Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 12(1): 45-52 (2004)

ISSN: 0128-7702
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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

significant in the development of quality education in school.

The role of leadership in educational systems is to sustain the vision of connectedness, so that students, teachers, administrators, parents and taxpayers understand their roles with respect to the larger system, of learning in which they operate (Langford and Clearly 1995). Berry (1997) believed that leadership is an action which yields social change and improvement, and is associated with the development of community involvement and participation on decision making, equal opportunity for students learning, the development of an aware and enlightened community, the management of educational change and the development process to promote quality educational outcomes

Gregory (1996) indicated that education is the foundation on which a competitive workforce is built. He further reiterated that despite some impressive improvements in performance in schools and colleges, many young people still emerge from education system ill-equipped to meet the challenges of life and employment. It is generally believed that in developing educational excellence, leadership somehow makes a difference (Fisher and Tack 1988; Moses 1985; Murphy *et al.* 1988). According to Cheng (1994) in order to improve classroom educational process as well as outcomes, teacher's effectiveness should be enhanced. In a classroom the teacher is presumed to be a leader of the groups and students were presumed to be the followers. It is the role of the teacher to bring the best out of the teaching and learning process. He has to create a mix of activities that will have a positive impact on learners. He as a leader should be able to practice his leadership roles to bring the impact on the lives of students either directly or indirectly. Leadership can be learned and developed. Hitschorm (1988) posited that colleges and universities in the US have established some sort of leadership education programs for students and according to Love and Yoder (1989) students believed that leadership abilities are an important part of their college education. Based on a transformational leadership theory, someone can become a leader through education and training.

Problem Statement

As a leader of a small social organization, in this case, a classroom, teachers' leadership may affect students' learning attitudes and social behavior at both individual and group levels (Cheng 1994). A teacher therefore needs to practice his leadership effectively. To be an effective leader, one has to have effective leadership skills. Jones, Simonetti and Vielhaber-Hermon (2000) believed that well-developed leadership skills are essential to create an organization where people thrive and build an organization capable of sustained drive and vitality for the distant future. Leadership, according to Poster and Brodsky (1992) can be learned and enhanced through education. Students of education who will ultimately become teachers will have to have characteristics and learn to lead while in college. They must realize that they will be leaders in schools. But, do they (students of the Faculty of Education, UPM) possess the characteristics needed to be a leader? A study was conducted to answer this question.

Objectives

The primary purpose of the study was to assess the leadership characteristics of UPM trainee teachers. Specifically the study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived leadership characteristics of UPM trainee teachers?
2. Do perceived leadership characteristics differ among UPM trainee teachers based on selected factors? (a) gender, (b) the level of participation in organizational activities, (c) perceived ability to manage the organization, (d) the perceived amount of knowledge the students have about the management of a student's organization, (e) the perceived importance of a student's involvement in the organization, and (f) type of teacher education programs?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research method.

Population and Sample

The population of the study were all final year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at the Faculty of Educational studies, UPM with the exception of students from the Bachelor of Education (Physical Education) during the academic year 1996/97. Students in the Physical Education program were excluded from this study because it was thought they

would provide much data with regard to participation in organizational activities and thus would result in a bias finding. There were 433 final year students enrolled in the education program at the Faculty of Educational Studies for the academic year 1996/97.

Students who participated in the study were selected using a cluster random sampling procedure whereby the programs of study were the clusters. According to Morgan and Kerjie (1970), a population size of 440 requires a sample size of 205. However, the researcher decided to choose 300 students as a sample to compensate for weaknesses of not employing a simple random sampling. Another reason was that by increasing the number of subjects in the sample there would be a greater variation among the subjects of the study especially when cluster sampling is used.

Instruments

The research instrument contained two parts. One part of the instrument contained questions related to demographic characteristics and another part contained questions related to the leadership characteristics. Part one of the questionnaire consisted of questions related to: (a) gender, (b) program of studies, (c) the perceived ability to manage the students' organizations, (d) the perceived amount of knowledge the students have to manage the students' organizations, (e) the perceived importance of a student's involvement in the organization, and (f) type of teacher education program, (g) academic achievement as measured by the cumulative grade point average. The questionnaire was tested for face validity and reliability estimate. No major problems (such as misunderstanding of the questions) were encountered during the pilot study. The result of a pilot test showed the reliability estimate of the leadership statements to be .94.

FINDINGS

Background of the Respondents

The questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 300 students who were selected to participate in the study. One hundred and seventy students returned the questionnaire. However, some students did not answer many of the questions. These questionnaires were discarded. Data analysis was based on 151 respondents who comprised 46 students from TESL, 23 students from PBMP, 12 students from Home Science Education, 22 students from Agricultural Science Education, and 47 students from Guidance and Counseling. The respondents comprised 45.5% female and 54.5% male students. Their ages ranged between 22 years and 43 years with a mean age of 31.3 years (S.D. =6.34 years) and a median of 33 years. Their teaching experience ranged from no experience at all to 18 years experience. About 37% of the respondents have no teaching experience while another 63% have taught in secondary schools prior to their enrollment in various Bachelor of Education programs. Of those who have taught in schools, their experiences from ranged 1 to 18 years with a mean of 6.14 years (S. D. = 5.75 years) and the median was 6 years. The respondents used different types of academic qualifications to enroll in the teacher education programs at the Faculty of Educational Studies. Among the academic qualifications used by the respondents to enroll in the Bachelor of Education program were: Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (22%), Diploma in various disciplines (12%), Malaysian High School Certificate (24%), and Teacher's College Certificate (40%).

Students' Academic Achievement

The respondents' academic achievements were determined based on the cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Their academic performances ranged between 2.25 and 3.80. The mean was 3.05 (S. D. = .27). About 4% of the respondents obtained a CGPA below 2.5 and about 6% of them obtained a CGPA of 3.5 and above. About 55% of the respondents obtained a CGPA between 3.0 and 3.49 and about 35% obtained a CGPA between 2.5 and 2.99.

Students' Involvement in Organizational Activities

The students' involvement in organizational activities was assessed by asking them to indicate their level of involvement in organizational activities while on campus. On a scale of 1 to 3 (being no involvement at all, 2 being average involvement, and 3 being highly involved), students will indicate their level of involvement in the organizational activities organized by the universities. The study shows that about 69% of the respondents' involvement in the organizational activities here at UPM is at the

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 participation 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 partici -pation	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 know -ledge	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 word.

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(Received: 7 March 2002)