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## Principal's Experience in Internalizing Handep Values Based on the Huma Betang Philosophy: Phenomenological Studies at Elementary School Number 2 Palangka Raya

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Case Studies, Huma Betang Philosophical Values, Principal Leadership, SD Negeri 2 Palangka, Work Ethic

#### Abstract

*This research aims to explore the principal's subjective experience in internalizing Handep values which include harmony, adaptation, reason, dedication, efficiency and unity based on the Huma Betang philosophy of the Dayak people in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. The philosophy of Huma Betang, as a symbol of longhouses symbolizing communal living, mutual assistance and social balance. Using an interpretive phenomenology approach, this research was carried out at SD Negeri 2 Palangka. Data were collected through semi-structural in-depth interviews recorded and transcribed, supplemented by participant observation in the school environment. Data analysis was carried out thematically with source triangulation to ensure validity. The findings reveal that the experience of internalizing Handep not only enriches leadership identity, but also creates an inclusive school climate. Recommendations include the integration of the Huma Betang philosophy in the national leadership curriculum to support continuing education.*

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## Introduction

National education basically has the aim of making the nation's life smarter and trying to develop Indonesia as a whole based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Education is something that happens continuously and experiences development. In essence, education is the process of forming humans into fully developed people, including thought patterns, taste, mental exercise and exercise through the learning process. Education contributes greatly to the progress of the nation and is a vehicle for building the nation's character. According to Suwardana, this largest investment can be realized by increasing human resources (HR) in the field of education, considering that education is the main factor in the formation of the human person. Where through education a person will become a person who is rich in knowledge, so he can compete with other nations (Ideswal, 2020).

Superior human resources are the main requirement for the realization of developed nations and countries where education is the basic capital for creating superior human resources. Education in Indonesia basically aims to shape the character of students through four key dimensions, namely as individuals who have confidence, independent abilities, the ability to interact in society, and as responsible citizens (Rulianto, 2019). Education is essentially an effort to transmit the values of – cultural values which aims to develop students' potential, interests and talents so that they can become human beings who have faith, are devout, have noble morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and are able to become citizens who are democratic, responsible, and able to maintain and develop the culture owned by society (Irwana 2015; Pratiwi, Roesminingsih, and Karwanto 2021).

Education in Indonesia, as a country of exceptional cultural diversity, faces the challenge of integrating local values into formal educational leadership practices. National character and identity can be created because of various local wisdom which has been proven to be able to make this nation dignified. Local wisdom in general is ideas, values or views from a place that have a wise and good value nature that can be followed and trusted by the local community and have been followed for generations. The word local wisdom is used to indicate the existence of a concept that in local socio-cultural life there is a complaint, a height of values, truth, goodness and beauty that is appreciated by society so that it is used as a guide or guide to build patterns of relationships between residents or as a basis for building their life goals that they want to realize (Kuntoro in Novilasari, 2019:954).

In line with this, Jupri (2019) explains that local wisdom is the value or behaviour of local people's lives in interacting with the environment in which they live wisely, so it is not the same in different places and times. Local wisdom is basic knowledge of life, obtained from life experiences or truths, can be abstract or concrete, balanced with nature and culture belonging to a particular community group. This is in line with the opinion by Fajarini in Sukari et al (2022) which explains that local wisdom is a view of life and science as well as various life strategies in the form of activities carried out by local communities in answering various problems in fulfilling their needs.

Indonesia is known as a country that has the most unique and diverse cultural patterns. Indonesia is the largest pluralistic country in the world as evidenced by sociocultural and geographical realities that are so diverse and vast (Apandie et al, 2019). In fact, currently Indonesian culture is felt to be increasingly fading. The influx of foreign culture was one of the factors in the decline of regional culture in Indonesia. Culture as an identity, which means inherent characteristics and characteristics, can be said to fade and even begin to disappear. At least, there are three things that are at the root of the cultural identity crisis in Indonesia. The first is the concept of identity itself which is never something absolute and permanent. Next is cultural policy related to cultural politics from every ruling regime in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the latter is of course the result of the invasion of global capitalism which provides many gaps in ambiguity in the development and formation of national cultural identities (Sukarwo, 2017). One of the largest tribes in Indonesia and has noble local wisdom and strong community character is the Dayak tribe. Dayak is the name for the native people in Kalimantan. The Dayak tribe consists of 7 (seven) large tribal groups and is divided into 405 small-to-small sub-tribes. Of the seven tribal groups, the Dayak tribe is mostly found in Central Kalimantan. According to Tjilik Riwut in Anggraini (2016), the Dayak tribe in Central Kalimantan has 54 sub-tribes spread across various rivers, namely the Kapuas, Kahayan, Katingan, Mentaya, Seruyan and Barito rivers. The most common Dayak tribe in Tengah Kalimantan is the Dayak “Ngaju”.

The meaning of the value of wisdom reflects the habits of indigenous people in living a wise life, one of which is reflected in the local wisdom of the Huma Betang Dayak tribe of Kalimantan. “Huma Betang” is in everyday terms “a large house” which is inhabited by many people with various religions and beliefs but remains harmonious and peaceful (Usop et al. 2011). In the Kalimantan region, especially among the Dayak people, the philosophy of “Huma Betang”—traditional longhouse which symbolizes communal life, mutual cooperation, social harmony and balance between humans, nature and spirit— is the foundation of deep culture. Huma Betang is the traditional home of the Kalimantan Dayak tribe, especially in the upstream river area which is usually the centre of Dayak settlement and is a transportation route for carrying out various mobility. Huma spans or longhouses have extraordinary meaning where the meaning from creation to development results reflects tolerance and leadership (Neni et al. 2012).

Huma Betang in the context of modern times then experienced changes in value content. In the past, it was considered a form of physical building, then the philosophical values contained in it emerged. These philosophical values then become the basis for social life, not only for Dayak residents, but also for all community members living in Central Kalimantan (Rostiana et al, 2020). Huma Betang's philosophical values have been ratified and contained in Palangka Raya City regional regulation Number 15 of 2009 which reads “What is meant by Huma Betang's philosophy of life or *Belom Bahadat* is a form of life behavior that upholds honesty, equality, togetherness and tolerance and obeys the law (state law, customary law and natural law). If you are able to carry out *Belom Bahadat's* life, eating will be actualized in the

form of *Belom Penyang Hinje Simpei*, namely living side by side, harmony and peace for the sake of shared prosperity”.

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of school principals in internalizing Handep values based on the Huma Betang philosophy. Phenomenology is methodologically appropriate because the research seeks to understand how meaning is constructed and experienced, rather than to measure variables or test causal relationships. Drawing on phenomenological thought, this approach allows the researcher to access principals' subjective interpretations, reflections, and consciousness in navigating leadership roles within indigenous cultural contexts. Compared to other qualitative approaches such as case studies or ethnography, phenomenology is particularly suitable for revealing the essence of leadership experiences as perceived by the participants themselves. By focusing on lived experience (*lebenswelt*), this method enables a deeper understanding of how indigenous values are internalized, enacted, and negotiated in everyday leadership practices, which cannot be adequately captured through outcome-oriented or descriptive methods. Then this philosophy not only reflects the social structure of Dayak society, but also produces noble values which are summarized in the concept of “Handep”, namely Harmony (harmony), Adaptation (adjustment to change), Reason (rational thinking), Dedication (full devotion), Efficiency (wise management of resources), and Unity (communal togetherness). These “Handep” values offer an inclusive and community-based leadership framework, which has the potential to be implemented in school settings as a miniature indigenous community. Apart from that, the implementation of Huma Betang values also aims to preserve the cultural heritage of the Dayak tribe amidst the flow of globalization and modernization.

Schools are institutions that function in shaping character. This is relevant to the goal of national education, namely that developing student competencies can create people who believe and fear God Almighty ([Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, 2003](#)). A school that is quality and has good quality is not born suddenly – arrives and immediately has complete facilities. Previously, good cooperation was needed between school managers, one of which was the principal and teachers. The principal has an important role in every process at school and teachers together – help the principal to always improve the quality of the school. The principal is the driving force of the policies set by the school, as well as to determine how the school's goals can be achieved ([Santika 2017](#)).

In wide definition, leadership includes the process of influencing in determining organizational goals, motivating follower behavior to achieve goals ([Yulk in Marno, 2008](#)). [Harbani in Syahril \(2019\)](#) believes that leadership is the ability to influence other parties through communication either directly or indirectly with the intention of moving people to be willing to follow the leadership's wishes with understanding, awareness and pleasure. Thus, leadership can be interpreted as the ability to influence and direct other people to achieve certain goals. In the world of education, a leadership function is as a leader and educator in order to improve quality in an educational institution. The significance of this study lies primarily in its theoretical contribution to educational leadership scholarship. By integrating phenomenological analysis

with indigenous cultural philosophy, this research advances leadership theory through a cultural-phenomenological perspective that foregrounds lived experience and contextual meaning. The findings contribute to the development of leadership theory by demonstrating how leadership identity and practice emerge through the internalization of local wisdom, rather than through the application of universal leadership models. In addition, this study enriches phenomenological research in education by extending its application to indigenous leadership contexts, which remain underrepresented in the literature. Beyond its practical implications, the study offers a conceptual framework for understanding leadership as a culturally embedded and meaning-driven phenomenon, thereby contributing to the broader development of context-sensitive and pluralistic educational leadership science.

The principal is a leader who is directly related to the implementer of the education program at school. Principal leadership plays a central role in shaping an effective educational climate, especially in rural areas of Kalimantan where schools often provide a bridge between local traditions and national educational demands. However, reality shows that many principals in the region have difficulty internalizing cultural values such as “Handep” into daily leadership practices. Factors such as the dominance of top-down bureaucratic leadership models, the influence of globalization eroding cultural identities, as well as the lack of training sensitive to indigenous contexts, lead to dissonance between the personal values of school principals and institutional demands. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2023 indicates that the level of job satisfaction of school principals in Central Kalimantan has only reached 65%, with the main issues being cultural identity conflicts and administrative pressure, which has an impact on overall leadership quality.

According to [Mardiyah \(2021:65\)](#), local wisdom-based leadership allows school principals to be more responsive to student and community needs. [Suryadi and Purnomo \(2022:78\)](#) added that a leadership model that integrates local wisdom values is very important in creating harmonious relationships between schools and society. [Fauzi \(2023:92\)](#) emphasizes that this leadership model not only strengthens local cultural identity but also serves as a means to increase community participation in education. From these three opinions, it was concluded that the principal's leadership model based on local wisdom values is very effective in building harmonious relationships between schools and communities, strengthening local cultural identity, and increasing community participation in education. By integrating the values of local wisdom, school principals can become more responsive to the needs of students and communities, and create a more relevant and inclusive educational environment.

Previous research, such as that conducted by [Sihotang et al \(2024\)](#) on the implementation of Huma Betang values in creating Eco literacy schools highlighted the school's efforts to combine formal curricula with local approaches based on local wisdom, such as learning in the open, using local resources as learning media, and introducing local culture to students. In addition, values such as mutual assistance, togetherness and a sense of responsibility for the environment are also instilled through various extracurricular activities and

social programs in schools. Thus, the implementation of Huma Betang values not only enriches students' learning experiences but also helps in shaping sustainable Eco literacy attitudes and behaviour. Similarly, a study by [Muslih et al \(2021\)](#) on the internalization of cultural values in education emphasizes a quantitative approach, less exploring the subjective and phenomenological dimensions of the internalization process. This gap is the main basis for phenomenological research, which aims to explore the life experiences (lived experiences) of school principals in internalizing the values of “Handep” based on “Huma Betang”. The phenomenological approach, with its emphasis on the essence of subjective experience, allows a deep understanding of how principals navigate this challenge, including personal reflection, practical adaptation, and transformation of leadership identities.

Although leadership based on local wisdom has received increasing attention in educational research, existing studies predominantly emphasize normative models, policy implementation, or outcome-based evaluations. In the context of the Huma Betang philosophy, prior research has largely focused on curricular integration, institutional programs, or student-related outcomes, such as environmental literacy and character education. However, these studies provide limited insight into how school principals personally experience, interpret, and internalize indigenous values in their daily leadership practices. Moreover, the internal process through which local values such as *Handep* are translated into leadership meanings and actions remains theoretically underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of school principals in internalizing Handep values grounded in the Huma Betang philosophy. The novelty of this research lies in its use of a phenomenological lens to integrate indigenous cultural philosophy with educational leadership theory, thereby offering a context-sensitive understanding of leadership that extends beyond universal and decontextualized leadership models. Research by [Robbins in Warti et al \(2024\)](#) shows that value-based leadership has a significant impact on the formation of disciplined teacher behavior. In addition, research by [Susilo \(2021\)](#) revealed that leadership indicators such as exemplary provision, effective communication, and teacher empowerment contribute directly to improving teacher work discipline. However, much of this research still focuses on universal values and has not specifically integrated local wisdom values as a basis for developing leadership models.

Previous studies on educational leadership and local wisdom demonstrate the importance of value-based leadership in strengthening school–community relations and cultural identity. However, much of the existing literature remains descriptive, treating local wisdom as a set of transferable values rather than as lived and embodied experiences of educational leaders. Leadership theories commonly applied in these studies tend to rely on universal frameworks, which inadequately capture the cultural specificity and symbolic meanings embedded in indigenous philosophies such as Huma Betang. Furthermore, empirical studies examining leadership grounded in local wisdom often prioritize observable outcomes while neglecting the interpretive processes through which leaders negotiate personal values, institutional demands, and cultural expectations. This conceptual limitation suggests the need for a theoretical framework that situates leadership within cultural experience and meaning-

making. By critically synthesizing leadership theory, local wisdom discourse, and phenomenological perspectives, this study positions indigenous values not merely as leadership attributes, but as experiential foundations that shape leadership identity and practice.

This research is relevant in the context of the Golden Indonesia Vision 2045, which emphasizes inclusive education and cultural preservation. By revealing the experience of the principal, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of leadership theories based on cultural phenomenology, as well as practical through training recommendations oriented towards the internalization of customary values. Therefore, research entitled *Principal's Experience in Internalizing Handep Values Based on the Huma Betang Philosophy: Phenomenological Studies* is an important step to bridge Dayak cultural heritage with contemporary educational leadership dynamics, ultimately supporting sustainable educational development and rooted in local identity.

## Method

### Research design

This research was carried out using a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological study design related to analysing and describing the value of “Handep” which was used as the basis for leadership by the principal at SD Negeri 2 Palangka. This approach was chosen considering that the aim of this research is to understand the phenomena carried out by the research subjects. According to Laxy Maleong, qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and behavioural observations. Meanwhile, descriptive research is a form of research aimed at describing or describing various existing phenomena, whether engineering or natural human phenomena (Maleong, 2019). This statement is supported by Saryono in Sari et al (2021) who said that qualitative research is research used to investigate, discover, describe and explain the quality or features of social influences that cannot be explained, measured or described through a quantitative approach. Through this method, researchers are expected to be able to recognize subjects by experiencing the subject's experience of an event. Researchers are also expected to always focus on events in the context being studied (Martha & Kresno, 2016: 2).

This study is grounded in phenomenology as a philosophical and methodological approach that seeks to understand how individuals experience and construct meaning from a phenomenon. In the context of this research, phenomenology is employed to explore how school principals experience the internalization of Handep values, not merely how these values are implemented at an institutional level. The internalization of Handep—encompassing harmony, adaptation, reason, dedication, efficiency, and unity—is understood as a subjective, reflective, and meaning-laden process, which cannot be adequately captured through

descriptive or outcome-oriented approaches. Phenomenology allows the researcher to access principals' consciousness, reflections, and lived meanings as they negotiate indigenous cultural values within formal leadership roles. Therefore, phenomenology is particularly appropriate for revealing the essence of leadership experience shaped by local wisdom, rather than explaining leadership as a set of observable behaviors alone. According to Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenological studies are an approach to provide an understanding of the meaning of the experiences experienced by individuals in certain concepts. In the phenomenological approach, researchers are required to understand the meaning of an event and the people who are in a particular event or situation. This approach emphasizes its focus on individual subjective experiences and world interpretation. This phenomenological research is carried out naturally as is (Moleong, 2013). This is supported by Speziale & Carpenter (2003) in Abduh (2018) that Descriptive phenomenology is a step that seeks to directly explore, analyse and describe certain phenomena as freely as possible from untested estimates and aims to display intuition to the maximum.

### Research sample

In connection with this, the respondents or research consisted of a School Principal, 26 teachers, and 5 educational staff. As a subject or research, it is determined based on the researcher's considerations, which is usually called purposive technique (Sugiyono, 2018). In other words, research informants/respondents are not carried out randomly, but have been determined or targeted by researchers (Miles and Huberman, 2019). The primary participants of this study were the school principal of SD Negeri 2 Palangka, as the main subject whose lived experience constituted the core phenomenon under investigation. Teachers and educational staff were included as supporting informants to provide contextual and experiential triangulation regarding the principal's leadership practices. Inclusion criteria for the principal included: (1) having held the principalship for at least three years, (2) active involvement in school leadership decision-making, and (3) direct engagement in programs reflecting Handep values. Teachers and staff were selected based on their sustained interaction with the principal and direct involvement in school activities related to local value implementation. The number of supporting informants was not intended to represent statistical generalization, but rather to enrich and validate the understanding of the principal's lived experience through multiple perspectives, consistent with phenomenological research principles.

### Research procedure

In this study the interview technique chosen was a semi-structured interview, where the interviewer had first prepared an interview guide to ensure the appropriateness of the list of questions. Interviewers still have the freedom to ask questions about the topic of the problem (Martha & Kresno, 2016: 55). Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit participants lived experiences related to the internalization of Handep values. The interview guide was developed based on phenomenological principles, focusing on open-ended questions that encouraged participants to reflect on concrete



experiences, feelings, and meanings rather than opinions or evaluations. Observations and document analysis were used as complementary techniques to contextualize and deepen the experiential data. This systematic design ensured that data collection remained aligned with the phenomenological aim of uncovering lived meaning.

### Data analysis

Data analysis followed a phenomenological thematic process adapted from van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology. First, the researcher conducted epoché (bracketing) to suspend prior assumptions regarding leadership and local wisdom. Second, interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify significant statements related to participants' experiences of internalizing Handep values (horizontalization). These statements were then clustered into meaning units and thematic categories reflecting essential aspects of the phenomenon. Through reflective writing and thematic interpretation, core themes were constructed to reveal the essence of the principals' leadership experience. This analytical process emphasizes meaning-making rather than variable reduction; therefore, interactive data analysis models such as Miles and Huberman were not used as the primary analytical framework.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied several qualitative validation strategies. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from principals, teachers, and educational staff. Member checking was carried out by returning interview summaries to participants for confirmation of meaning accuracy. In addition, researcher reflexivity was maintained through reflective journaling to monitor potential biases during data interpretation. These strategies enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings in accordance with qualitative research standards.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The leadership spirit in a leader is very important to use optimally so that you can compete with other institutions. SD Negeri 2 Palangka is one of the elementary schools in Palangka Raya City which has "A" accreditation with the vision: To make SDN 2 Palangka an educational institution capable of creating quality students, faith and piety as well as artistic culture accompanied by improving the quality of educators. As well as having a mission: 1) carrying out religious practices at school with daily application at home and in society as an obligation; 2) improving quality, effective, efficient and intensive learning at school to develop students' academic and non-academic abilities; 3) foster a disciplined and ethical attitude in social life at school, at home and in society; 4) fostering student independence through habituation, entrepreneurship activities, and planned and sustainable self-development; 5) creating an orderly culture of administration, time and teaching process in the school environment; 6)

improve the quality and professionalism of educator resources and educational staff through formal and informal programs and training; 7) establishing harmonious cooperation between school residents and other related institutions based on school-based, accountable, transparent and participatory management; 8) adding socio-cultural values through moral education in all fields of study; and 9) foster and preserve local and national cultural values.

In this section, the results of the research will be presented and discussed based on the results of the observations that have been made, it can be seen that the leadership of the principal of SD Negeri 2 Palangka has implemented the Huma Betang philosophy with a score of “Handep” in the school environment. Handep, which means solidarity, togetherness, or mutual cooperation. Handep's values emphasize the spirit of mutual assistance, cooperation and mutual support to achieve shared prosperity, regardless of differences in social status. Handep's values are particularly relevant to apply in school settings, where principals as leaders can leverage them to build an inclusive and collaborative school culture.

The following are some of the activities to implement the “Handep” values that have been carried out at SD Negeri 2 Palangka:

#### 1. *Mutual assistance program at school*

Every Friday in the second and fourth weeks, SD Negeri 2 always holds Clean Friday activities. The principal initiates this activity with the aim of building a sense of community and collective responsibility, so that students will learn to appreciate the contributions of others and strengthen family ties in the school. This activity involves all stakeholders, namely teachers, staff and students. This implementation begins with gymnastics at 06.30 AM then continues with mutual cooperation which ends at 09.00 AM.



**Figure 1.** Cleaned the classroom together



**Figure 2.** Had gymnastic time

#### 2. *Assistance programmes for disadvantaged students*

Not only to support government programs in Education, SD Negeri 2 Palangka also carries out sharing activities with the aim of helping underprivileged students, starting with students who are able to help their classmates who are experiencing difficulties. What is often done is share notebooks, stationery, and can even provide school uniform assistance. This is in line with the value of “Handep” which fosters a sense of empathy and mutual support and reduces social disparities in schools. The principal has an important role because he can initiate this activity so that it can foster solidarity.



**Figure 3.** Handover of Assistance from Palangka Raya Vice of Major



**Figure 4.** Submission of School Package Assistance for underprivileged and outstanding students.

### 3. Collaborative team for curriculum development in schools.

The principal forms a work team to design extracurricular activities, routine religious activities and other activities that are in accordance with the Education calendar or school calendar. In the process, the principal facilitates open discussions so that each team member can convey ideas and be involved. This is in line with the value of “Handep”, which encourages cooperation for common goals by increasing teacher work motivation and student creativity. All parties work together to produce work and achieve goals such as reflecting harmony in the Huma Betang. Even these activities can involve parents as assessors or facilitators.



**Figure 5.** Meeting with the stakeholders



**Figure 6.** Literature Program

### 4. Mediation and discussion activities for conflict resolution.

When there is a conflict between students or teachers, the principal uses the “Handep” score by holding mediation sessions involving related parties to look for joint solutions, not punishing individually. This approach can strengthen solidarity, teach students that problems can be solved through family and togetherness, reduce conflict, develop communication skills, and create a safe school environment. As a school principal when a dispute arises, you must be an active neutral mediator and ensure the process runs inclusively and ends with a collective agreement.



**Figure 7.** Evaluation weekend meeting



**Figure 8.** Student counselling moment

## Discussion

The phenomenological analysis reveals that the essence of the principals' experience in internalizing Handep values is leadership as shared moral responsibility rather than hierarchical authority. The lived experience of Handep is not perceived merely as a cultural guideline, but as an embodied ethical orientation that shapes how principals understand their role within the school community. Participants described leadership as a continuous process of maintaining harmony, fostering collective responsibility, and negotiating differences through dialogical engagement. This essence reflects Handep as a lived value that redefines leadership identity from being a decision-maker to becoming a cultural mediator within the school's social life. The principal has a responsibility to be able to create a pedagogical environment that is appropriate to the implementation of the independent curriculum currently being used. Along with these changes, school principals must have extra thoughts, attitudes and behaviour in facing problems that are not only related to academic achievement but also related to non-academic achievement. The curriculum changes that have occurred mean that school principals must act quickly and wisely so that the process of implementing the independent curriculum implemented at SD Negeri 2 Palangka can run well.

Horizons of meaning emerging from the data indicate that Handep is experienced simultaneously as personal conviction, social obligation, and cultural inheritance. Principals internalize Handep through repeated encounters with communal practices—such as collective work, mediation, and shared problem-solving—which gradually shape their consciousness of leadership. These horizons form a structure of experience where leadership is enacted relationally and contextually, grounded in mutual trust and togetherness rather than formal authority. From the phenomenological perspective, the structure of experience underlying Handep internalization consists of three interrelated dimensions: relational engagement, reflective adaptation, and ethical restraint. Relational engagement is manifested in principals' consistent efforts to involve teachers, staff, and students in collective decision-making processes. Reflective adaptation appears in how principals consciously reinterpret traditional values to address contemporary educational challenges without losing cultural authenticity. Ethical restraint is experienced as a moral boundary that prevents authoritarian leadership, encouraging instead inclusive and empathetic practices.

Challenges such as cultural resistance and limited resources are not merely operational obstacles, but are experienced by principals as existential tensions between indigenous values and bureaucratic demands. Cultural resistance is interpreted as a struggle of meaning, where principals must reconcile national educational policies with local moral frameworks. Resource limitations are experienced as ethical dilemmas, compelling principals to prioritize collective welfare over institutional efficiency. These experiences deepen the principals' understanding of leadership as a moral practice rooted in cultural wisdom.

This study contributes to phenomenological leadership literature by foregrounding indigenous cultural values as foundational structures of leadership experience. While previous phenomenological studies often focus on individual identity or emotional experience, this research demonstrates that leadership meaning can emerge from collective cultural consciousness. In dialogue with value-based leadership studies, the findings challenge universalist assumptions by showing that leadership values are not merely adopted but lived, negotiated, and embodied within specific cultural contexts. By situating Handep within phenomenological discourse, this study expands the understanding of leadership as a culturally embedded phenomenon, aligning with calls for context-sensitive leadership research in pluralistic societies.

The internalization of character values at SD Negeri 2 Palangka carried out by the principal elaborates policies in providing education. The philosophy of Huma Betang in Kalimantan has a very good meaning, where Huma Betang reflects a peaceful life, tolerance for differences. In Huma Betang there are four main pillars of life philosophy, namely: Honesty, equality, togetherness and obeying the rules or what is called "*Belom Bahadat*" means living in manners and "*Belom Penyang Hinje Simpe*" lives in equality, peace, tolerance, togetherness (Usop et al. 2011). Through formal education, namely school institutions which are in line with the function and role of education, schools are a continuation of family education. Schools are essentially not just places for the transfer of knowledge or certain materials that are tested, but also as institutions that are obliged to instil local knowledge according to local culture. In human resource management, the principal is the key to success in achieving quality education. Principals are required to always try to develop and develop human resources or teaching staff in order to create quality education.

In the school, the principal occupies two important positions to ensure the continuity of the education process as outlined by statutory regulations. First, the Principal is the manager of education in the school as a whole. Second, the Principal is the formal leader of education at school. Defined as head, because the principal is the highest official in the school (Rahman et al., 2017). It cannot be denied that a safe, comfortable and harmonious work environment will improve the work results of its residents. On the other hand, a work environment full of conflict will hinder and reduce work enthusiasm.

The results of this research are in line with Huma Betang's philosophical theory: "Huma betang for Dayak Ngaju more than just place to stay. Huma betang is the center of social

structure from the life of Dayak” (Laksono, 2006; Sangalang, Titi, & Darjosanjoto, 2011). In an educational context, the application of this value by school principals reflects Burns' (1978) transformational leadership concept, where leaders not only direct, but also inspire change through example. Strategies such as routine mutual assistance by respondents are effective because they create direct experience (experiential learning) for students, as explained by Kolb in Rosidin (2014), so that *Handep's* values are internalized as character. Rather than merely illustrating existing leadership theories, the findings extend and reinterpret them phenomenologically. Burns' concept of transformational leadership is reflected in the principals' lived experience, but with a culturally grounded nuance: transformation is not driven by visionary authority, but by communal moral alignment fostered through *Handep* values. Similarly, Kolb's experiential learning theory resonates with the way principals and school communities internalize *Handep* through lived practice. However, this study reveals that learning is not only experiential but also culturally situated, emphasizing shared meaning rather than individual reflection alone.

The challenges identified in this study are interpreted phenomenologically as moments of value confrontation and moral reflection, rather than policy shortcomings. Cultural resistance represents a liminal space where principals renegotiate their leadership identity between tradition and modernity as discussed by Geertz (1973) in Amady (2023) in the concept of cultural "deep play". This resistance often arises due to the dominance of universal national curricula, so school principals need adaptation strategies, such as gradual cultural training. Resource constraints also reflect structural educational problems in the regions, where school budgets are limited (Data from Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022), so the recommendation for this research is collaboration with local governments to fund cultural programs. Consequently, recommendations are not framed as technical solutions, but as invitations to cultivate reflective leadership awareness that honours cultural meaning while engaging institutional demands.

Overall, the long-term impact shows that the implementation of *Handep* by school principals not only preserves Dayak heritage, but also contributes to the goal of national education, namely the formation of the character of Pancasila (UU No. 20/2003). The implication is that not only at SD Negeri 2 Palangka but can also be done at other elementary schools in the Central Kalimantan region which can become a national model for local value-based education, with the potential for replication in other regions. The limitations of this study are that the sample is limited to one school and time constraints, so follow-up research is suggested with a quantitative approach to measure impact more widely.

## Conclusion

Theoretically, this study enriches phenomenological research by demonstrating how lived experience of leadership can be structured by indigenous cultural philosophy. It contributes to

leadership studies by proposing leadership as a process of cultural meaning-making rather than functional role performance. Furthermore, this research advances local wisdom-based educational scholarship by providing a phenomenological framework for understanding how cultural values are internalized and enacted in educational leadership. By integrating phenomenology with indigenous philosophy, this study offers a conceptual bridge between cultural heritage and contemporary leadership theory, contributing to the development of pluralistic and context-sensitive educational leadership science. In this research concludes that the experience of school principals within SD Negeri 2 Palangka in implementing *Handep* values tends to be positive, with benefits that exceed challenges if supported by strong leadership commitment.

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Prawati: Generating ideas and conceptualization, developing the research design, and managing entire research process. Fransiska: Translating for the article. Dilla: Field research including data collection. Simpun: Organizing the discussion and conclusion. Natalia: Writing the literature review. Rahmawati: Supervising the research and data analysis. Femmy: Data presentation. Cician: Result composition and final editing.

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