

Enhancing Student Assessment and Well-Being Through School–Community Engagement in Vocational Boarding Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how school–community engagement can enhance student assessment skills and overall well-being within the context of vocational boarding education. Conducted at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon, a vocational high school specializing in agriculture in Eastern Indonesia, the project aimed to support guidance and counseling teachers in identifying students' developmental challenges and to improve students' abilities in using assessment tools. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis involving dormitory managers and school leadership. Findings revealed that the boarding system plays a pivotal role in promoting academic success, especially for students from remote areas, by providing a structured and supportive environment. Key services included structured mentoring, extracurricular activities, and a well-organized dormitory management structure. The assessment phase identified a variety of student issues: personal problems (42.6%), academic difficulties (34%), social issues (12.7%), and career uncertainty (10.7%). These findings highlight the urgent need for a responsive, student-centered counseling system supported by the school and local community. The study recommends targeted improvements in dormitory infrastructure, professional development for staff, and stronger integration of assessment-driven decision-making. Overall, the project demonstrates that a well-managed residential education model, when coupled with active community engagement, can significantly foster student well-being, guidance responsiveness, and life skill development.

Keywords: boarding school, community engagement, guidance and counseling, student assessment, vocational education.

INTRODUCTION

Boarding schools play a pivotal role in enhancing the educational experiences of students, particularly in vocational settings where hands-on and contextual learning are essential. In Indonesia, Vocational High School of Agriculture (SMK Pertanian Pembangunan) Ambon provides dormitory services to accommodate students from remote and rural areas, ensuring equitable access to quality education and skill development in the field of agriculture. Dormitories function not merely as residential facilities but as integral learning environments that influence students' academic achievement, discipline, and character development (Azizi, 2013; Chinyoka, 2014).

The provision of a conducive residential environment has been widely recognized as a factor influencing students' motivation, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging, which in turn impacts academic outcomes (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). In

vocational schools like SMK Pertanian Ambon, which specialize in agriculture and practical training, dormitories serve not only as living quarters but also as spaces for informal peer learning, agricultural practice, and character formation. Therefore, the effectiveness of dormitory management—spanning planning, facilities, sanitation, safety, comfort, and counseling services—is essential in promoting holistic student development (Mashamba, 2014; Hughes et al., 2015).

However, challenges in managing student dormitories, especially in vocational education contexts, often relate to inadequate planning, limited stakeholder involvement, suboptimal organizational structures, and insufficient evaluation mechanisms (Mohamed & Azizan, 2021). To address such gaps, this observational study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of boarding services at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon. The study investigates how planning processes are designed, what components are prioritized, and the extent of stakeholder involvement—including students, teachers, and parents—in shaping a responsive dormitory program.

Organizational aspects such as task distribution among dormitory managers, guidance counselors, and school leaders, as well as communication flows between stakeholders, are crucial for effective service delivery (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Leithwood, 2006). Moreover, the allocation and management of resources—time, personnel, and facilities—play a central role in supporting daily dormitory operations (Adeyemi, 2012; Naylor, 2018). This study also explores implementation practices and how the success of dormitory programs is evaluated through feedback mechanisms and performance indicators.

The overarching goal of this study is to generate insights that contribute to the improvement of student dormitory services at SMK Pertanian Ambon, fostering a safe, comfortable, and academically supportive environment. In doing so, the study aligns with broader educational goals of promoting student well-being and academic success through structured and inclusive support systems (OECD, 2021; Day & Sammons, 2016).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the boarding services management system at SMK Pertanian dan Pembangunan Ambon. The qualitative descriptive approach is particularly appropriate for examining social phenomena in their natural settings and capturing the depth and complexity of participant experiences without the need for manipulation or control (Sandelowski, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows researchers to obtain a detailed understanding of how the dormitory system is planned, organized, implemented, and evaluated to support the academic and social needs of students.



Figure 1. Students' Visit and Group Photo in Front of the Agricultural Development School Building of Maluku Province.

Participants and Setting

The primary subject of the study was the head of the dormitory, who also serves as the supervisor of both the male and female dormitories. The selection of this participant was based on purposive sampling, given their central role in managing and overseeing all aspects of boarding life at the institution. The object of the study was the dormitory service itself—specifically, how the institution provides residential support to students at SMK Pertanian dan Pembangunan Ambon (also known as SPP Ambon). The study was conducted on-site at SMK Pertanian dan Pembangunan Ambon, located at Jl. Wolter Monginsidi, Passo, Kecamatan Baguala, Kota Ambon, Maluku. The school serves students from various regions of Maluku, many of whom reside on campus due to geographic distance from their homes. Dormitory services at this institution play a strategic role in ensuring students' continued participation in vocational agricultural education.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using three primary instruments: 1) Observation Sheets. Direct observations were made regarding the condition, functionality, and management of the dormitory facilities. The observation process followed structured guidelines to document key aspects such as infrastructure quality, cleanliness, safety, discipline routines, and daily dormitory activities. 2) Semi-Structured Interviews. Interviews were conducted with the dormitory head using a semi-structured format. This method enabled the researcher to probe deeper into the dormitory planning, management strategies, challenges, student needs, and the involvement of other stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in educational settings for obtaining both consistent and rich narrative data (Kallio et al., 2016).



Figure 2. In-depth Interview with the Dormitory Head in the Meeting Room of the Agricultural Development School in Ambon.

Documentation Review

Relevant documents, including school dormitory regulations, activity schedules, student occupancy records, and reports on dormitory incidents or improvements, were analyzed to corroborate the findings from observations and interviews.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, involving systematic coding and thematic categorization of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. The analysis aimed to identify patterns and themes related to the planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation of boarding services (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Coding was performed manually, with repeated reading to ensure consistency and reliability of theme emergence. This analytical approach is well-suited to derive practical insights in education and policy studies,

particularly when the goal is to improve service delivery in context-specific environments such as vocational dormitories (Patton, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dormitory services at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon are designed to support students who come from remote areas, ensuring that they can access quality education in a safe and comfortable environment. The observational data collected provide a comprehensive view of the planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation of dormitory services. Key findings are presented as follows: The dormitory at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon is equipped with essential facilities designed to support student comfort and academic focus. Each shared bedroom is spacious and furnished with beds, desks, and lockers, while other amenities include bathrooms, electricity, internet access, a canteen, and a prayer hall for Muslim students. Such infrastructure is critical in creating a conducive environment for rest and study, and has been shown to significantly influence students' well-being and learning outcomes (Naylor, 2018; Hattie, 2009). Dormitory activities are managed systematically to promote holistic development. The dormitory managers coordinate various structured programs such as group vegetable gardening, scheduled academic study hours, and extracurricular activities in sports and the arts. These initiatives are intended not only to enhance academic performance but also to foster students' social, emotional, and physical development, aligning with global best practices in youth development programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). In terms of organizational structure, the dormitory management involves three key roles: the dormitory manager, mentoring teachers, and the school principal. The dormitory manager handles daily operations, maintenance, and discipline. Mentoring teachers are responsible for providing academic and personal guidance while facilitating communication between students, the dormitory management, and parents. The school principal holds overall responsibility for institutional leadership and strategic decisions, including those related to dormitory services. A clear communication flow exists in this structure—students report issues to mentoring teachers, who then liaise with the dormitory manager or escalate matters to the principal. Parents can also communicate directly with school staff to stay informed about their children's well-being. Well-established communication frameworks such as this are known to significantly enhance problem resolution and overall satisfaction in school-based residential settings (Epstein, 2001; Bryk et al., 2010).

Standard operating procedures have been implemented to ensure the smooth running of dormitory life. These include clearly defined daily schedules that regulate study periods, meals, and recreation; codes of discipline that foster respect and order; and periodic evaluations conducted by the school leadership to assess service quality. Supporting resources include skilled teaching staff, dedicated physical spaces such as study rooms and sports facilities, and structured time management practices. Effective institutional planning and resource allocation are essential to maintain a safe and productive living-learning environment (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2021). Finally, evaluations conducted through student surveys revealed a high level of satisfaction with dormitory services, particularly regarding comfort, safety, and the structure of daily activities. These findings underscore the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation in maintaining service quality and making evidence-based improvements. As highlighted in educational research, continuous feedback mechanisms play a pivotal role in refining programs and aligning them with student needs (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

The dormitory at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon plays a pivotal role in promoting equitable access to vocational agricultural education. By providing residential support to students from remote or underserved areas, the dormitory effectively eliminates geographic and socio-economic barriers that might otherwise hinder educational attainment. Well-managed boarding services contribute not only to academic engagement but also to personal development, offering a structured environment conducive to learning and growth (Awumbila et al., 2017; World Bank, 2019). Dormitories serve far beyond their basic function as living quarters; they operate as critical educational environments that facilitate discipline, character development, and social integration. Students—particularly those from rural areas—benefit significantly from consistent routines, peer learning interactions, and structured mentoring systems. These factors are widely recognized as

fundamental contributors to students' academic achievement and social-emotional competence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pianta et al., 2008).

Effective dormitory management hinges on the involvement of trained and empathetic staff who are equipped to uphold discipline, ensure cleanliness, and provide emotional support. Research indicates that emotionally supportive boarding environments lead to improved psychological well-being among adolescents (Wentzel & Looney, 2006; Hughes et al., 2015). Additionally, defining clear institutional roles within the dormitory—between managers, mentors, and school leadership—promotes accountability and improves operational coordination (Leithwood et al., 2004). The integration of extracurricular and developmental activities into dormitory life is another key strength. Programs in agriculture, sports, and the arts serve to nurture students' talents while also fostering essential life skills such as collaboration, adaptability, and time management. Evidence strongly supports the role of non-cognitive skill development in predicting long-term academic and career success (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; OECD, 2015). As such, the dormitory functions not only as a residence but as a comprehensive learning environment that reinforces classroom instruction through real-life skill acquisition.

Furthermore, the planning, implementation, and evaluation of dormitory services at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon reflect a commendable level of organization. Structured planning ensures alignment with student needs, and the involvement of stakeholders—students, teachers, and parents—enhances the relevance and responsiveness of the programs offered. Regular monitoring and the use of evaluative mechanisms such as student feedback and activity logs allow for continuous quality improvement (Yonezawa et al., 2009; Danielson, 2007; Patton, 2015). These practices demonstrate a cycle of reflection and adaptation essential for maintaining high service standards. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to further improve dormitory services. First, the school should consider expanding its dormitory capacity to accommodate an increasing number of students. Second, infrastructural enhancements—such as the development of additional study and recreation areas—are necessary to improve the quality of student life. Lastly, targeted professional development for dormitory staff is essential, focusing on mentoring skills, time management, and adolescent counseling (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Fullan, 2007). By systematically strengthening the processes of planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating, and improving dormitory services, SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon can further enhance its ability to support students' academic, emotional, and social success.

CONCLUSION

The dormitory services at SMK Pertanian Pembangunan Ambon have made a significant positive contribution to students' comfort, academic engagement, and personal development. With a well-structured organizational system involving dormitory managers, mentoring teachers, and the school principal, supported by effective communication channels, the dormitory not only functions as a residence but also as a center for character building and social skill enhancement. High levels of student satisfaction reflect the success of current practices; however, improvements in infrastructure and targeted staff training are recommended to further enhance service quality. Overall, the dormitory plays a vital role in supporting the holistic educational experience and long-term success of students.

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