

The Impact of Second Classroom Activities on University Students' Leadership

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Abstract:

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed method design to gain an understanding of the impact of second classroom activities on university students' leadership in three selected universities in Guangxi, China. The students believed that the second classroom activities had a positive impact on the development of their leadership skills. They saw the activities in the second classroom as a gradual process of leadership development. It is an opportunity for experiential learning in actual organizational setups. It is a platform that exposes the students to mentoring, peer interactions, and challenges which all lead to the development of leadership skills.

Keywords: second classroom, student leadership

Introduction

Leadership is an essential comprehensive quality among university students and profoundly influences their lives and future employment prospects [1]. Businesses and industries have become more rigorous in evaluating the overall qualities of university students, including the need for strong leadership skills to meet the requirements of society and workplace positions [2]. The schools, therefore, must scientifically and systematically cultivate the leadership qualities of their students, unlock their leadership potential, and enhance their leadership skills [3]. In China, however, leadership education for university students is primarily concentrated in top-tier universities or those categorized under the "985" and "211" projects [4]. These universities offer leadership-related courses and programs for their students. On the other hand, in economically less developed regions of China, there are relatively fewer university student leadership training programs. The limited resources of these schools are preventing them from providing more leadership opportunities to their students. Given this situation, it is important to explore other avenues for student leadership development that are already part of the university curriculum like the second classroom.

The second classroom is the continuation and extension of classroom teaching activities, which reflects more of the students themselves and emphasizes students' flexible use of knowledge in various extracurricular activities. Its implementation is guided by the Medium and Long-term Youth Development Plan 2016-2025 [5] which points out that the second classroom transcript system in colleges and universities will help students broaden their horizons, understand society, and improve their overall quality. The instruction in second classrooms is more practical than theoretical. Students learn in activities like innovation and entrepreneurship, social practice, volunteering and public welfare, cultural and sports activities, social work, and skills training.

Given the highly social nature of the second classroom, the study investigated whether it has the potential to develop student leadership. Within the framework of transformational leadership theory, the study looked into the students' perceived impact of the second classroom on their leadership practice which was measured in terms of Kouzes and Posner's exemplary leadership model [6]. Comprising the model are the dimensions: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. The study also explored how student leaders in campus-based organizations describe their experiences in the second classroom about their leadership development.

Method

The study used a convergent parallel mixed method. It enabled the researcher to quantify the students' perceived impact of the second classroom on their leadership practice, and at the same time provide a qualitative description about it. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject. The study was conducted in three universities in Guangxi, China. It involved 155 student leaders of campus-based organizations who were selected randomly as respondents in the survey. The 155 number of respondents is the minimum sample size required from the population of 258 student leaders. For the qualitative part, six (6) student leaders were selected for interviews.

The study used a survey questionnaire to collect the quantitative data. To measure the impact of the second classroom on the respondents' leadership practice, the study adopted Kouzes and Posner's [7] student leadership practice inventory (SLPI). It is a standardized instrument that measures exemplary leadership skills among students. The SLPI is widely applied in university student leadership development programs [8]. It has been used in studies involving Chinese students by Hanhui, Wei, & Qian, [9], Xiaoyu et al., [10], and Xueqin [11]. It showed SLPI's applicability to the Chinese context. On the other hand, the qualitative inquiry revolved around the participants' second classroom experiences leading to the development of student leadership. The interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's [12] thematic procedure.

Results

The assessment of the perceived impact of the second classroom on student leadership practice showed the following means and standard deviations: model the way ($\bar{x} = 3.38$, $SD = 0.50$), inspire a shared vision ($\bar{x} = 3.32$, $SD = 0.52$), challenge the process ($\bar{x} = 3.27$, $SD = 0.55$), enable others to act ($\bar{x} = 3.37$, $SD = 0.49$), and encourage the heart ($\bar{x} = 3.42$, $SD = 0.52$). The overall mean is 3.35 which indicates that the second classroom has a sufficient positive impact on the students' leadership practices.

The qualitative analysis resulted in four themes that describe the participants' experiences leading to the development of their leadership practices. These themes are: developing leadership abilities, taking on organizational opportunities, active interactions, and challenges. It showed that the second classroom provided students with opportunities to develop their leadership practices.

Discussion

The respondents believed that the second classroom has a sufficiently positive impact on their leadership practices. It enhanced their "model the way" practices such as setting an example by demonstrating personal values and beliefs, leading by example, and being accountable, emphatic, and respectful. It also improved their "inspired a shared vision" practice. They became better at creating compelling visions of the future for their fellow students. Moreover, the respondents believed that the second classroom

enhanced their "challenge the process" practice like seeking out new and innovative ways of doing things. The second classroom is also seen as having a positive impact on the respondents' "enable others to act" and "encourage the heart" practices. The respondents believed that their collaborative and empowering practices improved, as well as their practice of encouraging fellow students.

The perceived positive impact of a second classroom on the leadership practice of the respondents is similar to what was observed by Gross [13]. He noted that specific experiences on the campus are one of the reasons students develop leadership skills. The same is true with Chinese college student leaders. They develop their leadership abilities through meaningful experiences as they get in touch with other people [14]. In the study of Yuanming [15], it was shown that Chinese student leaders have very satisfactory exemplary leadership practices. According to Ting Cai et al. [16], the exemplary leadership skills of ordinary Chinese students can be improved through community service. It is a form of volunteering which is one of the second classroom activities.

The qualitative findings corroborate the perceived positive impact of a second classroom on students' leadership practice. All the participants talked about the second classroom as a pathway for developing leadership practices. They attributed the development of their communication skills, organizational skills, innovation, teamwork abilities, goal-setting skills, building confidence, optimism, decision-making, collaborative skills, listening and respecting others, empowering peers, establishing trust, and inspiring peers. It must be noted that these practices fall into the different domains of exemplary leadership. The participants claimed that they were able to enhance these leadership practices by taking opportunities provided by different campus organizations linked to the different second-classroom activities. Another source of learning for the participants is the active interactions with fellow students and with mentors as well. They also believe that the challenges they met in the second classroom activities also contributed to the development of their leadership practices.

Conclusion

The student leaders perceived the second classroom as significant in the development of their leadership practices. It provided opportunities to learn leadership skills and served as a platform for its practice. The study has implications for student leadership development in China. It presents the second classroom as an alternative pathway for student leadership. What is needed is a strong collaboration between schools and the different student organizations. They have to come up with a well-structured leadership program in the second classroom.

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