

Exploring Challenges and Factors of Undergraduate Student Leadership

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Abstract

Undergraduate students are highly valued by the nation because they are able to contribute to the development of the country, both economically and socially. It is important for the higher education institutes to produce competitive students for the global markets by furnishing them with awareness about leadership skills. This study explores the leadership skills among the student leaders in the higher learning institutions of Malaysia. This study also explores the factors that influence the students to become a leader and the challenges faced by the student leaders. This is a qualitative study. Data was collected via interview approach. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to select 14 undergraduate student leaders from universities in Selangor, Malaysia. Findings indicated that the most stated leadership skills of a student leader are (1) self-enhancement, (2) presentation and confidence, (3) decision – making and problem solving, (4) responsibility and commitment, (5) time management, (6) communication and collaboration and (7) inspiring and motivating others. Most of the student leaders agreed that self-satisfaction, as well as support and encouragement are two main factors that influenced the student to become a leader; whereas time constraints, management support and group members have been the main challenges faced by student leaders. This paper clearly shows that respondents gained their leadership skills via participation in organizations and being active outside classroom which then enhances student leadership skills through experience.

Keyword: student leadership, higher education institution, challenges, undergraduate

Introduction

Student leaders are individuals with the ability to influence a certain group of people in an organization. The student leader motivates his peers to move towards a positive direction and be an agent of change. Student leadership is important as it can depict the readiness of the student leader in serving the nation (Krauss & Hamid, 2015).

According to Crosbie (2005), leadership skills are described as the emotional intelligence of a person which allows them to excel in organizations. Leadership

skills are primarily based on communication, teamwork, planning, organizing and presentations skills (Crosbie, 2005). Higher learning institutions play a role in developing student's leadership (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014). Undergraduate students play an important responsible to commit and ready to serve the nation. They are highly valued by the nation as the potential contributor to the development of the country, both economically and socially (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014).

Literature indicated that students are able to develop leadership skills when they get involved in leading an association, club or activity during their study life (Dugan et al., 2006). The learning structure is based on students experience, their thoughts and reflections on the knowledge gained, being proactive and having the ability to conceptualize. Student leadership skills are important especially for knowledge transfer at the workplace, awareness of the current environment and being adaptive (Borhan, 2013). The student who is proactive is able to analyze and be resourceful towards learning while planning for the organization (Bernd Schulz, 2008).

Student leadership is a learning process (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014). The student needs to be an active and responsible learner. While seeking knowledge, they must be able to build their own knowledge and create an objective towards learning while developing their own progress and skills (Krauss & Hamid, 2015). Posnes (2012) indicated that the knowledge gained during tertiary education should have an impact on the student. Leadership skills are able to change the students thinking style to be more analytical and practical in problem-solving (Jalil & Esa, 2012). It is important to maintain the quality of student leadership skills in a university environment to uphold their capabilities.

Higher education institutions in Malaysia have been given important responsibility to produce productive students that are competent in the global market. Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB, 2013-2025) focuses on graduates being holistic, entrepreneurial and talented. One of the main objectives under the MEB (2015-2025) is to equip the graduates with the added value to be more marketable and employable in the local and international industries, thus reduces the problem of unemployment among university graduates. Malaysian government has started to give more emphasis on leadership skills of undergraduate students. Students are evaluated based on communication and entrepreneurial skills, as well as values and ethics, among others.

Universities are required to develop soft skills of the undergraduate students, These soft skills such as social leadership, practical and communication skills, problem-solving and scientific thinking play a vital role in enhancing the student experience while pursuing their undergraduate studies at tertiary level. The companies nowadays expect the fresh graduates to have acquired sufficient leadership soft skills. Therefore it is crucial for the undergraduate student to have in depth knowledge about soft skills and not just focus on academic achievement.

Students can develop soft skills while holding leadership positions in association or society. They are believed to be able to learn leadership skills through experience. They may face challenges while being leaders and this in many ways allow them to learn more skills (Hermond, 2014). However, several studies reported that students tend to be involved less or do not explore extra-curricular activities while pursuing their degree (Abbasi, Siddiqi, & Azim, 2011). Therefore, this research aims to explore the leadership skills among student leaders in higher education levels. In addition, factors that influence students to be student leaders and challenges faced by student leaders in Malaysian higher education will also be discovered.

The findings may contribute to the fundamental knowledge about student leadership programmes in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. These findings can be the guidance to policy makers in developing programmes to encourage student involvement as leaders during their academic life and to create environment for students to obtain more leadership skills needed for their future careers. This is crucial to strategic planning to improve student leadership skills thus prepare for work life balance in future.

Literature Review

Student Leadership Skills

Literatures indicated that student leader is actively involved in the student associations or positions in residential colleges, as a university publication editor, an event planner or sportsman. They are not only good in academic but also in other activities. Student leader plays a role as a social agent for change (change agent) on certain issues arise among the students (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014).

There are four main concepts proposed by Somerset (2001) in the Model of Leadership Soft Skills: (1) setting and adjusting goals; (2) communicating; (3) aligning followers in the same direction; and (4) motivating group members. Firstly, a leader needs to set and adjust goals and ensure the goals suit everyone, and manages problems by having good decision making skills (Ngang, Prachak, & Saowanee, 2013). Secondly, communication is an important skill for a leader. Essentially, there are four main aspects in communication skills namely, being aware of the impact, listening to others, creating meaning between members and communicating effectively to convey the message (Somerset, 2001). Thirdly, aligning people in the same direction refers to understanding the different types of group members' needs and overcoming the conflicts to persuading the group members to be aligned with the organization's goals. A leader must have skills to overcome conflicts because without the unity of group members, any task will be difficult to accomplish. Lastly, motivating group members is to help the group members who have problems. When there is a right kind of motivation group members are able to

move towards the organization's goals (Krauss & Hamid, 2015). A leader needs to play the role guiding others during difficulties. A leader must be able to create trust and credibility among group members so that they will feel valued (Somerset, 2001).

According to Cole (1999), there has five main points to describe the soft skills required by a leader. In explained that leader must be sensitive towards their followers and must be able to fulfill their expectations. A leader must be able to create a positive relationship among followers to achieve their own needs. The ability to inspire others is the important soft skills of a leader. A leader should be able to explain the outcome of teamwork and the main purpose of being in the group. In addition, Cole (1999) also suggested that leader must be someone who is able to communicate and convey the message clearly to their followers in order to strive towards the mission. A proper communication will able to create trust among team members. Further, leaders must be a good listener for others to share their problems and always ready to find the solutions for any problem that may occur. Finally, a leader should understand his/her own weaknesses and strengths, ready to accept criticism from others and make changes from it. A leader must be open-minded, instead does not unreasonably just blindly follow what their heart says.

Undergraduates' student leadership can divide into three main categories namely, (1) individual values (consciousness of self-congruence and commitment); (2) group values (collaboration, common purpose and controversy); and (3) society values (active and engaged in the community) (Dugan et al., 2006). Individual values are those capable of making social changes. Group values refer to how group members work together with a common purpose to make changes in the society; and finally students engaged with society to make social changes. Student social change model discusses the role of leadership among the student in tertiary educational level. Students need to be actively engaged with society in order to bring changes, and learn to trust the team members in order to complete the task and achieve the goals. Students must be ready to commit in the society and leading the change (Dugan et al., 2006). According to Wagner (2006), regardless individual or group values, every member in the group should have the same purpose and every group will have some kind of controversial issues that need to be overcome.

Student Involvement and Challenges

One of the main factors in influencing students' involvement is the networking between their peers. A study done by Phillips (2015) reported that students who tale opportunity to participate will learn time management skills, networking and how to influence others. These leadership skills will be useful for student to be more capable and practical when entering workforce. The study also indicated that location is one of the factors that influenced students' participation as leaders in certain activities. Some students are not available to be involved in organization due to time constraints and staying far away from campus.

Experience based approach can develop the career pathway and leadership skills of the student (Marcketti & Kadolph, 2010). Students are motivated to become student leader hoping to gain more knowledge and experience. Their participation in activities will empower them to be more involved thus develop their own communication skills (Roberts & Mcneese, 2010). The factors that motivate student to be leader is to learn to go through different phases in life which makes them to be mentally stronger and have a desire to make their own decisions. All these learning outcomes cannot be taught through leadership programme (Roberts & Mcness, 2010).

Student leaders have to balance their life between studies and other activities. Leaders, who are able to face the challenges and willing to take risks, will find the solutions. Facing challenges will help enhance the students' ability to handle new situations and rapid changing development (Posner, 2009). According to Posner (2009), students will use knowledge that will allow them to learn different tactics to overcome problems.

The Present Study

This study aims to understand the phenomenology about student leadership in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Three main objectives in this study are: (1) to explore the leadership skills among undergraduate student leaders at their university of study; (2) to identify the factors influencing undergraduate students in becoming student leaders at their university of study; and (3) to identify the challenges faced by undergraduate student leaders at their university of study.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative approach was applied in this study to gather in-depth information based on individual understanding and experiences of subjective concepts. This is a non-experimental qualitative study, where subjective concepts are described in more detail about student leadership skills. A semi-structured interview was conducted to assess the leadership skills applied by the student leaders from their own perspective. Only a group of individuals was focused in this study, namely student leaders from various clubs and associations from higher learning institution, Selangor, Malaysia. A total 14 student leaders were involved in data collection. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used in this study to choose the student leader as respondent. Interview session was carried out by the trained researchers. Each interview session took about one hour. During the data collection, the researcher explained to all respondents the purpose and confidentiality of the

study. A written consent was obtained from the respondents prior to the interview. The interview was voice-recorded with permission from respective respondents.

Participants

Four universities located in Selangor were selected for this study. The participants for this study were undergraduate student leaders from the selected universities. Criteria that were used to select the student leaders were undergraduate students who had minimum of 1 year experience in holding a leadership position such as president or vice president; actively participating in association(s). The total number of 14 student leaders was enrolled in the interview, corresponded to 4 males and 10 females. Data was collected until it reaches a point of data saturation to conclude and generate the findings. Table 1.1 exhibits the demographic information of student leaders.

Table 1.1 Demographic Profiles of Student Leaders

Student (Label)	Gender	University	Course	Position	Duration as Student Leader
A	F	Private	Arts & Design	VP	1 year 2 months
B	F	Private	Mass communication	VP	1 year 6 months
C	F	Private	Mass communication	P	1 year 5 months
D	F	Private	Health Science	VP	1 year 4 months
E	M	Private	Digital media	P	3 years 6 months
F	M	Private	International business	VP	1 year 5 months
G	F	Private	Information & technology	P	1 year 3 months
H	F	Public	Chemical industrial	VP	2 years
I	F	Public	Islamic law	VP	2 years
J	F	Public	Chemical industrial	VP	1 year
K	F	Public	Environmental science	P	1 year
L	F	Public	Science & technology	VP	1 year
M	M	Public	Health Science	VP	1 year 2 months
N	M	Public	Engineering	VP	1 year

Note: VP = vice president; P = president

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was based on a semi-structured interview protocol. The leadership skills applied by the respective student leaders from their own perspective of being a leader were assessed. The interview questions were created based on research questions identified. The interview protocol was self-developed by the researchers of this study. It was designed based on issues related

to leadership skills gained by student leaders, and challenges faced by being a student leader in both the private and public university settings. Some questions were raised by the researchers to collect information that were relevant to the research topic. The semi-structured questions contained two sections: Section A was a set of questions related to the background of the respondents and the aim was to find out the socio-demographic background of the respondents; whereas Section B contained three parts (i) student leadership skills, (ii) influence factors and (iii) challenges faced by the student leader. All interviews were structured according to the criteria for carrying out and analyzing qualitative interviews.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Two types of data were being used by researchers to gather information. These included primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through interview of student respondents. The transcribing was done by listening to the recorded voice immediately after the interview session. The recorded conversations were transcribed into words. Subsequently, verification from the respondents was obtained from the respective respondents; and the data was analyzed manually. Codes and themes were created from transcribe for the subsequent in-depth discussion.

Transcribed data was analyzed using the thematic analysis, by coding the words according to the theme set. Code based analysis was done according to categories that gave the similar contexts in the interview session. Coding is not based on the frequency of the words but by giving importance to gathered codes according to the same concepts. The theme for the topic was obtained manually from the transcribed data. Specific coding was created according to the themes of the study and these emerged based on the coding analysis in order to get very clear subtopics or themes. In order to obtain the in-depth information, respondents were given freedom to express their experiences, review, and comment about the role of student leadership in activities or associations which are managed by the student and their satisfaction or effects while doing so the researcher will also not reveal the names of the institutions that participated in the study. The identity of the respondents was anonymized by using pseudonyms, for examples A, B, C and etc.

Secondary data was in the form of reports, record books, theses, journals, newspaper etc. Any existing material was used by the researcher is considered secondary data collection. According to Hox and Boeiji (2005), researcher is able to collect certain themes and theories needed for leadership skills as a guideline to conduct the study. In this study, secondary data also used to support the study findings and discussion.

Findings

Leadership Skills Applied by Undergraduate Student Leaders

Research Question 1 was formulated to explore the leadership skills among the undergraduate student leaders in higher learning institutions of Malaysia. Generally, the results showed that there were seven most frequently mentioned leadership skills by the student leaders as presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Seven themes of student leadership skills

Skills
Self- enhancement
Presentations skills and Self- confidence
Decision- making and Problem-solving
Responsibility and Commitment
Time management
Communication and Collaboration
Motivating and Inspiring others

Self-enhancement

The student leaders stated that self-enhancement was a leadership skill which they obtained while holding a student leadership position. Student leaders understood the importance of identifying their own strengths and weaknesses to explore their self-enhancement capabilities. They were expected to feel competent about themselves before guiding others. Self-enhancement is a leadership skill that student leaders aim to attain and it is an important leadership skill for student leaders to build their foundation as leader of a club, or event. For examples, student H and student M stated that :

“At the beginning I will get some exposure being in the organization. So that I won't experience the kind of cultural shock once I enter the workforce. Because I have familiarized myself on how to handle things. By doing this I am able to gain new knowledge about myself”.

(Transcript student H, line no. 4).

“We are not the best as there are others better than us and we have to accept and learn from others as well, as we could make it as a benchmark for us to do things so that we do better”.

(Transcript student M, line no.3).

Presentation skills and self-confidence

Presentation skills and self-confidence were important component in leadership skills as it gives the best first impressions to team members. Good presentations skills give overall confidence to the leaders. Student leaders who exhibit good presentations skills are able to convince their group members to support their vision. Confidence allowed them to make decisions and plan well before taking the next step. Self -confidence allows the student leader to determine their own weaknesses and strengths so that they can redefine their vision according to others' needs. This is supported by the statements from the student leaders such as the following:

"It is important to be confident when we are talking in front of people, because when started to work we will start to make presentations in public and among people who are more professional."

(Transcript student K, line no 3).

"I wanted to develop my own self-esteem that I wanted to know about myself, I wanted to try being a leader...hmm... I wanted to bring out my potential as a leader".

(Transcript Student A, line no 2).

Decision-making and problem-solving

Student leaders stated that decision-making and problem-solving skills were important especially when critical and crucial situations arise. Student leaders should be able to evaluate every opportunity to make a proper decision. Student leaders must be able to make changes according to the setting and adjust the direction according to the situation that arises (student E). The leader must be willing to listen to others before conveying the message (student G & J). Student leaders are able to be role models to others by having good planning and organizational skills; this allows them to lead others effectively. These skills are important because once the student enters the work force they would be able to plan and execute certain tasks effectively. Student I stated that as a leader, he was able to think and have proper planning before executing any event.

"I get involved myself without asking others to solve it as it is better to solve but I will solve it myself".

(Transcript student E, line no. 2).

"I make sure I will ask their opinions then I will tell come to a compromise by weighing the pro's and con's and I compare both and come to a conclusion".

(Transcript student G, line no 2).

"The cooperation and considerateness is important. As the head we must know how to control our emotions and we must know how to help him to overcome the problem. Solve the problem for our members".

(Transcript student J, line no 3).

"Head needs to think about all aspects of the running a project and how to write letters to get permission. Team members are involved in one aspect, but the head should be involved in all activities and think thoroughly".

(Transcript student I, line no 3).

Responsibility and commitment

The student leaders stated that it is important to be responsible and committed towards any task undertaken in an association. Student leaders need to have commitment which is a very essential leadership skill acquired. The student leader's initiative will help to accomplish certain tasks which team members are not aware. The student leaders below testified about being responsible for communicating with the management and completing certain tasks during the semester break for certain associations.

"During the semester break time I had a meeting with the management and that time I will be back to my hometown and had to be there in campus even if there is no class. As chairman I have to meet the higher authorities to discuss about the programs".

(Transcript student I, line no. 4).

"I must be able to make all the team members understand about the task well and give full commitment. Without commitment from the group there won't be any achievement."

(Transcript student B, line no. 3).

"You can let go he can do it. It's not like that. You have to really focus on them; you got to do it. And even if you are Vice President".

(Transcript student F, line no. 2).

Time management

Findings reported that time management skills were acquired by the student leader when leading teams. Student leaders also stated that taking the initiative is a vital leadership skill that they acquired as a leader. A student leader should equip with good time management skills for planning and organizing purposes. These skills

will enable the student leader to be always committed and responsible for completing any tasks on time. Good time management will enable the student to fulfill short and long term goals. Student B and D commented that important tasks need to be prioritized and completed first:

“ I only tend to plan 2 hours per day for the leadership task. After that I stop I continue with my academic coursework but for the society I will spend 2 hours every day I sort out important things to get it done”.

(Transcript student B, line no. 3).

“To be done cannot be done or procrastinate. I will try to do it or help someone else to complete it if there is a time frame I need someone to help too. I try to do it concurrently with coursework and leadership tasks”.

(Transcript student D, line no.3).

Communication and collaboration

Findings showed that almost every student leader commented that communication and collaborative skills were very important for student leaders. It allowed the leaders to share their message and vision with others. Communication skills enhanced the student leader's negotiation skills while dealing with their team members. Collaboration allows students to establish network with different association from various other universities.

“I just learn many things by being around with people. I tend to tackle the way I talk to them so they listen to me. I get to be more socialized with my team members by being in this position”.

(Transcript student F, line no.3).

“Cleverly juggle and do not be afraid to deal with the public. I handle and conduct formal and informal meetings and the search for funding.”.

(Transcript student L, line no.2).

“...I was not good with communication skills and management but once I became a leader I learned a lot of communication skills and how to interact with peopleteam work is really important for me because without it the team will suffer a lot. If we have a good team who can work properly and we do not rely on one person to complete everything”.

(Transcript student E, line no.5).

Motivating and inspiring others

Student leaders agreed that motivating and inspiring others in the team were also important skills. Understanding the needs of team members and motivating them to achieve goals is an essential skill that must be developed by the student leaders. This skill allows the leader to deal with people to fulfill their own needs and team members' needs.

"I would say encourage them when there is a meeting. Bonding is important. For the time we have to work together without stress. We also have meals together and discuss our problems".

(Transcript student L, line no.3).

"I will encourage them and I will never give the same person the same work. I give to different people even if they make mistakes also they have the chance to learn it then maybe I will monitor them while they are doing it".

(Transcript student E, line no. 3).

"I will encourage them whether you know or you don't know. It's ok. You learn. You learn first. Because everyone is not perfect but they have to do something... You must uplift them even they don't know anything about the ...If they have some problem you have to solve it. Give them exposure about the knowledge and allow them to feel interested about it".

(Transcript student F, line no.5).

"We need to motivate members who are tired or discouraged. There are many reasons why they neglect academic activities so we will create a study group together so who knows more about the subject will help him. So members of this group do not feel stressed and will always join the program".

(Transcript student K, line no.4).

Factors Influencing Undergraduate Students Becoming Student Leaders

Findings indicated that there are some factors that influence student to become a leader and holding a leadership position. Analysis of the data from various clubs and associations showed that student leaders were influenced by two main factors, namely (1) support and encouragement and (2) self- satisfaction as showed in Table 1.3.

Students have many support and encouragement groups that they can rely on such as parents, seniors, lecturers, friends etc. This support mechanism has influenced the students in becoming leader. Family members are believed to be the most important supporting component that influence student to play a role as leader. Family

members offer their support by being good role models for them. On the other hand, self-satisfaction has been one of the factors which influenced student to become student leaders. Self-satisfaction is a feeling of achievement. Individual has his/her own learning and development curve which give them satisfaction when they achieve their goals. Student leaders tended to feel that their purpose of career development was to be valuable to others. Self-satisfaction brings happiness to those students who managed to achieve certain goals. The feeling of self-satisfaction can be gained by fulfilling the needs of others.

Table 1.3. Factors influencing student become student leader

Interpretations of student leader statements	Codes	Themes
" through interaction with my friends"	Interaction	support and encourage ment
"lecturer gave me the moral support"	Moral support	
"friend support" "friends inspire me"	Friend	
"chance by senior" "admire my senior"	Senior	
"join leadership course"	Course	
"friend of mine vote me"	Friend	
"my father educate me to manage time"	Father	
"father used to say join"	Father	
"the way mother handle the family"	Mother	
"wanted to know more about myself"	Discover own self	self-satisfaction
"able to learn many new things"	Learning attitude	
"bring changes to other"	Contribute to the society	
"I'm helpful leading them"	Helpful	
"I have responsibility to bring this group"	Enjoyment	
"enjoy group work"	Inspirations	
"able to take right decision"	Decision	
"set an example to others"	Exemplary	
"willing to be involved"	Involved	
"train myself"	Exposure	

Challenges Faced by Undergraduate Student Leaders

The findings showed that there were three main types of challenges faced by the student leaders namely, time constraint, management support and members commitment (Table 1.4). Time management is the main problem to the student leaders. They stated that balancing their academic achievements and executing association tasks was one of the challenges for them. The student leaders also expressed that they experienced difficulties when dealing with the management to organize an event. In order to conduct an event, the student leader had to follow a long list of management procedures prior obtaining their official permission.

Student leaders also faced financial difficulty in having to organize events at university level due to limited allocations by the management. As a leader they need to demonstrate equality among group members and understand that every individual has different needs to be satisfied. The student leader faced challenges in having to fulfill everyone's needs at the same time. They did not get whole-hearted commitment by the team members because it is not easy to fulfill everyone's needs at the same time.

Table 1.4 Challenges faced by student leaders

Interpretations of student leader statements	Challenges
Time management Balancing between academic achievement and association tasks Academic schedule among team member	Time constraint
Financial support Management procedures Event locations	Management support
Lack of commitment by team members Every individual has different needs Understanding team members	Members commitment

Discussion and Conclusion

Student Leadership Skills

Student leadership skills are developed while they hold a leadership position in society. Finding reported that students leaders in this study gained certain leadership skills which included self-enhancement, presentation skills, self-confidence, decision-making and problem-solving, responsibility and commitment, time management, communication and collaboration and, motivating and inspiring others. This is in line with previous studies which indicated that leaders have few skills such as setting goals, motivating and inspiring others individual in a group (Somerset, 2001; Ngang, Prachak, & Saowanee, 2013).

Personal strength is considered as self-awareness to examine individual own identities and aspects of life (Crawford, 2012). Personal characteristics such as being more focused and self-motivated, are essential (Abbasi et al., 2011; Haber, 2012). As a student leader they must be aware that everyone is unique and different. They must also have an understanding of the various group members in their organizations (Marcketti & Kadolph, 2010; Calhoun, 2014). Student leaders should be able to create and manage good relationships and network with others, as it is one of the important soft skills they should possess. Student leaders should take the

opportunity to learn time management skills and networking with other organizations as this is also part of developing a leadership skills (Phillips et al. 2015). According to Borhan (2013), these skills will be useful for students, as they will learn the skills of becoming more capable and practical while entering the workforce.

The results found that student leaders in this study were able to participate in decision-making, as well as planning and organizing. The student leaders expressed that conflict in management must be handled by the leader. They should evaluate, assess and make a decision on their own without depending on others (Middlehurst, 2012). This will be useful for students to explore and meet the requirements of the corporate world in future. Student leaders should be able to understand the diversity of people in an organization. This study found that the student leaders have acquired communication and collaborative skills. Leader should be able to encourage others to be more cooperative rather than doing individual work to accomplish the task (Marcketti & Kadolph, 2010; Calhoun, 2014). They should know that tasks cannot be accomplished by doing it alone but a proper teamwork is essential to benefit all the members (Dugan et al. 2006; Phillips et al., 2015).

A single person can never make a difference if there is no interaction between the followers and their leader. Teamwork is important because it gives exposure to the students on how to interact with people. When the students started their career life it makes them comfortable to deal with people of various standing. A leader should be able to give importance to every individual's needs in an organization (Posner, 2012; Said, Pemberton, & Ahmad, 2013). Student leaders who acquire team work skills are able to give importance to other members' needs in the association and motivate them forward (Rhee, Parent, & Basu, 2013).

Student leaders need to be equipped with good communication skills as one of their leadership skills acquired (Abbasi et al., 2011). Findings indicated that the student leaders gained a lot of experience by interacting with group members. Social interaction is important for every student in order to prepare themselves for excel while enter the workforce (Kolodinsky et al., 2010). Unemployment is usually due to the lack of soft skills among fresh graduates such as communication skills and analytical thinking skills (Abbasi et al., 2011).

Influences of Student Leadership

This study reported two main factors that influenced students in this study in becoming student leaders. The factors which influenced students in becoming leaders were support, encouragement and self-satisfaction. To embrace their own self-satisfaction, the student leader tends to participate more in a particular association and holds a leadership position (Fischer et al., 2015). Students who wish to gain self-satisfaction are those who are more participative and focused on what

they actually want to do in order to succeed. Some students are interested in pursuing their own leadership skills by being active in an organization (Jalil & Esa, 2012; Phillips et al. 2015). Student leaders are interested to participate and hold a leadership position in order to identify their own capabilities and strengths. As claimed by student A earlier, students wish to learn new skills while being active in certain association.

The support and encouragement given by the people around the student is one of the main factors which influence participants in this study to become a leader. This support stems from the encouragement received from their parents, friends, seniors, lecturers and also the university environment and management. Student leaders tend to be influenced by their family members. Generally families and parents tend to trigger the interest of students about leadership. Therefore it is important for parents to help develop their children's leadership skills from young, by not just focusing on the academic part but to emphasize extra-curricular activities as well as those which will enhance their leadership skills from primary level (Cohen, Chang, Hendricks, Cope, & Harman, 2011). Parents play a vital role in influencing their children towards obtaining the necessary leadership skills. Friends, seniors and lecturers are generally the backbone for students.

Management support can also stimulate the interest of students through various programmes. This is done through various university programmes that encourage students to be more participative. The university also provides programs to help develop the soft skills of students. Student Leader I stated he had the opportunity to develop their own leadership skills through participating in these programmes. The respondents in this study stated that self-satisfaction was one of the important factors which influenced them to become a leader. Passion is an important factor that influences students in becoming a leader. On the other hand, self-satisfaction is experienced by the student leader when leading their group members. Studies found a strong relationship between the leadership position and one's personal values such as self-esteem and self-satisfaction (Hassanzabeh & Ebadi, 2007; Abbasi et al., 2011).

Challenges faced by Student Leaders

The student leaders pointed out that they faced many challenges such as time constraint, management support and lack of commitment among group members. Time management is very challenging for the student leaders. The findings indicated that majority of the student leaders in the study lacked of time management skills to balance their responsibilities and studies. Student leaders have to focus on their academic achievements while leading an organization or association. This requires proper time management in order to master both aspects. Coordinating assignments and group discussions need to be handled carefully by the student leader in order to keep on schedule. The student leaders claimed that they needed to plan very well and execute tasks timely whenever and not procrastinate or delay unnecessarily.

They needed to be active and focused on prioritising their tasks. Therefore, planning is important by taking notes on important dates and working accordingly towards that limited time frame (Somerset, 2001; Aldona & Liuda, 2014; Phillips et al., 2015). Student leaders must learn to balance and allocate their time effectively. Generally, effective leadership skills are important as it allows the student leaders to be multitasking and take on responsibilities concurrently.

As usual, student leaders need to work with management and comply with the necessary procedures in order to coordinate certain projects or events. Scheduling events has been one of the challenges faced by the student leaders as they have to lead the operating procedures, stipulated by the management, such as the agreed time frame for administering certain proposed events. The universities have established their own standard operating procedures to facilitate event coordination. Furthermore the results suggested that the approval process could be a challenge. Financial difficulty is another challenging issue because institutions have limited allocations for funding the university's clubs and societies. Student leaders were expected to create a team and get sponsors to fund their events. No matter how challenging it was to source for funding, it gave students the exposure to learn how to organize events (Kois et al., 2016).

Lack of commitment by the team members was also one of the main challenges faced by the student leaders in this study. Without proper team commitment, it would result in backlog and delays. After assigning certain tasks, the student leader needs to ensure that the tasks are completed on time. Student leaders must develop the ability to influence others in a positive direction (Somerset, 2001; Kois et al., 2016). Student leaders who initiate proper action will enable group members to learn good qualities from their leader (Posner, 2009; Roberts & Mcneese, 2010; Said et al., 2013). Diversity among group members in an association has been one of the challenges faced by the student leaders (Marshall, 2009; Fischer et al., 2015). Every team member has different characteristics and needs, so it is difficult for the leader to fulfill everyone's need. Leaders must be able to convey the vision and mission clearly to the team members in order to accomplish their organizational goals. A good student leader would be able to solve any conflict or misunderstanding arose within the group members. They must be able to motivate and inspire their team members together towards achieving their set goals (Posner, 2009; Karagianni & Montgomery, 2017).

Summary

Leadership skills will develop students' leadership competence that could direct their career paths. Student leaders in this study should be able to develop their interpersonal skills while active participating in certain associations. Student leader does gain leadership skills while participating in organizations and being active in the world outside of the classroom which then enhances student leadership skills

through experience. It is important for students who are not active to be more participative in the associations they have joined in order to gain leadership skills which will be helpful for their career in future.

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