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Student leadership competencies development

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of a framework for student leadership competencies development. This research used a qualitative method. This study involved triangulation as a result of combining in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews, review of documentation, and informal discussions with participants throughout the research process. The findings show there are several factors affecting student leadership competencies development such as 1) individual factors including emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and extroversion, 2) student experiences and involvement including academic involvement, student-faculty relationship, peer relationship, leadership position in class and in student organization, and 3) college environment. The results of this study provide practitioners such as student affairs staff, faculty, administrators, and boards of trustees with information on how to best prepare future leaders for effective leadership in 21 century.

Keywords: student, leadership, development, university.

1. Introduction

Today, students should be prepared to undertake the leadership role in the future (Rudolph, 1990). In fact, this is possible through education (Green & McDade, 1991). Student leadership development is the necessity of today’s society. Harvard University is the first to proceed this task (Rudolph, 1990). In order to have a society managed by prudent leaders, it is essential to train those leaders now. Student leadership development is gained through different activities and various experiences (Astin, 1993). Student development has existed since 1936, the beginning of American education. The role of universities in this regard is to function as facilitators to assist the students to attain maturity and develop as perfect humans. Student leadership development is considered as a significant and vital part of life to which they should gain access (Miller, 1997). Astin (1984) propounded student leadership development as “the process in which a person is exposed to changes that proceed to more complicated behavior which is caused by overcoming increasing challenges of life.” University has a great effect on students. Boyer (1987) indicated that the period of time the students spend at the university and the characteristics related to their participation in university activities have a potential influence on the quality of their experiences. Among these experiences, student leadership development is considered as the most important duty of the university. Astin (1993) argued that student leadership

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development was positively affected by the several environment factors that include living away from home, student-student interaction, student-faculty interaction, fraternity/sorority membership, intramural sports, volunteer work, tutoring other students, group class projects, and class presentations. Interactive leadership model by Sillien and others (1992) debated on this point that “leadership makes one join different people through common experiences with cautiousness, alertness, and social responsibility.” This model was proposed in four domains:

1. Recognition of self-development
2. Perception of others and appreciating them
3. Interaction & action between oneself and others
4. Perception of external situation and environmental conditions

In order to adapt with and harmonize challenges of the transforming world, Allen and others (1998) proposed ecological leadership theory that emphasizes individual responsibility, long-term perspective, abilities, and people developing capabilities, adaptation, and harmonization. The long-term focus of this theory is on the future.

1.1. Literature review

Leadership has been taken into consideration by many researchers and scientists. Leadership is a skill and learnable. Students learn leadership skills via their participation in class and out of class (Kuh & others, 1987). Elements which have effect on leadership competency development could be set forth as student’s major (Astin, 1993), grade point average (Hung, 1998) and sex (Astin, 1993) all of which can influence leadership competency development. Astin’s (1993) linear research showed that effective and important elements of student leadership development consist of living away from home (dormitory), student-student interaction, interaction with professors, participating in university activities, and taking part in class activities. These factors are effective for the student during his/her education process. However, elements such as family, school, neighbors, and friends could be influential in leadership competency development. Characteristics such as self-autonomy consisting of self-awareness, individual self-preciousness, and believing in one’s abilities and capabilities could be effective for student leadership development (Bass, 1990, Ouellette, 1998, and Felsheim, 2001). Also, self-effectiveness, believing in abilities in creating and acting in order to achieve the specified objectives, is influential in student leadership competency development (Felsheim, 2001, McCormick & others, 2003, Shertzer & Schuh, 2004, and Sohn, 2003). Extroversion is one of the most effective elements for student leadership development (McCauley, 1990, Bauer and Liang, 2003, and Bass, 1990). Emotional intelligence is another important influential element of student leadership competency development (Goleman, 1998, Feldman, 1999, and McDowelle, 1999).

The present research wants to answer the following questions:
1. Explain leadership.
2. Define leadership development.
3. How do you explain leadership experiences during university and life?
4. How do you explain knowledge, skill, and attitude that are required for efficient leadership?
5. What are the effective elements of leadership competency development?

2. Methodology

The data presented here were collected through triangulation as a result of combining in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews, review of literature, and informal discussions with participants throughout the research process. Indeed, after in-depth individual interviews, focus groups and background studies related to leadership competency development involved triangulating multiple resources to collect data and offer a more complete analysis to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1987, and Patton, 1990). The following five stages are used in qualitative data.
2.1. Approach

1. Organizing the data
2. Generating categories
3. Themes or patterns
4. Testing emergent hypothesis against data
5. Seeking alternative explanations by challenging emerging themes

All the six steps were used. The researcher presented a framework after triangulating and conducting an opinion poll about the suggested framework from experts and specialists.

3. Findings

As for the first question “Explain leadership”, students explained leadership as follows:
- leading others by means of their participation
- planning and organizing in organization
- directing people in performing better

As for the second question “Define leadership competency development”:
- factors improving leadership
- elements facilitating the performance in time in general
- all the elements that eventually make people capable of leadership

Regarding the third question “How do you explain your leadership experiences in university during life?”, The students propounded the importance of family, school, neighbors, and friends. They expressed factors such as professors, classmates, university programs, taking part in university activities, various associations, and leadership in class, too. As for the fourth question “How do you explain required knowledge, skill, and attitude for effective leadership?”, They stated knowledge and skill together and said that it is vital to get some information about leadership models, leadership theories, and leadership in the 21st century through workshops and leadership classes because if there is no knowledge, there is no change in attitude. Then attitude and behavior form.

3.1. Leadership knowledge & attitude

Knowledge is related to one-self, others, the surrounding environment, self-perception, making use of former experiences, understanding differences between various viewpoints, recognition of different cultures, creativity and innovation in leadership, making use of leadership modern strategies, and new technologies. Attitude is related to open mindedness about different subjects, understanding others, respecting others’ opinions, being responsible, having an ethical behavior, being optimistic, commitment (to effective work relation, improvement through participation leadership, hope for the future, people and organization).

3.2. Leadership skill and behavior

communication and communicational skills (verbal-non verbal), increasing inter-personal skills, active listening, motivating others to reach higher objectives, establishment of change culture, improvement in learning and teaching, effective time management, evaluating weak and strong points, cooperation via technology network, discussion skill, conflict management, and presenting a suitable pattern. The fifth question: “What are effective elements of
student leadership competency development?” The effective sets of leadership development put forward by students are:

- background factors: age, sex, and grade point average
- structural factors: campus environment (size and type of school)
- personality factors: excitement intelligence, self-efficacy, extroversion, and self-confidence
- factors before entering university: family, teacher, peers, and neighbors
- intermediate factors related to the university organization: student-faculty relationship, peer relationship, participating in class activities such as class projects and presentations, participating in different sections of university, being a member in university associations, and having leadership experience at university.

4. Discussion & conclusion

The result of triangulation stated that student leadership competency development in Iran is neglected by university as an important and crucial subject. This subject depends on family, school, classmates, the surrounding environment all of which are related to the time before entering university, but they are some of the important and effective factors. Regarding background variables, they showed that one’s major can be effective for leadership competency development. Astin (1993) understood that students with different majors have different leadership skills. Grade point average affects leadership competency development, too. Hung (1998) perceived that students with higher grades have higher leadership abilities. Sex is another effective element for student leadership competency development. Astin (1993) understood that when compared to female students, male students assess their leadership skills and abilities as being higher than that of female students. Prior to entering university, elements which are considered as structural factors influence student leadership competency development. Astin (1984) found out that life experience could have effect on student’s leadership skills. Participation factors such as relation with professors at university, interaction with classmates, membership in associations, and university participations which were stated in students’ interviews and also the results of triangulation showed these factors and they were proposed by Astin (1993) and Kuh & others (1987). Also, other elements such as self-autonomy, self-effectiveness, and extroversion are some of the influential elements in leadership competency development that are in line with the results of Bass (1990), Ouellette (1998), Felsheim (2001), Mc Cormick and others (2003), McCueley (1990), and Bauer & Liang (2003) researches. Emotional intelligence was stated by students as being an effective and important element for leadership competency development and this factor is in line with the research result of Goleman (1998), Feldman (1999), and McDowelle (1999). Studying the student leadership competency development can help politicians, planners, and higher education authorities to impel their policies and plans in line with leadership development and growth. It also assists student affairs vice presidents to direct their university programs in respect to student leadership growth development. Based on the research findings, it is suggested that 1) students have more involvement in university academic, cultural, and educational affairs, 2) there should be more student-faculty relationship in different affairs, 3) there should be more relationship between students and their classmates, and 4) higher education planners consider the variables affecting student leadership development.

References


