

Perceived Leadership Characteristics of Students Majoring in Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia

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Keywords: Students' leadership characteristics, trainee teachers' leadership characteristics

ABSTRAK

Satu kajian telah dijalankan untuk menilai ciri kepimpinan pelajar pengkhususan dalam Pendidikan di Universiti Putra Malaysia. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa secara amnya guru pelatih UPM yang memiliki ciri kepimpinan diperlukan berfungsi sebagai pemimpin secara efektif. Kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa penglibatan guru pelatih dalam aktiviti organisasi adalah secara purata. Hasil kajian juga mendapati bahawa ciri kepimpinan secara signifikannya berbeza di kalangan pelajar dengan perbezaan tahap penyertaan dalam aktiviti organisasi, kebolehan pengamatan dalam menguruskan organisasi pelajar, jumlah pengetahuan yang dimiliki pelajar tentang pengurusan organisasi, kepentingan organisasi pelajar dan jenis program pendidikan guru.

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the leadership characteristics of Universiti Putra students majoring in Education. The study showed that in general, UPM trainee teachers possess the leadership characteristics needed to function effectively as a leader. The study also showed that the trainee teachers' involvement in organizational activities was about average. It was also found that the leadership characteristics differed significantly among students with different level of participation in organizational activities, the perceived ability to manage the students' organizations, the perceived amount of knowledge the students have about the management of the organizations, the perceived importance of a student's organization, and the type of teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Many people believed that leaders are born not made. If we are to subscribe to this belief, then we should also subscribe that education and training are not needed to develop leaders. Someone who is now in a leadership position may have been born with certain leadership traits but without education and training a person cannot be a leader. In order to lead, it requires more than having leadership traits alone. Leadership is more than having suitable leadership traits. The leadership traits a person possesses should be developed and enhanced. Leadership has been defined differently by different people. However, there are some commonalities. In fact, according to Stogdill (1974), the definition of leadership is as many as the number of people who define the concept. Tucker (1984) for example, defined leadership

as the ability to influence or motivate an individual or a group of individuals to work willingly toward a given goal or objective under a set of specific circumstances. Leadership involves people who include a leader and followers. It involves influence. It involves goals. It is a process of influencing others to behave in a way that is desired to achieve the goals of the organization.

According to Schein (1992) and Yukl (1994) leadership is a critical factor for organizational performance and effectiveness. Kets de Vries (1996) also pointed that effective leadership is a determining factor in creating high performance organizations. Others such as Blanton (1991) and Robinson (1996) also believed that there is emerging evidence that leadership is a significant factor in the development of quality organization. Paine *et al.* (1992) believed that leadership is

average level (Mean =1.95, S.D.= .57). About 18% of the respondents indicated that they were not involved at all in the organizational activities organized by the university.

Perceptions of the Ability to Manage a Student's Organization

One of the teacher's roles in schools is to become an advisor to the students' organizations. It is therefore very important for them to have the ability to manage the students' organization. Related to this, we asked the respondents the extent to which they believed they are able to manage the students' organization when given the task. Using a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being very confident, 2 being not confident, 3 being confident, and 4 very confident) they will indicate their perceived level of confidence to manage the students' organizations. The finding shows that about 84.0% of the respondents indicate that they are confident in managing a student's organization when given the task (Mean=3.06, S. D. = .39).

Perceptions of the Level of Knowledge in Managing a Student's Organization

For a teacher to manage a student's organization he or she must have some knowledge about the management of a student's organization. We asked the respondents to tell us the level of knowledge they may have about the management of a student' organization. On a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being no knowledge, 2 being little knowledge, 3 being moderate amount of knowledge, 4 being a lot of knowledge), the respondents will indicate the level of knowledge on how to manage a student's organization that they have. The study shows that about 85% of the respondents believed they have a moderate amount of knowledge to manage a student's organization (Mean=2.93, S. D. = .36).

Importance of Participation in a Student's Organization

To participate in a student's organization, one must believe that such participation is important. We solicited from the respondents their perceptions about the importance of participations in students' organizations. On a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being not important at all, 2 being somewhat important, 3 being important, 4 being very important), the respondents will indicate their perceived levels of importance of participations in a student's organization. The study shows that 42% of the respondents believed that involvement in organizational activities was important and another 51% believed that the involvement is very important (Mean = 3.48, S. D. =. 60).

Perceived Leadership Characteristics of UPM Trainee Teachers

UPM trainee teachers' leadership characteristics were assessed using a questionnaire containing 38 statements of leadership characteristics. The reliability estimate of the leadership characteristics instrument as ascertained by Cronbach alpha was 0.94. The UPM trainee teachers, in general, believe that they have the necessary leadership characteristics (Mean = 4.14, S. D. = .24). The trainee teachers gave a rating of 4 or higher for about 65% of all the leadership characteristics statements. The score for each item of the leadership characteristics statement were summed up to obtain a total score of the leadership characteristics. The total scores ranged between 131 and 190. The mean was 167.97 and S. D. = 11.92.

Do the Perceived Leadership Characteristics Differ Among Students?

We hypothesized that students' perceived leadership characteristics do not differ across

TABLE 1
Means and standard deviations of students' involvement in organizational activities

	Involvement in organizational activities at UPM	Ability to manage organizational activities	Knowledge in managing organizational activities	Importance of involvement
N	149	149	148	147
Mean	1.95	3.06	2.93	3.48
Std. Deviation	.57	.39	.36	.60
Scale range	1-3	1-4	1-4	1-4

TABLE 2
Means and standard deviations of the perceived leadership characteristics of UPM trainee teachers

Statements of leadership characteristics	Mean	S. D.
I have the confidence in promoting important ideas	4.20	.59
I enjoy expressing ideas on important issues	4.06	.64
I encourage people to become involved in many beneficial activities	4.25	.60
It is easy for me to make friends and to get along with others	4.27	.59
I enjoy sharing information with others	4.38	.53
I enjoy meeting new people	4.34	.58
I am able to convince others about my opinions	3.99	.59
I am able to motivate others	4.12	.53
I like getting involved in organizational activities	3.98	.67
I like to see conflict resolved	4.27	.56
I am considered a trustworthy person by many people	4.27	.56
I understand that people have feelings, motives, and goals of their own	4.65	.51
I try to put myself in someone's shoes so that I can better understand the situation faced by others	4.28	.59
I feel people respect and admire me for what I am	4.10	.48
I am a flexible person	4.32	.57
I am concerned about maintaining good interpersonal relationships	4.44	.54
I willingly listen to others	4.34	.49
I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with friends	4.48	.75
People will seek guidance from me when they are having a difficult time	3.97	.55
People look for advice from me	3.90	.72
People always accept my ideas	3.88	.55
People accept me as their leader	3.64	.71
People often look to me to lead a discussion	3.64	.74
I am an effective decision-maker	3.70	.59
I feel I am proficient in my work	4.06	.60
Each year brings me closer to my professional goals	4.07	.73
I view myself as a professional	3.77	.80
I am tactful in everyday life	4.10	.75
I am persistent in my work	4.10	.67
I am intelligent	4.12	.51
Once I begin a project, I will work on it until it is completed	4.38	.53
I enjoy success and strive for it	4.54	.54
I stay on a project until it is completed	4.22	.59
I am enthusiastic about my work	4.2	.65
I have a good sense of humor	4.05	.63
Belonging to an organization is important for me	4.14	.70
It is relatively easy for me to mingle in a group	4.23	.70

Overall item mean = 4.14, S. D. = .24; scale mean =167.97, S. D. = 11.92

gender. A t-test was performed to test this hypothesis. The result shows that the students' perceived leadership characteristics did not differ between male and female students ($t_{132} = .55$; $p > .05$). The scores of the leadership characteristics for both male and female students were almost the same (Mean=168.61, S.D.= 13.14 and Mean=167.37, S. D. =12.62, respectively).

We also hypothesized that perceived leadership characteristics do not differ across the levels of participation in a student's organization. A one-way ANOVA was employed to determine if this hypothesis was tenable. The result of the one-way ANOVA (Table 3) shows that the perceived leadership characteristics differ among students with different levels of

participation in a student's organization ($F_{3, 133} = 4.68, p = .01$). Post hoc analysis using Tukey test showed that students who were actively involved in the student's organizations obtained a significantly higher score (Mean = 165.94, S. D. = 13.57) on the perceived leadership characteristics as compared to inactive and moderately active students (Mean = 154.63, S. D. = 10.02 and Mean = 156.61, S. D. = 12.98 respectively).

Another hypothesis we tested was whether perceived leadership characteristics do not differ among students with different ability to manage the students' organizations. The results of a one-way ANOVA (Table 3) show that perceived leadership characteristics differ among students with different abilities to manage the students' organizational activities ($F_{(2, 134)} = 14.64, p = .000$). Students who felt that they have a lot of ability to manage the activities of the organizations obtained significantly higher leadership characteristics scores (Mean = 171.53, S. D. = 12.63) than students who felt they have a moderate ability and the students who felt they do not have the ability (Mean = 156.57, S. D. = 11.96; Mean = 145.54, S. D. = 7.69, respectively).

As shown in Table 3, the leadership characteristics also differ among students with different amounts of knowledge about the management of organizational activities ($F_{(2, 133)} = 9.99, p = .000$). Students who thought they have a lot of knowledge about the management of activities scored significantly higher (Mean = 179.40, S. D. = 9.01) than those who felt they have a moderate amount of knowledge and those who felt they do not have the knowledge (Mean = 157.29, S. D. = 12.54 and Mean = 151.21, S. D. = 9.15, respectively).

We also wanted to know if the perceived leadership characteristics differ among students based on different teacher education programs. The results of a one-way ANOVA show that there is a significant difference of the perceived leadership characteristics among students based on different teacher education programs ($F_{4, 133} = 3.51, p < .05$). A post-hoc Tukey test showed that agricultural science students obtained significantly higher scores on the perceived leadership characteristics than the home science students, guidance and counseling students, and the Malay language students (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Means and standard deviations of perceived leadership scores by selected variables

Variables		Min score	S. D.	Test statistics	p
Gender	Male	158.07	13.14	t (132)=.55	>.05
	Female	157.57	12.62		
Levels of participation	No participation	154.63	10.02	F (2,133)=4.68	<.05
	Moderate participation	156.61	12.99		
	Active participation	165.94	13.57		
Levels of ability	No ability	145.14	7.69	F(2,134)=14.64	<.05
	Moderate ability	156.57	11.95		
	A lot of ability	171.53	12.63		
Amount of knowledge	No knowledge	151.21	9.15	F(2,133)=9.99	<.05
	Moderate knowledge	157.29	12.54		
	A lot of knowledge	179.40	9.02		
Perceived levels of importance	Not important	148.20	9.63	F(2,131)=3.74	<.05
	Somewhat important	154.91	12.38		
	Very important	159.81	12.95		
Type of teacher education programs	TESL	158.88	12.7	F(4,133)=3.51	<.05
	Agriculture Science	165.60	10.05		
	Malay Language	155.86	12.98		
	Home Science	150.75	12.80		
	Guidance & Counseling	155.31	12.80		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Teacher trainees from five program areas were involved in the study. Their teaching experiences ranged from no teaching experience to 18 years with a mean of 6.15 years and median of 6 years. A variety of academic qualifications were used to enroll in the program of their choices. Their academic performance based on CGPA ranged between 2.25 and 3.80 with a mean of 3.05. About 55% of the trainee teachers obtained grades between 3.00 and 3.49. It showed that the trainee teachers were doing well in their studies.

UPM trainee teachers were not very active participants in organizational activities at UPM although they thought that involvement in those kinds of activities were important. They believed that they have the ability to manage the organizational activities when given the task. They also believed that they have the knowledge on the manage of organizational activities.

In general, the UPM trainee teachers possess the leadership characteristics needed to lead a group. The study found that students who were active in organization felt that they possess the leadership characteristics needed to function compared to those who were less active. Students with a good amount of knowledge in the management of organization possessed the required leadership characteristics needed for the success of the organization. Participation in activities organized by clubs or societies have been found to correlate with adult leadership. We should recognize that leadership is learned over time through interaction with others.

Participation in a group provides abundance of opportunities for students to learn how to be leaders. They will be able to acquire the leadership skills and develop the required leadership characteristics to help them become leaders of the schools. By having the required leadership characteristics and the perception that they have the ability to manage and by having a good amount of knowledge in managing the organization, and by having positive self-concepts, these potential teachers will surely be able to help develop leadership in students. Researchers are in agreement about the importance of leadership development in students (Chan 2000 and Shore, Cornell, Robinson and Ward 1991). According to Chan, educators in Hong Kong (for example) felt that it is important to encourage and develop

leadership in students. Shore, Cornell, Robinson and Ward (1991) believed that it is important that all students, regardless of their ability, know the rudiments of leadership. By having good leadership characteristics as well as good leadership skills, these potential teachers will be able to play a significant role in the development of education in schools. Jones, Simoneti and Vielhaber-Hermon (2000) believed that well-developed leadership skills are essential to creating an organization where people thrive in their work and can build an organization capable of sustained drive and vitality right into the distant future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Participation in organizational activities should be made compulsory to trainee teachers, especially to those who have not taught schools. Chan (2000) in a study of leadership for gifted and talented students found that students learn the most from group exercises in which they assume the leadership roles.
2. Encourage trainee teachers to acquire leadership skills and develop their leadership characteristics. The importance of leadership in the success of any organization cannot be questioned. Yousef (1998) advocated that leadership represents an important factor in the determination of the success or failure of organizations.
3. A course on leadership development should be included in the teacher education curriculum to expose students in a formal way to leadership. In a study 'the Ohio 4-H Teen Community Leadership College, Kleon and Rinehart (1998) reported that participation in leadership programs improved teens' perception of their leadership skills. A similar result was reported by Hodson (1992).
4. Another important aspect that needs to be considered by the management of the teacher education program is the integration of leadership experience in teacher education classes. Leadership aspect has to be integrated into the subject matter. It means that student teachers need to be given an opportunity to develop and enhance certain leadership characteristics

by means of a group discussion (example). Cox (1996) suggested that today's youth must develop positive leadership knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspiration in order for them to become productive and contributing individuals who can be effective and proactive in determining the course of tomorrow's world.

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(Received: 7 March 2002)