

Strategic Management of School Principals in Strengthening Character Education in Elementary Schools in Samarinda City

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Abstract: Character education in elementary schools is essential for shaping students' morals and ethics from an early age. However, its implementation still faces various challenges, necessitating effective management strategies to realize character education optimally, particularly in the context of schools in Samarinda City. This research aims to describe the strategic management of school principals in implementing character education at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang. This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain rich and contextual data regarding the strategic management of character education. The collected data is analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, source and technique triangulation methods are applied. The specific steps of the case study method include determining the unit of analysis, collecting in-depth data through interviews, observations, and document studies, as well as interpreting the context holistically. The results of the study show that character education planning is carried out strategically and based on data, such as the education report cards and students' diagnostic assessments, and aligned with the school's vision, mission, and goals. The organization of character education involves forming a special structure that assigns teachers based on their competencies and develops two-way communication between the principal, teachers, and parents. The implementation of character education—such as values of religiosity, nationalism, mutual cooperation, independence, and creativity—is integrated into learning activities and daily routines. The supervision of character education is conducted regularly through observations, character journals, reflection meetings, as well as documentation and reporting of outcomes to both internal and external parties, such as the education office. The impact of this research is the strengthening of effective strategic leadership practices in elementary schools, which enables the development of a character education model that supports character building through collaborative and sustainable management.

Keywords: Case_Stud; Character_Education; Elementary_School; Principal; Strategic_Management.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Character education at the elementary school level is vital in fostering morally responsible citizens equipped with essential life skills and values. Research indicates that early education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' understanding of core values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility, which are crucial for their future attitudes and behaviors (Sofyan & Saputra, 2022; Mulyati *et al.*, 2020; Aminah *et al.*, 2022) assert that these formative years significantly influence children's moral frameworks, establishing a foundation for their engagement with societal norms throughout their lives (Mulyati *et al.*, 2020). By helping children discern right from wrong, character education not only influences their academic journey but also molds their potential as responsible citizens capable of contributing positively to society (Fadilah & Pandin, 2021; Gestiardi & Suyitno, 2021).

Civic education emerges as a pivotal component of character education, feeding into students' understanding of their roles within the community. According to (Raesi & Abdulkarim, 2023), civic education is not merely about acquiring knowledge; it involves instilling skills and values

that encourage active participation and adherence to democratic principles (Raesi & Abdulkarim, 2023). Pancasila, the Indonesian state philosophy, underpins civic education and emphasizes the importance of shaping a generation that is both knowledgeable and ethically conscious (Fitriasari *et al.*, 2020; Fuad, 2023). This reflects a broader understanding that civic engagement is critical for sustaining democratic values and governance in a rapidly globalizing world (Fuad, 2023; Munawaroh, 2023).

Furthermore, the implementation of character education programs in elementary schools is crucial for combating moral decay and fostering a healthier socio-cultural environment (Fadilah & Pandin, 2021; Gestiardi & Suyitno, 2021). Teachers play an instrumental role in this process by creating a nurturing classroom environment that encourages ethical behavior and responsibility among students (Depari & Indriani, 2024). They facilitate character development through various teaching methods, such as integrating character education into the curriculum, promoting social skills, and emphasizing community values (Zummi *et al.*, 2020; Mafrudin, 2023). By doing so, educators provide not just academic knowledge but also help students build the social

competencies necessary for thriving in diverse societies.

Participation in character education during these formative years enhances children's moral compass and equips them with the tools to respond to challenges in contemporary society. Educational frameworks that prioritize social studies and civic engagement encourage students to analyze social issues critically and contribute meaningfully to community welfare (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022; Yusnaldi *et al.*, 2022). This holistic view of character education ensures that students are prepared not only for academic success but also for their roles as engaged and responsible citizens in a democratic society (Dirgantari & Cahyani, 2023; Shih, 2021).

Character education is increasingly recognized as a critical component of quality education on both global and national levels. In Indonesia, this recognition is manifest through policies like the Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) and the Pancasila Student Profile (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), which are integral parts of the Kurikulum Merdeka. These frameworks aim to cultivate six essential attributes: faith and piety, global diversity, independence, collaboration, critical reasoning, and creativity Fathinnaufal & Hidayati (Kim *et al.*, 2019). The alignment of these values with the demands of the 21st century, particularly in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, emphasizes the urgent need for the educational system to adapt to contemporary challenges (Suherman, 2018).

The PPK policy emphasizes the integration of character education across all subjects within the curriculum while fostering a holistic approach to student development. According to Suherman (Suherman, 2018), the effective implementation of character education requires curricular integration and personal development tailored to the students' local contexts. Furthermore, (Zhu *et al.*, 2022) assert that an integrated approach to character education across subjects facilitates a deeper internalization of character values in students, fostering a more cohesive learning environment.

Notably, contemporary educational paradigms recognize the importance of collaboration between home and school in nurturing character attributes (Manurung *et al.*, 2025; Zhu *et al.*, 2022) underscore that parental involvement in character education enhances its effectiveness, as students benefit significantly from cooperative efforts

between families and educational institutions. This home-school partnership becomes crucial in fostering the identified attributes among students, which align with the broader educational goals of fostering responsible and engaged global citizens.

Moreover, global diversity and independence are particularly pertinent in today's interconnected world, where students are required to navigate complex social landscapes. Integrating global perspectives within character education not only equips students with the necessary skills to interact meaningfully with diverse cultures but also prepares them for active participation in the global economy. The focus on critical reasoning and creativity aligns with the competencies highlighted by ongoing discussions concerning the future of work and education in light of rapid technological advancements (Manowaluilou & Nilsook, 2023).

The implementation of these character education frameworks aims not just at academic success; it seeks to instill a comprehensive ethical framework that promotes responsible civic engagement. By cultivating attributes such as creativity and critical reasoning, educational stakeholders facilitate the development of individuals who are prepared to contribute positively to society and address the multifaceted challenges posed by globalization and technological progress (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Torti *et al.*, 2022).

Despite strong policy support, implementation challenges persist. Many elementary schools struggle to translate character education goals into strategic programs due to issues such as lack of consistent planning, minimal stakeholder engagement, weak monitoring mechanisms, and limited integration into everyday school culture. Teachers often face difficulty maintaining consistency in role-modeling, managing peer influence, and gaining parental support. Although efforts such as value-based school routines, moral instruction, and teacher-parent collaboration are underway, results vary across schools.

As school leaders, principals play a pivotal role in directing and sustaining character education initiatives. Their ability to exercise strategic management—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating school programs—significantly determines the extent to which character education becomes embedded in school life. Strategic management in this context refers to a continuous process of aligning vision, mobilizing resources, coordinating activities, and assessing

impact.

The city of Samarinda, the capital of East Kalimantan, provides a relevant context for studying these dynamics. The city's cultural diversity, social challenges, and evolving educational landscape necessitate adaptive and context-sensitive approaches to character development in schools. One exemplary case is SDN 011 Sungai Pinang, a public elementary school recognized for integrating character values into its daily practices—from religious and civic activities to programs promoting honesty, discipline, and mutual respect. However, the extent to which these outcomes stem from effective strategic leadership remains underexplored.

Problem Statement

While character education is mandated and supported by national policies, many elementary schools continue to face substantial obstacles in its implementation. These include:

- Inconsistent integration of character values into school programs,
- Limited leadership capacity for strategic planning,
- Inadequate monitoring and follow-up of initiatives,
- Minimal stakeholder participation.

There is a lack of empirical insight into how strategic management practices by principals influence the effectiveness of character education, especially in diverse educational settings such as Samarinda.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- Explore and analyze the strategic management practices of school principals in strengthening character education in elementary schools in Samarinda City.
Specifically, it seeks to examine how principals:
- Strategically plan character education programs,
- Organize and mobilize resources for implementation,
- Integrate character values into learning and school culture,
- Monitor and evaluate character development initiatives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following questions:

- How do school principals plan character education strategically?
- How do they organize and coordinate character education programs?
- What implementation strategies are employed?
- How do they monitor and evaluate character development outcomes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on strategic management in education encompasses various definitions, models, and frameworks that are essential for understanding and improving educational institutions. Within this context, key models such as SWOT analysis, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), and Mintzberg's strategies are particularly relevant for analyzing school leadership, strategic roles, and educational change.

Definitions and Models in Strategic Management

Strategic management in education refers to the systematic planning, monitoring, analysis, and assessment of all that is necessary for an organization to meet its goals and objectives. Among the strategic management models, the Balanced Scorecard has gained significant traction, particularly in the context of educational institutions. The BSC framework enables schools to translate their vision and strategy into operational objectives mapped across four perspectives: financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and growth (Maddocks *et al.*, 2011; Wu & Li, 2024). This model assists educational leaders in evaluating performance consistently and aligning activities with the school's strategic goals (Anwar, 2022; Huda & Rodin, 2020).

The SWOT analysis model similarly aids educational institutions by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the internal and external environment. This model provides a clear framework for strategic planning and decision-making, ensuring that schools can leverage their strengths while addressing weaknesses and anticipating external challenges (Anwar, 2022).

School Leadership and Strategic Roles

School leadership plays a pivotal role in the implementation of strategic management models. Leadership styles profoundly impact educational change, fostering a culture conducive to innovation and improvement. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been shown to inspire and motivate

staff and students, enhancing commitment to organizational goals and fostering a collaborative environment (Veeriah *et al.*, 2017; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2018). This style of leadership aligns with the principles underpinning both character education and strategic management, emphasizing a shared vision and mutual trust among all stakeholders.

In Indonesian schools, for instance, the integration of character education under the Pancasila Student Profile reflects a strategic move aimed at developing well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges of modern society (Suherman, 2018). Such leadership efforts underscore the importance of aligning educational outcomes with societal expectations, thereby reinforcing the role of strategic management in fostering a relevant and impactful education.

Character Education in Schools

Character education emerges as a key component within the strategic management framework, particularly in fostering core values in students. Notable frameworks such as Lickona's and Berkowitz's emphasize the importance of integrating character development into the educational curriculum to cultivate values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility (Maddocks *et al.*, 2011; Huda & Rodin, 2020). In the Indonesian context, character education aligns with national standards aimed at producing citizens who embody the six attributes identified in Pancasila, thereby addressing both local and global educational imperatives (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020; Suherman, 2018).

Studies in the Indonesian Context

Prior research indicates that leadership approaches and character education initiatives in Indonesia are crucial for shaping student outcomes. The application of the Balanced Scorecard within Indonesian schools has proven effective in organizing educational strategies that meet national standards and local community needs (Anwar, 2022; Habibi *et al.*, 2022). Studies demonstrate that implementing BSC can lead to improved educational practices and enhanced accountability among educational leaders and staff (Maddocks *et al.*, 2011; Wu & Li, 2024).

The engagement of school leaders in character education initiatives has particularly significant implications for student development, emphasizing a collaborative approach that integrates local cultural values with global educational trends (Dariyo *et al.*, 2022). This interplay is critical in

preparing students for both local and international challenges in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In considering the overarching theories that inform this discussion, both strategic management theory and transformational leadership theory provide robust frameworks for understanding how educational institutions can navigate change and implement effective character education. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring change and enhancing the organizational ethos, while strategic management theory underscores the necessity of aligning educational strategies with broader organizational goals (Shields, 2010). These theoretical frameworks support the idea that effective school leadership and a coherent strategic management approach are essential for fostering meaningful educational experiences.

In summary, the intersection of strategic management in education, school leadership, character education, and the specific needs of the Indonesian context reveals complex dynamics essential for effective educational practices. Integrating these elements through well-defined models such as the Balanced Scorecard allows educational leaders to navigate challenges effectively and foster environments that promote both academic excellence and character development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the strategic management practices of school principals in strengthening character education. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and strategies of key stakeholders—particularly principals and teachers—in managing character education programs. The case study method enables a detailed investigation of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising character education within a real-life school context, capturing the complexity of the phenomenon in a natural setting.

The focus of this study is SDN 011 Sungai Pinang, a public elementary school in Samarinda City, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, which has made significant efforts to integrate character education into its curriculum and school culture.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang over a period of five months, from November 2024 to April 2025. This elementary school was selected purposively due to its active implementation of character education aligned with national policy and local initiatives.

Participants in this study include the school principal, selected teachers, and parents of students. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that informants possess relevant knowledge, roles, and experiences related to character education implementation in the school.

Data Collection Techniques

Three main data collection techniques were employed:

In-depth Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to gain insights into strategic planning, implementation strategies, leadership practices, challenges faced, and stakeholder involvement in character education. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for both guided and emergent discussions, and were conducted in a private setting with informed consent.

Observation:

Direct observations were carried out during school hours to examine the real-time interactions, practices, and behaviors related to character education. The researcher used a structured observation checklist focusing on classroom environment, school routines, teacher-student interactions, and extracurricular activities.

Document Analysis:

Relevant school documents, including the school vision and mission, strategic plans, character education programs, academic calendars, syllabi, lesson plans, and visual documentation of school activities, were reviewed. These documents provided contextual data and corroborated findings from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles, (Huberman, and Saldaña model 2014), which involves four key stages:

Data Collection:

Raw data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Data Condensation:

The data were filtered, coded, and categorized to reduce and focus the information in line with the research questions.

Data Display:

The condensed data were organized and presented in visual forms such as matrices, charts, and narratives to identify emerging patterns and relationships.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification:

Conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring themes and verifying them through cross-checking with different data sources (triangulation), peer review, and re-examination of field notes to ensure reliability and validity.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research standards by:

- Obtaining informed consent from all participants;
- Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants' identities and responses;
- Securing ethical clearance from relevant educational authorities and institutions;
- Respecting voluntary participation, with participants free to withdraw at any point without consequences.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied triangulation techniques:

Source Triangulation:

Data were gathered from multiple informants (principal, teachers, and parents) to gain diverse perspectives and improve validity.

Methodological Triangulation:

The study combined interviews, observations, and document reviews to cross-validate the data.

Case Study Procedure

Following (Wahyudi. and Julaiha. 2021), the case study procedure included:

Planning:

Defining research focus, selecting participants, and preparing data collection instruments.

Data Collection:

Executing fieldwork using interviews, observation, and document analysis, while maintaining data saturation principles.

Data Analysis:

Applying a concurrent approach to reduce, categorize, and interpret data throughout the research process.

Reporting:

Presenting findings in a descriptive narrative, supported by empirical evidence and thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

Strategic Planning for Character Education

The findings reveal that strategic planning at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang is carried out systematically, rooted in the school's vision and mission, which prioritize values such as faith, piety, and noble character. These values are translated into short-, medium-, and long-term objectives, fully aligned with the dimensions of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

Planning is data-informed, with diagnostic assessments conducted at the beginning of each academic year to identify students' academic and non-academic character development needs. SWOT analysis is also applied to evaluate internal and external factors, guiding the development of targeted character education programs.

Stakeholder involvement is emphasized through participatory planning forums involving teachers (via KKG meetings), parents (via surveys and interviews), and school committees. The resulting strategies are documented in formal plans such as the Rencana Kerja Jangka Menengah (RKJM) and the Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP), indicating that character education is not an isolated initiative but embedded within the school's overall strategic management.

Organizing and Mobilizing Resources

The school established a dedicated character education team, with roles assigned based on teacher expertise. Religious studies teachers lead spiritual programs, while physical education teachers coordinate team-building and sportsmanship activities.

Responsibilities are distributed based on competence, following a human resource management approach that recognizes individual strengths. Teachers are mandated to integrate character values into both classroom and extracurricular activities.

Regular coordination is maintained through KKG forums and monthly meetings where program progress is reviewed. Two-way communication is encouraged, with the principal fostering a collaborative atmosphere that empowers younger

teachers to innovate. This reflects the application of distributed leadership principles and promotes adaptive, responsive team dynamics.

Implementation Strategies

Implementation at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang is integrative and embedded into the school culture. Character values such as religiosity, nationalism, cooperation, independence, and creativity are instilled through daily routines, classroom learning, and co-curricular activities. Examples include morning prayers, literacy activities, and school-wide character projects.

Project-based learning is a key strategy, allowing students to practice values through real-life experiences such as art performances and community service. These activities are consistent with the Merdeka Belajar framework, which emphasizes meaningful learning through student-centered engagement.

Role-modeling is crucial—both the principal and teachers demonstrate expected behaviors, reinforcing discipline, empathy, and generosity through their actions. Parental and community involvement further support implementation, contributing to a values-rich school climate.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The school adopts both formal and informal monitoring mechanisms. Formal evaluations are conducted biannually, documented in school reports, while informal supervision is embedded in daily reflections and teacher observations. Teachers use journals and behavior checklists to track student development.

Rather than focusing solely on cognitive outcomes, the evaluation emphasizes behavior change and attitudinal shifts as indicators of program success. Tools such as student reflection journals and character behavior rubrics are used.

Monitoring results feed into program refinement, showing a commitment to evidence-based practice. The principal engages teachers, class coordinators, and parents in reflective evaluations, and findings are also reported to the local education authority to ensure accountability and support.

Challenges and Success Factors

Despite progress, challenges persist. These include student non-compliance, varying levels of parental involvement, and limited resources. However, several success factors mitigate these challenges:

Strong leadership commitment from the principal;

Consistent teacher role-modeling and teamwork;

Integration of character values into formal curriculum and school culture;

Adaptive planning and continuous program revision based on feedback.

The school's participatory approach, sustained innovation, and alignment with national policy have contributed to its effective character education implementation.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the strategic management functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating—are effectively applied to character education at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang. The school exemplifies how visionary leadership, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making contribute to sustainable character development programs.

Compared to previous studies (Baidarus *et al.*, 2020; Windiyani *et al.*, 2020), this study confirms the importance of participatory planning and distributed leadership in achieving holistic character education. Unlike models that rely heavily on top-down enforcement, SDN 011 illustrates the value of empowering teachers and engaging families to create shared responsibility.

The integration of national policy, especially the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, into strategic planning and everyday practices aligns with frameworks proposed by Bryson (2011) and Robbins & Coulter (2012), reinforcing the relevance of strategic thinking in school management.

Contextually, Samarinda's socio-cultural diversity presents unique demands for inclusive, adaptable approaches to education. The school's strategic choices—grounded in religious values, cultural respect, and civic responsibility—reflect an effort to meet these local realities while addressing national mandates.

Ultimately, the principal's ability to think strategically, act adaptively, and lead collaboratively is the linchpin of success. This case affirms the growing body of literature suggesting that school leadership must go beyond administrative management and embrace transformational, strategic roles to sustain meaningful character education.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership and

strategic management by demonstrating how school leaders can operationalize character education through structured, participatory, and context-sensitive strategies. It supports existing literature that advocates for distributed leadership and planning that is aligned with both local realities and national policy objectives. Specifically, the integration of strategic management with the values of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila expands the theoretical application of strategic educational leadership in Southeast Asian contexts.

Practically, the findings offer several implications for education stakeholders. For school principals, the study highlights the importance of maintaining strategic continuity across all stages of program management—particularly in forming partnerships with external stakeholders such as religious institutions, community organizations, and local businesses to enhance the reach and resources of character education. For teachers, it emphasizes the need to act as consistent role models and to integrate character values across all subject areas. Regular training, reflective practices, and collaborative forums can support teachers in documenting and evaluating student progress more effectively.

Parents and school committees are encouraged to maintain active communication with the school and reinforce character values at home. This alignment between school and family environments is crucial for the sustainable internalization of values by students. For policymakers and educational authorities, particularly at the district and municipal levels, the study underlines the need for targeted support—especially for schools operating in socially challenging areas. This support could take the form of infrastructure development, strategic management training, and curriculum materials that reflect local cultural values.

Despite the strengths of this study, it is not without limitations. As a single-site qualitative case study, its findings may not be generalizable to all elementary schools across Indonesia. Moreover, the study focused on current practices and did not assess the long-term impact of character education initiatives on students' lives beyond the school setting.

Future research could address these limitations by employing mixed-method or quantitative approaches to enable broader generalization and

statistical analysis. Comparative studies across different school types and regions could also reveal how contextual variables influence the implementation of strategic character education. In addition, longitudinal studies could assess the sustained behavioral impacts of such programs. Researchers may also consider examining the correlation between strategic leadership models and the successful inculcation of Pancasila values to inform national education policy and leadership development programs.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the strategic management practices of the principal at SDN 011 Sungai Pinang in strengthening character education within a public elementary school context in Samarinda, Indonesia. The findings show that the principal applied strategic management comprehensively across the dimensions of planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring. Strategic planning was conducted systematically and grounded in diagnostic assessments, educational reports, and input from stakeholders such as teachers and parents. These plans were then embedded into formal documents including the School Work Plan (RKJM) and the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), ensuring alignment with the school's vision and the broader national framework of character education through the Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

In terms of organizational structure, the principal mobilized resources effectively by establishing a dedicated character education team. Responsibilities were assigned based on teacher competencies, reflecting a strength-based approach to human resource management. Coordination among staff was maintained through regular meetings and professional forums such as KKG, promoting collaborative leadership and fostering an environment that supports teacher innovation. Open, two-way communication between the principal and staff further enhanced organizational synergy.

Implementation of character education was integrated into daily learning activities, religious programs, project-based learning, and co-curricular activities that promoted core values such as religiosity, nationalism, collaboration, independence, and creativity. Teachers served as role models and reinforced these values both inside and outside the classroom. Students participated in activities such as social projects and arts

performances, while parents and the broader community played a supportive role, establishing a consistent and holistic environment for character development.

Monitoring and evaluation of character education were conducted continuously and adaptively. Formal assessments were held every semester, while informal mechanisms included daily observations, student journals, and reflections. Rather than relying solely on academic outcomes, the school emphasized behavior change as a key indicator of program success. The feedback gathered from these monitoring processes informed program revisions and enhancements, demonstrating a commitment to evidence-based practice. Furthermore, collaboration with parents and community representatives in oversight processes reinforced transparency and accountability.

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