

Transformational Leadership and the Role of Teachers in Shaping the Social Character of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership of school principals and the role of teachers in shaping students' social character through Social Science (IPS) learning in elementary schools. The research approach used was qualitative descriptive with the subjects of school principals, grade IV teachers, and grade IV students at SDN Sebaung III, Gending District, Probolinggo Regency. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using data reduction techniques, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that school principals implement transformational leadership through motivation, example, and continuous coaching that encourages teacher innovation in social studies learning. Teachers play an active role in instilling the values of responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and tolerance through group discussion strategies, simulations, and collaborative projects. Supporting factors include the principal's vision, positive school culture, and cooperation between school residents, while obstacles include limited facilities, learning time, and parental involvement. The findings of this study confirm the importance of synergy between principals and teachers in fostering students' social character, as well as the need to strengthen collaboration with parents and the community to create a sustainable character education ecosystem.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Role of Teachers, Social Character, Social Studies, Elementary School.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in forming a quality generation, both in terms of intellect and character. The educational process in elementary school is one of the important stages in shaping students' personalities from an early age. At this stage, students are introduced to moral, social, and cultural values that will influence their future development (Windasari et al., 2022).

Social character is one of the important aspects that need to be instilled through basic education. Social character includes the attitude of caring, cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and tolerance needed in social life. According to Sugi et al, (2025) explained that the cultivation of good social character will give birth to a generation that is able to interact harmoniously with its environment.

The role of schools is vital in shaping the social character of students. According to Zakira & Sagita (2024), it is explained that schools not only function as a place for knowledge transfer, but also as a vehicle for the formation of social attitudes and behaviors. A conducive learning environment will encourage students to internalize social values in daily life.

Social Science (IPS) learning has a great contribution in instilling students' social character. Through social studies materials, students are introduced to the values of togetherness, care, and responsibility in community life. Learning designed with an active and contextual approach can help students understand social realities more deeply (Masaong et al., 2024).

The principal plays a strategic role in creating a direction and culture of education that is oriented towards character building. According to Muliati et al (2022–2023), it is explained that the leadership of school principals determines the quality of learning implementation, including the success of teachers in instilling social values. Proper leadership will provide motivation, support, and role models for all school residents (Park et al., 2021).

The transformational leadership model is one of the relevant approaches in the context of character education. According to Sott & Bender (2025) explains that this leadership emphasizes the ability of the principal to inspire, motivate, and direct teachers and students towards positive change. Principals who implement transformational leadership are able to create a visionary, innovative, and collaborative school environment (Ardiani, 2024).

Teachers have a central position in the implementation of social studies learning that instills social values. According to Time Magazine (2023), it is explained that teachers are not only in charge of delivering material, but also as facilitators, guides, and role models for students. The example of teachers in behaving becomes a concrete example that students can imitate in their daily lives.

Teacher-student interaction plays an important role in shaping social attitudes. The teaching and learning process based on discussions, group work, and social simulations provides opportunities for students to practice empathy and cooperation. Creative teachers will be able to create a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere (Cardenal et al., 2024).

The support of the principal for teachers greatly determines the effectiveness of social studies learning. Principals who provide coaching, supervision, and learning facilities will encourage teachers to be more innovative in teaching. The synergy between the principal and teachers creates an academic atmosphere that is conducive to the development of students' social character (Wiratmoko et al, 2022).

Another influential supporting factor is the school culture. Schools that instill positive habits, such as mutual cooperation, discipline, and social concern, will accelerate the process of building students' character. A consistent school culture is able to instill social values not only in the classroom, but also in all school activities (Sugianto, 2024).

The involvement of parents and the community also contributes to the success of character education. According to Richardson & Khawaja (2025) explains that collaboration between schools, families, and the environment will strengthen the social values instilled through social studies learning. This synergy forms a comprehensive educational ecosystem for student development.

The real conditions in elementary schools show that there are still challenges in the formation of students' social character. Some students show less concern for their friends, are reluctant to work together in groups, and have difficulty accepting dissent. This problem shows the need for a more optimal leadership strategy and the role of teachers.

Principals are required to be able to lead with a transformational style that emphasizes vision, inspiration, and example. Teachers are required to design social studies learning that is not

only cognitive, but also affective and social students. The collaboration between the two will result in a more meaningful learning process (Effendi & Sahertian, 2022).

Much research has been done on transformational leadership and the role of teachers in shaping social character, but there is still room for deeper exploration. The local context of each school provides different dynamics in the implementation of leadership and learning strategies. In-depth studies will make a real contribution to the development of character education in elementary schools (People Magazine, 2025).

The study in this article focuses on the implementation of transformational leadership of school principals and the role of teachers in shaping the social character of elementary school students through social studies learning. It is hoped that the findings of this article can enrich the literature on character education, as well as provide practical references for school principals and teachers in improving the quality of social studies learning.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a **descriptive type of research**. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to understand in depth the implementation of transformational leadership of school principals and the role of teachers in shaping students' social character through social studies learning. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and views of the subjects directly in the natural context of elementary school.

The research subjects consisted of school principals, grade IV teachers, and grade IV students at SDN Sebaung III, Gending District, Probolinggo Regency. The selection of subjects was carried out by **purposive sampling**, which is based on their direct involvement in leadership and social studies learning related to the formation of social character. The research data was obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of school documents such as policies, learning implementation plans (RPP), and student learning outcome records.

The validity of the data was tested using triangulation techniques, including triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Data analysis is carried out **thematically** through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This process allows researchers to find the main patterns and themes related to the principal's leadership strategy, the role of teachers, and the dynamics of shaping students' social character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The principal at SDN Sebaung III showed the application of transformational leadership through providing motivation, example, and continuous coaching to teachers. This leadership is reflected in the principal's efforts to build a positive school culture, direct teachers to innovate in social studies learning, and create a harmonious atmosphere of cooperation in the school environment. This implementation has an impact on increasing students' awareness of important social values in daily life.

Teachers play an active role in instilling social character through social studies learning by using group discussion methods, role simulations, and project-based learning. This strategy is able to train students to work together, be responsible, and care more about others. The example of

teachers in behaving is also a real model that students follow, so that learning is not only cognitively oriented, but also on the development of social attitudes.

The results of the study also show the existence of supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include the principal's vision, a positive school culture, and cooperation between school residents. The obstacles encountered include limited infrastructure, limited allocation of learning time, and lack of involvement of some parents. Nevertheless, the strategies carried out by principals and teachers have proven to be effective in fostering students' social attitudes, such as caring, empathy, cooperation, and tolerance.

Table 1.
Research Results

Aspects	Key Findings	Impact
Principal's Leadership	Provide motivation, example, and ongoing coaching	Creating a positive school culture and increasing teacher motivation
The Role of the Teacher	Using discussion, simulation, and project methods in social studies learning	Increase student cooperation, responsibility, and care
Supporting Factors	Principal's Vision, School Culture, School Staff Cooperation	Accelerating the formation of students' social character
Inhibiting Factors	Limited infrastructure, limited time, and lack of parental involvement	A challenge in optimizing character learning
Formed Social Character	Care, empathy, cooperation, tolerance	Students are more adaptive and caring in social interactions

(Source: Data processed by researchers, 2025)

Discussion

The transformational leadership of school principals plays an important role in creating a conducive school climate. The principal is able to provide a clear vision to all school residents. This vision is a direction in developing a culture of character education. Teachers and students are motivated through the example of the principal. The involvement of school principals actively increases teachers' enthusiasm in teaching social studies (Effendi & Sahertian, 2022).

The application of transformational leadership includes the ability to inspire and motivate teachers. The principal provides space for teachers to innovate in learning. According to Windasari et al. (2022), it is explained that teachers feel valued when given the opportunity to develop teaching methods. The school environment becomes more adaptive to change. The social studies learning process also runs more interactively.

Teachers as learning implementers play a strategic role in instilling students' social character. Social studies learning is designed not only to focus on the cognitive aspect. Social values such as responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance are instilled through classroom activities. Students learn to understand their role in society. Teachers' exemplary efforts strengthen the process of internalizing social values (People Magazine, 2025; Cardenal et al., 2024).

Cooperative learning is one of the main strategies used by teachers. Students work in groups to complete tasks together. This process trains them to respect the opinions of others. According to

Richardson & Khawaja, 2025) explains that a sense of solidarity is formed through collaborative learning experiences. The value of mutual cooperation can be revived through discussions and group work.

Social simulation is also used as a learning method. Students are given specific roles in social situations created in the classroom. This activity trains empathy and communication skills. The experience makes students better understand the consequences of social actions. Social character is built through direct practice, not just theory.

The principal plays a role in providing learning support facilities. Support in the form of facilities, supervision, and guidance increases teacher motivation (Wiratmoko et al., 2022). Teachers are more confident in trying new methods. The classroom environment becomes more lively with a variety of teaching strategies. Students are more actively involved in the learning process.

School culture is a significant supporting factor. The values of discipline, responsibility, and care are emphasized through routine activities. Students are accustomed to repetitive positive habits. The formation of social character runs consistently. A positive school environment strengthens social studies learning outcomes (Muliati, 2022–2023; Park, 2021).

The inhibiting factors found are related to the limitations of infrastructure facilities. Some teachers find it difficult to develop active methods due to the lack of media. Limited learning time is also an obstacle. Social values take time to be instilled repeatedly. These limitations make the results not optimal in all aspects.

Parental involvement in supporting character education is still not optimal. Some parents have not fully understood the importance of their role. Social values taught in schools are less reinforced at home. Students need consistency between the school and family environment. This imbalance can slow down the development of social character (Sugi et al., 2025).

The transformational leadership of the principal acts as a liaison between the school and the community. The principal builds communication with parents and the community. This collaboration enriches social-based activities in schools. Students gain real experience in the application of social values. Synergy between schools and communities strengthens character education (Masaong et al., 2024)

Social studies learning evaluations show an increase in students' social attitudes. Students are more responsible in completing group assignments. The attitude of tolerance towards differences is increasingly visible in class interactions. Empathy is increased through social activities designed by teachers. The formation of social character went according to the expectations of the research.

The influence of the principal's leadership can be seen in the change in teacher behavior. Teachers are more creative in designing learning activities. Teachers' motivation increased because they felt they had the full support of Ardiani et al (2024). The working relationship between teachers and principals has become more harmonious. A conducive work atmosphere strengthens the quality of learning.

The role of teachers as facilitators has been proven to increase student participation. Teachers create interactive and dialogical classrooms. Students are encouraged to express their opinions. The learning process becomes more meaningful because of active involvement. Social values are understood through direct experience (Time Magazine, 2023).

Students' social character is formed through experiential learning. Group activities and simulations provide opportunities for real practice. Students learn to manage small conflicts that arise in group work. Social skills develop naturally in a classroom setting. As a result, students are better prepared to face social life.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of previous research. Previous research has shown that transformational leadership increases teacher motivation and learning effectiveness. The role of teachers as role models strengthens the social values that are instilled. A positive school culture accelerates the internalization of character values. The consistency between this study and the literature supports the validity of the results (Sugianto, 2024).

The implications of this research are important for the development of basic education. School principals need to continue to implement a transformational leadership style. Teachers are encouraged to enrich social studies learning strategies. Social character development programs can be expanded through school activities. Synergy between internal and external parties must be strengthened.

Teachers' strategies in instilling social values can be an example of good practice. Teachers can use a project-based approach to increase student responsibility. Social activities outside the classroom can also be a means of character education (Zakira & Sagita, 2024). Real interaction with the community enriches the learning experience of students. Social values are easier to understand through hands-on practice.

The principal has the responsibility to maintain the continuity of the character education program. Policy support and facilities must continue to be provided to teachers. Monitoring and evaluation are needed to see the development of students' character. Parental involvement should be strengthened through collaborative programs. A shared commitment will strengthen the effectiveness of social studies learning (Sott & Bender, 2025).

This research provides a theoretical as well as a practical contribution. Theoretically, the results of the research strengthen the concept of transformational leadership and the role of teachers in character education. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for other elementary schools in implementing similar strategies. The success of social character formation is highly dependent on the synergy of leadership and teaching. This article is expected to inspire in developing character education in elementary school.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results show that the transformational leadership of school principals plays an important role in building a positive school culture through motivation, example, and continuous support for teachers, while teachers play an active role in instilling students' social character through social studies learning with discussion, simulation, and collaborative project methods that foster empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance; Supporting factors in the form of the principal's vision, school community cooperation, and positive culture have been proven to strengthen character education, while limited resources, time allocation, and parental involvement are still obstacles, so it is recommended that the principal continue to develop an inspirational transformational leadership style, teachers enrich experiential learning strategies, and schools strengthen collaboration with parents and the community to create an ecosystem continuous character education.

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