



# Learning How Transformational Leaders Create Positive Climate for Learning in Multicultural Schools: An Exploratory Study

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**Abstract.** Transformational school leaders are always correlated to positive climate in order to encourage students learn maximally. This article is aimed at discussing the results of an exploratory study on how transformational leaders manage positive climate in five secondary multicultural schools in Surakarta, Indonesia. This is a narrative qualitative research in which the writer uses in-depth interview, observation, and documentation as the methods of collecting the data. The subjects of the study are five school principals, 15 teachers and 15 students from five multicultural schools. The data was analyzed inductively by following the thematic steps developed by Creswell. Credibility of the data is verified by applying data triangulation. The results of the interview show that the school principals created school rules, encouraged the teachers to implement character building in the classrooms, designed activities which involve students, and involve parents to monitor the school activities. As bullying occurred, the principals invited parents and school committee to solve the bullying problems, monitored the students, conducted dialogue, and involved the counseling teachers. The keys to create a positive climate are strengthening characters, becoming models for students, conducting good communication, teaching to respect others, and engaging school community to work together.

**Keywords:** positive climate · multicultural schools · transformational leadership

## 1 Introduction

Creating a positive climate is an important factor needed to encourage students engage in a teaching and learning process in order that they can develop their fullest potential [1]. Some scholars associate a positive school climate with safety, participatory, learning motivation, pleasure, well-being, and qualified interaction [2–4]. Hence, bullying, one of the problems which hinder students' learning success, should be stopped in schools. It can affect student well-being [5, 6] and the Indonesian government has launched several efforts to reduce it in schools. The reduced bullying can support the realization of Freedom to Learn Program. This program is implemented as a transformative effort in the field of education to give students independence in learning with the core of being independent, constructive, transformative, progressive, and humanist. Based on

this concept, students can learn well in an environment that is safe from violence and bullying.

The concept of Freedom to Learn is in line with the opinions of proponents in the field of Indonesian education. First, education gives freedom to students from fear, pressure, injustice, and darkness [7, 8]. Second, learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge by students [9]. Third, learning is carried out so that students are critical, dialogical, and actively involved in the transformation of education in society [10]. Fourth, the implementation of learning is progressive; gaining valuable experience through learning by doing [11]. Fifth, humanist learning emphasizes positive communication as a way to shape character of students. Through this approach, learning is sought to eliminate violence that occurs in schools [12].

Findings showed that bullying occurs in many schools. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) stated that in a period of 9 years, from 2011 to 2019, there were 37,381 complaints of violence against children. For bullying both in education and social media, the figure reached 2,473 reports and the trend continues to increase. Previous research on cases of violence in schools [13] revealed that bullying occurs because of the influence of individuals, peer groups, and the perpetrator's community environment. Meanwhile, Herawati and Deharnita [14] revealed factors that cause bullying, including family disharmony, lack of attention, and revenge.

Other causes of violence among students are family, schools, ethnic backgrounds, peer conformity, and process of teaching and learning [15–18]. In terms of student violence against teachers, Damanik [19] revealed that this behavior is included in the student's delinquency category which shows a student's deviant behavior. A literature review from 2014 to 2019 conducted by Muhopilah and Tentama [20] shows that bullying occurs due to personality factors, family, experiences in childhood and the school environment. Based on a literature review conducted on 10 articles, all of which were conducted on students, it is known that bullying behavior mostly occurred in school students aged 12–16 years.

One of the efforts of the Indonesian government is to cooperate with UNICEF in a program called roots. In this program, the school appointed a number of 30 students who have positive behavior and have an influence on their friends to be appointed as agents of change. These thirty students were accompanied by a facilitator teacher to promote anti-bullying. However, this effort until 2022 has not shown results. The government is still waiting for the results of the character survey conducted in 2021. However, the principal as the first person responsible for the implementation of all activities has made various efforts to create an environment that supports the implementation of bullying-free schools.

As argued by Muhopilah and Tentama [20], school climate is one of the factors which trigger bullying to occur. Research conducted by Rezapour, Khanjani and Mirzai [21] found the a low number of bullying in a comfortable school environment and a high number of verbal bullying in an uncomfortable school environment. In addition; rules, physical comfort, interaction, and environmental support are also associated with bullying behavior. These studies imply that this experience is a comfortable environment in reducing the amount of violence.

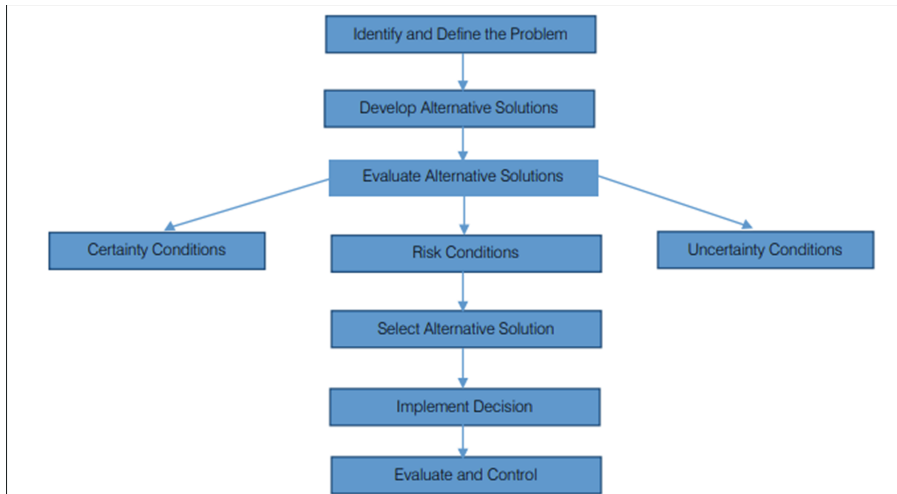
A positive school environment refers to the condition of school environment which makes students feel physically and psychically safe. This condition is often related with school community interaction which influences students' behavior [22, 23]. Koth et al. (2008) [24] agree with the statement that healthy schools result from positive interaction among students and teachers. Hoy et al. [22] and Koth et al. [24] added that positive school environment occur as educational values are introduced to school members. The climate created a good relationship among school community [22]. Hoy et al. [22] showed that positive climate drives teachers to enjoy working, make a good relationship with students, and colleagues and they strive for excellence. Based on the definitions of a positive environment mentioned above, the writer concludes that a positive environment is associated with school conditions, that is participatory (involving all school members), respective, interactive to achieve a predetermined school vision.

Since setting a positive climate is an ongoing process and its success requires the participation of all school parties, so school principals play an important role. School principals should be able to manage the school environment which can support students' freedom to learn. To achieve it school principals should also make transformation. They must be able to identify the interests, needs and desires of the school community [25]. They must also motivate those who are led to achieve these needs and desires [26]. The principal must also be a role model, inspire, and show a clear vision to all his subordinates [27, 28]. In addition, principals who encourage the school community to be creative, innovative, think critically in solving the problems they face. The behavior pattern of the principal is in accordance with the nature of transformational leadership formulated by Yukl [29], namely idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation.

As emphasized by Anderman et al. [30], school principals play an important role in managing school atmosphere. This management is a part of their duty as school leaders. Based on the ministerial regulation of Education and Culture number 6/2018, there are three main duties of school principals: performing administrative or managerial duties, performing instructional duties based on performing instructional duties based on eight standards of education, and enforcing policies and regulations. Regarding the performing instructional duties, school principals should maintain the quality of education based on five school components namely, context, input, process, output, and outcome. There are three main goals of the quality assurance; achieving the quality and relevance, justice (provide balanced treatment between rights and obligations), affectivity and efficiency, accountability.

Performing justice should be done by school principals in order to be fair, that is punishing the guilty and helping them to stop offending, while protecting the innocent in the school setting. This duty includes protecting students and solving the problems of bullying. In this case, schools' principals apply various efforts to prevent and solve bullying problems. Donnelly, Gibson, and Mancervich [31] suggested stages in making decision which can be seen in Fig. 1.

This study investigates the efforts done by school principals to create positive climate in 5 senior high schools in Central Java, Indonesia. Specifically, the research explored the strategies applied by five school principals to cope with bullying problems in 5 multicultural schools. The schools chosen based on some considerations. The first, they



**Fig. 1.** Stages of making decision making (adopted from Gibson, and Mancervich, 1995)

are multicultural schools which can be identified from the heterogeneity of students' social economic background, gender, religion, ethnicity, and demography. Second, they are all popular schools. Third, the schools are led by transformational school leaders. The best practices of the school principals in managing the positive school climate can be adopted by other schools.

## 2 Method

This is a descriptive narrative qualitative research adopted to describe and conclude the narrative of the school principals' experience to create a positive school climate specially to prevent and cope with bullying problems. This research approach is derived from phenomenological principles formulated by Husserl and Heidegger which aims to understand and describe deep specific phenomena in order to obtain the essence of the participants' life experiences [32]. The descriptive qualitative adopted in this study focuses on the naturalistic principle of inquiry that emphasizes the experience of participants in natural conditions [33]. In line with the two concepts, the participants' perspectives are the main focus of this study. The data, hence, were taken through in-depth interviews, observation, and analysis of supporting documents. Interviews were conducted with 5 school principals, 15 teachers, and 15 students.

The observations were carried out for one month in each school. The researchers observed the interaction of teachers and students as well as the learning process in the schools. Five students from each of the schools selected were the representatives of bullying agencies. Meanwhile, the teachers selected were religion teachers, mathematics or physics teachers, Guidance and Counseling, and Sociology teachers and English teachers. All selected teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experience in the same schools. This interview was conducted by asking to tell how the school principals and teachers prevented and dealt with bullying that occurred in their schools. Interviews

were conducted using open exploratory and interpretive questions to help participants share their experiences about the phenomenon being studied.

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed inductively by following the thematic steps developed by Creswell [34] consisting of 5 stages namely, organizing and preparing the data, concluding the information in general, coding, categorizing the data, and making interpretation of the data collected.

### 3 Result and Discussion

Based on the analysis, it is found that there are several efforts done by the school principals to create positive climate in schools. The first is the programs applied by the schools to prevent bullying. The second is the efforts to solve bullying cases. Each of the efforts is discussed below.

#### 3.1 Preventing

The results of the interview show that the school principals created school rules, encouraged the teachers to implement character building in the classrooms, designed activities which involve students, and involved parents to monitor the school activities. Following is the detail.

##### a. School Rules

To prevent bullying from occurring, the principals created school rules which include how to dress, behave, and interact with others. The principals kept reminding the rules to the students in several activities, such as school flag ceremony on Monday morning, Indonesian Independence Day ceremony, welcoming event of the new students, and conducting dialogue with the students. Following is the principals' statement:

*“Salah satu usaha yang kami lakukan untuk mencegah timbulnya perundungan di sekolah adalah dengan membuat tata tertib kemudian mensosialisasi tata tertib sekolah tersebut di setiap kesempatan.”* (Data 4.1)

(One of the efforts we do to prevent bullying in schools is to create rules and then socialize the school discipline at every opportunity).

*“Adanya peraturan yg mengikat peserta didik, mensosialisasikan, dan menumbuhkan kembangkan pendidikan karakter”* (Data 4.2)

(There are regulations that bind students, socialize, and develop character education).

*“Semua warga sekolah menyepakati tentang budaya sekolah damai, menciptakan kelas yang damai dan memiliki ciri utama adalah, kerja sama, komunikasi dan emosional.”*

*Lebih banyak memberikan layanan kegiatan kerohanian dan bimbingan konseling kepada peserta didik disekolah. Selalu menanamkan ikatan persaudaraan ke semua warga sekolah” (Data 4.12)*

(All school members agree on the peaceful school culture, creating peaceful classrooms and having main characteristics of cooperation, communication and emotion. More services provide spiritual activities and counseling to students in schools. Always instill fraternal ties to all school members).

*b. Involving students in nonacademic activities*

The schools provided a number of activities that the students could choose based on their interests. All students were encouraged to participate the activities known as extracurricular which were conducted after school hours at 3 until 5 pm once a week. The extracurricular activities that the studentss could join were basketball, photography, journalism, music, English club, soccer, traditional dance or chess. The schools also sent talented students to participate school competition.

*“Merancang, membuat dan memprogramkan kegiatan2 disekolah yang melibatkan semua siswa. Seperti dalam kegiatan2 keagamaan, ekstra kurikuler dan mengikutkan peserta didik dalam kegiatan lomba diluar sekolah.” (Data 4.3)*

(Designing, creating and programming school activities that involve all students such as in religious activities, extra-curricular, competition activities outside of school.)

The school principals also engaged all their school members to attend particular meeting such as green walk, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), performing arts, and doing religious rituals based on students' religion in particular day. As the vice principal of public school stated:

*“Untuk memberikan kesempatan pada semua komunitas sekolah agar saling mengenal, maka di sekolah kami diadakan kegiatan yang melibatkan semua anggota sekolah. Kegiatan ini dilaksanakan pada hari Jumat, seperti gotong royong membersihkan sekolah, membrikan kesempatan pada semua guru dan siswa beribadah sesuai keyakinan masing-masing, dan ada kegiatan pentas seni untuk mengenalkan budaya-budaya daerah.”*

(In order to provide opportunities for all school communities to get to know each other, at our school activities are held that involve all school members. These activities are held on Fridays, such as mutual assistance in cleaning schools, providing opportunities for all teachers and students to worship according to their respective beliefs, and there are art performances to introduce local cultures).

*c. Strengthening the character education (known as Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter)*

One of the efforts to prevent bullying is implementing “Strengthening The Character Education” program (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* abbreviated as PPK). This is an Indonesian government program to strengthen students’ characters by harmonizing the students’ cognitive, affective, and skill aspects. To realize it, school principals are suggested to engage teachers, family, and community. The education is conducted to realize “Pancasila student profiles” with 6 characters namely, 1) having faith, 2) fear God almighty, 3) global diversity, 4) gotong royong, 5) critical thinking, and innovative.

Equipping students with these characters is an integral part in teaching learning process, extracurricular, and other activities. Below is the result of the interview with the vice principal of Christian affiliated school.

*“Dengan Pembentukan Karakter, spiritual dalam bentuk etika moral agar siswa tahu bagaimana harus berperilaku baik, dan disiplin baik disekolah dan di rumah.”* (Data 4.6)

(With Character Building, spiritual in the form of moral ethics so that students know how to behave well, and be disciplined both at school and at home).

The characters were not taught only explicitly during teaching learning process but also through giving model. The principals said that:

*“...dengan pembelajaran karakter dan ketauladanan dari warga sekolah”* (Data 4.10)

(... with character learning and exemplary from school residents)

#### d. *Parents, classroom teachers, counseling teachers, and community involvement*

The principals involved parents, classroom teachers, counseling teachers, and community to avoid bullying to occur. The involvement was done in many activities. One of them is inviting a police officer to become an event speaker to discuss the danger of drug abuse, bullying, or sexual harassment. One of the principals explained as follows.

*“Para wali kelas dan guru2 BP juga saya perintahkan utk terus memberikan bimbingan dan sosialisasi ttg bahaya kekerasan pada anak. Sering juga sekolah kami mendatangkan dari unsur kepolisian dalam rangka sosialisasi bahayanya narkoba, tawuran, dan lain-lain. Warga sekolah kita ajak untuk merasa memiliki sekolah agar menjadi Sekolah yang Aman dan Nyaman”* (Data 4.9)

(I also instructed homeroom teachers and Guidance and Counseling teachers to continue to provide guidance and socialization about the dangers of violence against children. Most of the time, our schools also involve the law in order to socialize the dangers of drugs, fights, and others. We invite our school residents to feel like they belong to this school in order to make this school as a safe and comfortable space).

### 3.2 Solving

As bullying occurred, the principals invited parents and school committee to solve the bullying problems, monitored the students, conducted dialogue, and involved counseling teachers. Each of the solutions is discussed as follows:

a. *Discussing the problems with parents and school committee*

Inviting the stakeholders (parents and committee) was done to identify family education background and to inform parents about the bullying. This was also done to educate the parents how to behave parents also educate how to behave.

*“Bersosialisasi dengan murid dan orangtua/wali murid serta pihak yang terkait. Kerja sama dengan stakeholder”* (Data 5.2)

(Socializing with students and parents / guardians of students and related parties. Collaboration with stakeholder).

b. *Monitoring*

Classroom teacher, together with counseling teachers, monitored the students with bullying problems.

*“Pemantauan kedisiplinan secara berkelanjutan”* (Data 5.4) (Continuous disciplinary monitoring)

*“Kekerasan atau Bullying diharamkan disekolah kami. Mulai dari peraturan sampai dengan program kegiatan di sekolah kami menekankan dan memastikan Kepada peserta untuk menghindari Bullying”* (Data 5.8)

Homeroom teachers also monitored the students' social media by becoming their followers. This was done to avoid cyber bullying. As one of the Math teachers in Islamic affiliated school stated:

*“Pemantauan dilaksanakan tidak hanya dilakukan di sekolah saja, namun juga di luar. Kami memantau social media yang mereka gunakan. Kami tidak bermaksud mencampuri urusan mereka, namun hanya memastikan bahwa mereka tidak melakukan perbuatan-perbuatan yang buruk atau mendapatkan perlakuan yang buruk.”* (Data 5.5)

(Monitoring is not only done at school, but also outside of school. We put together the social media they use. We don't mean to interfere in their business, but we want to make sure that they don't do bad things or get bad treatment).

c. *Dialog*



Before the principals discussed the bullying cases with the stakeholders, the principals conducted a relevant dialog with the students. They invited both the bullier and the victim of bullying. It was done to identify the causes of the problems, the reasons why they bullied others.

*“Dengan pendekatan dialogis dan humanis religius.”* (Data 5.11)

(With a religious dialogue and humanist approach)

#### d. *Guidance and counseling*

Besides conducting the dialog with the bullier, the principals handed over the problems to guidance and counseling teachers. The teachers guided and monitored the students.

*“Usaha mengatasi kekerasan dengan cara pengawasan ketat dan pembinaan bagi yg melakukan”* (Data 6.2)

(The effort is to overcome violence by strengthen the supervision and guidance for those who do the bullying.)

*“Melaksanakan tugas piket bergiliran, melakukan penyelidikan kasus dan bimbingan.”* (Data 6.2)

(Carry out the rotating picket duties, carry out the case investigations and guidance)

Based on the findings, it can be seen that the school principals used some strategies to create positive climate at schools. One of the strategies to prevent bullying is through school rules, monitoring students both in and outside of schools. This finding support Perry’s findings [35] that ensuring a safe environment can be done by conducting school rules. Researches showed that school rules and norms obeyed by school community resulted positive situation is the school [36]. This effort was supported by encouraging the teachers and school staffs to interact positively with the students. Building good relationship among school community was done through collaboration and good communication.

Another effort to create a positive climate in school is by encouraging teachers, students, and academic staffs to respect others. This one of the criteria of building good relationship [37–39]. The school principals also encouraged teachers to strengthen students’ characters through explicitly and implicitly in teaching and learning process. This a good way to build a positive climate which support the students’ academic achievement well-being [40, 41]. It can be concluded that the school principals applied many strategies to prevent and solving bullying cases to create positive climate in school. The keys to create a positive climate are strengthening characters, becoming models for students, conducting good communication, teaching to respect others, and engaging school community to work together.

## 4 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be found that the secondary school principals applied several efforts to prevent bullying and solve bullying cases in the schools. To prevent bullying, the school principals created school rules, encouraged the teachers to implement character building in the classrooms, designed activities which involve students, and involved parents to monitor the school activities. To overcome the bullying cases, the principals invited parents and school committee to solve the bullying problems, monitored the students, conducted dialogue, and involved counseling teachers.

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