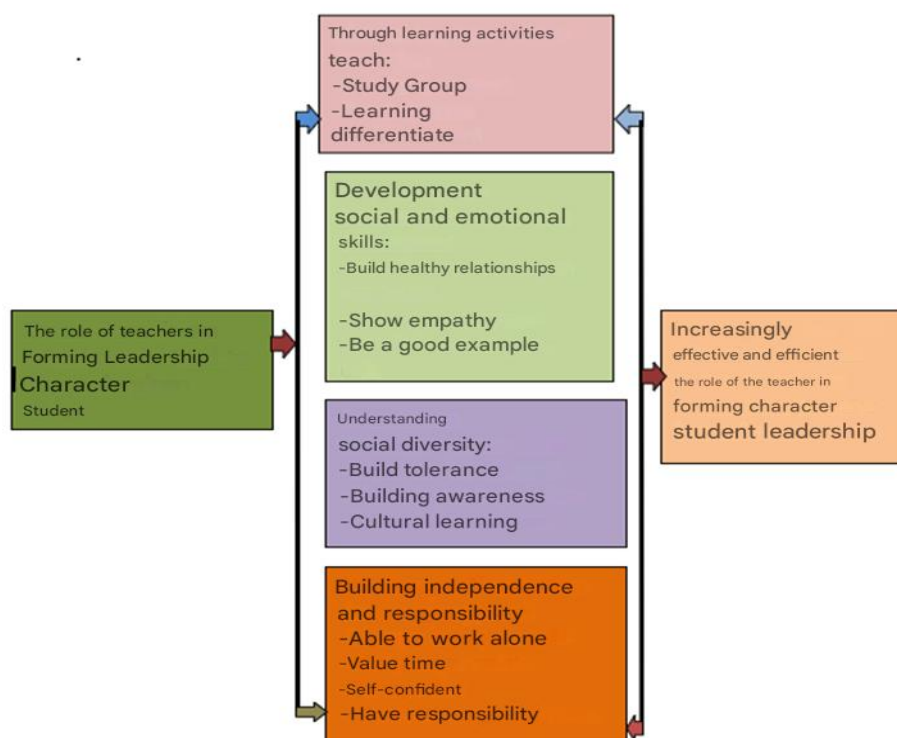


Figure 2. The Role of Teachers in Shaping Student Leadership Character

Teachers play an essential role in developing students' leadership skills by mentoring them in various school activities. One key approach is assigning leadership roles in group projects, such as science assignments, where students are guided in organizing teams, delegating tasks, and working together effectively. Through these experiences, students learn communication, responsibility, and problem-solving under teacher supervision.

Teachers also encourage leadership through classroom discussions by using open-ended questions and letting students lead. For example, in a history class, students debated ethical dilemmas faced by historical figures, helping them build confidence and consider different viewpoints.

In extracurricular settings like student councils or school clubs, teachers observe and coach student leaders, offering support when challenges arise. For instance, when a student struggled with team conflict, the teacher provided strategies for resolution, helping the student improve their leadership.

Teachers further promote leadership by assigning classroom responsibilities such as organizing study groups, leading assemblies, or managing peer tutoring. These tasks are monitored with feedback to build accountability and confidence. Overall, teachers' guidance helps students grow into capable and responsible leaders.

3.3. The Role of Parents in Shaping Students' Character

3.3.1 Through Care

The research findings show that the role of parents is highly significant in shaping students' character through the attitude of care instilled from an early age. Parent informants revealed that they always demonstrate good behavior in the family environment, both in speech and interactions. They teach their children about mutual respect, empathy, and politeness, such as making a habit of praying together, eating together, and communicating to understand the challenges their children face during school learning. This is reinforced by information from students who stated that at home, they are

taught to help each other, respect older family members, and show empathy towards others. According to several informants, parents are the primary figures who provide role models, and the family environment plays a crucial role in the character-building process of children. Children tend to imitate their parents' behavior and learn from experiences at home, so religious values and social norms are instilled from an early age as the foundation for developing good character.

3.3.2 Character Development through Guidance

The development of children's character through guidance is also one of the main responsibilities of parents. Although the school also provides character education, the role of parents in the guidance process remains very important. Parents strive to set good examples and become role models for their children in daily life. Information from teachers indicates that the reinforcement of students' character is largely formed from the early stages of education at home by their parents. Additionally, students have expressed that they have been taught to be polite, respectful, and to show honesty in communication and social interactions. At home, they are accustomed to manners, such as kissing their parents' hands when leaving for school, greeting upon returning home, and helping with household chores. This reflects that the guidance provided by parents plays a significant role in shaping students' discipline and manners. In conclusion, parents play a primary role in shaping their children's character by providing proper guidance, creating harmonious relationships, and being role models for their children.

3.3.3 Applying the Principle of Justice in Character Building

The principle of justice is one of the important characteristics that need to be developed in children. Based on the interviews with informants, justice is seen as a moral judgment process that includes equality, not taking advantage of others, not lying, and being fair in various situations. Teachers and the principal emphasize that the application of justice to students is carried out by providing equal freedom, equal opportunities, and reinforcing open-minded thinking. Students also expressed that they are taught to be fair, share with others, help friends with difficulties, and cooperate in completing school tasks. Parents also apply the principle of justice in the family, such as treating all children equally and avoiding discrimination in any form. They strive to meet their children's needs fairly, such as distributing pocket money equally, even if the children are at different school levels. The interview results indicate that the character of justice is crucial to instill from an early age because there is currently a phenomenon of a crisis in justice among children, which can affect their social behavior. Therefore, character education through the reinforcement of the principle of justice becomes an essential step in the process of effective learning. Through learning that prioritizes understanding and internalizing the values of justice, children are expected to implement fair behavior in their daily lives, thus developing into individuals with strong and positive character.

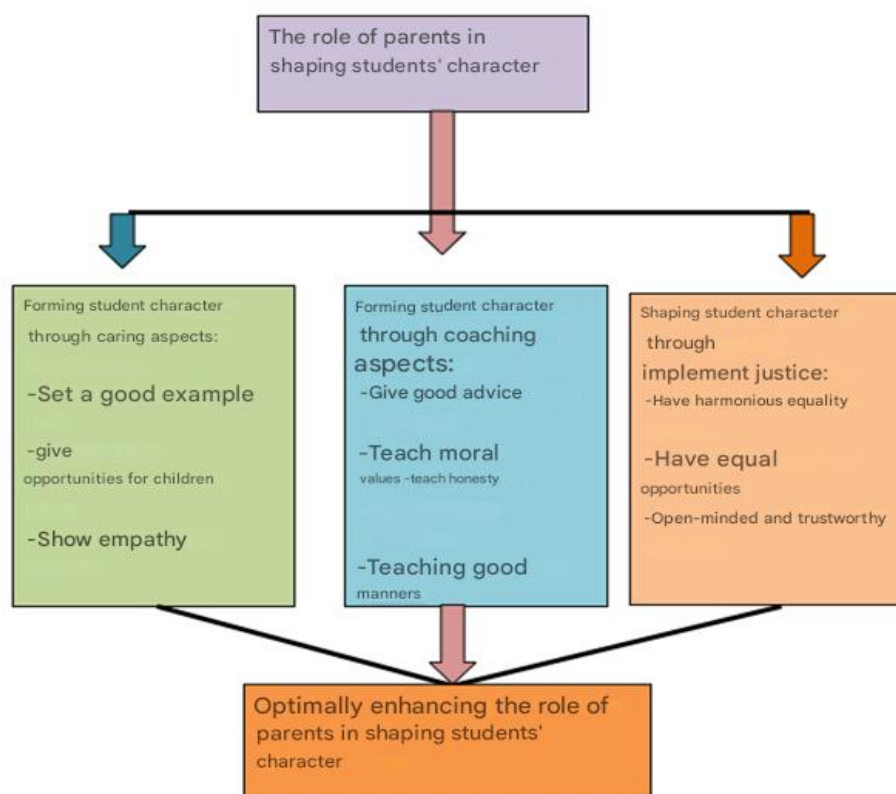


Figure 3. The role of parents in shaping students' character

One interview with a parent revealed how their involvement in daily life contributed to developing their child's leadership traits. A mother shared that she regularly discussed daily responsibilities with her child, such as organizing study schedules and helping younger siblings with their schoolwork. *"I always emphasize that being a leader is not just about giving orders but also setting an example,"* she said. As a result, her child showed improvements in taking initiative and responsibility, both at home and at school. Additionally, a father described how participation in extracurricular activities helped his child develop leadership skills. *"I often attend scout activities and encourage my child to speak up in front of his peers. He was initially shy, but after being given more opportunities, he became more confident in leading discussions and making group decisions,"* he explained.

However, external challenges such as time constraints and social influences often hinder parents from actively supporting their children's leadership development. To address these challenges, schools can play a crucial role by helping parents manage their time and providing practical guidance. For example, schools can organize parenting seminars that offer strategies for instilling leadership values in everyday routines. Furthermore, schools can establish parent communities that enable them to share experiences and strategies in supporting their children's development. One successful initiative implemented at SDN 7 Kota Barat is the Family Leadership Day program, where parents and children collaborate on various activities that enhance leadership skills, such as problem-solving in teams or strategy-based games. With strong support from the school, parents can more effectively overcome external limitations and actively contribute to fostering leadership traits in their children.

3.4 Challenges in Shaping Students' Character

Interviews with various informants revealed that several internal factors hinder the development of students' character. One of the main challenges is the low awareness among students regarding the importance of character values instilled both at school and at home. Many students continue to struggle with low self-confidence and lack motivation to engage in academic or non-academic activities. This issue is compounded by passive attitudes and a general indifference toward the learning process. Outside the school environment, students often have difficulty controlling their behavior, making them susceptible to negative influences from peers and surroundings that may not support character-building efforts. The lack of adequate school facilities further impedes the effective internalization of character values. Peer pressure and external influences often undermine the positive values taught at school, making it even more difficult for students to adopt and consistently apply them.

In addition to internal factors, external influences such as the family and community environment play a critical role in shaping student character. A significant barrier to character development is the limited attention and involvement of parents in reinforcing these values at home. Many parents are not equipped with the knowledge or strategies needed to effectively implement character education, which weakens the continuity between home and school learning environments (Tarmizi, 2023; Salmiati & Zaman, 2021). Students' diverse socio-economic, cultural, and family backgrounds further influence how they respond to character education initiatives (Andriani et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2022). Children often model behaviors they observe in their home environment, and when these behaviors contradict the values promoted at school, it becomes a challenge for educators to maintain consistency.

The community environment also significantly impacts students' character development, especially when it lacks positive role models or reinforces undesirable behaviors. In such settings, both teachers and parents face additional difficulties in guiding students toward positive moral growth. When the social environment does not align with school values, students may experience conflicting messages, leading to confusion or resistance in adopting the desired character traits.

Overall, the findings underscore that character development is a complex process shaped by both internal and external factors (Agboola & Tsai, 2012; Borolla1 & Marini, 2022; Agustini, 2021; Wiradimadja, 2020; Sirait, 2023; Syah, 2017; Lukman et al., 2021; Muassomah et al., 2020; Dirgantari & Cahyani, 2023). Internally, students' lack of self-awareness, low motivation, and vulnerability to peer influence present major challenges (Agboola & Tsai, 2012; Borolla1 & Marini, 2022; Agustini, 2021). Externally, limited parental support, varying family backgrounds, and unsupportive community environments significantly affect character formation (Tarmizi, 2023; Salmiati & Zaman, 2021). These findings emphasize the need for close collaboration among schools, families, and communities to create a supportive environment that fosters the consistent development of positive character traits in students (Andriani et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2022).

Discussion

The development of students' leadership character at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Gorontalo City, is shaped through a collaborative framework involving the principal, teachers, and parents. The findings of this study indicate that school leadership plays a central role in cultivating character by integrating moral values and leadership traits into both academic and non-academic activities. The principal leads by example—arriving punctually, reinforcing discipline, appreciating student efforts, and embedding the principles of the *Pancasila Student Profile* in daily practices. These behaviors model positive conduct for the entire school community and create a culture of respect, responsibility, and civic-mindedness. Souisa (2018) emphasizes that school principals must mobilize all resources to improve both work ethic and productivity, reflecting their comprehensive responsibility for shaping the school climate.

As an educational leader, the principal at SDN 7 Kota Barat is not only accountable for academic success but also for fostering a positive moral environment. This includes designing and implementing character-building programs that integrate religious and cultural values, aligned with the vision of

holistic education (Astuti & Danial, 2019; Suparman, 2015). According to Yuniarty and Ramli (2018), the dual role of the principal—as manager and leader—enables strategic oversight of school operations while actively guiding the implementation of character education. This study illustrates how the principal embodies these dual responsibilities by developing policies, mentoring students, and fostering a supportive school culture that nurtures leadership, discipline, and ethical awareness.

Teachers also play a critical role in shaping students' leadership traits, particularly through the implementation of differentiated learning models. At SDN 7 Kota Barat, this approach is applied in early grades, where students are grouped based on their knowledge levels and assigned leadership responsibilities within their peer groups. This model not only accommodates diverse learning abilities but also encourages leadership development, teamwork, and personal responsibility. Differentiated instruction provides opportunities for students to build character traits by engaging in collaborative learning, voicing their opinions, and taking ownership of tasks. Santika and Khoiriyah (2023) note that differentiated learning fosters inclusivity by aligning teaching methods with students' interests, abilities, and backgrounds, thus supporting holistic character development.

The teachers' role extends beyond classroom instruction. They address student motivation through positive reinforcement, such as verbal praise and small rewards, and conduct individual mentoring for students who struggle with self-confidence or engagement. Integrating motivational stories and real-life role models into lessons inspires students to adopt leadership qualities. Additionally, teachers coach group leaders on managing responsibilities, resolving conflicts, and promoting participation, thereby instilling foundational leadership and interpersonal skills. This hands-on, personalized approach ensures that character education is embedded in daily school experiences and adapted to meet each student's developmental needs (Agung, 2020).

Beyond school-based efforts, parents significantly influence students' character development, particularly through religious, cultural, and interpersonal practices within the home. Parents at SDN 7 Kota Barat are acknowledged as the first educators who model behavior, reinforce values, and shape their children's personalities. Through everyday routines—such as praying together, eating meals as a family, and practicing respectful communication—parents lay the foundation for moral and leadership development (Goodall, 2018; Luschei & Jeong, 2021). The importance of parental involvement is further emphasized by Fauziana et al. (2021), who argue that early family-based education fosters integrity, empathy, and social awareness in children.

However, this study also identifies challenges parents face in character education, particularly in balancing work commitments with quality time at home. To overcome this, parents at SDN 7 Kota Barat adopt practical strategies such as integrating leadership lessons into household routines, assigning chores to build discipline, and maintaining consistent communication through family discussions. In homes where direct supervision is limited, some parents utilize technology to maintain contact with their children, reinforcing values remotely. Structured home routines and collaboration with teachers also help counteract negative peer or environmental influences (Tarmizi, 2023; Salmiati & Zaman, 2021).

Despite these efforts, several obstacles hinder the optimal development of leadership character. A key internal challenge is students' low motivation and lack of self-awareness regarding the importance of character values. External challenges include unsupportive environments, lack of parental engagement, and limited school facilities. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing that character development is shaped by both internal and external factors, including peer influence, family background, and community context (Agboola & Tsai, 2012; Borolla1 & Marini, 2022). Majid and Andayani (2013) further argue that environmental and parental examples are crucial in shaping children's habits, values, and character traits from an early age.

To address these challenges, SDN 7 Kota Barat adopted several strategies that can serve as models for other schools. For instance, the principal's direct involvement in motivational programs and rule enforcement supports character growth. Teachers incorporate leadership roles into group activities, provide mentorship, and adapt lessons to different learning needs. Parents, despite time constraints,

find creative ways to reinforce values at home. These combined efforts contribute to the development of core leadership traits such as decision-making, initiative, teamwork, and problem-solving.

The study also found that students were actively engaged in leadership opportunities through participation in student councils and extracurricular activities. These experiences allowed students to apply leadership skills in real-time situations. One student shared how participating in school event planning improved her ability to make quick decisions and manage emergencies. Teachers supported this development through project-based learning that promoted independence and collaboration. Parents also encouraged leadership at home by involving children in decision-making and daily responsibilities, further reinforcing these traits across environments.

However, limited infrastructure remained a concern. The absence of dedicated spaces such as leadership labs or debate clubs restricted opportunities for structured leadership training. In response, teachers improvised by incorporating leadership elements into subject-based lessons and organizing classroom leadership rotations. These adaptations, although not ideal, demonstrate how creative approaches can compensate for resource constraints.

From a broader perspective, the strategies used at SDN 7 Kota Barat highlight how schools can implement character education even in resource-limited settings. Programs such as parent engagement initiatives, differentiated learning, and school-wide leadership modeling provide replicable frameworks for similar schools. Collaboration with external organizations could further strengthen character education by exposing students to broader societal leadership models and experiences.

This study, however, has its limitations. Conducted at a single school in a specific socio-cultural context, the findings may not be generalizable to all schools. Future research should expand to multiple locations and include schools with diverse cultural, economic, and geographic contexts. Incorporating mixed methods, including quantitative assessments, could also provide more robust evidence of character development outcomes. Comparative studies between urban and rural settings or between public and private schools could further enrich the understanding of effective leadership character development practices.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the essential role of principals, teachers, and parents in nurturing leadership character in students. Through coordinated efforts, each stakeholder contributes to shaping responsible, ethical, and resilient young leaders. By addressing existing challenges and refining their strategies, schools can build sustainable character education models that prepare students not just for academic success, but for meaningful participation in society.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of principals, teachers, and parents in shaping students' leadership character at SDN 7 Kota Barat, Gorontalo City. Through both academic and non-academic activities, the principal fosters leadership traits by modeling ethical behavior, enforcing discipline, and strengthening students' moral and social values. Teachers contribute by implementing differentiated learning, promoting social and emotional skills, and cultivating an appreciation for diversity, independence, and responsibility. Parents also play a crucial role by setting examples, instilling moral values, and nurturing empathy and honesty at home. However, challenges such as low self-confidence, lack of motivation, and external factors like family influence and school infrastructure limitations hinder the full development of leadership character. These findings underscore the need for policy improvements, including enhanced teacher training programs on leadership development and stronger school-parent collaboration initiatives. Future research could explore the long-term impact of these strategies on students' leadership growth, assessing their effectiveness over time and across different educational settings to develop a more comprehensive framework for character education.

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