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Principal's Strategies in Developing Student Leadership Competencies Through Service Learning in Elementary Schools

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Abstract: *Elementary education is pivotal in shaping character and cultivating leadership competencies for students' future lives. This study examines how the principal implements service-learning strategies to foster student leadership at Taman Bondowoso State Elementary School. The research uses a qualitative approach to explore managerial practices integrating community-based learning with leadership development. Data was collected through observations, indepth interviews, and document analysis involving seven informants: the school principal, four teachers, and two students purposively selected for active involvement in service-learning activities. The findings reveal five key service-learning strategies: (1) structured class discussions to enhance critical thinking and communication, (2) collaborative group projects that emphasize shared responsibility and peer leadership, (3) role-modeling inspired by local and historical figures to instill values such as justice and empathy, (4) extracurricular programs that develop social and organizational skills, and (5) community service that teach social responsibility through hands-on experiences. These strategies demonstrate how service-learning bridges academic goals with real-world leadership applications, offering a replicable model for elementary education focused on character and leadership development.*

Abstrak: *Pendidikan dasar memegang peranan penting dalam membentuk karakter dan mengembangkan kompetensi kepemimpinan bagi masa depan siswa. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana kepala sekolah menerapkan strategi pembelajaran berbasis layanan untuk mengembangkan kepemimpinan siswa di Sekolah Dasar Negeri Taman Bondowoso. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi praktik manajemen yang mengintegrasikan pembelajaran berbasis komunitas dengan pengembangan kepemimpinan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan tujuh informan: kepala sekolah, empat guru, dan dua siswa yang dipilih secara purposif untuk terlibat aktif dalam kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis layanan. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi lima strategi pembelajaran berbasis layanan utama: (1) diskusi kelas terstruktur untuk meningkatkan pemikiran kritis dan komunikasi, (2) proyek kelompok kolaboratif yang menekankan tanggung jawab bersama dan kepemimpinan sesama, (3) teladan peran yang terinspirasi dari tokoh lokal dan sejarah untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai seperti*

keadilan dan empati, (4) program ekstrakurikuler yang mengembangkan keterampilan sosial dan organisasi, dan (5) kegiatan pelayanan masyarakat yang mengajarkan tanggung jawab sosial melalui pengalaman langsung. Strategi-strategi ini menunjukkan bagaimana pembelajaran berbasis layanan menghubungkan tujuan akademik dengan aplikasi kepemimpinan di dunia nyata, menawarkan model yang dapat direplikasi untuk pendidikan dasar yang berfokus pada pengembangan karakter dan kepemimpinan.

Keywords: *Principal Strategy; Student Leadership Competencies; Service-Learning; Elementary school*

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping a person's personality because it aims to produce intelligent, creative, innovative, and broad-minded individuals and shape a noble character (Rosita, 2018). Education is transferring knowledge and values that shape students' attitudes and behavior. Therefore, education is expected to produce people who are not only academically brilliant but also have strong and noble characters (Khofi, 2024).

The character of the nation's children is the primary key to the progress of a country. The better the character of the younger generation, the more advanced the nation will be. Thus, education must focus on character formation so future generations can support the nation's development. One important aspect of education is the development of commendable attitudes, such as being diligent, honest, trustworthy, independent, and responsible. These attitudes are important for shaping students' characters that are strong and ready to face life's challenges (Khofi & Furqon, 2024).

Elementary education plays a vital role in shaping the foundation of character and developing children's potential (Murniyetti et al., 2016). At an early age, students are in a crucial stage of cognitive, social, and emotional development (Sulikasmi et al., 2024). Elementary education aims to prepare students academically and equip them with the skills needed in their social and personal lives (Mawati et al., 2024). Leadership is one of the competencies that must be developed early on, which will equip students to lead, collaborate, and be responsible. Thus, elementary school education is fundamental in preparing students to become competent, bright individuals with good character and leadership.

Previous studies provide insight into student leadership development at the secondary education level. Mukit (2023) highlighted strategic efforts at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School Foundation, such as basic leadership training, involvement in scouts, studying the Prophet's leadership book, and other training to ensure students have strong leadership competencies. Rista (2022) emphasized the role of the principal in building an effective school by applying leadership values, motivation for educators, and a democratic leadership style, such as at SMPN 4 Malang. Meanwhile, Joko (2018) showed the effectiveness of OSIS at SMPN 2 Sukadana as the primary means of developing student leadership through programs such as LDKS, outbound, comparative studies, work meetings, and other activities, which help students build leadership skills, art appreciation, and national attitudes. Although various studies have been conducted, the focus of student leadership development has been more directed at the secondary education level and the Islamic boarding school environment. Until now, no research has specifically discussed the principal's strategy in developing student leadership competencies at the elementary school level. Elementary schools play a strategic role as the primary foundation in shaping student character and leadership.

Leadership development at the elementary level involves cultivating core values such as empathy, responsibility, and care alongside interpersonal skills like active listening, collaboration, and decision-making (Saputra et al., 2023). Service-learning offers a practical framework for embedding these values, engaging students in meaningful community service tied to academic objectives. Organizing charity drives, participating in environmental cleanups, or visiting local communities allow students to practice leadership, enhance social-emotional skills, and develop a sense of civic duty. Principals play a central role in designing and implementing service-learning programs that foster these competencies, ensuring alignment with the school's vision and resources (Sujarwo, 2024).

Effective principal strategies for integrating service learning include curriculum integration, teacher training, and community partnerships. Principals can embed service-learning into subjects like social studies or religion, enabling students to apply academic knowledge to real-world issues. Professional development for teachers ensures they can guide students in reflective practices, a core component of service learning that deepens leadership learning. Collaborations with local organizations provide authentic service opportunities, enhancing students' leadership experiences. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and lack of structured programs persist in implementing service-learning in elementary schools.

This study investigates how principals can develop effective strategies to enhance student leadership competencies through service learning in elementary schools. By examining principal-led initiatives, the study aims to provide actionable insights for strengthening elementary education's role in cultivating future leaders who are empathetic, responsible, and equipped to make positive societal contributions.

Method

This research was conducted at Taman Bondowoso Elementary School, which was chosen as the research location because the school actively implements service-learning programs that are considered to have strong potential in developing student leadership competencies. The school's commitment to integrating character education and leadership values through community-based activities made it a relevant context for exploring the principal's strategic role.
The study aims to understand how the principal develops student leadership through service learning in the elementary school setting. A qualitative approach was used to explore in depth the strategies, practices, and experiences related to implementing service-learning to foster student leadership skills. This approach is appropriate for capturing the complexity of school dynamics and the lived experiences of those involved in the learning process.

This study's participants were selected using purposive sampling, including the principal, teachers responsible for implementing service-learning activities, and students actively involved in those programs. The selection was based on their direct involvement and insight into the planning, execution, and outcomes of service-learning activities within the school. A total of 7 informants were interviewed: the principal, four teachers, and two students.

Data was collected using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to witness learning activities and student interactions, especially during service-learning projects. This allowed the researcher to identify leadership behaviors and school culture in context. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and selected students to gather detailed information regarding the strategies used, the role of leadership in service-learning,

challenges encountered, and how those challenges were addressed. In addition, documentation such as lesson plans, program reports, student reflection notes, and visual documentation of activities was collected to complement and strengthen the data obtained from observations and interviews.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Throughout the research, this process was carried out continuously to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that could answer the research questions regarding the principal's strategies for developing student leadership through service learning. Validity of the data: Source triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. This method was used to maintain the findings' consistency, credibility, and reliability and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research focus.

Result and Discussion

Result

Research at SD Negeri Taman Bondowoso shows that the principal develops students' leadership competencies through a service-learning approach, one of which is through structured class discussions. Teachers use the initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) method to encourage active student participation. This method effectively creates a dialogue space that invites students to think critically and express their opinions, such as in discussions about social justice. Students are allowed to think, share views, and listen to classmates. The observations and interviews show that this approach improves students' communication skills, which are important in leadership, including listening and expressing ideas logically and empathetically.

The second strategy for developing student leadership competencies through service learning is collaborative projects. Students work in groups to complete tasks that benefit the school community or the surrounding environment. An example is making a disaster mitigation poster, which hones creativity and increases students' social awareness. In this project, students learn to divide roles in a team, such as choosing a chairperson and secretary, which are carried out with full responsibility. This shows the importance of cooperation and collective responsibility. Based on student reflection notes and project documentation, students can evaluate their roles in the group and show improvements in managerial, communication, and decision-making skills, all important competencies in leadership.

The third strategy is the role model of inspirational figures integrated into learning. Principals and teachers present stories of world leaders such as Umar bin Khattab and Mahatma Gandhi in lessons such as PPKn or Religious Education. The main goal is to introduce history and instill leadership values such as empathy, justice, and courage. Discussion and reflection on the stories help students understand and emulate leadership in everyday life. Interviews with students showed that they began to imitate these values, such as empathy and justice, in joint decisions, which were also recorded in changes in student behavior, such as increased social awareness and the ability to resolve conflicts. This strategy is effective in forming leadership character from an early age.

The fourth strategy is through extracurricular activities, especially Scouting and PMR. Both of these activities teach organizational skills, decision-making, and practical leadership. Students can lead a team, organize activities, and manage group

dynamics. They learn to give instructions, motivate friends, and resolve conflicts. Field activities and emergency simulations test their leadership skills. Studies have shown that students who lead teams or activities experience increased self-confidence, as seen in their ability to speak in public, take initiative, and influence groups. Reports and observations show high enthusiasm from students in carrying out leadership roles actively and responsibly.

The fifth strategy is social action, where students engage in social projects that impact the community, such as visits to orphanages and environmental projects. These activities teach students the importance of social contribution and allow them to plan and carry out activities individually or in groups. Students are involved in planning, organizing, and executing social activities, learning to work together, make decisions, and overcome challenges. For example, during a visit to an orphanage, students provide assistance, interact with children, and plan meaningful activities. Research shows that these social actions develop students' empathy and leadership skills, with many students reporting increased social awareness and the ability to lead activities wisely. Documentation and interviews show that students feel proud of positively impacting and strengthening their sense of social responsibility.

The results of the study on the principal's strategies in developing student leadership competencies through service-learning in elementary schools, particularly at Taman Bondowoso State Elementary School, show that:



Figure 1. Principal's Strategies in Developing Student Leadership Competencies Through Service Learning

Discussion

Class discussion is the key to success in learning because it helps students understand complex material while honing critical thinking, listening, and speaking skills (Gyogi, 2020). This is also conveyed by (Larson, 2022), who explained that students can deepen their understanding, learn to think critically, and communicate better through discussion. Practical class discussions, like diversity and collaboration, can meet the millennial generation's needs (Pramesworo et al., 2023). However, often, the questions asked by the teacher do not get an active response but are only greeted with silence (Kay, 2024). To overcome this, teachers can apply the initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) method. The IRE method effectively tests

students' understanding or evaluates their memory, supporting the development of reasoning or collaborative learning between students (Joni, 2019). In this method, the teacher starts with an open-ended question or sharing views to encourage students to respond more profoundly. Instead of immediately evaluating students' answers, teachers provide space for them to develop their ideas, creating more interactive and meaningful discussions (Frøytlog, 2024).

The principal encourages teachers to make class discussions routine to train student leadership. In discussions, students are invited to listen to each other, respect opinions, and express ideas. This process trains them to understand other people's perspectives, think critically, and communicate effectively. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students to listen with curiosity and respect the opinions of their friends. Class discussions create an inclusive learning environment that strengthens self-confidence, collaboration skills, and interpersonal relationships. Through this practice, students learn to become leaders who care, respect, and can motivate others. This experience also helps students understand the importance of teamwork and collaborative leadership. Classroom discussions help students understand the material and develop critical thinking, listening, and speaking skills. In elementary school, discussions train students to express opinions, listen with empathy, appreciate differences, and work together. With the initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) method, teachers can encourage students to think independently and confidently. Classroom discussions are important to implement in elementary schools because they can instill leadership values early; this builds students' self-confidence and trains them to take the initiative, lead discussions, and understand the importance of teamwork.

Student Collaboration Program

Collaboration means working with others to achieve common goals, sharing responsibilities, and achieving more significant results than they could achieve alone (Barfield, 2016). In collaborative learning, students learn through conversation, social interaction, and shared decision-making (Warsah et al., 2021). This process helps them grow individually and as a group while building shared understanding and knowledge (Lipponen, 2023; Sholeh et al., 2021).

Collaboration between students also allows them to practice working in a dynamic social environment. This ability is essential in leadership because good leaders must build solid, harmonious, and supportive teams (Boud & Bearman, 2024). However, not all students are used to group work or quickly adapt to this approach. Therefore, support from teachers and the school environment is needed to help them develop collaboration skills gradually and effectively.

The principal encourages student leadership development through a collaborative program that instills a spirit of active involvement. This program aims to strengthen students' ability to work together, build inclusive relationships, and support each other. Students are invited to get to know and understand their classmates in depth to create harmonious relationships. Collaborative activities include group work, joint projects, and team games. Students learn to listen, appreciate differences, share tasks, and find solutions through these activities. This process teaches cooperation and develops empathy, communication skills, and inclusive leadership. Students are trained to understand the team's needs, take initiative, and collaboratively lead the group toward a common goal. This program creates an environment that supports the formation of future inclusive, caring leaders who can build positive relationships.

Collaboration between students is important for developing elementary school student leadership competencies. Through group work, joint projects, and team games, students are trained to share responsibilities, understand the team's needs, and take initiative in achieving common goals. This process effectively forms leadership skills, such as empathy, communication, and cooperation, which are the foundation for elementary school students' development of these competencies.

Exemplary Inspirational Figures

Education is a lifelong need that is important in helping humans recognize, maintain, and develop their potential according to their respective characteristics (Atiqoh & Maunah, 2024). However, effective education teaches knowledge and requires role models as its main element (Irbathy et al., 2025). Role models, which means making someone or something an example, have a crucial role in education, especially for elementary school students. Students can learn attitudes, behavior, speech, obedience to rules, and discipline through role models. This is an important foundation for shaping the character of a good leader in the future (Yumni, 2019). Naturally, humans look for role models who can guide life, illuminate the path of truth, and provide examples of implementing the law of Allah SWT. In this context, role model-based education has become one of the important pillars in the development of Muslim society throughout history (Abbas et al., 2023). Through the example of inspiring leaders, students learn leadership values, how to work together, and good social etiquette; this process aims to produce a generation of leaders who are responsible, fair, and have good morals (Laili et al., 2024). With an exemplary-based approach, education becomes an effective means of forming individuals who can positively impact society in the future (Zenaida et al., 2023).

The principal introduces inspirational figures to instill leadership values in students. Through exemplary stories and motivational quotes, students are invited to understand and practice leadership in everyday life. For example, the story of Umar bin Khattab teaches that authentic leadership means serving fairly and helping the weak selflessly. Meanwhile, from Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq, students learn the importance of utilizing resources for the common good by showing sincerity, concern, and wisdom.

Schools also utilize quotes from world leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi. His quote, "An eye for an eye, the world will go blind," teaches the importance of avoiding revenge and violence. Instead, true leaders prioritize peace, forgiveness, and constructive solutions. Leaders must also have the courage to break the cycle of conflict and create a harmonious environment through dialogue and empathy. These stories and quotes are then combined with class discussions, where students are encouraged to reflect on the lessons they have learned. They are taught to emulate these qualities in school, such as helping friends in need, resolving conflicts peacefully, or being fair in decision-making.

Education through the example of inspirational figures plays an important role in developing the leadership competencies of elementary school students. Through the stories of figures such as Umar bin Khattab, who emphasized justice and service to the weak, or Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq, who taught sincerity and wisdom, students can learn the fundamental values of leadership. World figures such as Mahatma Gandhi also provide valuable lessons about peace, forgiveness, and constructive conflict resolution. Through discussion, reflection, and direct learning, students are trained to internalize leadership values, such as integrity, empathy, and responsibility. In this way, elementary school students are equipped with the knowledge and trained

to become leaders with integrity, empathy, and responsibility, shaping them into a generation of positive future leaders who impact society.

Extracurricular Activities

Education focuses on academic knowledge and developing students' skills, character, and interests to support their success in life (Putri et al., 2024). Extracurricular activities are important to holistic education because they help students explore and hone their potential, talents, and interests (Agustina et al., 2023).

Through these activities, students can develop important skills such as cooperation, leadership, discipline, and responsibility. Experiences in extracurricular activities equip students with the confidence and positive attitude to face real-world challenges (Fakhretdinova et al., 2021; Sa'idah et al., 2024). In addition, these activities encourage them to interact, collaborate, and communicate with others while teaching values such as respecting differences, working in a team, and overcoming challenges together (Jannah et al., 2023). The skills gained from extracurricular activities are invaluable in shaping adaptive individuals ready to face a changing world (Liu et al., 2023). With practice and dedication, students can develop themselves optimally (Salsabila et al., 2023). Therefore, schools need to provide a variety of diverse extracurricular activities to support the overall development of students.

The principal develops students' leadership skills through extracurricular activities, such as scouts and the Junior Red Cross (PMR), to provide opportunities for students to learn and hone their leadership skills. These activities teach students to work together, communicate, and make decisions. They are also given important tasks, such as being a chairman or secretary, to train their sense of responsibility and how to solve problems. Through this experience, students learn to be responsible leaders and can work with their friends to face challenges in the future.

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for elementary school students to develop physical, social, and leadership skills. Students learn to work in teams, communicate effectively, and make wise decisions through these activities. Extracurricular activities also teach students to be responsible leaders, able to collaborate, and ready to face challenges in social life and the world of work in the future.

Social Activities

Social activities such as visits to orphanages, community service, and fundraising are beneficial to the community and an effective way to develop student leadership (Prayanti et al., 2024). These activities help shape students' character, provide valuable social experiences, and prepare them to become caring and responsible leaders (Kusnadi, 2024). Through social activities, students are invited to see the lives of others who are less fortunate. These activities teach them to feel empathy, which is understanding and feeling what others feel (Xerri et al., 2018). These activities also teach important values such as empathy, responsibility, and caring, which are the main foundations of developing good leadership (Aulia Gusli et al., 2025).

The principal develops student leadership through social activities like orphanage visits, community service, and fundraising. These activities train students' empathy, responsibility, and concern for the environment and society. In visits to orphanages, students learn to understand the needs of others and the importance of selfless giving. Community service trains teamwork and social responsibility while

fundraising hones planning, communication, and leadership skills. Through these experiences, students are trained to grow into caring, responsible individuals ready to lead with empathy and service.

Social activities such as visits to orphanages, community service, and fundraising efficiently develop student leadership in elementary schools. These activities help students learn leadership values such as empathy, responsibility, and caring early on. In visits to orphanages, students learn to understand the feelings of others and the importance of selfless giving. Community service teaches students how to work together in a team and support each other to achieve common goals. Meanwhile, fundraising trains students to plan, communicate, and lead activities. Through these social activities, students in elementary schools can hone important leadership skills and grow into more caring and responsible individuals.

Conclusion

Taman Bondowoso State Elementary School's study revealed several principal-led strategies for developing student leadership competencies through service-learning approaches. First, the principal encouraged class discussions to enhance students' critical thinking and communication skills, which are key leadership components. Second, student collaboration in group work was promoted to cultivate leadership traits such as responsibility-sharing and decision-making. Third, inspirational role models helped instill core leadership values like fairness, empathy, and peace. Fourth, extracurricular programs such as scouting and the Red Cross (PMR) served as platforms to strengthen students' social engagement and leadership potential. Finally, direct involvement in service learning activities such as visits to orphanages and community service projects was instrumental in nurturing students' empathy, civic responsibility, and real-world leadership experience.

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