

The Influence School Policies, Communication, Traditions and Environment in Building the Student's Character through School Culture (Case Study: Elementary School Students)

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ABSTRACT: The research focuses on the positive relationship between school culture and building student character, emphasizing the crucial role of a supportive school environment and character education programs in shaping students' behaviour and values. Despite the recognized importance of character education in schools, there is a gap in understanding how school culture specifically impacts the character development of elementary school students. This study aims to explore the impact of school culture on student character development and to identify effective strategies for enhancing character formation in elementary schools. Previous research has highlighted the significance of character education in schools but has not delved deeply into the specific impact of school culture on student character development. The study will be conducted in an elementary school setting, focusing on the interactions among students, teachers, and the community to understand how school culture influences student character. A quantitative study will be conducted using a survey approach, involving the distribution of questionnaires for the elementary school student context to gather data on the impact of school culture in building elementary school student character. Finding emphasizes that character development is most effectively supported when school culture is based on structured and clear communication and rules.

KEYWORDS: School culture, Students character development, Character education, Quantitative study, Survey approach.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the learning process of a person to gain better knowledge and understanding of certain things. Education is also a process of creating change and building innovative attitudes and behaviours (Harahap, 2019). According to Sari & Puspita (2019), education is one of the important factors in human life. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System states that "Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, community, nation and state".

In recent years, educational institutions demand students to be able to learn well and have high graduation goals. However, moral attitudes, ethics, and manners tend to be low. This is a current problem as moral values, manners, etiquette and courtesy are declining, especially among students in educational institutions. Based on data quoted from Kesuma (2012), as cited in Sanimah & Wahyuni (2021), shows that 63% of Indonesian teenagers have had free sex, 1.1 million teenagers are victims of drugs, and 1,318 students are involved in brawls, with 26 deaths reported. These alarming numbers reflect the urgency of implementing stronger character education in schools. In response to this Harahap (2019), states that educational institutions themselves must be responsible for organising character education.

Globalization and technological advances expose students to external influences that may conflict with local cultural and moral values. The phenomenon of students not following moral principles, schools do not develop human character because they are only concerned with students' cognitive or academic abilities so the implementation of character education in elementary schools has not been implemented consistently (Prabandari, 2020).

One approach that can be used in building the character of students is through school culture. School culture is a habit found in schools. School culture is a characteristic, character and image that the school has in the wider community. School culture provides a picture of how the entire academic community gets along, acts, and solves problems in all matters within the school environment. School culture refers to a system of shared life that is believed to be a norm or pattern of behaviour that is obeyed together (Nizary & Hamami, 2020).

The above phenomenon indicates that the role of character education is an alternative to overcome these problems (Prabandari, 2020). The urgency to strengthen students character through school culture arises from real-world challenges like moral decline to

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the influence of negative digital content. Schools must go beyond to consistently implement a school culture that reinforces positive character traits. According to Silkyanti (2019), character education is needed to help students have good habits and behaviours in their daily lives, whether at home, at school, or elsewhere.

Based on the above challenge, this study focused on exploring the role of school culture in shaping the character of primary school students. Specifically, this study investigates (1) How does school culture impact the character development of elementary school students? (2) Which elements of school culture (such as policies, communication, rituals, environment and extracurricular activities) contribute most significantly to students' character development?

This research is important because it addresses the critical role of school culture in shaping the character of elementary school students. As behavioral and moral issues among young learners rise with the times, understanding how the school environment through rules, communication, traditions, and extracurricular activities, can build positive character is important for educators and policy makers. Findings from this study can be used by schools to improve character education programs and create a school culture that supports not only academic success, but also emotional and moral development. This study also provides empirical data to support future education related to school culture as well as character education.

This study focuses on elementary school students and explores the impact of school culture, including policies, communication patterns, traditions, learning environment, and extracurricular activities-on character building. The study used a quantitative approach through distributing questionnaires to elementary school students from various schools in Indonesia. This research is limited by the fact that data collection was conducted online, which may have affected the diversity of respondents. In addition, this study did not explore deeper insights through interviews or observations, which limits the depth of the findings.

In the current era, the character of the young generation is declining so habituation and education are needed to change attitudes (Luthviyani et al., 2019). It shows that character must be instilled from an early age because it is very important for later life. One way to shape student character is through a good school culture. The way that can be done as a step to solve character problems is to internalise values and character through school culture (Munjiatun, 2018).

Previous studies have highlighted the role of school culture in supporting discipline, communication, values and student engagement. However, many studies have focused on elements of school culture or character education in general without comparing which specific elements have the most impact, especially in the context of Indonesian primary schools.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining the relationship between school culture and students' character development and identifying the most significant contributing factors - namely policy, communication, rituals and environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deal & Kennedy (1985) cited by Stoll (1998) states that culture, In essence, it defines reality for those within a social organisation, gives them support and identity and creates a framework for occupational learning. Each school has a different reality or mindset of school life, often captured in the simple phrase “the way we do things around here”. The application of positive character needs to be instilled at school first, this is related to what Bandura & Walters (1977) cited by Firmansyah & Saepuloh, (2022) conveyed: people observe behavior either directly through social interactions with others or indirectly by observing behavior through the media. This highlights the importance of a positive school culture where values are practiced and demonstrated consistently.

The above is closely related to the Social Learning Theory introduced by Albert Bandura (1977) cited by Firmansyah & Saepuloh (2022), which suggests that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling. suggests that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling and is influenced by factors such as attention, motivation, attitudes, and emotions. The figure 1 shows the way the conceptual framework of school culture builds a students' character. The framework starts from values and school culture and it will be implemented to build the students' character.

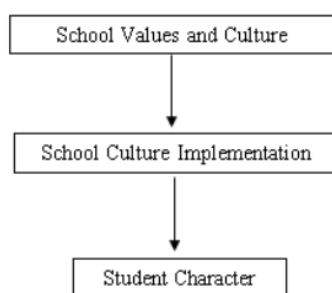


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of School Culture in Shaping Student Character (Wardani, 2019)

According to Ali et al., (2021), School culture is the overall relational pattern between individuals in the school environment that forms a tradition that grows and develops in accordance with the spirit and character values that develop in schools. Huda (2021)

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adds, to form a good culture, values such as morality and spirit must be instilled, so that the school becomes active, creative, and innovative and can have a positive impact on the school. School culture is well-formed if all the necessary elements can be implemented properly. McBrien and Brandt (1997) cited by Slater (2006), character education involves teaching children about basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect". Character education is an effort made by schools, communities, and families to assist children in understanding these values (Slater, 2006).

Lusyanti et al., (2020) states that examples of school policies that can support school culture are discipline, such as dressing neatly according to the rules, speaking kind and polite words, coming to school on time, throwing garbage in its place, and so on. Another one is recognition of achievements, students who get achievements are given awards and witnessed by other students during the ceremony. This can form a good self-concept for students (Nugrahami, 2016). According to Cusway, Barry & Derek (1993) in (Novianti, 2019), research states that culture is an organisational system that influences the way work is done and the way individuals behave. Associated with school culture this school culture can occur through the creation of positive norms and habits, cooperation between leaders and stakeholders to build a culture in accordance with the vision and mission of the school, as well as establishing harmonious relationships and mutual respect by all school members. A school environment that applies the concept of inclusion is very good for the growth of students' character values because it can foster a sense of caring, mutual respect, cooperation and differences (NurDiniyah & Supriyadi, 2023). School culture is the beliefs, values, and norms, as well as habits that all school members implement over a long period (Daryanto & Darmiatun, 2013) in (Arimbi & Minsih, 2022).

Effective school communication among students, teachers and parents is another important component of school culture. Open and honest communication builds mutual trust and encourages active participation in school life. According to Lusyanti et al., (2020), the way staff, students and parents communicate also affects school culture. Open, honest and understanding-based communication can increase trust and engagement within the school community. Ridho (2019) states that, an effective school culture will encourage all school members to work together based on mutual trust, invite the participation of all residents, encourage the emergence of new ideas, and provide opportunities for the implementation of reforms in schools, all of which lead to the achievement of the best results. The importance of communication between teachers and parents is mainly to ensure that children are learning effectively and getting the best for their growth and personal/character development (Arini, 2020). Teachers use effective communication strategies so that intentions are conveyed in full and can be accepted by students so that they can shape the character of the students themselves (Iswari, 2022). Open communication at school also fosters trust and encourages honesty. Most students agreed that open communication with teachers and peers strengthened their confidence and character. The key to success in improving school quality is how each school member interacts with each other through a good social culture. Positive relationships and communication patterns will play an important role in developing the school, educating students' character and improving student achievement Samong et al., (2016) in Pramana & Trihantoyo, (2021). This is supported by Iswari (2022), who found that communication strategies directly impact students' moral development. School culture is often manifested through visible elements such as routines, ceremonies and traditions. According to Sobri et al., (2019), The identification of school culture is done through school artefacts, regulations, rituals or ceremonies that are routinely conducted at school, and the values or beliefs held by the school community. An example of artefacts is the school is clean, tidy and shady. The culture of cleanliness is demonstrated by the implementation of a daily picket for students to clean the classroom. In addition, students are also accustomed to disposing of rubbish in its place (Nugrahami, 2016) and rituals include ceremonies every Monday and state holidays, checking body hygiene (nails, ears, hair, etc.) every day, praying when starting and finishing lessons, applying 5S (*senyum, salam, sapa, sopan, santun*) to all school residents, every morning shaking hands with picket teachers and others (Prabandari, 2020). The school environment is one of the factors that influence student learning motivation. A comfortable and clean school environment can create comfort in learning because students can concentrate more and be creative, it can increase student motivation to learn, Sa'adah et al., (2021) in Anggraini & Efendi, (2023). Character values that are actualised in a safe school character values are discipline, responsibility, cooperation, mutual trust, helping, alertness, and religion (Anisah & Sumarini, 2019). Positive school culture refers to the sociocultural environment that is embraced and becomes a programmed and planned activity by the school to instil character in students. School climate is a learning environment that encourages positive behaviour and student personality to create an optimal learning process, Kurniawati (2015) in Aswat et al (2022). According to research by Astuti (2013) in Febriani & Sarino (2017) learning facilities have a positive effect on student achievement.

Hypothesis Development

Because a good school culture will influence the success of character education (Rosyad & Zuchdi, 2018) then the school as an institution, needs to build a positive synergy relationship between school members to improve the quality of the school concerned (Sobri et al., 2019). The hypothesis form:

H1: *School policies* that support discipline, achievement recognition and equality have a positive impact on *school culture*.

The more consistent the school policies are with these positive values, the more positive the school culture will be. One of the variables that influence school culture is school policy. School policies related to discipline, rewards, recognition of achievements,

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inclusive learning, and safety of the school environment have a direct impact on school culture (Lusyanti et al., 2020). Meanwhile, in the concept of education, reward is one of the tools to increase the motivation of learners. This method can associate a person's actions and behaviour with feelings of happiness, and pleasure, and will usually make them do a good deed repeatedly. Rewards are a very important element of discipline in children's personal development and behaviour (Anggraini, 2019).

Examples of school policies that can support school culture are discipline, such as dressing neatly according to the rules, speaking kind and polite words, coming to school on time, throwing garbage in its place, and so on (Lusyanti et al., 2020). Another one is recognition of achievements, students who get achievements are given awards and witnessed by other students during the ceremony. This can form a good self-concept for students (Nugrahami, 2016).

H2: Open *communication* and mutual understanding in schools have a positive impact on *school culture*.

The more effective the communication between staff, students and parents, the stronger the school culture. The way staff, students and parents communicate also affects school culture. Open, honest and understanding-based communication can increase trust and engagement within the school community. (Lusyanti et al., 2020). An effective school culture will encourage all school members to work together based on mutual trust, invite the participation of all residents, encourage the emergence of new ideas, and provide opportunities for the implementation of reforms in schools, all of which lead to the achievement of the best results (Ridho, 2019).

H3: *Traditions and rituals* that promote positive values in the school have a positive impact on *school culture*.

The more frequent and robust the traditional practices that reinforce positive values, the more positive the school culture. According to Sobri et al., (2019), The identification of school culture is done through school artefacts, regulations, rituals or ceremonies that are routinely conducted at school, and the values or beliefs held by the school community. An example of artefacts is the school is clean, tidy and shady. The culture of cleanliness is demonstrated by the implementation of a daily picket for students to clean the classroom. In addition, students are also accustomed to disposing of rubbish in its place (Nugrahami, 2016) and rituals include ceremonies every Monday and state holidays, checking body hygiene (nails, ears, hair, etc.) every day, praying when starting and finishing lessons, applying 5S (*senyum, salam, sapa, sopan, santun*) to all school residents, every morning shaking hands with picket teachers and others (Prabandari, 2020).

H4: *An environment* that supports learning has a positive impact on *school culture*.

The more conducive and safe the school's physical environment is, the stronger the school culture will be. According to research by Astuti (2013) in Febriani & Sarino (2017) learning facilities have a positive effect on student achievement. Positive effect on student learning achievement, as well as a significant effect of learning facilities on student learning achievement (Wijayanti et al., 2014).

Samong et al., (2016) cited in Pramana & Trihantoyo, (2021) states, the key to success in improving school quality is how each school member interacts with each other through a good social culture. Positive relationships and communication patterns will play an important role in developing the school, educating students' character and improving student achievement.

H5: Positive *school culture* has a positive impact on building a *students' character*.

School culture programmes including religious culture, independence culture, nationalism culture, social care culture and environmental care culture when carried out well by school members, then student character grows well too (Johannes et al., 2020). A school environment that applies the concept of inclusion is very good for the growth of students' character values because it can foster a sense of caring, mutual respect, cooperation and differences (NurDinayah & Supriyadi, 2023). School culture is the beliefs, values, and norms, as well as habits that all school members implement over a long period (Daryanto & Darmiatun, 2013) in (Arimbi, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The research method began by developing a research model to answer five hypotheses as shown in Table 1, this school culture will be determined by 4 criteria aimed to explore the impact of school culture in building the character of elementary school students.

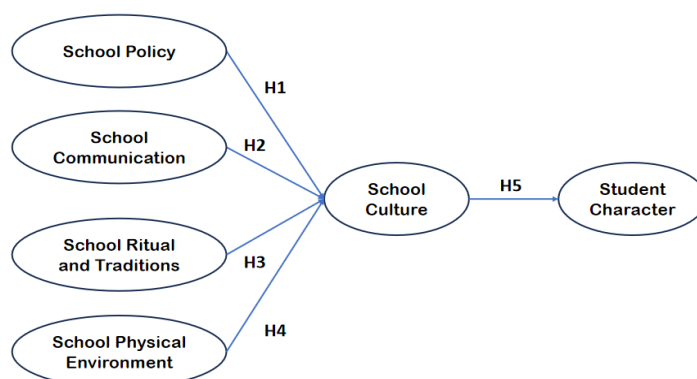


Figure 2. Research Model

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The research method that will be used to examine the relationship between school culture and student character building at the elementary level is a quantitative study with a survey approach. Research using this method will usually select and study samples from a population, and then later the research results will be generalized. Researchers must understand several terms, namely target population, and research sample. Generally, researchers use questionnaires to collect the necessary data from respondents. When collecting data using questionnaires, the researcher will give the questionnaire directly to the subject and can use technological media such as email, Google Forms, and several other media (Bagaskara, 2023).

Table 1. Summary of Research Hypotheses

H1	<i>School policies</i> that support inclusive learning, achievement recognition and equality have a positive impact on <i>school culture</i> .
H2	Open <i>communication</i> and mutual understanding in schools have a positive impact on <i>school culture</i> .
H3	<i>Traditions and rituals</i> that promote positive values in the school have a positive impact on <i>school culture</i> .
H4	<i>Environment</i> that supports learning has a positive impact on <i>school culture</i>
H5	Positive <i>school culture</i> has a positive impact on building a students' <i>character</i> .

This section will describe the process of developing and implementing the questionnaire used to collect data in this study. The data collection process may involve distributing questionnaires to elementary school students from various elementary schools. The questionnaire contained statements about students' perceptions of school culture, the values instilled by the school, and their experiences in living the school culture to determine the relationship between school culture and character building at the elementary school level. The questionnaire contained two parts. The first part contains student identity such as name and their elementary school. The second part contains statements to determine the impact of school culture on student character building.

Population can be interpreted as all elements in research including objects and subjects with certain characteristics and characteristics (Amin et al, 2023). The population of this study were students at the elementary school level. Sutrisno Hadi said that some of the individuals investigated were samples (Amin et al., 2023). The sample determination technique in this study uses incidental sampling. Incidental sampling is a sampling technique based on chance, that is, anyone who by chance / incidentally meets the researcher can be used as a sample if it is considered that the person who happened to be met is suitable as a data source (Amin et al, 2023). The research sample in this study was elementary school students from various elementary schools representing various types of school cultures.

The data used in this research is elementary data, which is obtained from respondents through questionnaires. Cross-section data is used in this study, namely data consisting of one or more variables at the same time. In this study, the instrument used in the form of a questionnaire was measured using a Likert scale. Likert Scale or Likert Scale is a research scale used to measure attitudes and opinions. In the Likert scale respondents are asked to complete a questionnaire which requires them to indicate their level of agreement with a series of questions. The questions or statements used in this study are usually referred to as research variables (BINUS Accounting, 2021). The variables measured are then translated into several indicators and from each indicator a question is made which is a guide in compiling instrument items. School Policies (S1–S4), Communication (S5–S8), Rituals and Traditions (S9–S12), Environment (S13–S16), Inclusiveness (S17–S22), and Extracurricular Activities (S23–S26) were the six constructs into which the 26 statements were separated.

RESULT AND FINDING

The descriptive analysis used to analyze 26 items of variables of school communication, school policies, school rituals and traditions, school physical environment, school culture, and students' character. High levels of agreement were found in all categories in the student responses, which were gathered using a Likert scale. This suggests that students had a positive perception of their school culture and thought it helped them develop as individuals.

To verify the quality of the instrument, the measurement model was evaluated through the outer loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values. Most Items have a loading value >0.7 , which indicates good indicator reliability. Composite reliability values for all constructs ranged from 0.812 to 0.902, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.7, confirming that all constructs were internally consistent. Similarly, the AVE values ranged from 0.571 to 0.732 exceeding the 0.5 threshold, indicating acceptable convergent validity.

According to the structural model study, school culture has a high influence on student character ($R^2 = 0.659$), while school policy, school communication, school traditions, and school environment all have a significant impact on school culture ($R^2 = 0.794$). Communication was the predictor that had the biggest effect on school culture ($\beta = 0.420$), followed by environment ($\beta = 0.314$) and school policy ($\beta = 0.325$). The effect of traditions was the weakest ($\beta = 0.218$). A substantial correlation ($\beta = 0.812$) was found between school culture and student character, indicating that a good school culture has a major positive impact on students' character

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development. These findings validate the role of school culture as a key predictor of student character development and demonstrate that improving specific elements like communication and policies can have meaningful educational outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of consistent and fair rules can build a disciplined and focused learning environment. As shown in the survey, the majority of students feel more disciplined and motivated by these rules. This supports the findings of Rosyad & Zuchdi (2018) who noted that a structured school culture directly improves behavior. Students reported that open communication between students, teachers and parents strengthened trust, honesty and mutual understanding. Arini (2020) and Iswari (2022) confirmed that communication between school and family builds strong moral values and reduces behavioral problems.

The weekly flag ceremony and the daily implementation of the 5S values (Smile, Salam, Sapa, Sopan, Santun) are highly valued by the students and considered part of the effort to promote patriotism, respect and manners. Prabandari (2020) and Sobri et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of rituals in strengthening students' emotional connection with values. Students recognize that a clean, well-equipped, and physically and emotionally supportive environment makes them feel safe and motivated to learn. This reflects findings from Samong et al. (2016) that a supportive school environment enhances social-emotional learning.

The result above shows that school culture has an impact on the character-building of students in elementary schools. The supporting indicators of character building include school policies, open communication between students, teachers, and parents at school, which helps strengthen values such as honesty, trust, and responsibility among students. From the data above, students feel more valued and supported in developing positive character through open communication. Consistent policies implemented at school such as punctuality, discipline, and rewards for achievement, help students pay more attention to structured and responsible behavior. The data above shows most students reported that school discipline builds focus, and being rewarded through awards motivates them to perform better. These findings support the research of Lusyanti et al. (2020), who found that reward-based discipline policies improved self-concept and motivation among students. Similarly, Anggraini (2019) emphasized that rewards play an important role in character development through emotional connection.

On the other hand, rituals and traditions such as flag ceremony and 5S that they actively practise in their school create a disciplined and structured atmosphere and strengthens relationships between students, teachers, and school staff. This, supported by Darmawarn et al., (2023) states that By implementing the 5S concept, schools can create an environment that supports social and moral development of learners. In addition, the physical and emotional safety provided by the school environment also plays a role in shaping student character. Students who feel safe and valued tend to be more engaged and develop a stronger sense of responsibility and empathy. This is in line with Astuti (2013) and Wijayanti et al., (2014) who found that a well-maintained school environment has a positive effect on student learning and behavior.

Open communication at school also fosters trust and encourages honesty. Most students agreed that open communication with teachers and peers strengthened their confidence and character. This is supported by Iswari (2022), who found that communication strategies directly impact students' moral development. In conclusion, a school environment that encourages discipline, open communication, and physical and emotional safety in the school environment, creates a strong foundation for holistic student character development.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

According to this study, elementary school culture has a big impact on how well pupils develop their character. The purpose of this study was to look into how Indonesian primary school kids' character development is affected by school culture. With a very strong path coefficient, the results of the statistic analysis show that school culture significantly and favorably influences students' character development. The largest contributor to creating a positive school culture among the different components was communication, which was followed by school policy, environment, and traditions. These findings suggest that encouraging shared values, emotional safety, and moral development in students requires open, trustworthy, and inclusive communication between educators, parents, and students. Students can cultivate social skills, empathy, accountability, and honesty in an educational environment that fosters communication. From the conclusions of the research above, several suggestions are made: first as a key component of school culture, effective communication techniques should be given top priority by educators and school administrators. Second, students who communicate openly and inclusively develop strong character characteristics, mutual respect, and emotional safety. Third, it is recommended that future studies investigate the effective application of communication techniques in various educational environments. And finally to acquire a better understanding, researchers may want to think about employing qualitative techniques like focus groups, interviews, or classroom observations.

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