The Role of Character Education in Improving Student Leadership: A Case Study of Two High Schools in Kulon Progo

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of character education in improving students' leadership skills in two high schools in Kulon Progo. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, this study analyzes the implementation of character education, its impact on student leadership, and the role of collaboration with external parties. The results show that character education in the first high school focuses on leadership development through extracurricular activities and value-based training, such as discipline and responsibility. Meanwhile, the second high school emphasizes social and emotional aspects through mentoring activities and group discussions. Character education has been shown to improve students' leadership skills, including communication, decision-making, and teamwork. In addition, collaboration with parents and the community supports the success of the program, providing students with real-world experience in leadership. Character education contributes to students' readiness to face future challenges by forming strong, responsible, and leadership characters. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating character education into the high school curriculum to produce a generation of competent and characterful leaders.

Keywords: Character Education, Student Leadership, Collaboration, High School, Kulon Progo.

INTRODUCTION

Character education is an integral part of the education system that aims to shape students' personalities and positive attitudes to become individuals with noble and responsible morals. Character development in early childhood can be achieved through integration in daily activities, programmed activities, and other strategies (Setyowati et al., 2023). In the context of education in Indonesia, character

education is the main focus implemented through strategies such as role models, habituation, conditioning the school climate, and integration in all subjects and extracurricular activities.

At the Senior High School (SMA) level, character education has a very important role because adolescence is a crucial period in the formation of a person's identity and character. There are teenagers who achieve a clear and integrated identity, while there are also those who experience identity confusion (Beyers & Çok, 2008). Adolescence is critical for early identity formation, which is influenced by social and interpersonal contexts (Marcia, 2002). Teenagers cover ages 10-24 years, more in line with adolescent growth and general understanding, social policies, and service systems that are in accordance with development (Sawyer et al., 2018).

At this stage, students begin to explore various life values and determine attitudes towards the world around them. Adolescent self-identity is shaped by factors including parental influence, peer relationships, cultural and ethnic identity, and the school context (Zhang & Qin, 2023). Therefore, character education implemented at the high school level is expected to have a significant impact on the formation of student leadership character.

Schools in Indonesia, including those in Kulon Progo, face major challenges in implementing effective character education. Various efforts have been made to combine academic education with character development, including through extracurricular programs, leadership training, and the application of values in everyday life in the school environment. However, the extent to which this character education has succeeded in shaping student leadership is still an interesting question to study.

Kulon Progo, as one of the regencies in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, has its own uniqueness in terms of implementing character education. High schools in this area play an important role in educating the younger generation to excel not only in academic aspects, but also in non-academic aspects, including leadership character. This study will explore more deeply how character education implemented in two high schools in Kulon Progo can play a role in improving students' leadership abilities. Character education is associated with higher levels of educational outcomes and expressions of love, integrity, self-discipline with a greater impact on high school students (Jeynes, 2019).

Character education is also considered an important component in leadership development in various fields, including the military and academics (McCaskey, 2017). Student leadership can be seen from various indicators, such as the ability to take initiative, work in a team, communicate well, and manage conflict effectively (Bespartochna, 2023; Pertegal-Felices et al., 2019). This study aims to explore the relationship between the implementation of character education and leadership development among high school students in Kulon Progo. To achieve this goal, this study will use a case study method in two high schools in Kulon Progo. Through this approach, it is expected to obtain a deeper picture of the ways in which character education is implemented, the challenges faced in the process, and its impact on student leadership. This study is also expected to contribute to the development of education policies at the local level, especially in terms of strengthening character education.

Thus, this study is expected to provide better insight into the importance of character education in shaping student leadership at the high school level. In addition, the results of this study can also be a reference for parties involved in developing curriculum and educational programs in schools, in order to

create a young generation that is not only superior in academic aspects, but also has a strong character and is able to lead change in the future.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine the role of character education in improving student leadership in two high schools in Kulon Progo. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied, especially regarding the implementation of character education and its impact on student leadership development. Case studies provide an opportunity to explore various relevant aspects in the context of character education, as well as to analyze them more holistically.

The location of this research was conducted in two high schools in Kulon Progo, which were selected based on certain criteria, namely schools that have implemented a fairly structured character education program and have a leadership training program for their students. This study aims to analyze the implementation of character education in both schools and how it contributes to the formation of student leadership. By using two locations, this study is expected to provide a useful comparison between two school contexts that may have different approaches.

The data collected in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers and students who were directly involved in the character education and leadership programs in both schools. In addition to interviews, direct observation of extracurricular activities, leadership training, and daily interactions of students at school were also conducted to obtain a more concrete picture of the implementation of character education. Secondary data were obtained from related documents, such as character education curriculum, activity reports, and school policies.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis, which allows researchers to identify and group the main themes that emerge from the collected data. This analysis process is carried out inductively, by connecting data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents, to produce a comprehensive understanding of the role of character education in improving student leadership. In addition, data triangulation is also used to ensure the validity of the findings, by comparing results from various different data sources to obtain more accurate conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the analysis of data obtained from interviews with teachers and students in two high schools in Kulon Progo, as well as direct observation of the implementation of character education in these schools, the results of this study indicate that character education has a significant role in improving students' leadership skills. The following is a description of the research results based on the interviews conducted:

1. Implementation of Character Education

Character education at the first school is implemented with a focus on developing leadership skills through extracurricular activities and leadership training. A first high school teacher said, "Character education at our school is focused on developing students' soft skills through extracurricular activities and leadership training. We believe that good leadership starts with a strong character." According to a first high school teacher, the program is effective in shaping students into more disciplined and responsible individuals. The teacher stated, "We use a values-based approach, such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation in every activity. Students who are active in extracurricular activities show good development in leadership skills." From the students' perspective, they feel more confident in developing leadership skills through the character education program implemented. One first high school student said, "Through leadership training, I learned how to be a responsible leader and can work together with friends. This really helps me in school organizations and daily life."

Character education at the second school focuses more on developing students' emotional and social aspects. Programs such as student-to-student mentoring and group discussions are held to help students develop empathy and communication skills. A teacher at the second high school added, "We prioritize activities such as group discussions and student-to-student mentoring to help them develop empathy and communication skills. This is very effective in forming leaders who are more sensitive to others." Students at the second high school also felt great benefits from the character education program. One of the students at the second high school stated, "With the mentoring and group discussions, I feel more confident in interacting with friends and dealing with problems that arise. This makes me more prepared to be a leader who cares about others."

2. The Influence of Character Education on Student Leadership

Character education has been shown to have a significant impact on the development of students' leadership skills. In the first high school, teachers assessed that students who were actively involved in character education activities showed improvements in their leadership skills. "We saw that students who were actively involved in character education programs showed improvements in their leadership skills, such as public speaking, decision-making, and team management," said the first high school teacher.

Students at the second high school also showed development in social and communication skills that support their leadership abilities. One student said, "Character education taught me the importance of listening to others and working together to achieve common goals. This is very useful in organizations and leadership activities at school."

3. The Role of Collaboration with Other Parties in Supporting Character Education

Collaboration with external parties, such as parents and the community, is also considered important for the success of the character education program. A teacher at the second high school said, "We feel that there needs to be closer collaboration with parents and the community to support the character education program. Students will benefit more if they have support from their families and the surrounding environment." Likewise, students at the first high school hope that the school can expand its collaboration with the outside community. "I hope the school can collaborate more with the community or outside organizations, so that we can get more real experience in leading and collaborating," said a student at the first high school.

4. Student Leadership Ready to Face Future Challenges

Character education that focuses on developing leadership skills is considered a very important provision for students to face future challenges. The first high school teacher stated, "We believe that character education that focuses on leadership not only helps students in school, but also prepares them for challenges in the workplace and society." A second high school student expressed something similar, "I feel more prepared to face challenges outside of school. Character education helps me become a more responsible person and can be trusted by others."

DISCUSSION

This study shows that character education has a significant role in improving students' leadership skills in two high schools in Kulon Progo. The implementation of structured character education through various extracurricular activities and leadership training has a positive impact that can be seen in the development of students' character and leadership skills. This discussion will review several key findings contained in the research results, including the implementation of character education, the impact on students' leadership skills, collaboration with other parties, and students' readiness to face future challenges.

1. Implementation of Character Education

The implementation of character education in the first high school focused on developing leadership skills through extracurricular activities and leadership training based on values such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. This is in accordance with the viewNutmeg (2011)which states that character education is essential to developing good character, including respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, compassion, by learning core ethical values and practicing them in a supportive school environment.

In contrast, in the second high school, character education focuses more on developing students' emotional and social aspects through activities such as mentoring and group discussions. This is related to the theory of emotional intelligence developedGeorge (2000), emotional intelligence contributes to leadership effectiveness by enhancing the ability to understand and manage moods and emotions, both in oneself and others. It is also associated with increased leadership potential and better work performance.

2. The Influence of Character Education on Student Leadership

Character education has been shown to have a significant influence on students' leadership skills, both in the first and second high schools. In the first high school, students who were active in character education activities showed significant improvements in their leadership skills, especially in terms of public speaking, decision making, and team management. In the second high school, character education that focuses more on developing social and communication aspects helps students develop interpersonal skills that greatly support their leadership abilities. According toGoncalves & Rego (2017)Social and relational skills, such as emotional intelligence, effective communication, and the ability to manage conflict, are critical to leadership success.

3. The Role of Collaboration with Other Parties in Supporting Character Education

Collaboration with other parties, especially parents and the community, is an important factor in supporting the success of character education. This was expressed by a teacher at the second high school who stated the need for closer collaboration between schools, parents, and the community to support the development of student character. This concept is in accordance with the viewHampden-Thompson & Galindo (2017)which states that positive relationships between schools and families can improve students' academic achievement. This is mediated by the level of parental satisfaction with their child's school. Good collaboration between schools and families can also improve students' test results, especially in elementary schools in urban areas.(Sheldon, 2003).

Collaboration with external parties also provides an opportunity for students to learn from real experiences outside of school, as expressed by students at the first high school. By collaborating with organizations or communities, students can gain more experience in leading and interacting with various parties.

4. Student Leadership Ready to Face Future Challenges

One of the main goals of character education is to prepare students to face future challenges, both in the workplace and in social life. Character education that focuses on developing leadership skills provides students with invaluable tools to prepare them for these challenges. As conveyed by a teacher at the first high school, character education that focuses on leadership not only helps students in school, but also prepares them for challenges in the workplace and society. This is in line with the viewThe Lutaj (2014)which emphasizes the importance of education that prepares students to become active and responsible members of society.

Students who engage in character education that focuses on leadership feel better prepared to face challenges outside of school. They develop a sense of responsibility, discipline, and the ability to work with others. All skills that are essential for success in professional and social life. This shows that character education not only benefits students during their formal education, but also provides them with a strong foundation for a brighter future.

CONCLUSION

Overall, character education has been shown to have a significant impact on improving students' leadership skills in both high schools studied. Programs that combine the development of character values, social skills, and leadership provide students with important provisions to become effective leaders in the future. In addition, collaboration with parents and the community is also an important factor that supports the success of character education. Therefore, character education must be an integral part of the curriculum in schools in Indonesia, to prepare students to face future challenges with full responsibility and good skills.

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