

Culturally Responsive Leadership In Education: Integrating Maja Labo Dahu For School Quality Improvement

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the integration of Maja Labo Dahu, a leadership philosophy rooted in Bima's local wisdom, into school management at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima to address challenges related to educational quality, student performance, and cultural integration. This research aims to analyze the core values of Maja Labo Dahu, evaluate their impact on school leadership and student outcomes, and propose a culturally responsive leadership framework. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, followed by an inductive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the application of Maja Labo Dahu values—collective decision-making, prioritizing the common good, and mutual respect—significantly improves school governance, teacher performance, student engagement, and overall educational outcomes. The research highlights the role of culturally embedded leadership in fostering inclusivity, strengthening school-community relationships, and enhancing learning environments. This study contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive educational leadership by demonstrating how indigenous leadership philosophies can be systematically integrated into modern school management. The results offer practical implications for educational policymakers and school leaders in Indonesia, emphasizing the necessity of culturally informed leadership training and policy frameworks. Future research should explore the long-term effects of Maja Labo Dahu leadership on school performance and expand its application to different educational settings to assess its broader impact on educational quality and cultural preservation.

Keywords: *Culturally Responsive Leadership; Maja Labo Dahu; Educational Quality Improvement; School Leadership Strategies; Indigenous Wisdom in Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial component that shapes the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and communities, ultimately fostering the development of a wise and competent human character through the processes of teaching and training (Hattie, 2008; Mustagfiroh, 2020). As education systems continuously evolve, influenced by the changes brought about by technological advancements and globalization, the emphasis has shifted towards competency and skills development for school principals, teachers, and students (Gocen, 2021; Shelley & Purzer, 2018). The Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 states that in the era of Industry 4.0, education must be driven by innovation and creativity from school leaders and teachers to prepare graduates capable of competing globally (Tonich, 2021). Consequently, national education faces the challenge of producing human resources who are innovative, creative, and competent to elevate the quality of education (Juharyanto et al., 2021; Walter et al., 2021). Government policies play a significant role in determining an educational system that aligns with contemporary demands (Gocen, 2021; Shelley & Purzer, 2018). In response, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum, aimed at fostering independent and autonomous learning environments (Kemendikbud, 2019; Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). In this framework, school principals play a critical role in improving education quality, influencing the organizational direction, and ensuring the successful implementation of learning strategies (Arifin, 2012, 2013; Warfield et al., 2019). Effective school leadership integrates cultural values with leadership strategies, making it more relevant to local contexts (Arifin & Adha, 2021). One of the

indigenous leadership approaches that can be applied in school settings is *Maja Labo Dahu*, a philosophy deeply embedded in the Bima community that emphasizes cooperation, unity, and environmental awareness (Tasrif & Komariah, 2021).

The primary issue in SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima is the suboptimal quality of education, as indicated by several factors: the lack of incorporation of local cultural values into the learning process, low average student performance, inadequate skills to face global challenges, and limited student participation in extracurricular activities. Additionally, the school lacks an effective strategy for student development and educational quality enhancement. To address these challenges, it is crucial to implement a leadership approach that incorporates local wisdom. The *Maja Labo Dahu* philosophy provides an alternative leadership strategy that aligns with local cultural values, fostering a cooperative and accountable educational environment.

The *Maja Labo Dahu* philosophy consists of seven core values that contribute to effective leadership: integrity, collective decision-making, community cooperation, accountability, solidarity, equitable resource distribution, and social responsibility (Mutawali, 2013). These values align with effective school leadership principles, which emphasize responsibility, transparency, and inclusivity in decision-making (Bafadal et al., 2019; Burhanuddin et al., 2018). Studies suggest that integrating local wisdom into educational leadership can foster a sense of ownership, strengthen school-community relationships, and enhance student engagement (Irmania, 2021; Arifin & Adha, 2021).

Several studies have examined the role of school leadership in improving education quality (Arifin & Adha, 2021; Sihaloho, 2022). Research has also explored the impact of local wisdom on education, highlighting the significance of incorporating traditional values in learning and leadership (Hendri, 2020; Specia & Osman, 2015). However, limited research specifically investigates the application of the *Maja Labo Dahu* leadership philosophy in enhancing educational quality within Indonesian schools, particularly in SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how the *Maja Labo Dahu* leadership model can be systematically implemented to improve student outcomes and school performance.

This study aims to analyze the leadership strategies based on *Maja Labo Dahu* and their impact on education quality at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima by identifying its core leadership values and their relevance to school leadership, evaluating their influence on school management and student outcomes, and developing a leadership framework that integrates local wisdom to enhance education quality. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of traditional Bima leadership values with modern school leadership principles, offering an innovative approach that aligns local cultural values with global educational standards. Focusing on the leadership practices of school principals, teachers, and the broader school community, this research explores the implementation of *Maja Labo Dahu* as a leadership model within SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. By investigating the role of *Maja Labo Dahu* in school leadership, this study contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive educational leadership and provides practical recommendations for policymakers and educators in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach, as advocated by Creswell (2014). A qualitative approach is employed to explore the complexities of leadership strategies rooted in *Maja Labo Dahu* within an educational setting, allowing for an in-depth understanding of context-specific phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Ulfatin (2022), qualitative research emphasizes a naturalistic inquiry process, aiming to understand human experiences within real-world settings rather than testing predefined hypotheses. The case study approach was chosen due to its ability to provide a rich, detailed exploration of leadership practices at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima, a school recognized for its strong academic reputation and its adoption of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima, chosen for its strong reputation in educational leadership and commitment to curriculum innovation. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of key stakeholders who directly influence and experience leadership practices. The primary participants included the school principal, who provided insights into leadership decision-making and strategic planning; teachers, who shared their perspectives on leadership effectiveness and instructional support; students, whose experiences helped assess the impact of leadership on learning outcomes; and school administrative staff, who contributed valuable insights into organizational management and the implementation of leadership strategies.

Data Collection Methods

To ensure a holistic and triangulated understanding, this study employed multiple data collection techniques, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, teachers, students, and administrative staff to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of leadership based on *Maja Labo Dahu*. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify key leadership patterns. Participant observation involved direct observation of school activities, leadership meetings, and interactions, with field notes documenting leadership behaviors, communication styles, and decision-making processes. Additionally, document analysis was conducted by reviewing school reports, strategic plans, teacher performance evaluations, and curriculum implementation guidelines, providing secondary data to contextualize

leadership strategies. By integrating these varied methods, the study ensured methodological triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of its qualitative findings (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was conducted using an iterative, inductive approach, following the analytical model proposed by Ridder (2014), which comprises three key phases: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data condensation phase, relevant data were systematically selected, categorized, and coded to identify emerging patterns and key leadership attributes related to Maja Labo Dahu, along with their practical implications. The data display phase involved organizing the coded data into matrices, thematic maps, and conceptual frameworks to facilitate interpretation, while comparing findings across multiple data sources to ensure credibility and coherence. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification phase, themes and relationships between leadership values and school performance were identified, with continuous verification through peer debriefing and member checking with participants, ensuring the interpretive accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To guide the interpretation of findings, this study employs Maja Labo Dahu as the primary analytical lens, positioning it within the broader context of educational leadership theories. This indigenous leadership philosophy emphasizes honor, integrity, and courage, providing a culturally relevant foundation for school leadership in Indonesia. The integration of this local wisdom with contemporary leadership models (such as transformational and servant leadership) offers an innovative perspective on school management, aligning traditional values with global educational standards. By adopting this comprehensive methodological approach, the study not only explores the effectiveness of Maja Labo Dahu-based leadership but also contributes to the broader discourse on culturally responsive educational leadership. Findings from this research are expected to inform policy recommendations and leadership training programs, ensuring a sustainable and culturally integrated approach to educational leadership in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS

Manifestation of Maja Labo Dahu Leadership Values

The findings reveal that the leadership practices at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima incorporate key values of *Maja Labo Dahu*, which significantly influence school governance and decision-making. The first value, Mbolo Ra Dampa, emphasizes collective decision-making through deliberation and familial consensus, ensuring that school policies are collectively accountable and accepted by all stakeholders. This approach fosters inclusivity and shared responsibility among the school principal, teachers, and students. The second value, Karawi Kabuju (prioritizing the common good), is reflected in the principal's leadership style, which involves thorough analysis, observation, and collaborative discussions with teachers and students before implementing school policies. This ensures that every decision considers diverse perspectives and serves the broader interests of the school community. The third value, Suu Sawau Sia Sawale (mutual respect and support), is evident in the principal's leadership approach, which prioritizes inclusivity, respect for differing opinions, and the creation of a harmonious school environment. These values collectively enhance trust, cooperation, and mutual respect among all school members, ultimately contributing to improved educational quality and student character development.

School Leadership Strategies

The research findings indicate that the integration of *Maja Labo Dahu* values into school leadership strategies has led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of local wisdom among students. This integration strengthens students' sense of cultural identity and pride in their Bima heritage, reinforcing character education alongside academic learning. Furthermore, internal school engagement strategies play a crucial role in enhancing education quality. The involvement of teachers and school staff in strategic planning and development has resulted in increased participation and motivation, leading to better instructional quality and student engagement. This heightened collaboration among educators has fostered an environment where teaching and learning practices continuously improve. Additionally, external collaboration strategies have had a profound impact on educational quality. Strengthened partnerships with local communities, industries, and governmental agencies have provided the school with greater access to resources, technology, and training opportunities. Consequently, students have been exposed to more practical and industry-relevant skills, bridging the gap between formal education and workforce demands.

Enhancement of Teacher Quality

The study finds that school leadership based on *Maja Labo Dahu* values has significantly improved teacher performance at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. Teachers have demonstrated enhanced collaboration, respect for diverse perspectives, and stronger character-building skills following the implementation of culturally grounded leadership. Additionally, teachers have developed more effective and innovative teaching methods, particularly in incorporating technology and student-centered approaches. The following table illustrates the improvements in teacher competencies before and after adopting *Maja Labo Dahu*-based leadership:

Table 1. Improvement in Teacher Competencies

Competency	Before Implementation (%)	After Implementation (%)	Increase (%)
Collaboration	60%	80%	20%
Mutual respect	75%	90%	15%
Student character development	70%	90%	20%
Project-based learning	50%	75%	25%
Problem-based learning	40%	75%	35%
Technology-based learning	60%	80%	20%
Inquiry-based learning	50%	80%	30%

These improvements demonstrate how leadership that incorporates local wisdom and values can enhance pedagogical skills, thereby improving overall teaching effectiveness.

Increase in Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The findings indicate that leadership grounded in *Maja Labo Dahu* has significantly boosted student engagement in extracurricular activities. Over the years, the number of students participating in leadership development and cultural programs has increased, reflecting greater enthusiasm and a stronger sense of identity among students.

Table 2. Increase in Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Year	Total Students	Active Participation	Percentage
2022	958	100	10.43%
2023	960	145	15.10%
2024	964	186	19.29%

These statistics illustrate a continuous rise in extracurricular participation, indicating that culturally responsive leadership not only enhances student engagement but also reinforces local cultural values and character education.

Improvement of Learning Environment

The study finds that the implementation of *Maja Labo Dahu*-based leadership has fostered a more positive and conducive learning environment at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. By integrating local wisdom into the school's curriculum and policies, students have become more motivated and actively involved in classroom discussions and learning activities. Teachers, in turn, have become more innovative and committed to delivering quality education. The impact of these improvements is reflected in the following table:

Table 3. Impact on Learning Environment

Impact Indicator	Before Implementation (%)	After Implementation (%)
Student Motivation	60%	80%
Teacher Motivation	70%	85%
Student Learning Outcomes (Avg. Score)	60	80

The data show a notable improvement in student motivation, teacher enthusiasm, and learning outcomes, reinforcing the effectiveness of culturally responsive leadership in fostering academic excellence and holistic student development. The study demonstrates that leadership practices incorporating *Maja Labo Dahu* values have had far-reaching positive effects on school governance, teacher performance, student engagement, and the overall learning environment. By integrating local wisdom with modern educational leadership strategies, SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima has enhanced educational quality while

preserving cultural identity. These findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive leadership in education and offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators seeking to implement similar approaches in diverse educational contexts.

4. DISCUSSION

Integration of Maja Labo Dahu Leadership Values in School Leadership

The findings of this study indicate that the local wisdom values embedded in Maja Labo Dahu, namely Mbolo Ra Dampa, Karawi Kaboju, and Suu Sawau Sia Sawale, are strongly reflected in the leadership style of the school principal at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. These values emphasize collective decision-making, prioritization of the common good, and mutual respect, fostering a leadership approach that promotes inclusivity, shared responsibility, and cultural integrity. The principal's decision-making process, rooted in Mbolo Ra Dampa, ensures that school policies are developed through deliberation and consensus, reinforcing a culture of shared accountability. Meanwhile, Karawi Kaboju encourages prioritization of the collective interest, aligning leadership decisions with the needs of students, teachers, and the school community. The practice of Suu Sawau Sia Sawale, which emphasizes mutual respect and support, contributes to the development of an inclusive, harmonious, and collaborative school environment. The results align with Iskhakova and Ott (2020), who found that team-level cultural intelligence (CQ) enhances the performance of culturally diverse teams, suggesting that culturally embedded leadership fosters trust and cooperation. Similarly, Bush and Glover (2018) argue that effective school leadership significantly influences student engagement and institutional success. The implementation of Maja Labo Dahu values in school leadership at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima further reinforces the importance of local wisdom in contemporary leadership practices, demonstrating that culturally responsive leadership approaches can significantly improve educational quality, organizational effectiveness, and student character development.

Comparison with Existing Literature on School Leadership Strategies

This study further demonstrates that leadership strategies integrating Maja Labo Dahu values, engagement of internal school members, and strengthening collaborations with external stakeholders contribute significantly to improving educational quality at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima. The study findings indicate that inclusive decision-making and participatory leadership approaches result in a stronger sense of collective ownership among educators and students, fostering a cohesive school culture that aligns leadership practices with cultural values and school improvement efforts. The findings also highlight the importance of external collaborations, particularly in expanding access to resources, technological advancements, and industry-based learning opportunities. These findings support Hitt and Ireland (2017), who assert that inclusive school development strategies involving all stakeholders positively impact educational quality. Leithwood et al. (2020) further emphasize that effective school leadership must be adaptive, context-specific, and culturally grounded, ensuring that leadership strategies align with local needs and global educational standards. By embedding Maja Labo Dahu values in school leadership, SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima successfully integrates culturally informed leadership models with contemporary educational management practices, demonstrating that leadership informed by local wisdom fosters sustainable school development and community engagement.

Impact on Teacher Quality and Instructional Innovation

This study also reveals that Maja Labo Dahu-based leadership significantly improves teacher quality at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima, particularly in areas of collaboration, mutual respect, and student character-building. Teachers reported a greater sense of shared responsibility and professional commitment, alongside an increased ability to implement student-centered, innovative, and technology-driven pedagogical approaches. Leadership strategies informed by Maja Labo Dahu values encourage teachers to engage in reflective practices, collaborate with peers, and participate in professional development programs, leading to sustained improvements in instructional quality and student learning outcomes. The findings align with Iskhakova and Ott (2020), who emphasize that cultural intelligence enhances team performance in diverse educational settings, reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive leadership in teacher development. Additionally, Widodo et al. (2024) found that school leadership emphasizing cultural intelligence positively affects teacher performance, particularly when mediated by organizational culture and governance structures. The application of Maja Labo Dahu values in teacher professional development at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima highlights the transformative potential of culturally embedded leadership practices, demonstrating that cultural wisdom enhances professional effectiveness, instructional creativity, and student engagement.

Enhancement of Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Findings from this study suggest that Maja Labo Dahu-based leadership significantly increases student participation in extracurricular activities, fostering stronger cultural identity, leadership skills, and school engagement. The principal's commitment to inclusive and participatory school governance encourages students to actively participate in extracurricular programs, contributing to their personal growth, teamwork, and leadership abilities. By embedding Maja Labo Dahu values into extracurricular programming, students develop a greater appreciation for their cultural heritage, reinforcing positive identity formation and community engagement. These findings are consistent with Bush and Glover (2018), who argue that

effective leadership positively influences student motivation and engagement in school activities. Similarly, Widodo et al. (2024) emphasize that school leadership based on cultural intelligence significantly enhances teacher performance and student participation, particularly when mediated by organizational culture and school governance structures. The study findings further illustrate that culturally embedded leadership approaches create inclusive, student-centered learning environments, ultimately strengthening school culture and academic performance.

Implications for Educational Strategies and Cultural Identity

This study underscores the importance of culturally embedded leadership strategies in enhancing student identity and pride in their local culture. By integrating Maja Labo Dahu values into school leadership, students at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima develop a stronger sense of belonging and appreciation for their cultural roots, which contributes to character formation and leadership development. The research findings align with Widodo et al. (2024), who highlight that culturally responsive leadership enhances student engagement and academic performance, reinforcing the need for policy frameworks that integrate local wisdom into school leadership practices. Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that effective school leadership must consider local cultural dynamics, ensuring that students receive holistic, culturally grounded education. This study provides strong evidence that culturally responsive leadership positively impacts student motivation, engagement, and social development, suggesting that future leadership training programs should incorporate frameworks for integrating local wisdom into school governance and pedagogy.

Improvement of Learning Environment and Motivation

Another significant finding of this study is that Maja Labo Dahu-based leadership improves the learning environment at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima, particularly in student motivation, teacher commitment, and classroom engagement. By integrating local wisdom into instructional strategies, students become more actively involved in learning, resulting in higher levels of engagement, creativity, and academic performance. Teachers also reported increased motivation and enthusiasm for curriculum development, reflecting a broader commitment to culturally responsive teaching practices. These findings align with Huda (2018), who found that incorporating local values into learning processes significantly increases student motivation and participation. Additionally, Widodo et al. (2024) argue that school leadership emphasizing cultural intelligence enhances teacher motivation and instructional quality, reinforcing the importance of integrating cultural intelligence into educational leadership training.

Significance of Findings in Educational Leadership and Policy Development

The findings of this study provide critical insights for educational policymakers and school leaders, demonstrating that culturally responsive leadership is essential for enhancing educational quality, fostering inclusivity, and promoting student engagement. The integration of Maja Labo Dahu values in school leadership not only improves teacher and student performance but also strengthens cultural identity and school governance. These results suggest that educational leadership training programs should incorporate cultural intelligence frameworks to promote holistic and inclusive school management practices. By recognizing the importance of local wisdom in school governance, policymakers can develop sustainable, community-driven educational strategies that align with global educational standards and local cultural values.

5. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to analyze the leadership strategies based on Maja Labo Dahu and their impact on education quality at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima by identifying its core leadership values, evaluating their influence on school management and student outcomes, and developing a leadership framework that integrates local wisdom into education. The findings reveal that the leadership practices at SMA Negeri 1 Kota Bima incorporate key Maja Labo Dahu values—collective decision-making, prioritizing the common good, and mutual respect—which significantly improve school governance, teacher quality, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes. The study contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive educational leadership by demonstrating that integrating indigenous leadership philosophies with contemporary leadership models fosters a more inclusive, accountable, and effective school environment. These findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators, emphasizing the importance of embedding local wisdom into leadership training and school management to enhance education quality while preserving cultural identity.

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