Experiential Learning Through Module: A Case Study on Leadership Skills

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Abstract: This case study highlights the process of acquiring leadership skills among student leaders. The module was developed and created in such a way to increase their critical, analytical and creative thinking. This case study was executed in three main modules. The analysis from the findings indicates that there is a meaningful relation between the leadership skill objectives and the module implementation. Thus, it is anticipated that this module could be resembled to different samples for different interesting findings.

Key words: Experiential learning, leadership skills, module, objectives, samples

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning through this module is the process of soft skills acquisition through hands-on experience. It encourages students to develop their leadership skills through three inter-related modules, namely, critical and creative thinking skills, public relation and student leadership. In present times, student leader will have to face the reality of an ever-changing educational system and policies. They will have to meet university visions of the future. Consequently, these phenomena pose new challenges for student leaders. So this module is innovated to meet the requirement. These three modules involve the essential skills of strategic leadership. Schoemaker *et al.* (2013) indicate that a leader requires attention on 6 areas anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align and learn. Their research shows that strength in one skill cannot easily compensate for a deficit in another. Thus, it is important to methodically optimize all six abilities in the execution of the three modules.

Literature review
Critical thinking: Students who have self-leadership and critical thinking skills have an advantage in their studies and have potential to perform in the organization's quality. A lot of researchers have contributed to the pool of knowledge regarding these two interrelated subjects. According to Ay *et al.* (2015) in their study, a positive moderate correlation was found (r = 0.426) between self-leadership and critical thinking. For critical and creative thinking skills module, critical thinking is the main focus in all activities conducted as it is proven to be related to self-leadership dimensions. Critical thinking is also scientifically justified as the basis of effective problem-solving and decision making (Ozer, 2002). This module also helps students to develop constructive thinking patterns. These patterns which are considered as the basis of self-leadership can lead students to improve their behavioral pattern (Ungureanu, 2014). Generally, the activities for this module were arranged from noticing the problem and it continues with problem identification, data collection, problem-related data selection, hypothesizing, hypothesis testing, inferencing, decision making about the validity of the result and making generalization (Ozer, 2002).

Public relation: With the knowledge of the need of communication and leadership ability among the future employee is highly sought by organization there is a need for educators to prepare the students. As mentioned by Meng (2013) many employers have become more selective and demand managerial and leadership trait in hiring employee. This is then supported by Meng (2013) in which he stated that the need of communication skill in future leader is the focus of interest of organizations. Relevant theories, skills and activities to companie's and organization's expectation and also to sharpen and

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enhance the development of future leader (Neff, 2002; Thayer, 1986; Meng, 2013) are highly needed. These relations highlight the importance of identifying the desired leadership quality, leadership skill and features of a unique leadership for future expectation (Meng, 2013). This identification would enrich the syllabus by integrating the expectation of organization into training with content and theory to sustain competitiveness (Meng, 2013).

Student leadership: Participants who joined this module have different perception and expectations towards leadership skills and managements. Yukle (1989) emphasizes that leadership is very often defined in ways that include perceptions of followers. It is important for all participants to corporate with the team members as a way to employ valued leadership skill. Chiriac (2012) highlights the role of leadership and performance in managing group research. Apart from being cooperative, participants are also promoted to have a good communication skill in order to be a good leader as proposed in a study by Chraif and Danciu (2011). They indicate that communication is related to leadership and management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The 3 day and 2 night program was implemented at a resort in the southern area of Malaysia. The groupings for the 50 selected participants were done in two ways according to the needs of different activities during the program; with the maximum of 5 and 10 members per group. The groupings were integrated in the preliminary activities to let the participants to be in their groups for them to proceed with their planning and preparations.

There are 3 modules in the program, namely critical and creative thinking skills, public relation and student leadership. These three modules comprising several activities were implemented sequentially. The activities for each module are summed up in the following Table 1.

This is a combination of quantitative and descriptive qualitative where the feedbacks from the participants regarding the activities were obtained via the usage of feedback form. The questionnaire consists of 3 sections with 5 statements respectively. 5-item likert scale is used for each statement. The main focus of the quantitative data is to find out whether the objective of the module is achieved. Open-ended item is also included in each section for the participants to provide the comments, either generally or specifically about the activities implemented during the program. The items with likert scale were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 Software to find out the significant data such as mean and comparison of mean

Table 1: Summary of activities and implementation strategies

Module	Name of activity	Implementation strategies
Critical and creative	Crack the code	Individual work
Thinking skills	Fabulous flag	Group discussion
Presentation	Grab less, give more	Presentation Group
Public relation	Media Kit Preparation Presentation	Group research Group discussion Role play
Student leadership	Identification of Student leader's Characteristics	Group discussion Presentation
	Presentation 1	Role play
	Presentation 2	Public speaking

Table 2: Demographic information on sample

Variables	Values
Gender	
Male	23
Female	20
Academic performance (CGPA)	
3.00-3.33	18
3.33-3.67	18
3.67-4.00	7
Faculty	
Civil engineering	9
Mechanical engineering	10
Electrical engineering	5
Chemical engineering	9
Management and Business Studies (Transportation)	10

value for each section related to participant's perceptions and feedbacks about the activities while the qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire item were analyzed using thematic coding.

Participants and sampling: The 43 semester two to semester six students who participated in the program were Engineering and Business students from a public university in Johor. The participants of the study were first identified and selected by their program coordinator, by prioritizing the students who excel in their studies and have potential to be leaders. The names were then sent to the department of students affair to go over a concise streaming prior to be chosen as participants for this program. Students affair department was also involved in the early briefing stage involving the selected participants. The details on the samples are presented in Table 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings based on modules
Critical and creative thinking skills module: In this first module, participants are anticipated to think creatively and critically in solving problems besides engaging in an ice breaking activity. This module consists of three activities with the objectives to:

- Build rapport among participants
- Develop teamwork and leadership skills
- Enhance creativity innovation and self-discipline
- Build motivation momentum to be more accountable to the participants themselves, their families and society

At the end of the module, it was found that the participants succeeded in executing all activities in the module. Generally, the participants indicate that all activities are good in terms of content, methodology, duration, objective and task impact. Table 3 shows the mean values of each criterion mentioned.

Table 3 shows that the objective of this module obtained the highest mean score, 4.0976 superior to the other criteria. This finding reflects the successfulness of this module in preparing the participants to be critical and creative leaders. In contrast, methodology of this module is rated as the lowest with 3.6098. This is due to the comments given by the participants that the tasks given were quite easy and simple. Nevertheless, the task impact criterion illustrates that although this module is stress free, the mean score is high with 4.0488. As for the open-ended item, the participants also commented positively about the module. Table 4 represents some of the remarks made.

All constructive responses given reflect the objectives of this module. Even though a few participants indicate that 'Crack the Code' was an easy task, they admit that the activity was unique and different than their experience in other similar program. This finding is expected as the intention of the researchers was not to burden them with initial difficult task as this activity was executed during their journey to the destination. It was just a way to kick start the program with something unusual and to raise awareness among the participants that the subsequent modules will get tougher.

In 'Fabulous Flag' activity, the participants learned that everybody was born special with talents and multiple capabilities. This is the platform for them to widen their views about people and things happening around them. To be a good leader, one must have the ability to understand the subordinates and be able to research in team. They have to be wise in making decisions and justify them. Based on the presentation made for this slot, students were generally able to discuss and come up with good ideas and products.

In 'Grab less give more' activity, the participants were expected to be able to critically think on how to create a product from a small paper clip to something big and valuable. At the end of this activity, the participants learned that our hands should give more than what we

Table 3: Mean values for critical and creative thinking skills module

Aspects	Mean
Content	3.8537
Methodology	3.6098
Duration	3.8780
Objective	4.0976
Task Impact	4.0488

Table 4: Participant's responses for critical and creative thinking skills module

Sample	Response
26	It was an interesting activity. I want it more and make it more challenging
24	I learned that to be a leader we need to have creative and critical mind
14	I hope other programs would duplicate this kind of activity
32	It's a good way to interact with people we don't know
36	It sharpens my mind

Table 5: Mean values for public relation module

Aspects	Mean
Content	4.2683
Methodology	4.0976
Duration	3.8293
Objective	4.3171
Task Impact	4.3902

receive. It is also an awareness-raising activity for the participants to realize that a leader holds big responsibility not just to himself but to the others especially society.

Public relation module: At the end of the module, participants emphasized that their knowledge and skills about current issue in Malaysia has improved. They also acknowledged that public relation module has improved their communication skills and critical thinking skills. In addition, they stated that this module has given them the experience to play a role as a media representative or press. It has improved their confidence level while interacting with other people especially those of different level of profiles, (i.e., ministers, officers, etc.). Table 5 shows the mean values of each criterion mentioned.

Table 5 shows that the task impact of this module obtained the highest mean score, 4.3902 superior to the other criteria. This finding reflects that this module gives high impact toward student's leadership skills and the objective of this module is successfully achieved. They gained a lot of soft skills from this module. In contrast, the duration of this module is rated as the lowest with 3.8293. This is due to the time constraint in order to finish out the task in the module.

In general, the participants reported that their experiences in this module have increased their knowledge pertaining current issues, communication skills, critical thinking skills and confidence level. Table 6 represents some of the remarks given by the participants for this module.

Student leadership module: This module requires the participants to portray their credibility as leaders.

Table 6: Participant's responses for public relation module

Sample	Response
1	The activity has widened the horizon of my thinking ability towards new things and situation
6	It's a mind boggling module as it challenged my knowledge on current issues
23	Increase my confidence in delivering presentation
24	Very satisfying module as it promotes ideas development and general knowledge
33	It challenges my mind and creativity
34	It teaches us to think and to be prepared in a very short time'

Table 7: Mean values for student leadership module

Aspects	Mean
Content	4.0976
Methodology	4.0244
Duration	3.9024
Objective	3.9024
Task impact	4.0732

Table 8: Participant's responses for student leadership module

Sample	Response
6	I am satisfied and I believe this module inspires me to be a valued leader
36	It motivates me to be student leader
40	This high-impact module gave me good ideas
41	Such an entertaining module and inspiring module

Therefore, they were expected to gather all notable information pertaining leadership characteristics. There were four activities conducted in this module that obligate the participants to be mindful of the crucial percentages and characteristics in order to be selected as a 'Tokoh Siswa'. At the end of the module, it was found that the participants succeeded in presenting all the expected leadership characteristics during the module. The findings for this module were presented in Table 7.

Table 7 indicates that the highest mean score of this module 3 is 4.0976 represented by content as compared to the other criteria. This finding shows the effectiveness of this module in providing valuable contents pertaining characteristics of student leadership. In contrast, duration and objective are rated as the lowest score with 3.9024 respectively. This is due to the participant's responses that they were given limited time to complete the tasks. Since this module is newly implemented they also claimed that they faced some difficulties to digest unfamiliar and different activities conducted in this module.

The participants also commented positively about the module. Table 8 represents some of the remarks made. The first activity requires all participants to perform a group discussion as they were required to create a rubric for leadership criteria. They were then instructed to present the input gathered from the group discussion. In this activity, all groups handled different rubrics on the leadership criteria based on their self-judgement. The following activity was a role-play and they were required

to act out a scene about leadership. This activity encourages the participants to employ their creativity and commitment upon completing the task. The final activity was a public speaking activity whereby the selected participants were able to portray valued self-esteem and credibility as a leader.

Critical and creative thinking skills module: For this module, the participants were generally successful in completing all activities within the time frame. Although, the time allocated for each activity is quite limited, the invented products and their reputations were at par. They had presented good relationship and cooperation with their team mates. The participants have also learned from this module to think and discuss ideas creatively, critically and analytically before making any decision. The inculcation of these skills in this module have shed light for the participants to also practice and improve them in the consecutive modules. Thus, it indicates that the objectives for this module were effectively attained.

Public relation module: This module indirectly provided exposures about current issues to the participants. This has increased their general knowledge regarding issues that they might overlook or neglect. Students were also able to polish their public speaking skills. Besides, they were capable to produce media kit. Media Kit activity was generally a good practice to train them to find valid and reliable information from legit sources. This is in line with the characteristic of becoming a good leader with the ability to organize high impact program with actual and comprehensive information.

Student leadership module: In student leadership module, the participants were capable to complete all four activities within two hours. They were highly motivated in completing all the given tasks although they have limited time to prepare. At the end of the module, all participants were believed to be able to portray all the leadership characteristics discussed in previous activities. To surmise, it is definite that the objectives of this module were successfully accomplished.

CONCLUSION

This module attempted to instill leadership skill among students. The result indicates that the objectives of this module were successfully achieved based on the responses from the participants. Generally, participants were able to present good relationship and cooperation among themselves and able to think and discuss ideas

critically, creatively and analytically prior to decision making. In addition, they managed to increase their general knowledge and awareness regarding current issues and successfully shared the information gained through public speaking. They were also highly motivated in completing the given task regardless the time constraint. Thus, all the leadership characteristics were excellently portrayed in all the modules.

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