

Research Paper



Unveiling stories of student leaders in their academic and non-academic journey

Larry C. Bercilla^{1*}, Arnel L. Mamac², Jenybabe M. Palingcod³, Mary Mae M. Plasquita⁴

^{1*,3}Department of Arts and Sciences, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines.

^{2,4}Department of Teacher Education, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of student leaders and their perspectives on how they dealt the challenges associated with managing their academic and non-academic journeys. The focus was on student leaders at UM Tagum College, coping mechanisms, and insights that can be shared with the community. The study utilized a qualitative design, encompassing 14 participants; likewise, thematic analysis was employed to examine the participants' responses. Results show numerous challenges experienced by the participants as they engaged in both leadership roles and academics. Additionally, participants shared various coping mechanisms and valuable insights related to their experiences.



Corresponding Author:

Larry C. Bercilla

Department of Arts and Sciences, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines.

Email: larrybercilla@umindanao.edu.ph

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1. INTRODUCTION

Preparing student leaders for the future is crucial as current leaders will inevitably age and require replacement, ensuring societal improvement [1]. However, an existing study reveals that a significant

number of student leaders encounter challenges while executing their responsibilities. Engaging in student leadership activities may impede the academic performance. Primarily, the issue is attributed to time since student leaders are likely giving more time to their duties as leaders as compared to their academic obligations [2]. Moreover, excessive workload takes away valuable time that could be spent on academic work [3]. Consequently, unbalanced academic and non-academic affairs may jeopardize student leaders' scholastic standing if improperly managed [4].

Furthermore, continual engagement in student leadership may hinder academics due to time management challenges and missed classes for mandatory meetings. In addition, student leaders face stress, handling events, and meeting expectations, leading to challenging experiences and potential difficulties [5]. Correspondingly, establishing a drive for student needs & interests aids development, preventing over-involvement and subpar academic performance [4].

Student leadership has been sought after by many aspiring student leaders where they can actively engage in any student organization. The significance of unveiling the experiences of student leaders has become vital, particularly considering the disruptive nature of today's environment. Hence, the more student leaders involved in student leadership roles the higher the probability they could effectively lead the future generation [6].

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design utilizing phenomenological approach to examine the participants' stories, experiences, and phenomena. The fourteen participants who were student leaders at UM Tagum College were the primary sources of data. Participants were split into seven for In-Depth Interviews and seven for the Focus Group. Similarly, this the practice of other educational researches in the locale. Purposive sampling was used to identify knowledgeable individuals and groups.

Moreover, an interview guide was designed by researchers. This served as the primary source of data for the conduct of this study. Data was then analyzed through thematic analysis to identify themes and core ideas that surfaced from the answer provided by the participants [7]. Likewise, "codes" were created for data sets [6]. Given that the study was conducted during pandemic restrictions, researchers were very adamant in observing the demanded health protocols.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the analysis produced three primary categories, each containing several themes. The categories identified are as follows: Experiences Encountered by the Student Leaders, The Coping Mechanism of the Student Leaders, and The Insights of Student Leaders.

3.1. Having a Motivational Factor

The first theme generated from their experiences is having a motivational factor. Noticeably, participants have mentioned that their past leadership experiences motivate them to accept and apply the position with the aim to gain new experiences, broaden horizons, and enhance their leadership abilities. Student leaders participate to contribute and improve their present leadership based on past experiences. Further, by accepting those responsibilities enhances both leadership skills and their capabilities and abilities to serve students [8]. Experience is important since leadership is nurtured over time [3]. touch other people's life (IDI_1) I have good training ground to enhance my potential (IDI_3) I grow and improve myself (FGD_1) I have prior leadership experiences (FGD_4) [9].

3.2. Adapting to Changes

The second theme generated is adapting to changes. Adapting to change is an excellent approach for new student leaders as pointed out by the participants [10], [11]. They have adjusted their attitudes enabling them to navigate unfamiliar situations, facilitating the transition process in organizations. Results revealed that participants demonstrated flexibility and adaptation when faced with changes in

environment, rules, and responsibilities. This implies that they were able to modify their behavior, mindset, or actions to align with the new circumstances they found themselves in. Further, adaptation is integral for student leaders because they inevitably face and embrace changes in their journey [12]. Thus, leadership concerns the changes adapted to facilitate the success of the organization [13].

I familiarize all offices and practice flexibility (IDI_2) I overcame my shyness to foster communication and camaraderie (IDI_3) I adjust to my responsibilities (FGD_4) I adjusted my attitude toward others (FGD_6) [14].

3.3. Experiencing Burnout

The third theme generated is experiencing burnout. Burnout negatively impacts productivity and affects all aspects of individuals' lives, as shown in various studies [15]. Based on the participants they experience burnout particularly when it comes to organizing consecutive events. Successive event organizing is a likely cause for student leaders to feel pressure, which may result to procrastination and cramming on their academic responsibilities. Ultimately leading to students feel the burnout [4], [16]. Additionally, a participant also mentioned that he experienced burnout upon adjusting from online to face to face. Further, emotional, and physical tiredness significantly impacts student leaders, especially in terms of handling important academic obligations. Therefore, their tiredness from successive stress leads to burnout [11]. Student leaders are humans who will feel exhaustion when obligations pile up [17].

I have difficulty with adjusting from online to face-to-face (IDI_3) I experience pressure, procrastination and cramming which led to burnout (FGD_2) I Participate in multiple events (FGD_3) I prioritize my leadership demands over my academic workloads (FGD_6) Committing to events held simultaneously [18], [19].

3.4. Managing Workloads

The fourth theme generated is managing workloads. Findings showed that participants struggled and have difficulty managing workloads resulting from their excessive workloads as student leaders. A participant also stated that they faced challenges throughout their leadership roles and academic pursuits when some things did not always happen as they desired or planned [20]. Additionally, balancing both roles through responsible management enables them to achieve success. However, if poorly managed leadership experiences can harm student leaders' academic performance due to excessive workload [21]. Consequently, efficient workload management is essential for student leaders to organize and prioritize tasks. This allows students to do tasks one at a time which results to a manageable workload.

Difficulty in balancing responsibilities and academic priorities (IDI_1) Dealing time between academic and personal matters (IDI_3) Limited time to accomplished academic requirements (IDI_4) Struggled with time management (FGD_1) Juggling multiple responsibilities (FGD_3)

3.5. Setting Priorities

The fifth theme generated is setting priorities. Setting priorities, taking notes, and planning beforehand are effective and essential for student leaders to avoid overlapping of tasks. Some participants even shared that they categorized activities according to importance [22]. In addition, schoolwork can be very stressful for those who have leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, when competing priorities are present, students may feel under pressure to focus on their studies [23]. Setting wise priorities enables efficient planning and accomplishment of personal and professional goals, leading to positive outcomes. Thus, responsibilities must be prioritized to avoid the piling up of workload. Doing so, allows students lighten the feeling of stress from too much work load [20].

Categorizing activities (IDI_2) Time-based prioritization of tasks (IDI_4) Planning beforehand (IDI_6) Having time for my review and leadership roles (FGD_1) Set my objectives responsibly (FGD_6) [24].

3.6. Dealing with the Pressure

The first coping mechanism unveiled by the student leaders in dealing with the challenges

encountered is dealing with the pressure. Primarily, the pressure to be exemplary role models and competent leaders, coupled with extensive responsibilities, adds significant weight to their burden [25]. A participant even mentions there are no specific standards in being a role model, there seems to be a prevailing notion if you become a student leader. This would mean that as a student leader, you should think and act like one. Furthermore, another participant shared on the pressure on specific expectations from him superiors. As a student leader they are always expected to behave professionally which includes online decorum [26].

I am pressured to be a role model (IDI_3) Pressured by superiors to be mentally mature (IDI_5) Felt pressured to be an effective leader (IDI_6) Expected to exemplify leadership through thoughts and actions (FGD_1) Pressured by the expectations and critics of others (FGD_2) [27].

3.7. Being Open-minded

The second coping mechanism unveiled by the student leaders is being open-minded. Student leaders aim to develop meaningful activities that cater to the interests and welfare of both their members and the entire student body. To manifest such goals, student leaders recognize the importance of being open and respectful of the diverse ideas generated by other student leaders [28]. A participant stated that having a leadership position does not grant absolute authority; it's important to consider and value input from fellow officers. Also corroborated by another participant that brainstorming substantial ideas requires teamwork with competent co-officers and members, as it is not solely one person's responsibility. Hence, key participants emphasized open-mindedness as crucial for effectively managing an organization [22].

View feedback as constructive criticisms (IDI_1) Leadership requires respecting and valuing fellow officers' input (IDI_3) Brainstorming substantial ideas needs teamwork (IDI_4) Ask members' opinions on important matters (FGD_2) Student leaders should be open to suggestions (FGD_4) [29].

3.8. Assigning Tasks and Responsibilities Properly

The third coping mechanism unveiled by the student leaders in dealing with the challenges encountered is assigning tasks and responsibilities properly. Leading organizations involves managing multiple tasks like document preparation, meetings, and implementing planned activities, among other responsibilities. To avoid overwhelming workloads and optimize efficiency, participants delegate tasks based on members' strengths and abilities [15]. According to the participants', shared responsibility is necessary; competence alone cannot bear organizational burdens. Thus, a wise decision would be asking for help from other student leaders [30].

Delegating tasks is crucial to student leaders (IDI_5) Disseminate information and responsibilities to co-officers (FGD_2) Utilize time wisely in order to be productive (FGD_4) List the immediate so as not to compromise other matters (FGD_5) Delegate tasks to effectively managed the organization (FGD_6) [31].

3.9. Creating a To-do-list

The fourth coping mechanism unveiled by the student leaders in dealing with the challenges encountered is creating a to-do list. Being a student leader takes work, especially since they are to excel in academic and leadership roles. There are many duties to maneuver, and one must avoid being entangled in the complexities of schedules and deadlines. Assignments, reports, projects, and examinations are just a few examples that student leaders need to prioritize before others thus participants admitted to resorting to utilizing a to-do list [32].

A participant highlighted the significance of creating a to-do list, which guides what and when to prioritize, supported by another participant that planning the immediate activities ahead of time will keep her posted. Correspondingly, having a to-do list somehow contributes to a smooth and organized performance of duties and responsibilities [16].

It is beneficial not to overlap the schedules (IDI_2) Priority planner efficiently guides your tasks. (IDI_3) Following scheduled routines to keep posted (IDI_4) Writing a list to focus on both studies and organization (FGD_1) Making a planner to balance and avoid cramming (FGD_2).

3.10. Taking Accountability as a Leader

The first insight is taking accountability as a leader. Majority of the participants shared insights relative to leadership. All of which were attributed three core attributes: hard work, passion, and commitment [18]. All the exerted efforts of student leaders in schools are not in vain, since all the effort equates to gaining valuable contextualized experience. Considering the insights shared by the participants, student leadership is not a joke and there is more to student leadership than accepting the position. Moreover, another participant stated that positive feedback, happy students, and stress relief are what drive student leaders to persevere in their roles. Consequently, having a strong purpose motivates leaders to persevere and serve without reluctance.

Leading with dedication and fervor (IDI_1) Leadership extends far beyond accepting position (FGD_1) Commitment is key to effective leadership (FGD_2) Positive feedbacks drive student leaders to persevere (FGD_4) Student leadership precipitate's purpose (FGD_6) [33].

3.11. Learning When to Speak and Listen

The second insight is learning when to speak and listen. Participants were able to share that organizational development relies on quality decisions made collectively by all members. Moreover, a student leader must actively listen to each constituent for their perspective [19]. Participants even highlighted that being a student leader is never about giving orders but more on listening and serving your fellow man. Other participants affirmed that learning when to speak and listen is an important practice that student leaders can apply in the future, most especially in public administration.

Important lesson I've got over the years (IDI_2) Know both sides of the coin to generate great ideas (IDI_4) Student leaders lead, command serve, and listen (IDI_5) A preparatory practice for student leaders' (FGD_2) Listen to subordinates for organizational harmony (FGD_3).

3.12. Engaging Scholastic Enhancement

The third insight is engaging scholastic enhancement. Key participants sought academic enhancement as it is expected of student leaders to join various engagements that engage scholastic development. Such activities nurture their leadership skills [2]. Provided that student leaders are equipped with the three core attributes (knowledge, motivation, and abilities). They will be able to manage their time as well as functioning efficiently in their organizations without even sacrificing their scholastic achievement [23]. A participant even shared his remarkable journey when he was given the opportunity to represent the University in an international conference. Another participant shared that winning an academic event showed that his skills have grown even with a very hectic schedule as student leader and as a student.

I flew to Kuala Lumpur to attend an international conference (IDI_2) I joined competition and won 2nd best news writer (IDI_4) We facilitated symposiums and joined international programs (FGD_1) I was chosen as representative for an international mission in JDM (FGD_2) I will attend a conference in Baguio (FGD_4).

3.13. Knowing your Priorities

The fourth insight is knowing your priorities. Participants shared that knowing priorities aids student leaders to manage time. Consequently, a participant was able to suggest that prioritizing essentials from the non-essentials demonstrate that there are certain occasions that can wait. Time constraints require self-discipline to prioritize and address urgent matters on the priority list effectively. Based on the Existential Theory, an individual is responsible for their actions [17]. In the context of this study, the individual concerned is the student leader. Because of free will, it is clear that there are choices and it depends on the person if they will prioritize academics over leadership responsibilities or vice versa [5]. In general, clear priorities endow saying no to unnecessary tasks and provide life direction, purpose, and self-worth awareness.

Creating priority list based on urgency (IDI_3) Discipline yourself to be progressive (IDI_4) Learn to be time-conscious (FGD_2) Having clear priorities (FGD_3) Timely completion of tasks to prevent

procrastination (FGD_5).

3.14. Having a Positive Mindset

The fifth insight is having a positive mindset. Participants emphasized the importance for student leaders to persevere with positive mindset and persistent determination, to achieve their goals or objectives. Since current leaders are not getting any younger, it is essential to shape and hone student leaders for advancements in the future [1]. Focusing on leadership now will benefit academic performance and future leadership positions [3]. Maintaining a daily positive outlook requires committed and persistent inspiring leadership for the benefit of the organization. Likewise, participants hard not to give up and take the risk rather than losing the opportunities. Therefore, an optimistic leader approaches a task with enthusiasm and purpose, demonstrating a resilient mentality, and motivating others to adopt a positive attitude.

Take the risk, or you will lose the chance (IDI_3) Don't give up and be persistent (IDI_5) Embrace optimism, bravery, and confidence (IDI_6) Find your purpose persevere, and inspire others (FGD_2) Enjoy and develop your skills (FGD_3).

4. CONCLUSION

The study's findings demonstrated that most of the participants acknowledged benefits from their participation in both leadership roles and being active in academics, while some participants also identified some difficulties like adapting to changes, burnout, and workload management, but they were able to manage these things along the journey. Further, it revealed how they overcome the challenges of being a student leader and shared insights on how to employ strategies that would be beneficial to excel in both their studies and duties. Overall, studying the multifaceted experiences of student leaders and understanding how they juggle both can provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between individual, social, and academic factors that shape the development of leadership skills and the pursuit of academic success.

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Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Larry C. Bercilla	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Arnel L. Mamac	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jenybabe M. Palingcod	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mary Mae M. Plasquita	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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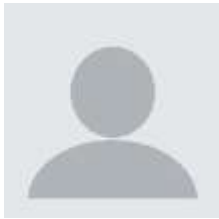
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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

	Larry C. Bercilla, is a faculty member in the Department of Arts and Sciences at the University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines. His academic interests include student leadership, higher education, educational psychology, and student development, kind of all in the same lane. He is actively engaged in research that explores students' academic experiences, leadership development, and holistic learning. His scholarly work tends to emphasize the promotion of leadership skills, student engagement, and educational excellence through evidence-based research, you know the sort that's supported. As an educator and researcher, he is committed to fostering critical thinking, personal growth, and lifelong learning while also contributing to the advancement of quality higher education and student-centered academic initiatives, at least in how he frames it. Email: larrybercilla@umindanao.edu.ph
	Arnel L. Mamac, is a faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines. His research interests include teacher education, educational leadership, curriculum development, instructional strategies, and student learning. He has participated in academic and research activities that support innovative teaching practices and professional development, which sounds straightforward but it's not always. His work focuses on enhancing educational quality through effective pedagogy and leadership development among future educators. Dedicated to academic excellence, he promotes learner-centered instruction and contributes to research that strengthens teacher preparation programs and educational practices in higher education institutions, and yes, that matters a lot. Email: a.mamac.109327.tc@umindanao.edu.ph
	Jenybabe M. Palingcod, a faculty member in the Department of Arts and Sciences at the University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines. In terms of her academic concerns, she leans toward student affairs, educational research, leadership building, and social sciences. She also stays very active in research about student engagement, academic success, and personal development within higher education, like not just surface level, but the deeper side too. Her scholarly output mostly highlights how students truly experience things, and how supportive learning environments can be designed, so that leadership and achievement grow together. Through teaching, research, and community outreach, she keeps pushing for better educational results and for learner centered practices that guide students toward academic and professional success. Email: j.palingcod.125191.tc@umindanao.edu.ph



Mary Mae M. Plasquita, is in a general sense, a faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines. Her research interests revolve around teacher education, educational leadership, curriculum innovation, and instructional effectiveness. She's focused on strengthening quality education by doing research, teaching, and joining professional development undertakings. Most of her scholarly output examines educational practices that sharpen student learning while also building leadership capacity and improving teacher competence. She regularly contributes to academic studies and teams up with colleagues to design evidence based educational strategies. Her commitment to educational excellence helps prepare capable educators, and supports ongoing refinement of teaching and learning in higher education. Email: m.plasquita.125192.tc@umindanao.edu.ph