

Implementation of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program to Realize a Character-Based School Culture at SMPN 3 Baleendah

Waska Warta¹, Ana Suryana², Mulyati³, Rina Nuraeni⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Islam Nusantara, Bandung, Indonesia.

Email: waskawarta@gmail.com, anasuryan1973@gmail.com, mulyatitie72@gmail.com,
rinanuraeni155@gmail.com

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of school management in implementing the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program" as a strategy for engineering a character-based school culture. Amidst the moral crisis among students and the challenges of digital disruption, the gap between character education policies and operational practices in schools has become a crucial issue. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, this study examines managerial dynamics through the lens of Deming's PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The research findings indicate that: (1) The Planning stage of the 7 Habits Program at SMPN 3 Baleendah is not merely an administrative task but serves as a crucial foundation for the school's transformation. The planning is carried out in a structured, data-based, and participatory manner, ensuring that the program truly aligns with students' character-building needs and complies with national policies; (2) The Do stage was driven by the instructional exemplary leadership and integration of the hidden curriculum; (3) The Check stage applied fact-based management that revealed the gap between public and private character; and (4) The Act stage ensured sustainability through external correction mechanisms and internal standardization (refreezing). The study concluded that the integration of PDCA quality management discipline with transformational leadership is a determining variable in realizing a character-based school ecosystem.*

Keywords: *PDCA Cycle, Character Education, School Culture.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas manajemen sekolah dalam mengimplementasikan "Program 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat" sebagai strategi rekayasa budaya sekolah berkarakter. Di tengah krisis moral pelajar dan tantangan disrupsi digital, kesenjangan antara kebijakan pendidikan karakter dan praktik operasional di sekolah menjadi isu krusial. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain studi kasus di SMPN 3 Baleendah Kabupaten Bandung. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam, dan studi dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) Tahap Plan Program 7 Kebiasaan di SMPN 3 Baleendah bukan sekadar tugas administratif, tetapi menjadi dasar penting bagi keberhasilan perubahan di sekolah. Perencanaan dilakukan secara terarah, melibatkan berbagai pihak, dan berdasarkan data, sehingga program yang dibuat benar-benar sesuai kebutuhan karakter siswa dan selaras dengan kebijakan nasional; (2) Tahap Do didorong oleh keteladanan instruksional pemimpin dan integrasi kurikulum tersembunyi; (3) Tahap Check menerapkan manajemen berbasis fakta yang menyingkap kesenjangan antara karakter publik dan privat; dan (4) Tahap Act menjamin keberlanjutan melalui mekanisme koreksi eksternal dan standarisasi internal (refreezing). Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi disiplin manajemen mutu PDCA dengan kepemimpinan transformasional adalah variabel determinan dalam mewujudkan ekosistem sekolah yang berkarakter.

Kata Kunci: Siklus PDCA, Pendidikan Karakter, Budaya Sekolah.

Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape in the 21st century is now standing at a paradoxical crossroad. On one hand, advancements in information and communication technology have democratized access to knowledge exponentially. However, on the other hand, global and national educational institutions are faced with a fundamental crisis that Lickona (2013) refers to as *the death of character*. The phenomenon of moral degradation marked by increasing juvenile violence, cyberbullying, and the fading of academic integrity serves as a warning signal that an education system too oriented towards cognitive achievements has failed to form whole human beings. Schools, traditionally believed to be fortresses of moral defense, are now overwhelmed in facing the onslaught of new values brought by unfiltered globalization currents.

Responding to this anxiety, the Indonesian government has reoriented policies through Strengthening Character Education (PPK) and the Pancasila Student Profile vision. Regulatory mandates, ranging from Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017 to the Joint Circular Letter (SEB) of 3 Ministers of 2025, explicitly demand educational units to transform from mere places of knowledge transfer into centers of value cultivation. This demand asserts that character education can no longer be done partially or merely as an insert in subjects, but must be integrated into the school culture. As defined by Deal and Peterson (2016), school culture is a tapestry of values, norms, and beliefs formed over a long period that influences how school members think and act.

One strategic approach to answer this implementation challenge is through a structured habituation program, such as the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program." This program is a contextual adaptation of the self-effectiveness concept designed to build students' personal and interpersonal maturity, covering: (1) Waking Up Early, (2) Worshiping, (3) Exercising, (4) Eating Healthy, (5) Loving to Learn, (6) Socializing/Being Social, and (7) Sleeping Early. However, empirical reality shows that many character programs that are conceptually ideal often fail at the execution stage due to the weakness of the management system supporting them. Programs often run sporadically, lose momentum, and end up merely as slogans on school walls without substantive impact on behavioral change.

To bridge the gap between policy idealism and practical reality, the application of strict quality management principles is required. One management model most relevant to the context of continuous school culture improvement is the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle introduced by W. Edwards Deming. Sallis (2012) emphasizes that a quality school is a school that constantly carries out continuous improvement based on data, not assumptions. The use of PDCA theory offers a systematic structure to ensure that character programs are planned thoroughly, executed consistently, evaluated objectively, and followed up with standard improvements.

SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, represents a unique case where the school consciously adopted the "7 Habits Program" as a flagship strategy for school culture formation. Preliminary studies show a strong institutional commitment, but also reveal the dynamics of implementation gaps. There are variations in teacher acceptance levels, inconsistency in the implementation of habits in the students' domestic realm, and challenges in measuring character evaluation which is qualitative in nature. This phenomenon indicates that program innovation alone is not enough without being accompanied by adequate managerial capacity to oversee it.

The main weakness in our education management often lies in the weakness of supervision and quality control functions.

Previous research regarding character education tends to be polarized on philosophical-normative studies or learning outcome effectiveness studies (output-oriented). There is still a scarcity of literature (research gap) that specifically dissects the managerial "process" (process-oriented) using the PDCA analysis tool in the context of character cultivation in public schools with all their bureaucratic complexities. Therefore, this study aims to fill this void by analyzing in depth the effectiveness of the principal's management at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, in navigating the PDCA cycle to transform the 7 Habits program into a character-based school culture.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design, aiming to dissect the phenomenon of character education management holistically in its natural setting. The selection of this method is based on the characteristics of the problem being studied, namely concerning managerial processes, behavioral dynamics, and the construction of organizational culture which is dynamic. The research location is at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, West Java.

Research subjects were determined through purposive sampling techniques, including the Principal as the key manager, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Teachers (Homeroom Teachers and the Character Strengthening Team as well as the Violence Prevention and Handling Team/TPPK), as well as representatives of Students and the School Committee. Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods: (1) In-depth interviews to explore managerial perspectives and leadership strategies; (2) Participant observation to observe the implementation of the 7 Habits routines and school culture artifacts; and (3) Documentation study on the Annual Work Plan (RKT), School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS), Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), and program evaluation reports.

Data analysis was performed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was tested through source and technique triangulation, as well as the extension of the researcher's participation in the field to guarantee the credibility of findings.

Result and Discussion

Strategic Planning (Plan): Participatory Vision Construction and Systemic Integration

In modern education quality management, the planning stage (Plan) occupies a very fundamental position as the main determinant of the success of a school innovation. This phase is not merely an administrative routine to meet bureaucratic standards, but an intellectual and managerial process that distinguishes between schools that move reactively-incidentally and schools that have a strategic-transformational vision. Based on in-depth research findings at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, the planning process of the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program" was constructed through a systematic and holistic approach. School management did not immediately adopt the program from outside, but contextualized the vision through data-based needs analysis (evidence-based planning). The principal began this process by dissecting the education report card data and conducting factual observations

on the condition of student character degradation post-pandemic, such as a decline in discipline and healthy lifestyles. This step aligns with strategic management principles emphasizing that strategy formulation must begin with an accurate diagnosis of internal and external environments. Furthermore, this planning was also designed as an adaptive response to national regulatory dynamics, specifically the Joint Circular Letter (SEB) of 3 Ministers of 2025, which demands character strengthening through habituation methods in educational units.

The success of the planning stage at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency is highly influenced by an inclusive leadership style through the application of a participatory planning approach. Research findings indicate that the principal actively involved all key stakeholders, including the board of teachers, educational staff, and the school committee, in a series of intensive Work Meetings (Raker). This forum was not only informative but deliberative, where operational indicators for each habit (e.g., parameters for "Waking Up Early" or nutritional standards for "Eating Healthy") were formulated together. This involvement is a crucial managerial strategy to minimize resistance and build a sense of ownership among program implementers. In the perspective of Organizational Change theory proposed by Kurt Lewin, this participatory planning stage serves as the Unfreezing phase. In this phase, the status quo of old comfort is "shaken," and a collective awareness of the urgency for change is built. By involving teachers from the design phase, school management effectively changed teachers' perceptions of the program; from initially being seen as a burdensome top-down instruction, into a collectively agreed-upon solution to improve school quality. This confirms that participation in decision-making correlates positively with organizational commitment (Anwar, 2024; Sulastri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the quality of planning at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency is reflected in the systemic integration between the program vision and logistical and financial support. Often, the failure of character education implementation in Indonesia is caused by the lack of synchronization between vision rhetoric and real resource allocation. However, this study found that the 7 Habits Program has been formally integrated into the school's Annual Work Plan (RKT) document and supported by specific budget posts in the School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS). This budget allocation is directed towards the provision of vital supporting facilities, such as the renovation of ablution areas to support worship habits, procurement of sports equipment, and printing of visual educational media in the canteen and school corridors. This step validates the School-Based Management (SBM) theory which states that school autonomy in managing resources is an absolute prerequisite for improving education quality. Without budget support planned thoroughly, character education programs will only stop at the level of moral discourse without sustainable execution.

Besides logistical aspects, planning at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency also includes the design of control and evaluation instruments from an early stage. School management realizes that character is an entity difficult to measure, so they designed the "Character Control Pocket Book" as a daily student monitoring tool. This planning also includes strategies for parental involvement through learning contracts, proving the school's deep understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Three Centers of Education concept. The school plans strategic alliances with parents to oversee habits that are in the domestic realm, such as "Sleeping Early" and "Waking Up Early." This strategy indicates that school management tries to expand its managerial influence beyond the physical boundaries of the school (sphere of influence), acknowledging that character education requires a consistent ecosystem between home and

school. Synthetically, the Plan stage at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency has laid a solid foundation for school culture transformation by meeting SMART principles (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). This mature planning becomes a crucial initial determinant, ensuring that the subsequent implementation stage has a clear and measurable directional guide (Suherman et al., 2025).

Program Implementation (Do): Instructional Exemplary and Value Internalization

The implementation stage (Do) is a critical phase in the PDCA cycle where abstract ideas that have been planned transform into empirical reality in the form of real actions and behaviors. At SMPN 3 Baleendah, the implementation of the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program" represents complex interaction dynamics between managerial structure, organizational culture, and individual behavior. In-depth analysis of field findings shows that the success of this phase relies heavily on the effectiveness of the Actuating function carried out through two main strategies: leadership exemplary (modeling) and environmental conditioning. The principal not only acts as an administrator but appears as an instructional leader who consistently applies the principle of *walk the talk*. Observation findings confirm that the principal, homeroom teachers, and teachers are present earliest at the school gate to greet students (Morning Greeting), directly lead the execution of Dhuha prayer, and demonstratively consume healthy food together with teachers and staff.

In the perspective of Transformational Leadership theory, this behavior of the principal is a manifestation of the Idealized Influence dimension. A leader capable of being an admired moral example will have the power to influence followers without needing to use formal authority coercion. This instructional exemplary functions as a high moral standard, which subtly "forces" other school citizens, both teachers and students, to adjust their behavior to that standard. When teachers see their leader consistently running the program, psychological resistance to refuse the program will crumble on its own. This confirms that in the context of character education, the most effective curriculum is the exemplary nature of the educator themselves.

Besides the leadership aspect, program implementation at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency also shows systematic efforts to integrate character values into the hidden curriculum. Giroux and Penna (1983) define the hidden curriculum as norms and values taught implicitly through routines and social interactions in school. The school creates environmental engineering that provides consistent stimuli for the formation of adaptive student behavior. Routines such as routinely scheduled Dhuha prayer, Friday prayers, female student sessions (*keputrian*), Wednesday and Friday gymnastics activities involving all school citizens, as well as strict rules prohibiting the sale of junk food, artificial sweeteners, and preservatives in the canteen, are real forms of such environmental conditioning. This aligns with Skinner's Behaviorism theory on Operant Conditioning, where human behavior is formed through the consequences of their interaction with the environment. By creating a conducive and orderly environment, the school effectively forms new habits (habit formation) in students through consistent repetition.

The implementation analysis also highlights the school management's approach in managing resistance and challenges in the field. Findings show that the school prefers to use a humanist coaching and mentoring approach rather than a punitive approach (punishment) towards teachers or students who are not yet disciplined. Management realizes that behavioral

change requires time and adaptation processes. Therefore, teachers experiencing difficulties in integrating character values in class are given assistance, not sanctions. This persuasive approach is important to keep the school climate positive and conducive to learning. If implementation is forced with an iron fist, only artificial compliance will be formed, which will disappear once supervision is removed.

However, findings in the field indicate an indication of a shift in student motivation, from external motivation towards internal motivation. Students begin to show initiative to perform good habits such as refusing unhealthy food or reminding friends to pray due to autonomous awareness, not merely fear of being watched by teachers. This transition signals that the value internalization process is ongoing effectively. Value internalization is the ultimate goal of character education, where external norms are transformed into internal values that become part of the student's self-identity. The success of the Do phase at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency proves that the combination of leader exemplary, system consistency, and humanist approach is capable of turning program routines into seeds of a resilient and character-based school culture.

Performance Evaluation (Check): Fact-Based Management and Gap Identification

The evaluation phase (Check) in the PDCA cycle at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency functions as a quality control mechanism and a critical mirror reflecting the reality of program performance objectively. In the framework of Total Quality Management (TQM), this stage is a manifestation of the Fact-Based Management principle. School management strives to avoid decision-making based on assumptions or intuition alone, but refers to empirical data collected through valid instruments. SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency uses the "7 KAIH Pocket Book" as the main daily monitoring instrument, supported by a tiered supervision mechanism involving homeroom teachers and the Student Character Strengthening Team as well as the TPPK (Violence Prevention and Handling Team). This approach is a serious effort by the school to measure the quality of human character which is inherently qualitative and difficult to measure.

In-depth analysis of evaluation data reveals an interesting phenomenon regarding the dichotomy between Public Character and Private Character. Evaluation findings show that habits which are collective and performed in the school's public space, such as "Worshipping" (congregational prayer) and "Exercising" (joint gymnastics), reached very high consistency levels, namely above 90%. This high compliance can be explained through Social Control theory, where individual behavior in public spaces tends to conform to group norms due to social surveillance and peer pressure. A controlled school environment makes it easy for teachers to monitor and correct student behavior directly.

Conversely, evaluation also revealed significant gaps in habits located in the domestic or private realm, such as "Sleeping Early" and "Waking Up Early," which only reached consistency levels of 65-70%. This low achievement reveals the limits of the school's authority reach and the weakness of synergy with the family microsystem. These findings confirm Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development, which states that child development is influenced by the interaction of various environmental systems, including the school microsystem and the family microsystem. Asynchrony between school rules and parenting patterns at home becomes a major inhibiting factor for holistic character formation. This evaluation provides crucial insight for school management that managerial intervention cannot

focus only on internal school improvements but must extend to the realm of parental involvement.

Additionally, the Check stage also highlighted methodological weaknesses in the evaluation instruments used. The use of a tick-box system in the pocketbook, although administratively efficient, proved weak in capturing the depth of qualitative character dimensions, such as "Loving to Learn" and "Empathy" (Socializing). A student might tick "have read," but the instrument cannot detect whether they read with understanding and intrinsic enthusiasm (moral feeling) or merely to discharge an obligation. These findings also indicate symptoms of monitoring fatigue among teachers, which has the potential to reduce data validity.

Nevertheless, the evaluation process at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency retains high strategic value because it functions as an accountability and diagnostic mechanism, not merely judgment. Evaluation data is presented transparently in teacher board meetings to find the root cause (root cause analysis), not to punish students or blame teachers. This paradigm shift in evaluation from judgmental towards developmental is important to build a learning organization culture. The school also performs data triangulation through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with students to verify self-report data validity. Synthetically, the Check stage has successfully functioned as an early warning system, providing an accurate map regarding areas of strength and weakness in school culture, which becomes vital fuel for formulating improvement strategies in the follow-up stage.

Follow-up (Act): Adaptive Correction and Cultural Institutionalization (Refreezing)

The follow-up stage (Act) is the culmination of the PDCA cycle that determines the sustainability and long-term impact of an educational innovation. At SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, school management applies the concept of Continuous Improvement or Kaizen by responding to evaluation findings through two main strategies: Adaptive Correction and Cultural Institutionalization. These strategies demonstrate the school's managerial maturity in managing change, where they not only fix errors but also consolidate success.

Adaptive Correction strategy is carried out to overcome gaps found in the evaluation phase, specifically regarding the low consistency of private character and instrument weaknesses. Realizing that the "Sleeping Early" problem is rooted in weak control at home, the school carried out external intervention through organizing emergency Parenting Workshops and intensifying communication with parents. The school takes a proactive role as an educator for parents, transferring knowledge and character accompaniment strategies, as well as utilizing digital control technology to help parents oversee children's gadget usage at night. This action is an adaptive response of an open system, where the school expands its managerial influence boundaries to align the child's education ecosystem. Additionally, internal correction is done by improving evaluation instruments, shifting from a simple tick system to Anecdotal Records and providing qualitative observation training for teachers. This change reflects the school's commitment to process validity and a shift towards authentic assessment that is more capable of capturing student character development holistically.

The most fundamental aspect of the Act stage at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency is Cultural Institutionalization or Standardization. School management took firm steps to issue official Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Decree Letters (SK) for habits that have proven successful and consistent, such as Dhuha prayer, Friday prayers, female student

sessions, and Wednesday and Friday gymnastics. This action is a real implementation of the Refreezing concept in Kurt Lewin's Organizational Change theory. After passing through the unfreezing phase during planning and the changing phase during implementation, the newly formed culture must be "frozen" to become permanent and stable.

By making these habits permanent school procedures, management changes the status of activities from merely "temporary programs" or "leadership projects" into permanent organizational "structures." This creates cultural stability, where new generations of students and teachers entering the school will see these activities as standard norms inseparable from the identity of SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency, without needing to question their origins. This standardization action is also supported by the application of a consistent reward system to provide positive reinforcement for character behavior.

The Act stage at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency ensures that the PDCA cycle does not stop as one closed loop, but moves in an upward spiral, bringing school culture quality to a higher level in each period. Corrective actions ensure that the school continues to learn from its mistakes (learning from failure), while standardization actions ensure that the success achieved is not lost (sustaining success). This synergy between adaptability and stability is the main key to realizing a solid and sustainable character-based school culture.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children Program" at SMPN 3 Baleendah, Bandung Regency has successfully transformed normative character values into a real, measurable, and dynamic school culture. This success did not happen by chance but is the result of effective managerial engineering through the disciplined application of the PDCA cycle. The main determining factor of success lies in the instructional leadership of the Principal who was capable of orchestrating participatory planning (Plan), providing total exemplary in implementation (Do), applying fact-based evaluation (Check), and carrying out adaptive cultural standardization (Act). Specifically, the study found that the biggest challenge lies in the synchronization of private character in the family realm and the measurement of qualitative character validity. However, the responsive Act mechanism through parenting interventions and assessment instrument improvements proves that the school operates as a resilient learning organization. This management model is recommended to be adopted by other educational units with contextual adjustments, to bridge the gap between character education policy idealism and operational reality in the field.

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