



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Higher Education

Journal Homepage: <https://ijmshe.com/index.php/pub/index>



Research Article

Leaders Helping Leaders: Strategic Leadership and Mentoring Experiences of Young Leaders in North Cotabato

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: December 9, 2024

Revised: December 24, 2024

Accepted: January 5, 2025

Keywords:

Student Leadership, mentorship of co-leaders, good governance, colaizzi method

Cite as:

Osumo, L. G., & Letigio, G. M. (2025). *Leaders Helping Leaders: Strategic Leadership and Mentoring Experiences of Young Leaders in North Cotabato*. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Higher Education*, 2(1), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.70847/588811>

Abstract

This study delves into the dynamic experiences of youth leaders, specifically student council presidents and vice presidents, across various colleges in North Cotabato. These young leaders navigated the complexities of strategic leadership and mentoring, balancing their roles as students and community representatives. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research captured the richness of their lived experiences. The Colaizzi method was utilized for data analysis, ensuring an in-depth and systematic exploration of the participants' narratives. Ten student leaders, purposively selected, shared insights that brought to light key themes: Duties and Responsibilities of Student Leaders, Acquired Leadership Training and Seminars, Challenges in Achieving Effective Leadership, Schools' Initiatives in Sponsoring Leadership Programs, Specificity of Institutional Training, Training Frequency, Leadership Enhancement Through Mentoring, Exposure to Strategic Leadership, Mentors' Impact, and Passion and Inspiration Derived from Mentors. The findings revealed that leadership training and seminars facilitated by both internal and external institutions significantly shaped the participants' skills and perspectives. Mentorship emerged as a powerful force, with mentors imparting valuable strategies and providing inspiration that deepened the participants' leadership vision. These experiences strengthened their leadership abilities and ignited a passion for service and excellence in their respective roles. This study highlights the indispensable role of institutional initiatives and mentorship in cultivating student leaders. It underscores how tailored leadership programs and guided mentoring journeys equip youth leaders with the confidence, resilience, and skills needed to excel in their dual roles as students and future changemakers.

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Introduction

Mentoring has played a transformative role in the lives of many young people, helping them unlock their potential and realize their leadership abilities. Though it comes with challenges, the advantages far surpass any obstacles, making it a critical tool for youth development. In South Korea, leadership development for the younger generation is at the heart of the nation's growth and future prosperity strategy. This commitment is reflected in the nation's policies, such as the National Youth Policy Institute (2023), which aims to equip youth with the skills and confidence they need to shape a brighter future.

In recent years, South Korea has taken significant steps to further empower its youth, especially with the 2019 amendment lowering the voting age from 19 to 18. This change, part of a broader effort to enhance youth participation, underscores the country's dedication to fostering leadership and creating opportunities for young people to influence their society. The leadership vision in South Korea is not merely about imparting technical knowledge but about cultivating a deeper understanding of human nature, emotional intelligence, and integrity. This holistic approach to leadership ensures that young leaders are well-equipped to meet the demands of an evolving global landscape. In embracing this approach, South Korea is working towards becoming a leader in economic progress, innovation, and citizen welfare, with the youth at the forefront of this vision. Focusing on mentorship, education, and civic engagement ensures that the next generation will actively shape the nation's future and contribute meaningfully to its success (Yang, 2024). This holistic approach emphasizes that leadership growth is not merely about power but about becoming a more principled and well-rounded individual capable of inspiring positive change and progress (Sandua, 2023).

Eva et al. (2021) point out that many adolescent leaders often do not view themselves as decision-makers. This is because, in some cases, adult

leaders need to provide the essential skills, experience, opportunities, and encouragement needed to foster leadership in youth. Furthermore, Khan (2022) suggests that how youth leadership is nurtured through service learning may unintentionally discourage young leaders from actively participating in community development. This creates a gap, leaving youth leaders feeling disconnected from their communities, which hinders their ability to engage meaningfully in local growth and progress.

While higher education institutions (HEIs) often provide a foundation for academic growth, there remains a noticeable gap in training and development for aspiring student leaders, especially those just beginning their leadership journey. As observed, students in HEIs who are said to be aspiring leaders lack mentoring and strategic leadership. They are considered neophytes when leading their co-students or managing things in order. In contrast, they need various viewpoints in leading future generations, like Generation Z and Alpha learners, in governing and taking responsibility for the student body to the various HEIs in North Cotabato. Hence, many novice student leaders still need more exposure to stiffly structure the mentoring and strategic leadership frameworks within them that could significantly enhance their leadership potential by learning from words and how leaders lend their hands to their co-leaders. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the various leadership strategies and mentoring experiences encountered by members of student councils, with a particular focus on the executive branches within colleges and universities. By delving into these experiences, the researchers aim to show how effective leadership practices and mentoring are a cornerstone in shaping young leaders, preparing them for future leadership challenges within and beyond their academic institutions.

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Research Questions

This study narrates the experiences of student leaders from various HEIs in North Cotabato. It sought to answer the following questions.

1. What themes emerged from the interviews on the experiences of student leaders from various HEIs in North Cotabato regarding leaders helping leaders toward strategic leadership and mentoring?
2. What are aspiring leaders' fundamental needs regarding leadership exposure and development?
3. How do various HEIs support their student leaders in honing them to be effective?
4. How do various HEI student leaders engage in strategic leadership and mentoring?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this study were based on three key frameworks: Leadership Theory, Mentorship Theory, and Good Governance Theory.

First, the Leadership Theory, particularly the Behavioral Theory of Leadership by Likert (1960), helped explain how specific individuals emerge as leaders. According to this theory, student leaders develop their leadership abilities by observing and imitating the behaviors of other leaders. These behaviors are often viewed as exemplary qualities that can be adopted to enhance leadership effectiveness. Strong ethics and moral integrity are central qualities the theory emphasizes, as these characteristics play a significant role in shaping a leader's capacity to guide and inspire others.

Next, the Mentorship Theory, based on Kram's Mentor Role Theory (1985), highlighted the importance of mentors in nurturing leadership skills. Kram identified two primary functions of mentorship: career-related support and psychosocial support. This theory underscored

how mentorship influences the growth of student leaders, aiding them in their leadership tasks and responsibilities. Mentors, often experienced leaders, impart their knowledge, guiding mentees on the attitudes, values, and characteristics necessary for effective leadership. The mentor-mentee relationship helps student leaders navigate their roles and responsibilities, particularly in their ability to serve their peers and the school community.

The third theoretical framework, Good Governance Theory, as outlined by Stoker (1998), provided insights into governance dynamics by presenting five key propositions: the involvement of both governmental and non-governmental actors, the blurring of responsibilities across various sectors, the interdependence of institutions in collective actions, the concept of self-governing networks, and the emphasis on the capacity to achieve results without solely relying on governmental authority. This theory tied together the previous two by showing how effective governance could result from integrating strong leadership and mentorship. In the context of this study, Good Governance Theory helped answer critical questions about the interplay between leadership and mentorship, illustrating how these two elements contribute to the effectiveness of governance structures within student leadership.

These three theories formed the basis for exploring the study's leadership, mentorship, and governance dynamics. They guided the development of specific research questions to test or refine these theoretical concepts to understand how leadership and mentorship contribute to good governance. Through this framework, the study aimed to either confirm or challenge the applicability of these theories in the context of student leadership and management of aspiring leaders in North Cotabato

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Materials and Methods

Research Design

The researchers employed a narrative experiential research design, which focused on the lived experiences of the selected participants in the study by telling their stories (Bailey & Bailey, 2021). This design also addressed deeply rooted qualitative research, where understanding the various perspectives, feelings, and personal journeys of individuals are emphasized. The fact that researchers were able to interpret and look beyond based on the HEIs student leaders' factual experiences on how they help leaders as leaders in their different points of view in strategic leadership and mentorship.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this research were ten (10) student leaders from various HEIs in North Cotabato. They are enrolled in public and private schools and considered bona fide students as they are enrolled in the specific semester 2023-2024. Moreover, participants were inclusively selected based on their qualifications as freshly elected student leaders in colleges or universities and have supreme roles in the study body's executive branch (President and Vice-president). Also, based on the things that were not mentioned were excluded from the interview: those who are not associated with any college or universities in North Cotabato and those who have legislative roles in the student body. Moreover, the participants were selected based on purposive sampling due to their knowledge and experience (Campbell et al., 2020) that they shared during the study.

Study Locale

This study was conducted in North Cotabato, as it was officially known as the Province of Cotabato. It is one of the provinces in the region

of SOCCSKSARGEN, Mindanao, Philippines. The province highlights its richness in terms of agriculture; it is also well appreciated for its aesthetics in nature and cultural diversity.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed the Colaizzi method to systematically analyze the responses from student council participants, which were based on the interviews conducted. Colaizzi's widely used phenomenological method involves a detailed and structured data analysis process designed to uncover the essence of experiences shared by participants. This method begins with an accurate transcription of interviews, ensuring every participant's response is thoroughly documented (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). Afterward, the researchers reviewed the transcriptions multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content before proceeding to the following analysis phase.

Each interview statement was carefully broken down into manageable segments, with meaningful codes assigned to capture the essence of the responses. As part of the coding process, the researchers tracked the frequency of each code, ensuring that patterns and trends could be identified. Detailed memos were added to the coding system to enrich the analysis further, with direct quotes from the participants included to support the emerging themes. The researchers then identified common themes by clustering related ideas, which helped define the key patterns and insights from the data.

To guide the analysis, the researchers utilized a deductive thematic approach, using predetermined themes grounded in the core theories of Leadership, Mentorship, and Good Governance as a framework. These theories helped shape the interpretation of the data and allowed the researchers to extract meaningful

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insights from the participants' responses. Using Colaizzi's method, the researchers ensured a rigorous, structured, and insightful data analysis

highlighting student leaders' experiences and perceptions.

Results and Discussion

Table 1.

Experiences of Novice Student Leaders

Themes	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Duties and Responsibilities of Student Leaders ▪ Acquired Leadership Training and Seminars ▪ Student Leader's Challenges in Achieving Effective Leadership ▪ Schools Initiative in Sponsoring Leadership Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Act as role models and take responsibility of the student body and provide full action for student rights to be guided in every college and university. ▪ They are more prepared and engaged to fulfill their skills in leadership, creativity, and critical thinking. ▪ Support are less provided due to limited access of funds and program development for students. ▪ Fundamental orientations and training are set by the schools to make the leaders who are just new in the field of leadership.

Experiences of Novice Student Leaders

Table 1 indicates that student leaders often find that school-based training activities provide valuable personal and leadership development opportunities. These experiences enable them to sharpen their communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills, which are essential for their roles (Norman & Zoncita, 2023). Participating in training programs helps student leaders build confidence as they learn how to effectively manage responsibilities, collaborate with peers, and handle challenges within the school setting. Moreover, the mentorship and guidance they receive during these activities enhance their capacity to motivate and support fellow students (McNair et al., 2022; Friaes, 2021). Overall, school-based training prepares student leaders to succeed in their current roles and equips them with skills transferable to future leadership opportunities in both academic and professional environments.

Duties and Responsibilities of Student Leaders

In the role of student leaders, 80% of the participants (8 out of 10) emphasized that their

responsibilities included guiding fellow leaders, representing their peers, serving as role models, and supporting other students by addressing their needs on campus. Additionally, one participant (10%) noted that in the event of the president's absence, the vice president would step in as acting president, responsible for managing their team.

Eslit (2021) highlights that encouraging student to take on leadership roles cultivates a culture that values ownership, collaboration, and community within and beyond the classroom. Through the development of student leaders, individuals acquire vital skills that benefit them during their time as students and serve them well into adulthood (Beltran, 2019). This insight underscores the importance of leadership activities as they teach students skills that will shape their future personal and professional lives. This suggests that the leadership experiences gained during school significantly prepare students for adulthood. Students are better equipped to face future challenges as they are nurtured and acquainted with their early leadership skills. As aspiring leaders are led to the

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environment of leadership, they have the trait that they can freely show their traits as leaders without following a system or any formal rules. Thus, the leadership theory of Likert (1960) shows that aspiring leaders will always showcase their skills naturally, even if they are not told to do so, and they can easily capture things that need to be done. Therefore, it is relevant to encourage students to engage in leadership training programs and seminars inside and outside the school. These opportunities help students cultivate their abilities, refine their leadership skills, and identify areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to their growth as capable and responsible leaders.

Acquired Leadership Training and Seminars

Based on their responses, all participants (100%) shared that they had engaged in some form of leadership development program or seminar, either before or after assuming the roles of the student council's executive branch (President or Vice President). Additionally, each participant was involved in a youth leadership development program and had become a member of a non-governmental organization (NGO). As part of their training, they attended leadership seminars and participated in team-building activities, which helped enhance their leadership capabilities.

As the participants described, leadership training equips individuals with the necessary skills to lead effectively, including the often-challenging abilities to persuade and influence others—especially those over whom they have limited authority. These skills are considered essential for successful leadership. Such training upholds creativity and critical thinking, enabling leaders to approach challenges innovatively.

Through leadership development, the participants noted that they could expand their knowledge and hone their skills, which would benefit them as they continued their leadership journey. Moreover, leadership training encourages student leaders to approach decision-making analytically

(Dedicatoria et al., 2023). They recognized that decisions without thorough analysis could negatively impact others and the organization. As leaders, they felt a deep sense of responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and understood the importance of careful, informed choices.

Student Leader's Challenges in Achieving Effective Leadership

Despite the challenges posed by the remote schools and the unavailability of funds, each participant was fortunate to have had access to some form of training before the difficulties in the far-flung areas with limited support and funds. This early exposure to training opportunities was particularly beneficial, as it allowed them to develop valuable skills that would later serve them well in their leadership roles. According to Morgan (2020), attending seminars can have several positive outcomes, such as improving communication skills, gaining specialized knowledge, building professional relationships, and reigniting motivation and confidence. Seminars allow the participants to immerse themselves in a subject through presentations and discussions led by industry experts.

The importance of attending seminars, as they mentioned, particularly those focused on enhancing personal communication, expanding knowledge in specific areas, and fostering connections, became apparent. These events gave attendees a deeper understanding and more excellent proficiency in the fields they chose to explore. Additionally, they offered a platform for participants to connect with others, especially those with similar interests. This networking enriched their knowledge and helped them find inspiration from their peers, enabling them to grow personally and as leaders. Even if the leaders are highly challenged due to some circumstances, these leaders will always show exemplary qualities. Not only by interacting with others and learning from their experiences, the participants were better prepared to take on leadership responsibilities and inspire those

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around them. Despite implementing a few seminars, it is still considered a powerful tool for honing skills, expanding networks, and boosting leadership capabilities. However, their behavior as leaders will always stand out to persevere and succeed in their goal to be better leaders and impact their co-student leaders.

Schools Initiative in Sponsoring Leadership Programs

The school played a significant role in supporting student leaders by organizing training sessions and seminars that equipped them with essential skills for their leadership journey. These activities included team-building exercises and leadership workshops tailored to help new officers navigate their responsibilities. As a result, student leaders became better prepared to manage activities, projects, and programs effectively, as they have stated based on their testimonies.

Through these initiatives, schools foster important values such as authenticity, honesty,

and determination, which are crucial for developing future leaders (Villar, 2021). These efforts suggest that the academic environment is not just a place for intellectual growth but also a space for character development. Students are encouraged to explore their unique strengths and capabilities by participating in daily school activities.

Moreover, the school experience provides a foundation for students to internalize good values, which they can apply to their personal and professional lives. The lessons and insights gained through these seminars and day-to-day learning experiences empower students to build themselves into confident and effective leaders. This holistic approach ensures that students succeed academically and emerge as individuals capable of making meaningful community contributions.

Table 2.

Igniting Participation of Student Leaders from Institutional Programs

Themes	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specificity of Training Provided by Institutions ▪ Student Leaders' Training Frequency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training are more focused on leadership traits and understanding on how the application of decision-making works. ▪ An organized leadership training program is impactful to have one to three times a year to be implemented for successful leadership.

Igniting Participation of Student Leaders from Institutional Programs

Table 2 indicates that the participation of student leaders in institutional programs is vital for fostering a sense of responsibility and community. Student leaders develop crucial skills such as organization, communication, and teamwork by engaging in various school activities (Petre, 2020). These programs provide a platform for leaders to influence their peers and actively contribute to the institution's improvement. As they take on roles in these initiatives, student leaders in the Philippines gain real-world experience, preparing them for future leadership roles (Apolinario & Oasan, 2021). This involvement strengthens their leadership

qualities while benefiting the broader school community by addressing student needs and promoting positive change.

Specificity of Training Provided by Institutions

Educational institutions provide training and seminars to enhance student leaders' leadership skills. These programs focus on nurturing essential attributes and competencies necessary for effective leadership. Topics range from developing positive leadership traits to understanding decision-making dynamics within the executive framework. Such initiatives equip student leaders with tools to refine their existing skills, enabling them to take on responsibilities

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more confidently and efficiently. Based on the participants' statements, they are trained first in their schools. They will undergo orientation for the specific roles, not only for the executive branch but also for the legislative branch, down to the representatives set by the student council.

Tyrell et al. (2023) emphasized that students must engage in leadership opportunities while still in school. These experiences help them develop critical skills such as teamwork, relationship-building, task management, and identity recognition within a group setting. Furthermore, these opportunities allow students to practice effective communication and interpersonal skills, which are integral to their growth as leaders.

The value of these training programs extends beyond skill-building; they create spaces for students to foster camaraderie and strengthen relationships with their peers. Learning to navigate personality differences and collaborate toward shared goals prepares them for the diverse challenges of leadership. The ability to adapt and work effectively with others is among the most significant lessons these programs impart, reinforcing the idea that leadership is as much about connection and understanding as it is about strategy and decision-making.

Student Leaders' Training Frequency

Leadership training refers to an organization's efforts to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge required for effective leadership. Such training is not exclusive to those in authority

but benefits all employees, as leadership qualities can enhance team dynamics and productivity. Organizations deliver these programs through various formats, including live sessions, video tutorials, audio materials, meetings, and online classes. Participants in this study reported that institutions typically organize leadership training one to three times a year, a frequency deemed adequate and impactful.

According to Dorlevi (2023), leadership development programs generally span two to five days and are led by instructors with extensive experience in leadership and management. These programs are designed to deliver valuable educational content and networking opportunities in a condensed format that minimizes disruptions to participants' schedules. This model suggests the importance of planning leadership programs seamlessly fitting into participants' busy lives. For student leaders, well-structured leadership training is essential and paramount. Such programs must balance educational value with practicality, ensuring they are consistent with academic schedules. According to them, student leaders juggle dual responsibilities—managing their academics and fulfilling their leadership duties—which require exceptional time management skills. Institutions must recognize this balancing act and schedule leadership seminars and training sessions thoughtfully, ensuring they complement rather than complicate students' academic commitments. This approach supports student leaders' personal growth and reinforces their ability to lead effectively without compromising their education.

Table 3.

Student Leader's Exposure to Strategic Leadership and Mentoring

Themes	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership Enhancement through Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innate leadership trait is not enough to suffice the student leader's eagerness to lead but with proper guidance and mentoring it will somehow prosper and achieved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Leader's Exposure to Strategic Leadership and Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aspiring leaders should be exposed to real-life scenario to deepen their commitment and values toward leadership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentors' Impact on Student Leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentors helps young leader to act as a ship helm to assist them to navigate possible challenges that may arise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Leader's passion and Inspiration from Mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leaders learn how to work on their own as they are well-guided by their mentors.

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Student Leader's Exposure to Strategic Leadership and Mentoring

Table 3 indicates that student leaders gain valuable exposure to strategic leadership and mentoring through hands-on experiences and guidance from seasoned mentors. Strategic leadership allows them to understand the broader vision of their roles, aligning their actions with long-term goals and organizational objectives. Experienced leaders provide insight, advice, and support in mentoring relationships, helping student leaders develop key leadership skills such as decision-making, communication, and problem-solving (Kroll, 2023; Malik, 2023; Reyes-Chua et al., 2021). This exposure is crucial for shaping student leaders, as it helps them refine their leadership style and provides a supportive network to navigate challenges and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Research has shown that mentoring enhances leadership abilities, with mentors guiding their mentees through complex situations while fostering personal and professional growth.

Leadership Enhancement Through Mentoring

Three participants believed that strategic leadership can be mentored, while four (participants 3, 5, 8, and 10) viewed it as an intrinsic skill. Those who believed in mentorship emphasized that leadership qualities could be developed through consistent exposure to learning opportunities such as seminars, classes, and everyday experiences. One participant highlighted the transformative potential of strategic leadership, noting that it is not an innate gift but rather a skill cultivated through guidance from a mentor. Observing and emulating effective leaders can hone these abilities over time. Leadership seminars and conferences also provide valuable platforms for acquiring and refining these skills.

Conversely, two participants argued that leadership is largely innate. They acknowledged that while leadership training sessions can provide some value, the repetitive nature of these sessions often left them uninspired. These participants believed that while innate leadership qualities form the foundation, learning and

development still play a complementary role in shaping leadership potential.

Smith (2021) noted that strategic leadership requires a complex blend of soft skills that can only partially be learned from books or classrooms. Mentors are pivotal in this process, helping mentees refine their abilities and adapt to various organizational and strategic challenges. While some academic perspectives suggest that leadership qualities can be inherent, transforming these abilities into strategic leadership requires developing adaptability and situational awareness and acquiring new skills tailored to specific contexts, objectives, and methods (Fuertes et al., 2020).

This discussion underscores the significant role of mentorship in leadership development. Mentors do more than pass down knowledge—they guide mentees through practical strategies, share lessons from their own experiences, and offer cautionary advice to navigate challenges effectively. Based on the Mentorship Theory discussed by Kram in 1985, leaders cannot directly or immediately acquire leadership ethics if they are not well-guided to grow and become better leaders in the future. Leaders cannot just rely on their natural talent. However, they must also learn from good practices from their mentors because mentors inspire mentees by modeling the values and behaviors necessary for leadership. Mentors serve as a reservoir of wisdom for young leaders, helping them grow into confident, capable individuals ready to lead effectively in their respective roles. This dynamic relationship between mentors and mentees is foundational to shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

Student Leader's Exposure to Strategic Leadership and Mentoring

All participants reported attending various trainings or seminars focused on strategic leadership development. These experiences were instrumental in helping them cultivate essential leadership skills, particularly in real-life situations where they were required to guide and influence their peers effectively. Participants emphasized how these programs improved their leadership ability and deepened their

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commitment, values, and passion for their roles. One notable outcome was the strengthened camaraderie among leaders, as the training emphasized teamwork and relationship-building, enabling them to complete their terms with a shared sense of accomplishment and unity.

Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of simulations included in their training. These exercises honed their communication skills and taught them to approach leadership strategically, enhancing their ability to adapt and respond to dynamic situations. By engaging in realistic scenarios, they were better equipped to navigate the complexities of their leadership roles.

Bligh et al. (2018) underscores that effective leadership growth requires adopting a learning mindset, an attitude that encourages openness to new experiences, a belief in one's ability to learn, and a deliberate focus on personal development through experiences. This aligns with the participants' insights, suggesting that student leaders must embrace learning from others, particularly those with more experience. A willingness to absorb new ideas and perspectives fosters a broader understanding of effective leadership, enabling student leaders to grow personally and professionally. These qualities enhance their immediate leadership roles and prepare them for future challenges in more complex environments.

Mentors' Impact on Student Leaders

Every participant in the study affirmed that mentoring played a crucial role in shaping strategic leadership. They acknowledged that mentorship exposed them to various leadership strategies, enhancing their understanding and practical skills. Mentoring significantly influences a leader's decision-making effectiveness, particularly in information processing, social interaction, and emotional intelligence.

Reeves et al. (2021) highlight that leadership knowledge is acquired through personal experience and mentor guidance. Mentors serve as role models, offering invaluable direction and inspiring aspiring leaders to emulate their

positive qualities. Leadership coaches complement this by providing tactical advice to address specific challenges. Together, these influences underscore the pivotal role of mentoring in fostering leadership capabilities.

The findings suggest that mentoring is essential for student leaders, as mentors serve as role models and provide strategic leadership guidance. By sharing their knowledge and experiences, mentors help young leaders develop strategies and refine their leadership skills. They offer support in moments of uncertainty, acting as advisors and consultants, acting as the ship's helm to help new leaders navigate challenges. This relationship builds confidence and empowers student leaders to make informed decisions, ultimately contributing to their growth into capable and effective leaders. Mentors are instrumental in shaping a new generation of leaders equipped to handle leadership complexities confidently and competently.

Otherwise stated, when this mentorship and leadership behavior is effectively practiced as soon as possible, the ability to have good governance will follow. Based on their experiences, aspiring leaders can already acknowledge their acts and implement fairness, accountability, and efficiency in participating and managing their group, which has also proven correct as it was linked to the theory of Good governance by Stoker (1998). Through their training, they have applied the fundamentals of being a leader because they have encountered the groundwork structured by their mentors to sustain the values and practices that both mentors and leaders have built in the first place.

Student Leader's Passion and Inspiration from Mentors

The participants emphasized that no one is perfect and that everyone benefits from having role models. For them, mentoring, leadership training, and seminars tailored to student leaders play a vital role in personal and professional growth. Mentoring was highlighted as a key factor in becoming competent as a leader. They believed that a leader's passion and dedication are evident when they are open to learning and

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self-improvement. Leaders who develop their competencies through consistent mentoring grow in their roles and showcase their enthusiasm and commitment to their responsibilities. Mentorship, therefore, was seen as an essential and ongoing process for leaders to thrive.

Yang (2023) highlighted that effective mentors do more than teach technical skills; they share life experiences, provide thoughtful advice, and offer solutions to challenges. These mentors excel not only at listening but also at observing and addressing issues with creative solutions. They take the time to understand and respect a

mentee's goals and interests, fostering a supportive and respectful relationship.

This underscores the invaluable role mentors play in developing student leaders. Acting as advisors, mentors share their years of experience, guiding mentees through challenges and helping them navigate the complexities of leadership. When difficulties arise, student leaders can rely on their mentors for practical advice and actionable solutions, ensuring they feel supported and empowered. Such mentorship enhances leadership capabilities and cultivates a culture of trust, growth, and shared learning.

Conclusion

In examining the leadership development of youth leaders in North Cotabato, particularly the Executive Branch (Presidents and Vice presidents) of Student Councils across various colleges, it is evident that training and mentoring have a significant role in shaping their leadership capabilities. These student leaders have attended numerous seminars and training programs, both within and outside their institutions, gaining invaluable insights that have equipped them to fulfill their roles effectively. Throughout these experiences, they have benefited from the guidance of experienced mentors, individuals they admire for their leadership acumen. These mentors have offered practical advice and emotional support, helping nurture the leaders' personal growth and boosting their confidence.

The findings of this study indicate that strategic leadership development has been a significant factor in shaping these student leaders. Through continuous exposure to leadership training, they have honed their understanding of their responsibilities, cultivating skills vital to their success. Notably, the leaders emphasized that leadership is not an innate trait but a skill that evolves through a willingness to learn and be mentored. Mentorship, in particular, has been central to their development, with mentors offering guidance, encouragement, and motivation. These relationships have been crucial in helping student leaders navigate their roles and achieve personal and leadership growth, proving that effective leadership is cultivated through experience, support, and an openness to development.

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