

## Application of Leadership Practice Characteristics of an Exemplary Model in Chinese Student Cadres

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the prevailing leadership characteristics shown by student cadres at Shandong Vocational and Technical University of International Studies (SWUT) in China and the relationship of these leadership practices to a number of demographic variables. Student cadres ( $N = 628$ ) working in different departments/colleges were selected by a stratified random sampling technique. A well-developed Leadership Practices Inventory questionnaire was employed to collect data. The information obtained was placed into scaled categories based on an exemplary Leadership Practices Model. The results obtained were arranged under five leadership practices, namely, Model the Way ( $M = 3.55$ , high category score) followed by moderate category scores for Encourage the Heart ( $M = 3.50$ ), Challenge the Process ( $M = 3.48$ ), Enable Others to Act ( $M = 3.46$ ), and Inspire a Shared Vision ( $M = 3.42$ ). There was a significant difference in the practice of Inspire a Shared Vision regarding gender ( $p = .012$ ). Nevertheless, year of study, major, and position did not show significant differences between the groups. The research indicated moderate values for student leadership practices that might be developed in potential university leaders.

**Keywords:** *Leadership characteristics, demographic variables, career training*

### Introduction

The complexity of today's world resulting from the rapid advancement of science and technology has caused great impacts on global citizens. Nations have become very competitive, which impact citizens in many ways such as economics, employment and education. Higher education is rapidly evolving in the areas of internationalization, marketing, and information (Zhu & Caliskan, 2021). The competition between higher education institutions has increased dramatically and is continuing to accelerate with the international mobility of students and academics. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government has proposed higher education reforms to elevate the quality of education (Zhu & Caliskan, 2021). The principle of these reforms is to create competitiveness and make China an international player in the new knowledge-based economy, and to cultivate world class universities. In order to enhance productivity and competitiveness, Western higher education institutions have been introduced in China in the belief that Chinese universities will grow and operate in a similar fashion to Western universities (Liu et al., 2019).

A prominent trend in China is the increasing number of students enrolled in colleges and universities. Young people realize the importance of receiving training for their future careers. Therefore, they choose to join the associations, student unions, or Youth League Committee in order to experience working in a real situation (Dai & Cai, 2014). Clearly, China's recent socio-economic developments and the potential impact of its higher education has accelerated causing China to look carefully at the future of higher education both nationally and globally. It is believed that the conventional educational system has proved to be inadequate and ineffective in a modernized and internationalized university (Xhemajli, 2016). Employers are increasingly concerned about the inadequate leadership skills of young people who are taught in traditional education systems because they have limited opportunities for leadership development (Kelly & Azaola, 2016). Leadership competence is an important issue that is continually raised and debated among educators in an attempt to find successful ways for leadership development.

Most researchers believe that the key to improving higher education resides in internal participation by students in higher educational governance (Boland, 2005; Menon, 2005; Luesher-Mamashela, 2013). Students need training and practice in professional skills along with classes in academic subjects. In this case, teachers can also use the student leadership to create an educational environment to increase students' success as well as grasping a practical understanding of the subject matter (Kashan et al., 2019).

The development of China's higher education requires both Chinese and Western values to promote the development of effective employee relations and educational leadership (Militello & Berger 2010). Yang (2017) indicated that extracurricular activities had a significant influence on the development of student leadership in the last year of college life. Student leaders, those involved in collaborative and comprehensive processes, showed consideration and knowledge when they worked with others and learned from their own experiences and from others. This was consistent with the study of King (1997, p. 87), who found that "helping students develop the maturity and strength of character that prepares them for leadership is perhaps one of the most challenging and important goals of higher education." In other words, higher education should become a source of potential change as it plays a key role in developing leadership potential among today's young people. In fact, education and development of student leadership has long been a major goal for higher education institutions. This can be seen from the increasing number of courses and co-curricular leadership development programs (Astin & Astin, 1996; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Leadership development during university studies can develop one's potential, citizen participation, personality, academic performance, and self-improvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It appears that student leadership is an important factor in increasing productivity within the classroom. Thus, this main goal of the educational environment can be achieved.

Shao and Du (2016) indicated that simply being a member of a student union did not mean that an individual would be challenged and acquire any leadership competencies. In the last year of university study, membership may be held in voluntary institutions such as student affairs, the student community, or the student union. However, all students need to learn and practice leadership skills and the knowledge or attitudes related to leadership development. Students' involvement in designing a curriculum, such as a participatory curriculum or faculty assessments, can result in significant improvements in higher education quality (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009). Additionally, students participating in volunteer organizations can greatly improve their quality of campus life and their social experiences (Kuh & Lund, 1994). In general, the participation of students in university governance has a very positive effect on leadership development. China's higher educational institutions need to cultivate students' leadership because training future leaders has become both a philosophy and educational practice in world-class universities. Improving the quality of personnel training has also become an international trend, and this is an important innovation for educational competitiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, to prepare students to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow, they must be well-equipped with leadership skills (Konuk & Posner, 2021).

Exploring current leadership development practices of college and university students, particularly where student cadres are in significant numbers, is relevant as they have been the main avenue for increasing enrollment in Chinese universities, and the number of such students keeps on growing. The student cadres are also bridges and links between all kinds of student organizations and student members (Shao & Du, 2016). All in all, the student cadres are the backbone of achieving college goals, instructors' teaching goals, and the goals of student management. Their activities contribute to further development of the universities where they enroll.

Leadership studies in higher education in China mainly have focused on external factors, including public financing or quality assessment in public schools, hospitals, companies, entrepreneur management, and so on (Currie et al., 2003). Few colleges and universities currently consider student cadre leaders as a training target. Hence there is an insufficiently educated group of student cadre leaders which lacks practical experience in leadership, responsibility aspirations,

and a sense of service. They tend to have an excessive interest in the pursuit of personal ends and show a lack of innovation.

These problems hinder the actual performance and management of cadres in work situations. The experience they could gain in student organizations would impact the value of their future work, and knowledge of college student cadres' leadership characteristics would also enhance their knowledge about organizations and management skills.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptualization of Term Leadership***

There is some agreement among research scholars that leadership is not innate, but it is a set of behaviors and abilities that can be learned and developed. Konuk and Posner (2021) suggest that developing leadership skills in young people will help them to overcome individual difficulties in a harmonious way, and will eventually lead to the development of society. Numerous scholars described "leadership" as personal direction by the head of an organization. For instance, Zeleke & Feleke (2015) asserted that leadership, in general, is a process of motivating and influencing others to achieve the goals of an organization. Similarly, Northouse (2007) defined leadership as a process whereby individuals influence groups to achieve common goals. El Homrani et al. (2012) maintained that leadership is not a position, but a process. Dai and Cai (2014) distinguished between the terms "leader" and "leadership" where a leader is a person who has authority and ability to influence others, while leadership is the way in which a leader acts: that is, the process of influencing a group to achieve a goal. They further explained that leaders in organizations have different styles of working with their subordinates. There are different styles of leadership—some are polite, friendly, and approachable, some are capricious or violent, while others are democratic. Stuke (2013) used the term "leadership style" to refer to the manner in which authority is exercised or the way in which leaders influence others; it will have a wide impact on the organization and its members. Consistently, Bolden et al. (2003) confirmed that several empirical studies have suggested that leadership style is positively associated with individual and organizational attitudes and behavior at both the individual and organizational levels.

In brief, leadership is a process or function of motivating and influencing a group of individuals such as subordinates, employees, teams, or people in an organization to achieve their goals by moving in a clear direction under a wide variety of situations or circumstances. This process is dynamic and involves the interaction of teams or members of organizations. The ultimate goal of leadership is to bring about positive change. Leaders who possess these characteristics create a friendly working environment, offer different types of solutions, and give challenges that lead to success.

### ***Student Leadership in Higher Education***

Student leadership in a university is institutional leadership that operates in the technical, transformational, and interpretative arenas. Thus, universities may provide opportunities for students to voice their opinions to governing bodies (Cáceres-Reche et al., 2021). Research has also indicated that students can increase their leadership skills during their studies in college or university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and that leadership development will in turn increase their self-efficacy, citizen participation, character development, academic performance, and personal development. According to Cáceres-Reche et al. (2021), student leaders have prominent roles and responsibilities in many respects. First, students with social leadership skills will show interest in social change, as well as self-organized and independent voluntary initiatives. Second, leaders hold representative positions, and may develop policy initiatives that will serve the university community. Third, healthy leaders understand patterns of behavior in health areas, and create campaigns and activities that encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits. Last, sports leaders specialize in specific sports skills, and transfer them to teams that represent the university.

Numerous studies have confirmed that involvement by student cadres with high leadership qualities in student union or other organizational activities can affect different student outcomes.

For instance, studies by Beaman et al. (2012) and Deng et al. (2020) suggested that student cadres had a strong effect on organizational performance because the types of students enrolled affected the performance of student government. Additionally, academic performance and leadership performance play important roles in student cadre election. Good academic performance and high levels of leadership efficacy reflect the capability and confidence to be a student cadre. It has been consistently found that experience of being a student cadre was significant for leadership development. The style adopted influences risk taking, adoption of a perspective that considers others, and the expression of empathy (Anderson & Galinsky 2006; Galinsky et al., 2006). Being a student cadre enhances students' managerial skills, determines their social competence, and offers some social and political participation (Downey et al., 1984). Previous studies have indicated similar results, that being a student cadre greatly improves students' social skills and political involvement after graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh & Lund, 1994).

### ***The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model***

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership is an important tool initiated by Kouzes and Posner (2014) to help individuals gain perspectives on how they view themselves as a leader. These practices are essential components of the concept of transformational leadership, and they serve as guidance for leaders to accomplish their achievements or "to get extraordinary things done" (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 9). They were created through intensive research on existing leadership practices, and have been recognized by many researchers as truly representative of highly effective leadership practices. The authors discovered that when leaders experience their "personal best," they displayed five key practices: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. According to Kouzes and Posner (2018) regarding personal best leadership experiences, individuals demonstrate leadership behaviors even if they differ in culture, gender, age, educational level, and other variables. The authors further explained that student leaders Model the Way by creating standards of excellence, and setting an example for others to follow. Inspire a Shared Vision student leaders set goals, foresee the outcomes, and by encouraging others to perform better, they also create an ideal and unique image of what the organization can be because of the belief that they can make a difference. Challenge the Process student leaders search for opportunities and look for innovative ways to improve their organization. They are also enthusiastic to learn new things, and challenge obstacles to open up new horizons and achieve excellence. Enable Others to Act leaders function by "fostering collaboration, and build[ing] the team spirit." Finally, Encourage the Heart leaders describes the process of celebrating victories and building community, identifying assistance, and "appreciating the individual performance" (Konek & Posner, 2021, pp. 81–82).

### ***Related Research on Leadership Practices on Exemplary Leadership Model***

Research on the Five Practices of the Exemplary Leadership Model has been conducted with college students in a variety of situations. Silva et al. (2017) examined the leadership practices exhibited by the nurse managers of hospital institutions and their relationships with the variables of their socio-professional profile. A total of 84 manager nurses in four hospitals in a city in the state of São Paulo participated in a cross-sectional, correlational study. The Leadership Practices Inventory and a sociodemographic survey were employed. The results revealed that the mean values of the leadership practices used by the nurses were: Enable Others to Act (50.60), Encourage the Heart (48.20), Model the Way (46.70), Challenge the Process (43.30), and Inspire a Shared Vision (43.10). The moderate values obtained indicated that managerial aspects might be improved by the leaders by means of organizational strategies and/or tools aimed at best leadership practices.

Cáceres-Reche et al. (2021), using a cross-sectional study design, investigated the characteristics of university student leaders to generate an explanatory model in terms of sociodemographic variables. They found that the highest mean scores were found in the female group in all dimensions, with significant differences found in leadership practices ( $p = 0.03$ ). Therefore, there

was agreement with other studies in which women showed greater leadership. However, other research shows that, despite the fact that women are becoming more influential, this does not happen equally. Better leadership can be defined as motivating leadership styles that are dynamic and adapt to the circumstances in order fulfill the established purposes—that is, to effectively represent peers.

In the study of Díaz et al. (2019) in a survey of students in a Mexican university and a Spanish university, found that Mexican and Spanish students ranked themselves differently in terms of their behaviors aimed at Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart. Significant differences between the two groups were found; however, there were no significant differences in terms of gender.

In a recent study based on the Kouzes and Posner (2018) leadership model, Konuk and Posner (2021) examined the effectiveness of a student leadership program at Yildiz Technical University (Turkey). A pre-test and post-test control group quasi-experimental design was used. The statistical analysis revealed that students' scores improved significantly with training. Students in the experimental group reported utilizing all five leadership practices more frequently. Also, the qualitative findings indicated that leadership development programs need learning activities that are applicable to real-life situations, and that focus on enhancing students' self-confidence as leaders.

The studies reviewed above revealed similar and slightly different results. It was found that adoption of the five practices under the transformational leadership model led to moderate improvements. The studies also found that age was not significantly different across the groups in terms of socio-demographics, and females showed statistically significant differences in all five dimensions in leadership practices. Regarding the five leader practices, Model the Way was practiced most frequently while Inspiring a Shared Vision was placed in a lower position in some studies. However, the studies indicated that position, gender, and time influenced student expectations and were crucial for effective leadership. In addition, since leadership is not innate, training programs for enhancing leadership competency in the students and teachers, as well as employees, are beneficial in educational institutes, organizations, and the private sector.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research study was carried out using a quantitative survey technique to identify the presence of leadership practice characteristics of student cadres in different colleges at SWUT University in China. Data were collected through the Leadership Practices Inventory, and analyzed based on the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model (Kouzes & Posner, 2013, 2014, 2018).

### **Participants**

The participants were student cadres working under the college student organization in each department selected by stratified random sampling technique from five colleges in accordance with their field, class cadres, and cadres from society at SWUT university. Student organizations in China are divided into a variety of functional departments, each with its own operations and responsibilities, and staffed with three to 10 student cadres depending on the size of department.

A total of 628 students were recruited from five colleges or faculties, namely, Accounting and Finance (195), Foreign Languages (83), Information Engineering (34), International Business (65), and International Education (251). The current positions of student cadres were categorized within the university's student organization. One student cadre was selected from every 10 class leaders. Thus, there was a total of 344 class leaders, 26 deputy ministers, 29 deputy ministers as class leaders, 110 student organization officers, one deputy minister, four members of the Presidium, seven members of the Presidium as class leaders, and 107 members of the Presidium as deputy ministers.

Student cadres are student leaders who perform educational functions, management, and service. According to Huang et al. (2021), student leaders are not only simply students, but they also possess characteristics of a leader. They exercise power on behalf of the institution and they apply

the rules of the supervisors, administrators, and day-to-day student affairs managers on a daily basis. As student cadres, they exhibit leadership qualities that connect all types of students and organizations, as well as having the ability to actively get involved in and support the university's educational management system. Student cadres are an essential part of student work and play a huge role in promoting formation (Yuanjuna & Yawei 2014). Throughout the administrative work, student cadres will progressively develop their own unique leadership style. In addition, they have received good ideological training and leadership studies to support their overall potential and strengthen their leadership characteristics to support the overall working environment for students more effectively. They are apparently prestigious among students and have outstanding abilities, capabilities, conscientiousness in their work, and positive attitudes (Dai & Kai, 2014).

### **Research Instruments**

The questionnaire used was adapted from the widely used Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 2014). It provides feedback that leaders can use to adjust and strengthen leadership behaviors. The internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) ranged from .85 to .92. Part 1 of the questionnaire gathered personal background information, whereas Part 2 consisted of 30 items of the Leadership Practices Inventory scored on a five-point Likert scale to assess student cadres' existing leadership characteristics in five practice models: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent do the student cadres at SWUT University show the leadership characteristics outlined in the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model?
2. Are there any significant differences among gender, year of study, and program of study (functional department) in the leadership characteristics shown by the Chinese student cadres?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the existing characteristics leadership practices, according to the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model (Kouzes & Posner, 2018), in Chinese student cadres at SWUT University.
2. To compare the differences in characteristic leadership practices, judged according to the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model, performed by Chinese student cadres when consideration is given to demographic variables, such as gender, year of study, and functional department.

### **Data Collection**

To collect data, the questionnaire (700) was distributed online for two weeks during middle and late May 2022; 628 valid responses were received.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were employed and the mean values received were interpreted into five scales according to the criteria for interpretation: 4.51–5.00 (*Very High*), 3.51–4.50 (*High*), 2.51–3.50 (*Moderate*), 1.51–2.50 (*Low*), and 1.00–1.50 (*Very Low*). ANOVA comparisons were used to determine if there were any significant differences in the mean scores of the five leadership characteristic practices.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

The questionnaire response rate was 89.71%. The Communist Youth League dominated (71.0%), as did students majoring in Literature and History (64.17%). There was an even gender distribution

(Table 1). Just over one-third of students majored in Science and Engineering (35.8%). Half of the respondents were in their third year.

**Table 1 Demographics Characteristics of the Student Cadres in Colleges and Universities (N = 628)**

Demography	Demographic Category	Respondent No.	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	321	51.1
	Female	307	48.9
Year of Study	2021	126	20.1
	2020	188	29.9
	2019	314	50.0
Major Category	Literature and History	403	64.2
	Science and Engineering	225	35.8
	Chinese Communist Party	125	19.9
Political Status	Communist Youth League	446	71.0
	Non-members	57	9.1

### ***Open-ended Question Responses***

The open-ended questions that were asked are detailed in Table 2. It is notable that slightly less than half the student leaders possessed a reasonable understanding about leadership. Just over half communicated frequently with various groups/representatives, and slightly more than 60% participated in internships and social practice activities, community services, or as volunteers.

**Table 2 Percentage of Student Leaders Who Attended Leadership Classes or Schools**

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Knowledge about leadership	Basically have no idea	17.99
	Little is known	36.31
	A professional understanding	0.16
	A certain understanding	43.95
	A full understanding	1.59
School promotion of student cadre leadership	Yes	44.90
	No	55.10
Participation in internships & social practice activities	Yes	65.61
	No	34.39
Participation in community service or volunteer activities	Yes	62.74
	No	37.26
Working as a student assistant	Yes	44.90
	No	55.10
Communication frequency—students in class, party branch, institute, or association	Occasionally	6.21
	Sometimes	41.24
	Always	52.55

### ***The Current Leadership Characteristic Practices Shown by Student Cadres at SWUT University***

The characteristic leadership practices shown by the student cadres are listed in Table 3. The highest score was seen for Model the Way. Moderate scores were found for Encourage the Heart, Challenge the Heart, Enable Others to Act, and then Inspire a Shared Vision. The table gives the

mean scores, standard deviations and the mean scale interpretation of the existing leadership characteristics of the student cadres based the Five Leadership Practices: The Exemplary Model.

**Table 3** *Leadership Practices Utilized by Student Cadres*

Five Practice Models	Current Leadership Characteristic Practice Shown by Student Cadres			
	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Model the Way	628	3.55	0.74	High
Inspire a Shared Vision	628	3.42	0.63	Moderate
Challenge the Process	628	3.48	0.60	Moderate
Enable Others to Act	628	3.46	0.72	Moderate
Encourage the Heart	628	3.50	0.74	Moderate

***The Relationship between Categorical Variables of Student Cadres and the Characteristic Leadership Practices Adopted***

The extent to which student cadres utilized performed their leadership characteristic practice in relation to categorical variables is shown in Table 4. A significant difference ( $p = .012$ ) was found with respect to Inspire a Shared Vision regarding gender (Table 5). The findings revealed that none of the other variables showed statistically significant differences, although position showed a weak possibility of reaching significance with a greater sample number and the inclusion of more variables.

**Table 4** *Relationships between Demographic Variables and Student Leadership Characteristics*

Demographic Variables	Model the Way		Inspire a Shared Vision		Challenge the Process		Enable Others to Act		Encourage the Heart		
	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Gender</b>											
Male	307	3.51	0.78	3.48	0.61	3.47	0.61	3.47	0.73	3.46	0.76
Female	321	3.59	0.71	3.36	0.64	3.49	0.59	3.46	0.72	3.53	0.73
<b>Major</b>											
Lit. & Hist.	403	3.55	0.74	3.43	0.62	3.51	0.587	3.45	0.72	3.47	0.74
Sci. & Eng.	225	3.55	0.76	3.40	0.64	3.43	0.609	3.49	0.73	3.54	0.75
<b>Year</b>											
Freshmen	126	3.45	0.78	3.38	0.69	3.51	0.610	3.50	0.68	3.56	0.79
Sophomore	188	3.52	0.70	3.44	0.60	3.45	0.562	3.37	0.77	3.45	0.74
Junior	314	3.61	0.75	3.44	0.614	3.49	0.611	3.52	0.70	3.49	0.73
<b>Position</b>											
Vice-Pres.	64	3.65	0.71	3.41	0.66	3.47	0.602	3.38	0.75	3.37	0.84
Ss. officer	219	3.46	0.75	3.45	0.60	3.51	0.615	3.48	0.74	3.50	0.75
Class cadre	349	3.59	0.74	3.40	0.64	3.47	0.584	3.47	0.71	3.52	0.72

**Table 5** *The p-values of Demographic Variables in Relation to Leadership Characteristics*

Demographic Variables	Leadership Characteristics				
	Model the Way	Inspire a Shared Vision	Challenge the Process	Enable Others to Act	Encourage the Heart
Gender	.168	.012	.544	.848	.204
Major	.946	.530	.085	.491	.308
Year of Study	.111	.755	.704	.087	.459
Position	.067	.744	.834	.619	.351

## Discussion

The leadership characteristic practiced most consistently by student cadres was Model the Way. This was followed in order of frequency by Encourage the Heart, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Inspire a Shared Vision. The highest mean score was found in the female group for Model the Way. The female cohort differed significantly from the male cohort ( $p = .012$ ) in the Inspire a Shared Vision category. This is in agreement with previous studies in which female leaders performed in a superior fashion (López et al., 2019; Cáceres-Reche et al., 2021). Although some studies have indicated that women are more likely to achieve greater leadership than men, they do not necessarily achieve this on account of subtle gender biases (Ely et al., 2011).

The leadership roles practiced in this study referred to a process or function of motivating and influencing a group of individuals such as subordinates, employees, teams, or people in an organization to achieve their goals by acting in a clear direction in a wide variety of situations or circumstances. The student cadres across all the demographic variables investigated (gender, major, academic year and position, student cadres in all classes except the freshmen) performed at a high level of leadership by using Model the Way. Freshmen still needed guidance from experienced leaders to indicate expected behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). This type of leader behavior corresponded to the key dimensions identified under transformational leadership. Hence, students may develop exemplary leadership practices as they place importance on teamwork and encourage others. By this means, living examples are provided of the ideals promoted (Kelly & Azaola, 2015).

There was a difference in the mean scores of the gender group, with female student cadres scoring significantly less than males in the Inspire a Shared Vision leadership category ( $p = .012$ ). In other words, an Inspire a Shared Vision student leader must have followers and be able to inspire them to engage with enthusiasm to reach the goals promoted (Konuk & Posner, 2021). Therefore, gender is an aspect that should be taken into consideration in leadership practice, as there is some evidence of behavioral strength differences (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009). Generally, gender is not considered a decisive factor when it comes to performing certain functions; some researchers assert that that gender cannot be accepted as fundamentally influencing leadership (Cáceres-Reche, et al., 2021). Hence, there is a need for continuing research.

Regarding the five dimensions of leadership practices, the present research revealed that Model the Way was ranked the highest by the student cadres. However, in the study conducted by Silva et al. (2017) it was practiced with the lowest frequency. According to research carried out by Abu-Tineh et al. (2009) in Jordan, practicing Inspire a Shared Vision was placed at the lowest extreme of the moderate range. This indicates a need to examine the roles of culture and context on leadership development. It is evident that moderating factors are operating. These may relate to the instructional time spent, the impact of examples used to illustrate good practice, efforts made in student image building, and the practical usefulness of examples provided in assignments. It is crucial to emphasize the need for personal and professional growth after short-term programs to enable effective leadership to become fully developed (Konuk & Posner, 2021).

Leadership training has applications in both educational and organizational settings. In the educational setting, particularly in higher education, there are opportunities for developing students' responsibilities to work cooperatively with friends and instructors. This suggests that educators might incorporate the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model into the planning and evaluation of their extracurricular and curricular activities. Different educational strategies may be needed to develop leadership skills on account of prevailing cultural and economic contexts, as highlighted by Díaz et al. (2019) in their study of Mexican and Spanish students. Such efforts help students to reach their professional potentials.

In the current study, student cadres served as an important connection between university administrators, instructors, and regular graduate students, as well as being a crucial supplementary force that assisted their university in student affairs management. Therefore, enhancing student leadership will help to increase the effectiveness of university administration and the overall management of student affairs.

The findings of the current study can be applied in business settings and private sector companies, by both entrepreneurs and organizations. Research indicates that exemplary transformational leaders are able to change people and culture within a workplace (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Therefore for a large organization, exemplary female or male CEOs can be role models (Model the Way) for their subordinates to improve their leadership in many aspects. According to Kouzes and Posner's (2013) concept, leaders who employ transformational leadership skills bring about desirable changes inside an organization. It is interesting to point out that in fostering organizational development, female exemplary leaders, such as CEO, managers, or department chairs, can instigate in-service training programs for female followers so as to meet the needs of labor markets. Moreover, in organizations with mostly female officers, such as healthcare organizations, recruitment should be promoted among those with leadership qualities. In the current global context and labor market, females need to have access to development of leadership skills, which has an influence on an institution's organizational culture and labor relations.

Nowadays, young generation professionals with some work experience are more likely to keep their jobs, or find another one when they decide to make a change and obtain a bachelor degree. The role of educators from different parts of the world is in identifying the appropriate leadership model for their students in developing the skills that they need to succeed in various jobs and become ready to start a business as an entrepreneur, or be self-employed. The implementation of entrepreneurial training to empower transformational leadership may help young professionals to more readily adapt to the current social and economic situation (Díaz et al., 2019).

### **Limitations and Implications**

A limitation of the present study was that only the first to third year student cadres were included. Involvement of all academic years would have enabled the development of more appropriate leadership training courses, and provided advice on the inclusion of the most meaningful leadership extracurricular activities. This could lead to the identification of the possible impacts of different demographic variables on leadership practices.

Due to the peculiarities regarding their identity, student cadres served as an important link between university administrators, instructors, and regular graduate students, as well as being a crucial supplementary force that assisted their university in student affairs management. To prepare students or teachers to function more efficiently in the instructional domain and be better managers, motivators and mentors, universities and alternative preparation program providers must equip students and teachers with exemplary transformational leadership practices and knowledge (Quin et al., 2015).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership was investigated among student cadres in a Chinese university. The Model the Way approach was recorded at the high level, and females scored slightly higher than males in leadership practice. In the Inspire a Shared Vision category, females scored significantly lower than males.

It is recommended that higher education institutions (a) pay attention to the needs of student organizations and the high demand for student cadres, (b) focus on training student/practitioners leaders/cadres to become knowledge-based leaders, and develop practical competence through more hands-on exercises such as via seminars or internships, and (c) provide an organization model for students, develop the quality of extracurricular student activities, and organize more student leadership competitions to enhance their practical abilities.

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