RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Qualitative Inquiry on the Factors Related to Students' Disengagement in Leadership Roles

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Abstract

Leadership is an important skill that students should develop. Campus organizations are some of the avenues for students to hone their leadership skills. However, some students are disengaging in leadership roles in campus organizations. Thus, this study sought to describe the factors behind students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations using a qualitative-descriptive research approach. The duly-validated written interview questionnaire was administered among six (6) student leaders who were selected through purposeful sampling. Three (3) significant themes such as personal-related, interpersonal-related, and structural-related factors were revealed. From these data, five (5) meaningful categories emerged. As personal-related factors, students disengage in leadership roles in campus organizations as it is a (1) hindrance to their academics and it (2) compromises their health. Furthermore, interpersonal-related factors include having (3) divided time and (4) being in the public eye. Finally, the (5) authority factor is the structural-related factor. Thus, improving the working conditions of student leaders may eliminate the negative experiences that will force them to stop serving their fellow students.

Keywords: campus organizations; leadership role; disengagement; students

Introduction

Leadership is a skill developed through a process involving experience and a skill already observable among youth (Tanjung, Harfiani, & Hartanto, 2021). It is a "multifaceted concept" that encompasses a range of human traits, abilities, and characteristics (Caraig, Masangcay, Villanueva, & Manibo, 2020). The development of effective leadership skills has long been recognized as a critical and challenging objective for higher education institutions (King, 1997; Xu 2019). In a university setting, campus organizations are some avenues for students to showcase and hone their leadership skills (Dugan, 2008; Rosch & Collins, 2019). The knowledge about the importance of leadership among students and the factors affecting their motivation in engaging in leadership roles within university organizations has already been established (Renchler, 1992; Rosch,

Collier, & Thompson, 2015; Curran & Fuselier, 2020). This existing knowledge is essential in building knowledge on exploring a new topic about students' disengagement in leadership roles in university organizations.

Several studies have suggested that some factors that motivate students to participate in leadership roles in school organizations include the increasing job opportunities in the future and the sense of purpose they gain (Cartier, 2018; Curran & Fuselier, 2020). On the other hand, holding a leadership position in campus organizations can cause stress to students as these two are considered to be "inseparably connected" (Caraig et al., 2020). It could also serve as a distraction to students that could harm their academic performance (Giancursio, 2021). Furthermore, some studies suggest that campus organizations are only focused on improving students' skills but compromise their self-efficacy and motivation (Dugan, 2011; Rosch & Collins, 2019). While these studies addressed the disadvantages of

engaging in leadership roles in campus organizations among students, there have been limited studies that directly link these identified disadvantages to students' disinterest in taking leadership roles.

Thus, this study seeks to describe the different factors that influence student leaders' disengagement in leadership roles in different campus organizations. The findings of this study can directly link those identified disadvantages in engaging in leadership roles in students sought by previous studies to the disengagement of student leaders in taking leadership roles— if those were relevant in the local setting. The study results could help university policymakers create a more conducive campus organization environment and conditions for student leaders.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative-descriptive research design to describe the factors related to students' disengagement in taking leadership roles in campus organizations. This research design is appropriate for this study as it seeks to reveal the factors that affect individuals in a certain

phenomenon (Florencio, Healee, Ratahi, Wiki, & McKenna, 2021). It is anchored on a constructionist epistemology which aims to investigate a complex reality utilizing a detailed description of the phenomenon involved (Pedroso, Siason, Tangco-Siason, 2021). The gathered data are grounded in the Theory of Experience by John Dewey which suggests three dimensions of human experience: (1) how a present experience is linked to past and future experiences; (2) the material and social context of an individual's situation; (3) and how an individual interacts within the learning environment.

Informants

The informants of this study are six (6) student leaders selected through purposeful sampling. The inclusion criteria in selecting the informants are: a) a bona fide student in a university within Region 6; b) 18-22 years old during the conduct of the study; c) a student leader who held a position in a campus organization for at least one academic year; d) a student leader who is no longer on a position in any campus organizations during the conduct of the study.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Location	No. of Years Being in a Campus Organization	No. of Years Since Disengagement in Leadership Roles in Campus Organizations
Mary	20	Female	Igbaras, Iloilo	2 years	4 years
Tina	20	Female	Barotac Viejo, Iloilo	7 years	3 years
Carly	20	Female	Guimbal, Iloilo	5 years	2 years
Feliz	20	Female	Guimbal, Iloilo	6 years	3 years
Melissa	21	Female	Miagao, Iloilo	7 years	1 year
Miguel	22	Male	San Joaquin, Iloilo	5 years	2 years

Instrument

A written interview questionnaire was utilized to gather data from the informants. This instrument was a researcher-made

written interview questionnaire, duly -validated by three (3) experts in qualitative research, and pilot-tested among non-participating students. The crafting of the questionnaire also adhered to Simon and White's Rubric for Expert Validation of Survey and Interview (2018). The English language was utilized as the medium for the written interview questions in which informants were required to answer the interview questionnaire using the same medium. The written interview questionnaire was administered online.

Data collection

An online platform was utilized in administering the data collection process for this study. It was conducted by following systematic and planned steps. First, researchers made use of social media to crowdsource student leaders who passed on the set inclusion criteria and who can be the informant for this study. Second, researchers sent a letter to the chosen students— an online or hard copy letter was sent depending on the location of the student. The said letter contains a short background of the study, the conditions, and a set of interview questions. Third, when the students gave their permission to be one of the informants of the study, a document containing interview questions that they used to type in their responses was sent to them. Lastly, researchers copied the informants' responses were compiled into one electronic file for analysis.

This study adheres to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173). As stated in Section 8, people who work for newspapers, magazines, or other types of media should always keep any personal information they come across private. Meanwhile, as stated in Section 20, personal information controllers must also implement reasonable and appropriate organizational, physical, and technical measures to protect personal information against any accidental or unlawful deterioration, modification, or disclosure, as well as any other unlawful processing. The level of security needed to protect personal information should depend on factors like the type of information, the risks involved, the size of the organization, and the cost of security measures (Philippine Government, 2012; Pedroso & Pacit, 2022). In this study, informants were informed about the study and were asked for their consent in writing. Furthermore, the researchers ensured to keep the informants' information private and anonymous throughout the study. Thus, a careful and thorough approach to collecting data was followed to ensure its validity and reliability.

Data analysis

As informants provide their responses electronically in MS Word format, the researchers also electronically copied the data and compiled it in a single file to ensure the researchers' easy access to those documents. The collected data then underwent analysis, comparison, and interpretation which utilized thematic analysis. This method of analyzing qualitative data enabled researchers to identify patterns and formulate relevant themes based on the responses given by the informants (Sutton, 2015; Caraig et al., 2020). First, the researchers evaluated interview transcripts as a whole to obtain an initial view of the informants and their experiences. Next, the researchers identified and selected key statements, organized those statements into clusters, and formulated and assigned themes for each cluster. Then, based on the formulated themes, codes were given to the statements of the informants and were assigned appropriate categories to ensure that the data collected is accurately analyzed and interpreted (Curran & Fuselier, 2020). In addition, relevant literature and studies were cited carefully to support their research findings (Pedroso & Pacit, 2022). To ensure that the analysis is valid and reliable, collected data were continuously compared to the data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Curran & Fuselier, 2020).

Results

Three significant themes emerged in this study namely (1) personal-related factors, (2) interpersonal-related factors, and (3) structural-related factors. From these significant themes, five (5) important categories were developed. Students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations is influenced the personal-related factors such as (1) hindrance to academics and (2) compromises health. Meanwhile, interpersonal-related factors include (3) divided time and (4) being in the public eye. Lastly, the structural-related factor is the (5) authority factor.

Personal-Related Factors

Students' disengagement in leadership roles is caused by their personal experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about student leadership in their school environment. There were two examined categories that are relevant to the personal-related factors namely (1) hindrance to academics and (2) compromises health.

Hindrance to Academics

Taking a leadership role in a campus organization is a hindrance to academics for the students. As these leaders are also students, not holding any leadership role in these organizations is the solution for their compromised academic standings. This is divided into two subcategories namely (1) diverted priority and (2) leadership consequence.

Diverted Priority. Assuming a leadership role while still being a student means having to divide one's priorities and this is an identified factor in students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Carly: "Oftentimes, I need to choose between doing my homework or going back to school on the weekend for some organizational work that I need to accomplish."*

- *Mary: "It made me sad to think that my academic performance is not good for sometimes I don't have any time for reviewing my lessons due to my busy schedule."*

Leadership Consequence. For the informants, being a leader for a campus organization while studying has consequences for them and those are some of the reasons why they built a disinterest in taking leadership roles in their succeeding academic years.

- *Feliz: "Multiple times, I had slept deeply during class hours due to exhaustion and lack of sleep, and I could not keep up with the lessons most of the time."*

- *Melissa: "I had a lot of outputs that I submitted late because I find it hard to balance my responsibilities in my organization and my academics."*

Compromises Health

Balancing academics and leadership roles posed health risks, mental and physical health, to the students. Thus, it became one of the factors for their disengagement in taking leadership roles in campus organizations. This is divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) entangled with stress and (2) influence of physical health.

Entangled with Stress. One of the common themes that was identified from the responses of the informants is the stress that their responsibility as student leaders gives them. Stress poses a threat to the mental and even physical health of students and it became one of the factors for their disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Miguel: "I experienced so much stress being a student leader and a student at the same time where there were times that I skip meals just to catch up with the demand of being a leader and a student."*

- *Mary: "I feel exhausted and these tiring days give me stress as well."*

Influence on Physical Health. Being a student leader in a campus organization brought a threat to the physical health of the students. It is one of the identified factors why they decide to not hold any leadership position on any campus organization in their succeeding academic years.

- *Tina: "I'd still be suffering from too much pressure and stress that I started collapsing at school, having random asthma attacks, and my mental health deteriorated. I started gaining weight because of stress eating and a sedentary lifestyle."*

- *Melissa: "There were weeks when I barely got any sleep due to heavy demand and I believe it was one of the reasons why I caught flu at that time because of my weak immune system due to lack of sleep."*

Interpersonal-Related Factors

Social interactions between students and their environment are contributing factors behind students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations. There are two (2) examined categories that are related to the interpersonal-related factors namely (1) divided time and (2) sacrificing relationships.

Divided Time

Being a student already takes away time in the personal or social life of students and being a student leader for a campus organization adds to that burden. This is one of the examined factors behind students' disengagement in leadership roles. This is divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) sacrificing relationships and (2) peer pressure.

Sacrificing Relationships. Time is an essential thing for the informants as they are not only student leaders but are surrounded by important people that they also want to spend time with but having a heavy responsibility as student leaders prohibits them to do so compromising their relationships.

- *Carly: "During my years as a student leader, it was hard as I need to balance my responsibilities as a student, being in an organization, a friend, and as a daughter."*
- *Miguel: "I had little time building my social life at that time because most of my time went to organizations, academics, and family."*
- *Feliz: "I almost lose my friends due to my responsibilities in the organization."*

Peer Pressure. The perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of their peers toward them holding a position in a campus organization also influence their disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Melissa: "In my circle of friends, I was the only one who is a student leader, and it makes me feel bad that whenever we have meetings in school, I cannot join them, especially*

on special occasions. Some of them also advised me to slow down."

In the Public Eye

Just like any public servant, student leaders are also placed in the public eye, and being in that position negatively impacts the informants. This is one of the identified reasons why students opt to stay away from leadership responsibilities on their campus. This is divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) subject to scrutiny and (2) affects self-esteem.

Subject to Scrutiny. Being in a public position also means receiving comments and scrutiny from other people. For some student leaders, it creates a negative impact to them and it became one of the factors of their disengagement in taking leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Miguel: "I felt like all my actions were being judged by others and it made me so conscious of my every move to the point where I felt that it wasn't healthy for me anymore."*

Affects Self-Esteem. As someone who placed themselves in a public position, they are subject to public scrutiny which affects their self-esteem, and this is one of the identified factors for their disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Tina: "I experienced bullying [for gaining weight due to stress eating] — my classmates would call me names and spread rumors tainting my reputation."*

Structural-Related Factors

The policies that were implemented in school organizations are some of the examined structural-related factors that influence students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations. Since this factor is not common among students, there is only one (1) examined category under this theme namely (1) authority factor.

Authority Factor

People who are in higher authority in campus organizations are among the identified factors for students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations. This is divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) pressure from the organization's adviser and (2) internal changes.

Pressure from the Organization's Adviser. Student organizations are usually headed by an adviser and student leaders are oftentimes subject to so much pressure from them which adds to the overall pressure for them. This is one of the identified factors in their disinterest in student leadership.

- *Melissa: "The pressure coming from our adviser is something that adds to the overall pressure of being an officer. I felt that I had no freedom to serve my peers the way I wanted it."*

Internal Changes. Most campus organizations are not independent from the school institution itself so any internal changes in the school might also impact the organizations and its officers. This is one of the identified factors for students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

- *Tina: "During my last year, there was a sudden change of school head teacher, there's a lot of adjustments and there's so much to fix and all of those are thrown and placed over my shoulders since I am the president.*
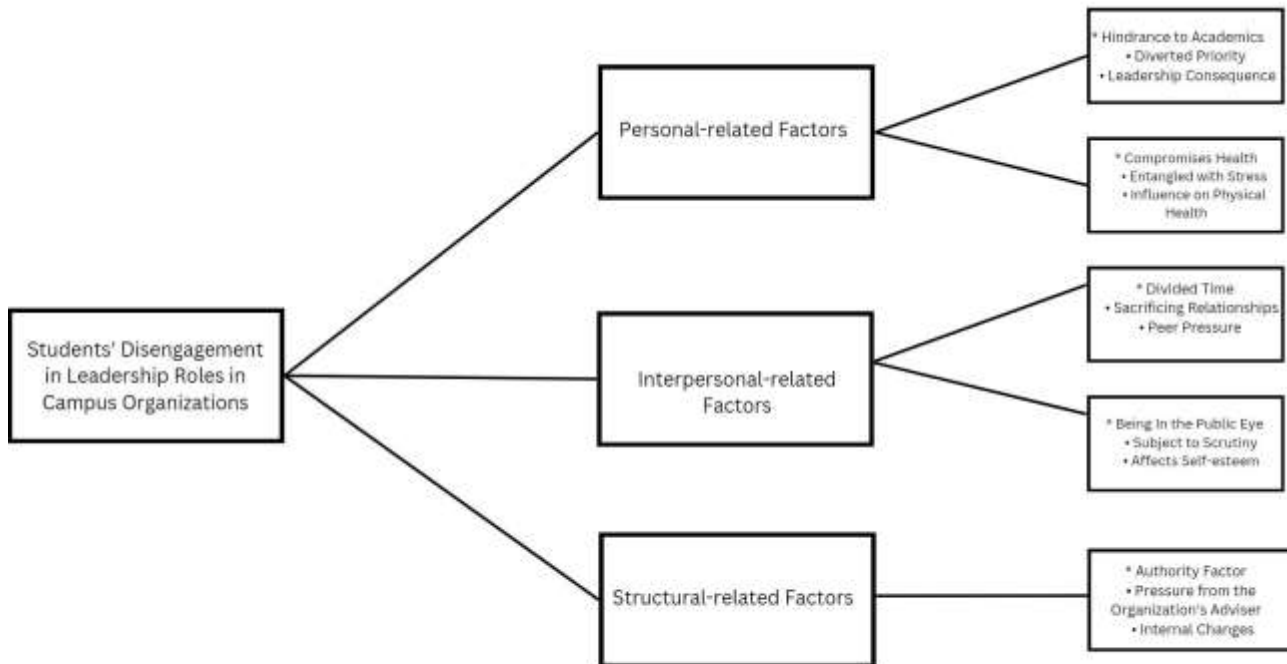

Figure 1. Demonstration of meaningful categories of the study

Discussion

Educational institutions are now emphasizing the importance of instilling the value of leadership among the youth (Sunderman, Hastings, and Sellon, 2022), and one of

the many ways to hone that skill among students is through different campus organizations. Ebede (2015) supports this idea as campus organizations are ideal to provide students with learning experiences outside a traditional classroom setting. It broadens students' network of connections to other peers who have the same interest as them and even develop core competencies and soft skills. However, students who are engaging in leadership roles in campus organizations also have negative experiences in assuming leadership roles.

As leaders in the present times are up for the challenge of coping with the fast changes in society – changes that they were bound to give a sense of (Draft, 2015), students who are engaging in leadership roles are subject to this burden. On a study conducted by Harms, Crede, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung (2017), they argue that leadership roles can be linked to stress in which 88% of leaders posited that the nature of their work as leaders is the main cause of stress for them. This suggests that the great amount of stress that comes with leadership roles stems from the challenges they face as leaders, the pressure of maintaining their reputation, and the desire to obtain prestige.

As joining a campus organization is considered an extracurricular activity, engaging in more than three extracurricular activities is detrimental to students posing a huge possibility of academic decline (Tanner, 2017). Furthermore, if a student who holds a position in a campus organization solely identifies him/herself as a leader and not as a student or a student leader, it is when his/her academics start to decline (Beron & Piquero, 2016).

On the other hand, the findings of this study are opposite to the findings from a study conducted by Anderson and Lu (2017) wherein students who were appointed to a leadership role had an increase in test scores compared to their other peers. They argue that appointed student leaders tend to increase their study effort due to the feeling of people having higher expectations of them or with the hopes of achieving higher leadership appointments in the future.

Several studies suggest that the level of engagement displayed by students in leadership activities during higher education can improve academic performance, personal growth, and a heightened learning experience (Kashan, Shah, & Rehman, (2019); Astin, 1999). Furthermore, students' utilization of their leadership skills can help them achieve academic goals as the study reveals that leadership skills and academic success are correlational (Kashan et al., 2019).

As revealed in the study, peer pressure is one of the factors behind students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations. This finding is supported by Zhu, Lu, and Chang (2020) who suggest that peer pressure is more influential on adolescents, the stage when most of the informants decide to quit from holding any leadership roles. They explained that it is the "adjusting" period for people, which is why peer influence is stronger. However, they stated that major life changes made due to peer pressure during the adolescent stage are part of a person's development.

Meanwhile, Moran (2015) links self-esteem with the leadership role. The growth of a leader and their leadership conduct is influenced by the individual's capacity to gain a thorough understanding of themselves throughout their journey of personal development. Moran (2015) suggests student affairs professionals should look after student leaders as self-esteem has a great influence on one's behavior and development.

Fortune and Olubunkunmi (2022) listed the different challenges faced by student leaders and one of which is the lack of respect from other peers. They suggest that because the student leaders and the other students are peers, it is a challenge for them to establish boundaries between them. Furthermore, the lack of support and cooperation from the students is also cited as one of the challenges faced by student leaders.

This current research has limitations that should be noted and addressed by future studies. First, this is a qualitative-descriptive study which implies that there is little to no quantitative data that will strengthen the findings. An accompanied quantitative data about students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations can address this limitation. Second, this current study utilized an online written interview, hence, there is a potential for distortion due to the influence of self-report bias. Finally, the informants are only within a small part of the country and do not fully represent a broad population of students which can be an issue for generalization of the findings. Nonetheless, despite mentioned limitations, the study conducted was able to generate adequate data on the factors influencing students' disengagement in taking leadership roles in campus organizations.

Conclusion

The factors behind students' disengagement in leadership roles in campus organizations are a reflection of the condition of student leaders in the present times. Facing the challenges of being a student, these student leaders also have struggles in concern to the position they put

themselves into. They are committed to serving their fellow students, but when that service already compromised their well-being, especially in academics as they are all students before becoming student leaders, they chose to set aside extracurricular activity which is the involvement in campus organizations. Unlike other public servants, student leaders have no monetary compensation for what they do for their school, so it is important that school heads look after the welfare of these student leaders and should ensure that the working environment for them will still allow them to balance academics and leadership responsibilities and promote growth among students.

Declaration

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