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A Comprehensive Examination of Educational Strategies in TVET Colleges for Nurturing Leadership Skills and Readiness for the Evolving Economic Landscape

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in fostering leadership skills and preparedness among students for navigating the dynamic economic terrain. As the global economy undergoes rapid transformations, there is a growing emphasis on cultivating adaptable and innovative leaders capable of addressing emerging challenges. Through an extensive review of literature and empirical analysis, this study explores various educational strategies employed by TVET colleges to empower aspiring leaders. Key focus areas include curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, experiential learning opportunities, and industry collaborations. By examining successful case studies and best practices, this research aims to offer insights into effective methods for nurturing leadership qualities among TVET students. Additionally, the paper discusses the alignment of educational initiatives with the evolving demands of the labour market and the importance of instilling a mindset of continuous learning and resilience. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational reform and highlights the pivotal role of TVET institutions in shaping the leaders of tomorrow amidst a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Keywords

economic landscape, empowering, educational strategies

INTRODUCTION

The current state of the global economy is undergoing unprecedented changes driven by technological advancements, globalization, and evolving labor market demands. As a result, educational systems face growing pressure to prepare students for an uncertain and complex future. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are uniquely positioned to tackle these challenges by providing students with practical skills, leadership acumen, and the flexibility needed to succeed in the modern economy (Selane and Odeku, 2024). Leadership skills play a pivotal role in this context, as they enable individuals to navigate intricate organizational structures, foster innovation, and effectively respond to economic fluctuations. In TVET environments, leadership is not limited to managerial roles but also encompasses the cultivation of problem-solving, communication, and decision-making abilities that contribute to overall economic resilience (Chelimo, 2022).

While there is a growing body of research on leadership development in higher education, there is a relative lack of focus on how Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions contribute to cultivating leadership skills (Plummer, 2023). Existing studies often emphasize traditional universities, overlooking the specific challenges and opportunities that TVET institutions present. Furthermore, the alignment between TVET leadership programs and labor market demands remains underexplored, raising concerns about whether current educational strategies effectively prepare students for the evolving economic landscape. This paper aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive examination of the strategies employed by TVET colleges to nurture leadership skills. It

critically evaluates how these strategies align with the changing demands of the global economy and the extent to which TVET institutions foster innovation, adaptability, and resilience among their students.

The research holds significant value as it delves into a crucial aspect of educational reform and its potential impact on future leadership across various industries. This qualitative study seeks to answer how TVET colleges utilize educational strategies to cultivate leadership skills and equip students for the swiftly evolving economic landscape. The aims of the study are: to scrutinize the educational strategies employed by TVET colleges to nurture leadership skills among students; to evaluate the alignment of these strategies with the changing demands of the global economy; to identify exemplary practices and successful case studies of leadership development in TVET institutions; and to provide recommendations for enhancing leadership education in TVET colleges to better prepare students for forthcoming challenges.

Purpose of the study

The primary aim of this comprehensive study is to meticulously evaluate the effectiveness of educational strategies that have been implemented in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges with the specific goal of nurturing and developing leadership skills in students. The overarching objective is to equip these students with the necessary capabilities to navigate and excel in an ever-evolving economic landscape. This research will delve deeply into the specific leadership skills that are most relevant to TVET graduates, placing particular emphasis on attributes such as decision-making, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. By taking into account the prevailing economic trends and challenges that TVET graduates are likely to encounter throughout their careers, this study seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of leadership education programs by offering insights into the skills that are most critical for success in the professional world. To achieve this, the research will utilize a range of appropriate and rigorous research methods, including surveys, interviews, and case studies. The intention is to generate valuable and actionable insights into the current state of leadership education in TVET colleges. In addition to examining the existing landscape, the study aims to provide recommendations for enhancing these programs to better align with the demands of the modern economic environment. The anticipated findings of this research have the potential to have far-reaching implications for TVET colleges, policymakers, and employers, as they can inform the development of more effective leadership education programs. Ultimately, the goal is to empower graduates with the essential skills and competencies needed to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and competitive professional landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature

The study is grounded in various theoretical frameworks. One of the pertinent theories that underpins this study is the Transformational Leadership Theory, which underscores the pivotal role of education in cultivating leaders who can inspire and innovate (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Initially introduced by Burns (1978), the theory distinguishes leaders who foster strong motivational relationships with their followers and prioritize transformational leadership interactions to yield results. The theory posits that leaders who are adaptable and proactive can more effectively navigate organizational changes, making it particularly relevant in the context of TVET institutions tasked with preparing students for a volatile economic environment.

Constructivist theories of learning, particularly those advocated by Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky (1978), also offer insights into the role of TVET education in fostering leadership skills. These theories are pertinent to this research because they underscore the significance of experiential learning and collaboration in cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are pivotal aspects of leadership.

Empirical Literature

Blayney and Blotnick (2017) conducted a study indicating that students in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) who engaged in industry-oriented internships and leadership workshops exhibited superior adaptability and decision-making skills in comparison to their counterparts. Other research underscores the necessity for educational reforms that incorporate leadership instruction alongside technical skills training. Manwaring et al. (2019) contend that TVET institutions should prioritize leadership development by integrating project-based learning and real-world problem-solving into their curricula, thereby nurturing both technical aptitude and leadership proficiencies. Nevertheless, there is still a need to comprehend the specific approaches used by TVET institutions to harmonize leadership education with labour market requirements.

The Educational Strategies Employed by TVET Colleges to Nurture Leadership Skills Among Students

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) epitomizes a specialized form of education meticulously designed to furnish individuals with the practical skills, knowledge, and competencies pertinent to specific industries, occupations, or vocations, as elucidated by McGrath (2005). TVET programs are architecturally structured to prime students for workforce entry, characterized by their hands-on, application-oriented pedagogical approach (Powell, 2014). The span of TVET education extends across a myriad of fields including, but not limited to, technology, engineering, healthcare, and trades, offering a comprehensive curriculum that marries theoretical knowledge with practical training to

ensure graduates are proficient in applying principles of their chosen fields in real-world contexts (Stephen, 2020). Furthermore, TVET operates within specific legal and regulatory frameworks instituted by governmental bodies, which delineate the establishment, accreditation, and oversight of TVET institutions and programs. These frameworks might encompass stipulations for instructor licensing, safety standards, and curriculum content, in addition to safeguarding the rights of TVET students to receive quality education and equitable treatment (Gyimah, 2020).

Moreover, the design of TVET programs often involves collaboration with industry stakeholders to align graduates' competencies with industry-specific standards and requirements, thereby enhancing employability and forging robust linkages between education and the workforce (Adams, 2019). Adherence to the legal and regulatory frameworks established by government authorities is imperative for ensuring the quality and legitimacy of TVET education (Sithole et al., 2022). In the realm of leadership skill cultivation within TVET, an array of scholarly research underscores the efficacy of certain pedagogical strategies. For instance, integrating leadership development into the curriculum, implementing mentorship programs, and fostering experiential learning have been identified as pivotal. These strategies include embedding leadership-oriented concepts and skills in courses, facilitating mentorships with professionals or faculty members, and providing real-world application opportunities through internships and community projects (OECD iLibrary; International Journal of Contemporary Research; Journal of Vocational, Adult and Continuing Education and Training).

Significantly, Zhang (2020) accentuates the criticality of practical experience in leadership skill development, arguing that real-world application is essential for cultivating confidence, problem-solving capabilities, and decision-making acumen in students. Correspondingly, Patel (2018) highlights the role of mentorship in nurturing leadership potential, presenting it as a conduit for guidance, support, and exemplary role modeling. Additionally, Lee (2015) points to the importance of experiential learning in the honing of leadership competencies, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, through internships, community projects, and simulations. The literature presents a compelling narrative on the integral role of TVET in equipping individuals with industry-relevant skills and the innovative strategies employed to embed leadership development within this educational framework. This synthesis of academic discourse provides a foundation for further exploration and implementation of effective practices in the realm of TVET and leadership education.

Leadership roles and responsibilities at TVET colleges

Leadership is increasingly recognized as a pivotal element that significantly impacts the operational dynamics of educational institutions and, consequently, the educational achievements of students (Bush & Glover, 2016). In the context of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Robertson and Frick (2018) articulate that effective leadership necessitates the ability to articulate the institution's objectives and desired outcomes both at an individual and organizational level. Furthermore, it involves the formulation and execution of strategic plans aimed at accomplishing these predefined goals and outcomes. Prentice (1961) conceptualizes leadership as the capacity to comprehend human dynamics, thereby motivating and engaging employees in a manner that aligns their personal aspirations with the organizational mission. This alignment necessitates leaders to possess specific traits, qualities, and behaviors that foster an environment of encouragement and motivation, thereby facilitating lecturers' development, participation, and commitment to the institution (Badshah, 2012).

Leaders within colleges are positioned within a reciprocal and non-coercive nexus with faculty and administrative departments, tasked with not only adhering to governmental mandates but also managing fiscal constraints. These institutions function across diverse sectors including private (business and industries), public (business, industry, education, and labor), and the broader community, navigating through constant shifts in policy landscapes. A pivotal role of college leadership is to guide faculty towards a shared vision (Rost, 1991), as they assimilate into the higher education sphere alongside the complex vocational offerings and sectoral diversities. Leaders are thus required to cater to unique and varied needs while staying informed of continuous advancements in pedagogical strategies, influenced by a myriad of factors such as evolving market trends, industrial revolutions, adherence to global educational standards, and changing environmental conditions. These leaders bear the responsibility of advocating and representing the interests of their colleges within the local community and business sectors.

Moreover, college leaders are entrusted with the stewardship of the institution's human, physical, and financial resources, aligning business strategies with educational imperatives, educational policies with local realities, and entrepreneurial ventures with accountability, balancing managerialism with professionalism (Callan, Mitchell, Clayton & Smith, 2007). Such leaders are required to possess expertise in fiscal and human resource management, public relations, collective bargaining, and political navigation (Robertson, 2016). Additionally, the evolving educational landscape demands that leaders adapt to and accommodate flexible learning and teaching methodologies, such as online education, while considering student limitations and aspirations (Eddy, 2010).

Exemplary Practices and Successful Case Studies of Leadership Development in TVET Institutions

In Alemu's (2020) research, the author emphasizes the critical importance of establishing strong communication systems and implementing a variety of employee and leadership development programs in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in West Oromia. Alemu highlights the challenges faced by leaders in implementing transformational leadership, such as limited resources and resistance to change. Moving to Malaysia, Rahman (2021)

conducted a comprehensive study to develop a leadership model specifically tailored for TVET institutions under the Ministry of Education. Utilizing thematic analysis, the Fuzzy Delphi Method, and the Interpretive Structural Model, Rahman verified the key elements of the leadership model, ensuring a holistic approach to leadership development.

Furthermore, a report by the World Bank (2022) delves into the lessons learned from TVET reforms, particularly those accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report underscores the necessity for more impactful and coordinated TVET systems, focusing on principles and practices that can enhance the resilience and effectiveness of these institutions. This highlights the crucial role of strategic leadership development in augmenting the effectiveness and resilience of TVET institutions.

Leadership Education in TVET Colleges to Better Prepare Students for Forthcoming Challenges

The development of leadership is widely acknowledged as a critical strategic process within organizations, playing a vital role in enhancing the skills, capabilities, and effectiveness of individuals in leadership positions (Kotter, 2012). According to Bennis (2009), leadership development is a process that aims to expand the capacity of individuals to effectively perform leadership roles and processes. Kotter (2012) further emphasizes its strategic significance, stating that leadership development is crucial for driving organizational change, navigating complexity, fostering innovation, and achieving strategic objectives. Leadership development initiatives usually involve various structured activities and interventions, such as leadership training programs, executive coaching, mentoring relationships, action learning projects, and succession planning processes (Phillips, 2016). These initiatives are designed to build leadership competencies, encourage personal growth, and enhance organizational resilience. However, investing in the growth and development of leaders not only establishes a strong leadership pipeline and ensures continuity in leadership roles but also drives overall organizational success (Cappelli, 2019). Additionally, leadership development plays a pivotal role in fostering a positive organizational culture, improving employee engagement, and retaining talent (Phillips, 2016). These aspects are essential for organizations striving to adapt and excel in today's competitive business environment. By nurturing effective leaders who can inspire and empower others, organizations enhance their capacity for innovation, drive transformative change, and achieve sustainable growth. Flores (2017) examined the strategies employed by human resource managers in Silicon Valley to improve employee leadership development programs, guided by transformational leadership theory. The study highlights the challenge faced by business leaders in allocating sufficient time to developing employee leadership capabilities, leading to suboptimal programs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the educational strategies utilized by TVET colleges for fostering leadership skills. According to Bhandari (2020), the qualitative approach involves gathering and analyzing non-numerical data, such as a screenplay, videotape, or audio, to understand viewpoints, attitudes, or proficiencies. This type of research aims to reveal meanings, concepts, definitions, traits, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of objects (Ghorbani et al., 2024). A case study design was chosen to facilitate a thorough exploration of specific TVET institutions and their approaches to leadership development. The study's population encompasses TVET institutions in both urban and rural settings across South Africa. A purposive sampling strategy will be utilized to select six institutions that showcase a variety of leadership development programs and educational strategies. CS will include administrators, instructors, and students engaged in leadership training initiatives. Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with administrators and instructors, as well as focus group discussions with students. The interviews will delve into institutional leadership strategies, curriculum design, and industry partnerships, while the focus groups will delve into student experiences in leadership development programs. Data was collected over a three-month period through a combination of in-person and online interviews and focus group discussions. All conversations were recorded and transcribed for analysis, with strict adherence to ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to leadership development in TVET institutions. The data was coded and categorized using NVivo software to ensure alignment with the research objectives and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational strategies utilised. According to Maden (2019), sampling refers to selecting a subset of the target population that the researcher aims to study in order to make generalizations about the entire group of people or entities from whom information is needed (social artifacts). The population consists of 8 students and 4 lecturers, which constitute a sample size of 12 participants. The coding format for College Students is (CS1 -CS8), and the coding format for College Lecturers is (CL1- CL4). In order to protect the rights of the participants, obtaining informed consent was a crucial step. This involved thoroughly explaining the study's objectives and potential benefits (or lack thereof) to the participants. It was communicated to the participants that their responses would be handled with complete confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, it was stressed that their participation was entirely voluntary, allowing them to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Demographic data

The study's population encompasses TVET institutions in both urban and rural settings across South Africa. The population consists of 8 students and 4 lecturers which constitute a sample size of 12 participants. The coding format for the College Students is (CS1 -CS8) and the coding format for College Lecturers is (CL1- CL4)

The college students responded to the questionnaires given, and the responses are presented. Participants answered the questions thus:

Theme: 1. Student Experiences and Perspectives

How would you describe your experience with leadership training conducted in your institution?

CS1: *It was good training that left us with experience of knowing how to deal with situations when in leadership positions.*

CS2: *I appreciate that our university is continuously improving its programs and adapting to the evolving needs of students and the job market. The trainers are knowledgeable and often bring in guest speakers from various fields, allowing us to gain diverse perspectives on leadership.*

CS6: *It has been rather challenging*

CS8: *It is a very good experience because I get to learn many things I never knew.*

In what ways has the program helped you develop skills such as decision-making, communication, or teamwork?

CS1: *It has helped me in knowing how to work together as a team.*

CS7: *Communication Participating in group discussions, presentations, and workshops has improved my verbal and written communication skills. I have learned how to articulate my ideas clearly, listen actively to others, and provide constructive feedback, which is essential for effective collaboration.*

CS4: *Enabling one to be fully capacitated to understand what their expectations as a leader is. So, it has fully capacitated me*

CS5: *To be good in decision-making*

Theme 2: Experiential Learning and Real-World Preparation.

Have you had any hands-on leadership experiences, such as internships, projects, or group activities? If so, how did they impact your leadership skills?

CS 4: *Yes. It was group activities that helped as they brought together different ideas.*

CS6: *Working with diverse individuals can lead to differing opinions and conflict. I learned how to mediate disputes, listen to different perspectives, and find common ground, which fostered a more collaborative environment.*

CS7: *I have had projects. I was amazed by how much people have given me credit*

CS8: *No*

How prepared do you feel for real-world leadership roles based on your training in your institution?

CS1: *Not really prepared*

CS3: *"I feel at least ready now for real-world leadership roles. I've gained valuable skills and experiences that have built my confidence, and I'm excited to tackle the challenges that come with leading a team. I'm eager to put my knowledge into practice and continue growing as a leader.*

CS4: *It has made me able to resolve conflicts as a leader. And be able to solve life problems broadly*

CS5: *I can say I can be able to put my two cents opinion here and there.*

Theme 3: Perceived Value and Impact of Leadership Training:

Do you feel that the leadership training you received aligns with your career goals? Why or why not?

CS2: *Yes. The career that I wish to pursue is very broad which then means working closely with people and service delivery.*

CS5: *I feel that the leadership training I received does not align with my career goals in administration. The training was focused more on general leadership theories and concepts, but it didn't really address the specific skills and knowledge I need for my role.*

CS6: *Yes, it does because also, in my career, there is project management.*

CS7: *Yes. It helps to engage very well with people.*

What aspects of the program have been most beneficial for your leadership development, and which could be improved?

CS1: *Ways to respond when provoked as a leader.*

CS2: *The practical experiences offered have been game-changers. Engaging in hands-on projects enabled me to apply the theories I learned in real-world situations, helping me develop essential skills in a meaningful way.*

CS3: *To being able to better communicate effectively and have strategies. Nothing to be improved.*

CS6: *Public speaking. The one that could be improved is speaking in confidence.*

Theme 4. Challenges in Leadership Training:

What have been the most challenging aspects of leadership training for you, and how did you work to overcome these challenges?

CS6: *Attending to rude people who also seek help from me.*

CS8: *While I don't have personal experiences*

CS4: *Having to speak the language fully understood by students. So I had to learn to adapt through visiting them and having social gatherings and conversations*

CS5: *The most challenging aspect is this of addressing the people, but they seem to want to hear what they want to hear, nothing other than that.*

How well do you feel your instructors support your leadership development, and what additional support would be helpful?

CS1: *More training sessions on leadership skills*

CS4: *I appreciated my instructor's support in my leadership development journey. Their ability to engage the class and foster a collaborative learning environment made a significant difference. They regularly encouraged participation, which not only allowed me to share my ideas but also helped me learn from my peers.*

CS5: *I am fully satisfied so far greatly and they are using tools and methods simplified.*

CS6: *They are always encouraged to speak nothing but the truth under no circumstances.*

Theme 5. Future Aspirations and Application of Skills:

How do you envision applying the leadership skills you've developed once you graduate?

CS3: *Yes I do*

CS5: *Having benefited from guidance throughout my education, I plan to take on mentorship roles, sharing my experiences and knowledge with new or less experienced individuals in my field. This can help build a supportive community and empower others to grow and succeed.*

CS6: *By availing myself to lead and being a good listener at work because leaders are great listeners too*

CS8: *To fight the unemployment of graduates because it has become the serious issue*

Are there specific leadership skills you feel are essential for your future career, and do you feel prepared in these areas?

CS4: *Yes*

CS2: *I have worked on understanding my emotions and recognizing how they impact my interactions with others. Through various team projects and feedback sessions, I've learned to navigate interpersonal dynamics with empathy, which I believe is crucial for effective leadership.*

CS3: *The critical thinking capabilities under pressure and problem-solving methodologies. So, when faced with conflict management, it will be easy to deal with such aspects*

CS6: *The manner of approach to people in order for them to listen to what I have to tell them it's what I think it's going to help*

The College Lecturers responded to the questionnaires given, and the responses are presented. Participants answered the questions thus:

Lecturer in Business Studies

Theme 1: Experiential Learning and Mentorship

How do you provide students with authentic leadership experiences, such as internships or mentorship opportunities?

CL1: *"We proactively link students with local businesses for internship opportunities. These placements offer valuable hands-on experience, enabling students to take the lead on small projects, such as organizing events or managing product inventories. Moreover, we facilitate mentorship programs where seasoned professionals offer guidance through challenges and provide career advice."*

Could you share an example of an experiential learning activity that you believe successfully fostered leadership among students?

CL1: *"Students organised a charity drive, managing finances, delegating tasks, and engaging with community members. It was rewarding to see them grow from uncertain individuals into confident leaders."*

Theme 2: Measuring Leadership Development

How do you evaluate students' leadership skills, and what indicators do you consider essential for assessing their progress?

CL1: *"We use practical assignments, peer assessments, and reflective essays to evaluate growth. We focus on important skills such as problem-solving, communication, and teamwork."*

In your experience, what are some of the most challenging aspects of evaluating leadership skills in a TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) context?

CL1: *One main challenge is that leadership can be very subjective. Leadership styles differ, and some students may shine in quiet, supportive roles instead of being very assertive. It can be difficult to recognize and evaluate these different ways of showing leadership.*

Theme 3: Responding to Student Needs

How do you customize leadership training to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and career aspirations of students?

CL1: "We conduct initial surveys to gain insights into students' career aspirations and customize case studies or activities to align with their areas of interest. For example, a student with an interest in hospitality may engage in roles related to event coordination, whereas those drawn to finance might handle budgeting during group projects."

What strategies do you employ to support students who may face difficulties with specific leadership competencies, such as public speaking or problem-solving?

CL1: To help with public speaking, we hold practice sessions in a relaxed setting. Students build problem-solving skills by working together on real-world problems through scenario-based learning.

Theme 4: Feedback on Program Effectiveness

What feedback, if any, have you received from students regarding the efficacy of leadership training?

CL1: Students often like the practical parts of the training but want more chances to face real-life leadership challenges. Some students have asked for longer internships or more direct contact with industry leaders.

Are there specific recommendations you would make to enhance the leadership development initiatives?

CL1: "I suggest using leadership simulations with decision-making software and building stronger connections with the industry. This will create better hands-on learning experiences."

Lecturer in Engineering

Theme 1: Experiential Learning and Mentorship

How do you provide students with authentic leadership experiences, such as internships or mentorship opportunities?

CL2: "Our emphasis is on joint projects during workshops, where students assume leadership positions in creating and developing prototypes. Guidance from industry experts is incorporated through seminars and guest talks."

Could you share an example of an experiential learning activity that you believe successfully fostered leadership among students?

CL2: "In a renewable energy project, students created a solar-powered irrigation system. One student took charge of the team, overseeing schedules and assigning responsibilities. It was a difficult yet profoundly impactful experience for the group."

Theme 2: Measuring Leadership Development

How do you evaluate students' leadership skills, and what indicators do you consider essential for assessing their progress?

CL2: "Leadership is evaluated based on the results of group projects, personal reflections, and assessments from peers. Our main areas of emphasis are clear communication, taking initiative, and making decisions."

In your experience, what are some of the most challenging aspects of evaluating leadership skills in a TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) context?

CL2: Measuring intangible qualities like emotional intelligence and the ability to inspire others is challenging. Furthermore, some students may avoid leadership roles, making it harder to assess their potential in this area.

Theme 3: Responding to Student Needs

How do you customize leadership training to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and career aspirations of students?

CL2: "We offer role-based opportunities during practical sessions, allowing students to experience leadership in diverse contexts. For instance, quieter students may take the lead on quality control tasks, where attention to detail is essential."

What strategies do you employ to support students who may face difficulties with specific leadership competencies, such as public speaking or problem-solving?

CL2: "For students facing challenges, we provide workshops focused on communication skills and decision-making frameworks. Role-playing scenarios are also employed to enhance confidence in leadership situations."

Theme 4: Feedback on Program Effectiveness

What feedback, if any, have you received from students regarding the efficacy of leadership training?

CL2: "Students frequently express that hands-on projects are the most valuable aspect of their training. However, they believe that leadership training should be introduced earlier in the curriculum."

Are there specific recommendations you would make to enhance the leadership development initiatives?

CL2: "Integrating leadership modules from the first year and utilizing augmented reality tools to simulate leadership scenarios could significantly enhance learning outcomes."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Student Experiences and Perspectives

The study's findings highlight a diverse range of experiences among students concerning leadership training in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. Many students, including CS1 and CS2, expressed positive feedback, emphasizing the importance of knowledgeable trainers and the relevance of the training to their career goals.

This observation aligns with existing literature suggesting that effective leadership training significantly enhances students' ability to navigate complex situations in professional settings (Baker & McCarthy, 2020).

Challenges were also identified, particularly by students such as CS6 and CS8, who described the training experience as demanding or lacking in personal relevance. This underscores an important gap in experiential learning opportunities, supported by research that shows hands-on experiences significantly enhance leadership skills (Cohen & Fullerton, 2019). The varied feedback highlights the necessity for a more tailored approach to leadership training, ensuring that it addresses the diverse needs of students.

Experiential Learning and Real-World Preparation

The theme of experiential learning has emerged as a critical factor influencing the development of students' leadership skills. In particular, students who participated in collaborative group activities and comprehensive projects, specifically those categorized as CS4 and CS6, reported notable advancements in their leadership capabilities. They emphasized substantial improvements in key areas such as conflict resolution and teamwork dynamics. This finding is consistent with established educational theories that advocate for experiential learning as a vital component in preparing students to face real-world challenges and scenarios effectively (Kolb, 1984).

Interestingly, there appears to be a divergence in the perceptions of students regarding their preparedness for leadership roles in practical settings. While some students voiced feelings of inadequacy and expressed concerns about being unprepared for real-world leadership responsibilities (CS1), others demonstrated a strong sense of confidence in their abilities to handle such roles (CS3). This observable discrepancy may indicate varying degrees of exposure to practical leadership experiences throughout the program. Consequently, it suggests that educational institutions should take proactive measures to ensure equitable access to these valuable opportunities for all students, fostering an environment where every individual can develop and refine their leadership skills effectively.

Perceived Value and Impact of Leadership Training

The perceived connection between leadership training and career aspirations varied among participants. Some students, such as CS2 and CS6, found the training advantageous for their future careers, while others, like CS5, criticized it for being overly theoretical and not adequately tailored to specific roles. This observation aligns with existing literature that underscores the importance of contextualizing leadership training to meet actual job requirements (Hiller & Day, 2003). Furthermore, students expressed a desire for more practical experiences and opportunities for direct engagement with industry professionals. This sentiment resonates with previous research advocating for the incorporation of real-world challenges into leadership training (Gordon & McEwan, 2021).

Challenges in Leadership Training

Students highlighted several challenges encountered during their leadership training, including difficulties with communication and managing diverse viewpoints (CS6 and CS8). Instructors, on the other hand, emphasized the complexities involved in evaluating leadership skills, particularly in identifying various leadership styles (CL1 and CL2). This observation aligns with existing literature that elaborates on the subjective nature of leadership and the challenges associated with assessing intangible qualities such as emotional intelligence (Zaccaro et al., 2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance leadership training in TVET institutions:

Expand Experiential Learning Opportunities: Institutions should broaden their hands-on projects, internships, and mentorship programs, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical environments. This approach aligns with the experiential learning model and better prepares students for real-world challenges.

Tailored Leadership Training: Development of customized leadership training modules that align with specific career aspirations and industry expectations is essential. Involving industry professionals in the training process can effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Incorporate Early Leadership Training: Introducing leadership training modules earlier in the curriculum can help build foundational skills and confidence among students. This proactive strategy enhances students' readiness for leadership roles upon graduation.

Enhance Evaluation Methods: It is important to implement diverse assessment strategies that acknowledge various leadership styles and competencies. Incorporating peer assessments and reflective practices can provide a comprehensive perspective on a student's leadership development.

Foster Instructor Support: Providing instructors with professional development opportunities is crucial for equipping them to better support students' leadership journeys. This could include training in mentorship and coaching techniques.

CONCLUSION

The study emphasises the diverse experiences of students participating in leadership training within TVET institutions in South Africa. While many students gain valuable insights from the existing programs, there are significant gaps in experiential learning and alignment with their career aspirations. By adopting the recommended strategies, institutions can improve the efficacy of their leadership training initiatives, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to navigate the

complexities of the modern workforce. Ultimately, a more customised and experience-oriented approach to leadership training will not only benefit students but also foster the development of competent leaders across various industries.

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