

Cultivating Leadership Character For Elementary Students

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Abstract

This community service activity aims to build the character and potential of early childhood to have a spirit of leadership in the future. This program was initiated as a response to the need to equip children with the basics of leadership, moral integrity, and socio-emotional skills to face real-world challenges. The methods used include a participatory approach with a series of interactive activities designed to introduce basic leadership concepts such as responsibility, courage, and simple decision-making. The results of this activity have shown a notable positive influence on the character development of young children and serves as a foundation for cultivating leadership skills within the school setting. It is anticipated that the program will yield sustained benefits for the character growth of students at SD Petra Alpha School Kembangan, West Jakarta.

Keywords: Leadership; early childhood; character; moral integrity and responsibility.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership, rather than being an inherent trait, is a critical competency that requires systematic cultivation from an early age, particularly during the formative elementary school years (<https://bekasi.binus.sch.id>). This developmental stage is considered optimal for instilling fundamental leadership principles, given children's heightened receptivity to identity and value formation [1]. Today's youth, particularly Generation Z and Alpha, face complex challenges amidst an uncertain environment. Increasing global competition and the need for moral integrity are central issues. Leadership development programs must be able to transform these VUCA challenges into opportunities based on Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility [2]. The characteristics of Generation Z that are more dominant in processing visual information (images, videos, storytelling) than textual, as well as their relatively unstable tendencies, demand a more adaptive and creative approach to education [2]. This suggests that traditional educational methods that tend to be narrative and transactional are no longer adequate to prepare them. Therefore, there is an urgent need for educational programs, particularly leadership training, to go beyond conventional methods. Programs should be highly adaptive, foster intrinsic motivation, and proactively address children's social-emotional development to prepare them for an unpredictable future [3]. The urgency of leadership development is also closely linked to the phenomenon of leadership crisis and moral decline observed in society [4]. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) showing alarming violence in the school environment (84% of students reported experiencing violence, and 75% admitted to being perpetrators of violence) further emphasizes the importance of strong character building and the creation of a safe and supportive school climate as the foundation of leadership development [5][6].

This high incidence of violence underscores that character education, including leadership, must be the foundation for creating individuals who are not only academically competent but also ethical and empathetic. Leadership in the context of elementary school-age children is defined as the capacity to lead, motivate and influence peers or small groups in achieving a common goal, which can be developed early on. The core of leadership learning for elementary students includes the development of respect and trust, the ability to build emotional connections, and commitment to task completion [1]. This definition is expanded to include the ability to communicate effectively, inspire others, work together in teams, take responsibility, and show initiative. Important aspects of leadership that can be taught to elementary school children include problem solving, imagination development, and prosocial behavior [7]. Although general leadership traits such as energy, emotional stability, personal motivation, communication skills, teaching skills, social skills, and technical ability (based on George R. Terry) are more often associated with adults [8], the basic

principles can be adapted for children. Similarly, characteristics such as being a lifelong learner, being service-oriented, and bringing positive energy (based on Stephen R. Covey) are the foundations of leadership ethics that can be instilled early in life [7]. Leadership in children is a form of interpersonal intelligence that develops through the internalization of values [9]. This directly links leadership to the development of social and linguistic intelligence.

Early leadership cultivation contributes to the formation of a solid character, including high integrity, discipline and honesty [10], that make students role models for their environment (www.gamelab.id). The formation of this strong character is rooted in intrinsic motivation and consistent guidance [11]. More than just preparation for future careers, early leadership training, with its emphasis on empathy, collaboration, conflict resolution, and self-confidence, serves as a "social-emotional vaccination" against negative social trends such as individualism [12] and violence [5]. By cultivating these qualities early on, children are better equipped to deal with complex social dynamics, build respectful relationships, and contribute to a more harmonious and less violent school and community environment. Effective leadership requires strong interpersonal communication skills, not just organizational ability. Schools provide opportunities for students to interact with diverse peers, fostering empathy, understanding and collaboration skills. Nurturing soft skills such as communication, problem-solving and time management prepares students for real-world leadership challenges, including driving change, tackling complex problems and teamwork to achieve common goals, making these skills valuable for a future career. Currently, the education system in Indonesia is increasingly emphasizing the development of soft skills, including leadership, as an important part of student character building. Therefore, elementary school is a strategic time to start instilling and practicing these skills in children. By building leadership skills from an early age [13] [14], children will have the ability to adapt, think critically, and take responsibility in the face of various changes. SD Petra Alpha School, located in Kembangan, West Jakarta, and overseen by the Petra Alpha Education Foundation, demonstrates a profound commitment to enhancing educational quality.

This commitment extends beyond academic achievement to encompass the cultivation of robust character, grounded in faith-based values integrated throughout the school's ethos. Challenges exist in cultivating leadership qualities among elementary school children, primarily due to the diverse emotional and cognitive developmental stages within this age group, which can impede a consistent grasp of leadership concepts. Consequently, this community service (PkM) initiative endeavors to foster early leadership characteristics and prepare the younger generation for future leadership roles. The program also aims to enhance student adherence to school regulations and develop a leadership spirit pertinent to contemporary demands, alongside nurturing a sustained commitment to learning and leadership among children

II. METHODS

The location of this service was carried out at SD Petra Alpha School Kembangan, West Jakarta. This activity was carried out on December 10, 2024. This training is interactive and participatory based, actively encouraging student involvement in every stage of the learning process. Strong emphasis is given to the internalization of ethical and moral values as the main foundation of leadership with integrity. The program participants are students in grades 4-6 with a total of 35 children, who are at a critical developmental phase to start training leadership skills because their minds are young, have high curiosity, and are in the process of forming their identity.

The training materials are designed in a comprehensive yet easy-to-understand manner to cover various aspects of leadership and character development:

1. Character foundation:

- a. Responsibility: train children to take responsibility for personal obligations (e.g. household chores, school work).
- b. Discipline: emphasis on effective time management, punctuality in task completion and activity participation, and habituation of positive routines such as waking up on time and making the bed.
- c. Honesty and integrity: encouraging students to act according to positive moral values, to be honest in word and deed, and to be a role model.

- d. Empathy and social care: developing the ability to understand and feel the point of view of others and caring for the needs of friends.
- e. Initiative: encourages children to be proactive in identifying problems and taking the first step to solve them.
2. Interpersonal and social skills in the form of effective communication by teaching courageous speaking, active listening, and expressing ideas clearly and politely. Practical exercises such as telling stories.
3. Cognitive and decision-making skills include critical thinking, which encourages children to analyze situations in depth, consider various options, and make logical decisions based on available evidence.
4. Self-development:
 - a. Self-confidence: building self-confidence through sincere praise and providing opportunities for children to express their opinions.
 - b. Positive attitude: teaching children to maintain a positive attitude when facing difficulties, turning problems into challenges, and not giving up easily.

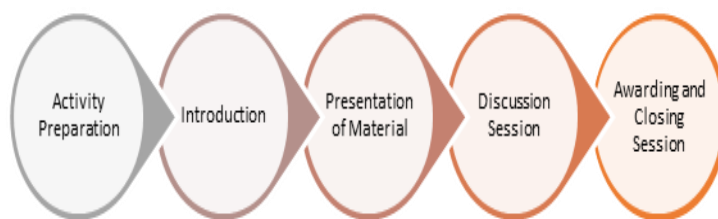


Fig 1. Training Implementation Process

The implementation of the leadership training program is carried out through structured interaction with the following training implementation process:

1. Organize training in the form of presenting material on leadership skills to provide knowledge of the meaning of leadership, the character of leaders and how to become a good leader.
2. Linking learning materials to students' experiences and daily lives. Such as using examples of leadership from figures known to students and playing some animated educational videos that illustrate the character of a leader.

Discussion and question and answer sessions to encourage effective communication, critical thinking, and the ability to express opinions. Rewarding students who actively participate during the training process.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community service program (PkM) was held on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, at SD Petra Alpha School Kembangan, West Jakarta. The program, which aims to foster leadership spirit in elementary school students, took place starting at 09.00 WIB. Documentation of activities is carried out through photographs that illustrate the series of training activities.

1. Initial Activity

The initial activities of the leadership character development training were carried out systematically to build a basic understanding of leadership in students. The PkM team officially opened the training by involving teacher representatives to provide motivation and ice breaking through yells. Activities carried out to create a conducive learning atmosphere include: introductions of the PkM team to build initial communication with students, and question and answer sessions that connect student's daily activities with the concept of leadership.



Fig 2. Training Opening

2. Activity Implementation

The introduction between the PKM team and the students of SD Petra Alpha School Kembangan, West Jakarta, was the first step to create a supportive atmosphere during the training. The team then conducted an apperception to explore students' understanding of leadership. Students were invited to think about their daily experiences through interactive questions around the role of class leader, understanding of leaders, and the importance of helping friends. The speaker explained that a leader is an individual who is able to listen, cooperate, and help others. Leadership was also explained as the art, function, process, and ability to influence and direct people in a way that makes them obedient, trusting, and loyal to achieve predetermined goals. It is emphasized that leadership is a skill that can be learned by anyone who has the will. Once this basic understanding was established, the main material on leadership began to be delivered.

The main material on leadership is the main focus of this activity. This material is specifically designed to help students understand the importance of leadership, identify their potential, and develop skills and attitudes that are essential for a leader. The material covers the definition of leadership, the importance of having leadership character and how to be a good leader. The discussion begins by exploring students' knowledge and abilities about the concept of leadership, as well as examples of leaders they know. Next, it explains how to be a good leader, such as making plans, understanding priorities, not being afraid to compete, always sharpening yourself, having the nature of compromise and tolerance.



Fig 3. Training Implementation



Fig 4. Training Materials

The activity continued with the screening of an educational video aimed at strengthening students' leadership character. Students of SD Petra Alpha School Kembangan West Jakarta showed enthusiasm when watching the video containing lessons on leadership character. This video serves as an interesting and effective educational media, able to inspire and provide insight into leadership. In addition, the video helps students understand the character traits of a leader, including a sense of responsibility, the ability to influence and direct others. The video emphasizes the importance of values such as responsibility and cooperation that a leader should possess. The purpose of screening the video is to instill positive attitudes, including courage in making decisions, the ability to listen to others, and resilience in the face of challenges.

3. Closing

In closing the service activity, a reflection on the results of the activity was carried out and appreciation was given to the participants. This closing stage begins with a question and answer session to measure students' understanding of the leadership material that has been delivered. Students' active participation in answering questions showed enthusiasm and a good understanding of the training material. As a form of appreciation for their active participation, the team gave prizes to the students. This award is a form of recognition for the contributions and achievements they have made during the activity. The whole series of activities ended with a group photo session and thanks to all parties who have contributed to this training program.



Fig 5. Awarding and Closing

The results of this training program can be seen in some children can show their leadership attitude. Program participants showed high confidence in expressing their opinions and speaking in public. In addition, students' communication skills are also effective. They are able and willing to listen to the opinions of others. The high enthusiasm of the participating children is an indicator of success, showing that this training has succeeded in creating an interesting, motivating learning environment and showing that students are able to understand and apply leadership values, which include aspects of responsibility, motivation and problem solving. Students not only understand leadership values but are also eager to implement them. Overall, the program succeeded in fostering more responsible and confident individuals, in line with the initial goal of shaping future leaders with character, which focuses on internalizing strong character values.

IV. CONCLUSION

This community service program has effectively demonstrated great potential in fostering leadership character in elementary school children. Through an interactive and participatory approach, the program successfully demonstrated various indicators of student leadership, including self-confidence, independence, discipline, and communication skills. Internalization of character values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy are also taught to strengthen the moral foundation for the younger generation. Although the leadership training program showed positive results, the challenges identified during implementation were mainly related to internal student factors. Some students did not have optimal leadership attitudes, showed a lack of confidence, and did not have the courage to express their opinions. Student boredom and lack of motivation towards the learning material also became obstacles. In addition, students' awareness of the importance of leadership attitudes still needs to be improved.

Based on the findings and analysis presented, several strategic recommendations are proposed to strengthen and sustain the early childhood leadership training program in the future:

1. Utilize more varied and interesting learning methods, such as role-playing or group discussions. This can reduce boredom and increase students' motivation towards the material.
2. Organize activities specifically designed to increase students' self-confidence, such as public speaking exercises, group activities that require cooperation, and group discussions.
3. To ensure students grasp the pervasive relevance of leadership, its values should be systematically integrated across the entire school curriculum, rather than being confined to isolated subjects.
4. Identify the individual needs of students to understand their challenges and potential.

It is anticipated that the implementation of these recommendations will enable the community service program to surmount existing challenges and more effectively cultivate leadership characteristics in elementary school children.

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