



STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP TRAITS, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND EXTRACURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT: TOWARDS A PROPOSED ENHANCEMENT PLAN

FENG JIN

Abstract: This research study aimed to analyze college students' leadership traits and social-emotional skills and their engagement in extracurricular activities. The study was conducted at Guilin Normal College in China and employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The participants were college students selected based on their active involvement in extracurricular activities. The study addressed several research questions about students' leadership traits, social-emotional skills, and extracurricular engagement.

Based on the study's findings, recommendations were provided for educators and schools. These include providing opportunities for students to further develop their leadership skills, nurturing the growth of social-emotional competencies, promoting and expanding extracurricular engagement opportunities, and integrating social-emotional skill development within extracurricular activities. These recommendations aim to support students' holistic development and maximize the positive impact of extracurricular engagement on their educational journey.

Keywords: *Chinese Universities, Leadership Traits, Student Engagement*

I. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental issue of education is who to cultivate people for, how to cultivate them, and what kind of people to cultivate. Higher education, as an activity to cultivate people, aims to "stimulate and guide the sustainable self-development of college students, and cultivate talents capable of promoting sustainable social development.". It is necessary to cultivate people required for social development, knowledge accumulation, cultural inheritance, national survival, and institutional operation, educate and guide students to cultivate comprehensive abilities, and attach importance to and strengthen the construction of extracurricular activities. As the main force of talent cultivation, universities shoulder the responsibility of talent cultivation. Extracurricular activities, as an important carrier of talent cultivation, play an important role in meeting the needs of talent cultivation in the new era.

Based on the above considerations, the present researcher has chosen "students' leadership traits and social emotional skills towards better extracurricular engagement" as his doctoral dissertation. The purpose is to analyze and describe the constituent elements of students' leadership traits and social and emotional skills in the context of the new era; Analyze the relationship between extracurricular activities and students' leadership traits and social emotional skills, and further reveal the impact of extracurricular activities on students' leadership traits and social emotional skills; Finally, based on empirical research, this paper explores practical strategies for how extracurricular activities can more effectively enhance students' leadership traits and social and emotional skills.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In view of the important role of extracurricular activities in cultivating personalized and diversified development of college students, this study explores the three dimensions of extracurricular activities and college students' leadership traits based on the principle of the important role played by extracurricular activities in cultivating college students' traits and social emotional skills in Guilin Teachers College, and on the basis of in-depth analysis of how to describe college students' leadership traits and social emotional skills. The relationship between the five aspects of social and emotional skills, and proposes practical strategies to enhance college students' leadership traits and social and emotional skills through extracurricular activities, providing theoretical reference and practical guidance for extracurricular activities in "how to cultivate people.". The following groups will benefit from the study:

University Officials. Understanding the students' leadership traits and social-emotional skills and their impact on extracurricular engagement can be crucial for university officials. This study can provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to student success and engagement outside the classroom. By recognizing the significance of these traits and skills, university officials can develop strategies and initiatives to promote and support students' involvement in extracurricular activities, leading to a more vibrant and inclusive campus environment.

Chinese University Students. For Chinese university students, this study holds great significance as it directly pertains to their overall development and growth. By identifying the leadership traits and social-emotional skills that positively influence extracurricular engagement, students can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to their success. This knowledge can empower them to actively cultivate these skills, enhancing their leadership abilities, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being, thereby maximizing their university experience.

Professors. Professors play a critical role in shaping the academic and personal growth of students. Understanding the relationship between leadership traits, social-emotional skills, and extracurricular engagement can enable professors to design pedagogical approaches that foster these skills in their classrooms. By integrating activities and assignments that promote leadership development and emotional intelligence, professors can create a conducive learning environment that extends beyond academic achievement, nurturing well-rounded individuals.

Guidance Counseling Unit. The guidance counseling unit can leverage the findings of this study to enhance their support services. By recognizing the impact of leadership traits and social-emotional skills on extracurricular engagement, counselors can provide tailored guidance to students seeking assistance in these areas. They can offer workshops, mentorship programs, and resources that facilitate the development of these skills, empowering students to take on leadership roles, build resilience, and navigate the challenges of extracurricular involvement effectively.

University Student Organizations. Student organizations are the backbone of extracurricular engagement on campus. This study's significance to student organizations lies in its ability to shed light on the factors that contribute to successful student leadership and engagement. Armed with this knowledge, student organizations can refine their selection processes, training programs, and leadership development initiatives. They can create an environment that encourages the growth of social-emotional skills, empowering student leaders to foster inclusivity, collaboration, and effective team dynamics within their organizations.

Future Researchers. For future researchers, this study serves as a foundation for further exploration and expansion of knowledge in the field of student leadership and social-emotional skills. It can inspire researchers to delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which these traits and skills influence extracurricular engagement. Future research can explore interventions, longitudinal studies, and comparative analyses across different cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors contribute to student success and well-being.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. Firstly, it described the leadership traits and social emotional skills of college students through a comprehensive literature review. Then, based on the identified research objectives, a questionnaire survey method was used to conduct a quantitative analysis of extracurricular activities, leadership traits, and social emotional skills among college students. The study aimed to analyze the relationship between extracurricular activities, leadership traits, and social emotional skills of college students.

The researcher collected data by administering the questionnaire to the participants, and the participants' responses were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. The collected data allowed for an examination of the extent of students' involvement in extracurricular activities, their exhibited leadership

traits, and their social emotional skills.

By conducting the quantitative analysis, the study sought to explore the potential associations and correlations between extracurricular activities, leadership traits, and social emotional skills among college students. The data collected enabled the researchers to determine whether there was a significant relationship between students' engagement in extracurricular activities and the development of their leadership traits and social emotional skills.

Through the analysis of the collected data, the study provided valuable insights into the impact of extracurricular activities on college students' leadership traits and

social emotional skills. The findings contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between these variables and provided empirical evidence to support or refute existing theories and hypotheses.

The descriptive-correlational research design allowed the researchers to provide a detailed account of the relationship between extracurricular activities, leadership traits, and social emotional skills among college students. The findings of this study helped to shed light on the importance of extracurricular engagement for the development of leadership qualities and social emotional competencies in the college student population.

IV. SAMPLING DESIGN

This study focused on college students from Guilin Teachers College as the research participants. To determine the sample size, Cochran's Finite Population Formula was utilized, considering the population size and desired level of confidence.

The population of college students from each year level at Guilin Teachers College was as follows: 4460 students in the first year, 3774 students in the second year, and 3564 students in the third year. The total population of college students at the institution was 11798.

Using Cochran's Finite Population Formula, the researchers calculated the sample size required for the study. The determined sample sizes for each year level were as follows: 141 students from the first year, 119 students from the second year, and 112 students from the third year. Overall, a total of 372 students were selected to participate in the survey.

By selecting a representative sample from each year level, the study aimed to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences among the college student population at Guilin Teachers College. This sample size allowed for adequate data collection and analysis to address the research objectives effectively.

V. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This study utilized a set of questionnaires to gather data for the research. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, which were completed by the participants.

The first part of the questionnaire surveyed the participants' involvement in extracurricular activities. Respondents were provided with six categories of extracurricular activities and were asked to choose the ones they have participated in. The components for this section were adopted from O'Brien and Rollefson's study on Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement (1995).

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 14 questions that aimed to assess the self-perceived leadership traits of college students. These questions were designed to evaluate leadership traits from three dimensions: self cognition and management, social practice, and personality charm. The questionnaire was derived from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire utilized by the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW).

The third part of the questionnaire included 25 questions to assess the self-perceived social and emotional skills of college students. These questions were structured to evaluate social and emotional skills across five aspects: work confidence, perseverance, organization, coexistence, and flexibility. These were derived from "The Impact of Specific Social and Emotional Skills on Life Outcomes" by OECD (2020).

By using this questionnaire, the study sought to gather self-reported data on the participants' extracurricular engagement, leadership traits, and social and emotional skills. The participants were asked to respond to the questions based on their own perceptions and experiences.

The use of the questionnaire allowed for a systematic and standardized approach to collect data from the participants. It provided a structured framework to capture the participants' insights and self-assessments regarding their involvement in extracurricular activities, leadership traits, and social and emotional skills.

The first part of the questionnaire, which surveyed the participants' involvement in extracurricular activities, demonstrated strong content validity. This was evidenced by the fact that the questionnaire items were adapted from O'Brien and Rollefson's (1995) study on Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement, a well-established and widely recognized source in the field. Moreover, the participants' responses showed significant variation in the number of extracurricular activities they engaged in. On average,

participants reported participating in 3.8 extracurricular activities ($SD = 1.2$). This indicates that the questionnaire effectively captured the diverse range of extracurricular activities that college students typically participate in.

The second part of the questionnaire, which assessed the self-perceived leadership traits of college students, demonstrated strong construct validity. The questionnaire items were derived from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire utilized by the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW), which is a well-validated measure of leadership traits. Factor analysis revealed three distinct factors representing self cognition and management, social practice, and personality charm. The participants' responses indicated that they perceived themselves to possess moderate to high levels of leadership traits. The average scores for the three dimensions were as follows: self cognition and management ($M = 4.2, SD = 0.8$), social practice ($M = 4.0, SD = 0.7$), and personality charm ($M = 3.9, SD = 0.6$).

The third part of the questionnaire, which assessed the self-perceived social and emotional skills of college students, demonstrated strong criterion validity. The questionnaire items were based on OECD's (2020) research on specific social and emotional skills that influence life outcomes, providing a robust theoretical foundation. Factor analysis revealed five distinct aspects representing work confidence, perseverance, organization, coexistence, and flexibility. Participants' responses indicated that they perceived themselves to have relatively strong social and emotional skills. The average scores for the five aspects were as follows: work confidence ($M = 4.1, SD = 0.9$), perseverance ($M = 4.2, SD = 0.8$), organization ($M = 4.0, SD = 0.7$), coexistence ($M = 3.9, SD = 0.6$), and flexibility ($M = 3.8, SD = 0.7$).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings indicate that the students possess commendable leadership skills across the dimensions of self-cognition and management, social practice, and personality charm. They demonstrate very satisfactory levels of leadership skills in these areas. In terms of self-cognition and management, they exhibit qualities such as perceptiveness, determination, persistence, diligence, and conscientiousness. In social practice, they display friendliness, empathy, outgoingness, sensitivity, and articulateness. Regarding personality charm, they are perceived as dependable, self-confident, self-assured, and trustworthy. These findings highlight the students' effectiveness as leaders and their ability to establish positive relationships and communicate effectively.

The students demonstrate satisfactory to very satisfactory levels of social-emotional skills in the dimensions of work confidence, persistence, organization, getting along, and resilience. They exhibit confidence in sharing ideas, work independently, and handle difficult tasks. They display a strong commitment to giving their personal best, maintain focus on challenging tasks, and show resilience in the face of adversity. Their organizational skills, ability to get along with others, and self-regulation skills are also very satisfactory. These findings emphasize the students' positive social-emotional development and their ability to navigate various aspects of their academic and personal lives successfully.

The findings reveal that the students are moderately to highly engaged in various extracurricular activities across different categories. They demonstrate passion, dedication, and active participation in academic, animal welfare, community project, sports and leisure, healthcare, and green initiatives. Specifically, they show a moderate level of engagement in academic activities, a high level of engagement in animal welfare, community projects, sports and leisure, and a moderately engaged level of involvement in healthcare and green initiatives. These findings underscore the students' commitment to making a positive impact in multiple areas of interest outside of their academic pursuits.

The study reveals positive and significant correlations between extracurricular engagement and various social-emotional skills. Active participation in extracurricular activities, including academic, animal welfare, community projects, sports and leisure, healthcare, and green initiatives, positively impacts students' leadership capabilities and social-emotional skills. Such engagement fosters self-awareness, self-reflection, self-management, communication, teamwork, community engagement, confidence, empathy, communication skills, and resilience. These findings highlight the importance of promoting and encouraging students' involvement in extracurricular activities to enhance their social-emotional development and leadership potential.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings that students possess commendable leadership skills, it is recommended that educators and schools provide opportunities for students to further develop and refine their leadership abilities. This can be done through workshops, training programs, and extracurricular activities that focus on enhancing self-cognition and management, social practice, and personality charm. Encouraging students to take on leadership roles in school clubs, projects, and community initiatives can also provide valuable experiential learning opportunities for them to apply and strengthen their leadership skills.

Considering the students' satisfactory to very satisfactory levels of social-emotional skills, it is recommended that educators and schools continue to support and nurture the development of these skills. Providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages students to express their ideas, collaborate with others, and persevere through challenges can help further enhance their social-emotional competencies. Implementing programs and interventions that specifically target areas for improvement, such as expressing feelings when upset, can be beneficial in promoting well-rounded social-emotional development.

Given the students' moderate to high levels of engagement in extracurricular activities across different categories, it is recommended that educators and schools continue to promote and expand opportunities for involvement in these areas. They can establish and support clubs, organizations, and initiatives related to academic pursuits, animal welfare, community projects, sports and leisure, healthcare, and green initiatives. Providing resources, mentorship, and recognition for student participation can encourage and sustain their passion and dedication in these extracurricular activities.

Based on the positive correlations found between extracurricular engagement and social-emotional skills, it is recommended that educators and schools actively encourage and facilitate students' participation in a diverse range of extracurricular activities. They can promote the integration of social-emotional skill development within these activities, such as incorporating opportunities for self-reflection, teamwork, communication, and resilience building. Additionally, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment that recognizes and values students' extracurricular engagement can further motivate and reinforce the positive impact on their social-emotional well-being.

