

The Empowering Women Leaders of Tomorrow Programme
(Program Pemerkasaan Wanita untuk Pemimpin Masa Hadapan)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of leadership programs on empowering female students and fostering their active participation in leadership roles. The research is guided by three primary objectives: (1) analyzing the need for leadership programs specifically designed for female students, (2) developing a tailored leadership module, and (3) obtaining expert evaluations to enhance its effectiveness. A qualitative approach was adopted, using the Waterfall model to systematically guide the program's development. Data were collected through interviews with education and leadership experts who validated the structure and content of the program. Findings indicate that a well-designed leadership program significantly enhances female students' self-confidence, leadership skills, and access to supportive social networks. The study also identifies key challenges, such as societal expectations and gender biases, that hinder female participation in leadership roles. Expert feedback informed several recommendations for improving the program, including the integration of interactive and experiential learning components, alignment with 21st-century learning goals, and the inclusion of structured mentorship opportunities. These findings offer important implications for educators, policymakers, and institutions committed to fostering inclusive and effective female leadership development.

Keywords: Women in Leadership, Leadership Programs, Female Students, Higher Education, 21st Century Learning

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka impak program kepimpinan dalam memperkasa pelajar perempuan dan menggalakkan penyertaan aktif mereka dalam peranan kepimpinan. Penyelidikan ini dipandu oleh tiga objektif utama: (1) menganalisis keperluan program kepimpinan yang direka khusus untuk pelajar perempuan, (2) membangunkan modul kepimpinan yang disesuaikan, dan (3) mendapatkan penilaian pakar bagi meningkatkan keberkesanannya. Pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan, dengan model Waterfall sebagai panduan sistematik dalam pembangunan program ini. Data dikumpul melalui temubual bersama pakar dalam bidang pendidikan dan kepimpinan yang telah mengesahkan struktur serta kandungan program tersebut. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa program kepimpinan yang dirancang dengan baik dapat meningkatkan keyakinan diri, kemahiran kepimpinan, dan akses kepada rangkaian sokongan sosial dalam kalangan pelajar perempuan. Kajian ini juga mengenal pasti cabaran utama seperti jangkaan masyarakat dan bias jantina yang menjadi penghalang kepada penglibatan pelajar perempuan dalam peranan kepimpinan. Maklum balas pakar telah menyumbang kepada beberapa cadangan penambahbaikan program, termasuk pengintegrasian elemen pembelajaran interaktif dan berasaskan pengalaman, penjajaran dengan matlamat pembelajaran abad ke-21, serta penyediaan peluang bimbingan (mentoring) yang berstruktur. Penemuan ini memberikan implikasi penting kepada para pendidik, pembuat dasar, dan institusi yang komited dalam memupuk pembangunan kepimpinan wanita yang inklusif dan berkesan.

Kata kunci: Wanita dalam Kepimpinan, Program Kepimpinan, Pelajar Perempuan, Pendidikan Tinggi, Pembelajaran Abad ke-21

INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of women through leadership development has become a global priority, reflecting an increased commitment to gender equality and recognition of the valuable perspectives women bring to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In Malaysia, this vision is echoed through educational initiatives that focus on nurturing leadership potential among female students. Central to these efforts is the Women's Empowerment Program for Future Leaders, designed to equip young women with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to take on leadership roles across various sectors, contributing meaningfully to the nation's progress (Chin, 2011).

Historically, leadership landscapes have been male-dominated, with women facing persistent barriers such as societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and limited access to leadership development opportunities (Connell, 2009). However, growing awareness of the need for inclusive leadership has led to national efforts to dismantle these barriers. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia, PPPM) highlights the importance of cultivating leadership skills among all students, with a strong emphasis on promoting gender inclusivity and equality (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Leadership programs specifically tailored for female students, such as the Women's Empowerment Program for Future Leaders, play a pivotal role in bridging gender gaps in leadership. These programs do more than develop practical leadership skills—they also work to reshape societal perceptions and build supportive environments that empower women to lead with confidence (Northouse, 2018). Through active participation, female students are encouraged to find their voice, take initiative in leadership settings, and create valuable peer and professional networks (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

Furthermore, integrating such leadership development into the educational curriculum supports the broader aim of producing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and capable of initiating meaningful change (Komives et al., 2006). Key elements such as mentorship, experiential learning, and exposure to real-world leadership scenarios contribute to the holistic development of female students as future leaders.

In conclusion, the Women's Empowerment Program for Future Leaders is vital in preparing young women to rise to leadership challenges. By providing structured opportunities, guidance, and support, the program fosters a generation of empowered female

leaders ready to drive positive transformation in their communities and beyond. As Malaysia continues to advance toward gender equality, initiatives like this are not just beneficial—they are essential.

YOUNG FUTURE LEADERS SUMMIT PROGRAMME

The Young Future Leaders Summit is a dynamic platform aimed at cultivating leadership qualities among female students through a series of interactive activities, including workshops, seminars, and experiential sessions. It emphasizes the development of critical thinking, communication, and teamwork.

Experiential learning, a core component of the summit, enables students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations, thus fostering deeper leadership insight (Johnson & Johnson, 2020). The program also features problem-solving challenges that build decision-making confidence and initiative.

Mentorship is another key element, where participants are guided by experienced leaders who provide ongoing support and career guidance (Kram, 1985; Allen & Eby, 2010). This exposure not only strengthens leadership skills but also expands participants' understanding of women's diverse roles in leadership.

Topics such as gender equality and leadership diversity are included to raise awareness of the barriers women often face and strategies to overcome them (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The collaborative structure of the summit encourages teamwork, a critical factor in effective leadership development (West, 2005).

Overall, the summit empowers young women to emerge as confident, capable leaders with a strong sense of community and purpose.

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS OF TOMORROW PROGRAMME

"The cultivation of leadership skills is essential for enabling young women to take on influential roles in their communities and broader society" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The Empowering Women Leaders of Tomorrow program is built around this fundamental belief, offering a structured framework designed to develop and strengthen leadership capabilities among female students. The program is divided into several focused modules, each aimed at fostering critical competencies such as strategic thinking, effective communication, collaboration, and ethical leadership. These modules

are strategically designed to allow participants to progress through the stages at their own pace, ensuring a personalized and impactful learning experience (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The Empowering Women Leaders of Tomorrow program draws upon various leadership theories, including transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating others to achieve higher levels of performance. By integrating these theories into the program's design, it provides participants with a robust foundation in leadership principles, encouraging them to develop a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities they may face as future leaders (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985).

This program also emphasizes the role of mentorship and networking, recognizing that the support of established women leaders is crucial in shaping the leadership trajectories of younger women. Through a series of interactive workshops, case studies, and real-world projects, participants are not only equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for leadership but are also connected with a network of peers and mentors who can guide and support them in their leadership journey (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

In addition to these educational components, the program includes a strong focus on self-awareness and personal development. By engaging in reflective exercises and feedback sessions, participants are encouraged to explore their own leadership styles and values, leading to greater self-confidence and a clearer vision of their potential impact as future leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Overall, the Empowering Women Leaders of Tomorrow program serves as a critical stepping stone for young women aspiring to leadership roles. It not only enhances their leadership competencies but also instills in them the confidence and determination to pursue their goals. The program is a testament to the importance of investing in the leadership development of women, recognizing that their contributions are essential to the advancement of society as a whole (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

This structured program is grounded in the belief that cultivating leadership skills is crucial for female empowerment (Eagly & Carli, 2007). It features progressive modules focused on strategic thinking, communication, ethical decision-making, and collaborative leadership, allowing students to learn at their own pace.

Drawing from transformational leadership theory, the program encourages participants to inspire and motivate others while understanding the broader

challenges they may face (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). It blends theory with practice through workshops, case studies, and real-world applications.

Mentorship and networking are integral to the program's success, with participants connecting to role models who guide and support their development (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Self-awareness exercises and reflection activities help participants discover their leadership styles and build confidence in their potential (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

This initiative plays a critical role in shaping the next generation of female leaders and underscores the societal value of empowering women through leadership education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to:

- i. Analyze the effectiveness of leadership programs in empowering female students.
- ii. Evaluate the impact of the leadership module on the participants' leadership outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach as the primary method to systematically gather accurate data. As noted by Othman (2001) in Hamidah (2007), a methodology is a structured process combining the research approach and data analysis, aimed at optimizing the researchers' effectiveness. This study primarily focuses on exploring the perspectives of female students on leadership and evaluating the potential of leadership programs designed for them. Additionally, the research aims to assess the insights of experts on the effectiveness of these programs.

To achieve the research objectives, the study involves two key samples: three female students and two expert professionals. The three female students are selected to provide firsthand insights into their experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding leadership roles. These students are chosen based on specific criteria that align with the study's focus on female leadership development.

The second sample consists of two experts in the field of leadership development, particularly with experience in female empowerment and leadership training. These experts are engaged to validate the findings from the student interviews and offer professional perspectives on the design and

implementation of leadership programs for female students. As Kamarul Azmi Jasmi (2012) points out, qualitative analysis often involves multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. In this research, data is primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected students and experts. These interviews are designed to be flexible, allowing the respondents to share detailed and nuanced views on the subject matter. The interview process includes a set of predefined questions, but it also allows for follow-up questions that explore specific topics in greater depth.

The research instrument used in this study is a set of inventory interview questions divided into three sections: introductory questions, content-focused questions, and concluding questions. These questions are designed to elicit comprehensive responses that address the research objectives. The data collected from these interviews are transcribed and analyzed using coding methods to identify key themes and patterns relevant to female leadership. To ensure the validity of the findings, the experts are asked to review the interview transcripts and provide feedback on the content, structure, and relevance of the leadership

programs being studied. Their feedback is gathered using a Research Instruments Validity Form, which allows them to suggest any necessary revisions or improvements.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Background

The data collection for this research was conducted using a Semi-Structured Interview Protocol on five respondents, including three female students and two experts. The respondents were carefully selected based on their experiences and specific criteria relevant to the study. The three female students were chosen due to their active participation in leadership activities within their educational institutions, while the two experts were selected based on their extensive experience in leadership development and female empowerment.

Respondents in Group 1: Female Students

The following table presents the biodata, expertise, and experiences of the respondents in Group 1.

TABLE 1. Biodata, Expertise, and Experiences of Respondents in Group 1 of Research

Respondent	Biodata, Expertise, and Experiences
Respondent 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Leader • 2 years of experience in leadership roles. • Active in student council and community projects.
Respondent 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ambassador • 2 years of experience representing school in external leadership programs. • Involved in organizing school events.
Respondent 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club President • 2 years of experience leading student clubs. • Engaged in peer mentoring and leadership workshops.

These students provided valuable insights into their experiences with leadership roles, the challenges they faced, and their views on the effectiveness of leadership programs tailored for female students. The semi-structured interviews explored their motivations for pursuing leadership roles, the support they received, and their aspirations for the future.

Respondents in Group 2: Experts

The second group of respondents consisted of two experts who were consulted to validate the findings from the student interviews and to provide professional opinions on leadership development programs for female students.

TABLE 2. Biodata, Expertise, and Experiences of Respondents in Group 2 of Research

Respondent	Biodata, Expertise, and Experiences
Respondent 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Lecturer • 15 years of experience in leadership development. • Expert in female empowerment and AI.
Respondent 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential Women Leader • 10 years of experience working with youth leadership programs. • Specialist in mentoring young female leaders.

The evaluations conducted through semi-structured interviews with these experts focused on their perspectives regarding the effectiveness of leadership programs, particularly those designed for female students. They provided feedback on the program content, the approach used in training, and the potential long-term impact on the participants.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the interviews with the female students revealed a strong interest in leadership roles, driven by a desire to make a positive impact within their communities. The students highlighted the importance of mentorship and supportive environments in nurturing their leadership potential. However, they also pointed out the challenges they face, including balancing academic responsibilities with leadership roles and overcoming gender stereotypes.

The experts corroborated these findings, emphasizing the need for tailored leadership programs that address the unique challenges faced by female students. They suggested that such programs should not only focus on leadership skills but also on building confidence and resilience in young women. The experts also recommended the inclusion of mentorship components, where experienced female leaders can guide and inspire the students.

Overall, the research highlights the critical role of well-designed leadership programs in empowering female students and fostering the next generation of women leaders. The feedback from both the students and experts underscores the importance of creating supportive and inclusive environments that enable young women to thrive in leadership roles.

ANALYSIS OF THE DEMAND FOR WOMEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of research findings indicates a significant demand for the development of leadership programs specifically tailored for female students. This research, titled *Empowering Female Students Through Leadership Programs: A Study on Women Leadership*, focuses on creating a program that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young women in leadership roles.

In response to one of the research objectives, which is to analyze the demand for the development of leadership programs for female students, the findings obtained from the respondents reveal that there is a strong need for structured programs that not only teach leadership skills but also foster self-confidence and resilience. The three female students interviewed emphasized the importance of having access to leadership opportunities that are supportive and inclusive. They highlighted that such programs should include mentorship components where experienced female leaders guide and inspire them.

The two experts consulted during this research echoed these sentiments, stressing the importance of designing programs that go beyond traditional leadership training by integrating elements that address the specific needs of female students, such as navigating gender biases and overcoming societal expectations. The experts also pointed out that early exposure to leadership roles can significantly impact the future aspirations and career choices of young women.

The demand analysis further showed that there is a growing recognition among educational institutions of the need to cultivate female leaders from a young age. By developing and implementing these leadership programs, schools and universities can contribute

to closing the gender gap in leadership positions and ensuring that female students are well-prepared to take on leadership roles in various fields.

DESIGN FOR THE WOMEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The research design for the Women Leadership Program is based on a combination of the ADDIE Model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) and a participatory approach to ensure that the program meets the specific needs of female students.

In the design phase, the researchers utilized collaborative tools like Canva to create visually appealing and engaging program materials that resonate with young women. Canva's user-friendly interface and extensive library of templates allowed for the easy creation of brochures, worksheets, and other resources that can be used in workshops and seminars. Additionally, the researchers employed interactive online platforms like Kahoot! and Padlet to develop activities that encourage active participation and discussion among the participants.

To ensure that the program effectively addresses the challenges faced by female students, the researchers incorporated feedback from the respondents during the design process. This feedback highlighted the need for the program to include modules on self-advocacy, negotiation skills, and emotional intelligence, which are crucial for navigating leadership roles in a male-dominated environment.

Furthermore, the program design features a mentorship component, where participants are paired with successful female leaders from various industries. This mentorship provides students with real-world insights and guidance, helping them to build a strong support network as they embark on their leadership journey.

The use of vibrant and empowering imagery throughout the program materials is intended to inspire confidence and reinforce the message that young women have the potential to lead and make a significant impact. By integrating these design elements, the Women Leadership Program aims to create a positive and empowering learning environment that encourages female students to embrace leadership roles and pursue their goals with determination.

VALIDITY EVALUATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP MODULE

Overall, all the respondents agreed that this module effectively addresses leadership concepts and is suitable for use in nurturing leadership skills among female students. However, one respondent noted that the module serves as a significant medium for enhancing students' comprehension of leadership principles, while the other respondents suggested that further evaluation is required to determine the module's actual impact on leadership development. Despite the differences in viewpoints, this module is believed to meet most of the criteria identified in the research (Othman, 2013).

In general, the inclusion of real-world scenarios and case studies within the module is seen as an effective approach to applying the principles of leadership in practical contexts. This approach not only helps students understand leadership concepts but also encourages them to apply these concepts in real-life situations (Shuib, 2019). The module incorporates essential elements such as decision-making, communication, and team collaboration, which are critical for developing leadership skills (Mazihah, 2013). Furthermore, the module emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, an aspect that is increasingly recognized as vital for effective leadership (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2012).

It is recommended that the module be enhanced by including more interactive components, such as role-playing and group discussions, to ensure that it remains relevant to 21st-century learning demands. Instructors are also encouraged to take an active role in facilitating student-led activities and promoting a collaborative learning environment (Shuib, 2019). Additionally, providing clear guidelines and structured feedback mechanisms will help improve the overall effectiveness of the module in developing leadership skills among female students (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2012).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Women's Leadership Module developed through this research is a valuable educational tool designed to enhance leadership skills among female students. The module is specifically tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young

women in leadership roles, providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in leadership positions. The incorporation of real-world scenarios, interactive activities, and theoretical foundations ensures that the module is both engaging and effective in fostering leadership abilities. By integrating elements of decision-making, emotional intelligence, and collaborative teamwork, the module prepares students to navigate the complexities of leadership in various contexts. This research contributes significantly to the ongoing efforts to empower young women through education, and it is envisioned to be a key resource for educators seeking to cultivate the next generation of female leaders. The module's adaptability to different learning environments and its focus on student-centered learning ensure that it will remain relevant and impactful in diverse educational settings.

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