LEADERSHIP STYLES OF UNDERGRADUATES AT UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK (UNIMAS)

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the leadership styles of undergraduates at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). It also attempted to determine the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates, namely systemic leadership and hierarchical leadership and the differences in undergraduates' leadership styles based on a set of demographic variables (gender, type of entry mode, academic program, ethnicity and current academic achievement). Using a cross-sectional research design, data for the study was collected from 160 undergraduates in four faculties, two faculties in hard discipline or science stream respectively, namely, Faculty of engineering (FE), Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST), whereas another two faculties in the area of soft discipline or art stream including Faculty of Economic and Business (FEB) and Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (FACA) in UNIMAS. The research instrument was a questionnaire consisted of two sections comprising background information of the study participants, such as their gender, types of entry mode (Matriculation/Asasi or STPM), academic program (hard discipline and soft discipline) or faculties, ethnicity (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Sarawak Bumiputera, Sabah Bumiputera, and others) and current academic achievement based on Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) whereas another session regarding preferred leadership style, namely, systemic leadership style and hierarchical leadership style. A chi-square test was used to determine undergraduates' leadership styles differed based upon demographic variables, namely, gender, entry mode (Matriculation/Asasi or STPM), academic program (soft discipline or hard discipline), ethnicity (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Sarawak Bumiputera, Sabah Bumiputera, and others), and academic achievement based on CGPA. The findings indicated that none of these variables (gender, ethnicity, entry mode, academic program and academic achievement) had a significant effect on the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates. However, research results did reveal that the participants had a significantly higher preference for systemic style of leadership compared to hierarchical style of leadership.

ABSTRAK

GAYA KEPIMPINAN PELAJAR PRASISWAZAH DI UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK (UNIMAS)

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Kajian ini mengkaji gaya kepimpinan pelajar prasiswazah di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Kajian ini juga bertujuan mengenalpasti gaya kepimpinan yang digemari oleh mahasiswa, iaitu kepimpinan sistemik dan kepimpinan hirarki dan perbezaan dalam gaya kepimpinan berdasarkan pembolehubah demografi (jantina, jenis cara kemasukan, program akademik, etnik dan pencapaian akademik semasa). Dengan reka bentuk kajian keratan rentas, data untuk kajian ini dikumpul menggunakan soal selidik daripada 160 pelajar prasiswazah daripada empat fakulti; dua fakulti dalam aliran sains iaitu Fakulti Kejuruteraan (FK) dan Fakulti Sains dan Teknologi Sumber (FSTS), manakala dua fakulti lain dalam bidang aliran sastera merangkumi Fakulti Ekonomi dan Perniagaan (FEP) dan Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif (FSGK) di UNIMAS. Soal selidik terdiri daripada dua bahagian merangkumi maklumat tentang latar belakang peserta kajian, seperti jantina, jenis kemasukan (Matrikulasi/Asasi atau STPM), program akademik atau fakulti, etnik (Cina , Melayu, India, Bumiputera Sarawak, Bumiputera Sabah, dan lain-lain) dan pencapaian akademik semasa berdasarkan Purata Nilai Gred Kumulatif (PNGK) manakala bahagian lain adalah mengenai gaya kepimpinan yang digemari, iaitu gaya kepimpinan sistemik dan gaya kepimpinan hirarki. Ujian khi-kuasa dua digunakan untuk menentukan kewujudan perbezaan gaya kepimpinan pelajar prasiswajah berdasarkan pada pembolehubah demografi seperti jantina, jenis kemasukan (Matrikulasi/Asasi atau STPM), program akademik, etnik (Cina, Melayu, India, Bumiputera Sarawak, Bumiputera Sabah, dan lain-lain) dan pencapaian akademik berdasarkan PNGK. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak satu pun daripada pembolehubah-pembolehubah (jantina, etnik, cara kemasukan, program akademik dan pencapaian akademik) ini mempunyai kesan terhadap pilihan gaya kepimpinan pelajar prasiswazah. Namun, hasil kajian menunjukkan peserta lebih memilih gaya kepimpinan sistemik berbanding dengan gaya kepimpinan hirarki.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of ten main sections, which covers the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses, research framework, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms and summary of the chapter. The first section discusses the trend and importance for undergraduates to foster leadership skills in today's society. The next four sections discuss the problem statement, research objectives, research questions and research hypotheses of this study. The sixth section provides the research framework of the study as it outlines the independent and dependent variables. The significance and limitation of the study are also presented in the next two sections.

The definitions of term used in this study are also provided in the ninth section, including the conceptual and operational definition. The last section summarizes the chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia aims to change rapidly from an agriculture economy to an industrial economy and moving towards becoming a fully developed nation and a mature democracy by the year 2020. The paradigm shifted from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and from a national to a global economy that called for adaptive, creative solutions that would require a new kind of leadership (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1999).

In 2004, the Central Bank of Malaysia revealed that 77.6% of the respondents claimed that Malaysian graduates were lacking relevant skills and knowledge to work effectively in the workplace (Ng, Abdullah Shamsul Kamariah, Nee, Tiew, & Choo, n.d.). This showed that the employment market required college graduates to possess strong and effective leadership skills. Hence, Ng et al. (n.d.) proposed that a market driven education system was required to create work-ready graduates in Malaysia. It was imperative for the institution of higher learning to provide numerous and practical opportunities for undergraduates to develop such skills in line with the increase in the demand for leadership skills among employees. It had been a common concept that university should equip graduates with proper and relevant skills which were necessary to achieve success in the workplace (Robinson & Garton, 2007). According to Astin and Astin (2000), higher education played a pivotal part in shaping the quality of leadership in modern American society. American higher education emphasized on the issues of preparing students for leadership roles is one of its founding tenets (Smith, 2009).

Burns (1978) noted that "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (cited in Adams & Keim, 2000, p. 2). According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), leadership can be defined "as the art of mobilizing others to struggle for shared aspirations" (p. 30). It consisted of knowledge and skills which influenced and directed others' activities (Khalili, 1994). A person's leadership style is his or her approach of giving direction, motivating people and implementing plans. There were a variety of approaches or leadership styles, based on different assumptions and theories. In other words, the leadership style had been shaped by a variety of experiences. Individuals could demonstrate a variety of leadership styles and some people might even combine leadership styles that appeared contradictory. Normally, a leader is the person who developed and maintained sufficient cohesiveness and motivation to guide his or her subordinates working together as a functioning unit. The leader also positively motivated the behavior of others in order to achieve a predetermined accomplishment or goal (Leister, 2009).

This study was conducted in one of Malaysian public higher education institution, University Malaysia Sarawak, located in Kuching. It was officially incorporated on the 24th December 1992 and the university had developed rapidly with the establishment of eight faculties. The total student population was 5976 and the total staff number was 1456 at UNIMAS (University Malaysia Sarawak, 2008).

There were many views on leadership styles, including autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez faire leadership, hierarchical leadership and systemic leadership. This study investigated two particular types of leadership, namely hierarchical leadership and systemic leadership. Athens State University (ASU) conducted a study and found that their students appeared to be more aligned to the traditional hierarchical style of leadership (Smith, 2009). Allen, Stelzner, and Wielkiewicz (1998) had suggested that an ecology approach (systemic leadership) was preferable compared to leadership based on position or traditional hierarchical as authority was inadequate to face the challenges in today's competitive environment.

Jago and Vroom (1982) conducted a study that dealt with differences in leadership styles of college students. A sample of 161 women and 322 men were asked to assume the role of leader in 30 hypothetical cases and responded with a decision making process. Women were found to be more participative in their self-reported leadership style than men. In addition, women used group decision making procedures more frequently than men (Adams & Keim, 2000). Another study revealed that male respondents showed preference for systemic styles as compared to female respondents (Leister, 2009).

Clark, Freeman, and Britt (1987) found that over 600 colleges and universities offered courses and curricula on leadership. This showed that colleges and universities had a vital role to play in the development of future leaders (Astin & Astin, 2000). In addition, the importance of developing student leadership skills had been acknowledged in college and university mission statements (Bass, 1990). Claire (1999) mentioned that the significance of leadership skills needs to be cultivated in order to adapt to the changing workforce. Mohd Najib Abdul Razak (2006) asserted that the most vital element of leadership in the 21st century was the need to perform and emphasized that the questions of leadership should be taken into consideration in order to facilitate learning apart from developing a leader as an investment.

According to Tichy and Cohen (1997), "leadership talent can be nurtured and it is never too late or early to develop one own leadership abilities and talent of others" (p. 204). Moreover, Smith (2009) stated that "it is incumbent upon the education community to produce graduates who can take up the mantle of leadership as they enter the workforce in the future" (p. 2), likewise preparing the leaders for tomorrow's world.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is essential for higher education to strengthen its approach to leadership education (Astin & Astin, 2000). Many colleges and universities mission statements reflected philosophical goals such as "producing future leaders" and preparing students for citizenry in a global community and fostering leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000). However, Clark (2001) stated that a gap between expectations for skilled leaders and lacking of comprehensive programs to foster leadership skills among students reflected that the higher education community lacked consensus on how to deliver, evaluate or even on the necessity of student leadership programs in the development of future leader.

Astin and Astin (2000) reported on the need for nurturing leadership skills among undergraduates and they added that the notion of leadership and the educational goals of leadership development had been given very little attention by most of the institutions of higher learning education. Furthermore, Dempster and Lizzio (2007) further noted the abundance of literature regarding adult leadership issues and the mirroring lack of research on student leadership issues. Astin and Astin (2000) reported that undergraduates were busy and thus, they were less likely "to become deeply engaged in the kinds of leadership activities that are central to responsible citizenship" (p. 23).

Furthermore, Levin (2002) asserted that colleges have been slow and even pay little attention to respond to society's need for leadership skills and civic engagement but rather emphasized more on the operational needs of business and industry. A lack of research existed on preferred leadership style of the undergraduates in colleges and universities also led to the debate and confusion over how leadership should be taught and how it could be acquired (Clark, 2001). Additionally, many of the researchers did not determine whether there were any differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon demographic factors.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the leadership styles prevalent among undergraduates in UNIMAS and aimed to determine whether there were differences in leadership styles among gender, entry mode, academic program, ethnicity and current academic achievement based on cumulative grade point average (CGPA).

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the leadership styles of undergraduates at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates at UNIMAS,
2. Identify if differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon gender,
3. Identify if differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon entry mode (Matriculation/Asasi or STPM),
4. Identify if differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic program (soft discipline or hard discipline),
5. Identify if differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon ethnicity, and
6. Identify if differences existed among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic achievement.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the questions stated as follows:

1. What were the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates at UNIMAS?
2. Were there significant differences among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon gender?

3. Were there significant differences among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon entry mode (Matriculation/Asasi or STPM)?

4. Were there significant differences among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic program (soft discipline or hard discipline)?

5. Were there significant differences among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon ethnicity? and

6. Were there significant differences among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic achievement?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on these research questions, this study had the following null hypotheses:

H_01: There was no significant difference in the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates at UNIMAS.

H_02: There was no significant difference among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon gender.

H_03: There was no significant difference among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon type of entry mode.

H_04: There was no significant difference among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic program.

H_05: There was no significant difference among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon ethnicity.

H_06: There was no significant difference among undergraduates' leadership styles based upon academic achievement (CGPA).

1.6 Research Framework

The research framework was presented in Figure 1.1 outlining the independent and dependent variables in the study. From Figure 1.1, demographic variables of undergraduates such as gender, type of entry mode, their academic program, ethnicity and current achievement in their academic were independent variables in this study. The demographic variables were assumed to have effects on preferred leadership styles (systemic leadership or hierarchical leadership) of the undergraduates in UNIMAS.

Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**

Demographic variables:

- Gender
- Type of entry mode
- Academic program
- Ethnicity
- Academic achievement

Leadership styles (systemic leadership or hierarchical leadership) of undergraduates in UNIMAS
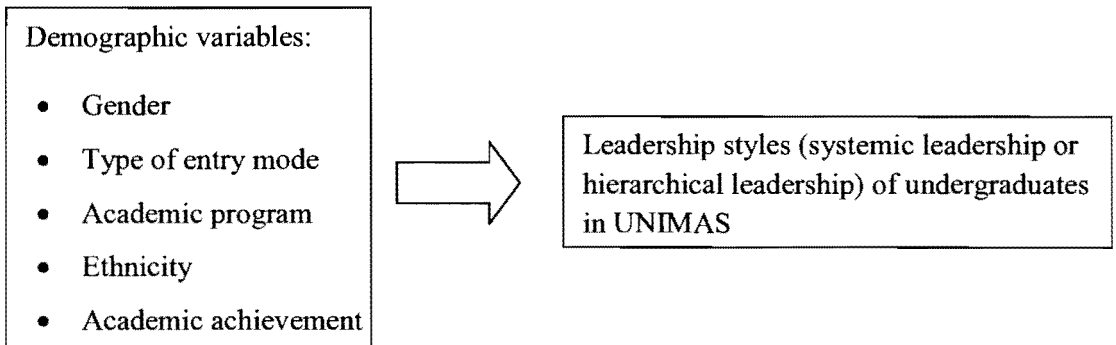
Figure 1.1 Research Framework of the Study

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study regarding the preferred leadership styles of undergraduates is important as the expected outcome from this study would be useful in providing direction for Malaysian higher education for preparing the undergraduates for leadership roles.

It is also expected that this study would contribute towards the understanding and promotion of excellence in leadership in Malaysian public universities and assisted the institution in strengthening the leadership skills of undergraduates in order to meet the growing demands of employers.

As pointed out by Chambers (1992), one of the key elements of education was to prepare individuals to assume leadership roles. Connaughton, Lawrence and Ruben (2003) mentioned that "colleges and universities have a fundamental responsibility to guide the development of the next generation of capable and ethical leaders and that these institutions must do so through a highly focused, multidisciplinary approach" (p. 46). Jacobs (2006) asserted that, it was a need for colleges to provide, promote and encourage undergraduates to engage in leadership training as leadership potential existed in every undergraduate as well as their inner desire to lead and serve.

Leadership development programs at colleges and universities continued to gain popularity due to the increasing need for effective leadership. It was estimated that over 700 colleges and universities acrossed the United States had leadership development programs (Schwartz, Axtman & Freeman, 1998).

The results of this research could be useful specifically for University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) to monitor existing curriculum and provide more leadership program for creating opportunities to enhance leadership skills of students in UNIMAS. Moreover, the results could be used to compare the differences exited among undergraduates' leadership style based on a set of demographic variables including gender, type of entry mode, academic program, ethnicity and current academic achievement. Due to the limited research on leadership styles among undergraduates in university, the results of the study served as a reference for higher education professionals in their future research in order to plan and implement well.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

There were a few limitations in this study. Firstly, this study used questionnaires to collect the data. This method has its own limitation as the respondents possibly ticked their answers anyhow without understanding.

In addition, this study only focused on third year undergraduates in University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and the collected data might not represent first year and second year undergraduates. Moreover, this study only involved four faculties. Two faculties each from the art stream and the science stream respectively were surveyed from the eight faculties in UNIMAS. Thus, the data might not be generalizeable to all the undergraduates from the different faculties in UNIMAS. Additionally, the findings of the study might not be applicable to other institutions of higher learning such as, private universities, polytechnics and colleges.

1.9 Definition of Terms

The definition of terms related to the purposes of this study was stated as follows:

1.9.1 Leadership

Numerous definitions of leadership had been given by researchers over time. No universal point of consensus existed among scholars. Gordon (1955) stated that leadership could be conceptualized as an interaction between a person and the members of a group. Kouzes and Posner (1995) defined leadership as the ability of mobilizing the leader and group members to struggle for shared goal and objective. Nahavandi (2006) declared that the leadership was goal directed and played an active role in groups and organizations.

This study focused on students in University Malaysia Sarawak, involving their preferred leadership styles, namely, the hierarchical leadership and systemic leadership.

1.9.2 Hierarchical Leadership

Loveleena Rajeev (n.d.) defined hierarchical leadership type styles are based on the traditional method of leading that focused on a top-down approach. All course of action were asserted and carried out with formal authority and had little scope for participatory analysis.

In this study, the hierarchical leadership was formal and well-defined, with the leader at the top and the members were required to follow instructions. For those that preferred hierarchical leadership, they were be less likely to invite free-flow of information and were less aware of the complex and diverse nature of today's organization.

1.9.3 Systemic Leadership

Wielkiewicz (2000) defined systemic leadership as the ability to relate a variety of ideas and concepts to organizational success, such as ethics and the need for cooperation and long-term thinking of all individuals to help the organization accomplish goals. Thompson (2006) stated that systemic thinkers and systemic organizations alike would be likely to find more successful in the future and conducive to high level of adaptability and sustainability.

Hence, in this study, the undergraduates who preferred systemic leadership were believed to be more adaptive and successful and they viewed leadership as a cooperative effort and realized the importance of keeping up with a constantly changing environment.

1.9.4 Hard and Soft Discipline

Hard discipline was associated with pure science, computer sciences, engineering, biotechnology and medicine that focused on teacher-oriented approach to learn (Lueddeke, 2003). On the contrary, soft discipline was more associated with social sciences, humanities and arts that emphasized on student-oriented approach to learn (Lindblom-Ylanne, Trigwellb, Nevgia & Ashwinc, 2006).

In this study, four out of eight faculties in UNIMAS were selected for the research. Two faculties were from the hard-discipline or science-stream respectively, namely, Faculty of Engineering (FE), Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST), whereas another two faculties in the area of soft discipline or art stream including Faculty of Economic and Business (FEB) and Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (FACA).

1.10 Summary

This section discusses the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses. It also outlines the research framework of the study and the definition of terms used in this study. This section presents significance of the study as well as limitations of the study. The aspects that are explored in this chapter are the influences of the demographics factor towards leadership styles of undergraduates in UNIMAS. The following chapter provides a review of the literature regarding leadership among undergraduates.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Chapter two provides a review of literature related to this study. Section 2.1 reviews leadership in terms of leadership definition and effective leadership processes. Section 2.2 discusses theories in leadership, which included Trait Theory, Behavioural Theory, Contingency Theory, Transformational Theory and Transactional Theory. Section 2.3 explains the definition of leadership styles whereas section 2.4 explains the importance of leadership development among students and their roles and responsibilities. In addition, section 2.5 discusses studies on the leadership styles of undergraduates. The next two sections focuses on the difference in leadership styles based on gender, ethnicity, the discipline of the study, and current

academic achievement; whereas section 2.6 emphasized on entry mode. The last section presents the summary of this chapter.

2.1 Definition of Leadership

According to Fleishman, Mumford, Zaccaro, Levin, Koratkin, and Hein (1991), there were 65 different classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership in the past 50 years. It could be defined differently by many historians and philosophers based on various contexts. Leadership was the ability to influence the individuals towards the achievement of goals in performing a task (Lussier, 1990; Robbins & Coulter, 2001). It could also be defined as "interpersonal influence, exercised in situations and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal" (Tannenbaum, Weschler, & Massarik, 1961, p. 24). However, leadership was defined as "the attribute of a position, as the characteristics of a person and as a category of behavior" in the social literature (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 301). Fairholm stated that "understanding the role and function of leadership is the single most important intellectual task of this generation, and leading is the most needed skill" (1998, cited in Smith, 2009, p. 12). Leadership required one to develop strong reflective and inquiry communication skills. According to Kotter (1990), leaders communicate vision and direction, align people, motivate, inspire, and energize followers. In addition, Clark (2001) asserted that leadership was a process that was ultimately concerned with fostering change which a person influenced others to accomplish an objective and directed the organization in a way that made it more cohesive and coherent.

Moreover, leadership was also a purposive process which was inherently value-based and provided meaningful direction to collective effort and willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose. The leader was being viewed basically as a change agent, the one who fostered change consistent with the notion that leadership was concerned with change. Bradford and Cohen (1984) stated that a leader was one who

shared responsibility, believed in continuous personal improvement for each individual, and worked to create a common vision. An effective leader must be open for change and capable of a long-term vision and a culturally sensitive world perspective as well as knowing how to marshal resources and motivate people to solve problems in their communities. Peres mentioned that "leaders need to continue to learn so that they are up to tomorrow, rather than just up to date" (n.d., cited in W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 1999, p. 3).

Chemers (1993) characterized effective leadership as the ability to reach goals in which the leader stimulated the group members to cooperate with each other. Effective leadership necessarily required the group to function according to certain principles and values. Besides, it also required the individual members of the group exemplified certain qualities and values that contributed to the effective functioning of the group.

2.2 Leadership Theory

There are many definitions on leadership defined by theorists (Gardner, 1990). Nevertheless, a specific and universally accepted definition of leadership and leadership theory continues to elude researchers and practitioners (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998).

The study of leadership had been plagued with an overabundance of theories with little common direction (Chemers, 1993). The studies on leadership were first started from the very start of the Great Man Approach to explain the leadership. The time spectrum showed a theoretical evolution that advanced from trait theories, to behavioural theories, followed by contingency theories to transformational and transactional theories (Taylor & Machado, 2006).