

Student Leadership Character In Educational Research: A Bibliometric Analysis Of The Last Two Decades

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Abstrak: Pendidikan modern semakin mengakui kepemimpinan siswa sebagai saluran penting untuk mengembangkan rasa tanggung jawab, ketahanan, dan kerja sama. Namun, meskipun signifikansinya semakin meningkat, analisis penelitian mengenai kepemimpinan siswa secara keseluruhan masih kurang. Studi ini menyajikan tinjauan bibliometrik penelitian yang diterbitkan dari tahun 2003 hingga 2024 mengenai tren utama, pola publikasi, dan tema yang muncul. Dengan menggunakan kerangka PRISMA, artikel yang relevan diambil dari Scopus, menargetkan artikel penelitian dan ulasan berbahasa Inggris. Dari 548 dokumen yang teridentifikasi, 348 telah dianalisis. Hasil penelitian menyoroti pentingnya peran kepemimpinan siswa yang semakin meningkat, terutama di bidang kesehatan, ilmu sosial, dan teknik, dengan penelitian yang didominasi oleh Amerika Serikat, yang menunjukkan ketidakseimbangan penelitian secara global. Berdasarkan analisis ko-okurensi, tema umum yang diidentifikasi meliputi kepemimpinan dalam pendidikan kesehatan, pengembangan kurikulum, dinamika gender, dan pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa. Tema-tema ini mencerminkan fokus utama dalam penelitian saat ini tentang kepemimpinan siswa. Temuan ini membantu pendidik, pembuat kebijakan, dan peneliti dalam membimbing peningkatan pengembangan kepemimpinan siswa

Kata Kunci: bibliometrik, karakter kepemimpinan, pendidikan, siswa

Abstract: Modern education increasingly recognizes student leadership as an important channel for developing a sense of responsibility, resilience, and cooperation. Yet, despite its increasing significance, there is a lack of an overall analysis of research on student leadership. This study presents a bibliometric review of research published from 2003 through 2024 on main trends, publication patterns, and emergent themes. Using the PRISMA framework, relevant articles were retrieved from Scopus, targeting English research articles and reviews. Of the 548 identified documents, 348 were analyzed. The results highlight the growing significance of student leadership, especially in healthcare, social sciences, and engineering, with U.S.-based research dominating the field, indicating global research imbalances. Based on the co-occurrence analysis, the common themes identified are Leadership within healthcare education, Curriculum development, Gender dynamics, and the student-centered approach. These themes reflect the key areas of focus in current research on student leadership. These findings assist educators, policymakers, and researchers in guiding the enhancement of development in student leadership

Keywords: bibliometrics, education, leadership character, student



Introduction

Within pedagogical educational discourses, student leadership has been one of the key areas that aim to develop well-rounded individuals who are not only academically good at their work but also lead, influence, and give back to their societies positively. Necessary qualities inculcated among the students through the skill of leadership include responsibility, resilience, collaboration, and self-confidence, which are highly indispensable in today's ever-complex world (Filiz, 2019; Atkins & Shrubbs, 2018). The expectation of young people developing leadership abilities to deal successfully with significant global challenges, such as climate change, technological disruption, and social inequality, is increasingly complex. Schools are now envisaged as one of the key sites where future leaders will be developed, and the development of leadership is being inculcated into educational systems with a view to providing students with competencies that will enable them to be successful personally, academically, and professionally. Furthermore, in the recent past years, student leadership development has been given increased significance in educational policies and research frameworks (Pont, 2020; Kiersch & Peters, 2017).

Recently, there has been a shift toward more integrated models of education within which leadership development is part of the general curriculum (Ylimaki, 2012; Fusarelli et al., 2018). In fact, schools and universities are being called upon to develop character, as well as intellectual capacity, in emerging leaders for a world of ever-increasing complexity. Leadership development programs among students aim at encouraging students to take initiative and make ethical decisions on aspects involving or affecting society. The experience the students gain in this process encourages personal growth; it also instills in them a level of civic responsibility that is clearly needed within the framework of a globalized and interdependent world. The emphasis on student leadership in education is directed at raising responsible, innovative, and socially conscious future leaders (Frost, 2016; Lee et al., 2020).

Research into student leadership has gained increasing relevance because educational institutions have started to realize the significance of leadership skills both in the individual development of students and for society in general. This is underlined by such works as Dong et al. (2017) and Diehl et al. (2016). Over the last twenty years, the field of student leadership research has evolved to incorporate scholarly exploration of various dimensions of leadership: leading styles, the effect of leadership programs, and leadership development across educational contexts (Sfantou et al., 2017; Day et al., 2020). This body of growing research reflects an understanding that leadership is not an inborn but rather an acquired feature developed through targeted educational intervention. In this respect, student leadership research becomes increasingly important as an area of inquiry that supports educational reform and innovation (Day et al., 2016; Urbanova, 2021).

Given the rapid increase in the volume of research on student leadership and its importance for the development of effective educational practice, there is an evident need for a systematic investigation into the nature of its development. The objective of the present study is to carry out a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the research into student leadership that has been produced within the last two decades. Bibliometric analysis is, therefore, a systematic method within which trends, patterns, and evolution in the scholarly literature of a particular field can be understood. In this regard, this research will analyze different ranges of academic publications on student leadership to highlight key messages on trends within published documents, country contribution, types of research disciplines involved, and content analysis of recurring themes. The present research has, therefore, mapped out the trajectory of student leadership research, detailing how such a strand of inquiry has evolved through time, along with what elements have influenced that evolution. Beyond this, such analysis will also summarize the key areas of focus within the research, providing further clarity on how aspects of student leadership are under investigation and where future research may be required.

This bibliometric approach will also enable the research to fill significant gaps in the existing literature on student leadership by pointing out the themes or topics that are less considered and deserve further research in the future. Additionally, this analysis will contribute to the wider understanding of educators, policymakers, and researchers about the importance of student leadership in today's schools. This will give an overview of useful knowledge with regard to how leadership programs and initiatives within educational settings have been reviewed and debated within the academic domain, thereby providing a basis for informed decision-making in education. Finally, the present study aims to contribute to the student leadership literature by providing a comprehensive review of its academic landscape over the last two decades.

These will be informed by a number of research questions guiding the bibliometric analysis in achieving the objectives of the study. First, the study will look at the major trends which have characterized student leadership research over the last twenty years. The understanding of these trends will in turn provide a historic overview of how the area has changed and the factors that may have influenced such change. This study will also look at the patterns of publication in student leadership research. This will involve mapping the publication landscape in order to examine the distribution of the published documents among countries, the distribution of the documents according to research disciplines, and the most influential journals. Mapping these patterns will give insights into which academic communities are most actively engaged in student leadership research and into their overall contributions to the development of the field. Lastly, the study will look at the recurring topics and key themes in student leadership research. In this respect, it will serve to underscore areas of critical interest and give a framework for the major concern, challenges, and opportunities connected with research into student leadership over the last two decades

Method

This study employed the PRISMA framework to review the existing literature (Tricco et al., 2018). By adhering to PRISMA guidelines, a scoping process was utilized to identify the most relevant articles related to student leadership in education. This method facilitated the identification of critical themes and helped in categorizing key search terms. Multiple keyword combinations were used to retrieve relevant published papers from a reputable research database, specifically Scopus, aiming to uncover significant scientific journals and publications. The terms "student leadership" and "education" were used in the database search, with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with quality requirements, applied to refine the search results. These filters ensured the quality of the selected studies, and the following section details the inclusion and exclusion criteria used.

The search was conducted over the past two decades, 2003-2024, to ensure that recent research into the review of student leadership was represented. A preliminary retrieval of 548 documents included document types such as research articles, reviews, editorials, and book chapters. The refinement of search to research article and review papers yielded 358 documents, as described in Figure 1. Further refinement for English language publications resulted in 348 documents for evaluation. The selected data, after going through the exclusion and inclusion criteria, were exported into an Excel file in support of the systematic review process.

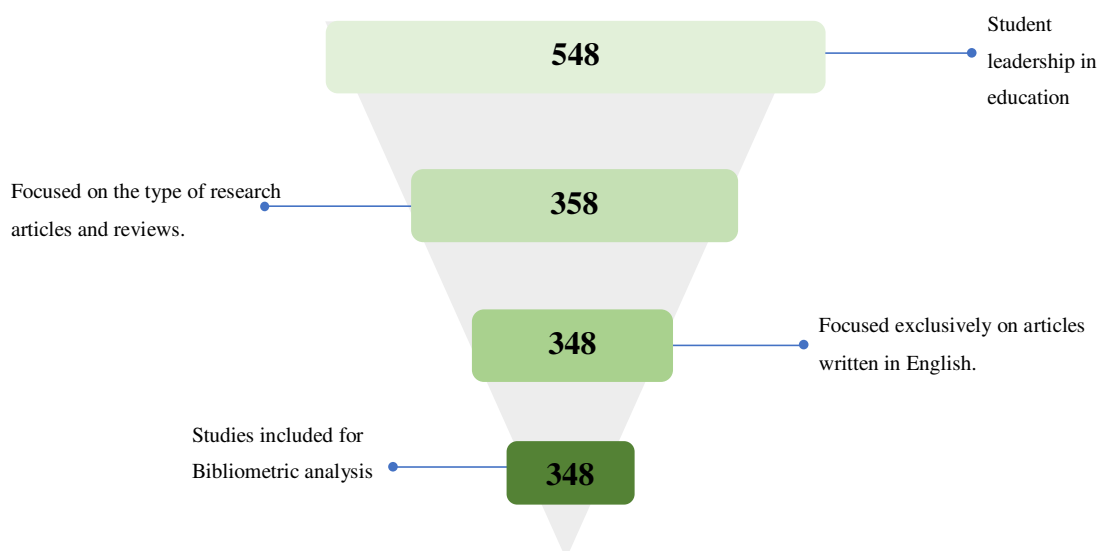


Figure 1 PRISMA Diagram

Result and Discussion dan Pembahasan

Figure 2 shows research articles on student leadership in education from 2003 to 2024. From these data, a few general trends emerge. From 2003 to 2009, publications are low and relatively variable, indicating limited attention to the topic in this period. Then, around 2010 to 2015, there is a gradual increase in research interest with some noticeable fluctuations. This peak in 2013, together with slight declines and subsequent rises, testifies to an emergent but as yet inconsistent focus on student leadership within educational research.

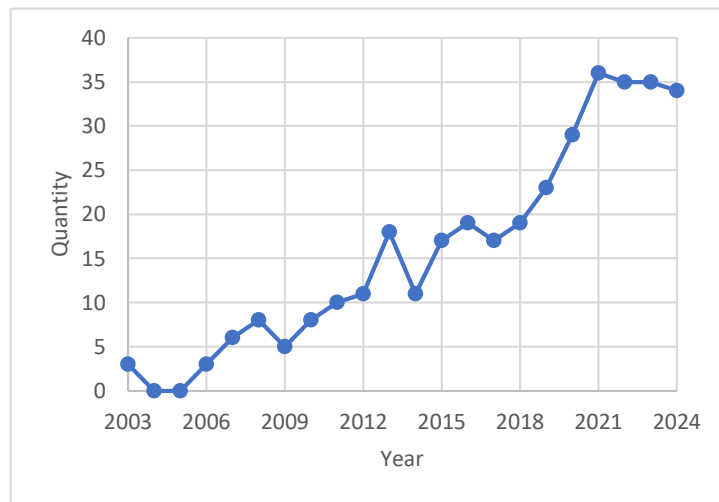


Figure 2 Distribution of Published Documents From 2003 to 2024

From 2016 to 2019, the number of articles began to rise more steadily, showing a growing academic interest in student leadership. This trend likely corresponds with broader educational reforms or global movements that emphasized the importance of developing leadership skills in students. The sharpest increase occurred from 2018 to 2021, where the number of articles surged, peaking at over 35 in 2021. This spike could be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced schools and educators to rethink leadership roles, particularly as students took on more active roles in digital learning and crisis management (Aslan et al., 2020; Aldawood, et al., 2019; Damayanti & Mirfani, 2021).

From 2021 to 2024, the number of articles remained high, reflecting sustained interest in student leadership. This ongoing focus suggests that student leadership has become an integral aspect of educational research, influenced by innovations in education, the need for leadership development in students, and the growing recognition of student agency (McNair et al., 2022; Elrehail et al., 2018). Overall, the increasing trend in research publications highlights the growing significance of student leadership in shaping modern educational practices.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of documents published within the top 10 countries. This figure shows that there is a great difference in research contributions with regard to student leadership in education. The United States is very dominant, with 195 publications, and therefore leads the academic discourse on the topic. This high output is probably a reflection of the country's solid educational infrastructure, emphasis on leadership in schools, and considerable research funding therein (Robinson & Gray 2019; Shava & Tlou, 2018). Australia follows with 25 publications showing a strong regional interest possibly premised on its current educational reforms anchored around student leadership (Harris et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2021). Similarly, China, with 19 publications, demonstrates a growing investment in research, reflecting its broader national efforts to enhance educational practices and leadership development (Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

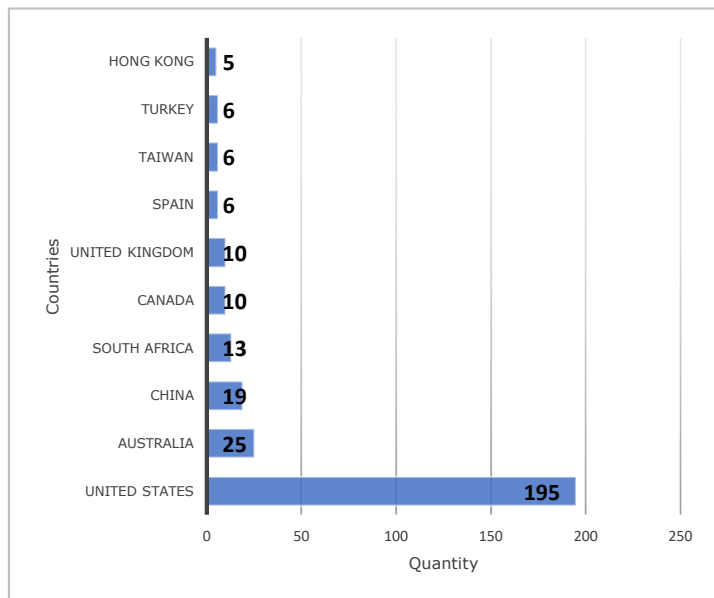


Figure 3 Distribution of Published Documents Among Top 10 Countries (2003–2024)

Countries such as South Africa, Canada, and the United Kingdom each contributed between 10 and 13 publications. Their contribution increases, thus showing growing interest; however, it is not as high compared to that of the US or Australia. Such countries may engage in research on student leadership within certain educational contexts or respond to specific local needs for leadership development. In comparison, countries like Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, and Hong Kong are relatively less engaged in this research area, with only 5 to 6 publications. This relatively low contribution could be because these countries have other priorities in education or have committed fewer resources to this area, though their inclusion in the top 10 suggests emergent interest.

Overall, it appears that research is not equitably distributed worldwide, as the US dominates the list, while other countries are contributing on a minimal scale. The apparent dominance of US-based research contributions might influence global discussion and, in the process, reduce the diversity of insights into how student leadership could be addressed across different educational systems. Stimulating research from countries that are so far under-represented will develop a more inclusive understanding of the topic and better address different challenges faced by different regions. This can create, even more, a balanced and comprehensive global discussion on student leadership in education by further collaborative effort and funding of research in these areas.

Figure 4 displays the distribution of published documents by subject area among the top 10 countries from 2003 to 2024, using data from Scopus. According to Research Discipline (2003–2024). The analysis reveals that Social Sciences accounts for the largest proportion of publications, at 39.8%, indicating a dominant focus on social research over the past two decades.

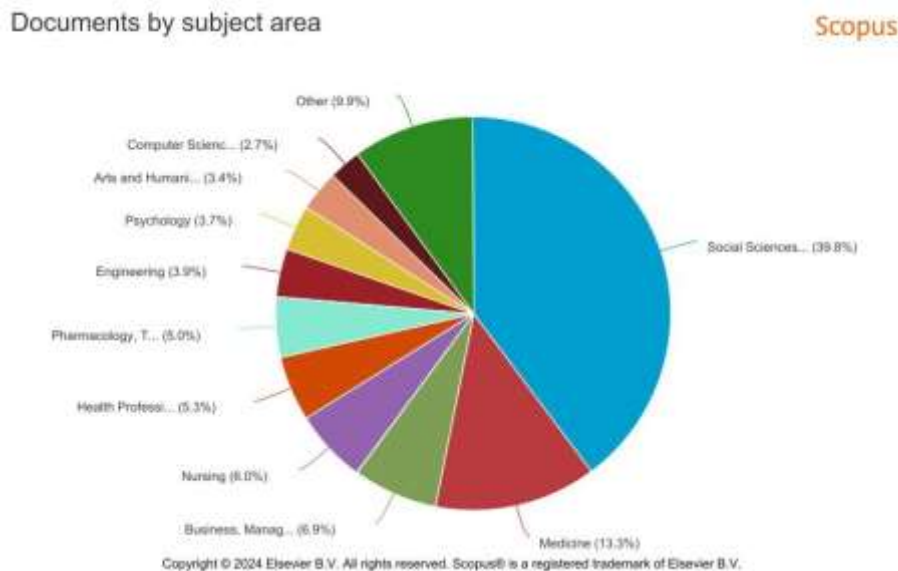


Figure 4 Distribution of Published Documents

This may suggest a strong global interest in understanding societal structures, policies, and behaviors (Dunbar et al., 2018; Young et al., 2017; Cansoy, 2019). The next largest category is Medicine, which stands at 13.3%. It reflects important, continuous vital contribution from medical research, no doubt hastened by pandemics and other global health concerns. Business, Management and Accounting are next at 6.9%, followed by Nursing at 6.0%, Health Professions at 5.3%, and Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutical Science at 5.0%. Aggregately, these areas reflect that health-related research accounts for a decent chunk of global academic output, reinforcing recent trends of increasing the priority toward healthcare innovation, medicine education, and the pharmaceutical industry.

Smaller shares are those of Engineering and Psychology, with 3.9% and 3.7%, respectively; their presence in applied and cognitive sciences is limited but stable. Then, 3.4% represents Arts and Humanities and 2.7% is Computer Science, showing a quite low commitment to these latter disciplines by the leading research-active countries.

Overall, the distribution signifies that social sciences and health-related disciplines are at the fore, hence their importance for articulating global societal and healthcare needs. It may at the same time signal underrepresentation in such fields as engineering and technology, which might just be where growth may occur in the future in light of continued technological shaping of the globe.

Figure 5 highlights the most relevant journals contributing to the literature on this topic between 2003 and 2024, offering insights into the academic focus areas related to student leadership and education. The presence of *New Directions for Student Leadership* as the second-highest contributing journal with 12 documents underscores the significant attention being given to leadership development in students.

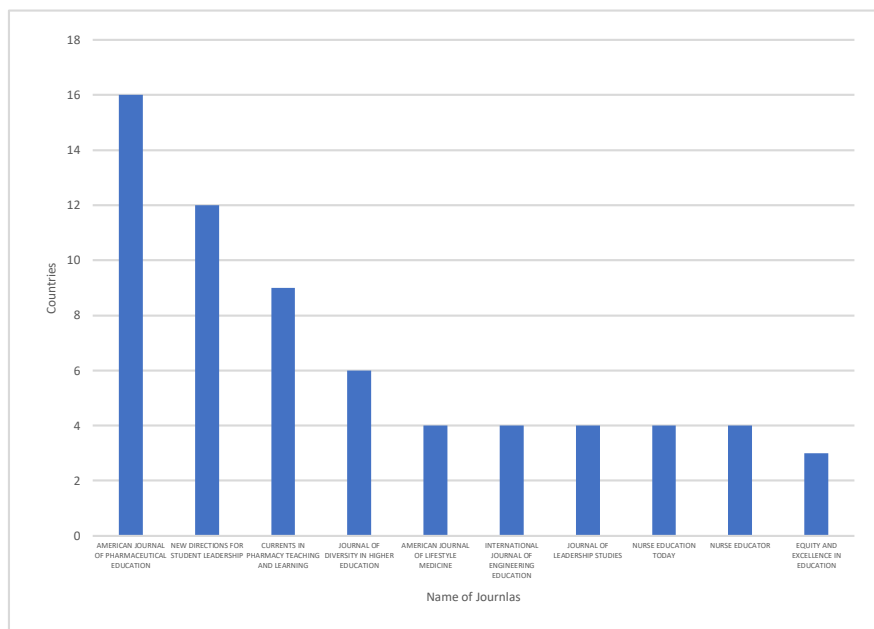


Figure 5. Journal Distribution of Published Records (2003–2024)

This journal’s position reflects the growing recognition of leadership as a vital skill within educational settings, where students are encouraged to take active roles in leading initiatives, influencing peers, and shaping institutional dynamics. The focus on student leadership also aligns with contemporary educational goals that prioritize 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and innovation (Birgilli, 2015; Caniglia et al., 2018; Tierney & Lanford, 2016).

Other related journals, for example, the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education (6 documents), indicate how leadership and inclusivity might be related, particularly in diversified academic settings. This contribution from a journal suggests that increasingly, research on leadership takes into consideration such challenges and opportunities put forth by diverse educational space where students are called upon as leaders to engage in nurturing an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Although American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education (16 documents) and Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning (9 documents) dominate in terms of publication volume, their relevance to student leadership is more nuanced. The connection lies in leadership development within professional and healthcare education, where students in pharmacy and medical fields are often trained to become future leaders in healthcare teams. The focus on leadership in these contexts is crucial for preparing students to take on complex roles that require both technical expertise and the ability to lead interdisciplinary teams (Mumford et al., 2017; Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

The contributions from Nurse Education Today and Nurse Educator (both with 4 documents) further support the idea that student leadership is important across various professional fields, particularly in nursing. As nursing education increasingly emphasizes leadership skills, students are trained not only in clinical skills but also in leadership competencies that allow them to advocate for patient care, lead healthcare teams, and contribute to healthcare policy (Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020; de Zulueta, 2015; Figueroa et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the journal distribution in Figure 5 reveals that student leadership is a critical topic that permeates various educational domains, from healthcare and nursing to diversity and general leadership studies. This research focus reflects the evolving understanding that leadership, particularly among students, plays a key role in shaping the future of educational and professional fields, fostering environments where students are empowered to take charge of their learning and their communities.

Figure 6 presents key themes and trends coming out of the occurrence data and network visualization concerning Student Leadership in Education. The theme of Leadership is most central, with 160 occurrences and the highest link strength of 875, hence central in educational research. This centrality is further highlighted in the network visualization, where "leadership" forms the largest node, connected to key terms such as student, curriculum, and higher education. This

that educational institutions are increasingly focusing on understanding these gender differences to create more inclusive and equitable leadership development opportunities for all students.

Finally, the student-centered approach to leadership is a growing trend. The frequent occurrence of terms like student leadership (62 occurrences) and student voice (12 occurrences) highlights the importance of understanding how students perceive and engage with leadership roles. This approach supports the development of more effective leadership education programs, allowing educators to create environments that foster the growth of confident, capable student leaders (Bregman, 2022; Poekert et al., 2016).

Taken all together, the combined occurrence data and network visualization underline the interdisciplinarity of Student Leadership in Education. Leadership is studied by a range of fields: health care, engineering, general education—all those things that make leadership not limited to any particular stream of studies but a universal skill across streams. That indeed is an indication that the data underline the leadership education, through curriculum incorporation, mentorship support, and inclusive design, so every student—irrespective of field and gender—can get a fair opportunity to become good leaders.

Conclusion

The growth pattern of research publications indicates the emerging importance of student leadership in the development of current educational practices. There is clear evidence that student leadership is important in a variety of domains such as health, social sciences, and engineering. The dominance of the United States in research published on the subject shows the international importance of the topic but also points out the one-sided nature of research being published from other parts of the world. This concentration of research in the U.S. may influence the global discourse on student leadership, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives that are vital for addressing leadership challenges in different educational systems worldwide.

The co-occurrence analysis reveals four key themes: Leadership within healthcare education, focusing on leadership skills in healthcare; Curriculum development, integrating leadership training into education; Gender dynamics, addressing gender-specific challenges in leadership; and the student-centered approach, promoting student autonomy and active leadership. These themes highlight the growing importance of diverse approaches to leadership education.

Recommendation

There is a need to encourage research from under-represented regions as a step toward making the global understanding of student leadership an inclusive one. Cooperation and increased funding of research in these areas may help study unique country or educational system challenges that will make the global dialogue balanced and diverse. Moreover, since engineering and technology fields are among the least represented in the literature on student leadership, further studies need to be directed toward this leadership development. Keeping in mind the present high speed of technological change, there is a need to determine how leadership can be developed in students within the fields of engineering and technology in order to enable them to manage innovations in the future. Educational institutions should also develop clear plans to infuse leadership education throughout the curriculum in all disciplines, augmented by mentorship and inclusive leadership programs. This would ensure that students of every discipline and gender leave with the necessary leadership skills for application in academic and professional contexts. Further research is also needed into differential gender development of leadership so that leadership programs afford equal opportunity to all students. Such educational institutions can help leaders recognize and foster more inclusive leadership practices, better equipped to navigate diverse and complex environments.

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