



The Role of Principals' Collaborative Leadership in Developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesia Children at SDN Petarangan

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of the principal's collaborative leadership in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan. The study was grounded in the need to strengthen character education through school culture, stakeholder participation, and consistent habituation practices at the elementary school level. A qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design was employed to obtain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices in their natural school context. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving one principal, five teachers, one educational staff member, and one chairperson of the school committee. The data were validated through source and technique triangulation and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the principal implemented collaborative leadership through open communication, regular coordination, shared decision-making, teacher coaching, role modeling, parental involvement, and collective evaluation. The Seven Habits program was implemented through daily habituation activities, including morning greetings, discipline routines, classroom cleanliness, literacy activities, group cooperation, religious activities, and polite behavior. These activities supported the development of students' discipline, responsibility, independence, cooperation, social care, creativity, and integrity within daily school life and broader school community relationships. However, the implementation still faced challenges, including inconsistent student habituation, limited parental involvement, and time constraints between academic targets and character-building activities. The study concludes that collaborative principal leadership functions as a strategic mechanism for building a sustainable character-based school culture through stakeholder engagement, shared responsibility, and continuous character habituation practices.

Introduction

Education faces increasingly complex challenges due to rapid technological development, globalization, social change, and the growing demand for students to possess strong academic and non-academic competencies (Siregar et al., 2025; Daud et al., 2026; Hoyriah et al., 2026). Schools are no longer expected to focus only on cognitive achievement. They must also develop students' character, social awareness, responsibility, independence, and ability to cooperate with others. In the Indonesian educational context, this demand has strengthened the

position of character education as an essential part of school development. Character education helps students build moral awareness, positive behavior, and social responsibility in daily life. Therefore, strengthening character education has become one of the main priorities in the implementation of education in Indonesia (Fitrah, 2020; Wahyuningsih et al., 2026; Wawan & Wasliman, 2026).

Character development in elementary schools requires more than classroom instruction. It needs a positive school culture that involves principals, teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and school committees. Character values become stronger when students repeatedly practice them in school routines, classroom interaction, peer relationships, and activities outside the classroom. A school that builds a consistent culture of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, respect, and integrity can support students in internalizing positive values. In this context, the success of character education depends on the school's ability to create shared commitment among all stakeholders. It also depends on the principal's role in guiding, coordinating, and sustaining character-based programs within the school environment (Azhar & Halwati, 2026; Basire et al., 2026; Komalasari et al., 2026).

One character education program that supports student development is the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. This program aims to cultivate seven essential habits among students, namely discipline, responsibility, independence, cooperation, creativity, social care, and integrity. The program does not function merely as an additional school activity. It seeks to build daily habits through repeated practice, role modeling, participatory activities, and integration of character values into school life. Students are expected to experience character values directly through routines such as greeting teachers, maintaining cleanliness, queuing properly, reading activities, group work, and respectful communication. These practices help students understand character not only as knowledge but also as behavior that must be practiced consistently.

The implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children requires strong leadership from the principal. Principal leadership plays a central role in determining how school programs are planned, implemented, monitored, and improved. Principals function not only as administrators but also as educational leaders who manage school resources, develop organizational culture, and guide teachers in improving the quality of learning and student development. According to Mulyasa (2022), principals are responsible for managing all educational resources so that school goals can be achieved optimally. Wahjosumidjo (2021) also emphasizes that the effectiveness of principal leadership strongly determines the quality of school culture and the achievement of educational goals.

In modern education, principals need to act as change agents who can respond to technological development, curriculum change, and the demands of twenty-first century learning. Suryana and Iskandar (2022) explain that principals play an important role in implementing the Merdeka Belajar concept through innovative and participatory leadership. Principal leadership also influences school organizational culture, teacher motivation, and efforts to improve educational quality (Hanim et al., 2020). Abrori and Muali (2020) add that principals contribute to improving human resources through teacher coaching and empowerment. Furthermore, Wening and Santosa (2020) state that principals must develop leadership strategies that fit the challenges of the digital era. Fadhillah et al. (2020) also explain that transformational leadership can significantly influence the work ethic of teachers and school staff.

Collaborative leadership has become increasingly relevant in the current school context. This leadership approach emphasizes cooperation, open communication, active participation, and shared decision-making in achieving organizational goals (Kasmawati, 2021). According to

Northouse (2021), collaborative leadership positions leaders as facilitators who build cooperative relationships and empower organizational members. In schools, this approach allows principals to involve teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and school committees in supporting school programs. Collaborative leadership can strengthen a sense of ownership because stakeholders do not only receive instructions but also participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating school activities.

Educational leadership today is no longer effective when it relies only on individual authority. Bush and Glover (2021) explain that modern educational leadership needs to foster collaboration and participation among school members. Hanim and Wazir (2021) state that principal leadership styles influence teacher work effectiveness through communication and coordination. Hulkun et al. (2024) also argue that twenty-first century principal leadership strategies should focus on human resource development through collaboration and innovation. In line with this view, Yukl (2020) explains that collaborative leadership can increase member involvement and create a more democratic work culture. These views show that collaborative leadership can support school improvement by building shared responsibility among school stakeholders.

Collaborative leadership is closely connected to the success of character education. Character formation requires consistency, and consistency cannot be created by one actor alone. Principals need to build cooperation with teachers so that character values are applied across classrooms. They also need to involve parents so that character habituation at school continues at home. Bush (2020) explains that effective educational leadership should build cooperative relationships among school members to create a positive learning environment. Anam and Malikkhah (2020) also state that teacher competency improvement can be achieved through continuous coaching and collaboration. Robbins and Judge (2022) add that a strong organizational culture can shape members' behavior and strengthen commitment toward shared goals. Murtafiah (2022) further emphasizes that professional human resource development requires leadership that supports collaboration and innovation.

The Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program needs a school culture that supports habituation, role modeling, and continuous reinforcement. Lickona (2020) explains that character education is a process of instilling moral values through habituation, role modeling, and a positive school culture. This means that character education will be stronger when schools provide repeated opportunities for students to practice positive behavior. School culture becomes an important factor in supporting student character formation (Fitrah, 2020). Ya'cub and Ga'a (2021) also explain that student character development requires a supportive learning environment and the involvement of all school members. Therefore, a principal who applies collaborative leadership can become a key actor in connecting school culture, teacher involvement, parental support, and student character development.

In many schools, character education programs still face several practical challenges. These challenges include inconsistent implementation among teachers, limited time for habituation activities, weak parental involvement, and differences in student awareness. Character programs often run well in formal school activities but become less effective when they are not reinforced in the family environment. In addition, teachers may face difficulty balancing academic targets and character habituation. These conditions show that character education must be managed as a collective school agenda. The principal needs to create a system that allows teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee to work together in maintaining program continuity.

The context of SDN Petarangan shows the importance of strengthening collaborative leadership in character education. The school has implemented various character habituation activities, including morning greetings, collective prayers, classroom cleanliness programs, literacy activities, and collaborative student projects that reflect the values promoted in the Seven Habits program. However, several challenges remain visible, such as inconsistent implementation across classes, different levels of teacher participation, limited parental involvement in reinforcing character habits at home, and the need to institutionalize collaborative practices within the school culture. These conditions indicate that the sustainability of the Seven Habits program depends not only on the existence of the program but also on the principal's ability to mobilize, coordinate, and strengthen stakeholder participation.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on the role of principals' collaborative leadership in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan. This focus is important because character education at the elementary school level requires leadership that can build shared commitment, strengthen school culture, and involve all stakeholders in a sustainable way. The study offers academic and practical relevance by highlighting how collaborative leadership can support character habituation, improve stakeholder participation, and strengthen a positive school culture. Through this focus, the study is expected to contribute to the discussion of educational leadership and character education in elementary schools, especially in the implementation of school-based character programs.

Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of how collaborative principal leadership was practiced in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan. This approach allowed the researcher to explore leadership practices, stakeholder participation, school culture, and character habituation activities based on the direct experiences of participants in their natural school context. The descriptive case study design was appropriate because the research focused on one specific educational setting and examined the phenomenon in detail without manipulating field conditions. Through this design, the study described how the principal built collaboration, how school members participated in character habituation, and how the school culture supported the implementation of the Seven Habits program.

The study emphasized the meaning, process, and context of collaborative leadership rather than numerical measurement. The main concern was not to test statistical relationships but to understand the forms of leadership, communication patterns, cooperation among stakeholders, and daily practices that contributed to student character development. Therefore, the qualitative descriptive case study design enabled the researcher to present a detailed and contextual account of the principal's role in strengthening character education through collaborative school practices.

Research Site

This research was conducted at SDN Petarangan. The school was selected because it had implemented the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program as part of its character-strengthening agenda at the elementary school level. The school also showed relevant collaborative practices, such as the involvement of teachers, educational staff, parents, and the

school committee in supporting character habituation activities. These conditions made SDN Petarangan suitable for examining the relationship between principal leadership, school culture, stakeholder collaboration, and student character development.

The selection of this site was also based on the relevance between the school context and the focus of the study. SDN Petarangan had implemented several routine character habituation activities, including morning greetings, discipline routines, classroom cleanliness, literacy activities, group cooperation, religious activities, and polite behavior habituation. These activities reflected the values promoted in the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. Therefore, SDN Petarangan provided a meaningful setting for investigating how collaborative leadership operated in a real school environment and how the program was sustained through daily school practices.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of eight informants, namely one principal, five teachers, one educational staff member, and one chairperson of the school committee. These participants were selected because they had direct knowledge and experience related to the implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. The principal was included because of his central role in planning, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating the program. Teachers were included because they implemented character habituation directly in classroom and school activities. The educational staff member was included because school staff also contributed to maintaining school routines and supporting student discipline. The chairperson of the school committee was included because the committee represented parental and community involvement in supporting school programs.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used because the study required informants who understood the research focus and were directly involved in the phenomenon being examined. The selection was not based on the number of participants but on the relevance and richness of the information they could provide. Each participant had a different role in the school, which allowed the researcher to obtain varied perspectives on collaborative leadership, character habituation, stakeholder involvement, and challenges in implementing the Seven Habits program.

Data Sources

The data in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct field observations and in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, educational staff, and the chairperson of the school committee. These data provided information about leadership practices, forms of collaboration, character habituation activities, stakeholder participation, and obstacles encountered during program implementation. Primary data were important because they captured the actual experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant school documents. These documents included school program records, schedules of habituation activities, documentation of school activities, photographs, meeting records, and other written materials related to the implementation of character-strengthening programs at SDN Petarangan. The secondary data were used to support, compare, and clarify the information obtained from interviews and observations. The use of multiple data sources helped the researcher build a more complete understanding of collaborative principal leadership in the school context.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine the real implementation of character habituation activities in the school environment. Through observation, the researcher identified how the principal interacted with teachers and students, how teachers guided students in daily routines, how students practiced the values of the Seven Habits program, and how school members worked together in maintaining a positive school culture. Observation also helped the researcher understand the natural setting of the school and the consistency of program implementation in daily activities.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, five teachers, one educational staff member, and the chairperson of the school committee. The interviews explored participants' views and experiences regarding collaborative leadership, communication patterns, decision-making processes, teacher involvement, parental participation, school committee support, and challenges in implementing the Seven Habits program. The interviews used a semi-structured format so that the researcher could guide the discussion while still allowing participants to explain their experiences openly. This format made it possible to obtain detailed information while maintaining focus on the research topic.

Documentation was used to strengthen the data obtained from observations and interviews. The researcher examined school documents related to character habituation programs, activity schedules, photographs, reports, and other relevant records. Documentation helped confirm whether the activities described by participants were supported by written or visual evidence. It also provided additional information about how the school organized, implemented, and evaluated the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program.

Research Instrument

The main instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher. The researcher played a direct role in planning the study, collecting data, interpreting information, and drawing conclusions from the findings. To support the data collection process, the researcher used observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation checklists. The observation guideline helped the researcher focus on leadership practices, school routines, student habituation, and interactions among school members. The interview guideline helped ensure that all participants were asked about relevant aspects of collaborative leadership and character education. The documentation checklist helped the researcher identify school records that supported the research focus.

The use of these supporting instruments helped maintain consistency during data collection. However, the researcher remained flexible in following important information that emerged during fieldwork. This flexibility was needed because qualitative research requires sensitivity to the context, participants' explanations, and unexpected findings in the field.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began with obtaining permission from the school. After receiving approval, the researcher identified participants who met the research criteria and explained the purpose of the study to them. The researcher then conducted observations of school activities related to the Seven Habits program. These observations focused on daily routines, teacher-student interactions, school culture, and collaborative practices among school members.

After the observation stage, the researcher conducted interviews with selected participants. Each interview was directed toward the participant's role and experience in the program. The principal was asked about leadership strategies, coordination, supervision, and program

evaluation. Teachers were asked about classroom implementation, student habituation, and support from the principal. The educational staff member was asked about involvement in school routines and student discipline. The chairperson of the school committee was asked about parental involvement and cooperation between the school and families. The researcher also collected relevant documents to strengthen and verify the data gathered from interviews and observations.

Data Validity

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from different participants, including the principal, teachers, educational staff, and the chairperson of the school committee. This process allowed the researcher to examine whether the information given by one participant was consistent with information from other participants. For example, the principal's explanation about collaborative leadership was compared with teachers' statements and school committee perspectives.

Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. Interview results were checked against observed school practices and relevant documents. This process helped reduce bias and strengthened the credibility of the findings. If the interview data showed that certain character habituation activities were implemented regularly, the researcher verified this information through direct observation and school documents. Through triangulation, the study produced findings that were more accurate, credible, and consistent with actual field conditions.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, organizing, and simplifying data that were relevant to the research focus. The researcher reviewed interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify important information related to collaborative principal leadership, stakeholder involvement, character habituation activities, school culture, and implementation challenges.

After data reduction, the researcher presented the data in narrative form. Data display helped the researcher organize findings into clear categories, such as the principal's collaborative leadership role, implementation of the Seven Habits program, leadership strategies, and challenges in program implementation. This stage made it easier to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings within the data. The researcher then drew conclusions by interpreting the findings based on the data collected from the field. The conclusions were developed gradually by comparing data across sources and techniques until a clear understanding of the phenomenon was obtained.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study are presented based on data obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation at SDN Petarangan. The data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to identify patterns related to collaborative principal leadership in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the principal, teachers, educational staff, and the chairperson of the school committee, while technique triangulation was used to compare interview findings with observation and documentation data. The analysis produced several main findings concerning the principal's role in building

collaborative leadership, the implementation of character habituation activities, leadership strategies, stakeholder participation, and challenges in sustaining the program. These findings are discussed in relation to relevant studies on collaborative leadership, school culture, and character education.

Collaborative Leadership as a Foundation for Character Education

The findings show that the principal of SDN Petarangan implemented collaborative leadership as the main foundation for developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. Based on data reduction from interviews, observations, and documentation, the principal did not position himself merely as an administrative leader. He acted as a facilitator, coordinator, motivator, and role model who encouraged school members to participate in strengthening student character. This finding indicates that collaborative leadership at SDN Petarangan was not limited to formal coordination but was reflected in daily interactions, shared decision-making, teacher involvement, parental communication, and collective responsibility in implementing character habituation activities. Interview data showed that the principal viewed character education as a collective responsibility. The principal stated,

“Character habituation programs will not succeed if they are carried out only by the principal. All teachers, educational staff, and even parents must be involved so that children’s habituation can run consistently.” (KS/W/12-02-2026).

This statement indicates that the principal understood the importance of shared participation in sustaining the Seven Habits program. The interview findings were supported by observations showing that the principal actively monitored morning routines, communicated with teachers, and provided direct examples of discipline and polite interaction in the school environment. Documentation of school activities also showed that character habituation programs were not implemented as incidental activities but were scheduled and integrated into regular school routines.

The principal’s collaborative leadership was reflected in regular coordination meetings, task distribution among teachers, informal communication, and collective evaluation of character habituation activities. Teachers stated that the principal involved them in planning and evaluating school programs. One teacher explained,

“The principal always invites teachers to discuss before the program is implemented. We are given opportunities to express our opinions and help determine activities suitable for students’ conditions.” (G1/W/15-02-2026).

Another teacher added,

“Whenever there are obstacles in implementing habituation activities, the principal immediately conducts joint evaluations so that solutions can be found together.” (G3/W/15-02-2026).

These findings demonstrate that the principal created participatory spaces that allowed teachers to contribute ideas, identify problems, and formulate solutions collectively.

The finding is consistent with Kasmawati (2021), who explains that collaborative leadership emphasizes cooperation, open communication, active participation, and shared decision-making. In the context of SDN Petarangan, this leadership model strengthened teachers’ sense of ownership toward character education programs. Teachers did not only carry out instructions from the principal. They became active actors who helped design, implement, and improve the program. This condition also supports Northouse (2021), who states that collaborative leadership positions leaders as facilitators who empower organizational members and build

cooperative relationships. The principal's leadership style created a work climate in which teachers, educational staff, and the school committee could contribute according to their respective roles.

The involvement of the school committee and parents also became an important element of collaborative leadership at SDN Petarangan. The chairperson of the school committee stated,

"The school often invites parents to cooperate in habituating children's positive behavior at home so that school programs continue within the family environment." (KM/W/18-02-2026).

This finding shows that the school attempted to extend character education beyond the school environment. Character habituation was not treated as a responsibility of teachers alone. It was linked to family support and parental involvement. This finding strengthens Epstein's (2018) view that school, family, and community partnerships are important in supporting students' positive development.

From the perspective of educational leadership, the findings indicate that collaborative leadership serves as a social mechanism that transforms individual responsibility into collective responsibility. Through communication, coordination, and shared evaluation, the principal developed a common understanding among school members regarding the importance of character habituation. This process gradually strengthened school culture and increased stakeholder commitment. Bush and Glover (2021) argue that modern educational leadership is no longer centered on individual authority but on the ability to foster collaboration and participation among school members. The findings of this study confirm that collaborative leadership can support character education when the principal builds shared responsibility, maintains open communication, and encourages stakeholder participation.

Implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children through School Culture

The implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan was carried out through routine habituation activities embedded in the school culture. The program aimed to develop students' discipline, responsibility, independence, cooperation, creativity, social care, and integrity. Based on observations, these values were not taught only through verbal instruction. They were practiced through daily school routines, classroom activities, peer interaction, and teacher role modeling. This finding shows that the Seven Habits program functioned as a practical character education strategy that connected values with concrete student behavior.

The observation results showed that the program was implemented through morning greetings, orderly lining up, classroom cleanliness, literacy activities, group learning, religious activities, and polite communication between students and teachers. One teacher stated,

"Every morning students are accustomed to greeting teachers, lining up orderly, and cleaning the classroom before learning begins. This habituation is carried out every day so that it becomes a habit for students." (G2/W/15-02-2026).

This finding indicates that discipline and responsibility were developed through repeated practice. Students were trained to arrive on time, follow school rules, maintain classroom cleanliness, and respect the school environment.

The Seven Habits program also strengthened cooperation and social care through group learning and collaborative classroom activities. A teacher explained,

"In group learning activities, students are trained to cooperate and help one another. Teachers also remind students to be responsible for their respective tasks." (G4/W/16-02-2026).

Observation data supported this statement. Students worked in groups, shared learning tasks, and helped peers who had difficulty completing classroom assignments. These activities encouraged students to practice cooperation, responsibility, and respect for others. The program also supported student independence because students were gradually trained to manage simple tasks without constant teacher instruction.

Documentation data supported the observation and interview findings. School activity schedules, photographs, and program records showed that character habituation activities were integrated into daily and weekly school routines. These documents confirmed that the Seven Habits program was not only a written policy but also a practical school agenda. This evidence strengthens the credibility of the findings because the same pattern appeared in interview data, observation notes, and school documents. Through technique triangulation, the study found that the program was implemented through a combination of routine, role modeling, and reinforcement.

The principal emphasized that character formation must be developed through direct practice. He stated,

"We strive to ensure that character building is not only delivered through theory, but also through direct habituation in students' daily lives at school." (KS/W/12-02-2026).

This statement is important because it shows that the school understood character education as a process of internalization. Character values need to be repeated, modeled, and reinforced until they become part of students' behavior. This finding aligns with Lickona (2020), who explains that character education involves moral value internalization through habituation, role modeling, and a positive school culture.

The findings also support Berkowitz and Bier (2021), who argue that character education becomes more effective when implemented through school culture and consistent positive habituation. At SDN Petarangan, the Seven Habits program was embedded in the rhythm of school life. Students encountered character values not only in formal lessons but also in the way they entered the classroom, interacted with teachers, cleaned the environment, participated in group learning, and behaved toward peers. This condition shows that character education requires a whole-school approach. It cannot depend only on classroom teaching. It must be supported by school leadership, teacher consistency, student participation, and parental reinforcement.

The implementation of the Seven Habits program also reflects the importance of organizational culture in shaping behavior. Robbins and Judge (2022) explain that organizational culture can shape members' behavior and strengthen commitment toward shared goals. In this study, school culture functioned as a medium for shaping student behavior. When discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and politeness were practiced repeatedly in school routines, students became more familiar with these values. Although the internalization process varied among students, the school culture provided a consistent environment that supported character formation.

Principal Strategies in Strengthening Character Habituation

The findings reveal that the principal implemented several strategies to strengthen the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. These strategies included role modeling, teacher

coaching, routine coordination, school culture strengthening, parental involvement, and continuous evaluation. These strategies show that collaborative leadership at SDN Petarangan was not only relational but also practical. The principal did not only invite participation. He created mechanisms that supported the continuity of character habituation.

The first strategy was role modeling. The principal provided examples of discipline, responsibility, respectful communication, and involvement in school activities. The principal stated,

“If we want students to be disciplined, then the principal and teachers must first set an example. Role modeling is an essential part of students’ character formation.” (KS/W/12-02-2026).

This statement shows that the principal regarded leadership behavior as a direct source of character learning. Observation data confirmed that the principal participated in school routines and communicated positively with teachers and students. This role modeling created consistency between what the school taught and what school leaders practiced.

The second strategy was teacher coaching. The principal guided teachers through coordination meetings, informal discussions, and regular evaluations. Teacher coaching was important because teachers acted as direct implementers of character habituation in classrooms and school activities. One teacher stated,

“The principal always reminds teachers not to become discouraged in guiding students because character formation requires a long and consistent process.” (G5/W/16-02-2026).

This finding indicates that the principal understood the long-term nature of character education. Teachers needed motivation and support because student character formation requires repetition, patience, and consistency.

The third strategy was strengthening cooperation between school and family. The principal emphasized that character habituation would be more effective when supported at home. The chairperson of the school committee stated,

“The school often provides information to parents regarding the importance of character habituation at home so that children demonstrate consistent behavior both at school and at home.” (KM/W/18-02-2026).

This finding shows that the school attempted to reduce the gap between school-based character education and home-based behavior. Parental involvement became important because students spend significant time outside school. Without reinforcement at home, character habituation at school may become less stable.

The fourth strategy was continuous evaluation. The principal conducted evaluations with teachers to identify obstacles and improve implementation. This strategy shows that collaborative leadership also involved reflective practice. Teachers were given opportunities to report problems, propose solutions, and adjust activities based on student needs. This finding aligns with Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018), who state that collaborative professionalism strengthens schools’ capacity to solve problems through shared reflection and cooperation. At SDN Petarangan, evaluation was not only an administrative process. It became a space for collective learning among school members.

These strategies are consistent with Leithwood et al. (2020), who explain that effective school leadership influences school culture and student development through consistent direction,

support, and role modeling. The findings also support Fullan (2018), who emphasizes that school culture change requires the involvement of all school members. In this study, the principal's strategies helped connect leadership, teacher participation, parental involvement, and student habituation. This connection became the main mechanism that supported the implementation of the Seven Habits program.

From a theoretical perspective, the principal's strategies show that collaborative leadership can function as a cultural leadership practice. The principal did not only manage school programs but also shaped norms, habits, and relationships within the school. By involving teachers and parents, the principal distributed responsibility for character education. This finding supports the concept of distributed leadership, in which leadership functions are shared among organizational members to achieve common goals. The principal remained the main coordinator, but teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee also played important roles in sustaining the program.

Stakeholder Participation in Supporting the Seven Habits Program

The findings indicate that stakeholder participation was a central element in the implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children program. Teachers, educational staff, parents, and the school committee contributed to character habituation based on their respective roles. Teachers guided students in classroom learning and daily routines. Educational staff supported school order and discipline. Parents reinforced character values at home. The school committee helped connect school programs with parental and community support.

Teacher participation was the most visible form of stakeholder involvement. Teachers acted as instructors, mentors, role models, and evaluators of student behavior. They guided students in maintaining cleanliness, practicing discipline, cooperating in groups, and showing respect toward others. The findings show that teachers' involvement increased because the principal created opportunities for discussion and shared decision-making. This condition supports Day et al. (2020), who explain that teacher involvement is important in creating positive learning environments and supporting student social development.

Educational staff also supported the program by helping maintain order and routine in the school environment. Although their role was not as dominant as that of teachers, their involvement strengthened the overall school culture. Their participation showed that character education was not limited to the classroom. It involved all adults in the school environment. This finding is relevant to the whole-school approach in character education, which views all school members as contributors to student development.

Parental participation was also important, although it still required strengthening. The school communicated with parents through the school committee and direct communication channels. Parents were expected to support students' discipline, responsibility, and polite behavior at home. This finding confirms OECD (2021), which explains that collaborative school cultures can strengthen students' social and emotional learning when schools involve broader educational actors. However, the findings also show that parental involvement was not yet optimal. Some parents had limited time, different levels of awareness, or limited understanding of their role in reinforcing character habituation.

The school committee played a bridging role between the school and parents (Kuswanda et al., 2026; Aryanti et al., 2026). The chairperson of the school committee supported the school's effort to promote positive behavior at home. This role was important because the committee helped communicate school expectations to families. The involvement of the school committee

also strengthened the legitimacy of the program because parents were not only recipients of information but also part of the school's collaborative network.

These findings indicate that collaborative leadership increased stakeholder participation by creating a shared sense of responsibility. The principal's ability to involve various actors helped transform the Seven Habits program from a school policy into a collective agenda. This condition differentiates the present study from previous studies that focus mainly on principal leadership in improving teacher performance or school effectiveness. This study shows that collaborative leadership also contributes to student character development by integrating school, family, and community participation.

Challenges in Sustaining the Seven Habits Program

The implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan still faced several challenges. The main challenges included inconsistent student habituation, varied teacher consistency, limited parental involvement, and limited time for character activities amid academic demands. These challenges were identified through interviews, observations, and documentation review. The findings show that character education is a long-term process that requires continuity, reinforcement, and support from multiple environments.

One teacher stated,

"There are still some students who need to be continuously reminded to remain disciplined, especially in maintaining cleanliness and complying with school regulations." (G2/W/15-02-2026).

This statement indicates that not all students internalized character values at the same pace. Observation data also showed that some students still needed repeated reminders to follow school routines. This variation is natural in elementary school settings because students have different family backgrounds, levels of maturity, prior habits, and social experiences. Therefore, character habituation requires patience and consistent reinforcement. Another challenge was limited parental involvement. One teacher explained,

"Sometimes habituation at school runs well, but it is not fully supported at home, so students return to repeating less desirable habits." (G1/W/15-02-2026).

This finding shows that the continuity of character education can be disrupted when school values are not reinforced in the family environment. The issue is not only technical but also contextual. Some parents may have limited time due to work demands. Others may not fully understand the importance of consistent character habituation at home. This condition shows the need for stronger school-family partnerships.

Time constraints also became a challenge. The principal stated,

"Our challenge is ensuring that character habituation continues without reducing the academic learning targets that students must achieve." (KS/W/12-02-2026).

This statement reflects a common tension in schools between academic targets and character development. Teachers need to integrate character values into learning activities so that the program does not compete with academic instruction. This finding indicates that character education must be designed as an integrated part of school life rather than as an additional burden.

The findings support Rizkita and Supriyanto (2020), who explain that one major challenge in character education is maintaining consistency in school culture and stakeholder involvement. Hanum et al. (2020) also state that successful character strengthening requires intensive

cooperation between schools and families. In the case of SDN Petarangan, the challenges did not stop the implementation of the program. The principal and teachers continued to conduct evaluations, strengthen communication, and improve coordination. This response shows that collaborative leadership helped the school build a problem-solving culture.

The challenges found in this study also have deeper implications. Inconsistent student participation reflects differences in students' social environments and prior habituation. Limited parental involvement reflects the need for more structured communication between school and family. Time constraints reflect the need to integrate character education with academic learning. These findings suggest that sustainable character education requires systemic support. Schools need policies, schedules, communication systems, and teacher capacity-building programs that recognize character development as an essential part of school effectiveness.

Collaborative Leadership as a Mechanism for Sustainable Character Education

The findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative leadership plays an important role in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan. Collaborative leadership created a positive school culture, increased teacher involvement, strengthened parental communication, and supported student character habituation through repeated practice. These findings reinforce the view that school leadership affects character education not only through formal policy but also through communication, role modeling, cooperation, and cultural development.

The principal's leadership influenced student character development indirectly. The principal did not directly shape every student's behavior. Instead, he built a collaborative system that enabled teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee to contribute to character formation. This system created a supportive environment for students to practice discipline, responsibility, cooperation, social care, independence, creativity, and integrity. Therefore, the relationship between collaborative leadership and student character development can be understood as an indirect relationship mediated by stakeholder engagement and positive school culture.

This finding extends previous studies on collaborative leadership. Earlier studies often focused on the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance, educational quality, and organizational effectiveness. This study shows that collaborative leadership also has an important role in character education. The principal's collaborative practices helped transform character education from a formal program into daily school culture. This finding contributes to educational leadership scholarship by positioning collaborative leadership as both a managerial and cultural process.

The findings are consistent with Hallinger et al. (2019), who explain that collaborative leadership strengthens professional relationships and improves the implementation of educational programs. In SDN Petarangan, collaborative leadership strengthened teacher participation and encouraged shared responsibility. Teachers became more involved because they were included in planning, implementation, and evaluation. This condition also supports Bush and Glover (2021), who emphasize that effective school leadership requires cooperation with school communities to achieve educational goals.

The study also confirms the importance of role modeling in character education. The principal and teachers served as examples for students. Students were more likely to understand discipline, responsibility, and polite behavior when they observed these values in adults around them. This finding supports Lickona (2020), who states that character education requires

habituation and role modeling. It also supports Berkowitz and Bier (2021), who argue that character education becomes more effective when embedded in school culture.

The implementation of the Seven Habits program at SDN Petarangan reflects a whole-school approach. Character education was not limited to classroom instruction. It involved daily routines, teacher guidance, school rules, peer interaction, parental support, and school committee involvement. This finding is relevant to contemporary discussions on social-emotional learning and collaborative school culture. OECD (2021) emphasizes that social and emotional skills develop through interaction with the school environment, teachers, peers, and families. The findings of this study show that the Seven Habits program can support these skills when implemented through collaborative leadership and consistent school culture.

The study also shows that collaborative leadership strengthens collective ownership. Teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee did not only support the program passively. They became part of the program implementation process. This collective ownership is important because character education requires long-term consistency. When character programs depend only on the principal, implementation may weaken when leadership changes. However, when programs are owned collectively by school members, they have stronger potential for sustainability.

The challenges identified in this study show that collaborative leadership is necessary but not sufficient by itself. Stronger parental involvement, more consistent teacher implementation, and better integration of character values into learning activities are still needed. These challenges suggest that schools should develop clearer mechanisms for monitoring student habituation, communicating with parents, and integrating character values into academic instruction. For policymakers, the findings indicate that character education programs should be supported through practical guidelines, teacher training, and school-family partnership models.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the principal's collaborative leadership at SDN Petarangan functioned as a strategic catalyst for sustainable character education. The principal built communication, encouraged participation, distributed responsibilities, provided role models, and sustained evaluation. These practices created a school culture that supported the implementation of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children. The study contributes to the literature by showing that collaborative leadership can strengthen character education through stakeholder engagement, positive school culture, and consistent habituation. Thus, effective character education at the elementary school level requires not only a well-designed program but also leadership that can mobilize the whole school community toward shared character-building goals.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the principal's collaborative leadership plays a central role in developing the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children at SDN Petarangan by strengthening communication, participation, coordination, role modeling, and shared responsibility among school stakeholders. The findings show that the program was implemented through daily habituation activities, including discipline routines, morning greetings, classroom cleanliness, literacy activities, group cooperation, religious activities, and polite behavior, which gradually shaped students' responsibility, independence, cooperation, social care, creativity, and integrity. The principal supported the program by involving teachers, educational staff, parents, and the school committee in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, so that character education became part of the school culture rather than a separate activity. Although

the program still faced challenges, such as inconsistent student habituation, limited parental involvement, and time constraints between academic targets and character-building activities, the principal and teachers continued to address these issues through regular evaluation and collaborative problem-solving. Therefore, collaborative leadership at SDN Petarangan can be understood as a strategic mechanism for building a sustainable character-based school culture and strengthening elementary students' character development through consistent habituation and stakeholder engagement.

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