

A Qualitative Exploration of Alumni Reflections on Student Leadership Practices through Co-Curricular Engagement in Public HEIs

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the leadership practices developed by students through co-curricular engagement in a public higher education institution (HEI). The research aims to examine the leadership roles undertaken by students during their years and the extent to which these roles contributed to the development of leadership practices. Leadership roles refer to formal positions such as student council members or event coordinators, while leadership practices encompass the application of skills in real contexts, including communication, teamwork, and decision-making. The study also examined the perceived benefits and challenges encountered by students as they balanced academic responsibilities with active participation in co-curricular activities. The qualitative research design was used to record rich and detailed insights. Two male and four female alumni of HEI were selected for semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling technique. Key insights and common patterns in the data were found through thematic analysis. The results show that organized university platforms such as student councils, events, and leadership training programs are the main catalysts for the development of student leadership. These platforms promoted critical thinking, teamwork, time management, and effective communication. Two main themes emerged from the data: 1) Student leadership practices and their impact on personal and professional development, and 2) Institutional support mechanisms that have facilitated or restricted the involvement of students in student leadership. Although most alumni reported positive results in terms of leadership development, they also pointed to a number of challenges, including time constraints, academic pressure, and sometimes lack of institutional support or coordination. The study concluded that leadership development in higher education requires both an engaged student population and a supportive institutional framework. The findings underlined the importance of aligning institutional guidance strategies with the development needs of students and strengthening the design and implementation of co-curricular programs. The study recommended that students should take an active and participative approach to leadership opportunities offered during their academic career to prepare them for future professional roles and societal contributions.

Keywords: Leadership Practices, Employment Readiness, Career Preparedness, Higher Education Institution (HEI), Graduate Employability, Case study

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has become gradually significant as it is one of the main factors which help each nation accomplish its goal for quality graduates with leadership potential. Such a goal also requires students who can persevere and remain focused on their plans without getting distracted by arising circumstances or challenges. Students need to overcome every excruciating obstacle and challenge that comes their way from enrollment until graduation. Enrolment into a university in pursuit of a beneficial education is a challenging issue to study,

especially in terms of studying the skills necessary for future needs and various future challenges that entails.

There is a growing debate about the changing nature of work. Jobs that existed thirty years ago have evolved or no longer exist. Job markets need people with new characteristics to fit in with the changing workplace. Despite the interest in and the ongoing research on graduate's work readiness, the struggle to bridge the skill gap between graduate skills supply and employer requirements continues in all countries. Furthermore, many businesses have realized that fresh graduates lack crucial skills that could be deemed assets or serve to secure their present employment for an extended duration. These persistent skills gaps often stem from a mismatch between academic training and market demands (Yong & Ling, 2023). Some graduates exhibit undesirable traits such as low work ethics, deficient enthusiasm, lack of resilience, or even dishonesty during their tenure (Mohamad et al., 2020)

Student employability is one of the major challenges in the higher education sector. As a key performance indicator in university quality assurance processes, the product and employability rate of students after their graduation is an issue of concern worldwide. In recent decades, student quality has become an increasingly important topic. One of the ways of enhancing employability is the imposition of leadership practices. Research suggests that there are several factors that affect student employability including the role of work experience, particularly that were gained before entering university is often underestimated (Bennett et al., 2023). Moreover, government or institutional support, including policies that promote graduate employability, access to professional certifications, mentorship opportunities, and support networks, also play a crucial role in enhancing employability as these kinds of sense of belonging tend to manifest into leadership practices (Kim et al., 2022).

The education world is affected aggressively by the emergence of globalization and artificial intelligence. Graduates are being mass produced by universities to occupy the labour market. The issue mentioned above highlighted the inadequacy of graduates' work readiness and their insufficiency in crucial skills (Abd Majid et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some other graduates are qualifying themselves through soft skills and leadership experiences gained through employability programs. These graduates are equipping themselves with working skills including management and leadership skills. Ahmid et al. (2023) highlights that innovation dimensions such as leadership, risk taking, energy, and creativity are valuable in improving employability of students leading them to stand out in competitive professional environments. Therefore, this study attempted to explore the perceptions of alumnus from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) pertaining to the student leadership practices to enhance their employability with the following research questions determining the direction of this study:

1. What are alumni's perceptions of their leadership practices developed through co-curricular involvement during their university years?
2. Which aspects of leadership participation are perceived to support alumni's employment readiness?
3. What challenges do alumni face when participating in leadership practices in public higher education institutions?

Although various researchers have conducted numerous studies on the topic of student leadership, with the rapid evolvement of technology, globalization and ever-changing socio-economic conditions which affect graduates' preparedness, studies focusing specifically on graduates' perceptions who managed to secure placements and reach continuous milestones are still very limited. Studying these aspects is very crucial as it can enable better strategic actions to be taken by current students and educators to shed light into the real-world insight of what works, understanding sustainable long-term-employability to prepare psychologically and motivationally; having better coping mechanisms. Moreover, these success stories enable authorities such as education departments, schools, and HEIs to improve curricula, career services, and industry linkages and shape policies that bridge the gap between education and labour market needs. The findings of this study could also help the school personnel, HEI administrators, as well as parents and future graduates themselves to promote continuous learning, upskilling and develop strategies into navigating career path and creating achievable future milestones. Thus, this study is carried out to investigate the importance of leadership

practices particularly to enhance employability in Malaysia.

Problem Statement

Youth unemployment has become a critical issue in Malaysia and globally. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), approximately six out of ten unemployed individuals are under the age of 24. Each year, more than 250,000 students graduate from Malaysian institutions, yet one in five remains unemployed six months after graduation. Unemployment among diploma and degree holders is now nearly three times the national average, with around 26% of first-degree holders out of work. Nearly half of these unemployed graduates are from both public and private universities.

These statistics highlight a growing disconnect between higher education outcomes and workforce readiness. Employers increasingly emphasize soft skills such as communication, resilience, and leadership competencies that are not always explicitly taught within academic syllabi. While higher education institutions are expected to equip students with these attributes, there is ongoing concern that co-curricular and leadership development opportunities are underutilized or inconsistently structured.

Leadership practices developed during university years through student organizations, peer-led initiations, and institutional support systems are believed to play a vital role in enhancing employability. However, limited research exists that captures the voices of graduates who actively engaged in these practices and successfully transitioned into the workforce. Understanding their experiences is critical for informing policy, improving support systems, and bridging the gap between education and employment. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the leadership experiences of graduates from public universities in Malaysia and examining the ways in which these experiences support their employment readiness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the twenty-first century, the demand for leadership skills and experience such as being adaptable, knowledgeable, qualified, and employable individuals is expected to rise to meet the changing requirements of the job market. As such, there is a need to generate personalities that possess these traits to effectively gather the needs of new employment opportunities (Borg & Scott-Young, 2020). The provision of work readiness opportunities enables individuals to use their affective abilities effectively, exhibit emotional intelligence, demonstrate common qualities, and harness career-specific intellectual talents (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Multiple factors contribute to an individual's employability, augmenting their prospects of securing employment and rendering them more appealing as potential candidates in the job market.

Various factors can influence the readiness of a worker in the workplace. These may include possessing leadership traits such as adaptability, integrity, interpersonal skills, and a strong work ethic. The level of work readiness and individual exhibits is influenced by various factors, including career planning, cultural background, self-efficacy, resiliency, social skills, entrepreneurial orientation, proactive outlook, and emotional intelligence (Stough et al., 2009; Miners et al., 2018). The following sequence presents the eight elements: career planning, culture, self-efficacy, resilience, social skills, and entrepreneurial orientation (Audibert et al., 2020).

According to Caballero and Walker (2010), work readiness refers to an individual's ability to respond to a pre-determined set of conditions. The concept of job readiness encompasses three key aspects: physical, mental, and emotional health. The second aspect pertains to the prerequisites, which should be followed by evaluating one's proficiencies and educational background. Experience contributes to a candidate's job preparedness and the three attributes (Akbar et al., 2021).

On top of that, according to Sartika and Nengsi (2022), the most crucial aspect of work readiness depends on individual qualities, which are personal attributes stemming from leadership practices that determine an individual's resilience, adaptability to the work environment, and self-development efforts. Hence, with lack of these in graduates, problems of attaining their next career milestone might surface.

This is particularly emphasized as Asian society particularly the south-eastern Asian countries have a strong spirit of patronage. Therefore, paying attention to the leadership practices in every unit of society, especially in preparation for workplace and career milestones is very important and crucial (Asbari et al., 2020; Asbari et al., 2020).

Obviously, each employer depending on size and industrial background is looking for a different skill set (Benbow & Hora, 2018) because each job requires its own specific skills. However, Leadership Practices is a crucial skill that employers in various industries consistently value. Leadership is seen as an asset in the workplace because it indicates an individual's ability to effectively guide and motivate others, make sound decisions and drive organizational success (Zafar et al., 2023).

Hence, this research will help understand the topic of study under the Malaysia context to help future graduates prepare themselves and develop higher marketability skills. A useful way to understand the need of the industry is not only to wait for their practical training period but to develop an awareness of the importance of leadership practices and possess and practice those even during their studying years. Therefore, it is important for single unit learners and educators to note that they themselves play a crucial role on top of policymakers to ensure sustainability employment and success way after graduation and be able to navigate their career milestones despite changes in the job market demands.

Based on the literature mentioned above, we can conclude that individuals must have leadership practices to transform it into work readiness to face challenges and compete with others in the workplace. Leadership practices are a crucial feature that must be strengthened and progressively practiced since it is one of the factors used to determine whether graduates can satisfy the needs of employers. Studies have shown that this issue has been regarded as a crucial part in the selection and hiring process. Adaptable, knowledgeable, qualified, and employable personalities will be generated to gather the needs of new employment requirements in the twenty-first century (Borg & Scott-Young, 2020).

It can be concluded that the solution to the issue lies in the hands of the students as participants in the topic. In the case of this study, it is highly recommended for students to participate actively and put in their effort whole-heartedly in both academic and non-academic activities when studying in a particular institution. Any other added working experience, skills or self-initiation will benefit them in their career milestone. This study approach therefore aims to explore the nature of leadership practices in learners in preparation for their future career aspirations and milestones, especially among the early years after graduation in securing initial job placements from the content of alumni based on their success stories.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

This conceptual framework highlights the increasing global emphasis on developing employability skills among graduates to meet the evolving demands of the workforce. As the modern labor market becomes more complex and competitive, individuals who actively engage in continuous learning and skill acquisition are more likely to remain relevant and productive. A direct correlation exists between employability and skill levels, with limited competencies often restricting growth and success. In this context, leadership development, particularly among students, serves as a critical factor in enhancing employability and aligning workplace expectations.

The framework underscores the importance of organizational culture in shaping leadership behavior. Drawing on Werner and Schoepfle's (1987) knowledge systems theory, it suggests that leadership effectiveness is influenced by both internal attributes and external cultural contexts. Leaders must adapt to changing environments by modifying their behaviors to suit organizational needs and drive positive outcome. Student leaders, through their engagement in campus activities, develop interpersonal and adaptive skills that contribute not only to personal growth but also to future professional success.

Participation in co-curricular leadership roles is identified as a valuable contributor to employability. Institutions of higher education are therefore encouraged to provide opportunities for leadership development, particularly through experiential learning models that focus on relational skills. These experiences are

increasingly supported by structured programs designed to prepare students for the realities of the modern workforce.

Active student participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities, especially leadership roles, has been widely recognized as a key contributor to enhanced graduate employability in higher education contexts. Tinto (2012) emphasizes that institutional engagement plays a crucial role in developing students' leadership capacities and expanding their social capital. When higher education institutions implement structured programs that focus on relational skill development, they contribute to producing graduates who are more effectively prepared to meet the demands of the modern workforce. This growing emphasis on experiential and applied learning has, in turn, prompted a notable increase in leadership development initiatives across universities.

In the Malaysian context, national policy plays a pivotal role in shaping higher education reform. The Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 outlines a strategic plan to enhance institutional performance and foster future ready graduates. It calls for continuous innovations in teaching, curriculum design, and institutional governance. A key policy requirement mandated that universities allocate 30% of their curricula to the development of employability-related skills. This reform aims to ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and resilience required to succeed in an increasingly knowledge-driven and technology-intensive economy. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study, which posits that leadership practices among public university students, particularly those involving empowerment, can serve as a foundation for developing effective employability strategies.



Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study Adopted from Ivancevich (2001)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative exploratory case study designed to investigate students' leadership behaviors and preparedness for the workforce in Malaysian university setting. The researcher chose the qualitative approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences and the way they interpreted and contextualized their leadership journeys. As this issue has not been studied in depth with this particular population, especially in Malaysia, the qualitative approach has enabled to uncover nuanced perspectives that maybe overlooked by quantitative methods (Lim, 2024).

Case studies are particularly useful when research is focused on understanding current real-world phenomena in bounded systems (Rashid et al., 2019). The study included student leaders who had graduated from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and were now in leadership positions in their respective

fields. Following the guidelines of Stakes (1995) and Yin (2017), the case study method, helped researchers to collect detailed contextual data over a defined period of time, using open-ended and semi structured interviews as a primary tool for data collection. This approach has allowed a thorough understanding of the dynamics between student leadership experience and employability.

Participants

The study focused on IIUM alumni who had served in student leadership positions during their undergraduate studies and have advanced into professional positions. Using purposive sampling, six participants were chosen from a population of more than 85000 IIUM alumni. Since the objective of qualitative research is to obtain profound understanding rather than statistical generalizations, this non-probabilistic approach is suitable (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The three main requirements that all chosen participants had to fulfill were: 1) currently serving in an executive or higher leadership position within their company; 2) having worked in their respective fields for at least three years; 3) graduated from IIUM with a minimum of CGPA 3.0. To guarantee a variety of viewpoints, the participants were chosen from a wide range of professional and academic backgrounds. The researcher was able to concentrate on rich, in-depth narratives rather than general trends because of the small sample size (Palinkas et al., 2013).

This study included six alumni to allow for in-depth, detailed analysis, consistent with the goals of qualitative research. As Creswell (2008) notes, quantitative inquiry requires rich descriptions of individual perspectives, making large samples time-consuming and impractical. Given the exploratory nature of study, generalizability was not intended. Supporting this, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that smaller samples are more suitable for qualitative research, enabling deeper engagement with the data.

Data Collection

Data Collection was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews, which are well suited for qualitative research as they allow participants to share detailed personal stories while still addressing the core research questions (Adyeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interviews took place in November 2017 and March 2018, lasting approximately 40 minutes to an hour each. Participants were provided with an interview guide and a consent letter in advance to familiarize themselves with the nature and objectives of the study.

Inquiries about the participants' educational and professional backgrounds were used to establish rapport before the interviews started. Three sections comprised the core interview questions: 1) their perceptions of leadership; 2) their leadership experiences at university; 3) and obstacles that influenced their employability. The interviewer was able to delve deeper into intriguing themes as they surfaced during the conversations because of the semi-structured format's flexibility. Every interview was done in English language; on top of it being recorded with permission, and the verbatim transcription of the audio analyzed. Throughout the procedure, ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement were upheld. To improve the interview guide and make sure the questions were pertinent and clear, therefore, a pilot study was conducted whereby a postgraduate student participated with voluntary participation (Dikko, 2016).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in line with the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1) data acquisition; 2) initial coding; 3) theme search; 4) theme review; 5) theme definition; and 6) report production (Bryne, 2021). The transcriptions were manually coded, and recurring theme were grouped together to fit the research objectives (Adu, 2019). To ensure credibility and to reduce bias, the researchers engaged in investigative triangulation. A second analyst, a trained qualitative researcher, was consulted to review the coding and interpretation. In addition, the verbatim was checked by members by sending them their copies of transcripts and a summary of findings to confirm the accuracy of their interpretation (Chang, 2014).

The themes were developed by recursive coding and continuous benchmarking process, with special attention being given to how participants described their leadership practices, decision-making approaches and

challenges as student leaders. The analysis was mainly semantic, focusing on the explicit meanings conveyed by the narratives of the participants rather than trying to infer hidden themes beyond the narratives (Wæraas, 2022).

Coding Process and Reliability Measures

This study employed reflexive thematic analysis, grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, to interpret qualitative interview data. The six-step framework provided a structured yet flexible guide for analysis. The process began with transcription of interviews, a stage that promotes deep familiarization with data. Manual coding was performed on printed transcripts, as recommended by Brandão (2014), enhancing engagement with the text. The process was iterative and recursive, with regular movement back and forth across phases. Codes were generated through data immersion and were aligned with the research questions. Semantic level analysis was employed, focusing on explicit meanings rather than latent interpretations.

This analytic process also paralleled the categorical-content approach (Lieblich et al., 1998), involving the dissection of narratives into categorized units. Techniques by Ryan and Bernard (2003) such as identifying repetitions, metaphors, indigenous phrases, transitions, and sentence connectors further supported theme identification. Rigorous methods like word lists and context-based keyword analysis refined the coding outcomes.

Flexibility in defining themes was key, as themes were not determined by frequency alone but by their relevance and explanatory power. The study acknowledged prioritizing meaning-making derived from participants' responses following the teaching of Clarke and Braun (2013) and avoided equating interview questions with themes. The final themes emerged through analytical synthesis, validated through literature consultation and feedback from seniors.

Due to the personal nature of the study, reflexivity played a critical role in actively mitigating potential biases. As double vision, shifting between self and participant perspectives, was employed to explore shared and divergent experiences, enriching the interpretative depth of the findings. Although reflexive thematic analysis does not prioritize intercoder reliability, limited coder collaboration was incorporated at early stages to foster reflexive dialogue and to enhance interpretative depth and not to achieve coding consensus. Coding differences were treated as analytic opportunities rather than reliability issues (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

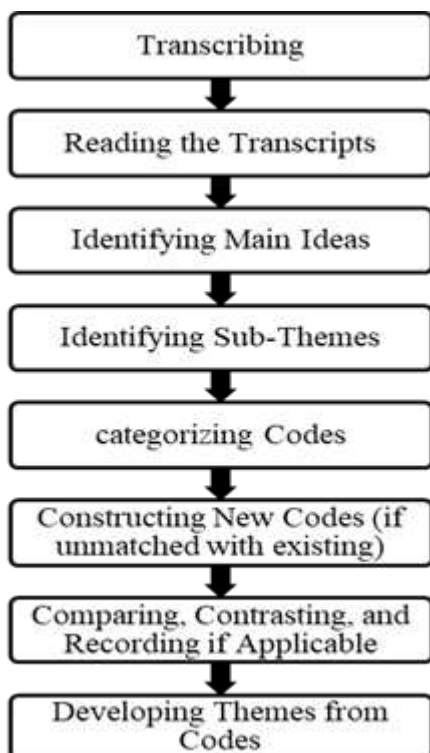


Figure 2 Coding Process of the Study

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of a semi-structured interview with six alumni of International Islamic University Malaysia. The aim of the study was to examine student leadership experience during the course of a student's academic year. The three main objectives of the study deliver: 1) understanding the student's perception of their leadership practice in university life; 2) exploring the benefits of participating in leadership activities; and 3) identifying the challenges students face in balancing academic and non-academic commitments. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed literally and coded systematically. A qualitative thematic analysis was used, with themes being extracted from the overarching ideas underlying the responses of the participants. This thematic approach has allowed us to identify patterns and differences between stories.

Table 1 Breakdown of Respondents' Details

Pseudonyms	Age, Gender	Basic Information
Nadia	31, Female	Hometown: Terengganu English Language and Literature Major, Class of 2012, Senior Executive of Corporate Affairs; Berjaya Corporation
Faris	30, Male	Hometown: Kuala Lumpur Psychology Major, Class of 2013, Head of Human Resources; Skytrex Adventure
Saufi	30, Male	Hometown: Selangor Information Technology Major, Class of 2013, Software Executive; Mysoft Corporation
Sara	28, Female	Hometown: Kedah Aerospace Engineering Major, Class of 2013, Operation Executive; CETCO Energy Services
Anna	29, Female	Hometown: Selangor Aerospace Engineering Major, Class of 2014, Engineer; Quality Assurance Department
Rose	29, Female	Hometown: Kuala Lumpur English Language and Literature Major, Class of 2012, Educator; International Arabic School

Major Themes

The thematic analysis of the data revealed seven overarching themes that are leadership as a development process, learning through real-life exposure, personal growth and employability, practical leadership and management skills, academic empowerment through leadership, conflict and role-related stress, coping mechanisms, and strategic adaptation. These themes have been mapped out against the three research questions in the study and reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of student leadership positions and the challenges faced by students in balancing multiple responsibilities. The following table 2 shows the themes and sub-themes aligned with each of the research questions below:

Table 2 Themes And Sub-Themes Aligned with Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes	Sub-Themes
RQ1: What are alumni's perceptions of their leadership practices developed through co-curricular involvement during their university years?	Leadership as a Developmental Process	-Involvement in student organizations -Leadership roles in campus events -Extracurricular engagement as leadership learning

	Experiential Learning through Real-World Exposure	-Industrial training and internships -Application of theory in practice -Leadership through part-time/off-campus work
	Academic Empowerment through Leadership Engagement	-Improved academic performance -Higher academic engagement -Transfer of leadership skills to coursework
RQ2: Which aspects of leadership participation are perceived to support alumni's employment readiness?	Personal Growth and Employability Skills	-Enhanced communication and writing skills -Increased confidence and adaptability -Time management and decision-making
	Practical Leadership and Management Skills	-Event planning and organization -Delegation and teamwork -Conflict resolution and problem-solving
	Academic Empowerment through Leadership Engagement	-Improved academic performance - Higher academic engagement -Transfer of leadership skills to coursework
RQ3: What challenges do alumni face when participating in leadership practices in public higher education institutions?	Conflict and Role Strain	-Self-conflict: time pressure and stress -Peer conflict: group expectation clashes -Institutional conflict: scheduling and structural issues
	Coping Mechanisms and Strategic Adaptation	-Prioritization and discipline -Emotional resilience -Support systems (peers, mentors, faith)

RQ1: Perception of Leadership Practice

The main objective of this interview prompts was to collect comprehensive information on respondents' personal leadership practices and experiences during their university years, regardless of their background. The interviews were designed to explore how students view leadership and the role of exposure to leadership in preparing for employment. The findings of the interviews show that all the six participants have broadly similar views on leadership practices and experiences in their university careers. They saw leadership as a continuous, day-to-day process, which requires both understanding and practical experience. Notably, respondents' interpretations of leadership focused on three main themes: 1) student involvement; 2) leadership experience; and 3) impact on academic and employment readiness.

Theme 1: Student Involvement and Participation

The first theme is student involvement and participation in university activities. All six respondents agreed that leadership practices at the university level primarily centered on student engagement in departmental and university-wide initiatives, which they viewed as some of the most effective platforms for developing leadership skills. Co-curricular activities and students' personal efforts to participate in clubs and societies revealed that such involvement was perceived as a valuable venue for acquiring leadership experience. Through these engagements, students not only gained practical experience, hands-on skills but also reinforced the theoretical knowledge acquired in class. These opportunities were considered essential for personal development and growth, as they enabled students to spend their time meaningfully while enhancing their academic and leadership competencies. Similar findings were also indicated by Zada (2021) who concluded

that participating in co-curricular activities improves students' leadership practices and plays an important role in the growth of leadership practices among graduates.

Table 3 Narrative Representation from the Transcript

Theme 1: Student Involvement	
Nadia	"During my study time, I actively involve myself in so many clubs and societies. So that's where I learn how to be good in leadership. I think IIUM promotes students to be participative and most of my friends did that too."
Sara	"I join a lot of co-curricular activities back in university years, during my first year as a participant and next as sub-committee and representative committee. Throughout the years, I gained momentum."
Anna	"Most of my semester breaks, I can say that it is very full, full of university activities. So, the second year is my first year to join the COMRADE, then I was just a normal participant. Then, in my third year, I was elected to be a secretary for COMRADE CLUB. So, I can say I really learn a lot."
Rose	"The only club that I join was KARATE. Even KARATE alone gives me a lot of things to learn."

Theme 2: Industrial Experience as a Platform for Leadership Development

The second emerging theme concerns the acquisition of industrial experience. Four out of six respondents reported that they worked part-time during their studies. These students stressed that leadership development and learning through experience in a university context are enriched by supplementary roles carried out outside of formal academic requirements. These experiences, both external and internal to the university, were seen as valuable opportunities to develop transferable skills.

Furthermore, in addition to conventional extracurricular activities, the results highlight the value of industrial experience as a supplemental means of fostering leadership skills. As highlighted by Okeke and Okolocha (2023), industrial experience provides learning opportunities for students to experience leadership skill development and activities associated with creative and innovative skills where students are able to develop professionalism, leadership skills, and interpersonal skills, cultivating essential leadership practices and soft skills.

Students are exposed to real-world professional settings through part-time work, where students can gain useful skills and insights. By giving the students, a chance to investigate fields that interest them, boost their employability, and gain confidence, this early involvement promotes career readiness. Such experiences not only help students earn extra money, but they also greatly influence their leadership potential and overall development.

Table 4 Industrial Experience for Leadership Development

Theme 2: Industrial Experience	
Anna	I was a part-time worker in Centre for University Social Responsibilities (CENSERVE)...and then I also experience working in Student Learning Enhancement Unit (SLEU) for a few months during my first and second year.
Sara	I did part-time jobs during my second and third year, I was a private home tutor; teaching maths and additional maths to high school students.
Anna (Cont..)	Previously, I opened a lot of booths. I had some small businesses ... and part-time tutoring at SLEU; I teach kids Mathematics and Science.
Rose	I started working as a teacher in my second year of university... I was part-time tutoring, and I was teaching karate at the same time...

Theme 3: Engagement in Additional Commitments for Leadership Development

The third theme that emerged is the involvement of students in extracurricular activities, which illustrates their attempts to develop skills outside of the classroom. Pursuing additional experiences was essential to their leadership development, according to two respondents mentioned in table 5. These pledges were viewed as chances for them to develop their skills outside of the official academic setting. These interactions promote both professional and personal development. Engaging in external leadership experience enables students to handle challenging, real-world situations. Effective leadership requires the development of decision-making, accountability, and resilience, all of which are fostered by these experiences. These extra obligations expose students to a variety of settings that demand growth, reflection, and adaptation. Similarly, a recent study conducted by Shomotova and Ibrahim (2024) showed students' self-initiated commitments outside of class such as active engagement in entrepreneurial education programs to carry out projects of any kind whether in the workplace or personal sphere could help develop leadership practices. Thus, making such commitments promotes holistic life preparedness and increases their overall leadership readiness.

Table 5 Academic Empowerment through Leadership Engagement

Theme 3: Academic Empowerment through Leadership Engagement	
Faris	<p>“Try reading newspapers and everything-know about what is going on because in a few years’ time you may come across all those things again and it might be useful for you. And try to start networking with others, so...you may come across with them again in the future.</p> <p>Knowledge can also be gained from outside world; when you do some events, some sports, you enjoy doing outdoor activities or you just enjoy being alone, reading books...make sure you don’t just focus on assignments and everything, give time to others too, do some run, do some random acts of kindness.”</p>
Saufi	<p>“I tried to join that society. But then, in the end, its like, doesn’t give me what I think I want, I can get that from...I think first year it’s like you are, how to say ‘culture shock’ because it’s a university life...its different from CFS or foundation.”</p>

RQ2: Perceived Contributions of Leadership Participation to Employment Readiness

Exploring this issue, an analysis of the data on the interviews revealed three emerging themes which highlight how leadership involvement supports students' preparation for the labor market. These themes are: 1) personal development; 2) professional development; and 3) academic satisfaction.

Theme 4: Personal Development

According to all six respondents as per table 6, their participation in leadership initiatives at university had a major positive impact on their personal growth. This development included improved self-awareness, developing one's unique strengths, and using experiential learning to reach one's full potential. Students realized that strong self-discipline, independence, focus, and sense of responsibility were necessary for effective personal development and were considered to be critical for success in the future workplace.

The development of high order thinking abilities was closely associated with personal growth. Through active participation in leadership roles, students developed critical thinking skills, decision-making, problem-solving, and survival skills. The importance of taking charge of one's future was recognized by the respondents, regardless of their individual life goals or career aspirations. They saw institutions, mentors, and outside resources as helpful growth platforms, but they saw themselves as the main forces behind their success. Being involved in leadership activities was viewed as necessary in this situation rather than optional. Students who were actively involved were able to take charge, overcome obstacles, and acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

Similarly, Middleton et al. (2024) highlighted that self-development, and improvement impacts one's leadership practices vis-vis leadership practices; increased confidence, and higher leadership practices are attributed to greater self-awareness and enhanced leadership knowledge.

Table 6 Personal Development

Theme 4: Personal Development	
Nadia	<p>“... you have to do it on your own. You have to make sure the objective is achieved. And then it's all under your shoulder to plan and everything... that's not a problem if you focus in your work.”</p> <p>“Leadership for me is simple. When you are able to make a decision for yourself its considered leadership already...and...when you also know how to make a decision for a group, an organization, know what to do, if you have a problem, a problem comes out, and you know what is the step to solve it, then that is leadership.”</p>
Faris	<p>“...you have to learn to be more self-discipline...”</p> <p>“You have to ensure that everything is correct. So, the final decision comes from you, you cannot allow for mistakes to happen...it teaches me to be more like objective when it comes to decision-making.”</p>
Sara	<p>“...I develop certain skills such as the attentiveness towards things...and also commitment.”</p> <p>“Leadership practices benefit me when I first attended the job interview then also while I was working problems solved.”</p>
Anna	“...I love something different. So maybe it started out of curiosity.”
Rose	“...however competent you are, you need to be clear of your goals and your aims and along the way, you will learn a lot.”

Theme 5: Professional Exposure

Professional exposure is the fifth theme of the study. Two themes regarding professional exposure are produced by the interview data. 1) Leadership skills and 2) management skills are the two items on the list. Professional exposure are the advantages that come from taking part in leadership activities during their time at IIUM, according to all six of the respondents, who are alumni of the university.

Table 7 Professional Exposure

Theme 5: Professional Exposure (Leadership Skills)	
Nadia	...What I've been doing during my university life really helps me now instead of what we just learn in class... it's more to you work with people... And how you represent yourself... one of those could be your confidence level which I gained during those leadership experience in the university... presentation skills; it's not a problem for me to do presentations because we already did that so many times in the university.
Faris	<p>... basically, when we study in university, you are kind of exposed to lots of presentations. So that gives you some advantages when you need to present something to your boss. I believe that kind of thing is not something that everyone has. It can be learned but it's good if you can have it... I love being part of a team, I think I'm a good team player... you know exactly how, what are the preparations that need to be done and how to engage with certain kinds of people from various backgrounds.</p> <p>... I think it's beneficial in every way in terms of how teachers need to be confident when I speak, to be outspoken, to respect each other's opinions and ideas... to be defensive and... you know how to persuade others to accept your ideas and everything... it makes me become a more like open minded kind of person, I'm more calm in every situation... presentation skills I think that is very important... I'm not a kind of person that loves to give presentation but because of leadership, I have learned to try to give my best... at the same time you have learned to communicate with others, like it's innate.</p>

Saufi	... not to say everyone has the same mindset or opinion with you. So, you need to accept others' opinions regardless of it, whether you like or don't like that person... you need to have a positive mindset; to accept others' opinions.... When you are given a task by your lecturer, that one taught me in dealing with people... so it's different, different feedback from different people, so it's a good experience for me. For example, my current work is more on dealing with people. So, it's my responsibility to show good leadership to them, I mean how you respond to others... you will face different kinds of person from different departments.
Anna	... I find community service a very good learning process and becoming a leader... it's quite hard dealing with people, it's even harder to reach them so along the journey of doing the program I think I learned a lot... I love discussions, that we were more understanding, closer with each other, heart to heart, there's no barrier between the boss and subordinates... we can see what's the real issue during your societal meeting... during university, I opened up a lot of booths, I had some small businesses selling bundle things so it is marketing skills; how to talk to people, we have to be really outgoing in order to sell our stuff and then we also widen our networking... from joining courses and part time jobs, I met a lot of people, we are dealing with small kids to parents... it's really divorced me to be more confident person in dealing with many type of levels of people.
Rose	... it opened up my mind, teaches me to understand and also, I got to communicate. I can utilize all the basics of phrases and clauses in Arabic, and I really utilized them during my first two years of working. Especially working with Middle Eastern students, I can see that they are more comfortable talking to me because I know a little bit of Arabic. ... I lost a lot of tournaments during my university years, disturb me in any interviews that I went, I was not afraid to be rejected... you have to know how to accept criticisms and harsh comments when they are given to you and to accept them and to digest and to allow yourself to embrace all of those and to filter at the same time.

The responses indicate that leadership skills are crucial for student success, even for those who do not hold formal leadership positions within an organization. These skills play a vital role in supporting both personal and professional advancement. Enhancing employment readiness is closely linked to the ability to collaborate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds throughout one's professional journey.

Table 8 Management Skills

Theme 5: Professional Exposure (Management Skills)	
Nadia	...In leadership you have to have those skills. Organizational skills are important, time management is super important. Those times I remember like, if I have class at 8, so I went to class. During my free time, and weekends I have activities with the society, during the night we have meetings for the events for the society. Like I have a full day, packed but if you enjoy it, you have good time management, that's not going to be a problem... time management, everyone has 24 hours. Some feel like 24 hours is enough, some feel it's not enough, but you have the same hour, so I always make sure I have time for everything, if you don't have time, make the time
Faris	... as a team, we need to know how to distribute tasks... it was kind of hectic, but it was manageable... mostly with my group assignment, where we have to take charge of certain things. People will come up with excuses, you can tolerate with these people, or you have to be strict... that way I managed to learn to manage my time... Always have a backup plan... you need to assign who will be in charge of what and I need to step up and show my leadership skills.
Saufi	... I participated in one society called "CIPHER" which all universities have, it's something like a one-day program which involves with the United States' embassy. During that time, I have been given the task to handle the participants from the university to the embassy. I think one of my weaknesses is because managing people is not easy and there are 40 plus people where I learn to manage and network.

	... When I have to photocopy anything for my friends, that one taught me how to manage in a good way because it didn't was costing and finance. It's a good experience for me and back to square 1; how to manage your time. Your responsibility as a student is to attend class and that is a must, you need to sacrifice your time by joining a few societies; that's your option. You yourself should be aware of this... it's your priority and attitude.
Sara	... during those experience, the management skill definitely helped me in my current job and responsibilities... my current position demands me to be proactive because sometimes I have to remind clients... and I have to make sure that the purchase order tallies with the invoice and that the proposal tallies with the purchase order.
Anna	... At that time, time management is very important. The more time you have, the more free time you have, you're wasting it. So, if you pack yourself in many types of activities, you are still actually using your time to the fullest spend it on more beneficial activities.
Rose	... I learn how to control the class, I know how to manage the class, I control the mood, I control the atmosphere in the class I learned that time management is very important, I value the time management skill more than I used to, I have lived in a rushed life throughout my degree years and I was teaching karate at the same time...I was really busy. A leader has to know how to allocate a task... karate alone gives me a lot of things to learn because I had to manage tournaments. I had to manage my teammates to get into perfect training schedules, I have to arrange the guests...to get everything moving and then meet all the deadlines provides. So, I already trained myself to study and to divide my time according to my needs so that was not a big issue for me.

Table 8 explicates the second element centers on management skills, a theme consistently emphasized by all respondents. This aspect primarily relates to students' ability to manage their busy lives effectively. One respondent, in particular, emphasized the value of management skills in the context of leadership experience, noting its importance in navigating responsibilities and commitments.

Overall, the responses highlighted the significance of prior experiences in shaping a strong foundation for future success. Developing effective management skills through leadership activities allows students to better handle multiple responsibilities and enhances their readiness for professional life. Thus, active participation in leadership roles contributes meaningfully to becoming career ready.

Theme 6: Academic Satisfaction

The sixth theme pertains to academic satisfaction. The majority of respondents agreed that participating in leadership activities positively influenced their academic experience. They stated that these activities helped them develop time management skills and strike a balance between academic and non-academic responsibilities.

Several respondents also noted that being active in leadership roles boosted their motivation to perform better in their studies. This drive came from the need to maintain eligibility for leadership positions, which often required good academic standing. Thus, leadership involvement acted as an incentive for students to excel academically, contributing to a more fulfilling university experience.

Table 9 Academic Satisfaction

Theme 6: Academic Satisfaction	
Sara	Among them, there's the management skills, time management skill, commitment, social skills, oral and written skills and also presentation skill... I think most of them I have gained during my university life. It was reinforced during my working life, but the foundation is there from university life.

Anna	during my university life, okay so we have club meetings and all that, so we have to do minutes meeting, project proposal, budgeting, I think that skill really helps me in working life.
Saufi	as simple as writing an e-mail requesting for something, but you want to be diplomatic but you want to be persistent at the same time. So, the soft skills I have now, thanks to that.

Overall, it can be concluded that writing skills are among the key competencies developed by the respondents, and they have played a significant role in enhancing their employment readiness. Regardless of the career paths they pursued, writing proficiency emerged as an essential requirement in the workplace.

RQ3: Challenges Faced When Participating in Leadership Practices in University

In response to the research question, the study investigated the various problems, challenges, and dilemmas encountered by university students in balancing their academic and non-academic responsibilities while simultaneously engaging in the development of leadership competencies. The research also aimed to ascertain whether these challenges constituted barriers to academic achievement. Furthermore, the study sought participants' insights and recommendations for addressing these challenges.

Through qualitative analysis of interview data, three central themes emerged:

1. Intrapersonal Conflict
2. Peer -Related Conflict
3. Institutional Conflict

All six participants acknowledged that, to varying degrees, the difficulties they experienced acted as an impediment to their academic achievement. The data revealed that these barriers manifested differently among individuals, influenced by their mental state and the nature of their academic programs.

Theme 7 : Intrapersonal Conflict

The theme of intrapersonal conflict was identified as the most prevalent concern. All six participants indicated that this was the primary issue affecting their ability to maintain balance in their university life. These conflicts included personal challenges, difficulties with stress management, and the pressures of fulfilling familial obligations. The following explanation pertains to the themes representing these particular research questions.

Table 10 Intrapersonal Conflict

Theme 7: Intrapersonal Conflict	
Nadia	<p>I want to be actively involved in all societies. It happened because I have problems, which I think I have to make myself busy instead of like after class, you stay in the room and then you'll be depressed, so that way, I choose to make myself busy because I want to forget all my problems... the memories that you will remember is the Co-curricular activities, the activities that are outside the room... if you don't like it, then it will give you stress. Time management is very important.</p> <p>So, Monday to Friday is my working day, but I have night, I mean after work is for myself. So, some of the days I go to the gym, some of the days I go to yoga, some of the days I went out with my friends for movie and then weekends I will allocate for "me time" I will allocate for the family and it's always full then 24 hours.</p>
Faris	A great mind comes from a great body. So, people which I think I consider as a clever person, they know that study alone will not help them to become healthier in a way that they also need to go out and do some activities-outdoor activities, playing sports and because you do that ...it gives you more focus while you are studying.

Saufi	Your responsibility as a student is to attend class, which one is in normal work hours. But the odd hours, you need to sacrifice and your priority and your attitude.
Sara	Regardless of how busy you are with your co-curriculum, do not skip class, because hearing first-hand what your lecturers taught is different...I think cut down on all entertainment like going out for example, and also maybe reduce sleep in order to catch up with the studies.
Anna	Most of my semester breaks, I can say it was very full; full of university activities. I never stayed home, enjoying, no... so, you yourself you need to be always positive-be positive. Watch out your-no matter how stressful that situation is. You have to bounce back fast, you can't stick to the stressful situation for long. Time management is very important... our utmost priority is to study but we have to develop ourselves to become more.
Rose	I remember I was in the second and third year, I was taking 21 credit hours for those two years. My father was working in Rwanda, my brother was in Nilai, my sister was in Australia, and my mom was working as a principal-from 7:00 to 5:00 every day. And I had my little sister, taking her PMR and SPM for two years I had to deal with that. So, my schedule was really tight. So, I only had one hour break, and within that one hour, I had to fetch my sister, feed her, and make sure that she bathes and then sent her for tuition for two years... from there I learned how to set my priorities.

It was thus observed that intrapersonal conflict represented the most significant challenge for students in maintaining a balance between their academic and non-academic responsibilities. Influenced by their individual obligations and personal expectations, students frequently encounter internal struggles during their university years.

Theme 8 : Peer-Related Conflict

Peer conflict emerged as another prominent theme, representing a significant challenge in students' efforts to balance academic and non-academic responsibilities. This issue was identified by three out of six respondents. The presence of supportive peers and a conducive social environment plays a crucial role in enabling students to persist and succeed throughout their university education.

Table 11 Peer Conflict

Theme 8: Peer-Related Conflict	
Faris	And I think, the challenges might be because, you know, some people may come out with some excuses and everything so that's where your leadership skills come in and it's like whether you-you can tolerate these people or you have to be strict.
Anna	The most difficult, I think the challenge for is to deal with people, okay. Like I said before, we are still young right, so, over there we have a lot of people, a lot of aged level, so, in terms of dealing with different kinds of people...
Rose	When you are in between making decision, it's good for the team, but it's going to be firm with your decision, and how to tell your teammate that you have to disappoint him or her just for the sake of the team. You have to let people down sometimes.

Theme 9 : Institutional Conflict

The final theme identified is institutional conflict. Participants highlighted that, in the process of balancing academic and non-academic responsibilities, institutional challenges may hinder their ability to succeed. As noted by many respondents, such conflicts can become significant obstacles to student achievement.

Table 12 Institutional Conflict

Theme 9: Institutional Conflict	
Nadia	Challenge...I do not know now, but during my time, we have poor facilities, or, you know the classes; a few rows at the back, the seats and chairs are broken.
Faris	...And I think maybe the university also need to like maybe cut down the class time up until four or four-thirty, so they have time to get back to their respective rooms and hopefully do something beneficial...
Anna	Besides that, we also have a problem because our Mahallah (hostel) is quite far from Kulliyyah (faculty), so it is quite-it needs a lot of physical...you have to because our class is not early, most of them are after lunch. So, it's quite hot and all. Transportation around the campus is also challenging.
Rose (challenge faced at Nilai campus)	So, especially living in Nilai is very difficult because you have to share a room with 20 other girls. So, I had to steal time, yeah while waiting for my food to be ready, I would read and scribble something...what I should achieve

Overall, the challenges students face in balancing their academic and non-academic lives often stem from both internal and external factors. While dilemmas are inevitable, overcoming them requires students to set clear priorities and make thoughtful decisions to maintain progress. The experiences and skills acquired throughout their academic journey serve as valuable tools in navigating these obstacles, ultimately preparing them to transition successfully into the world.

In summary, the findings highlight how student participation in leadership activities contributes significantly to their overall development and employment readiness. These insights set the foundation for a deeper discussion on the broader implications, connections with existing literature, and potential areas for future improvement and research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section highlights the similarities and differences in students' experiences with leadership practices at a university. It aims to explore the implication of student involvement and leadership activities which is followed by recommendations and perspective on current leadership practices among university students, providing insights for future researchers and interested in this area.

Student Perceptions of Leadership Practices in University Settings

The examination of students' perception regarding leadership practices within university context reveals in advance understanding of experiential development and institutional involvement. Empirical evidence from recent studies supports the assertion that student engagement in structured university programs significantly foster leadership capabilities. The original section emphasizes alumni attributing their leadership development primarily on student involvement activities, industrial experiences, and additional commitments beyond academic coursework.

This synthesis affirms that leadership in university settings is multifaceted, grounded in both formal and informal learning environments. For instance, reflective practice models, which integrate critical incident analysis and dialogue, have shown to enhance leadership soft skills by encouraging students to introspectively engage with their values and assumptions (Lemos & Brunstein, 2022). Similarly, involvement in professional organizations and university events foster critical leadership traits such as responsibility, initiative, and teamwork skills recognized as essential in the contemporary industrial landscape (Rijal, 2023).

Notably, a Malaysian based study on student leadership underscores the significant role of citizenship and institutional participation in democratization and leadership development processes. It confirms that structured university programs influence students' civic engagement and leadership identity (Mokhtar et al., 2024).

Moreover, the integration of design thinking and collaborative problem solving in academic curriculum contributes to the practical and cognitive dimensions of leadership (Pismenkova & Ziborov, 2021).

Lastly, the importance of student involvement as a catalyst for leadership identity development cannot be overstated. Extracurricular participation provides students with real world contexts in which leadership skills are not only taught but embodied and refined over time (Haber-Curran & Pierre, 2023). This aligns with the documented perceptions that leadership is cultivated through consistent engagement, industrial exposure, and reflective commitment to personal and communal growth.

Contributions of Leadership Practices to Employment Readiness

Recent literature consistently affirms that the development of leadership practices among university students significantly contributes to their employment readiness. The study outlines 3 key dimensions of leadership benefits: personal development, professional exposure, and academic satisfaction; each substantiated by contemporary scholarly evidence.

Personal development emerges as a foundational theme in leadership discourse. Recent studies align with the assertion that engaging in leadership roles enhances students' self-awareness, resilience, and confidence. These attributes are essential in today's job market, where adaptability and emotional intelligence are critical (Al-Awad, 2024; Chapman et al., 2020). Professional exposure has been consistently supported through recent literature. Smith and McPherson (2020) found that leadership activities provide platforms for acquiring real world skills such as critical thinking, team management, and communication skills that are heavily sought after by employers. These experiences enable students to bridge academic learning with industry expectations, facilitating smoother transition into employment (Ananda et al., 2023).

Academic satisfaction, while in a more intrinsic outcome, is recognized in recent work by Huaman et al. (2022) as a motivating factor that enhances student engagement and persistence. Leadership roles given to students' agency within the academic setting positively influence their academic outcomes and by extension their preparedness for postgraduate challenges.

Moreover, the review affirms that structured leadership opportunities, especially those embedded in university programs or facilitated through community engagement, are crucial. Recent empirical data by Kisambira et al. (2024) and Hlalele et al. (2015) showed that students who actively participate in such initiatives not only improved their interpersonal and organizational skills but also become more politically and socially aware which is a key attribute to dynamic work environment.

All in all, the literature robustly supports the claim that leadership practices during university years are instrumental in enhancing students' employment readiness. These practices foster multidimensional growth pertaining to personal, professional, and academic aligning well with employers' expectations in the competitive global workforce.

Challenges Faced When Participating in Leadership Practices in University

This section addresses key challenges that university students encounter while attempting to balance academic and non-academic responsibilities, which clearly in the context of developing leadership practices. These challenges include self-confidence issues, view related social pressures, institutional inadequacies, and environmental adaptation difficulties.

Recent studies reaffirmed these findings. Self-confidence and psychological resilience remain pivotal concerns, especially for first year students entering unfamiliar academic environments. Scholars such as Tsedendamba and Gungaarentsen (2023) highlight students limited self-efficacy and emotional regulation skills who often experience heightened stress when juggling academic performance with extracurricular commitments, including leadership roles.

Peer related challenges, especially those involving social cohesion and belonging, have also been documented in contemporary research. According to Zharya et al. (2025), the social climate within student groups

significantly influences engagement and success. The difficulty of integrating into peer networks, especially in culturally or linguistically diverse institutions, can impede participation in leadership initiatives, leading to isolation and disengagement.

Institutional challenges, such as overcrowded curriculum, under resource libraries, and inadequate student accommodations, remain prevalent. Recent research by Gilbert and Burden (2022) shows that infrastructure and limitations ranging from lack of study spaces to outdated facilities negatively affect students' academic focus and their ability to engage in meaningful non-academic activities. These constraints not only diminish morale but also restrict their capacity for effective time management and leadership practice development.

Adjustment to university life, particularly among those from rural or socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, has also been recognized as a systematic barrier. University often failed to provide sufficient transitional support, leading to prolonged adaptation periods. Studies like that of Callaway (2023) show that first-generation college students struggle more with academic and social integration, which in turn diminishes their leadership participation and general well-being.

Overall, student leaders face multifaceted challenges that are structural, psychological, and social in nature. To foster effective leadership development, universities must implement integrated support systems ranging from mental health services and social mentorship programs to infrastructure improvements so that students can thrive both academically and in Co-curricular capacities. The following figure 3 presents a thematic overview of the study's findings, illustrating the aspects of student leadership participation that alumni perceived as influential in shaping their employment readiness.

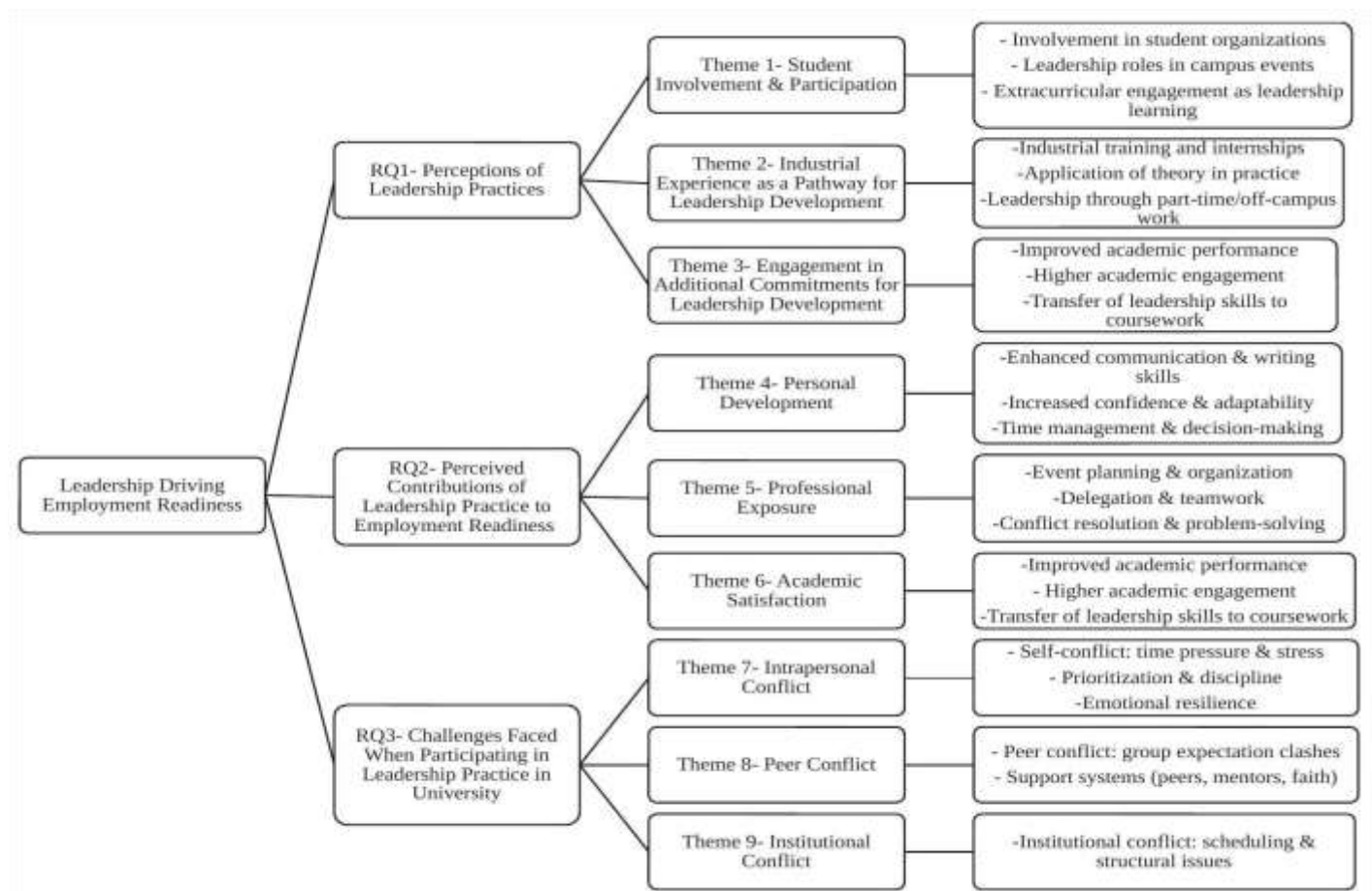


Figure 3 Summary of Key Findings of the Study

Implications

Leadership development in higher education plays a vital role in equipping students with transferable skills necessary for life beyond university. Engagement in residence based and co-curricular activities contributes to

growth in communication, decision making, teamwork, and confidence. Those are qualities which prove to be essential for both career and personal development. These experiences enable students to evolve from passive participants into proactive leaders through consistent involvement and increased responsibility.

The findings suggest that such environments offer meaningful opportunities for experiential learning, where leadership is shaped by context, interaction, and reflection. The study affirms that leadership is a learned and practiced capacity, not a fixed trait. Therefore, leadership education should be designed to incorporate mentorship, reflection, and skill application.

Higher education institutions are encouraged to implement structured programs that align with leadership theory and practical experiences. Doing so can strengthen student readiness for the workforce while fostering civic engagement and personal empowerment. The implications extend beyond individual development, highlighting the broader institutional responsibility to support student leadership as a critical outcome of tertiary education.

CONCLUSION

This study presents valuable insights into students' perception and their application of leadership practices, though it is not without limitations. The research focuses solely on students from International Islamic University Malaysia, selected due to their active roles in shaping their academic journeys. While participants came from various disciplines and backgrounds, the sample size was limited to six individuals, restricting the generalizability of the findings. Time constraints also prevent broader engagement with a larger pool of respondents. Despite these limitations, the findings highlight the importance of leadership development in preparing students for the workforce.

As such, several recommendations are proposed. University programs, particularly those related to communication and career readiness, should incorporate practical experiences like mock interviews and workplace simulations. Academic credits should be awarded to students involved in leadership roles to encourage participation and emphasize the value of these experiences. Collaborations with alumni and industrial linkages through mentorship projects can further bridge the gap between academic life and professional expectations.

Institutions should also provide continuous mental health support, from old student-alumni dialogue, and ensure that campus facilities support a conducive learning environment. Moreover, students should be encouraged to seek advice from university staff when facing challenges, and initiatives should be in place to develop their decision making and conflict resolution skills. In conclusion, the study underscores the lasting impact of student leadership experiences and calls for more comprehensive research with larger, more diverse participant groups. Future research should explore a broader aspect of leadership and its responsibilities, helping to better prepare students for success beyond university life.

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We would like to dedicate this study to all fighters out there, who work hard and would go through hurdles in life to finish what they have started. Finishing is hard for a lot of people, especially ones that need lots of continuous effort and energy. Therefore, do not just finish. Complete by putting in your best effort. Tie your camel and then, put your trust in God. In the end, the journey never truly ends. With each completion, new beginning awaits. May God grant us success, always. Continuously.

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