

The Application of Axiological Values by the Principal of Kindergarten Handayani 1 Penajam to Teachers' Work Ethic and Children's Character

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Abstract

Keywords:

Axiological Values;
Principal Leadership;
Character Education;
Early Childhood Education.

This study aims to analyze the application of axiological values in the leadership of the principal of Kindergarten Handayani 1 Penajam and its impact on teachers' work ethic and children's character development. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis involving the principal, teachers, parents, and learning activities. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman with triangulation to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that the principal's value-based leadership, emphasizing integrity, empathy, justice, and moral responsibility, contributes to the creation of a humanistic and inclusive school culture. This leadership approach positively affects teachers' work ethic, reflected in improved discipline, professionalism, and commitment. Furthermore, the integration of axiological values through daily habituation and school-community collaboration supports holistic character development in children, including religious values, honesty, discipline, independence, responsibility, and self-confidence. The study concludes that axiological-based leadership is essential for sustaining educational quality and fostering comprehensive character development in early childhood education.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci:
Nilai-Nilai Aksiologis;
Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah;

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan nilai-nilai aksiologis dalam kepemimpinan kepala sekolah TK Handayani 1 Penajam dan dampaknya terhadap etos kerja guru serta perkembangan karakter anak. Pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif digunakan. Data dikumpulkan melalui

*Pendidikan
Karakter;
Pendidikan Anak
Usia Dini.*

wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, orang tua, dan kegiatan pembelajaran. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman dengan triangulasi untuk memastikan validitas data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan berbasis nilai kepala sekolah, yang menekankan integritas, empati, keadilan, dan tanggung jawab moral, berkontribusi pada terciptanya budaya sekolah yang humanis dan inklusif. Pendekatan kepemimpinan ini berdampak positif pada etos kerja guru, yang tercermin dalam peningkatan disiplin, profesionalisme, dan komitmen. Lebih lanjut, integrasi nilai-nilai aksiologis melalui pembiasaan sehari-hari dan kolaborasi sekolah-masyarakat mendukung perkembangan karakter holistik pada anak, termasuk nilai-nilai agama, kejujuran, disiplin, kemandirian, tanggung jawab, dan kepercayaan diri. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan berbasis aksiologi sangat penting untuk mempertahankan kualitas pendidikan dan mendorong pengembangan karakter yang komprehensif dalam pendidikan anak usia dini.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping a child's moral foundation, character, and social behavior. At the kindergarten (TK) level, the educational process focuses not only on cognitive development but also on the formation of ethical values, morality, and positive character that influence a child's holistic development (Erita et al., 2025). The principal's leadership is a key factor because the leader of an educational institution is responsible for ensuring that the entire learning process and school culture leads to the formation of children with character and values (Ducation, 2022). Therefore, the application of axiological values by the principal is important to ensure that the implementation of education is not only administrative in nature, but also oriented towards noble values that benefit children, teachers and society.

Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies the values, goals and benefits of human actions, providing a basis for educational leaders in determining what is good, appropriate and useful to be implemented in the school environment (Hartono et al., 2025). The axiological approach is very important in the educational process, connecting moral, aesthetic and humanistic values with holistic education (Antoniuk & Alendar, 2021). Leadership based on axiological values emphasizes integrity, empathy, justice, moral responsibility, and values-based decision-making. At the kindergarten level, these values are realized through a humanistic approach, ethical interactions, and a school climate that encourages positive character development

(Maulana et al., 2025). Research by (Payung, 2025; Sakti & Martha, 2023) that value-based leadership has a significant influence on teachers' work ethic, school culture, and the success of implementing character education. So, axiology underpins value-based educational leadership that promotes ethical school environments and supports teacher performance and effective character education.

Early childhood is a golden age that is crucial for the formation of a child's character, morals, and social behavior. At this stage, children's sensitivity to values, ethics, and role models is highly developed, making the school environment a primary foundation for personality development (Benish-weisman et al., 2022). The principal, as a central figure in the school's culture and values, has a strong influence on both teachers and children in the character-building process. Therefore, leadership based on axiological values is crucial to ensuring that educational practices in kindergarten are not only administrative but also morally and humanistically imbued.

Field findings at several kindergartens in Penajam Paser Utara Regency indicate that there are still variations in teacher discipline, motivation, and consistency in implementing character education. Challenges such as workload, low value role models, and rapid social change resulting from the development of the Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) also affect the quality of character education implementation. This situation emphasizes the need for principal leadership capable of internalizing and applying axiological values in building school culture, improving teacher work ethic, and optimizing children's character development. Therefore, research on the application of axiological values at the kindergarten level is important and urgent.

From a community engagement perspective, schools are not only places for formal education, but also institutions that provide social contributions through community empowerment (Rofiki, 2024). Schools are expected to establish strategic partnerships with parents, social institutions, and the surrounding community to create a conducive and character-oriented educational environment. Community engagement theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration, dialogue, and community participation in supporting child development (Telrandhe & Holding, 2025). In the context of TK Handayani 1 Penajam, the principal acts as a liaison between educational institutions and the community, so that axiological values become an important foundation in building harmonious and mutually reinforcing relationships.

In addition, community development theory reveals that education is a key instrument in increasing social capacity and the quality of life of the community (Setiawan et al., 2022). The kindergarten principal, within the framework of community development, is tasked with translating axiological values into school policies and programs that can provide direct benefits for increasing the capacity of parents and the community. According to (Koskela & Sinkkonen, 2025) parenting programs, parent training, and other collaborative activities reflect the school's role as an empowering agent.

In the context of leadership, the theory of value-based leadership emphasizes that leaders who adhere to moral and ethical principles are able to create a positive work environment, improve teachers' work ethic, and encourage professionalism (Ahmad et al., 2025). Teachers' work ethic is a crucial factor in early childhood education, as they are the figures who interact intensively with children on a daily basis. The principal's exemplary practice of axiological values can influence teachers' work ethic and their commitment to consistently implementing character education.

Previous research conducted by (Islam et al., 2023; Szecsi et al., 2025) shows that moral and ethical leadership in early childhood education has a significant impact on the quality of teacher interactions, the effectiveness of character education programs, and the creation of a humanistic school environment. The success of character education requires consistency of values between home, school, and society, so the role of the principal as a value director is very important.

However, research on the application of axiological values in kindergarten principal leadership, particularly in the North Penajam Paser region, which is undergoing social transformation due to the development of Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN), remains very limited. The rapid urban development, demographic shifts, and increasing multicultural interactions in this emerging capital city require value-based educational leadership that is adaptive, ethical, and child-centered. Early childhood institutions function not only as educational spaces but also as social foundations that shape children's character, identity, and social awareness amid ongoing transformation. Studies integrating the perspectives of community engagement, axiological values, principal leadership, teacher work ethic, and holistic child character development are also scarce. This gap reinforces the urgency of this research.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) Identify the application of axiological values by the principal in leadership practices at TK Handayani 1 Penajam; (2) Describe the influence of these values on teachers' work ethic; (3) Evaluate the contribution of the application of axiological values in the formation of children's character within the framework of school involvement with the community.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, because it seeks to understand a phenomenon in depth (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023) This study examines how the principal applies axiological values and their impact on teachers' work ethic and children's character development at Handayani 1 Kindergarten Penajam. The research was conducted at Handayani 1 Kindergarten Penajam, Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan. This location was chosen because it offers a character-building program, parental involvement, and active leadership in implementing moral and ethical values.

The research subjects included the principal, two teachers from level A, seven teachers from level B and ten students were randomly selected to observe their behavior and character development within the learning environment. The selected informants were individuals who truly understood the process of implementing axiological values and were directly involved in school activities. Data in this study were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol developed based on the study's axiological framework, containing focused questions on espoused values, exemplary leadership practices, work culture, and patterns of character formation in children. Participant observation was conducted using a structured observation rubric specifying indicators of value-based practices, including teacher-child interactions and the habituation of values within the school environment. Detailed descriptions of the interview guidelines and observation rubric are provided in the appendix to ensure transparency and methodological rigor.

In this study, variables are not defined numerically, but are examined conceptually, namely: (1) the application of axiological values by the principal, including integrity, empathy, moral responsibility, justice, and ethical role models; (2) teacher work ethic, including discipline, professionalism, commitment, and work motivation; and (3) child character, including prosocial behavior, discipline, empathy, independence, and basic morality. The data analysis procedure was carried out qualitatively interactively using the Miles & Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was guaranteed through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation, so that the findings can be academically accounted for. With this qualitative approach, the study provides a comprehensive picture of how axiological values are realized in the leadership of the principal and how these values influence teachers and the character development of early childhood.

3. Result and Discussion

Handayani 1 Kindergarten Penajam consistently instills axiological values as the primary foundation for character development in students. These values are not merely conceptual but are manifested through various habituation programs that are closely related to children's daily lives. One such activity is the almsgiving activity, which teaches caring and empathy from an early age, as well as fostering mutual respect in every interaction within the school environment, even though students have diverse backgrounds. This is in line with research (Fajrussalam et al., 2024) that the habit of regular almsgiving can foster social awareness, empathy, and responsibility in students.

The uniqueness of Handayani 1 Kindergarten Penajam lies in the diversity of its students. The school has students from three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. This is due to the strategic geographical location of Penajam Paser Utara Regency, close to Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN). This location makes the region a popular

destination for immigrants from various regions in Indonesia, resulting in the students at Handayani 1 Kindergarten coming from diverse ethnicities and cultures. This diversity provides a concrete opportunity to instill and cultivate axiological values in children's daily lives. As written by (Kusumawati & Hasanah, 2024) Multicultural education becomes a real space to introduce and bring to life the values of diversity and moral values in children's daily lives, because teachers integrate cultural diversity directly into the learning activities and daily activities of early childhood children.

The application of axiological values in this school is evident in the way teachers guide children to understand and respect differences. For example, when Muslim students perform the Dhuha prayer, non-Muslim students are instructed to remain quiet and maintain a calm atmosphere as a form of respect. Conversely, when Muslim students are curious about why their friends aren't joining in the prayer, teachers explain in simple, warm language that is easy for young children to understand. These explanations are delivered without judgment, but emphasize that everyone has their own way of worship, and all are worthy of respect. Research (Tobing et al., 2024) shows that the use of clear and simple verbal instructions and developmentally appropriate communication methods helps children understand messages.

The success of school programs and the maintenance of teacher professionalism are inseparable from the principal's role as a role model, particularly in the application of axiological values within the school environment. At Handayani 1 Kindergarten Penajam, the principal serves not only as an administrative leader but also as a figure who provides concrete examples of the values of justice, togetherness, and caring in everyday life. (Syayyiquil et al., 2025) reinforces that the principal serves as a role model for positive behavior and work culture for teachers, staff, and students.

One concrete manifestation of the application of these values is seen in the regular Saturday activity, a sharing forum with teachers. This activity provides a safe and open space for sharing, establishing collaborative agreements, designing learning modules, and addressing various issues teachers face in the classroom. Each issue is not left to become an individual burden, but is discussed and resolved collectively. In this forum, the principal positions himself as a colleague, thus eliminating awkward distances. This warm and comfortable atmosphere encourages teachers to be open, trusting, and confident in expressing their opinions. According to (Veletić et al., 2023) This positive school climate is created when the principal does not maintain a rigid formal distance, but instead encourages open communication and mutual trust between the principal and teachers.

The findings indicate that the principal demonstrates a strong commitment to axiological values, particularly justice, responsibility, and collective benefit. The principle of fairness is reflected in the equitable distribution of professional development opportunities among teachers. Rather than privileging certain individuals, the principal ensures that access to training is provided proportionally and

transparently. When resources are limited, opportunities are allocated on a rotating basis as a manifestation of distributive justice. Furthermore, teachers who participate in training are entrusted with the moral responsibility to share their knowledge with colleagues, reinforcing the values of solidarity, shared growth, and communal advancement. This practice illustrates that professional development is not merely an administrative agenda, but a value-driven effort grounded in ethical commitment and collective well-being. Research (Wistiany et al., 2024) found that organizational justice implemented by the principal had a positive and significant influence on teacher performance. The research findings were reinforced by (Sciences, 2024) that organizational justice had a strong influence on teaching effectiveness

This entire process ultimately leads to one primary goal: improving the quality of learning for students. The knowledge and experience teachers gain from various professional development activities extends beyond theory to practical application in the classroom (Makhmetova et al., 2025). So, with humanistic leadership grounded in axiological values, the principal successfully creates a collaborative, equitable, and student-centered school culture.

The principal continually evaluates all school activities, including those related to learning, teacher development programs, and student-centered activities. These evaluations are not intended as a mere attempt to find flaws, but rather as a shared reflection to determine the extent to which the programs implemented are truly having a positive impact on child development and teacher professionalism. Through ongoing evaluation, the school has a strong foundation for continuous improvement and refinement of each step taken. (Sauri & Suherman, 2025) states that periodic/continuous evaluation allows for continuous improvement in the implementation of the school's vision and mission, so that the school has a strong basis for continuously improving quality.

To strengthen the implementation of the program and the values instilled, the principal also opened up broad opportunities for collaboration with various parties. Because, according to (Wardanah, 2023) The success of educational goals is determined not only by internal school factors, but also by the support and cooperation of external stakeholders who are interconnected in achieving educational goals. The community, parents, and relevant agencies are involved as strategic partners in supporting the educational process. One form of collaboration with the community is engaging religious leaders to deliver sermons and reinforce religious values, not only to students but also to teachers. This activity serves as a means of moral and spiritual development, delivered in language appropriate to the child's world and the school context.

Each semester, the school brings in psychologists and representatives from relevant agencies to support teacher education and development. The presence of these experts helps teachers understand children's character, needs, and psychological development more deeply. One teacher stated, "With the

psychologist's sessions, we better understand why children behave in certain ways and how we should respond ethically, not emotionally." Another participant emphasized, "These programs remind us that educating children is not only about teaching lessons, but about understanding their character and emotional needs." With the support of these various parties, the school does not operate in isolation but thrives within a mutually reinforcing ecosystem. This collaborative approach reflects the principal's open, caring leadership, and focus on the sustainability of educational quality and the holistic development of students' character. This aligns with research findings (Nitte et al., 2024) explains the role of the principal in implementing Total Quality Management to shape student character through a conducive school culture, good relations with stakeholders, and strategies for involving all parties that reflect the quality of sustainable education.

Through all these efforts, the principal hopes that teachers will not only excel in theoretical knowledge but also become the educator's children long for. Teachers who are warm, patient, and fully present in their students' growth and development. This expectation aligns with the school's goal of ensuring the fulfillment of the eight characters traits required for kindergarten graduation: religious, honest, disciplined, independent, responsible, and self-confident.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussion, this study shows that axiological leadership becomes effective when values are translated into consistent institutional practices rather than remaining normative statements. Justice, empathy, and moral responsibility at TK Handayani 1 Penajam were operationalized through rotational teacher training opportunities, mandatory peer knowledge-sharing, reflective dialogue forums, and structured collaboration with psychologists and community leaders. These concrete mechanisms strengthened teachers' work ethic and fostered children's prosocial and respectful behavior in observable ways.

An important field insight is that the multicultural dynamics emerging in the development area of Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) position kindergartens as strategic spaces for early value negotiation. Diversity became an educational asset when guided by consistent ethical modeling and simple, contextual explanations adapted to children's developmental stages. This indicates that value internalization in early childhood settings is most effective through daily habituation and moral example.

Practically, schools in transitional regions should institutionalize fair professional development systems, establish structured reflective forums, and formalize collaboration with external experts to support holistic child development. For policymakers, leadership standards in early childhood education should explicitly integrate axiological competence ethical decision-making, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement into principal training and evaluation frameworks.

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