

## The Development of Leadership Skills Among Students At Post Graduate Level: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Leadership skills enable individuals to influence and direct others towards goals. Developing leadership abilities through higher education is crucial for students' professional and personal success. However, research suggests that while students gain academic knowledge at universities, they often lack opportunities to build critical leadership competencies. This qualitative study aimed to explore students' perspectives on developing leadership skills during higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students from 5 different universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Students were asked about the leadership skills they felt were most important, their perspectives on how their university supports leadership development, and suggestions for improvement. The findings revealed that students believe they gain theoretical knowledge through their academics, but feel ill-equipped with the practical leadership abilities required for professional life post-university. Key leadership skills identified included problem-solving, decision-making, communication, teamwork, and interpersonal abilities. Students reported lacking motivation, encouragement, and practical courses for building these skills. They expressed that universities should provide more opportunities to take on substantive leadership roles and incentivize participation in leadership development programs. Suggestions included incorporating compulsory skill enhancement workshops, arranging skill assessments and feedback systems, and offering targeted training activities and courses. Overall, students felt universities focused heavily on academics without adequate emphasis on equipping them with leadership competencies needed to succeed after graduation. They believed institutions must improve efforts to develop students' skills in parallel with academic learning. The study concludes that developing leadership skills during higher education requires initiative from both students and institutions. Students must proactively seek skill-building opportunities, while universities need to prioritize providing leadership development alongside academic education. This may require reviewing curricula, program offerings, and incentive structures to enable leadership capacity building. Effective leadership contributes to positive organizational cultures and team success. By focusing efforts on developing students' leadership skills, higher education institutions can fulfill their responsibility of holistically*

*preparing graduates both intellectually and competently for professional pursuits and personal growth.*

**Keywords:** *student perspectives, leadership skills, higher education, leadership development, professional skills*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has emphasized the need for universities to develop leadership skills among students to enable their professional success after graduation (HEC, 2016). However, with only around 170 degree-granting institutions nationwide, Pakistan's higher education system faces challenges in providing holistic skill development alongside academic teaching (Bashir, Khalil & Perveen, 2016).

Previous research has identified critical leadership skills for students, including problem-solving, communication, teamwork, decision-making, and interpersonal abilities (Addison, 1985; NCWD, 1985). To fulfill the goal of developing well-rounded graduates, universities must provide opportunities to strengthen these competencies through practical application.

This study investigates students' own perspectives on building leadership skills during higher education. It aims to determine which abilities students view as most important for their professional and personal growth. Additionally, it explores students' opinions on how effectively their institution supports leadership development alongside academic learning.

By understanding students' firsthand experiences, this study seeks to provide insights into how universities can improve efforts to nurture leadership capacity. Findings will highlight areas where expanded programs, training, and incentives may enable institutions to better prepare graduates with the skills needed to succeed in their careers and lives after university. However, existing research indicates university curricula remain focused on academics

without adequate emphasis on building leadership capacities needed professionally. Students have highlighted the need for more integrated leadership development opportunities.

This study investigates students' firsthand views on developing leadership skills through higher education. It aims to understand perspectives on how their university's curriculum, programs, and activities contribute to leadership abilities. It also identifies key competencies students feel are critical for professional and personal success after graduation.

By eliciting students' experiences, this study provides insights into how universities can improve efforts to nurture leadership alongside academics. Findings will highlight areas where expanded curricula, initiatives, and incentives can enable institutions to fulfill their responsibility of holistically preparing graduates.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

This study aims to explore students' perspectives on developing leadership skills during higher education. The objectives are:

- To explore students' perspectives on developing leadership skills during higher education.
- To identify key leadership skills students feel they have developed during higher education.

### **Research Questions:**

- What are students' perspectives on developing leadership skills through higher education?
- What leadership skills do students report gaining from their higher education experience?

### **Significance of the Study:**

This study aims to shed light on the importance of student perspectives for developing leadership skills during higher education. Educational leaders must foster a culture where both faculty and students build leadership capacities. While possibilities exist for students to gain skills, they often go unutilized.

Developing leadership skills in higher education is critical for students' professional growth, achieving academic goals, and improving the education system overall. By understanding students' experiences, this study provides insight into how institutions can create more opportunities for leadership development alongside formal education. The findings will inform efforts to equip graduates with abilities needed to succeed professionally and personally after university.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Leadership development is an important goal of higher education. However, many colleges and universities do not place enough emphasis on fostering leadership skills in students. Leadership training can help students handle challenges in their personal lives and careers after graduation.

Leadership has been defined as inspiring others to work toward a common purpose that benefits the group (Northouse & Baltas, 2001). Effective leadership requires certain personal attributes like self-confidence and integrity as well as interpersonal skills like understanding, open communication and conflict resolution (Bass, 1990). Research shows that the ability to build strong relationships is a vital component of leadership (Conner & Strobel, 2007). Therefore, strengthening individual competencies and interpersonal skills should be a central aim of leadership development initiatives.

There are several reasons why leadership training in higher education is critical. Many young people ages 15-29 face issues like unemployment, substance abuse and lack of educational opportunities (OECD, 2013). Developing leadership capabilities can help students overcome

adversities and be better prepared for life after college (Astin & Astin, 2000). However, few colleges and universities offer formal leadership development programs or classes (Külekçi, 2016). This represents a missed opportunity to equip students with versatile leadership abilities.

Leadership training programs can take many forms including courses, workshops, mentoring and experiential learning through community service projects. Simply teaching leadership theory is not enough; students need opportunities to apply leadership skills in real-world settings (McDonald-Mann, 1998). Research shows that leadership potential begins developing before college, but relevant interventions during the college years can still have a meaningful impact (Komives et al., 2006). A coordinated series of leadership development activities woven through the undergraduate experience can produce significant growth.

Higher education institutions should make leadership training a priority in order to fully prepare students for life after graduation. Formal academic courses and experiential learning focused on building leadership skills are needed. Colleges and universities that provide quality leadership development opportunities are investing in their students' future success and ability to contribute positively to society. Making leadership education a signature part of the undergraduate experience would benefit both students and institutions

### **Leadership skills:**

In today's world, students need to develop leadership skills to be prepared for the future (Greenwald, 2010). Leadership involves influencing others to work toward shared goals (Yukl, 1994). As Hillard (2010) notes, higher education plays a vital role in developing leaders who can guide institutions in the coming years. Providing leadership training should be a top priority for colleges and universities (Astin & Astin, 2000).

However, many institutions lack assessment data to show if their leadership programs are truly effective. Students typically complete leadership activities or coursework without follow-up to see if they improved in skills like decision-making, teamwork, planning and communication (Posner, 2009). This is especially concerning for community colleges, where students may only attend for 1-2 years before graduating or transferring. These students have a short window to build critical leadership capabilities.

As students graduate, leadership skills, courses, and student leadership activities are typically never reviewed, leaving the institution in the dark about whether participants benefited and improved their leadership skills. In Posner's (2009) study, the adolescents were given 4 years to develop their leadership skills. Community college students, on the other hand, may only have either one or two years before completing or moving to a four-year higher education institution to develop and strengthen leadership skills. Community college students, on the other hand, may only have one or two years to develop strong leadership skills before graduating or transferring to a four-year university.

### **Leadership Development Education Programs**

Formal leadership development programs can include a variety of components to foster growth. Students who participate in campus organizations and leadership training gain valuable skills like budgeting, event planning, group collaboration and administrative abilities

(Berman, 1987). When done well, these programs can provide positive leadership learning experiences that equip students for the future (Torres, 2008).

Effective leadership education addresses three key areas: knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Komives et al., 2007; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). The knowledge component focuses on understanding oneself and one's environment. Attitudes involve developing personal qualities like integrity, empathy and self-confidence. Behaviors emphasize building interpersonal skills like communication, collaboration and conflict resolution. Programs that address all three domains can have significant impacts on students' leadership capacities.

#### **Understanding the reasons for leadership in youngsters:**

Schools play an important role in providing students' first experiences with leadership development. As their primary organizational setting in early life, schools introduce students to concepts of leadership, teamwork and self-management (Montgomery & Kehoe, 2015). In high school, students can build skills like decision-making, relating to others, self-organization and teamwork through activities like student government, clubs and community service (Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997).

Higher education has a vital role in shaping leadership abilities, with leadership as a key outcome of the college experience. Research shows that all students have leadership potential that can grow during college through both curricular and co-curricular experiences (Jones & Kilburn, 2005). As students' leadership skills improve, benefits can include increased civic engagement, stronger character, and greater involvement on campus (Komives et al., 2005).

There are several important considerations for how leadership is taught to college students. Experiential learning that allows students to practice leadership in real scenarios is critical.

This can occur through hands-on activities in classes, internships, mentoring programs and community service projects (Eich, 2008). Rather than just learning about leadership theoretically, students need opportunities to lead teams, make decisions, organize events, collaborate with others, and resolve conflicts.

### **Leadership Skills Development of Students:**

In the exploration of cultivating leadership qualities among students, it is crucial to grasp the fundamental concept of leadership. Beyond academic pursuits, students must acquire the ability to lead, guide, and inspire their peers. This process instills qualities like determination and self-control, enabling them to discern between ethical and unethical behaviors as they develop their leadership skills. As students acquire and refine leadership skills, they become proficient in effectively leading and influencing others. This progression demands commitment and the continuous expansion of skills along the right path. Such skills hold particular significance for individuals aspiring to advance their careers, as they encompass a diverse range of components essential for achieving personal and professional goals, thus enhancing prospects for a fulfilling livelihood.

### **Importance of developing leadership skills among students:**

The significance of nurturing leadership skills among students is emphasized by Haynes-Tross, who highlights the responsibility of higher education institutions in imparting essential knowledge and skills. This equips students not only to accomplish tasks efficiently but also to provide guidance, contributing to both personal growth and the betterment of society.



In today's job market, leadership skills are highly valued, offering roles such as technology executives, communication experts, and specialists in leadership skill enhancement. Despite this demand, the onus falls on schools, particularly middle schools, to meet these requirements. Middle schools play a vital role in instilling leadership skills, thereby necessitating strategies to effectively teach students how to develop these qualities.

The development of leadership skills is pivotal for students, extending beyond academics to empower them with qualities that resonate in the contemporary professional landscape. Middle schools have a crucial responsibility in imparting these skills, ensuring students are equipped with the tools to thrive academically and beyond. (Reference: Haynes-Tross, 2015).

### **METHODOLOGY:**

Our examination is tied in with knowing the viewpoints of advanced education understudies on the improvement of authority abilities among them. In this way, we need a more profound comprehension of explicit associations and occasions, rather than an essential portrayal of a tremendous example of individuals. We utilize the subjective examination technique for our exploration since this system is used to grasp feelings and viewpoints. Interviews were picked as an examination device so there might be immediate collaboration with the understudies of advanced education organizations (colleges) can occur. Direct meetings likewise cause legitimacy in information, so they were appropriate for the dependable aftereffects of examination. We led individual meetings with the understudies of colleges. Every understudy interview was very nearly 15 to 20 minutes.

The motivation behind leading semi-underlying meetings and surveys was to get itemized data verbally from the understudies of various colleges which they can't give through polls.

One more reasoning behind the meeting choice was that we gathered information about points of view connected with the advancement of authority abilities of understudies. Through interviews, we accomplished a high reaction rate from understudies. Assuming we did quantitative exploration on this issue, we couldn't without much of a stretch gather itemized data about this examination. We have just restricted information. That wouldn't be enough for our examination. They are difficult to approach, and questionnaires contain limited information and are intended for large samples. The questionnaires are less reliable than the limited sample interviews and the extensive collection of data.

Since they share similar characteristics and are enrolled in higher education, the population of this study is comprised of all relevant university students from the Lahore district. The analyst utilized helpful inspecting during her exploration. A helpful examination essentially incorporates the people who end up being generally open to the specialist. This is a simple and modest method for social affair beginning information. She chose an effectively open interviewee for the information assortment.

### **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:**

The reason for the review was to investigate understudies' viewpoints with respect to the advancement of their administration abilities during advanced education. Twenty students from various universities were conveniently chosen for this purpose. It can likewise be seen from the information that understudies had exceptionally nitty gritty perspectives in regards to authority abilities. The information showed that the greater part of the understudies are just taught in advanced education organizations however are not completely gifted according to the market interest. As HEC (2016) expressed advanced education understudies ought to

foster initiative abilities to move to different schools and track down work. Educators in HEC colleges ought to assist understudies with building administration abilities/abilities.

This review demonstrated that little consideration is paid to the execution of authority advancement programs for understudies that help them create and work on their abilities as they partake in such projects or take classes. Try not to support. Understudies are not endlessly urged to partake in programs that are not connected with their scholastic courses. Their main essential concern is finishing their tasks frame and keeping up with their grades. Understudies ought to work on applying their authority abilities in their expert lives. In people in general and confidential areas, Pakistan has around 170 colleges and degree-giving foundations. These information appear to be deficient, information creation, educating learning, and exploration culture in colleges basically relies upon college scholastic authority Bashir, Khalil, and Parveen 2016. It requires investment to determine issues and guarantee execution. In order to prepare students for a better and more successful professional life after graduation, such programs should be offered at universities. Specifically, there is a requirement for establishments to make serious strides towards such exercises, projects, and preparing that likewise foster the abilities of the understudies.

As per the information examination in the past section 4, the general outcomes presumed that understudies ought to have authority abilities, for example, relational abilities, critical thinking, group the board, using time productively, critical thinking abilities, self-improvement abilities, persuasive, and persuasive abilities, arranging, imagination, and decisive reasoning abilities. Some authority capabilities that can be granted to youth in advanced education (NCWD) as per the Public Cooperative on Labor force and Handicap for Youth, 1985 are administration information, bunch abilities, critical thinking and thinking abilities, Inspiration, self-assurance, individual and social obligation, relational connections, collaboration, coordinating others, relational abilities. Understudies ought to concentrate and work on their abilities alongside their examinations.

As Hillard 2010 expressed, the job of advanced education in the public arena is to deliver profoundly gifted people who will lead different organizations later on. Through the reactions of the understudies, we can say that advanced education isn't completely dealing with the improvement of administration abilities. Yet, some way or another, in certain associations that we allude to as confidential foundations, a few projects offer initiative abilities and set up

their separate understudies and planned contender for initiative. We can likewise express that somewhat advanced education is creating authority abilities in understudies however not at the rudimentary level since it is the need of each and every understudy in his/her commonsense life. Through bunch exercises and undertakings at the college level, understudies some way or another acquire and rehearse their initiative abilities.

As per Astin and Astin (2000), one of the most remarkable elements of advanced education is to assist understudies with creating administration abilities so they can figure out how to live subsequent to finishing their schooling. The teachers and the department, as well as how much they encourage or provide opportunities for students to demonstrate and practice their skills, are also important factors in the development of skills. There ought to be fitting meetings, preparing, and programs for creating initiative abilities for understudies so they can get ready for a superior future.

As an understudy, we can create and work on our current abilities by partaking in bunch errands or understudy clubs and capitalizing on significant open doors through leadership development training and courses. Through training and consequently following our good examples we can work on our abilities now and again. In general, a large portion of the understudy's point of view on administration improvement among them is that they need to create and work on their abilities for a superior future as it is a market necessity. He likewise featured that advanced education foundations ought to furnish them with valuable open doors through which their authority abilities can be created.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The research findings underscore the critical significance students attribute to leadership development. A well-rounded understanding of leadership's importance, coupled with practical experience, is deemed essential. Delving into the multifaceted nature of instilling leadership skills in young individuals unveils a host of pivotal factors. These encompass goal-oriented direction, intrinsic motivation for self-growth, creative performance, the power to inspire, adept decision-making, adeptness in handling adversity, efficient task execution amidst varying scenarios, fostering professionalism, honing

knowledge and skills, and embracing social responsibility. This holistic comprehension empowers students to elevate their leadership qualities.

Moreover, a spectrum of attributes like effective communication, passion, goal orientation, interpersonal acumen, accountability recognition, responsibility acceptance, mentorship capabilities, adept problem-solving, continuous improvement focus, and negating negativity prove vital in nurturing students' leadership competencies. These strategies are imbibed from family members, teachers, peers, and personal experiences. The core leadership skills encompass Leadership, Collaboration, Communication, Problem-solving, Learning, Inspiration, and Management, forming the bedrock of constructing efficient and productive teams. Central to this is fostering a collaborative disposition among students in educational settings. Notably, students exhibit a strong inclination to engage with educators and peers, thus fostering a rich ground for cultivating leadership traits.

Within this context, the role of educational institutions becomes paramount. In preparation for their roles as future leaders, students' leadership aptitude must be cultivated. This involves both teacher encouragement and ample opportunities for skill demonstration and refinement. To this end, workshops, training initiatives, and specialized programs assume significance. Developing leadership skills is vital not only for academic accomplishment but also for professional growth and self-sufficiency post-education. Universities have a pivotal role in this process, offering leadership roles and engagement avenues to foster skill development.

While a considerable portion of respondents acknowledge acquiring leadership skills within university settings, there remains a substantial cohort desiring further development. A limited subset perceives sole responsibility for leadership skill development, suggesting higher education institutions' involvement in the process is paramount. The majority of students express a desire for institutional support in acquiring leadership abilities, recognizing their positive impact on future career prospects.

Drawing from the research, students can embark on skill enhancement through various means mentioned earlier, including pursuing personal passions, seeking mentorship, embracing challenges, enrolling in leadership courses, and continuous learning. This iterative process aligns with the understanding that learning is perpetual and transformative, ultimately shaping students into proficient leaders poised to excel in both academia and their professional journeys.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Cultivating leadership skills is an acquired art, attainable through deliberate guidance, dedicated courses, and consistent practice.

1. The nurturing of leadership skills within higher education institutions is paramount, aligning with the academic pursuits of students.
2. These institutions bear the responsibility of providing students with avenues like leadership courses, programs, and activities. Such opportunities serve as platforms for acquiring, honing, and practically applying leadership skills.

3. Educators play a pivotal role by encouraging students to deliver lectures, fostering the confidence necessary for active participation in leadership and future managerial roles.
4. Active involvement in extracurricular activities serves as a catalyst for students' leadership skill development. Additionally, senior students can assume mentoring roles, offering guidance to their junior counterparts and exemplifying leadership through their actions.
5. To delve deeper, future research could employ a mixed-methods approach to investigate "Student Perspectives on Leadership Skill Development in Higher Education." Such an approach would comprehensively cover various dimensions of students' viewpoints. Furthermore, research could aim to discover commonalities and disparities between students' perspectives and the real-world application of leadership skill development at an advanced level.

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