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## Voices of Student-Leaders: Experiences of SSLG Officers in School-Related Activities at Dinadiawan National High School

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### Abstract

*Student leadership is increasingly recognized as a meaningful avenue for student voice, participation, and school improvement, yet student-leaders often navigate complex expectations, resource constraints, and role conflicts. This qualitative descriptive study examined the lived experiences of Supreme Secondary Learner Government (SSLG) officers in school-related activities at Dinadiawan National High School. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions explored SSLG roles, participation processes, leadership learning, and challenges. Thematic analysis yielded four themes: (1) service and representation as identity work, (2) leadership learning through practice and mentorship, (3) collaborative participation in school activities, and (4) tensions and constraints shaping student leadership. Findings suggest that authentic participation is strengthened by supportive adult mentorship, opportunities for decision-making, and a school culture that legitimizes student voice (Mitra, 2004; Schaefer, 2024). However, time demands, peer pressures, and logistical limitations can reduce participation to compliance rather than shared governance. The study concludes that SSLG officers contribute to organizational functioning and student engagement when leadership structures are developmental, inclusive, and well-supported. Implications for student leadership development, school leadership practice, and policy are discussed.*

**Keywords:** student leadership, SSLG, student voice, school activities, qualitative study, secondary education

## Introduction

Student leadership in schools has long been associated with student voice, civic learning, and leadership development, particularly when students are positioned as legitimate contributors to school life rather than symbolic participants (Mitra, 2004; Fielding, 2001). In contemporary secondary education, learner governance structures (e.g., student councils/SSLG) provide a formal platform for representation, organizing activities, and supporting school programs, while also serving as a developmental space for leadership identity formation and interpersonal competence (Raudoniute, 2024). Research suggests that when student participation is authentic meaning students influence processes and decisions schools benefit through improved engagement, belonging, and shared responsibility (Schaefer, 2024).

In the Philippine setting, SSLG officers often assume responsibilities for academic and co-curricular activities, school campaigns and learner welfare initiatives. Yet student leaders also face competing demands, including balancing academic requirements with leadership duties, navigating peer dynamics, and working within institutional constraints. Studies on student leadership experiences highlight that leadership development frequently occurs through practice, reflection, and mentoring, but outcomes vary depending on the quality of adult support and the extent of student agency in decision-making (Buhain, 2024; Mitra, 2004). Despite the relevance of SSLG to student voice and school participation, localized qualitative accounts of SSLG officers' lived experiences especially within routine school-related activities remain limited.

This study examined the experiences of SSLG officers in school-related activities at Dinadiawan National High School to provide context-sensitive insights into how student leadership is enacted, supported, and constrained within everyday school life.

## Research Objectives

This study aimed to examine the experiences of SSLG officers in school-related activities at Dinadiawan National High School. Specifically, it sought to describe how SSLG officers understand and enact their roles in organizing and supporting school activities, explore how leadership learning develops through participation and mentoring, identify enabling conditions (e.g., supportive culture, adult guidance, peer cooperation) that strengthen student participation, and determine the challenges that limit meaningful student leadership and sustained engagement (Mitra, 2004; Schaefer, 2024).

## Methodology

A qualitative descriptive research design was used to capture in-depth perspectives on SSLG officers' experiences in school-related activities, appropriate for documenting practices and meanings within natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants included SSLG officers (e.g., president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and committee heads), selected through purposive sampling based on direct involvement in planning and implementing school activities. Key informants (e.g., SSLG adviser and activity coordinators) were also included to triangulate perspectives on participation processes and support structures (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Questions covered role expectations, participation in planning and implementation, leadership learning, decision-making experiences, collaboration with teachers and classmates, and challenges encountered. Data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with iterative coding, categorization, and theme refinement. Trustworthiness was supported through triangulation (student leaders and adult advisers), member checking of thematic summaries, and peer debriefing to strengthen credibility and reduce interpretive bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Note on quotes:** The participant excerpts below are presented as **illustrative verbatim-style samples** for a journal-ready draft. Replace them with your study's actual transcripts before submission.

## Results/Findings

The analysis generated four themes describing SSLG officers' experiences in school-related activities. Each theme is supported by participant responses and followed by explanation and interpretation.

### Theme 1: Service and Representation as Identity Work

SSLG officers described their roles as anchored in service, representation, and responsibility to the student body. They framed leadership as "being visible," "being accountable," and "speaking for learners," especially during assemblies, campaigns, and activity coordination. Officers experienced role growth as they navigated expectations from teachers, peers and school administrators while trying to remain credible to classmates.

**Participant responses :**

“Kapag SSLG ka, hindi lang pangalan kailangan may gawa at may paninindigan.” (SSLG officer 13)

“Minsan kailangan mong maging boses ng klase, kahit nakakahiya.” (SSLG officer 11)

“Service talaga ‘yung mindset naming kami ang una sa trabaho.” (SSLG officer 4)

These responses suggest that SSLG leadership is experienced as identity work where students construct a “leader-self” through service, visibility, and representation. Such identity formation aligns with student voice scholarship emphasizing that leadership roles can strengthen agency when students are recognized as legitimate participants in school life (Mitra, 2004). The emphasis on “service” also reflects findings that student leadership development often becomes meaningful when grounded in purpose and responsibility rather than status alone (Raudoniute, 2024).

**Theme 2: Leadership Learning Through Practice and Mentorship**

Participants reported learning leadership primarily through doing planning events, facilitating meetings, speaking in public, and handling conflicts rather than through formal instruction. Advisers and teacher-coordinators were described as critical mentors who helped officers refine communication, delegate tasks, and manage pressures. Officers noted that guidance was most helpful when it allowed them to decide while adults provided structure and feedback.

**Participant responses :**

“Natuto ako mag-lead dahil pinagawa sa amin-meeting, plan, execute.” (SSLG officer 10)

“Kapag may adviser na gumagabay, mas kaya naming magdesisyon.” (SSLG officer 5)

“Tinuruan kami paano mag-handle ng problema nang hindi nakaka-offend.” (SSLG officer 3)

These accounts indicate that leadership learning is experiential and socially scaffolded, consistent with perspectives that emphasize learning through guided practice and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Importantly, mentorship appears to function as enabling scaffolding: student leadership becomes developmental when adults support autonomy while providing structure, a condition often associated with more authentic student participation (Mitra, 2004). Similar work on student leadership experiences highlights the importance of adult support in sustaining students’ leadership efficacy and participation over time (Buhain, 2024).

**Theme 3: Collaborative Participation in School Activities**

SSLG officers described school-related activities (e.g., events, campaigns, clubs, school drives) as collective projects requiring coordination with teachers, class officers, and student volunteers. They emphasized teamwork, communication and negotiation particularly when mobilizing participation across grade levels. Officers noted that activities were most successful when teachers treated student leaders as partners and when students perceived activities as relevant.

**Participant responses :**

“Hindi namin kaya mag-isa—kailangan ng class officers at volunteers.” (SSLG officer 8)

“Mas gumagana kapag nakikinig ang teachers sa suggestion namin.” (SSLG officer 6)

“Kapag nakikita ng students na may purpose, mas sumasali.” (SSLG officer 2)

These responses highlight that student leadership is relational and collaborative, relying on coordination across school actors. This aligns with student voice literature noting that participation improves when schools build structures for dialogue, partnership, and shared responsibility (Fielding, 2001; Schaefer, 2024). When students perceive that their ideas matter, participation shifts from compliance to engagement an indicator of more authentic involvement in school processes (Mitra, 2004).

**Theme 4: Tensions and Constraints Shaping Student Leadership**

Participants identified recurring challenges: time pressures, academic workload, uneven peer cooperation, limited resources for activities, and emotional strain. Some officers experienced role conflict being a leader while remaining socially accepted among peers. Others noted that tight timelines and logistical constraints sometimes reduced student leadership to implementation rather than co-planning.

**Participant responses :**

“Minsan conflict sa oras-may requirements, tapos may activity pa.” (SSLG officer 4)

“Hindi lahat nakiki-cooperate; minsan kami-kami lang ang gumagalaw.” (SSLG officer 8)

“Kapag kulang ang resources, hirap kami mag-implement kahit may plano.” (SSLG officer 1)

These responses indicate that the quality of student leadership is shaped by contextual constraints that can limit the depth of inquiry, planning, and decision-making students can sustain. Research on participation emphasizes that authentic student voice requires structural supports time, resources, and organizational routines otherwise participation risks becoming tokenistic (Mitra, 2004; Schaefer, 2024). The reported tensions also reflect broader patterns in student leader experiences where academic demands and peer dynamics complicate leadership practice, reinforcing the need for supportive systems and realistic workload design (Buhain, 2024).

## Discussions

The findings suggest that SSLG officers experience leadership as service-based identity work, developed through practice and mentorship, and enacted through collaboration during school-related activities. These patterns align with scholarship emphasizing student voice as a developmental and relational process rather than a one-time event (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2004). When adult advisers provide autonomy-supportive guidance and when teachers listen to student suggestions, student leadership becomes more authentic and meaningful, strengthening engagement and shared responsibility (Schaefer, 2024).

At the same time, constraints such as time pressures, uneven peer cooperation, and limited resources may reduce student leadership to logistical execution rather than participatory governance. These challenges suggest that institutional design matters: student leadership effectiveness is not only a function of student capacity but also of whether school systems provide enabling conditions for students to plan, decide, reflect, and lead sustainably (Mitra, 2004). Strengthening student leadership, therefore, requires structured supports, mentorship, and participation opportunities that move beyond event implementation to student involvement in decision-making.

## Conclusions

This study concludes that SSLG officers at Dinadiawan National High School experience school-related activities as key sites for leadership identity formation, experiential learning, and collaborative participation. Officers develop leadership skills through practice and mentorship and contribute meaningfully when their participation is treated as legitimate and influential. However, leadership experiences are constrained by time demands, resource limitations, and participation barriers, underscoring the need for sustained institutional supports that protect student time, strengthen mentorship, and broaden opportunities for authentic student voice.

## Implications of the Study

**For practice:** Schools may strengthen SSLG effectiveness by institutionalizing structured planning cycles, reflection sessions, and shared decision-making routines where SSLG officers contribute beyond implementation.

**For leadership and mentoring:** Advisers and coordinators may adopt autonomy-supportive mentorship setting clear structures while allowing student leaders to make decisions and learn from outcomes.

**For policy:** Student leadership policies may explicitly include resource support, protected time for leadership work, and mechanisms for feedback from the student body to strengthen representation and accountability.

**For research:** Future studies may use comparative qualitative designs across schools or mixed-methods approaches linking student-leader experiences to indicators such as school climate, participation rates, or student engagement.

## Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Informed consent/assent procedures and confidentiality safeguards should be documented based on your institution's ethics requirements.

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## Conflicts of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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