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Investigating Students' Perceptions Regarding the Role Played by Universities in Cultivating Leadership Qualities: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of the role of universities in developing students' leadership qualities. For educational institutions to create welcoming environments and facilitate the holistic development of students, it is essential to understand the impact of student leadership. The study implemented a quantitative approach, using stratified sampling techniques combined with a survey based on a Likert scale to collect comprehensive information about students' perspectives. The research sample included 200 students. The questionnaire consisted of 45 items based on different factors. These were vision, decision-making, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the mean and standard deviation. In inferential statistics, an independent sample t-test was used to compare the differences in the participants' responses by using their demographic variables like gender, university type, and level of education. The results of this research are significant on different factors of leadership qualities in informing organizations about the areas they need to improve. Further, the practices these institutions can adopt to support students on their journey to become effective leaders for future achievements.

Introduction

Leadership is about establishing, not simply meeting, plans, recognizing problems, and initiating changes to improve realities. Student leadership is increasingly recognized as a fundamental aspect of the educational process. Students holding leadership positions in colleges/universities have unique opportunities to develop essential abilities and characteristics outside the classroom. These abilities include vision, decision-making, problem-solving, empathy, and effective teamwork. Additionally, student leadership engagement is associated with improved personal development, confidence, and academic performance (Badura, K. L., et al., 2020).

Many studies have explored the effectiveness of leadership development programs offered by universities. These programs include workshops, seminars, consulting opportunities, and community engagement activities. An important task for educators is to encourage and monitor changes in participation in educational projects and exercises that build skills in the classroom (Allen-Handy, A. et al., 2021). Additional research is needed on the specific factors that have the maximum impact on these programs.

According to Evett (2010), individuals must be aware of how they pass from a leader status to a follower status. In addition, they must understand the importance of being strongly encouraged to act as a follower and that this is not meant to be humiliating. For leaders to lead successfully, it is helpful to focus on their strengths to motivate them to be at a high level (Caza, A., et al., 2021). They must be encouraged by others so that they feel cared for and valued by someone. The common factors that unite leaders are enabling, encouraging, and empowering followers. In this way, expertise can be gained in leadership roles (Eagly, A. H., & Koenig, A. M. 2021).

Statement of the Problem

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Our educational institutions are facing a lack of effective student leadership. The research explores possible solutions to cultivate and empower future student leaders. Therefore, the study was designed to recognize the essential factors causing insufficient student leadership. The lack of strong and capable student leaders on campus severely affects student engagement, academic achievement, extracurricular activities, and general student well-being. Student leaders can work to ensure transparency and accountability within their institutions by advocating for fair and transparent admission processes, combating cheating and academic dishonesty, and promoting ethical behavior among students and staff.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of various factors that foster leadership qualities in university students.
2. To assess the perceived importance of university involvement in fostering leadership qualities among male and female students.
3. To evaluate the students' perceptions regarding the role of the universities in cultivating leadership qualities in students belonging to the public and private sectors.
4. To evaluate the students' perceptions regarding the role of the universities in cultivating leadership qualities in students belonging to graduate and post-graduate levels.

Null Hypothesis

1) There is no significant difference in the perceived importance of university involvement in fostering leadership qualities between male and female students.
2) There is no significant difference in the perceptions of public and private sector students' regarding the role of universities in cultivating leadership qualities.

Research Question

Q1. What is the level of various factors (like vision, decision-making, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence) that foster leadership qualities in university students?

Review of Literature

Student leadership involves students taking active roles in their education and developing positive skills in the process (Harris, M. S., & Ellis, M. K. 2020). The goal of inspiring student leaders is to create a culture of ownership, collaboration, and community in the classroom (Pletcher, B. C., 2020). Student leadership development helps in creating skills that can help the students to carry over to adulthood.

Leadership and Characteristics

The term "leadership" has been defined by various researchers and is presented in a large body of literature (Masduki, M., & Zakaria, N. 2022; Zuo, L., et al., 2022). The concept of leadership has been widely used and applied in various fields such as business, military, politics, and education (Selznick, 2021). Leadership is a process in which a leader influences subordinates by motivating, directing, inspiring, and motivating them to achieve their goals (Andriani et al., 2018). Leadership can be a profession in that a leader has the expertise and ability to lead a group/group of people (Tipu, S. A. A. 2022; Yeomans, L., & Bowman, S. 2021).

Murphy, B. (2023) argued that effective leaders make wise and educated decisions. They know how to react in different positions. Williams and Williams (2011) claimed that good educational leaders promote a motivating and positive culture in universities that supports student achievement. Caldwell (2012) added that followers admire and respect the services of their leaders. Good leaders develop the education system hence everyone has equal prospects to learn and acquire knowledge (Tarker, D. 2021; Mohebi, M. et al., 2022).

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The culture and goals of organizations reveal the leadership style decided by managers (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Wise leaders merge different leadership styles, but they can switch from one leadership style to another depending on the circumstances (Shinde, N., & Bamber, C. 2023; Bagga, S. K., et al., 2023). Different management styles help managers to make decisions (Atkočiūnienė et al., 2022). Great leaders consistently provide a leadership style that can be specifically applied to motivate, guide, direct, and inspire others (Apesin, A., & Gong, T. (2021)

Student Development

Universities focus on students and also on their social, moral, spiritual, citizenship, intellectual, and physical development (Carsten, M., et l., 2023). Student leadership focuses on building relationships, building trust, and upholding ethical standards (Cho, C. C., & Kao, R. H. 2022). Students acquire knowledge throughout college, creating beliefs that influence their lives and experiences (Hernandez, 2019).

Teaching methods affect the leadership skills of students (Orfan et al. 2021). It was found that most Afghan teachers used traditional teaching methods in language classes, which negatively affected students' achievement and language skills. Students' efforts and classroom activities are effective in developing leadership skills in higher education (Deng, H., et al., 2022; Hayes, S. D., et al., 2021).

The factors of university student leadership development, are identified considering the context (Heggestad, E. D., et al., 2023). The five factors utilized in this study are vision, decision-making, communication skills, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, which play an important role in the lives of students.

Role of University in Developing Leadership Qualities

Positive attitudes towards leadership were found to boost students' leadership abilities, (Lee, S. H. 2020). Noori, A. Q. (2021) examined the behaviors of university instructors and the motivation of their pupils and discovered a statistically significant association between the two. In addition, some researchers found in 2021 that the behavior of university lecturers affects the management skills of students along with their learning outcomes.

The basic function of leadership is to unify the leader's and followers' personal goals to achieve a larger goal (vision). This includes the possibility that people do not necessarily have to agree on everything, but the vision and direction of the activity must unite individuals (Jamieson, M. V., et al., 2021). Effective leaders demonstrate the direction and policies of others through their behavior, modifying established processes when necessary (Jamieson et al., 2020). Predicting future challenges is becoming more and more complex. All leaders are active or tend to influence power, but not all are true leaders (Rahimi, Z., et al., 2020).

The fact is that Pakistan has its own culture and subcultures as a result Western theories of leadership have limited significance in its context (Yeomans, L., & Bowman, S. 2021). The current study revealed this fact.

Research Design and Methodology

The quantitative study was designed. All HEC-recognized public and private universities of Lahore comprised the population of the study. A stratified sampling technique was used. One public and one private university were selected. 100 students from the public sector and 100 from the private university were considered. The total sample was 200 students.

Instrumentation

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The researcher developed the questionnaire after a thorough review of the literature. A point-5 Likert scale was used to examine leadership qualities among university students. The questionnaire consisted of 45 items based on five factors. These were vision, decision-making, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence.

Delimitation

- This research study was delimited to HEC-recognized public and private universities of Lahore in Punjab.
- The research study was delimited to Lahore graduate and post-graduate university students in Lahore.

Validity and Reliability

The items of the questionnaire were validated by two lecturers from the Faculty of Social Sciences The items were improved and modified after a thoughtful revision. A pilot study was conducted before the survey. The Cronbach Alpha Statistics (Test of Reliability) results showed that the items had an overall value of 0.95 (Table 1).

Table1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Items	N of Items
.950	.950	45

Data Analysis

SPSS version -25 was used to analyze the data. Simple descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to measure the difference between the two study groups.

Demographic Information

The demographic data of 200 participants shown in a graphical presentation (Fig 1) reveal that 77% of participants were under 20 years old, while 23% were between 20 and 25 years old, indicating that the sample was mainly young. In terms of gender, the group of participants was 60% female and 40% men, revealing the female majority.

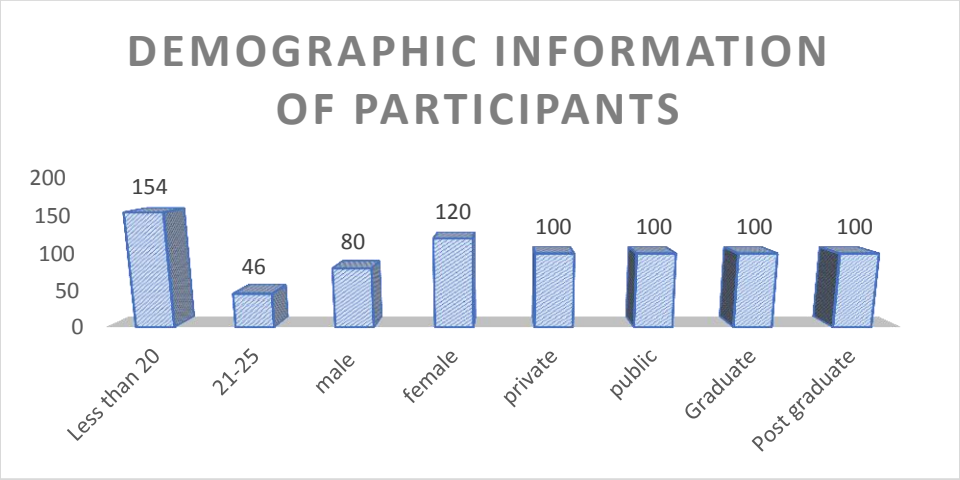

Fig:1

Descriptive Statistics

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The given table (2) represents descriptive statistics for five different characteristics, namely vision, decision-making, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. The statistics shown in the table are useful for understanding the central tendency and variability of the data points related to each factor. These help in making comparisons between different factors in terms of their average scores and the spread of those scores.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Vision	32.3300	3.68633	200
Decision making	11.9000	1.89153	200
Communication	19.9600	3.05040	200
Problem-solving	23.7850	3.29287	200
Emotional intelligence	19.5150	2.96034	200

The standard deviation values suggest the range of variability or the distribution of the data points around the mean for each factor. In the table, the factor vision has the highest standard deviation of 3.68633, which shows that the scores for this factor are spread out over a larger extent. On the other hand, the factor decision-making has the lowest standard deviation of 1.89153, which shows that the scores for this factor are firmly crowded around the mean as compared to other factors. The factor of problem-solving has a standard deviation of 3.29287, and the communication factor has a standard deviation of 3.05040 respectively, signifying a rather large spread of scores. The emotional intelligence factor has a standard deviation of 2.96034, which suggests a medium level of intensity in scores. A graphical presentation (fig 2) presents the mean scores of the five factors.

The factor vision has the highest mean score of 32.3300, indicating that, on average, the respondents scored comparatively high in the area of vision. The factor decision-making has a mean score of 11.9000, which reveals a lower average score compared to the other factors. The factor communication has a mean score of 19.9600, which indicates an average level of communication skills among the participants. The mean score of problem-solving is 23.7850, which suggests a fairly high average ability in problem-solving skills. In emotional intelligence, the mean score is 19.5150, which indicates an ordinary level of emotional intelligence among the respondents.

Analysis based on student demographic variables

The researcher conducted an independent sample t-test to measure differences in participants' responses based on their gender, type of university, and level of education. 1to15 tables show the alpha value for the hypothesis testing.

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Table No. 3

Independent Samples t Test to find out difference between groups regarding students vision based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Vision	Equal variances assumed	.019	.891	1.876	198	.062	.99167	.52874	-.05102	2.03436
	Equal variances not assumed			1.888	173.146	.061	.99167	.52535	-.04524	2.02858

1) The insignificance level p=.891 shows that there is no significant difference between the male and female students' opinion on "vision" with value t= 1.876(198), p=.891 which is higher than probability level a=0.05. These values show no significant statistical difference in the mean score of the male and female participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho is "There is no significant difference between the opinion of males and females on the vision". It shows that the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

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Table No. 4

Independent Samples tTest to find out difference between groups regarding decision making based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Decision making	Equal variances assumed	.124	.725	1.916	198	.057	.41667	.21749	-.01222	.84555
	Equal variances not assumed			1.959	181.733	.052	.41667	.21269	-.00298	.83632

2) The significance level p=.057(2-tailed) which shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students' opinions on the "importance of decision making in leadership" with value t= 1.916(198), p=.057 which is almost equal to probability level a=0.05. These values show significant statistical differences in the mean score of male and female participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female students regarding "decision making in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 5

Independent Samples tTest to find out difference between groups regarding communication based on gender

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means	
			95%

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									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Communication	Equal variances assumed	2.506	.115	2.305	198	.022	1.00417	.43559	.14517	1.86316
	Equal variances not assumed			2.385	187.350	.018	1.00417	.42099	.17368	1.83466

3) The significance level p=.022(2-tailed) shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students' opinions on the "importance of communication in leadership" with value t= 2.305(198), p=.022 which is lower than probability level a=0.05. These values show a significant statistical difference in the mean score of male and female participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female students regarding "communication in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 6

Independent Samples t Test to find out difference between groups regarding problem solving based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Problem-solving	Equal variances	2.459	.118	1.061	198	.290	.50417	.47513	-.43281	1.44114

	assumed								
	Equal variances not assumed		1.081	179.617	.281	.50417	.46655	-.41646	1.42479

4) The insignificance level p=.118 shows no significant difference between male and female students' opinions on the "importance of problem-solving in leadership" with value t= 1.061(198), p=.118 which is higher than probability level a=0.05. These values show no significant statistical difference in the mean score of male and female participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female students regarding "problem-solving in leadership' failed to be rejected.

Table No. 7

Independent Samples Test to find out difference between groups regarding emotional intelligence based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Emotional intelligence	Equal variances assumed	6.210	.014	1.309	198	.192	.55833	.42652	-.28278	1.39945
	Equal variances not assumed			1.362	189.736	.175	.55833	.40990	-.25021	1.36688

5) The significance level p=.014 shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students' opinions on the "importance of emotional intelligence in leadership" with value t= 1.309(198), p=.014 which is lower than probability level a=0.05. These values show a significant statistical difference in the mean score of male and female participants on this

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factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female students regarding "emotional intelligence in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 8

Independents sample t test to find out difference between groups regarding vision based on sector type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Vision	Equal variances assumed	5.698	.018	-2.487	198	.014	-1.28000	.51466	-2.29493	-.26507
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.487	185.093	.014	-1.28000	.51466	-2.29536	-.26464

1) The significance level p=.018 shows that there is a significant difference between public and private university students' opinions on the "importance of vision in leadership" with value t= -2.487(198), p=.018 which is lower than probability level a=0.05. These values show significant statistical differences in the mean score of public and private university participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private university students regarding "vision in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 9

Independents sample t test to find out difference between groups regarding decision making based on sector type

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

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									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Decision making	Equal variances assumed	.101	.751	-2.266	198	.025	-.60000	.26477	-1.12212	-.07788
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.266	197.526	.025	-.60000	.26477	-1.12213	-.07787

2) The significance level p=.025(2-tailed) shows that there is a significant difference between public and private university students' opinions on the "importance of decision-making in leadership" with value t= -2.487(198), p=.025 which is lower than probability level a=0.05. These values show a significant statistical difference in the mean score of public and private university participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private university students regarding "decision-making in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 10

Independents sample t test to find out difference between groups regarding communication based on sector type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean opinions	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Communicati	Equal	04	.82	-	198	.126	-	.42993	-	.1878

on	variances assumed	7	8	1.535		.66000		1.50783	3
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.535	195.457	.126	-.66000	.42993	-1.50789	.18789

3) The insignificance level p=.828 which shows that there is no significant difference between public and private university students' opinions on the "importance of communication in leadership" with value t= -1.535(198), p=.828 which is higher than probability level a=0.05. These values show no significant statistical difference in the mean score of public and private university participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private university students regarding "communication in leadership' failed to be rejected.

Table No. 11

Independents sample t test to find out difference between groups regarding problem solving based on sector type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean opinions	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Problem-solving	Equal variances assumed	4.304	.039	-1.573	198	.117	-.73000	.46397	-1.64495	.18495
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.573	186.809	.117	-.73000	.46397	-1.64528	.18528

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4) The significance level p=.039 shows a significant difference between public and private university students' opinions on the "importance of problem-solving in leadership" with value t= -1.573(198), p=.039 which is lower than probability level a=0.05. These values show no significant statistical difference in the mean score of public and private university participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private university students regarding "problem-solving in leadership' is rejected.

Table No. 12

Independents sample t test to find out difference between groups regarding emotional intelligence based on sector type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean opinions	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Emotional intelligence	Equal variances assumed	2.426	.121	-1.268	198	.206	-.53000	.41802	-1.35434	.29434
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.268	193.373	.206	-.53000	.41802	-1.35446	.29446

5) The insignificance level p=.121 shows no significant difference between public and private university students' opinions on the "importance of emotional intelligence in leadership" with value t= -1.268 (198), p=.121 which is higher than probability level a=0.05. These values show no significant statistical difference in the mean score of public and private university participants on this factor. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho "There is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private university students regarding "emotional intelligence in leadership' failed to be rejected.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to identify the key factors that play a vital role in cultivating leadership qualities in university students at graduate and postgraduate levels. Overall, five factors (vision, decision-

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making, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence) were found and studied by using descriptive (table 2) and inferential statistics. As the factors of university student leadership development, are identified by considering the context (Mozhgan Amirianzadeh, 2011). It is possible that these could be more dependent on other factors like personal characteristics and incidents. Independent t-tests were employed to compare the mentioned five factors utilizing gender, type of university, and level of education.

In the factor of vision, the p-value=0.891 and p=0.118 for problem-solving specifies that there is no significant difference between genders concerning these factors in the context of university student leadership. The result recommends that male and female students may have similar levels of vision and problem-solving in a leadership role. However, in decision-making where the value of p=.057, is nearly close to the actual value of 0.05. It shows that there may be a balanced link between gender and decision-making among university students. In communication, the p-value = 0.022, and in emotional intelligence p-value=0.014 which suggests a significant association between gender and these factors communication skills and emotional intelligence in the context of university student leadership. This result signifies that there might be significant differences i) in the communication styles and between male and female student leaders. ii) in emotional intelligence and between male and female student leaders Considering these differences may provide awareness in improving leadership training programs.

There is a statistically significant p-value in the case of vision it is 0.018 for decision-making p-value=0.025 and for problem-solving p=.039. These values indicate that there is a remarkable association between the university type and factor vision and decision-making in student leadership. This means that students in either public or private universities may have different levels of vision and decision-making due to changes in the educational environment, resources, or institutional culture. The high value of p=.828 for communication and emotional intelligence where p=.121 suggests that the type of university may not significantly affect the communication skills and emotional intelligence of student leaders. This means that the communication abilities and emotional intelligence of students may not differ significantly based on whether they attend public/ private universities.

On the basis of discussion given above it could be concluded that: -

- The significant p-values for vision, decision-making, and communication suggest that students who excel in these areas are more likely to be effective leaders.
- Vision and problem-solving, may not significantly differ based on gender.
- Factors like communication and emotional intelligence could be influenced by gender-specific traits / societal expectations.
- The findings focus on the potential effect of certain external university factors like resources, curriculum, faculty expertise, and cultural values, on the development of leadership skills among students.
- The importance of problem-solving skills can vary depending on the context and field of study.
- The significance of emotional intelligence is evident those who can understand and manage their emotions and the emotions of others can build strong relationships and motivate their peers effectively.

The study supports the perception that there is a need for planned strategies to develop leadership qualities among the students in the university atmosphere.

Recommendations

The study recommends that for developing student leadership qualities among the university students the following aspects should be considered.

- Encouraging peer learning and teamwork among student leaders. This can help in promoting their visionary and strategic thinking abilities.
- Team-building activities can be organized that foster collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills.
- Activities can be considered to create situations that student leaders might come across. It permits them to practice their leadership skills in a supportive environment.
- Student leaders have to interact in real-world projects/community arrangements where they can utilize their leadership skills. This will help student leaders to gain practical experience outside the university.

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