Internalization of leadership values among young children in inclusive schools

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Abstract

Instilling leadership values in the younger generation from an early age is crucial as it equips them with the skills necessary for mastering leadership in the 21st century. This research delineates strategies for developing leadership values in young children within inclusive schools in Bengkulu City. The research methodology is a mixed method, involving data collection through questionnaires and interviews. The study included 71 young children and five teachers as the participants. The findings reveal that the categorization of young children's leadership profiles in Kindergarten B is as follows: 29.6% in the high category, 62% in the medium category, and 8.5% in the low category. Applying leadership values for young children with diverse backgrounds involves forming habits, creating picket schedules, and engaging in direct practice. Various strategies are implemented to instill leadership values for young children within inclusive schools, including outbound programs, home visits, outings, hacking, training children to accept positions like prayer leaders, and assigning line leaders based on a predetermined picket schedule.

Keywords: leadership, young children, inclusive schools

Public Interest Statement

This research departs from the importance of instilling leadership values for young people in inclusive schools because the schools have students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. All children are well received. Children in inclusive schools who have different backgrounds should have good attitudes and be able to respect each other. This attitude certainly needs to be possessed by a leader. Inclusion schools are an excellent place for children to train themselves as leaders because they face so many differences. Leadership attitudes can be trained and internalized by teachers in the school environment. This research is a mixed study that focuses on knowing students' leadership profiles and knowing effective ways to instill leadership values in students in inclusive schools. Researchers conducted interviews with several teachers to find out why and how leadership is important for children in inclusive schools in Bengkulu, Indonesia.

Introduction

Implementing educational programs for young children represents an endeavor to stimulate, guide, nurture, and offer learning activities that can foster young children's abilities and skills, irrespective of children's differences. All young children must receive equitable attention and guidance, fostering a fair, comfortable, and joyful learning atmosphere. This naturally aligns with the principles upheld by inclusive schools. Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an institution that provides educational services for general young children and extends these services to young children with special needs. Through inclusive ECE, young children with special needs can access the same quality of education as their general counterparts. Inclusive ECE must be tailored to young children's needs while aligning with the prevailing values in the surrounding environment. Inclusive education is a system that embraces all young children without discrimination, ensuring every young child has an equal opportunity to receive education.

The environment at an inclusion school is a good place for a child to learn about leadership. In such schools, children are faced with many differences. These differences are certainly not a separator, a unifier to care for each other. Children in inclusion schools can be trained to lead others who are diverse. Teachers also need to emphasize that all children have equal opportunities to become leaders. Teachers really need to convey this to build children's awareness of the importance of respecting everyone. Thus, children will grow into human beings with character and good leadership skills.

Today many inclusive schools offer comfortable education for all children. In Bengkulu City, ECE implements inclusion-based schools. Inclusive schools eliminate distinctions between young children with special needs and general young children during the learning process, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The school provides one accompanying teacher for each child with special needs, who guides and directs the young children throughout the learning process. Additionally, the school equips an inclusion room where, every Friday, young children with special needs participate in a program provided by school staff.

Educational practices in inclusive schools goes beyond focusing solely on academic mastery; they are also dedicated to instilling values in young children. Leadership is a pivotal value that young children must acquire from an early age in inclusive schools. Ideally, teachers employ appropriate strategies tailored to the developmental skills of young children to instill these values. The development of leadership skills necessitates early intervention, requiring parents and teachers to comprehensively understand the stages of their growth and development. (Waruwu et al., 2017, p. 1).

By internalizing leadership values from an early age, young children in inclusive schools are expected to become wise leaders one day. They have been equipped with leadership values and get along

with many friends who have differences during school, so the character of a leader is expected to stick with them. This condition makes researchers interested in conducting research regarding internalizing leadership values in children in inclusive schools.

Literature review

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is an education system that provides services and opportunities for all young children with special needs to receive education alongside their general education peers—supported by Widyawati's statement (2017), which defines inclusive education as a system offering equal opportunities to all young children, irrespective of their physical or mental condition. This aligns with Istiningsih's perspective (2020), who defines inclusive education as a type of educational reform emphasizing anti-discrimination, the advocacy for equal rights and opportunities, justice, and the expansion of access to education for every young child. Inclusive schools are considered most effective in fighting discrimination, as young children with special needs in inclusive classrooms receive the same treatment as their general education counterparts (Pratiwi, 2015). All individuals engaged in inclusive school institutions are committed to collaboratively assisting young children in exploring their potential (Alfina & Anwar, 2020). This commitment is noted by Wahyu et al. (2017), emphasizing that inclusive education is vital for ensuring an equitable distribution, thereby aiding young children in achieving a quality education. Additionally, inclusive education presents a unique opportunity for young children with special needs to optimize their potential without fearing discrimination. Inclusion in education is recognised as a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (Loreman et al., 2014). Based on these statements, it can be asserted that inclusive schools provide equal opportunities for learning for all children who come from all backgrounds or differences. Inclusive schools do not discriminate against students. All students are guided to learn well and comfortably so that they can maximize their potential.

Leadership

Yukl (2016) asserts that "leadership is a particular type of power relationship characterized by a group member's perception that another group member has the right to prescribe behavior patterns for the former regarding his activity as a group member". Leadership is considered an art through which an individual aims to influence others, enabling them to achieve the goals of a group. "Leadership as influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals" (Shofa, 2018). Kusuma et al. (2022) describe leadership as positively influencing others to attain group goals. Nurmiyanti and Candra (2019) affirm that the presence of a leader in a group ensures optimal execution of activities, enhancing overall effectiveness and efficiency through organized control. This perspective aligns with Coleman et al. (2016), who argue that leadership can foster an environment that respects diversity. Leadership may be widely distributed among the members of a group, and there may be no sharpboundary between leaders and followers (Sun et al., 2017). Moreover, Stamopoulos (2012) emphasizes that leaders must build professional and pedagogical knowledge. Based on some of these leadership statements, it can be asserted that leadership is closely related to professional efforts to influence others and create collaboration space to achieve common goals. Leadership is not just about power but rather organized collaborative action to achieve the goals of a group.

Method

This research employs a mixed-methods approach with a Sequential Exploratory design, combining quantitative and qualitative research components. This approach consists of a two-phase data collection process, where the researcher first gathers quantitative data, analyzes it, and then uses these findings to inform or extend the subsequent qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Integrating these data sources aims to certify researchers to acquire the necessary information and elucidate the research depth.

Quantitative

In the quantitative phase, the researchers assessed the leadership profiles of young children within inclusive schools. The analysis used to measure these profiles employed a descriptive data analysis method using the Guttman scale. In this research, the total population consisted of 286 young children, and the researchers selected a representative sample, constituting 25% of this population, from five inclusive ECE institutions in Bengkulu City. Consequently, the study included a participant group of 71 young children.

Table 1. Details of the research sample size

No	School Name	Number of Young Children
1	FK ECE	13
2	LB ECE	10
3	AL 1 ECE	22
4	MH ECE	14
5	LI ECE	12
Total		71

Qualitative

In the qualitative research stage, researchers conducted observations, documentation, and interviews to explore strategies for instilling leadership values in young children within inclusive schools. Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity of the data—this involved triangulation of sources, time, and methods. Researchers cross-referenced information from different sources and times, comparing statements from one source. Additionally, the results of interviews were compared with existing documents to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

Result and Discussion

The Young Children's Leadership Profile

Quantitative data collection from participants was conducted directly. Researchers visited the school to meet with participants and distributed questionnaires from February 13, 2023, to March 13, 2023. A total of 71 young children participated and completed the questionnaires provided by the researchers. Based on the characteristics of the children, the following findings have been identified:

Table 2. Participants Characteristics

	Number of Young Children	Percentage
Young Children	71	100%
Sex		
a. Boy	41	57,74%
b. Girl	30	42,25%
Age		
a. >5 years	0 00%	
b. 5 - 6 years	71	100%
c. < 6 years	0	00%

Based on the table above, there were 71 young children, with 41 boys as the participants, comprising 57.74%, and 30 girls as the participants, comprising 42.25%. The age distribution of the young children was as follows: less than five years, 0%; between 5 and 6 years, 71 participants or 100%; and over six years, 0%.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Leadership Value Variables

Variable	Categorization			M
	Low	Medium	High	
Leadership	8.5%	62%	29.6%	25.8

Based on the available information, the research finding concerning the leadership variable among the young children revealed a mean value of 25.8 with a standard deviation of 1.3. The mean value surpasses the standard deviation, indicating an even distribution of the distributed questionnaires.

The table shows that the leadership variable is categorized into three groups: high, medium, and low. Among the 71 young children, 21 young children, or 29.6%, fall into the high category, 44 young children, or 62%, fall into the medium category, and six young children, or 8.5%, fall into the low category. The table illustrates the leadership characteristics of young children based on ten leadership indicators, which include: problem solver/ creatively solves problems, verbal skill/ communicates well verbally with peers, emphatic, sensitive to other feelings, sought out by peers, self-confident, energetic, flexible, independent, responsible, organized.

The Importance of Instilling Leadership Values

The significance of instilling character values was discovered through structured interviews with five teachers. The interviews were conducted directly with the teachers, and the results were subsequently processed and analyzed. The analysis revealed several themes concerning implementing leadership values in young children. Instilling leadership character values in young children from an early age is crucial. By equipping young children with leadership character early on, they are hoped to become trustworthy and responsible leaders. This statement is supported by the following assertion from an interview conducted by researchers with one of the teachers:

> "*Leadership characteristics are crucial to instill from an early age because it is not only about leading others but, more importantly, about leading oneself, exercising self-control, fostering courage in children, regulating voice volume, influencing and managing others.*" (Informant 1)

From the assertion above, we can deduce that, according to the teacher, the primary reason for instilling leadership values in young children is to enable them to lead others and, more importantly, to empower them to lead themselves in the future. Young children must comprehend their identity to make appropriate decisions and take responsible actions. Fostering this capability from an early age contributes to shaping individuals capable of making informed and decisive life choices. Ultimately, this process transforms them into influential leaders who can adeptly manage themselves.

Another perspective supporting the importance of instilling leadership character is expressed as follows:

"*Leadership trait is of utmost importance from an early age as it teaches children self-management skills, such as waking up in the morning, putting on their shoes, and learning to manage time. By instilling leadership trait early on, leadership qualities will naturally emerge.*" (Informant 3)

This statement suggests that developing leadership character helps young children develop excellent self-management skills. Encouraging young children to practice independence and manage their time effectively teaches them to act logically and systematically, fostering inherent leadership character. Additionally, the data emphasizes that instilling leadership values is essential for creating confident and active young children:

"*It is crucial to instill leadership values in children from an early age because this character teaches children to be more confident, speak more actively, and learn to lead their friends.*" (Informant 2)

Leadership character enhances young children's confidence and activity levels as they become adept at leading themselves and their peers. They develop the skills to speak confidently in front of others and express their opinions effectively.

Strategy for Instilling Leadership Values

Based on interviews conducted with several teachers, various strategies for instilling leadership values in young children at inclusive schools, particularly in EDE were identified. The objective of these strategies is to enhance children's leadership abilities. This is articulated in the following statement:

"*In instilling leadership values, every activity always includes leadership elements, such as saying a prayer before eating, designating a leader during prayer, and allowing children to take on leadership roles when lining up for class. Moreover, children are encouraged to showcase themselves in front of an audience, such as participating in competitions.*" (Informant 1).

From the above assertion, one of the strategies that teachers employ to instill leadership values is the integration of these values into learning materials. This integration includes activities such as praying before eating, being a priest during prayer, fostering leadership skills by organizing lines when entering the classroom, and providing opportunities for children to appear in public, often through participation in competitions. This strategy positively impacts young children's mental abilities, courage, and speaking skills, ultimately enhancing their leadership capabilities. This is crucial for teachers in molding a generation capable of becoming future leaders. Another aspect of the strategy involves selecting young

children as priests during Forenoon/Duha prayers to develop their leadership skills further, as indicated in the following statement:

> "*For the material itself, we teach children to become priests during Duha prayers, observing the enthusiasm of the children, some of whom are actively engaged while others remain silent.*" (Informant 2).

In addition to taking the role of a priest during prayers, young children are taught to be responsible for their actions, as responsibility is considered an essential trait for a leader:

> "*The material we teach for developing leadership revolves more around habituation, emphasizing responsibilities such as proper equipment usage.*" (Informant 3).

Beyond instilling responsibility, entrepreneurial programs are implemented by schools to develop leadership skills in young children from an early stage. Entrepreneurial activities also impart a sense of responsibility, as highlighted in the following assertion:

> "*There are three special programs from the school, namely the program of entrepreneurship, outbound, and agriculture. The child will be taught to be responsible, confident, and independent.*" (Informant 5).

In addition to entrepreneurship programs, other activities like outbound programs, home visits, outings, and hiking are organized to internalize leadership values in young children, as mentioned in the following quote:

> "*We conduct outbound activities, home visits, outings, and hiking. Through these programs, we aim to teach children to become leaders during various activities.*" (Informant 2)

Moreover, teachers are encouraged to employ creative methods in instilling leadership values and fostering a positive and engaging learning atmosphere for young children. The methods include habituation, role-playing, direct practice, demonstrations, assignments, and storytelling, as indicated by the following statements:

> "*We apply habituation and role-playing for students in every activity as our teaching method.*" (Informant 1)
> "*As our teaching method, we also implement direct practice, demonstrations, familiarization, and assignments*" (Informant 3)
> "*We instil leadership values in children through storytelling methods.*" (Informant 4)

The data reveals that these creative methods effectively elicit positive responses from young children, who display enthusiasm and a willingness to take on leadership roles, as highlighted in the following statements:

> "*Regarding children's reaction, they enjoy taking on leadership roles. They eagerly compete for leadership positions, exemplified by instances of children attending school despite being unwell,*

because it is their appointed day to lead their friends. This is undeniably a positive response from children." (Informant 1)

"*Children exhibit positive responses, displaying no hesitation when asked to lead their friends.*" (Informant 4)

The positive responses from young children indicate the success of the teacher's strategy in instilling enthusiasm for leadership values, suggesting that these values are becoming internalized by young children. Teachers must employ media that supports the learning process in developing leadership values. The media utilized should be engaging to prevent boredom during learning activities. Based on the teacher's interview:

"*Storytelling media or audio media, video media, and image media are used in every learning activity. Children engage in storytelling, listening, and viewing existing videos or pictures.*" (Informant 2)

Incorporating storytelling, audio, video, and image media in learning activities is an exciting strategy that enhances the learning experience. This strategy ensures enjoyable learning activities, making the material more meaningful and accessible for young children.

The Barriers to Instilling Leadership Values

Instilling leadership character values in young children undoubtedly encounters obstacles. These challenges are elucidated through assertions from interviews conducted by researchers with the teachers:

"*The inhibiting factor in instilling leadership values is that children can still not control their movements and emotions. However, some children already understand this concept, as their development depends on their maturity. It becomes the teacher's responsibility to guide and direct children in improving their self-control.*" (Informant 1)

From the assertion above, the emotional maturity of young children varies, resulting in some children struggling to control their emotions effectively. This variability is influenced by family education at home. Thus, the teacher must guide and direct the young children, enabling them to manage their emotions adeptly. Young children are taught to comprehend that not all desires must be fulfilled.

Moreover, there are times when young children's attitudes fluctuate—sometimes they are very enthusiastic, and other times less so. In such instances, they require assistance and motivation from the surrounding environment, particularly from teachers, as highlighted in the following aertion:

"*Inhibiting factors include* young children's *changing attitudes and occasional lack of enthusiasm. However, as teachers, we must continue guiding and directing them to remain enthusiastic in participating in the learning process.*" (Informant 2)

The challenges faced by teachers extend beyond fluctuations in enthusiasm. They also involve young children's attitudes, some of whom may fiercely compete for leadership roles. Even in the case of confident and active children, guidance and understanding are necessary. Research findings reveal instances where young children actively compete for leadership positions, as expressed in the following assertion:

> "*The obstacle we experience in instilling leadership values is that children compete to become leaders. However, we have established a schedule to ensure that each child will have a turn to take a leadership role. It necessitates guiding children to understand that everyone has the opportunity to become a leader.*" (Informant 3)

From the data above, it can be concluded that confident and enthusiastic young children require guidance and direction. Encouraging them not only to possess the courage to lead but also to embody the characteristics of a leader is crucial. Young children need to be taught positive character traits, emphasizing that everyone can take a leadership role. When young children muster the courage to lead, the subsequent step involves guiding them to effectively fulfil their leadership roles, as expressed in the following assertion:

> "*There is a need for assistance and familiarization with children because the development of each child is different. While some children show good development, others still require assistance.*" (Informant 5)

According to the research findings, it is noticeable that the leadership profiles of the young children included a total of 71 young children. Out of these, 21 young children, or 29.6%, were in the high category; 44 young children, or 62%, were in the medium category; and six young children, or 8.5%, were in the low category. The instillation of leadership values in young children in inclusive schools is through habituation, playing, demonstration, assignment, storytelling, and direct practice. Various media are utilized in this process, including images, videos, and storybooks, guided by the Al-Qur'an and Hadith. Additionally, schools conduct programs to train leadership for young children, such as outbound activities, recalls, home visits, outings, and hacking, learning programs, picket schedules for children to become leaders, entrepreneurship programs, and agricultural programs.

Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, several issues are discussed in line with the third research objective: (1) the importance of instilling leadership character education from an early age to train young children to become leaders, both leading themselves and learning to lead their surrounding environment; (2) materials incorporated in the implementation of leadership values for young children include activities such as children practicing the role of leading prayers, participating in recitals, taking on leadership roles during class lining up, and being trained to perform in front of audiences, including involvement in competitions. These activities aim to teach responsibility and foster leadership skills in young children; (3) programs carried out to train young children's leadership, including outbound programs, home visits, outings, hacking, learning programs for children where they are trained to become prayer leaders, picket schedules for children to become leaders, entrepreneurship programs, and agricultural programs; (4) the methods used to instill leadership values include habituation, game, demonstration, assignment, storytelling, and direct practice; (5) the media used to instill leadership values in young children include picture media, video media, storybook media, and guidance from the Al-Qur'an and Hadith; and (6) obstacles that occur in the process of instilling social care values, such as young children not being able to control their movements and emotions, changing attitudes, occasional lack of enthusiasm, young children often fighting to become leaders, educational background at home or parenting style, and the need for young children to get used to it.

By instilling leadership characteristics early on, young children can become a driving force or model for the group, always acting reasonably and feeling caring and sympathetic towards other

friends, especially in inclusive schools with diverse young children. Morrissey (2021) emphasizes that the leadership approach in an inclusive educational setting must be triadic in structure, underpinned by a triad of teacher leadership, managerial leadership, and values leadership. Billingsley et al. (2018) state that "School leadership is critical to providing young children with disabilities opportunities to learn in inclusive schools," as having leadership in schools can provide opportunities for young children with disabilities to learn together with regular students without focusing on disadvantages. Leaders are agents of change who can influence others. "Leaders are agents of change, persons whose actions affect other people more than other people's acts affect them" (Gibson et al., 2011).

Leadership skills must be applied to young children early because this is the basis or foundation for them to manifest their dreams and life hopes. Every child can become a leader; therefore, leadership in young children must be instilled from an early age. This will, of course, be a provision for young children to make their dreams come true (Salu, 2022). Ningsih and Novitasari (2021) state that role-playing can instill leadership character in young children. With role-playing, young children learn to be responsible, make decisions, solve problems, and act out roles according to the scenario. Leadership is a practice distributed among leaders, followers, and the school›s situation or context (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). These abilities are integrated with leadership characteristics: honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, learning, and cooperation (Rahmat, 2015, p. 38).

Leadership in ECE is a process (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013). Knowledge is the basis for distributing leadership (Jordan, 2008). In line with Stamopoulos's (2012) opinion, leadership that includes all those who work with young children provides multiple perspectives to understand the change process better. Fox et al. (2015) argue that the leadership character of young children has ten characteristics: (1) problem solver/Creatively solves problems, (2) verbal skills/Communicates well verbally with peers, (3) empathic/sensitive to other feelings, (4) sought out by peers, (5) self-confident, (6) energetic, (7) flexible, (8) independent, (9) responsible, and (10) organized.

Based on the aforementioned perspectives, it is essential to instill leadership values in young children at an early age to develop their good character. The anticipated leardership values encompasses attributes such as character, perspective, courage, kindness, and integrity. By instilling these high-level values, young children are better equipped into robust leaders in their adulthood.

Conclusion

Instilling leadership values in inclusive schools is essential for fostering great and responsible leaders. The development of leadership skills is important in young children, especially during their early childhood years. This research involved 71 young children, revealing a leadership profile of 29.6% in the high category, 62% in the medium category, and 8.5% in the low category. Appropriate methods are crucial in instilling leadership values in these children. The strategies employed in this research include habituation, play, demonstration, assignment, storytelling, and direct practice methods. In its implementation, the teacher emphasizes the necessity of innovative media, such as videos, pictures, and storybooks, and the incorporation of field experiences like outbound activities, home visits, outings, hacking, and assigning children the role of a prayer leader. These experiences are designed to provide meaningful leadership exposure for young children.

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