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Empowering Teachers to Shape Intelligent Children with Local Character Through Green-School-Based Strategies: A Multi-Case Study in Kindergarten

Ratna Purwanti*, Ahmad Suriansyah, Ahmad Alim Bachri, and Noorhapizah
Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Banjarmasin. Indonesia
*ratna.purwanti@ulm.ac.id

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Abstract

The importance of a leader in empowering others to achieve goals optimally, especially in forming intelligent children with local character in early childhood education, is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to describe teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character through a green school approach. This study utilizes a qualitative method with a multi-case design. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The validity of the findings is credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data analysis utilizes an interactive model from Miles and Huberman (2014): data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and data conclusion. The results of the study showed that leadership values and beliefs, such as religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality values , are fundamental in implementing teacher empowerment strategies to shape intelligent children with local character. including improvement (mentoring; competency improvement-based digitalization); nurturing (providing work motivation; individual involvement in work teams; involving all teachers based on their competencies); maintenance (providing freedom to innovate; creating positive work culture; and creating work climate with a sense of family); protecting (building positive communication; and providing recognition); and integrated into learning to form the local character of early childhood accompanied by monitoring and evaluation both internally and externally. The results of this study can be used as a reference and consideration in developing a principle in empowering others.

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INTRODUCTION

The golden age is the most appropriate time to lay the first and main foundation for developing various potentials and abilities in children, including character development. Early childhood is a unique phase of life, a period of change involving growth, development, maturation, and refinement, both physically and spiritually, which occurs throughout life, gradually, and continuously (Mulyasa, 2014).

Early childhood is the first foundation for optimal child development (Anggreani & Purwanti, 2024; Daelmans et al., 2017; Novitawati et al., 2022). Early childhood forms the basis for a child's overall and optimal development (Novitawati et al., 2024; Palmer et al., 2013; Purwanti, 2021). The first years of childhood provide the essential foundation for future development (Saleh et al., 2022; Richter et al., 2017; Salsabila & Purwanti, 2023; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Early childhood is the foundation for long-term character and

intellectual development. At this age, children have a high capacity to absorb moral, social, and intellectual values. Therefore, the importance of national character development from an early age is emphasized through a holistic and quality national education system in support of realizing the Vision of Golden Indonesia 2045, a united, sovereign, advanced, and sustainable unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas: https://indonesia2045.go.id). However, the hope of realizing this vision faces challenges such as environmental crises and low concern for nature. However, the hope of realizing this vision has challenges, such as environmental crises, social morality, and low concern for nature. This can be seen from the emergency condition of waste in the city of Banjarmasin, which must be given important attention (Antaranews, 2025_ https://megapolitan.antaranews.com/berita/384713/darurat-sampah-yang-terjadi-di-banjarmasin-jadi-poin-di-rpjmd-2025-2029).

This is evident from the findings of Saputra & Fauzi (2022) regarding the unresolved waste problem, which is due to population growth impacting the increase in waste accumulation. The amount of waste is increasing year by year. Therefore, strong character formation and the development of children's intelligence need to be done through educational institutions such as Early Childhood Education (PAUD) so they can produce intelligent children with a character that cares for the environment, behaves responsibly, and has a high level of social awareness from an early age (Rustini, 2012; Sarinastitin, 2018; Sarinastitin, 2019; Wiyani, 2017; Silahuddin, 2017).

Children's interaction with their surrounding nature should be fostered through habit formation from an early age so that they can mutually support and benefit each other. Loving the environment, if learned from a young age, can become a habit and last a long time in a person's mind and heart (Chandrawati & Aisyah, 2022; Ramdhania & Windarsih, 2020). The concept of a green school emerges as a comprehensive educational approach that integrates the principles of sustainability and environmental care into the learning process and school culture and strengthens early childhood character education, such as values of responsibility, discipline, creativity, and environmental awareness (Ariani et al., 2022; Maarif., 2024; Riska et al.,2024; Wahyuningsih, 2020).

However, the implementation of these values will not succeed without the role of visionary educational leaders who are committed to change. The leadership of the school principal in early childhood education is a crucial key in building an environmentally friendly school culture (Maula & Rifqi, 2023; Sugiyanto & Abdullah, 2022). Training teachers to become role models and creating a learning environment that fosters children's character and intelligence (Hawa, 2020; Khakiim, 2017).

Leaders make a significant contribution to the progress of education implementation in schools (Botutihe et al., 2020). There is no great school without a great principal to manage every component of the school; the principal's leadership is key to the success of an excellent school (Bafadal & Ibrahim, 2020; Mulyasa, 2015). Good leaders are able to anticipate change and seize opportunities, inspiring teachers to achieve high levels of productivity and be prepared for technological advancements (Purwanti et al.,2025). This means that leadership factors are crucial for the success of a school institution in achieving its goals optimally.

Good leadership involves management that encompasses a series of strategies and steps to plan, organize, and manage character education within an educational environment (Suriansyah, 2024). The important thing is that education is achieved through excellent, humanistic leadership, effective and efficient service, and cooperative resources (Suriansyah et al., 2023). The creation of local character education, especially in wetland areas, is highly dependent on synergy between all elements. This depends on what and how the school approaches empowering school members, especially educators, to participate optimally (Purwanti et al., 2024). Empowerment can be achieved through improving the

competence of teachers and education personnel (enabling); empowering (socialization, recognition/appreciation & partnership/collaboration, and organizational climate); protecting (involving mentoring); and participation (involving teachers, education personnel, and stakeholders) (Kartasasmita, 1996; Suriansyah, 2023).

Based on a review of several previous studies, most research primarily focuses on teacher empowerment, character education, and the concept of green schools as separate research areas. This indicates that existing studies have not comprehensively discussed how these three aspects can be interrelated and support each other or integrated, especially in the context of early childhood education. There is still a lack of in-depth analysis of the processes, strategies, and practical implementation of more specific principles in developing intelligent early childhood with strong local character through the integration of learning by empowering teachers, as well as developing character values with an environment-based school approach, considering the area of the research setting is wetland-based, so with local character developed in children from an early age, it is certainly one part of loving the local area (love of culture) and preserving the wetland environment. Furthermore, previous studies tend to emphasize theoretical perspectives rather than holistic and applied models that can be directly implemented in educational environments, especially for principals. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by offering a more integrative approach. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a comprehensive teacher empowerment strategy that not only increases the capacity of educators but also systematically and sustainably strengthens the local character of early childhood through the implementation of a green school approach, particularly in the context of early childhood education. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a structured and integrated model of teacher empowerment that explicitly links leadership practices, green school principals, and local character education within early childhood settings. Unlike previous studies that discuss these components separately, this research offers a more comprehensive and operational framework by detailing how teacher empowerment is systematically implemented through stages such as capacity building, mentoring, collaboration, participation, and protection.

Furthermore, this study provides a clearer operationalization by demonstrating how these empowerment strategies are embedded in daily learning activities, school culture, and environmental practices aligned with the green school approach. It also contextualizes the integration within local environmental and cultural settings, ensuring that character values are not only taught conceptually but practiced consistently by children. Therefore, the study contributes not only at a conceptual level but also offers practical guidance for school leaders and educators in implementing sustainable, character-based early childhood education.

Hence, empowering teachers in green schools not only produces intelligent, characterful, and competitive children but also a generation with strong ecological awareness and local cultural identity, making them ready to face global challenges without abandoning their roots in local wisdom. The purpose of this research is to describe teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character. Teachers are the main actors in the educational process, so empowering teachers is key to developing students who excel not only academically but also have strong character and care for the environment. Through the principal's leadership in empowering teachers, they gain improved pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies, enabling them to deliver creative, innovative, and contextual learning.

The focus of this study is how empowerment teacher strategies shape intelligent children with local character in early childhood education based on green schools. The purpose of this research is to describe the strategies for teacher empowerment in shaping intelligent children with local character based on green schools.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative method with a multi-case design. The two schools were chosen as case 1 and case 2 because the two schools are reference schools for other schools in developing green school-based character, the schools are often visited by other schools as green schools, and the schools often receive achievements related to clean environmental management. The research setting was conducted in two schools located in Banjarmasin.

This study employed snowball sampling to recruit participants with direct experience in implementing green-school-based strategies. Initial informants, consisting of kindergarten principals, were purposively selected and subsequently asked to recommend teachers and parents involved in environmental and character education practices. The process continued iteratively until data saturation was reached. Inclusion criteria included active involvement, relevant experience, and willingness to participate. While this approach facilitated access to information-rich participants, potential sampling bias was addressed through data triangulation across multiple participant groups. Demographic details of the study participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Research participants' demographic details

No	Participant Code	Role	School/Case	Gender
1	P1	Principal	School (Case 1)	Female
2	P2	Teacher 1	School (Case 1)	Female
3	P3	Teacher 2	School (Case 1)	Female
4	P4	Parent 1	School (Case 1)	Female
5	P5	Parent 2	School (Case 1)	Female
6	P6	Principal	School (Case 2)	Female
7	P7	Teacher 1	School (Case 2)	Female
8	P8	Teacher 2	School (Case 2)	Female
9	P9	Parent 1	School (Case 2)	Female
10	P10	Parent 2	School (Case 2)	Female

Based on Table 1, the research subjects are the school principal as the key informant, and there is one principal in case 1 and one in case 2; two teachers in case 1 and two teachers in case 2; and a parent of the school committee as another key informant. Data collection utilizes in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation.

The interview guide of the research is empowering teachers to shape intelligent children and relate to a green school. The school programs are environmental and culture-based. Training/mentoring teachers on shaping intelligent and character-based children using the green school approach, the principal stated, the importance of mutual agreement to achieve goals is not an easy thing to implement. the involvement of teachers, parents, and children in decision-making related to the green school program; a communication strategy to cultivate harmonious and familial relationships between teachers and staff; the implementation of real activities that reflect the empowerment of school citizens in realizing a green school; the principal's commitment to realizing an environmentally friendly school (green school); and activities that involve supporting the creation of a green school.

The observation protocol in this study was designed to systematically capture the implementation of teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character within green-school-based early childhood education settings. Observations were conducted using a non-participant approach, supported by structured field notes and guided observation sheets to ensure consistency across research sites.

The focus of observation was divided into three main domains. First, observations targeted the daily activities of the school principal, particularly in relation to leadership practices, decision-making processes, and efforts to empower teachers in integrating

environmental values and local character into school programs. This included monitoring routines such as morning briefings, supervision practices, and coordination meetings.

Second, observations were conducted in the schoolyard environment to examine how green-school principals were implemented in physical and social contexts. Attention was given to environmental management practices, the availability and use of green spaces, student engagement in environmental activities, and the integration of local cultural values within the school setting.

Third, classroom observations focused on teaching and learning activities, particularly how teachers enacted empowerment strategies in daily instruction. This included observing instructional methods, teacher–student interactions, the integration of local character values, and the use of environmentally based learning resources.

Data were recorded through detailed field notes, complemented by documentation where appropriate. To enhance reliability, observations were conducted repeatedly across different times and contexts. The use of multiple observation focuses allowed for triangulation of findings, thereby strengthening the credibility of the data.

This study obtained ethics approval from the research institution prior to data collection. All research procedures adhered to established ethical standards, including confidentiality and protection of participants' rights. Formal permission was obtained from the principals of the participating kindergartens. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, including principals, teachers, and parents, after they were provided with detailed information about the research study. To ensure confidentiality, all participants were anonymized using coded identifiers. The collected data was used solely for research purposes and stored securely. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

The researcher has an academic background in early childhood education and professional experience in character education and environmentally based learning approaches. This positionality facilitated an in-depth understanding of the research context, particularly in relation to green-school-based strategies and local character development.

The researcher’s presence in the field functioned as the primary research instrument, encompassing roles in conducting observations, collecting data, engaging with participants, and gathering relevant documents. As a qualitative researcher with a background in early childhood education, the researcher was actively involved in interpreting contextual practices related to teacher empowerment and green-school-based learning.

In this study, the researcher assumed the role of a nonparticipant observer while maintaining professional interaction with participants to facilitate data collection. This positioning enabled access to naturalistic settings without significantly interfering with ongoing activities. At the same time, the researcher established a respectful and ethical relationship with participants, ensuring openness, trust, and voluntary engagement throughout the research process.

However, the researcher acknowledges the potential for subjectivity and interpretive bias due to close engagement with the research context. To address this, include continuous self-evaluation, maintain detailed field notes, and apply data triangulation across multiple sources and methods. Furthermore, efforts were made to maintain analytical distance to ensure that interpretations were grounded in empirical data rather than personal assumptions or prior experiences. Through this approach, the researcher sought to balance engagement and objectivity, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings.

The data analysis technique uses an interactive model from Mile and Huberman (2014). There are data collection, condensation, data display, and conclusions. (1) Data collection is the process of gathering data. This data collection is conducted in the field using data collection techniques, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies.

The data obtained by the researcher is collected directly and recorded using field notes. These notes remain general while the researcher is in the field, while the details of each note are made after leaving the field. (2) Data condensation is the process of editing data so that only relevant data is selected, while irrelevant data is eliminated. This data reduction is also carried out by the researcher continuously after each data collection and rewriting upon returning from the field. The research focus serves as a guideline and reference for each reduction process. (3) Data display is the organization of data into specific formats to make it more visible, such as classifying field notes using codes. Data coding plays a crucial role in the data analysis process and determines the quality of the research data abstraction. (4) Conclusion drawing or verification is a drawing activity that involves researcher interpretation. In this process, the researcher takes the core of the findings that have been logically structured and presented in the research results chapter. The researcher interprets the core of these findings. The results of this interpretation are then verified and dialectically compared with the theoretical framework contained in the theoretical review chapter.

The data collection is carried out in the field using data collection techniques, namely in-depth interviews with the principal, teacher, and parent about empowering teachers to shape intelligent early childhood; observations about culture work (empowerment); and supporting documentation related to teacher empowerment activities. In the data condensation process, no data is really thrown away or eliminated, but is reduced to find the true meaning of the data so that it can be part of producing answers to research problems significantly. The data display, namely classification and categorization, and conclusion drawing or verification, is a concluding activity that involves the researcher's interpretation. Then, the data validity uses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The cross-case data analysis cases can be seen in the following in Figure 1.

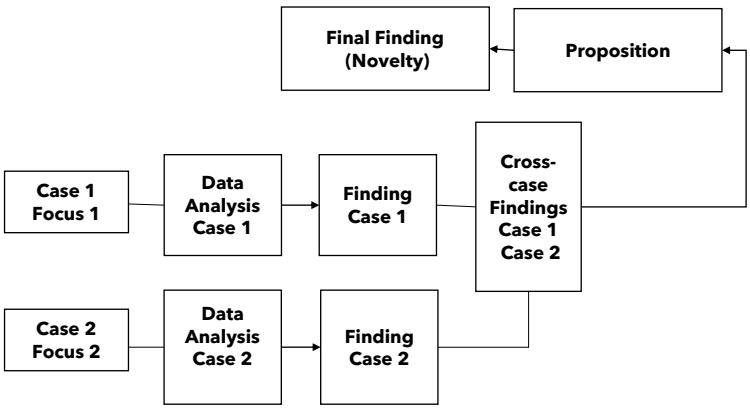

Figure 1 Cross-case data analysis

Based on Figure 1, the systematic process of data analysis in a multi-case study consists of two main cases (Case 1 and Case 2). The flow begins with each case separately and is then integrated to produce final findings. In the initial stage, each case has its own research focus (Case 1 Focus and Case 2 Focus). Based on this focus, the researcher conducts data analysis for each case (Data Analysis Case 1 and Data Analysis Case 2). This stage demonstrates that each case is analyzed independently to maintain the depth and uniqueness of the context. Next, the results of this analysis produce specific findings for each case (Finding Case 1 and Finding Case 2). These findings represent the interpretation of the data within the unique context of each research location. The next stage is cross-case analysis, as shown in the section Cross-case Findings: Case 1, Case 2. In this stage, the researcher compares and integrates findings from both cases to identify emerging patterns,

similarities, and differences. This process is crucial in multi-case studies because it allows for stronger conceptual generalizations. The results of the cross-case analysis are then formulated into propositions, conceptual statements that explain the relationships between the phenomena discovered during the research. The final stage of this entire process is the Final Finding (Novelty), which demonstrates the research's primary contribution in the form of novelty or new findings resulting from the synthesis of the entire analysis process. Cross-case data analysis for cases 1 and 2 was conducted to compare and integrate the findings obtained from each case. The analysis technique used the constant comparative method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation of Case 1

a) Interview Result

The principal, in empowering teachers to shape intelligent children and relate to a green school, interview results indicate that “the principal plays an active role in empowering teachers through the integration of a curriculum based on the environment and local culture, providing space for innovation, and enhancing competencies through training." The leadership demonstrated emphasizes role models, collaboration, family-like communication, and appreciation for teachers' creative ideas to build shared commitment. Empowerment is also carried out through internal activities such as learning communities and character programs, as well as external support in the form of training. The implementation of the green school is realized through various concrete programs such as waste banks, clean water management, reforestation, and environmental projects involving teachers, students, and parents."

Furthermore, to delve deeper into the interview data with the principal, interviews were conducted with teachers and parents. Interviews revealed that “the principal is strongly committed to realizing a green school through concrete programs such as routine cleaning, energy-saving campaigns, and instilling environmental responsibility values in teachers and students. The principal also leads by example, involving the entire school community (teachers, students, and parents) and encouraging active participation in various environmental activities. Supporting programs include school greening, planting herbal plants, scheduled garden maintenance, and environmentally based project activities. Parents also play a role in assisting their children in greening activities and processing organic waste. Furthermore, the principal plays a role in providing and monitoring environmentally friendly infrastructure, collaborating with relevant parties, and regularly conducting evaluations through learning communities and providing appreciation to teachers. Overall, the principal's leadership is a key factor in the successful implementation of a green school and teacher empowerment.

b) Observation Result

The observation focused on several teacher empowerment strategy activities in shaping intelligent children with local character at excellent early childhood education institutions based on green schools, as evidenced by the data collected during in-depth interviews.

The observation shows that the teacher empowerment strategy for developing intelligent, locally characterized children based on green schools is effectively implemented and aligns with the research framework, which emphasizes leadership, teacher empowerment, and the integration of environmental values into learning.

First, from a leadership perspective, the principal serves as a strong role model. This is evident in his disciplined early arrival, welcoming students, and ensuring a safe and comfortable school environment. In learning community (*kombel*) activities, the principal actively participates in formal and informal academic discussions, creating a collaborative and supportive atmosphere. This practice demonstrates the implementation of

empowerment strategies through motivation, coaching, and rewarding, which strengthens teacher confidence and performance.

Second, from a teacher empowerment perspective, observations indicate capacity building and a positive work climate. The principal provides encouragement, trust, and appreciation for teacher performance, reflecting the enabling and empowering dimensions. The familial relationship established between the principal and teachers also fosters collaboration and active participation, in line with the empowerment framework that emphasizes interpersonal communication and teamwork.

Third, from a green school implementation perspective, the school's green, comfortable, and safe physical environment serves as a contextual learning medium. Satisfied parental involvement also indicates the success of the participatory approach within the education ecosystem.

Fourth, in the learning process, project-based activities utilizing recycled materials and environmental care activities demonstrate the integration of local character values and environmental awareness. Children actively participate in activities such as making crafts, sweeping, and watering plants, reflecting the development of responsibility, independence, creativity, and environmental awareness. Analytically, these observational findings confirm that the synergy between transformative leadership, teacher empowerment strategies, and the integrated implementation of green schools significantly contributes to developing intelligent children with local character.

c) Documentation

Documents that can be viewed from the focus of the teacher empowerment strategy in shaping intelligent and locally-characterized children in excellent green school-based early childhood education are photos of the work program preparation meeting, which contain activities to be carried out, such as socialization, work programs, and parenting. In addition, documents such as daily lesson plans, photos of learning activities, and children's work were also obtained.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as confirming the data obtained (as data triangulation and confirmability), as described above, the focus on teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character at the green school-based excellent early childhood education (PAUD) is as follows:

1) Leadership Values and Role Modeling
   The principal demonstrates core values such as sincerity, commitment, consistency, perseverance, responsibility, and the principle of *ing ngarso sung tulodo* (setting an example). Their role as a parent/friend figure for teachers strengthens interpersonal relationships and forms the basis for establishing a positive work culture.
2) Strengthening Teacher Capacity (Capacity Building)
   Efforts to improve competency are carried out continuously through training, seminars, and workshops to adapt to the demands of modern developments and the needs of environment-based learning.
3) Participatory Engagement
   Teachers are actively involved in various activities and work teams according to their competencies and experience, thus fostering a sense of ownership, responsibility, and optimal contribution to school programs.
4) Open and Collaborative Communication
   Open communication serves as the primary foundation for coordination, decision-making, and problem-solving, thus creating a harmonious and supportive work environment.
5) Providing Space for Innovation (Autonomy and Innovation)

Teachers are given the freedom to innovate in the learning process, particularly in developing media and methods based on the local environment and culture.

6) Recognition and Motivation
Providing awards and recognition for teacher performance and creative ideas is an important strategy for improving motivation and performance.

7) Coaching and mentoring.
The principal actively provides coaching and mentoring to help teachers improve their self-confidence, competence, and achievement of learning objectives.

Data Presentation of Case 2

a) Interview Result

The interview results indicate that the principal implements a comprehensive strategy to foster intelligent and environmentally conscious children through the green school concept. The strategy begins with the dissemination of the vision and mission to the entire school community and the involvement of teachers and parents in decision-making, including in environmentally based project activities that involve children's choices.

The principal emphasizes the importance of role models, positive discipline, and religious values as the foundation for building a culture of environmental awareness. Implementation is carried out through concrete programs such as tree planting, school garden activities, environmental mini-projects, and the promotion of clean and healthy living habits.

Teacher empowerment is carried out through in-house training and mentoring, competency development, and providing space for innovation in environmentally based learning. Furthermore, collaboration with external parties and parents is strengthened to support the program's success.

Overall, the implemented strategy is participatory, collaborative, and based on role models, integrating leadership, teacher empowerment, and the involvement of the entire school community in supporting the implementation of the green school.

Furthermore, to delve deeper into the interview data with the principal, interviews were conducted with teachers and parents. Interviews revealed that "this demonstrates the principal's strong commitment to realizing a green school through a participatory and collaborative approach." The principal involves teachers, staff, and parents in decision-making through discussion forums and fosters family-based communication to instill environmental awareness as a sustainable habit. Various programs have been implemented, such as collaboration with community health centers (*Puskesmas*) on personal hygiene (toothbrushing and 6-step handwashing), waste management through a joint government waste bank, and recycling activities that provide creative space for teachers. Parents are also actively involved in environmental cleanup and greening activities and support children's project activities by providing materials from home."

Furthermore, the principal consistently conducts outreach, sets a good example, and recognizes teachers for their achievements. Overall, this strategy demonstrates the synergy between the school and parents in building a culture of environmental awareness and strengthening children's character from an early age.

b) Observation Result

The observation focused on several teacher empowerment strategy activities in shaping intelligent children with local character at green, school-based, excellent early childhood education institutions, as evidenced by the data successfully collected during in-depth interviews. Observations indicate that the teacher empowerment strategy for developing intelligent children with local character based on green schools has been implemented

systematically and integrated, in accordance with the research framework. This is evident in the principal's policy support, which provides teachers with space for innovation in teaching, supported by organized documentation such as learning modules and learning community activities.

Furthermore, the empowerment process not only focuses on teachers but also involves parents as active partners through intensive communication (e.g., WhatsApp groups) and direct participation in the planning and implementation of activities. The close interaction between the principal, teachers, and parents demonstrates a collaborative and participatory approach. Analytically, these findings confirm that the implemented empowerment strategy encompasses the aspects of enabling, empowering, and participating, contributing to the creation of a green school-based learning environment. Synergy among all school members is key to supporting the development of intelligent children with local character and who care about the environment.

c) Documentation

Documents that can be viewed from the integrated curriculum activities of local character education, especially regarding teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character in excellent early childhood education based on green schools, are photos of the working program preparation meeting containing activities to be carried out such as socialization, work programs, and parenting. In addition, documents such as daily lesson plans, photos of learning activities, and children's artwork were also obtained.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as confirming the data obtained (as data triangulation and confirmability), as described above, the focus on teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character in excellent early childhood education (PAUD) based on green schools is as follows:

1) Leadership Values and Work Ethos
   The principal instills the value that work is a form of worship and usefulness, emphasizing role modeling, commitment, consistency, the ability to be a good listener, and building relationships as friends or parental figures for teachers in achieving common goals.
2) Innovating freely according to the teacher's creativity (Autonomy and Creativity)
   Teachers are given the freedom to innovate according to their individual creativity, particularly in developing learning methods and media based on the local environment and character.
3) Competency-Based Participation
   Involving all teachers according to their competencies. All teachers are actively involved in various school activities and programs according to their respective competencies and expertise, thus encouraging optimal contributions.
4) Communication and Motivation
   Building good communication and motivating subordinates. The establishment of good, open, and supportive communication serves as the basis for coordination and serves as a means of motivating teachers in carrying out their duties.
5) Strengthening Teacher Capacity
   Improving teachers' existing competencies through training. Teacher competency improvement is carried out continuously through training so that they are able to meet learning needs and support the implementation of the green school program.

Cross-case Analysis of Case 1 and Case 2

Based on the cross-case analysis of Case 1 and Case 2, this study found teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent and locally characterized children based on green schools. Further analysis was conducted on Case 1 and Case 2, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Cross-case findings of case 1 and case 2

Research Focus	Case 1 Findings	Case 2 Findings	Cross-case Findings of Case 1 and Case 2
Teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character in early childhood education based on green schools.	1) Possessing values and a motto of sincerity in work, commitment and consistency in work, perseverance, responsibility for work, *ing ngarso sung tulodo*, leading by example, working together, being a mother/friend/older sibling to subordinates, and being a beneficial person by providing examples of good practices. 2) Improving the competence of subordinates through training, seminars, and workshops. 3) Involving teachers in all activities and work teams, according to their respective competencies and experiences. 4) Maintaining open communication as the initial foundation for coordination. 5) Freedom to innovate. 6) Providing recognition. 7) Conducting coaching and mentoring.	1) Having values and a life guide that work is about obtaining blessings, setting an example or being a role model, being beneficial, being a good listener, being a friend or parent to subordinates, working together to achieve goals, being committed to work, and being consistent. 2) Innovating freely according to the teacher's creativity. 3) Involving all teachers according to their competencies. 4) Building good communication and motivating subordinates. 5) Improving teachers' existing competencies through training.	1) Possessing core values in leadership such as religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality values 2) Mentoring 3) Competency development-based digitalization 4) Involving all teachers according to their competencies 5) Providing work motivation 6) Individual involvement in work teams 7) Freedom to innovate 8) Creating a positive work culture 9) Creating a family-like work environment 10) Building positive communication 11) Providing recognition

The two cases demonstrate a number of strong similarities: (1) leadership values based on exemplary leadership, both cases emphasize values such as commitment, consistency, responsibility, and serving as role models and parental/peer figures for teachers. (2) Teacher competency development: Training is a key strategy for improving teacher capacity so they can perform their duties optimally. (3) active teacher involvement: teachers are involved in various activities according to their respective competencies, demonstrating a participatory approach. (4) Communication as a foundation: Good and open communication forms the basis of coordination and working relationships. (5) freedom to innovate. Both cases provide space for teachers to be creative in learning. it can be concluded that both cases share the same foundation: values-based empowerment, participation, and capacity building.

There are differences in strategic emphasis between the two cases: (1) case 1 (more structural and systematic) explicitly adds coaching and mentoring. emphasizes recognition as a motivational strategy. Communication is focused on a formal coordination tool. (2) case 2 (more cultural and relational): higher emphasis on the value of "work blessings"

(spiritual/philosophical). emphasizes the leader's role as a good listener. explicitly incorporates motivational aspects into communication. The approach is more based on emotional and familial relationships. It can be concluded that case 1 tends to use a formal managerial approach, while case 2 emphasizes a cultural-relational approach and spiritual values.

From both cases, the following main patterns emerge: (1) integration of values and real practices, namely, leadership values are not only concepts, but are realized in actions (exemplary behavior, communication, involvement). (2) Empowerment is holistic, namely, not only focused on competence, but also includes motivation, interpersonal relationships, and work culture. (3) balance between autonomy and support, namely, teachers are given the freedom to innovate, but are still supported through training, direction, or motivation. (4) A collaborative approach, namely active teacher involvement, is key to the success of the program. and (5) leadership as a central factor: the role of the principal is very dominant in shaping the work culture and direction of empowerment.

Based on the explanation above, both cases show that teacher empowerment strategies that are capable of developing intelligent and locally characterful early childhood children can be seen in the following model findings in Figure 2.

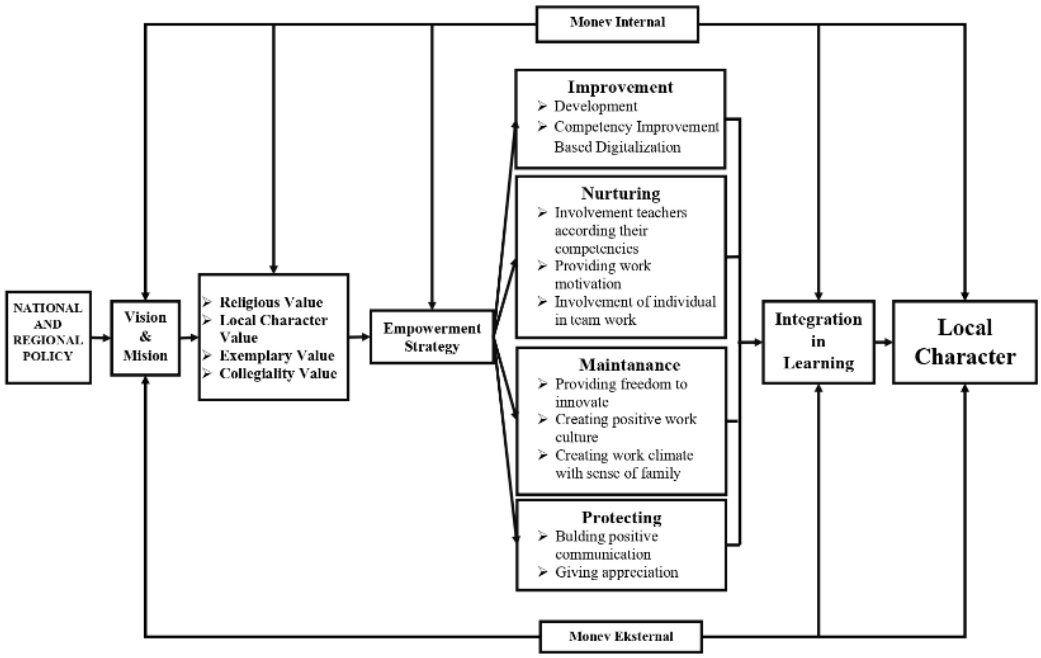

Figure 2 Finding model

Figure 2 shows a conceptual model of an empowerment strategy in the educational context, oriented toward the formation of local character through the integration of values into the learning process. In general, the process is systemic, starting from policy to classroom implementation. First, national and regional policies serve as the primary foundation influencing the institution's vision and mission. This vision and mission are then translated into core values, namely, religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality. These values serve as the basis for leading and empowering teachers. The empowerment strategy is implemented through four main pillars: (1) Improvement: Focusing on developing and enhancing competencies, primarily through a competency-based digitalization approach. (2) Nurturing: Emphasizing teacher involvement according to their competencies, providing work motivation, and enabling individual participation in teamwork. (3) Maintenance: Aiming to maintain sustainability

by providing space for innovation, building a positive work culture, and creating a family-like work environment. And (4) Protecting: Leads to building positive communication and providing appreciation to maintain individual enthusiasm and performance.

The next outcome of this strategy is integration in learning, which becomes the concrete implementation stage in the classroom. This integration then forms local character in early childhood. Overall, this figure illustrates that local character formation does not occur instantly, but rather through a structured process involving policies, values, empowerment strategies, resource support, and implementation in learning. This model emphasizes the importance of synergy between managerial, cultural, and pedagogical aspects of education.

It cannot be denied that the empowerment carried out by the principal is inseparable from the values and beliefs held by the principal, such as religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality values. This value of belief is very important for a leader to possess, as it serves as the moral and ethical foundation for leading subordinates, sets an example of noble character for teachers, parents, children, and staff in daily attitudes, words, and actions, builds a school culture with tolerance, makes wise decisions, prioritizes the common good, avoids actions that harm others, and works with sincerity, viewing the principal's duty as a trust that must be accounted for not only to humans but also to the creator.

Research findings indicate that teacher empowerment carried out by principals is not neutral or merely technical but is strongly influenced by the leader's system of values and beliefs, such as religious values, local character, role models, and collegiality. These values have been shown to serve as a moral and ethical foundation that guides leadership patterns, decision-making, and interactions with all school members.

Empirically, the internalization of these values is reflected in leadership practices that emphasize exemplary behavior, sincerity, and an orientation toward the common good. Consequently, a more humanistic, tolerant, and collaborative school culture is formed, ultimately strengthening the effectiveness of teacher empowerment. Teachers are positioned not merely as implementers but as partners who are valued and encouraged to develop. However, it is critical to note that a strong reliance on the leader's personal values has the potential to lead to variations in implementation across school contexts. This means that the success of empowerment is highly influenced by the leader's internal qualities, making it difficult to replicate without a more structured system. Furthermore, the dominance of religious and moral values needs to be balanced with a professional and competency-based approach so that it is not merely normative but also operational and measurable.

A leader must also possess local character values, as these will foster a spirit of mutual cooperation, togetherness, commitment, consistency, perseverance, responsibility, independence, and high solidarity, benefiting others, which is a hallmark of the region's local values. Additionally, the principal's exemplary values make their leadership more inspiring and have a broader impact, not only on school learning management but also on the character development of all school members. The principal's exemplary values are also a leadership principle demonstrated through consistent attitudes, behaviors, words, and real actions, meaning words align with deeds. With exemplary values, the principal can create a positive school culture, strengthen the local character of school members, and serve as a role model or example for all school members, respected and emulated by subordinates.

Then, as a leader in empowerment, the value of collegiality is also needed. This is because the value of collegiality makes the principal's leadership more participatory, humanistic, and oriented toward togetherness or familyhood to achieve the school's vision optimally. The value of collegiality is also able to create a democratic climate in the school, where every school member is given space to express opinions and contribute to decision-

making without fear or worry. Additionally, it also increases the sense of belonging toward the school, leading school members to be more committed to their work, and strengthens teacher empowerment because they feel involved, trusted, and valued in every school management process to achieve optimal and effective goals.

Thus, teacher empowerment supported by religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality will strengthen the strategy for developing intelligent children with local character. Since teachers are not only given tasks and responsibilities but also supported by values that are integrated into daily life, the learning process runs more optimally and consistently. Just as religious values can encompass not only intellectual intelligence but also moral development, teacher empowerment based on religious values makes it even more important. Local character values refer to education based on local wisdom, such as *haram manyarah*, *waja hingga kaputing*, and *gawi sabumi*. When teachers promote local values, learning becomes more contextual, and children feel close to their cultural identity and are not uprooted from their roots. Children are shaped into individuals rooted in tradition but remain open to global developments. Exemplary values are reflected in teachers' attitudes that demonstrate discipline, hard work, honesty, and responsibility. Children are more likely to imitate what they see than hear. Character education is more effective with empowerment strategies that emphasize exemplary behavior. Furthermore, the value of collegiality, where teachers collaborate and support one another, creates a harmonious school culture based on collegiality. Children learn the values of solidarity, tolerance, and mutual cooperation from the practical practices demonstrated by teachers.

Vangrieken et al. (2015) stated that collaboration between teachers improves the quality of teaching and creates a more positive learning environment. Collaborative practices also serve as concrete models for children in learning the values of cooperation and social responsibility. Marks & Louis (1997) stated that teacher empowerment significantly impacts the quality of learning and child development. Empowered teachers not only carry out their duties but also demonstrate moral commitment, creativity, and consistency in their teaching practices, resulting in more effective and meaningful learning. Berkowitz & Bier (2005) stated that values-based character education has proven effective in shaping student behavior. Integrating values into daily school activities strengthens children's moral and social development, not just cognitive aspects.

This aligns with Fitriyani (2023), who stated that one of the moral competencies in work culture is sincerity. Suriansyah et al. (2023), in strengthening Indonesian character education, include the various characters contained in the motto "waja sampai kaputing", which are related to integrity and independence. Surawardi & Zuhriah (2023) stated that "*gawi sabumi" is "Sabumi Sampai Manuntung"* (working together until it's finished).

Sarbaini (2022) states that 1) "nilai bauntung" means living full of luck, always being blessed with sustenance, and working in a halal, fast, smooth manner with good and blessed results; 2) "nilai baiman" means that life must be based on faith because luck is not everything. Don't forget to ask for your parents' prayers for a fortunate, happy, and proud life; 3) "*nilai batuah"* which means adhering to principles such as being beneficial for oneself, others, and society; and for success in this world and the hereafter.

Furthermore, according to Maarif et al. (2024), the school principal already understands how to build a green school, which includes environmentally conscious school policies, an environment-based curriculum, participatory-based activities, and the management of facilities and infrastructure that support the environment. Purwanti et al. (2025) found that school principal leadership includes being a model and example for everyone in the school, shared commitment, and building communication.

The principal in empowering teachers in the novelty of this research is like an improvement. The results of the study by Afrizal et al. (2025) stated that digitalization has

a significant influence on improving individual competence. In line with the study of Blanka & Krumay (2022) stated that in a broader perspective, the development of digital-based competencies is seen as a key factor in the success of organizational transformation, as individual competencies function as the main drivers in the digital transformation process. Pusparini (2023) always sets an example first in instilling character in his students and is always self-reflective. Furthermore, it is important for teachers to improve existing competencies through various trainings, workshops, or similar activities, as found by Nadar et al. (2021). Professional competence is one of the competencies that must be possessed by early childhood education teachers so that training will improve their skills.

This research also found that in improving teacher competence, school principals must also provide assistance. In line with Satiwi & Dekawati (2023), it was found that there is a positive and significant contribution from teacher coaching to teacher work discipline. In addition, Fauzi et al. (2023) stated that the purpose of teacher coaching is to improve teachers' professional abilities in order to improve learning processes and outcomes through mentoring.

Then, the next empowerment strategy is the involvement of teachers according to their competencies. The results of the study of Pantić & Wubbels (2010) found that the involvement of teachers in the learning process cannot be separated from the competencies they have, because competence reflects the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow teachers to play an effective role in various educational contexts. In line with Kaendler et al. (2015), who state that, in the context of collaborative learning, teachers' involvement is highly determined by their competence in planning, monitoring, supporting, and reflecting on the learning process in an ongoing manner.

In addition, providing work motivation is also an important part of empowering teachers, as expressed by Vo et al. (2022) that providing work motivation is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing individual performance and organizational effectiveness. Work motivation functions as a driving force that determines the intensity, direction, and persistence of employees' behavior in achieving organizational goals. The results of the study by Blumkin et al. (2024) indicate that the involvement of individuals in teamwork plays a significant role in enhancing work outcomes. Empirical evidence shows that teamwork and team-based incentives can significantly increase individual output and work engagement, particularly when collaborative structures create shared goals and mutual accountability among members.

Other empowerment strategies, such as maintenance, are also important things that can be done to achieve goals optimally. The study also found the importance of giving teachers the freedom to innovate, which is in line with the previous findings from Muryanti & Herman (2021) that freedom for teachers to innovate, create, and learn independently makes teachers more motivated to improve their quality and self-competence. The results of the study by Mokhlis & Abdullah (2024) found that providing freedom to innovate, particularly through teacher autonomy, is a critical factor in fostering innovative work behavior in educational settings. Autonomy allows teachers to experiment with new teaching methods, strategies, and ideas without fear of negative consequences, thereby enhancing creativity and professional judgment in instructional practices. Then, Kavgacı, et al. (2026) that empowering leadership that grants freedom and supports teacher agency has been shown to significantly enhance collective teacher innovativeness through the development of shared efficacy and collaborative engagement.

In addition, the results of the study Glass (2023) that creating a positive work culture is a strategic factor in enhancing employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall organizational effectiveness. A positive work culture is characterized by shared values, supportive relationships, and a work environment that promotes respect, collaboration, and well-being, enabling employees to contribute optimally to organizational goals. Then, Radu

stated that (2023) positive work culture is closely associated with psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, taking risks, and engaging in innovation without fear of negative consequences. This condition encourages creativity, collaboration, and stronger team engagement, which are essential for sustainable organizational development.

Furthermore, the results of the study by Yawman (2020) that a positive and supportive work climate contributes to stronger employee commitment and satisfaction, as it fosters a sense of belonging and shared values similar to a family-like environment. Then, Khalfaoui et al. (2021) that a positive climate characterized by connectedness, belongingness, and respectful relationships mirrors the core attributes of a family-oriented environment, where individuals feel psychologically safe to interact, collaborate, and grow together. This condition is particularly important in educational settings, as it enhances both social interaction and collective well-being.

Another very important thing in empowering teachers is protecting them, such as by building positive communication. Results of the study by Rahmawati et al. (2024) state that building positive communication within organizations is a fundamental element in creating an effective and productive work environment. A positive communication climate reflects the quality, openness, and clarity of interactions among organizational members, which significantly influence trust, collaboration, and overall organizational performance. Then, Wahid et al. (2024) that positive communication is closely linked to interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Effective communication based on respect, trust, and openness enables employees to interact without hesitation, build strong professional relationships, and maintain workplace harmony, which are essential for long-term organizational success. Then, Fatmawati et al. (2018) Build communication by using verbal messages in the form of verbal and written messages, as well as non-verbal messages in the form of actions, to achieve the school's vision and mission

Giving appreciation, according to Nicuță et al. (2024), not only encourages employees to perform better but also fosters internalized motivation that sustains performance over time. Seitl et al. (2024) showed that employees who consistently receive appreciation are more likely to exhibit higher engagement, effort, and positive work attitudes. Then, Imran et al. (2025) stated that giving appreciation in the workplace has been widely recognized as an effective strategy to enhance employee motivation and performance. Appreciation, often expressed through gratitude and recognition, fulfills individuals' psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement. Empirical studies indicate that employees who receive appreciation tend to demonstrate higher motivation levels and stronger commitment to their work roles.

In addition to the importance of recognition for teachers' achievements, it also serves as a significant appreciation for their presence and work, in line with Merry et al. (2020), that recognition has a significant impact on teacher performance. Husnunnadia & Masyithoh (2024) emphasized that a bold and innovative award strategy needs to be developed and implemented to improve the overall quality of education.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the teacher empowerment strategy is a systematic, planned, and sustainable effort to improve teachers' competence, motivation, and professionalism so that they can carry out an effective and optimal educational process. The principal also plays an important role as a role model by incorporating religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality values into the policies and actions taken by the principal; integrating the principles of local wisdom into the learning process; developing the critical, innovative, and creative thinking skills needed to produce intelligent children; shaping the children's personalities rooted in local culture but flexible with the times; and collaborating with parents and the community. Therefore, teachers who are empowered through value-based leadership will produce students who are intellectually

intelligent, emotionally mature, noble in character, and have strong local character. They will have the ability to face global challenges without losing their cultural identity or being uprooted from their cultural roots.

This research has implications for school curriculum management, especially in empowering teachers to shape intelligent children with local character through green-school-based strategies. Theoretically, the findings of this study show that teacher empowerment is not only related to improving professional competence but also includes the dimensions of autonomy, creativity, and innovation, as well as the contextual ability to integrate environmental values and local wisdom into learning. This expands the concept of teacher empowerment from being originally oriented to administrative and performance aspects to a more holistic approach based on ecological and cultural contexts.

In addition, this study confirms that green-school-based learning allows children to build knowledge through direct interaction with the surrounding environment and culture. In this case, the empowered teacher functions as a mediator who connects the child's concrete experience with local values so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and contextual. Furthermore, this study implies the need to develop a more integrative conceptual model that explicitly links teacher empowerment, learning strategies, and green school approaches in the formation of children's local characters.

Practically, this study provides guidance for early childhood education in designing and implementing green-school-based teacher empowerment strategies. Schools need to provide teachers with a wider space of autonomy to innovate in learning, especially in utilizing the environment as a learning resource and integrating the value of local wisdom into daily activities. In addition, it is important for early childhood education to provide continuous support through training, mentoring, and strengthening the teacher's learning community so that the empowerment process can take place optimally. School principals also have a strategic role in creating a supportive work climate, including building a collaborative culture, positive communication, and appreciating innovations made by teachers. In the context of policy, the results of this research can be the basis for the development of educational programs that emphasize the integration between environmental education and character formation based on local culture. The government and education stakeholders are expected to encourage the implementation of the green-school model as part of efforts to improve the quality of learning in early childhood education. However, the implementation of this strategy needs to be adjusted to the conditions of each school, especially related to the availability of resources, teacher readiness, and support for the surrounding environment. Therefore, a flexible and contextual approach is the key to success in implementing green-school-based teacher empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The leadership values and beliefs, such as religious values, local character values, exemplary values, and collegiality values, are fundamental values in implementing teacher empowerment strategies to shape intelligent children with local character. Including the following: improvement (mentoring and competency improvement-based digitalization); nurturing (providing work motivation and individual involvement in work teams and involving all teachers based on their competencies); maintenance (providing freedom to innovate, creating positive work culture, and creating a work climate with a sense of family); and protecting (building positive communication and providing recognition).

To achieve success in shaping intelligent children with local character through green-school-based strategies, optimally, it is necessary to have the values and confidence of a school principal in carrying out his leadership. These values and beliefs are manifested through the ability of the principal to lead and empower teachers. The integration of these

two aspects is an important foundation because it is able to form the local character of children who are not uprooted from their cultural roots.

This research can be used as training material, workshops, and coaching that have characteristics of schools and areas similar to the location of this research, related to teacher empowerment strategies in shaping intelligent children with local character through green school-based strategies. This research can also be used as a reference for further studies related to empowering teachers to shape intelligent children with local character through green-school-based strategies, using other focuses such as quality assurance systems, and using different approaches to this research, such as quantitative research approaches and mixed methods.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Conceptualization, RP, AS, ALB, N; methodology and introduction, RP, AS, ALB, N; analysis of cross-case findings of Case 1 and Case 2; all authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited independently without the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools or techniques. The authors take full responsibility for the originality and integrity of the content of this publication.

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AUTHOR PROFILES

Ratna Purwanti (corresponding author) is a doctoral student in educational administration at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia. Her research focuses on educational management, curriculum development, early childhood education, and general education.
Email: ratna.purwanti@ulm.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7474-3152
https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=dgUkMyAAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao
https://sinta.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/authors/profile/6657081
https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57217052718

Ahmad Suriansyah is a senior lecturer in the doctoral program in educational administration at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia. His research primarily focuses on educational leadership, education management, early childhood education, curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and learning technologies.
Email: a.suriansyah@ulm.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6601-0150
https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=wfsEDxoAAAAJ&hl=en
https://sinta.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/authors/profile/6092326
https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57195919966

Ahmad Alim Bachri is a senior lecturer in the doctoral program in educational administration at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia. His research primarily focuses on management
Email: ahmadalimbachri@ulm.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1741-2721
https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=UHOCAS8AAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao
https://sinta.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/authors/profile/6136814
https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57219361519

Noorhapizah is a senior lecturer in the doctoral program in educational administration at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia. His research primarily focuses on educational leadership, education management, elementary education, teaching methodologies, and learning technologies.
Email: noorhapizah@ulm.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9718-8147
https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=HUO-oYUAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao
https://sinta.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/authors/profile/6657081
https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57212877266