



Evaluating the effectiveness of a student leadership training program for the early adolescent students in Kanchanaburi province, Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a student leadership training program for the early adolescent students in school. A quasi-experiment design with a pre-test and post-test control group and experimental group was adopted to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. The sample group consisted of 50 adolescent students who were 10 to 14 years old, were studying in Primary 4, 5, or 6 in formal schools, and were studying at English Tutorial School in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. They were assigned to 2 groups with 25 students in an experimental group and 25 students in a control group by simple random sampling method. The results showed that the intervention student leadership training program, which consisted of an online course and an on-site course with 12 activities such as “me in the photo”, “rock paper scissors posse,” and “share the vision”, for 24 hours over 7-weeks, resulted in a statistically significant ($p < .001$) increase in student leadership skill. Students involved in the student leadership training program were impacted positively in terms of their leadership capabilities. The recommendations from the findings can help educational institutions, administrators and teachers to enhance students’ leadership by including core activities on developing student leadership in the school curriculum.

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Introduction

Adolescence is the period of the formation of identity (Gardner, 1995) and the transition from childhood to a more mature stage (Allen & Waterman 2019; Refanthira

& Hasanah, 2020). Adolescents are viewed as positive force for changes. Gardner (1995) asserted that leaders-to-be are popular among their friends since their early age, some young students possess leadership qualities, and the leadership qualities make them stand out from an early age. The inclination of being leaders from early childhood is recognized as the young generation are risk takers, make a great effort to do something, and defy others to achieve their goals. In other words, leadership qualities emerge from an early age as young leaders stand out from their friends (Gardner, 1995). Additionally,

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Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) suggest that adolescents play a critical role in leadership development. The development of leadership skills in adolescents can help to reinforce self-esteem into a successful adult. However, many adolescents are never given any opportunities to lead, and adult leadership models are not always appropriate for teenagers. Throughout childhood and adolescence, school is the primary organizational experience for children, which is viewed as a form of learning (Karagianni & Montgomery, 2018; Montgomery & Kehoe, 2016).

According to the Regional Office for South-East Asia, World Health Organization (2018), there are 362 million adolescent boys and girls aged between 10 and 19 years in the South-East Asia Region. Younger adolescents are between 10 and 14 years while older adolescents are between 15 and 19 years. As mentioned earlier, adolescents are viewed as positive force for change. However, the adolescent years attract the attention of community leaders as health problems and health-related behaviors matter. There are 8.88 million adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years in Thailand. According to the findings from the World Health Organization (2018) regarding Thai adolescents' mental health issues, such includes anxiety, depression and having no friends, the rates of which are reported as 9.3 percent, 9.7 percent, and 6.4 percent, respectively. In the meantime, youth violence is also an important issue internationally, and in Thailand, previous research on youth violence discovered that the prevalence of violence in school is the highest during the early and middle adolescent years of Thai students (Sirirassamee et al., 2017). The violence in school includes physical fighting, not going to school, and being bullied. Consequently, adolescent problematic issues need to be addressed to help adolescent students pass the developmental stages successfully (Refanthira & Hasanah 2020). To solve adolescents' problems on life qualities, student leadership is a practical method according to early adolescent students' desired characteristics. The development of adolescents' leadership is important since it will help lead to the success in all aspects of their lives including family, study, work and living in the society because leadership can support them to maintain responsibility, courage, assertiveness, patience, perseverance and sacrifice (Manager Online, 2020).

In terms of leadership characteristics, Kouzes and Posner (2006) indicate that leadership is important, and it is learnable and teachable. Also, leadership is the ability to inspire and motivate oneself and others into taking positive and sustainable action. Everyone feels the need for leadership in all aspects of their lives (Northouse,

2009). It is crucial to understand that each person is a leader, or at least a leader in making. Leaders are needed in one's personal life both at school and in the workplace.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2018), the leadership model includes five practices that exemplify leadership consisting of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart. They argue that leadership is more of a collection of behaviors and practices than a position. Modeling the way means student leaders act in a good way, show good examples, do what they say, and model the behaviors they expect from others. Inspiring a shared vision suggests that student leaders believe that they can envision the future, share their passion, and make a difference for positive changes together with others. Challenging the process focuses on how student leaders look for innovative ways to improve things by taking risks, which include failures. However, they can learn by doing and consider failures or disappointments as learning opportunities. Enabling others to act focuses on the abilities of student leaders, who can promote trust and cooperative goals among other students and people. Through their relationship with one another, student leaders can strengthen others into becoming leaders themselves by sharing power, building up their capabilities, and making them feel confident. Encouraging the heart focuses on how student leaders encourage other students to keep hope alive through tough times. By all means, student leaders sincerely celebrate other students' victories and demonstrate team spirit.

Many researchers have studied leadership in education in order to find out effective educational leaders. Leadership research has become one of the most important and discussed topics in education. Burchard (2009) claims that leadership provides people with unique and powerful challenges to grow, contribute, and make meaningful relationships and changes. Moreover, several studies regarding educational leadership have been studied, and such focused on adult leadership development (Reichard et al., 2011; Riggio, 2008). The studies concerning leadership development have mostly focused on teachers, principal, or adult leadership. However, studies on leadership emergence of adolescence are ignored (Reichard et al., 2011). Consequently, youth leadership development should be increased since leadership is a very necessary skill for all young students and should be cultivated from an early age (Al-Jammal, 2015).

According to Office of the Basic Education Commission (2011), globalization, the changing context of learning in the 21st century, and the changing climate of technology, society and economy around the world have pushed

several countries including Thailand towards education reform to prepare and develop their new generation students to survive in the worldwide flow of information, and to be critical thinkers. Enhancing adolescent student leadership can scarcely be found. Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) point out that there is a gap in literature in response to student leadership. At present, studies about leadership of early adolescent students are rather limited as leadership studies excessively focus on adult leadership (Whitehead, 2009). Consequently, this study can be conducted to narrow down the gap.

In addition, the long-standing outbreak of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) has changed teaching and learning management of schools in formal education to be online teaching and learning. Student development activities, which were mostly taught on-site cannot be organized to develop students' skills. This present study develops a student leadership training program by integrating non-formal learning management process, which focuses on flexibility in learning, and students are able to learn at their own pace according to their personal interest, experience, atmosphere and other available resources. Students can learn about leadership and apply leadership in their lives. Leadership activities are provided both online and on-site. Online activities, which can be learned anywhere and anytime, are in line with teaching and learning management in the new norm. The training program activities were also designed and developed based on the five practices of student leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2018), consisting of modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Therefore, the aim of this present study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a student leadership training program for early adolescent students in school.

Methodology

Participants

The population of the study was 77 early adolescent students who studied at English Time Tutorial School located in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. A total of 50 students were recruited by using simple random sampling method according to certain criteria. The criteria were: (1) age between 10 and 14 years old; (2) studying in Primary 4, 5, or 6 in formal schools; and (3) studying at English Time Tutorial School in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. Then, the researcher classified 25 students to an experimental group and 25 students to a control group via simple random sampling method.

Setting

A quasi-experiment design was employed since Creswell (2012) argues that experimental researchers use intact groups because the research setting prohibits forming an artificial group. This intervention student leadership training program was utilized in this study in order to promote student leadership characteristics for early adolescent students.

Measures

Student leadership instruments, which include a pre- and post-test questionnaire and a student leadership training program, were developed based on the five practices for becoming an exemplary leader including model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). They were used as the main tools to assess the levels of student leadership. Both tools were confirmed by 3 relevant experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (0.97). The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of the student leadership training program was average results value 0.74. The questionnaire discriminated well (0.45). The questionnaire was developed in English and Thai, but perhaps some participants could not understand English well.

Procedures

The intervention student leadership training program was conducted at English Time Tutorial School in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. In terms of sample size, an experimental methodology requires at least 15 participants (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, Creswell (2012) suggests that there should be approximately 15 participants in both control and experimental groups. Therefore, 50 participants were assigned to two groups, 25 students in the experimental group and 25 students in the control group. The pre-test and post-test were conducted for both groups. It was a 24-hour over a 7-week training program. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the training program was adjusted to a blended learning format, both online via application and on-site in order to mitigate COVID-19 exposure. The modes of delivery included online training for 5 days and on-site training for 2 days. It took four hours for each student leadership practice. The training program was only conducted with the experimental group. However, both groups were provided student leadership training manuals. The researcher designed and selected 12 activities including course introduction

(i.e., students explain the meaning and the importance of leadership), me in the photo (i.e., students illustrate the idea of identifying values), who is the leader (i.e., students illustrate the idea of identifying values and present their own idea in the presence of their friends), innovation challenge (i.e., students illustrate their imagination and ideas), share the vision (i.e., students practice speaking in a manner with vivid imagery), community challenge (i.e., students work with others to solve the problem at hand), path to success (i.e., students recognize the importance of teamwork), mission possible (i.e., students work with others to solve the problem at hand), photo scavenger hunt (i.e., students demonstrate delegation.), thank you notes (i.e., students demonstrate gratitude), rock paper scissors posse (i.e., students create an atmosphere of celebration), and conclusion (i.e. students review key concepts learned in the student leadership training program), in order to develop participants' leadership according to the five practices for becoming an exemplary leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2018), which include: (1) model the way, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) challenge the process,(4) enable others to act, and (5) encourage the heart.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Independent samples t -test and dependent samples t -test were employed to examine the differences of mean values between the experimental group and the control group and to compare mean values of both groups within each group.

Results

According to Table 1, 31 participants (62.00%) were female while 19 participants (38%) were male. Regarding students' educational level, most participants (44%) were studying in Primary 6. The majority of the experimental group were female (72.00%) and studying in Primary 5 (44.00%). The majority of the control group were female (52.00%) and studying in Primary 6 (44.00%).

According to Table 2, for the experimental group, the overall mean score of student leadership was at low level ($M = 2.22$) for pre-test and at high level ($M = 4.05$) for post-test, and there were statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results ($p < .001$). For the control group, the overall mean score of student leadership for pre-test was ($M = 2.07$) and post-test ($M = 2.19$). In other words, students' leadership of students in the control group was at low levels, and there were statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test result ($p < 0.001$). In the meantime, it also showed that the control group and the experimental group were not statistically significant on the mean score of the pre-test ($p = 0.357$). On the other hand, the control group and the experimental group were statistically significant on the mean score of the post-test ($p < .001$). The compared pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group revealed that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$).

The results showed that the control group's mean score for each sub-dimension of the pre-test had no statistically significant difference ($p > .05$). However, there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control group for the post-test result ($p < .001$) as shown in Table 3.

Table 1 Frequency and percentage of the general personal information of participants

| The General Personal Information | ($n = 50$) | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|
| | Experimental Group Frequency (Percentage) | Control Group Frequency (Percentage) | Total Frequency (Percentage) |
| 1. Gender | | | |
| 1.1. Male | 7 (28.00) | 12 (48.00) | 19 (38.00) |
| 1.2. Female | 18 (72.00) | 13 (52.00) | 31 (62.00) |
| 2. Student's Education Level | | | |
| 2.1. Primary 4 | 2 (8.00) | 10 (40.00) | 12 (24.00) |
| 2.2. Primary 5 | 12 (48.00) | 4 (16.00) | 16 (32.00) |
| 2.3. Primary 6 | 11 (44.00) | 11 (44.00) | 22 (44.00) |
| Total | 25 (100) | 25 (100) | 50 (100) |

Table 2 Dependent samples *t*-test between the experimental and control groups.

| Statistical Use | Experiment Group (<i>n</i> = 25) | | Control Group (<i>n</i> = 25) | | Dependent samples <i>t</i> -test | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> value |
| Between group | | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 2.22 | 0.53 | 2.07 | 0.54 | 0.94 | .357 |
| Post-Test | 4.05 | 0.57 | 2.19 | 0.52 | 12.06 | .001* |
| Within group | | | | | | |
| 1. Experiment group | | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 2.22 | 0.53 | | | | |
| Post-Test | 4.05 | 0.57 | | | -16.48 | .001* |
| 2. Control group | | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | | | 2.07 | 0.54 | | |
| Post-Test | | | 2.19 | 0.52 | -5.41 | .001* |

Note: **p* < .05.

Table 3 Sub-dimension of independent samples *t*-test between experimental and control group

| Sub-dimension | Experiment group | | Control group | | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> value |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|----------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Pre-test | | | | | | |
| 1. Model the way | 2.14 | 0.52 | 2.05 | 0.65 | 0.50 | 0.63 |
| 2. Inspire a shared vision | 2.08 | 0.56 | 1.87 | 0.58 | 1.26 | 0.22 |
| 3. Challenge the process | 2.19 | 0.59 | 2.01 | 0.50 | 1.11 | 0.28 |
| 4. Enable others to act | 2.37 | 0.64 | 2.08 | 0.60 | 1.61 | 0.12 |
| 5. Encourage the heart | 2.25 | 0.66 | 2.35 | 0.62 | -0.57 | 0.57 |
| Post-test | | | | | | |
| 1. Model the way | 3.99 | 0.62 | 2.17 | 0.66 | 9.13 | .001* |
| 2. Inspire a shared vision | 3.99 | 0.66 | 1.93 | 0.58 | 11.69 | .001* |
| 3. Challenge the process | 3.94 | 0.63 | 2.13 | 0.50 | 10.48 | .001* |
| 4. Enable others to act | 4.17 | 0.59 | 2.30 | 0.58 | 12.85 | .001* |
| 5. Encourage the heart | 4.13 | 0.59 | 2.43 | 0.61 | 11.42 | .001* |

Note: **p* < .05.

Discussion

For the study, the program enhanced and promoted student leadership skills based on Kouzes and Posner's (2018) five practices of exemplary leaders, which is one of the well-established transformational leadership frameworks that promotes young adolescent students to become young leaders and mobilize others to be leaders in the field of education (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). It focuses on actual behaviors of the leader and is one of the most current and popular leadership theories (Northouse, 2018). As a guideline for leaders, Konuk and Posner (2021) stated that the five practices of exemplary leaders are relevant for students and students' environments (Kouzes & Posner, 2018; Martin, 2019).

According to the findings, participants in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group after participating in the intervention student leadership training program. Considering pre- and post-tests' mean scores of both groups, the experimental group's mean score of the post-test was 1.83 higher than the pre-test mean score while the control group's mean score of the post-test was only 0.12 higher than the pre-test mean score. It could be seen that

differences of mean scores between pre-test and post-test of the experimental group were from the student leadership training program, parent involvement, and activities students participated in at school. According to Boonrusmee and Thongseiratch (2022), growth and development of adolescents includes not only physical growth but also intellect, emotions and social skills. On the one hand, all adolescents develop physical growth, intellect, emotions and social skills at their own pace. On the other hand, there are guidelines to enhance adolescents' intellect, emotions and social skills (Boonrusmee & Thongseiratch, 2022). Consequently, it is advisable to acknowledge teachers to include activities that can help develop students' intellect, emotional and social skills. The student leadership training program can be seen consistent with these guidelines as one of the guidelines to enhance adolescents' emotional development is modeling the way. Activity 2 (Me in the photo) and Activity 3 (Who is the leader?) in the student leadership training program should be promoted. For Activity 2, students can identify and exemplify their values, illustrate the idea of identifying values, and present their own idea in the presence of their friends. For Activity 3, students can reflect on how they act, and illustrate the idea and present it in the presence of their friends.

The results of this study were in line with other studies about the impact of leadership development programs. Konuk and Posner (2021), for example, studied the effectiveness of a student leadership programs in Turkey and found that all five practices, which included model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart, demonstrated a positive effect on the growth of student leadership after attending a leadership program.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the overall student leadership of both experimental and control groups had low levels before attending the student leadership training program. After the program ended, the mean leadership score of the experimental group was higher than those of the control group, the experimental group showed significant gains in their performance on the post-test as opposed to the control group. Students involved in the student leadership training program were impacted positively in terms of their leadership capabilities.

For future studies, student leadership training program for lower primary school students or younger students should be developed. Since leadership can be learned and nurtured, it can also enhance young students to possess 21st century skills as they are desirable characteristics of students in the 21st century. Another important aspect for the Office of the Basic Education Commission to consider is to prioritize the enhancement of student leadership by developing student leadership activities as core activities that every school should include in the school curriculum. Also, in order to carry out this leadership training program efficiently, there should be a pre-test regarding participating students' listening, speaking, reading, writing, communication and computer skills before they attend the training program. This should be done because the facilitator or trainer will be able to provide activities according to participants' skills.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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