



Strategic School Leadership in Implementing Character Education for Environmental Awareness: A Case Study in an Indonesian Islamic Primary School

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Abstract : This study explores the strategic role of school leadership in implementing character education that promotes environmental awareness in a primary Islamic school in Indonesia. Conducted at SD Islam Siti Chodijah, Probolinggo, the research responds to the ongoing gap between formal learning and students' environmental behavior, which often reflects weak implementation of character-based ecological values. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, this research investigates the lived experiences and strategies adopted by the principal to instill environmental character values. Key leadership strategies identified include the reinforcement of the school's vision and mission, periodic teacher training, community and parental involvement, the application of fair reward and sanction systems, and routine monitoring and evaluation. Implementation is carried out through a series of school programs such as SENSE (healthy morning exercises), SIROSA (corridor literacy), WAKABIRRU (time for honoring parents), JUMBERKAH (clean and blessed Fridays), BUSPATA (proper waste disposal), and SERABI, KUKIS, METASEKA, and MEPISEKA—programs designed to cultivate personal and collective hygiene habits. The findings highlight that effective leadership is instrumental in integrating character education with daily school practices, bridging pedagogical vision with actionable programs. This research contributes to the discourse on school-based environmental character education and offers practical insights for education policymakers and practitioners in similar contexts.

Keywords : Character Education; Environmental Awareness; School Leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in educational development globally, as nations increasingly recognize the importance of cultivating moral, responsible, and environmentally aware individuals (Muharam et al., 2022; Hidayat et al., 2022). Within this paradigm, environmental character education—defined as the integration of ecological awareness and responsibility into learners' ethical formation—has emerged as a critical component in preparing future generations to confront complex global environmental challenges. Primary schools, as foundational institutions in a child's educational journey, play a pivotal role in embedding values of environmental stewardship, particularly through school culture and daily practices (Susanti et al., 2020).

The school principal occupies a strategic leadership position in ensuring the successful implementation of character education initiatives, including those focused on environmental responsibility. Beyond administrative duties, principals shape the institutional vision, manage pedagogical alignment, and cultivate a culture conducive to character formation. Despite the policy emphasis—such as in Indonesia's 2013 Curriculum and Ministerial Regulation No. 16 of 2019—gaps in the implementation of character education, particularly in environmental domains, remain prevalent. Empirical observations suggest that in many cases, educational institutions prioritize cognitive instruction over holistic character development (Annur et al., 2021; Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021).

This study draws attention to these concerns by focusing on SD Islam Siti Chodijah in Probolinggo, Indonesia, where a distinctive institutional model of environmental character education has been observed. Preliminary investigations reveal that the school integrates its vision and mission with daily environmental programs such as SENSE (Senam Sehat), SIROSA (literasi lorong bahasa), and BUSPATA (membuang sampah pada tempatnya), among others. These initiatives reflect a deliberate effort by the school principal to operationalize character education through routine, context-sensitive practices. However, how these efforts are strategically managed and aligned with institutional goals remains underexplored.

Previous studies have addressed the roles of principals in character education (Yanto, 2020; Tri Mulyanto et al., 2021), the challenges of environmental character instruction (Hariandi et al., 2023), and general strategies for educational management (Syafi'i et al., 2023). However, few have examined the intersection of school leadership, institutional vision and mission, and the implementation of environmental character education in a unified framework. This gap becomes particularly relevant in rural Islamic schools, where resource constraints often demand innovative leadership strategies.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the leadership strategies employed by the principal of SD Islam Siti Chodijah in translating institutional vision and mission into tangible character education practices that emphasize environmental responsibility. By analyzing the articulation of institutional vision, the strategies formulated, and their implementation in school programs, this research seeks to contribute empirically and conceptually to the

discourse on school leadership and environmental ethics education. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for school administrators and policymakers in strengthening the role of visionary leadership in building character-based environmental education at the primary school level.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore how school leadership contributes to the implementation of environmental character education in primary school settings. Phenomenology was chosen as it enables the researcher to gain a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences and perspectives regarding school leadership practices, particularly in relation to moral and environmental values. This approach is well-suited for uncovering the meaning and significance behind observable behaviors and decision-making processes in educational institutions.

The study was conducted at SD Islam Siti Chodijah, located in Kraksaan, Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia. The site was selected based on two main considerations: (1) the presence of a leadership-driven policy addressing environmental character education, and (2) the school's unique integration of Islamic values with ecological awareness programs. While SD Islam Siti Chodijah operates as a faith-based institution, its leadership model actively incorporates strategies for fostering environmental responsibility among students, making it an exemplary case for qualitative investigation.

Data sources were categorized into primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with key informants, including the school principal and the vice principal for student affairs. Secondary data were drawn from supporting materials such as school documents, institutional policies, and relevant literature. Three primary techniques were used for data collection; 1) non-participant observation, to document routines and environmental programs at the school; 2) semi-structured interviews, to gain detailed insights into leadership strategies and implementation processes; and 3) document analysis, to examine supporting institutional artifacts such as vision-mission statements, program plans, and evaluation reports. The observation process focused on real-time school activities related to environmental behavior reinforcement, such as daily hygiene practices and collaborative environmental campaigns. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow for both guided inquiry and participant-led elaboration. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and thematically coded. Document analysis was used to triangulate findings and verify consistency between reported strategies and institutional documentation.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, involving iterative cycles of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying patterns related to leadership roles, institutional vision, strategic implementation, and the cultural embedding of environmental character education. Trustworthiness of data was ensured through

triangulation of data sources, member checking, and audit trails, in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's criteria for qualitative rigor.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of character education for environmental awareness in schools requires not only well-designed programs but also strong and strategic leadership capable of fostering a values-based culture. In the context of Indonesian Islamic primary education, the principal's leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional direction, mobilizing teacher commitment, and engaging the wider school community. This section presents the findings and discussion from a qualitative case study conducted at SD Islam Siti Chodijah, which explores how strategic school leadership operationalizes vision, mission, and daily practices to embed environmental character values. Through programs such as SENSE, SIROSA, and WAKABIRRU, as well as structured routines like classroom cleanliness and personal hygiene initiatives, the school illustrates a comprehensive model of character formation aligned with ecological stewardship. The results demonstrate the relevance of vision-driven leadership, pedagogical empowerment, and community collaboration in cultivating sustainable school ecosystems that support both moral and environmental development.

1. Strengthening the School's Vision and Mission in Implementing Character Education

Character education has become a central pillar in forming students' integrity, moral responsibility, and civic engagement, especially at the primary education level. In this context, strengthening the school's vision and mission serves as a strategic foundation for institutionalizing character education values across learning processes. SD Islam Siti Chodijah in Probolinggo exemplifies this effort through an integrated vision and mission explicitly aligned with Islamic values, national culture, and environmental awareness. The results of interviews with the school principal reveal a strong institutional commitment to embedding character education within the school culture. The principal stated;

"We design the school's vision and mission not just as an administrative formality, but as the main direction in shaping students' character. Our focus is to produce an Islamic generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also cares about the environment and others." (Interview, May 12, 2024)

This commitment is reflected in the school's vision: *"To become an ideal school for nurturing Islamic, morally upright, intelligent, creative, cultured, and environmentally conscious Indonesian citizens."* This vision is operationalized through seven mission points, including the development of Quranic memorization programs (tahfidz), instilling noble cultural values, fostering environmental stewardship, and building a comprehensive education management system. Observational data confirmed that these missions are not merely rhetorical, but actively influence classroom behavior, extracurricular activities, and school-wide initiatives.

For instance, mission number six and seven specifically emphasize environmental awareness and protection. Observations conducted over three weeks showed that environmental values were embedded in daily routines, such as trash separation, tree planting, and peer-to-peer accountability in maintaining classroom cleanliness. Teachers regularly reminded students of environmental responsibility, and visual materials in classrooms reflected values of sustainability and respect for nature.

Descriptive analysis of the implementation strategies indicates that vision and mission reinforcement is not solely conveyed through documentation but is consistently internalized through structured programs. These include school-wide assemblies where the vision is reiterated, student projects aligned with environmental themes, and teacher reflections linked to character indicators. Such initiatives demonstrate alignment between institutional vision and student behavior, as noted by Panoyo et al. (2019), who argued that character education becomes effective when embedded within an institution's strategic and operational framework. Moreover, interviews with two homeroom teachers confirmed that the school's mission serves as a pedagogical guide. One teacher remarked;

“We always refer to the school's mission when designing learning activities, especially in civics and crafts lessons. Students learn about social and environmental responsibility through hands-on practice, not just theory.” (Interview, May 14, 2024)

From the data gathered, it is evident that the principal's leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the school's vision and mission are actualized in everyday practice. This finding aligns with Kusdaryani et al. (2016), who emphasize that visionary school leadership is crucial in shaping institutional character culture. At SD Islam Siti Chodijah, vision-driven planning has become a basis for measurable behavioral transformation, particularly in fostering students' environmental sensitivity and Islamic values.

The results confirm that the reinforcement of vision and mission is not merely symbolic but serves as a key driver in the effective implementation of character education. Through leadership commitment, teacher involvement, and student participation, SD Islam Siti Chodijah demonstrates how a clear and actionable vision can function as an operational tool for shaping school culture and promoting environmental character development in primary education.

2. Implementation of Environment-Oriented Character Education Programs

This study found that SD Islam Siti Chodijah has systematically integrated environmental values into its character education strategy through a series of structured programs aimed at building habitual behaviors among students and staff. The principal's leadership in embedding environmental values within everyday school practices was evident during field observations and was corroborated through interviews with teaching staff. Two prominent programs observed in this implementation are SENSE (Senam Sehat) and SIROSA (Literasi Lorong Bahasa).

Field observations conducted during three school visits showed that every month, on selected Fridays, all students and teaching staff at SD Islam Siti Chodijah gather in the school courtyard to participate in group physical exercises. According to the vice principal of student affairs:

“Healthy exercise is not only a physical activity, but also a habit of healthy living and discipline for students. After exercise, they are also immediately directed to tahfidz activities, so there is continuity between the physical and spiritual.” (Interview, May 12, 2024)

The SENSE program is designed not only to improve students’ physical fitness but also to enhance mental well-being and social cohesion. Observational data showed that students were actively engaged, cheerful, and enthusiastic throughout the session. The activity creates a routine that encourages discipline, respect for collective health, and a sense of community. Analysis of the program reveals that SENSE contributes to the cultivation of multiple character traits. Physically, students benefit from enhanced cardiovascular and musculoskeletal health; socially, the program strengthens peer interaction; and mentally, it promotes stress relief and concentration. By encouraging students to adopt healthy lifestyles early, the school aims to nurture responsible future citizens who are conscious of personal and public well-being.

The SIROSA initiative utilizes a designated “language corridor” equipped with visual materials in Arabic and English, strategically placed to enhance foreign language literacy. Observations showed that the corridor featured images, vocabulary cards, and short phrases arranged under the concept of *seeing, reading, and speaking*. As students move through this area, they are exposed to words and sentences that they are encouraged to pronounce and internalize. During interviews, one of the language teachers explained:

“We want to create a learning environment that is not limited to the classroom. With SIROSA, children can learn while walking, while playing, while reading. This makes foreign languages feel close and fun.” (Interview, May 13, 2024)

This embedded literacy model aligns with research suggesting that environmental print is a powerful medium for early literacy development. Through SIROSA, students gain passive and active exposure to language elements that strengthen both their academic and character development. More importantly, the initiative fosters a culture of curiosity and self-directed learning, which are core components of character formation in primary education. The corridor becomes a symbolic and practical extension of the classroom, promoting inclusivity and engagement while also encouraging the habit of learning beyond formal instruction. The program’s success is evident from student responses during informal observation, where many were seen reciting vocabulary aloud or engaging each other in language games facilitated by visual cues on the walls.

Both SENSE and SIROSA programs illustrate how character education particularly in fostering environmental and personal responsibility can be embedded in school culture

through routine, space utilization, and teacher modeling. These practices reflect the school's commitment to its mission of nurturing environmentally and morally conscious individuals. Data triangulation through interviews, observations, and document analysis confirms that such programs are not merely ceremonial, but strategically designed and systematically implemented as part of SD Islam Siti Chodijah's broader vision. These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of habituation and environmental cues in character formation (Panoyo et al., 2019; Kusdaryani et al., 2016). Furthermore, the principal's role in aligning school programming with core values reinforces the theoretical proposition that effective character education depends on the coherence between leadership vision, school activities, and cultural norms.

The WAKABIRRU program was designed to reinforce the Islamic value of *Birrul Walidain*—a deeply rooted concept emphasizing respect, obedience, and care for parents. Conducted weekly on Sundays, this activity assigns students the task of assisting their parents at home, such as helping with household chores or gardening. Interviews with school leaders revealed that:

"We created Wakabirru so that children not only serve at school, but also get used to helping their parents at home. This is also an event to foster empathy and independence." (Principal, Interview May 15, 2024)

The documentation review showed that student reflections collected post-activity often included narratives of helping with cooking, cleaning, or simply spending meaningful time with their parents. These reflections were recorded in a weekly "Wakabirru Logbook," which was reviewed by teachers during class meetings. Analytically, the WAKABIRRU initiative serves multiple character formation purposes. Psychologically, it enhances empathy and gratitude. Socially, it bridges the school-home character continuum. This home-based character education model also supports self-regulation, as students are expected to manage time and tasks independently, thus fostering autonomy and accountability.

The JUMBERKAH program, or "*Jumat Bersih dan Berkah*," is a monthly environmental initiative that encourages collective responsibility for school hygiene. On Fridays, all school stakeholders—including students, teachers, administrative staff, and the principal—engage in school-wide cleaning routines. Based on field observations on May 10, 2024, this activity involved; classroom cleaning (sweeping, wiping windows, arranging learning materials), cleaning shared prayer equipment, and outdoor cleaning including sweeping school corridors and gardening. As noted by a 4th-grade homeroom teacher:

"We instill in students that cleanliness is part of faith. With clean Friday, students learn to love their own school environment." (Interview May 10, 2024)

The program fosters the internalization of ecological ethics and shared responsibility. Observational data confirmed that students approached the tasks with a

sense of pride and camaraderie. JUMBERKAH not only contributes to the physical cleanliness of the school but also creates a psychological climate conducive to learning—clean spaces promote focus and comfort. The program aligns with principles of experiential learning, where values are built through consistent behavior rather than just verbal instruction. Over time, such repetition transforms environmental care from obligation to habit.

Aside from monthly programs, SD Islam Siti Chodijah promotes daily habits such as pre-classroom cleaning and post-learning tidying. These routines are conducted at the beginning and end of every school day. Students are expected to; remove visible trash from their area, organize books and materials, and take turns in rotating cleaning duties under a classroom "piket" system. During site visits, students were observed independently sweeping floors, aligning chairs, and disposing of trash before exiting the classroom. This embedded habit was facilitated through consistent teacher modeling and reinforcement. As expressed by one teacher;

"We want children to realize that the classroom is a second home. If they learn to keep their classroom clean, they will also care more about the cleanliness of the environment outside of school." (Interview May 11, 2024)

Analysis of this micro-practice indicates a strong potential for instilling discipline, respect for shared spaces, and the internalization of orderliness as a life value. The act of keeping their learning space tidy translates into a form of civic responsibility that students can extend to other public domains. Thus, the implementation of WAKABIRRU, JUMBERKAH, and classroom hygiene routines reflects an integrated pedagogical design where environmental care is not taught in isolation but embedded within daily student behavior. These programs leverage religious, social, and physical dimensions of student life to foster sustainable character development. The synergy between school-based routines and home-based expectations reinforces the continuity of values formation.

The implementation of piket kelas at SD Islam Siti Chodijah is conducted after school hours, where students take turns cleaning classrooms by sweeping, arranging desks, and disposing of trash. Field observations conducted on May 15, 2024, confirmed that students perform these tasks independently without direct teacher prompting. According to the vice principal for student affairs:

"We want to accustom the children to responsibility. Class duty is part of character building, not just maintaining cleanliness." (Interview, May 15, 2024)

The role of piket kelas goes beyond hygiene. It is a pedagogical tool used to foster character values such as cooperation, time management, and leadership. This aligns with Dewey's theory of experiential learning, which emphasizes learning by doing as a means of instilling moral values (Dewey, 1938). Students also develop organizational and communication skills as they coordinate roles within the team. Moreover, this routine demonstrates the school's strategic approach to instill collective ownership of the classroom

environment. When students are given a stake in maintaining their learning space, their sense of belonging and engagement with school activities increases, reinforcing environmental responsibility as a shared duty.

The BUSPATA program encourages students to throw trash in designated bins through repetitive behavior modeling. Observations noted the availability of labeled waste bins around classrooms and hallways, and teachers consistently reminded students to use them. Students were often seen correcting peers who attempted to litter, suggesting internalization of the behavior. This initiative is supported by daily reminders during flag ceremonies and posters across campus. A grade 5 teacher stated that “The children get used to it. Even if they see a friend littering, they immediately reprimand them.” (Interview, May 10, 2024).

From a character education lens, BUSPATA promotes moral and civic values such as care for the environment, respect for shared spaces, and ethical decision-making. According to Lickona (1991), instilling character requires repeated opportunities for moral action. The BUSPATA program provides precisely this by making proper waste disposal a habitual act rather than a rule to follow. Furthermore, this program supports the goal of green schooling, as advocated by UNESCO (2021), by integrating environmental sustainability into school culture. As students learn to manage their waste responsibly, they not only contribute to a healthier school environment but also acquire ecological literacy that may influence behaviors outside school.

The SERABI program focuses on students placing their shoes neatly and keeping them clean. Though simple, this habit serves as a foundational practice in building self-discipline, respect for order, and hygiene awareness. During classroom observations, teachers were seen checking students’ shoes and praising neatness. One teacher noted that *kerapian sepatu dijadikan simbol tanggung jawab anak*. The SERABI initiative also instills spatial awareness and responsibility, teaching students to manage their personal space within the school. This aligns with the school’s vision of cultivating students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and environmentally conscious.

In the broader framework of environmental character education, personal hygiene plays a vital role in fostering responsibility, discipline, and health awareness among elementary school students. At SD Islam Siti Chodijah, two programs such as KUKIS (Kuku Kita Bersih) and METASEKA (MEncuci TAngan SEbelum dan sesudah maKAn), have been systematically implemented to internalize hygienic behavior as part of moral and environmental responsibility. These routines function not only as health-promoting measures but also as practical tools for nurturing a clean and mindful school culture.

The KUKIS program focuses on routine nail trimming and hand cleanliness as an expression of self-discipline and respect for one's body. Observations conducted during morning inspections found that teachers routinely checked students’ fingernails every Monday. In interviews, a fifth-grade homeroom teacher explained;

"Clean nails are part of manners. We teach our children to pay attention to small details like this so that they get used to living cleanly." (Interview, May 7, 2024)

This initiative is more than just cosmetic. Students were taught to reflect on how dirty nails can harbor pathogens, potentially causing illness and discomfort. The program also includes educational sessions where health officers or teachers demonstrate proper nail hygiene and explain its relevance to health, aesthetics, and social courtesy. As noted by Lickona (1991), fostering good habits in students starts from small actions that build moral character and civic virtues.

The METASEKA program aims to instill the habit of washing hands before and after meals using soap and running water. This initiative responds to observations that many students, especially in lower grades, lacked consistent hygiene practices. To address this, SD Islam Siti Chodijah installed handwashing stations near the school canteen and provided routine guidance on proper handwashing techniques. A school health officer shared;

"We not only emphasize washing hands as a clean habit, but also as a form of responsibility towards oneself and the environment." (Interview, May 13, 2024)

Hand hygiene is an essential part of personal environmental responsibility, especially in communal settings such as schools. According to WHO (2020), handwashing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in schools. In this context, METASEKA not only improves student health but also functions as pedagogical character reinforcement. Students learn to take ownership of their health, reflect on the impact of their actions, and adopt habits that benefit the broader school community. From an educational theory standpoint, this program supports the constructivist model of moral education, where values are formed through guided interaction with one's environment. Teachers model and scaffold hygienic behaviors, and students internalize these through routine application. Furthermore, integration into the curriculum is evident through class discussions, visual posters, and role-play activities that reinforce the importance of personal hygiene.

Inculcating character education in elementary students must go beyond moral theorization to encompass practical habits rooted in responsibility and sustainability. The MEPISEKA program, initiated since the establishment of SD Islam Siti Chodijah in 2018, seeks to internalize the value of personal accountability through the act of dishwashing after meals. Observations during school hours revealed a systematic practice where students, particularly in lower grades, were seen actively cleaning their dishes after the second recess, when lunch is typically consumed. A first-grade teacher remarked;

"Many children actually first learn to wash dishes at school. We consider this not just a routine, but a real character learning." (Interview, May 9, 2024)

The implementation of MEPISEKA aligns with life-skills-based education (LSBE), which UNESCO (2014) promotes as essential for preparing learners for everyday responsibilities. In this context, dishwashing teaches students environmental awareness (e.g., minimizing water usage and soap), hygiene, respect for domestic labor, and social cooperation. From a developmental perspective, this initiative supports Erikson's psychosocial theory, particularly the stage of industry vs. inferiority, by allowing children to experience a sense of competence through productive, meaningful tasks. Interviews with school administrators also affirmed that students show increased initiative in home settings after engaging with MEPISEKA at school. Thus, MEPISEKA not only develops basic hygiene awareness but also promotes character values such as discipline, environmental stewardship, empathy, and practical independence. This form of experiential learning represents a concrete manifestation of the school's vision to produce environmentally conscious and ethically grounded individuals.

Maintaining cleanliness in shared facilities is a cornerstone of communal life. Recognizing this, SD Islam Siti Chodijah integrates hygiene education into its character curriculum through explicit instruction and habitual practice: every student is required to flush the toilet and clean up after urinating (BAK) or defecating (BAB). This routine is introduced from as early as Grade 1. During school site visits, bathroom facilities were equipped with visual instructions promoting this behavior. A sanitation coordinator at the school stated that toilet cleanliness is an indicator of civilization that is taught from an early age, not only as a habit, but as a social responsibility.

This habit formation is theoretically grounded in social norm theory (Bicchieri, 2006), which argues that sustainable behavior becomes embedded through social expectations and reinforcement. The program aims to transform sanitation etiquette from obligation into norm, thereby improving school hygiene and reducing disease transmission risks. The intervention is also informed by public health frameworks, particularly the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program by WHO and UNICEF, which emphasizes school-based hygiene education to promote well-being and learning readiness. Students are not only taught how to flush and clean appropriately but also why it matters linking their actions to broader consequences such as public health, dignity, and mutual respect. Moreover, this initiative strengthens values such as respect for others, self-regulation, and environmental maintenance of essential qualities for community living. The observable outcomes include reduced complaints about sanitation, increased student participation in bathroom monitoring, and an overall increase in toilet hygiene standards.

The findings presented above indicate that strengthening the school's vision and mission aligns with the notion that a shared vision helps shape a positive school culture and supports meaningful transformation. Evidence-based studies demonstrate that transformational leadership enhances school culture and serves as a foundational factor in improving educational quality. Through the principal's commitment and the active engagement

of teachers, SD Islam Siti Chodijah illustrates that a well-articulated vision and mission provide an effective foundation for implementing environmental character education.

The improvement of teacher quality through continuous training reflects a pedagogical leadership approach that emphasizes the development of instructional competence and professional teaching practices. This aligns with Culduz's (2023) research, which highlights the importance of instructional leadership in promoting student engagement and teaching effectiveness. The practices implemented at SD Islam Siti Chodijah are consistent with literature emphasizing the need for enhancing teachers' professional capacities to foster character values (Nada et al., 2021).

Similarly, the involvement of parents and the community is recognized as a critical component in building a character-oriented ecosystem, particularly when undertaken collaboratively. The implementation at SD Islam Siti Chodijah reflects the principles of Living Values Education and a clean, inclusive school ecosystem. These programs reinforce character literacy beyond the classroom and foster a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders.

The school's monitoring and evaluation systems clearly represent best practices in school environment and leadership management. Consistent application of reward and sanction systems fosters a culture of discipline, in accordance with a holistic character education framework. Theoretically, this is consistent with the principles of Ecopedagogy and the Eco-Schools approach, which emphasize the internalization of values through environmental habits supported by regular monitoring. These programs align with Ecopedagogy and Eco-Schools strategies, both of which promote pro-sustainability values through action-based learning. The approach is also consistent with Ecopedagogy theory, which emphasizes the integration of values, organizational structures, and consciousness within environmental education. Through these structured programs, SD Islam Siti Chodijah has successfully instilled key behavioral habits, with a broader character scope and consistent cultural alignment.

These activities are also aligned with research in school environmental education and character development, which shows that environmental habits foster values of responsibility and discipline. According to Methodist et al. (2021), hygiene routines in early school settings empirically improve students' awareness and internalization of core values. Consequently, the character model implemented by SD Islam Siti Chodijah is considered effective and is recommended for adoption by similar schools. Overall, the data suggest that the principal's leadership strategy and the school's systematic approach to building environmental character education meet key principles: strengthening the vision and mission, teacher training, community engagement, structured monitoring and reward systems, and daily environmental-based practices. These findings are consistent with literature indicating that a combination of visionary leadership, instructional leadership, and environmentally grounded practices contributes to a learning ecosystem that nurtures student character.

A principal leadership model focused on environmental values and character has shown positive results in building a school culture rooted in integrity and environmental awareness. Practical recommendations include the replication of the SENSE and SIROSA systems, regular training for teachers as instructional leaders, and the development of adaptive monitoring and reward mechanisms. This study offers significant contributions to the literature on character education and ecopedagogy within rural primary education settings, while also serving as a reference for national environmental education policies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strategic school leadership plays a critical role in effectively implementing character education for environmental awareness in primary education. Strengthening the school's vision and mission serves as a foundational step in embedding values of integrity, responsibility, and ecological mindfulness within the learning culture. The findings reveal that consistent articulation of the school's vision, regular teacher training on character-based pedagogical approaches, and active parental and community engagement significantly enhance the sustainability of environmental character programs. Moreover, the application of a structured recognition and sanction system, alongside routine monitoring and evaluation, ensures the institutionalization of character values in everyday school life. The implementation of contextually designed initiatives—such as SENSE (Senam Sehat), SIROSA (Literasi Lorong Bahasa), WAKABIRRU (Waktunya Birrul Walidain), JUMBERKAH (Jumat Bersih dan Berkah), and other daily environmental behavior programs—demonstrates a comprehensive, practice-based model that supports the formation of student habits aligned with ecological and moral responsibility.

These results underscore that character education, when supported by coherent vision, pedagogical leadership, and community-based collaboration, can cultivate an environmentally conscious school culture. This model provides empirical and practical insights relevant to educational policy and future development of ecopedagogy, particularly within rural and faith-based schooling contexts.

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