

The role of student leadership in academic achievement: a pathway to framework development

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is widely recognized in fostering personal development and academic achievement of every student. This study explores the relationship between leadership involvement and academic performance, identifying influencing factors, best practices, and a framework for development. Using a mixed-method approach with concurrent triangulation, 179 randomly selected undergraduate student leaders completed a validated survey analyzed through Spearman's rank-order correlation, while 12 purposively selected participants underwent semi-structured interviews analyzed thematically. Findings show a strong positive correlation ($r_s=0.744$, $p<0.001$) between leadership involvement and academic achievement. Leadership fosters skill development, personal growth, motivation, and support systems. Best practices include capacity-building programs, inclusivity, recognition, supportive structures, and collaboration. A structured framework was developed to systematically enhance and sustain student leadership's role in academic excellence. Institutional application highlights the need for universities to integrate leadership development into academic programs through structured mentorship, faculty engagement, governance mechanisms, and policy support. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can optimize student leadership initiatives by providing resources, recognizing achievements, and fostering an inclusive environment that supports holistic growth. The findings have significant implications for higher education policies and practices, emphasizing that well-structured leadership programs cultivate future-ready individuals capable of excelling academically and beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Student leadership is not limited to formal positions but also an avenue to emerge in academic settings. They inspire and motivate their peers through their actions and ideas and improve their personal academic standing. This holistic development of leadership qualities is critical in shaping their academic excellence. Taking on leadership roles teaches them the significance of responsibility, as they balance their academic duties with their leadership obligations. It also instills accountability for their actions and decisions. Meanwhile, student leadership is the ability of students to influence, guide, and inspire their co-officers, friends and institution towards achieving their organization's shared goals and fostering a positive environment. It embodies the development of leadership skills among students and by taking on leadership roles. Student leaders also learn to balance their responsibilities, cultivate teamwork, collaboration,

empowerment, and build a sense of accountability. Moreover, they often serve as role models, demonstrating integrity, empathy to their peers, and dedication. Their influence helps shape the behavior and attitudes of their peers, encouraging a culture of respect and inclusivity. Through participation in student councils, they provide a voice for the student body, ensuring that their needs and concerns are addressed. Additionally, opportunities in leadership allow them to enhance skills and have experiences that prepare them for future roles in academic, professional, and civic life. On the other hand, academic achievement pertains to the measurable performance of a student in their educational pursuits to achieve the completion of academic programs. It reflects the extent to which a student has attained specific learning competencies, learnings and developed skills in various disciplines. Academic achievement is a key indicator of educational success and is often used to assess the effectiveness of an institution in delivering instructions.

Consequently, student leadership has been studied extensively in the existing literature and studies that have examined the relationship between student leadership and academic achievement. It investigated the relationship between student leadership and academic performance, finding that student leadership had a positive effect on academic performance [1]. They also found that student leadership was linked with higher grades, better performance, and higher levels of engagement in the classroom. Meanwhile, it was found out that student leadership is associated with higher levels of self-efficacy, motivation, and increased engagement in learning [2]. Additionally, it was demonstrated that student leadership led to increased academic performance and success in college [3]. Simultaneously, research has demonstrated that student leadership is associated with higher levels of confidence, self-esteem, and social skills [4].

Student leadership has been positively linked to academic achievement. Studies have found that students who are in leadership roles tend to have higher scores than students who are not in leadership roles [5]. Additionally, student leaders also have access to more resources and support which help them to succeed in their studies. Student leaders are engaged in the classroom and take ownership of their learning, resulting in better academic outcomes [6]. In addition, students who take on leadership roles are more motivated, engaged in their learning, and less likely to drop out of school. Finally, students who take on leadership roles tend to have better problem-solving capabilities, better communication skills, and a better sense of self-worth [7]. With these, this study explored the relationship between student leadership involvement and academic achievement, determined how student leadership influences the academic performance of student leaders, and identified the best practices for promoting student success through student leadership programs. Moreover, the researchers developed a framework undertaken to promote student leadership and achieve academic excellence across the university.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student leadership is important in shaping academic achievement of students. It fosters essential skills, promotes engagement, and creates structured support systems within academic institutions. Leadership experiences provide students with opportunities that contribute to academic success including the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, and interpersonal skills [8], [9]. It is also shown in the existing studies that student leaders often demonstrate higher levels of motivation, self-discipline, and resilience, which positively influence their academic performance [10], [11]. Leadership participation also enhances students' sense of responsibility and goal-setting abilities, fostering a stronger commitment to academic excellence [12].

Moreover, research shows that student leadership involvement has a mutually reinforcing relationship with academic achievement. It was found that student leaders who actively participate in governance, student organizations, and extracurricular leadership roles develop a sense of responsibility and organizational skills that translate into improved academic performance [13]. Similarly, it argues that leadership training enhances students' ability to manage academic workloads effectively, leading to improved grade point average (GPA) and learning outcomes [14]. Leadership development programs encourage engagement in collaborative learning, critical decision-making, and self-efficacy, all of which contribute to academic success [15]. Furthermore, structured institutional support, such as mentorship programs, faculty involvement, and guidance systems, provides student leaders with the necessary resources to balance leadership responsibilities with academic demands [12].

Simultaneously, it emphasizes the role of co-curricular leadership activities in academic performance. It was found that students involved in leadership roles within student organizations exhibited higher levels of cognitive engagement and self-directed learning [16]. Meanwhile, it highlights those students who engage in leadership experiences report greater academic and social integration, ultimately improving retention rates and academic success [17]. In addition, student leaders tend to develop superior communication and networking skills, which enhance their ability to navigate academic challenges [18].

3. METHOD

This study employed a concurrent triangulation design under a mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance data validity and depth [19]. By using both approaches in parallel, the study triangulated data to explore the influence of student leadership on academic achievement. This design provided comprehensive insights into their relationship and the impact of leadership experiences on students' academic performance.

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents who answered the survey questionnaire. Random sampling was used to select undergraduate student leaders, ensuring a representative sample [20]. A total of 179 respondents participated, with 51 males and 128 females. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 174 are single, while 3 of them are married and 2 are separated. Most respondents (133) were aged 19-21, while 19 were 16-18, and 27 were 22 or older. Moreover, the respondents come from various year levels, with a fairly balanced distribution. This shows that 1st year students comprised 21 respondents, 2nd year were 42, 3rd year had 63 which is the largest group, and 4th year composed of 53 respondents. Simultaneously, the vast majority of the respondents, 173 have a regular academic standing, meaning they are enrolled in the prescribed curriculum and have not fallen behind. In contrast, only 6 respondents have an irregular status, possibly due to academic delays or program shifts. In addition, the data shows varying levels of leadership experience among respondents which shows that the largest group has 1 to 2 years of leadership experience while the 3 to 4 years composed of 37 respondents, and 5 years and above has 39 respondents, respectively.

Additionally, purposive sampling was employed to select 12 student leaders for in-depth interviews, ensuring diverse perspectives. Participants, aged 18-24, included an equal gender distribution (6 males, 6 females). Selection criteria required active enrollment, a leadership role within the university, and at least two years of leadership experience. Quantitative data was collected through a self-made survey in undergraduate students. The survey includes questions related to student leadership and academic achievement such as leadership activities, academic performance, and self-efficacy. This was validated using Cronbach alpha and three field experts to ensure its consistency. On the other hand, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences, with the interview guide also validated by field experts. Further, the study used surveys to quantify the relationship between student leadership and academic achievement and interviews to gain deeper insights. By combining the two approaches, researchers gained a richer understanding of the relationship between student leadership and academic achievement. Data analysis included Spearman's rho for quantitative findings and thematic analysis for qualitative patterns.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profile in the survey

Profiles		Frequency
Gender assigned at birth	Male	51
	Female	128
Civil status	Single	174
	Married	3
	Separated	2
Age	16-18	19
	19-21	133
	22-above	27
Year level	1st year	21
	2nd year	42
	3rd year	63
	4th year	53
Academic standing	Regular	173
	Irregular	6
Years of experience being a leader	1-2 years	104
	3-4 years	37
	5 and above years	39

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight significant insights into the relationship between student leadership involvement and academic success, as well as the multifaceted factors contributing to effective leadership development. This section integrates the statistical results with supporting literature and best practices, offering a comprehensive discussion of the outcomes and their implications for enhancing leadership initiatives in educational settings.

4.1. Correlation of student leadership involvement and academic achievement

Table 2 shows the Spearman's rank-order correlation ($r_s=0.744$, $p<0.001$) which revealed a strong positive relationship between student leadership involvement and academic achievement. With a sample of 179 student leaders, the results confirm that higher leadership engagement aligns with better academic performance. This correlation reiterated that leadership roles foster essential skills like time management, organization, and self-discipline, which enhance academic success. Additionally, leadership provides motivation, responsibility, and alignment with academic goals, reinforcing its positive impact on student achievement.

Table 2. Correlation of student leadership involvement and academic achievement

Variables	Spearman's rho (ρ)	p-value	Interpretation
Student leadership involvement and academic achievement	0.744	<0.001	Strong positive correlation

Research demonstrated that leadership activities cultivate essential skills like time management, organization, communication, and self-discipline, contributing to academic success [21]. Students in leadership roles performed better academically due to increased responsibility and motivation [22]. Student involvement theory also supports the idea that extracurricular participation enhances development [23]. It shows that leadership fosters self-efficacy, resilience, and critical thinking [24]. Empirical evidence further supports this link, with a study reporting a significant positive correlation (Spearman's $\rho=0.710$, $p<0.001$) between leadership involvement and academic performance.

4.2. Influence of student leadership in the academic performance of college student leaders

Student leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic performance of college student leaders by fostering essential skills, personal growth, and the ability to balance multiple responsibilities. Through leadership experiences, students develop critical competencies such as teamwork, organizational management, and problem-solving, which enhance both their academic and professional success.

4.2.1. Skill development

The development of leadership skills including teamwork and organizational management is fundamental to the personal and academic growth of student leaders. These interrelated competencies enable students to acquire practical and interpersonal skills essential for success in their academic and professional journeys. Skill development in leadership roles is highly transferable to academic settings, driving both academic and personal success [25]. Participation in student leadership activities creates a dynamic platform for self-improvement, fostering meaningful relationships, and refining organizational capabilities. It emphasizes that the integration of these skills enhances academic outcomes while preparing students for future professional challenges [26]. As shared by a student leader:

"Joining a student organization helped me improve time management, communication, and problem-solving skills. It also boosted my leadership abilities, confidence, and preparedness for future challenges while fostering connections and friendships with like-minded individuals."
(SL2, 22, female)

Additionally, strong organizational skills have been linked to academic achievement, as students who effectively self-regulate and manage responsibilities tend to excel [27]. Furthermore, as expressed by the student leaders:

"Fostering a supportive university environment that provides resources, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration further strengthens student leadership development." (SL3, 18, male)
"Encouraging initiatives such as leadership campaigns and workshops further enhances these competencies, ensuring that student organizations recognize individual accomplishments and contributions." (SL4, 21, female)

4.2.2. Personal growth and motivation

Leadership experiences play a transformative role in fostering personal growth, encompassing confidence-building, self-discovery, and motivation for excellence. These experiences empower students to realize their potential and strive for success, equipping them with the necessary tools to build self-confidence

and explore their identities. It explores leadership identity development and found that involvement in leadership activities fosters a strong sense of belonging and self-confidence [28]. Similarly, students in leadership roles develop a clear sense of identity and purpose [29] and heightened academic motivation among student leaders [30]. Students affirm the importance of personal growth through leadership roles:

“...having regular consultation and providing positive feedback helps to maintain students’ confidence and direction in their goals.” (SL5, 19, male)

“Leadership also fosters self-discipline, confidence, and motivation, ultimately benefiting academic success.” (SL1, 23, male)

“Moreover, the promotion of cooperative learning and academically focused organizations through leadership further enhances students’ commitment to excellence.” (SL4, 21, female)

4.2.3. Challenges of balancing roles

Balancing academic, personal, and leadership responsibilities presents significant challenges for student leaders, often leading to stress, role strain, or burnout. Effective time management, prioritization, and institutional support are essential in mitigating these difficulties. Student perspectives highlight these challenges:

“Time management of student leaders can hinder balance of their responsibilities. Cooperation or participation of other students can determine the success of an event.” (SL11, 19, female)

The importance of prioritizing tasks based on urgency and importance, which is particularly relevant for student leaders are emphasized [31], [32]. Additionally, it was found that leadership roles often correlate with higher stress levels due to competing responsibilities [33]. As mentioned by the student leader:

“The overwhelming responsibilities associated with both academic and organizational commitments can lead to burnout and negatively impact academic performance.” (SL3, 18, male)

However, another students added that:

“...with proper support and time management, student leadership can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience.” (SL8, 23, female)

4.2.4. Support systems and guidance

Mentorship, faculty/adviser support, and structured guidance play a critical role in the success of student leaders. These support mechanisms provide necessary resources, encouragement, and a framework for navigating leadership responsibilities. Effective support systems enhance leadership and academic success by addressing emotional, intellectual, and logistical challenges. It emphasizes the importance of mentoring relationships in fostering student development, particularly in leadership and self-confidence [34]. Student testimonials reflect the significance of these support systems:

“The most effective strategies for promoting student success through student leadership include encouraging mentorship programs, and promoting a balance between academic and leadership responsibilities.” (SL8, 23, female)

“Universities also contribute by offering leadership training workshops, faculty mentorship, and student affairs resources.” (SL7, 20, female)

“Faculty and staff members play a vital role in creating a positive and encouraging environment that supports student leadership development.” (SL5, 19, male)

4.3. Best practices of academic institution in promoting student success through leadership programs

Academic institutions promote student success through leadership programs by equipping students with essential skills, fostering inclusivity, and providing strong support systems. Best practices include capacity-building programs, mentorship, recognition, and effective collaboration, ensuring student leaders thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

4.3.1. Capacity-building programs

Capacity-building programs are essential in equipping students with leadership competencies through structured workshops, skills enhancement initiatives, mentorship opportunities, and role-specific training. These programs promote student success by fostering experiential learning, continuous improvement, and intentional guidance. Institutions adopt a comprehensive approach by integrating these

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components into leadership initiatives, ensuring students are not only prepared for their roles but also inspired to achieve academic and personal excellence. Supporting leadership development in this way benefits both the individual students and the broader campus community, fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and success. As one student emphasized:

“Resources to support college students in their leadership roles include seminar programs and workshop programs focused on developing communication, decision-making, and time management skills.” (SL9, 21, male)

Similarly, workshops utilize case studies, role-playing, and group discussions to engage students actively, allowing them to apply concepts in realistic scenarios [35]. Additionally, an emphasis on interpersonal and communication skills ensures that student leaders can effectively collaborate and manage diverse teams. Regular evaluations provide students with actionable insights for improvement [36]. This experiential learning is evident in students’ experiences, as one student noted:

“My experiences I had are to give students mentorship opportunities to develop leadership skills by organizing events, representing their peers, and working with teachers or school administrators. I learn about teamwork, responsibility, and communication, helping them grow both personally and academically.” (SL7, 20, female)

4.3.2. Inclusivity and diversity

Promoting inclusivity and diversity in student leadership programs is critical to ensuring equitable opportunities and diverse representation. These programs emphasize inclusive participation, diversity in leadership, and equal opportunities to create environments where all students, regardless of their backgrounds or identities, can contribute meaningfully and thrive. Universities ensure equal access to leadership roles and foster a welcoming, diverse environment to enhance collaboration and creativity. As a student observed:

“Different development of plans that can be crucial in such events and significant for the involvement of various courses or students in the university.” (SL8, 23, female)

Moreover, the integration of inclusivity and diversity into leadership programs empowers underrepresented groups while enriching the overall leadership experience through collaboration and innovation. Universities prioritize these practices by embedding inclusivity and diversity into their leadership development strategies, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to contribute and grow.

“Encouraging inclusivity and diversity in leadership roles will help build a stronger, more representative organization.” (SL5, 19, male)

Leadership opportunities are well-publicized and accessible to all students, particularly underrepresented groups [37]. Universities actively recruit students from different academic, cultural, and social backgrounds for leadership positions [38] and equip student leaders with skills to understand and respect cultural differences, fostering inclusion [39]. Highlighting the achievements of leaders from diverse backgrounds reinforces the value of varied perspectives.

4.3.3. Recognition and motivation

Recognizing and motivating student leaders is crucial for sustaining their engagement and commitment. Institutions implement reward systems to acknowledge student leaders’ efforts, boosting their morale and encouraging further participation [40], [41]. By valuing students’ efforts and celebrating their successes, institutions enhance motivation, retention, and the overall impact of leadership programs. A student shared:

“...whether with incentives, rewards, or just a kind word, inspires students to pursue excellence.” (SL9, 21, male)

Additionally, recognition and appreciation are not merely acts of validation; they are investments in building a thriving and sustainable leadership culture.

“...acknowledging and appreciating student accomplishments.” (SL7, 20, female)

Institutions host award ceremonies to celebrate the achievements of student leaders [42] and emphasize the importance of celebrating successes to enhance motivation.

“... recognize the accomplishments of every individual and celebrate successes to enhance motivation.” (SL5, 19, male)

4.3.4. Supportive structures and resources

Supportive structures and resources provide a foundation for student leadership success. These include financial support, institutional resources, and organizational frameworks to sustain and enhance leadership activities. Universities provide funding, mentorship, and academic flexibility to enable student leaders to balance responsibilities effectively. Effective support systems demonstrate a commitment to leadership development as a cornerstone of student success. As one student noted:

“Motivations by the parents, teachers, advisers and also financial support from the school.” (SL4, 21, female)

Consequently, these structures enhance the effectiveness of leadership initiatives while ensuring their sustainability and inclusivity. Universities establish clear governance structures, policies, and guidelines to support student leaders.

“When it comes to resources, the biggest resource that we have is the people, the manpower, and the support from each other. Because we will not gain our sponsorships, IGP, and membership fee collection if no one is really initiating to do it.” (SL3, 18, male)

Establishing defined roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies within leadership organizations ensures smooth operations [43], [44].

4.3.5. Collaboration and communication

These are essential for fostering strong partnerships among student leaders, faculty, and administrators. Universities promote teamwork and shared success by integrating open communication, team collaboration, and networking into leadership programs. These elements create a collaborative environment that fosters trust, cohesion, and success. Effective communication ensures transparency and feedback, while collaboration enhances collective goal achievement [45]. Networking builds bridges to external opportunities, fostering leadership growth and development beyond the campus. As one student explained:

“Communication is the key to accomplish and delegate your tasks with your team members. And if it is not addressed properly, you will end up like a ghost organization.” (SL10, 23, male)

Meanwhile, institutions enhance the leadership experience and equip students with the skills, relationships, and mindset needed to lead effectively both on and off campus by fostering collaboration.

“One of the strategies is encouraging collaboration for students to share their new ideas and experiences.” (SL11, 19, female)

Institutions committed to fostering these elements create an enriching leadership experience, preparing students for future leadership roles in their professional and personal lives.

4.4. Student leadership development and academic excellence framework

The developed framework demonstrated in Figure 1 integrates student leadership and academic achievement to foster excellence in educational institutions. It empowers students to grow as effective leaders while maintaining academic success, creating a holistic and supportive environment for leadership development. Serving as a blueprint, it cultivates future-ready individuals by fostering essential skills, balancing responsibilities, and aligning with the university's mission of producing competent, socially responsible graduates. This framework enhances academic achievement, develops leadership skills, promotes inclusivity, and ensures sustainable leadership programs. It provides structured guidance, equitable access, and recognition mechanisms, strengthening long-term success in leadership initiatives.

The developed framework consists of three phases (i.e., core leadership competencies and academic integration; structured processes; and outcomes) which are interrelated to one another. This ensures a holistic approach to student leadership and academic excellence.

- i) The development of essential leadership skills including time management, organization, collaboration, communication, and self-discipline directly enhances academic performance by equipping students with the ability to manage responsibilities effectively. These skills, in turn, support key leadership roles that contribute to personal growth and motivation, allowing student leaders to balance their academic and leadership responsibilities while fostering a strong sense of responsibility and academic aspirations.
- ii) The framework incorporates structured processes that facilitate skill development and leadership engagement to translate leadership competencies into meaningful experiences. Capacity-building programs, recognition and appreciation, supportive structures, and inclusivity initiatives create an environment that nurtures leadership and academic success. These interconnected processes ensure that student leaders receive the necessary training, encouragement, and resources to thrive.
- iii) The integration of core competencies and structured processes leads to key outcomes: student leadership development and academic excellence. Through continuous engagement in leadership roles supported by institutional programs, student leaders become well-rounded individuals who are prepared for both academic and professional success. Furthermore, the framework fosters a culture of collaboration, responsibility, and continuous improvement, ensuring that leadership development remains sustainable and impactful.

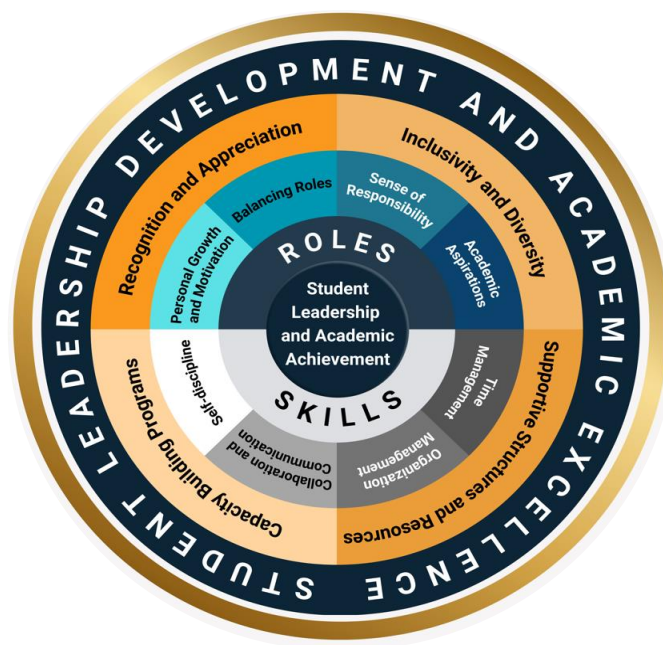


Figure 1. Student leadership development and academic excellence framework

5. CONCLUSION

The findings confirm the mutually reinforcing relationship between leadership involvement and academic achievement, as supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative results highlight how leadership experiences positively impact academic performance, while qualitative insights emphasize the importance of structured institutional support, including mentorship, faculty involvement, and guidance systems. Universities strengthen their leadership programs by investing in capacity-building programs, clear governance structures, inclusivity and diversity, recognition, and strong support systems. Leadership training, mentorship, and resource allocation equip student leaders with the skills to balance academics and leadership roles effectively. Promoting inclusivity ensures equal access to leadership opportunities, while recognition motivates continued engagement. The framework integrates these key components into a holistic approach that fosters leadership development and academic excellence. This sustains a culture of equity, communication, collaboration, and continuous growth within academic institutions by addressing the evolving needs of student leaders.

For recommendations, Institutions should expand mentorship initiatives, actively engage faculty in leadership development, and establish structured support systems to further enhance the impact of leadership programs on student success which highlights in the study that mentorship fosters leadership identity and

academic persistence. Strengthening capacity-building programs and promoting diversity and inclusivity will enhance student engagement and motivation, aligning with studies emphasizing the role of inclusive leadership in student development. Additionally, implementing effective recognition strategies can reinforce motivation and sustained participation in leadership activities. Continuous assessment and refinement of leadership initiatives will ensure long-term sustainability, as institutional support and adaptability are key to maximizing student leadership outcomes. Collaboration among administrators, faculty, and students should be prioritized to create a supportive academic environment where leadership and academic success are seamlessly integrated. For future research, a longitudinal study on the impact of leadership on academic achievement should consider long-term career outcomes, leadership persistence, and professional success. Comparative analyses across different higher education institution (HEI) typologies and settings in the Philippines would provide deeper insights into how institutional structures influence student leadership effectiveness, contributing to a broader understanding of leadership's role in higher education.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nterpretation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**diting

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that no conflict of interests exists.

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in this study.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study complied with ethical guidelines provided by the university research policy.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [JMDA], upon reasonable request.




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