

The Role of Principal Leadership in Developing a Positive Organizational Culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan

Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Mengembangkan Budaya Organisasi yang Positif di SDN 18 Sungai Rotan

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Received:
06/07/2026

Accepted:
16/07/2026

Abstract

This study aims to describe the principal's leadership role in developing a positive organizational culture, the strategies employed to build positive habits, and the supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving the principal, teachers, and educational staff selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the principal implemented open, participatory, communicative, and collaborative leadership, which fostered harmonious working relationships, improved discipline, and strengthened communication and cooperation among school members. The strategies applied included the implementation of the 5S culture, collective prayers, morning literacy activities, regular religious gatherings, flag ceremonies, community service activities, and other character-building programs conducted consistently. Supporting factors included supportive leadership, effective communication, a family-oriented culture, and strong collaboration among school members. Inhibiting factors included limited facilities and infrastructure, internet connectivity issues, uneven technological competence, administrative workloads, and adaptation to changes in work culture. The findings indicate a pattern of positive organizational culture development through exemplary leadership, the habituation of positive values, and the synergy of all school members.

Keywords

principal leadership; organizational culture; positive habits; elementary school.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam mengembangkan budaya organisasi yang positif, strategi kepala sekolah dalam membangun kebiasaan positif, serta faktor pendukung dan penghambat pengembangan budaya organisasi di SDN 18 Sungai Rotan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan informan yang terdiri atas kepala sekolah, guru, dan tenaga kependidikan yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah menerapkan kepemimpinan yang terbuka, partisipatif, komunikatif, dan kolaboratif sehingga mampu membangun hubungan kerja yang harmonis, meningkatkan kedisiplinan, serta memperkuat komunikasi dan kerja sama antarwarga sekolah. Strategi yang dilakukan meliputi penerapan budaya 5S, doa bersama, literasi pagi, pengajian rutin, upacara bendera, kerja bakti, serta berbagai kegiatan pembiasaan karakter yang dilaksanakan secara konsisten. Faktor pendukung meliputi kepemimpinan yang suportif, komunikasi yang efektif, budaya kekeluargaan, dan kerja sama warga sekolah. Faktor penghambat meliputi keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana, kendala jaringan internet, kemampuan teknologi yang belum merata, beban administrasi, serta adaptasi terhadap perubahan budaya kerja. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan pola pengembangan budaya organisasi positif melalui keteladanan kepemimpinan, pembiasaan nilai-nilai positif, dan sinergi seluruh warga sekolah.

Kata Kunci

Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Budaya Organisasi, Kebiasaan Positif, Sekolah Dasar.

Introduction

Improving educational quality remains one of the primary goals of Indonesia's education system. Achieving this objective requires the support of various interconnected factors, among which school leadership plays a central role. The responsibilities of school principals extend beyond administrative management to include the ability to establish and sustain a positive organizational climate and culture within schools (Palah et al., 2022; Ulfa & Shalahuddin, 2023; Odo et al., 2024). Through effective leadership, principals can cultivate shared work values, strengthen collaboration among school members, and create a supportive working environment that encourages collective commitment toward improving educational quality (Cotta et al., 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025; Ceballos et al., 2020).

A positive organizational climate is essential for fostering effective teaching and learning, promoting collaboration, and supporting the professional growth of teachers as well as the holistic development of students. In this context, principals function not only as administrators but also as strategic leaders who shape the organizational culture necessary for continuous school improvement (Sariakin et al., 2025; Marmoah, 2019; Mokhele, 2025). By promoting shared values and collaborative practices, school leaders contribute to the creation of an educational environment that supports the achievement of institutional goals.

Education itself represents a collective effort by society and the nation to prepare younger generations for future challenges while preserving and advancing cultural values and national identity. Beyond transmitting knowledge, education serves as a medium for developing character and strengthening the cultural foundations of society, thereby contributing to sustainable national development (Zaleha et al., 2025; Hani et al., 2025; Puspitasari et al., 2020). Consequently, educational institutions are expected to produce graduates who possess not only academic competence but also strong character and social responsibility (Amzat et al., 2022; Meyer, 2024).

Elementary schools, as the foundation of formal education, play a crucial role in shaping students' character, learning habits, and social behavior. To accomplish these objectives, schools require a healthy and well-established organizational culture. Such a culture is reflected in the values, norms, beliefs, and daily practices shared by teachers, administrators, and other members of the school community.

According to Shafiq et al. (2023), organizational culture consists of shared values, expectations, and beliefs collectively embraced by organizational members and transmitted across generations. Likewise, Mukhtar et al. (2020) define organizational culture as the accumulation of shared experiences, historical backgrounds, beliefs, and organizational standards that distinguish one organization from another. Mokadem et al. (2025) further argues that organizational culture serves several important functions, including differentiating organizations, establishing organizational identity, maintaining organizational continuity, and providing behavioral control. Within educational institutions, organizational culture does not emerge automatically but must be intentionally developed through effective leadership to ensure that school activities remain aligned with educational objectives (Nurlina et al., 2022; Sadiqin, 2023; Nasrullah & Saleh, 2021).

Leadership is generally understood as a process of social influence through which leaders motivate and guide others to work collectively toward predetermined goals (Arafat & Rosani, 2023; Malik et al., 2020; Fiannisa et al., 2024). Effective leaders do more than assign tasks; they inspire, coordinate available resources, facilitate collaboration, and build organizational commitment. Consequently, leadership significantly influences members' attitudes and behaviors, enabling organizational activities to be carried out systematically and efficiently (Schein, 2016; Nabella et al., 2022; Saputra & Wajdi, 2023).

Within schools, the principal serves as the professional leader responsible for directing all educational activities. Besides managing administrative functions, principals are expected to act as instructional leaders, managers, innovators, and motivators who create conditions conducive to effective learning (Davis, 2024; Rusdarti et al., 2021; Felten et al., 2021). Mulyasa (2023) emphasizes that principals are among the most influential factors in improving educational quality because they

are responsible for understanding schools as complex organizations and leading them toward continuous improvement. Previous studies have also demonstrated that principals' leadership styles significantly influence teachers' work culture, professional collaboration, and overall school performance (Sariakin et al., 2025; Meyer, 2024; Mokhele, 2025).

These issues are particularly relevant to SDN 18 Sungai Rotan, a public elementary school located in a rural area. Rural schools possess distinctive characteristics, including strong social relationships, active community involvement, and close interpersonal interactions. However, they also face challenges such as limited educational resources and infrastructure. Under these circumstances, the success of organizational culture largely depends on the principal's ability to mobilize teachers, foster shared values, and encourage positive working habits throughout the school community.

Preliminary observations indicate that SDN 18 Sungai Rotan has implemented several initiatives to cultivate a positive organizational culture, including strengthening teacher discipline, promoting school cleanliness, reinforcing students' character education, and encouraging collaboration among teachers. Nevertheless, the extent to which the principal's leadership contributes to the development and sustainability of these cultural practices has not yet been comprehensively examined through empirical research.

Although numerous studies have investigated educational leadership and school effectiveness, research specifically addressing the role of principal leadership in developing positive organizational culture in rural elementary schools remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in Indonesian rural contexts, where leadership practices are often influenced by local cultural values, resource constraints, and community participation. Understanding how principals navigate these contextual challenges is therefore essential for strengthening school management and improving educational quality.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the role of the principal's leadership in developing a positive organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan. Specifically, it investigates the leadership strategies employed by the principal, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the development of organizational culture within the school. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of educational management, particularly by providing practical insights into fostering sustainable organizational cultures that enhance the effectiveness of elementary schools, especially in rural settings.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of the principal's leadership in developing a positive organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan, Indonesia. A qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and leadership practices within their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tisdell et al., 2025; Patton, 2020). The research was conducted over a six-month period, from December 2025 to June 2026, covering the stages of research preparation, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, and report preparation.

The study focused on the principal's leadership and the development of organizational culture within the school. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby informants were intentionally chosen based on their roles, experiences, and direct involvement in the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total of nine informants participated in the study, comprising one principal, three classroom teachers, one Islamic Education (PAI) teacher, one Physical Education (PJOK) teacher, one school operator, one administrative staff member, and one school caretaker.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain participants' perspectives regarding the principal's leadership practices and the development of organizational culture. Observations were undertaken to examine everyday interactions, school activities, and organizational practices, while documentary evidence including the school's vision and mission statements, work

programs, meeting minutes, school regulations, and other institutional documents was analyzed to support and validate the findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the study employed several validation strategies, including source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. These techniques enhanced the credibility and consistency of the findings by comparing information obtained from different participants, data collection methods, and repeated observations.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2023), which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and simplifying the collected information. The organized data were subsequently presented in descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences and the observed phenomena.

Results

Principal Leadership in Developing a Positive Organizational Culture

The findings demonstrate that the principal plays a pivotal role in establishing and sustaining a positive organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan. Leadership practices observed during the study extended beyond administrative responsibilities and encompassed instructional leadership, staff motivation, collaborative decision-making, and value-based management. These practices contributed to the development of a school environment characterized by discipline, cooperation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

Interview data revealed that the principal intentionally adopted exemplary leadership as the primary strategy for influencing teachers and school staff. Rather than relying solely on formal regulations, the principal emphasized leading through personal example in carrying out daily responsibilities. As the principal stated, *"I always try to be the first to arrive at school because teachers are more likely to follow what they see than what they are told."* (Principal)

This finding indicates that role-modeling has become an important leadership approach in strengthening organizational commitment. Field observations further confirmed that teachers consistently demonstrated punctuality, complied with school regulations, and actively participated in routine school activities, reflecting the successful internalization of organizational values.

The interviews also showed that the principal promoted participatory leadership by encouraging teachers to contribute to planning and decision-making processes. Teachers perceived that open communication enhanced trust and strengthened professional relationships within the school. One classroom teacher explained, *"The principal regularly invites us to discuss school programs before making important decisions, so we feel involved and appreciated."* (G1)

Another teacher emphasized that collaborative leadership had created a supportive working atmosphere where problems were addressed collectively rather than individually. *"Whenever we encounter difficulties in teaching, the principal encourages us to discuss them together and find solutions collectively."* (G2)

These findings suggest that participatory leadership has strengthened collegiality among teachers, increased their sense of ownership toward school programs, and fostered a collaborative organizational culture.

Organizational Culture Development Strategies

The study identified several leadership strategies employed to cultivate a positive organizational culture. These strategies included strengthening teacher discipline, implementing character education programs, establishing daily school routines, promoting environmental cleanliness, and encouraging teamwork among teachers and educational staff.

Daily routines were found to be particularly influential in reinforcing organizational values. School members consistently participated in morning greetings, classroom cleanliness activities, student discipline monitoring, and regular coordination meetings. One participant described these practices as follows: *"Every morning we conduct routine activities such as greetings, cleaning the classrooms, and checking students' discipline before lessons begin."* (G3)

These habitual activities gradually became part of the school's organizational culture and encouraged teachers and students to internalize positive values through consistent practice rather than formal instruction alone.

The principal further emphasized that organizational culture requires continuous reinforcement and cannot be established through short-term interventions. According to the principal, *"Organizational culture cannot be built instantly; it requires consistency and commitment from everyone."* (Principal)

Document analysis supported these interview findings by showing that school regulations, annual work plans, teacher meeting minutes, and character education programs consistently reflected the school's commitment to strengthening discipline, collaboration, and professionalism.

Communication and Collaborative Leadership

Effective communication emerged as another important component of the principal's leadership. Teachers reported that the principal maintained open communication channels, encouraged constructive dialogue, and provided opportunities for teachers to express opinions regarding instructional practices and school development.

Instead of adopting a hierarchical management style, the principal emphasized consultation and consensus-building when implementing school policies. This communication pattern reduced conflicts, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and facilitated teamwork across different educational roles.

Observational data also indicated that teachers frequently collaborated in preparing instructional materials, organizing extracurricular activities, and solving academic or administrative problems. Such collaborative practices contributed to the development of mutual trust and strengthened organizational cohesion.

Supporting Factors

Several supporting factors contributed to the successful development of a positive organizational culture. Strong interpersonal relationships among teachers, commitment from school leadership, and active participation of the local community were consistently identified by participants as important facilitating factors.

Teachers described the working environment as highly cooperative, where mutual assistance had become part of everyday practice. One teacher commented, *"Teachers here are willing to help one another, making school programs easier to implement."* (GP)

The rural setting also encouraged close relationships between the school and the surrounding community. Parents and community members frequently participated in school activities, environmental programs, and character-building initiatives. Such community involvement strengthened social support for school improvement and reinforced the implementation of organizational values.

Furthermore, school documentation demonstrated that collaborative activities involving teachers, parents, and local stakeholders were routinely incorporated into the school's annual work program, indicating institutional commitment to participatory school management.

Challenges in Developing Organizational Culture

Despite these positive findings, several obstacles were identified during the implementation of organizational culture development. Limited educational facilities, financial constraints, increasing administrative responsibilities, and rapid technological changes were considered major challenges.

The school operator explained that technological limitations occasionally affected administrative efficiency. *"Limited technological facilities sometimes make administrative work less efficient."* (OPS)

Teachers also acknowledged that limited infrastructure restricted the implementation of certain educational innovations, particularly those involving digital learning resources. Nevertheless, participants agreed that these constraints did not diminish their commitment to maintaining positive organizational values.

Instead, school members attempted to overcome existing limitations by maximizing available resources, strengthening collaboration, and maintaining effective communication. This adaptive approach enabled the school to sustain organizational stability despite external challenges.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the development of a positive organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan is strongly influenced by the principal's leadership. The principal successfully fostered an organizational culture characterized by discipline, collaboration, shared responsibility, effective communication, and continuous improvement through exemplary leadership, participatory decision-making, and consistent implementation of school values.

Although the school faces challenges related to infrastructure, financial resources, and technological development, strong leadership and collaborative commitment among school members have enabled the organization to maintain a positive working environment that supports educational quality and school improvement.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the principal plays a fundamental role in fostering a positive organizational culture at SDN 18 Sungai Rotan through participatory leadership, effective communication, exemplary behavior, and collaborative decision-making. Rather than functioning solely as an administrator, the principal actively engaged with teachers and educational staff through regular meetings, informal discussions, classroom monitoring, and daily briefings. This leadership approach strengthened teachers' commitment, enhanced mutual trust, and promoted a collaborative working environment. One teacher stated, *"The principal always prioritizes deliberation and two-way communication before making decisions, so we feel valued and involved in every school activity"* (G1). Another teacher explained, *"The principal encourages us to try new teaching methods and learning media according to students' needs"* (G2). These findings support the argument that participatory leadership enhances teacher involvement and reinforces organizational culture (Sutrisno, 2019). Likewise, international studies have consistently demonstrated that effective school leadership contributes significantly to organizational effectiveness and educational quality (Bush & Glover, 2019; Hallinger & Wang, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The study further revealed that the principal successfully cultivated positive organizational values through consistent communication, discipline, and professional collaboration. Communication

occurred formally through meetings and briefings and informally through daily interactions and digital communication platforms, enabling teachers and staff to discuss challenges openly. One educational staff member explained, *"The principal always provides clear directions and helps us find solutions whenever administrative problems arise"* (OPS). Open communication created a supportive organizational climate characterized by trust, transparency, and mutual respect, consistent with the findings of Handayani and Nurhayati (2019), who emphasized that effective leadership communication strengthens teachers' work culture and organizational relationships.

Another important finding concerns the principal's strategy for developing positive habits as part of the school's organizational culture. The implementation of daily character-building activities, including the 5S culture (Smile, Greeting, Salutation, Politeness, and Courtesy), morning literacy programs, collective prayers, religious activities, flag ceremonies, and environmental cleanliness programs, gradually became institutionalized within everyday school practices. One teacher explained, *"The implementation of the 5S culture has significantly improved relationships among teachers and students, making the learning environment more comfortable"* (G1). Classroom observations confirmed that these routines encouraged students and teachers to practice positive behaviors consistently, although several students still required continuous guidance to maintain discipline. These findings corroborate previous studies indicating that continuous habituation effectively strengthens students' character development and school culture (Putri & Ramadhan, 2022; Yusuf & Kurniawan, 2024).

The findings also demonstrate that exemplary leadership significantly influenced teachers' professional attitudes and discipline. Although the principal occasionally faced personal constraints related to health conditions and travel distance, participants consistently viewed the principal as a responsible leader who demonstrated commitment through daily practice rather than formal authority alone. Teachers acknowledged that the principal's consistency motivated them to improve punctuality, instructional preparation, and administrative responsibilities. This finding supports Astuti (2021), who argued that principals' exemplary behavior plays a decisive role in establishing organizational discipline within schools.

Collaborative culture also emerged as one of the school's major strengths. Teachers regularly shared teaching strategies, jointly prepared instructional materials, assisted colleagues in solving classroom problems, and supported one another in using digital technologies. Informal interactions, including communal meals and collective school activities, further strengthened collegial relationships. These findings align with Maulana et al. (2022), who reported that transformational leadership encourages professional collaboration and mutual trust among teachers, thereby improving school effectiveness.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges continued to influence organizational culture development. Limited educational facilities, unstable internet connectivity, administrative workloads, and varying levels of technological competence constrained the implementation of several school programs. Furthermore, adapting teachers and students to newly established organizational values required continuous reinforcement and monitoring. Nevertheless, participants agreed that collaborative commitment enabled the school to overcome many of these constraints. As one school staff member remarked, *"Limited technological facilities sometimes make our administrative work more difficult, but we try to support one another so that school activities continue effectively"* (OPS). These findings are consistent with Bush and Glover (2019), who highlighted resource limitations as one of the primary challenges affecting leadership effectiveness in schools, particularly in rural contexts.

Overall, the study demonstrates that developing a positive organizational culture depends not only on the principal's leadership but also on the collective participation of teachers, educational staff,

and the wider school community. The findings extend previous studies by showing that positive organizational culture is sustained through the integration of participatory leadership, effective communication, collaborative practices, continuous character habituation, and contextual leadership strategies adapted to rural school conditions. While previous studies primarily examined the relationship between leadership and organizational culture in general (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020; Bush & Glover, 2019), this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational values are internalized through everyday interactions, habitual practices, and collaborative relationships among all school members. These findings suggest that contextual and participatory leadership serves as an essential mechanism for sustaining positive organizational culture and improving educational quality in rural elementary schools.

Conclusions

This study concludes that teacher performance improvement at SD Negeri 05 Indralaya Utara has been implemented through an integrated approach combining academic supervision and continuous professional development. The planning process was conducted systematically and collaboratively by identifying teachers' professional needs through supervision data, reflective discussions, and stakeholder participation. The implementation of clinical academic supervision, lesson study, peer observation, and professional learning communities created meaningful opportunities for teachers to improve instructional practices through continuous reflection and collaboration. Evaluation was carried out comprehensively by integrating evidence from classroom observations, teacher reflections, student feedback, and administrative documentation, demonstrating positive improvements in instructional quality, teacher professionalism, and student engagement.

Despite these achievements, the study also identified several challenges that may limit the sustainability of teacher performance improvement, including teachers' psychological resistance toward supervision, excessive workload, disparities in digital competence, limited financial and technological resources, and insufficient supervisory frequency. Addressing these barriers requires stronger instructional leadership, adequate institutional support, and sustained investment in teacher professional development. Overall, the integration of academic supervision and continuous professional development represents an effective and sustainable strategy for enhancing teacher performance and improving the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools.

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