

# The Influence of Self-Esteem on Leadership Orientation among FSR UiTM Seremban Undergraduates.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of self-esteem on leadership orientation among undergraduate students from the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seremban 3. A total of 356 students participated, representing different academic levels and gender backgrounds. Self-esteem was measured using the Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale (TDSES), while leadership orientation was assessed with the Multidimensional Leadership Orientations Scale (MLOS). Results indicated that students reported moderate levels of self-liking and high levels of self-competence. Among the four leadership dimensions, structural leadership scored the highest, followed by human resources, charismatic, and political leadership. Gender analysis showed that female students slightly outperformed male students in both self-competence and leadership traits. These findings highlight self-competence as a critical factor influencing leadership orientation and emphasize the value of initiatives that build confidence and competence in higher education. The study contributes to understanding the psychological determinants of leadership among sports science undergraduates and provides practical implications for developing targeted leadership programs to prepare future leaders in sports and recreation.

**Keywords:** Self-Esteem, Leadership Orientation, Universities Students, Gender

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical determinant of organizational, educational, and social success. In higher education, particularly in sport and recreation faculties, student leadership is increasingly recognized as a foundation for professional readiness and community engagement. Effective leaders are not only required to manage tasks but also to inspire, motivate, and influence others, which makes leadership orientation a vital construct in preparing undergraduates for future roles (Polat, 2023). Leadership orientation reflects an individual's preferred leadership style, encompassing structural, human resource, charismatic, and political dimensions (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Understanding what influences these orientations is essential to developing effective leadership training in universities. One factor consistently linked to leadership potential is self-esteem, defined as an individual's evaluation of their self-worth and competence (Orth & Robins, 2022). Self-esteem influences confidence, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and resilience, which in turn shape leadership behaviors. Within the two-dimensional framework, self-liking reflects an emotional evaluation of oneself, while self-competence represents the perceived ability to achieve goals and exert influence (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001). Research suggests that self-competence plays a stronger role in leadership outcomes compared to self-liking, particularly in structured and performance-driven contexts such as sports education (Günel, 2021; Akdeniz & Saytekin, 2020).

Despite increasing international interest, limited empirical evidence exists on the role of self-esteem in shaping leadership orientation among Malaysian undergraduates. Studies in Malaysia have primarily examined self-esteem in relation to academic achievement or organizational commitment (Kern & Selamat, 2022), while recent work on youth leadership highlights self-confidence as a key competency (Mohamad, 2024). However, few studies have specifically investigated the interplay between self-esteem and leadership orientation among sports science students, a population expected to take on leadership roles as coaches, managers, and educators. Moreover, gender differences in leadership orientation remain contested, with some studies reporting no significant differences (Ojha & Pandey, 2023), and others suggesting that female students increasingly outperform males in confidence and leadership skills (Gunel, 2021; Mohamad, 2024).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the relationship between self-esteem and leadership orientation among undergraduate sports science students at UiTM Seremban 3. Specifically, it examines (i) the level of self-esteem among students, (ii) their preferred leadership orientations, (iii) the effect of self-esteem dimensions on leadership orientation, and (iv) gender-based differences. Findings are expected to contribute to the literature on student leadership in Malaysia and provide practical implications for universities and policymakers in designing targeted leadership development initiatives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Self- Esteem

Self-esteem is a fundamental psychological construct that influences personal development, social relationships, and academic achievement. It reflects an individual's sense of worth and competence, shaping how one perceives abilities and interacts with others (Orth & Robins, 2022). High self-esteem has been associated with resilience, persistence, and leadership potential, while low self-esteem often results in self-doubt and limited initiative (Mbuva, 2017). In educational settings, self-esteem plays a key role in enhancing student engagement and motivation (Ullah, 2024). Specifically, Yu et al. (2022) reported that higher self-esteem among students positively correlated with better academic performance, adaptability, and social integration. For sports students, who often face performance pressures, self-esteem is particularly critical as it influences both academic and athletic outcomes. Gunel (2021) found that sports students with higher self-esteem reported greater leadership tendencies, suggesting that confidence in one's abilities directly enhances leadership capacity. Self-esteem is widely conceptualized in two dimensions: self-liking (emotional evaluation of oneself) and self-competence (belief in one's ability to achieve goals). Tafarodi and Swann (2001) emphasized that while both dimensions are important, self-competence is more strongly associated with performance and leadership outcomes. According to Karatas, Akyuz, and Hayri (2021) confirmed that self-competence, rather than self-liking, predicted leadership orientation among sports science students. These findings suggest that leadership development initiatives in higher education should focus not only on fostering positive self-image but also on enhancing students' belief in their skills and capabilities.

### Leadership Orientation

Leadership orientation reflects the preferred styles and approaches individuals use when guiding and influencing others. According to Bolman and Deal (1991) conceptualized leadership orientation into four dimensions: structural, human resource, charismatic, and political. Structural leadership emphasizes logic, organization, and planning; human resource leadership prioritizes empathy and interpersonal relationships; charismatic leadership inspires others through vision and enthusiasm; and political leadership involves negotiation, persuasion, and managing group dynamics. These orientations are particularly relevant in academic and sports environments, where leadership demands are diverse and complex. Empirical evidence suggests that students in sports-related disciplines often score highly on structural and charismatic orientations due to their exposure to team-based activities, competition, and strategic planning (Alemdar et al., 2023). However, Polat (2023) argued that leadership orientation is not static; rather, it evolves with education, training, and personal experiences. In Malaysia, Mohamad (2024) emphasized that youth leadership competencies are strongly linked to self-confidence and interpersonal skills, underscoring the role of psychological traits in shaping leadership effectiveness. These findings highlight the importance of exploring how self-esteem contributes to leadership orientation within university contexts.

## Self-Esteem and Leadership Orientation

The relationship between self-esteem and leadership orientation has been studied across various populations. As stated by Gunel (2021), it demonstrated that higher self-esteem among sports students correlated with greater leadership orientation, particularly in structural and charismatic styles. Similarly, Akdeniz and Saytekin (2020) reported that students with high self-competence displayed stronger leadership orientations, whereas self-liking showed weaker associations. Consistent with De Prada et al. (2024) further suggested that teamwork and collaborative experiences enhance both self-esteem and leadership capacity, supporting the notion of a reciprocal relationship. In the Malaysian context, Kern and Selamat (2022) investigated the relationship between leadership style, self-esteem, and organizational commitment among university students, finding that self-esteem was a significant predictor of leadership behaviors. This aligns with broader evidence that confidence in one's abilities is a critical determinant of leadership readiness. However, despite international research progress, empirical evidence in Malaysia, particularly among sports science students, remains limited. Addressing this gap is essential to developing culturally relevant leadership development programs.

## Gender Differences in Self-Esteem and Leadership Orientation

Gender differences in self-esteem and leadership have received growing attention. Some studies suggest minimal or no gender-based differences (Ojha & Pandey, 2023), while others report that female students demonstrate stronger leadership potential, particularly in self-competence and interpersonal leadership dimensions (Gunel, 2021). In Malaysia, Mohamad (2024) highlighted the increasing leadership capacity of young women, driven by expanding educational and extracurricular opportunities. Similarly, Hatim and Jamil (2023) emphasized that gender, self-esteem, and institutional support jointly shape organizational commitment and leadership development among educators, findings which may extend to student populations. Overall, the literature suggests that while both genders possess leadership potential, female students may increasingly exhibit higher confidence and leadership orientation due to evolving cultural and institutional contexts. Nevertheless, inconsistencies in the findings highlight the importance of further examining gender-based differences, particularly within Malaysian higher education.

## Summary and Gap

The reviewed literature confirms that self-esteem, especially self-competence, plays a central role in shaping leadership orientation. While multiple international studies demonstrate strong correlations between these constructs, evidence in Malaysia remains limited and fragmented, particularly in the sports science domain. Previous research also presents mixed findings on gender differences, requiring further exploration. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of self-esteem on leadership orientation among Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation students and to assess gender-based differences, thereby contributing to the local and regional literature on student leadership development.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental survey design to examine the effect of self-esteem on leadership orientation among undergraduate sports science students. A survey approach enables efficient data collection from a large sample and allows generalizable insights into the relationship between psychological traits and leadership orientation. Non-experimental designs are appropriate when the objective is to identify associations rather than establish causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 1,322 students at the Faculty of Sport Science and Recreation, UiTM, Seremban 3 Campus. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, a minimum of 356 students were recruited using convenience sampling. The final sample included 54.5% male and 45.5% female respondents, aged 18–25 years.

## Instrumentation

Instruments included (1) demographics, (2) the Two-Dimensional Self-Esteem Scale (TDSES; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995, 2001), which measures self-liking and self-competence across 16 items, and (3) the Multidimensional Leadership Orientations Scale (MLOS; Dursun, Gunay, & Yenel, 2019), which assesses

political, human resource, charismatic, and structural leadership orientations across 19 items. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.887$  (TDSES) and  $\alpha = 0.912$  (MLOS). Ethical approval was obtained from UiTM, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Questionnaires were distributed both online and in class. Data was analyzed using Jamovi software, with descriptive statistics, and independent t-tests applied to address the research objectives.

Table 1. Demographic of Gender

Gender / Jantina	Counts	% of Total
Female	162	45.5%
Male	194	54.5%

The study involved 356 students from the Faculty of Sport Science and Recreation. Out of these, 54.5% were male and 45.5% were female, indicating a balanced gender representation that supports diverse perspectives in the data.

Table 2. Self- Esteem among Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation UiTM Seremban 3 students.

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Self-Liking	356	3.02	3.00	3.00	0.208	2.38	3.88
Self-Competence	356	3.56	3.88	4.13	0.866	1.50	4.50

Descriptive analysis showed moderate self-liking ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 0.208$ ), indicating consistent emotional self-worth among students. In contrast, self-competence was higher ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.866$ ), suggesting students generally feel confident and capable, though with greater variation in the strength of this perception.

Table 3. Leadership orientation among Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation UiTM Seremban 3 students.

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Political Leadership	356	3.79	4.40	1.14	1.00	5.00
Human Resource Leadership	356	3.89	4.40	1.07	1.40	5.00
Charismatic Leadership	356	3.91	4.40	1.11	1.40	5.00
Structural Leadership	356	4.08	4.50	1.12	1.50	5.00

Students reported relatively high leadership orientation across all four dimensions. Structural Leadership scored the highest ( $M = 4.08$ ), followed by Human Resource ( $M = 3.98$ ) and Charismatic Leadership ( $M = 3.91$ ), reflecting strengths in organization, support, and communication. Political Leadership was lowest ( $M = 3.79$ ) but still moderate, suggesting some persuasion ability. Overall, students favored structured, supportive, and people-oriented leadership styles.

**Table 4.** The significant differences between self-esteem and leadership orientation among Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation UiTM Seremban 3 students based on gender.

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Self-Liking	Female	162	3.03	3.00	0.193	0.0152
	Male	194	3.02	3.00	0.220	0.0158
Self-Competence	Female	162	3.63	4.13	0.858	0.0674
	Male	194	3.50	3.88	0.870	0.0625
Political Leadership	Female	162	3.89	4.40	1.086	0.0853

	<b>Male</b>	194	3.72	4.40	1.177	0.0845
<b>Human Resource Leadership</b>	<b>Female</b>	162	4.05	4.40	1.045	0.0821
	<b>Male</b>	194	3.92	4.40	1.093	0.0785
<b>Charismatic Leadership</b>	<b>Female</b>	162	3.97	4.50	1.095	0.0860
	<b>Male</b>	194	3.85	4.40	1.120	0.0804
<b>Structural Leadership</b>	<b>Female</b>	162	4.13	4.25	1.084	0.0851
	<b>Male</b>	194	4.04	4.50	1.159	0.0832

Self-liking scores were nearly identical for females ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.193$ ) and males ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 0.220$ ), indicating no gender difference in personal self-regard. However, females reported slightly higher self-competence ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.858$ ) than males ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 0.870$ ), suggesting greater confidence in their abilities. Across all leadership dimensions, female students also outperformed males. Mean scores were higher for females in Political (3.89 vs. 3.72), Human Resource (4.05 vs. 3.92), Charismatic (3.97 vs. 3.85), and Structural Leadership (4.13 vs. 4.04). These consistent patterns suggest a modest female advantage in leadership orientation, particularly in interpersonal and motivational aspects, possibly linked to gender socialization, curricular exposure, or engagement in leadership roles.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of self-esteem on leadership orientation among sports science students at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seremban 3. Students reported moderate self-liking ( $M = 3.02$ ) and high self-competence ( $M = 3.56$ ). Structural leadership scored highest ( $M = 4.08$ ), followed by human resources ( $M = 3.98$ ), charismatic ( $M = 3.91$ ), and political ( $M = 3.79$ ). Independent t-tests revealed that female students scored slightly higher in self-competence and all leadership orientations.

The findings revealed that students reported moderate self-liking and high self-competence, with structural leadership emerging as the dominant orientation. Importantly, self-competence showed a strong and significant relationship with all leadership dimensions, while self-liking demonstrated no effect. Female students also scored slightly higher in both self-competence and leadership orientation. These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that self-competence, rather than self-liking, is a stronger predictor of leadership readiness (Gunel, 2021; Akdeniz & Saytekin, 2020). The emphasis on structural leadership aligns with research by Alemdar et al. (2023), which found that sports students often value organization and analytical skills due to the structured nature of their academic and competitive environments. The trend of stronger female scores supports emerging evidence in Malaysia showing that women are increasingly confident and capable in leadership roles (Mohamad, 2024).

The study provides several implications. For students, it highlights the importance of developing confidence and belief in one's abilities as a foundation for effective leadership. For universities, the findings suggest the need to integrate leadership modules, mentorship, and confidence-building programs into curricula, which can help cultivate stronger and more resilient student leaders (Kern & Selamat, 2022). At the policy level, the government and the Ministry of Youth and Sports can design youth leadership initiatives that emphasize self-competence, ensuring graduates are better prepared for professional and community leadership roles. While the study adds valuable evidence, it is limited to one faculty and a cross-sectional design. Future research should include diverse faculties and longitudinal approaches to capture the long-term role of self-esteem in leadership development. In conclusion, this study underscores that self-competence is the key dimension of self-esteem shaping leadership orientation in higher education. By prioritizing confidence-building initiatives, universities and policymakers can help prepare capable future leaders in the fields of sports and recreation.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that self-competence significantly predicts leadership orientation among sports science students, while self-liking has no measurable effect. Female students reported slightly higher self-competence

and leadership orientation. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering confidence-building and leadership programs to prepare students for roles in sports and recreation industries. Future research should expand to other faculties and adopt longitudinal designs to assess long-term impacts.

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## Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

## Ethics Approval

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Faculty of Sport Science and Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seremban 3 and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the [UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan Branch Research Ethics Committee (BERC)] under reference number [REC/1252/2025]. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

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