

Original Article (Mixed)

Identifying and prioritizing student leadership growth indicators

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Abstract

The aim of the current research is to identify and rank the growth indicators of students' leadership. This research is applicable in terms of its purpose, exploratory-mixed in terms of approach, and in terms of strategy; content analysis in the qualitative part, and survey in the quantitative part. The participants in the research in the qualitative part were 19 educational management experts and principals of secondary schools in Kerman, who were selected by purposive sampling. The statistical population of the quantitative part was formed by the directors of the education department and the directors of secondary schools in Kerman, which was determined using the non-probability sampling method, with a sample size of 69 people. The tool for collecting information was a semi-structured interview in the qualitative part, and a researcher-made questionnaire in the quantitative part; the validity and reliability of which was confirmed using the CVR index, Cohen's kappa test, and retest. Qualitative part data analysis was done using open and axial coding method and using MAXQDA2020 software, and quantitative part data analysis was done using fuzzy Delphi technique. The analysis of the data from the exploratory interviews led to the identification of 24 indicators of student leadership growth. Then by extracting these indicators, they were ranked through quantitative research. The results of the research show: networking, recognition of the new generation, perceived organizational support, and talent management are the most important indicators of student leadership growth.

Keywords:

Growth,
leadership,
Students,
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Extended abstract

Introduction

In the current educational landscape, cultivating leadership skills among students is increasingly recognized as an essential element in preparing them for future roles in society. However, despite the increasing emphasis on leadership development in educational settings, there is a lack of agreement regarding the key indicators that contribute to student leadership development. Existing literature often provides fragmented insights, which create challenges for implementing effective leadership development programs in schools (Kuroda, 2022). Ambiguity surrounding these indicators prevents educational institutions from cultivating the essential leadership skills students need. The education system of countries has a central role in the development and enrichment of human capital, and the result of effective strategies for guiding and developing students can lead to extensive changes (Sodirjonov, 2020). The need to cultivate capable leaders who can properly manage the society under their management in various crises is a concern that leads us to think about finding a workable solution. Weak leadership in many social, economic, cultural and scientific educational centers has caused us great problems. From when and by which centers should education and training of leaders take place and how people are identified and prepared for this responsibility is one of the concerns of this field (Hermino & Arifin, 2020). This research seeks to address this gap by identifying and prioritizing key indicators of student leadership development, thereby providing a structured framework that educators can use to enhance leadership development efforts in educational settings. The general purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of student leadership, especially in the context of secondary education in Kerman. Using a mixed method, this study integrates quantitative and qualitative data to examine and rank the most important indicators of leadership development. The purpose of this research is to inform educators and policy makers about the most effective strategies for cultivating leadership qualities in students. The main question of the research: What are the important indicators of student leadership growth and which indicators have more priority?

Theoretical framework

Fundamentals of leadership development

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in the fundamental concepts of leadership development, which emphasizes the multidimensional nature of leadership skills. Leadership development is not just about acquiring technical skills, but involves a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, emotional and social dimensions. This study is based on the theory of transformational leadership, which focuses on the ability of leaders to inspire, motivate and enhance the potential of their followers. Transformational leaders are those who go beyond interactive interactions and create an environment where students can develop their visionary thinking and intrinsic motivation. This perspective emphasizes the importance of cultivating leadership qualities that enable individuals to lead with integrity, insight, and a deep sense of responsibility toward others (Lee et al., 2022).

Social and organizational learning

Another important aspect is the role of social learning and organizational behavior in leadership development. Social learning theory holds that leadership skills are often developed through observation, imitation, and interaction in a social context. In educational settings, students learn leadership behaviors by observing peers, teachers, and instructors. This study emphasizes that leadership development is a social process in which interactions within society play an important role. Additionally, schools as an organization should create

environments that encourage leadership through supportive measures, positive reinforcement, and opportunities for students to take on leadership roles (Hermino & Arifin, 2020).

Integrated approach to leadership skills

This research supports an integrated approach to developing leadership skills, in which individual, social, and organizational elements are integrated seamlessly. This discussion argues that effective leadership development cannot happen in isolation, but requires a structured program that includes real-world experiences, reflective practices, and continuous feedback. This integrated approach is particularly relevant in educational settings, where leadership development must be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students. By integrating these elements, the theoretical framework provides a comprehensive model that educators can use to develop leaders ready to face future challenges (Allen et al., 2021).

Noori (2021) investigated "Students' experiences of developing their leadership through the topic of leadership taught at the University of Technology of Malaysia" in a research. This study aims to investigate the experiences of Afghan graduate students in their leadership development through the leadership course taught at the Malaysian University of Technology. A quantitative research design was used in this research. An online survey questionnaire with 19 items was used to collect data. The findings showed that the students had a positive understanding of the leadership course.

Rastegar et al., (2024) conducted their research using a qualitative method to collect data, and apply their findings in practice. Their method was a case study focusing on 18 faculty members, staff and experts of Fars Islamic Azad University. In this research, the data-based theory method has been used to identify and analyze the dimensions and components of sustainable human resource management, which begins with interviews and proceeds through data collection and coding.

Research methodology

The participants in this research were 19 educational management experts and principals of secondary schools in Kerman city, who were selected for the qualitative stage through purposive sampling. These experts were selected based on their extensive experience and knowledge in the field of educational leadership, ensuring that the opinions collected were both relevant and informed.

The qualitative phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with these experts, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on student leadership development. The data obtained from these interviews have been analyzed using open and axial coding techniques and with the help of MAXQDA2020 software. In the quantitative phase, a survey was conducted among 69 directors of education departments and directors of secondary schools in Kerman. The fuzzy Delphi technique was chosen for its ability to obtain expert consensus on complex issues, making it particularly suitable for the purposes of this study.

Research findings

Qualitative data analysis led to the identification of 24 key indicators of student leadership development. Then these indicators were analyzed and ranked in a quantitative stage. The findings show that networking, recognizing the new generation, perceived organizational support, and talent management are among the most important indicators of student leadership growth. The results of this research are consistent with the researches of Palatic et al., (2021), Chethana et al., (2023), and Persada et al., (2019).

Networking: This index appeared as the most important factor in the growth of student leadership, with a high consensus among experts. Networking is recognized for its essential



role in leadership development, as it enables students to access diverse resources, perspectives, and support systems.

Recognizing the new generation: this study also highlights the importance of knowing and understanding the views of the new generation. Leaders attuned to the values and cultural shifts of younger cohorts are better equipped to make informed decisions that resonate with these cohorts.

Perceived organizational support: Leaders who perceive adequate support from their organization feel empowered to innovate, take initiative, and effectively implement strategic initiatives.

Talent management: Talent management and development in an organization is known to be critical for leadership development. Leaders who excel at talent management are those who can identify, nurture, and leverage the strengths of their team members.

Conclusion

This research concludes that student leadership development is a multifaceted process that requires attention to a wide range of indicators that each uniquely contribute to the overall development of leadership skills. The findings of this study emphasize the need for educational institutions to adopt a holistic approach to leadership development, one that goes beyond teaching leadership theories and focuses on cultivating practical skills and behaviors.

The high importance of networking and organizational support shows that leadership growth should be embedded in the social context of the educational environment. Schools should actively create opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers and participate in leadership roles. Additionally, identifying generational changes and talent management in the educational environment is critical to ensure that leadership development is relevant and responsive to the needs of the future workforce. According to the results, the following suggestions can be considered:

Evaluation of leadership programs using thematic coding, fuzzy Delphi and social network analysis to understand and strengthen students' networking skills through quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Organizational support and perceived leadership outcomes be investigated using narratives, psychometric tools, coding, fuzzy Delphi, and latent class analysis to classify support levels and leadership behaviors.

To study generational understanding in leadership using interviews, focused groups, assessments, coding, fuzzy Delphi and experience sampling method to collect real-time interaction data.