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José María Pino Suárez 400-2 esq a Lerdo de Tejada, Toluca, Estado de México. 7223898473

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TÍTULO: El descubrimiento de problemas de liderazgo para crear un ambiente amigable para la Educación a Distancia.

AUTOR:

1. Dr. Zaffar Ahmed Shaikh.

RESUMEN: Este estudio busca desarrollar la importancia de la educación a distancia y ayuda a mejorar las diferentes habilidades de liderazgo a través de la educación a distancia. El documento utiliza teorías de liderazgo para estudiar la capacidad de crear un espacio amigable para fomentar la educación a distancia en la sociedad. Se tomó una muestra de 392 estudiantes que estudian con el modelo de educación a distancia, con edades entre 18 y 25 años. Se examinaron los detalles de la educación a distancia para cada grupo de edad. Los resultados refutan estereotipos sobre la educación a distancia, encontrándose que la educación a distancia ayuda en la evaluación y las implicaciones de la afiliación grupal y la autoexpresión en las actividades académicas.

PALABRAS CLAVES: educación a distancia, aprendizaje a distancia, liderazgo, teoría del liderazgo, ambiente de aprendizaje.

TITLE: Discovering leadership issues towards creating a friendly environment for Distance Education.

AUTHORS:

1. Dr. Zaffar Ahmed Shaikh.

ABSTRACT: This study seeks to develop the importance of distance education and helps improve different leadership skills through distance education. The document uses leadership theories to study the ability to create a friendly space to promote distance education in society. A sample of 392 students studying with the distance education model was taken, aged between 18 and 25 years. The details of distance education for each age group were examined. The results refute stereotypes about distance education, finding that distance education helps in the evaluation and implications of group affiliation and self-expression in academic activities.

KEY WORDS: distance education, distance learning, leadership, leadership theory, learning environment.

INTRODUCTION.

Distance Education has been expanding with the passage of time around the globe. Most of the conventional and distance education providing universities have been expanding their curriculum through information technology (Crawford, 2012; Rego et al., 2007; Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004). Most of the universities in Europe have been introducing virtual education courses. They have shown more concern about distance education broadcasting through satellite and computer networking. (Hank, 2010; Benjamin & Flynn, 2006; Bennet et al., 2003; Becker et al., 2002; Plas & Lewis, 2000).

Distance Education is a challenging computer-based technology system where the student can involve in self-supporting learning. The student of an extramural education system can communicate using modern technology with their classmates and lecturers, who can be in different time zone (Razik & Swanson, 2010; Silverthorne, 2001).

Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1947) researched the impact of a group on the performance of an individual and sought their attention towards leadership. The group forces substantially impact the behavior of a leader and it was overcoming her/his effect with the passage of time (Bush & Glover, 2004).

A leader, in education management, is treated as a counselor for students, who becomes a source of inspiration at different levels. A group of different leaders might be useful to mentor their followers in enhancing the different kinds of pedagogy. Leadership is a process of decision making that might influence the management of the organization (Bryk et al., 2010). Management is a decision-making procedure decision, which is taken for the benefit of a specific purpose. These decisions might not necessarily satisfy the stakeholders involved in the process of teaching and learning (Judge et al., 2002).

A great leader is the one who motivates her/his followers to involve in problem-solving, helps in identifying their individual qualities, and helps them in making a friendly environment to achieve maximum productivity. The overall productivity and the capacity of an organization are enhanced through higher workers' motivation, their sense of responsibility and having trust in their organization (Day, 2000).

Leadership at the managerial level is comprised of different stages. The first one operates at the operational level, whereas the next level of leadership determines the course of action. The majority of theories on leadership have been analyzing it on the basis of personal experiences, their individual capacity, and capabilities (Garrison, 2011).

Leadership has been defined by the researchers with respect to their goals. That's why leadership has been defined in hundreds of different ways by the individuals involved in leadership. According to another definition, it is a process in which an individual interacts with the followers to achieve a specific objective (Giessner & Schubert, 2007).

This paper uses leadership theories to study the capacity to create a friendly space to nurture distance education in society. For this purpose, a sample has been taken for the identification of relevant skillset. Hence, distance education proved to have positive implications on the skill sets of leaders.

DEVELOPMENT.

Theoretical framework.

There are different kinds of leadership as defined under research done in the field of Psychology.

Some of the most useful concepts are as follows:

1. Trait Theory of (Charismatic) Leadership.

True leaders have certain inborn characteristics that make them special as compared to others. The list of these features is quite extensive and none of these is cohesive, accurate and complete. A leader is born with some of the most important qualities that make them different from their followers. Like the quality of being charismatic gives an advantage of confidence to the leader and she/he stands out in a group (Morrison, 2010).

2. Situational Theory of Leadership.

It is a slight modification of the trait theory and it suggests that a leader reacts with different leadership styles in different situations. The individuals who face challenges and expertise in interpersonal communication lead their group in at least one quality. This theory believes that a specific situation would entice the leader to demonstrate her/his traits. A leader might control and lead in one situation and does not display her/his qualities in another, yet the group follows her/him. A person proving himself a good leader in one situation might be known as a good leader in a similar situation.

3. Behavioral Approach to Leadership.

A good leader has a different set of actions in different situations. The selection of a specific leadership style and its effectiveness is solely dependent on the concerned situation. The behavioral

approach of leadership studies different styles of leadership. Anyhow, the practicality of this approach much lesser than the situational theory and it has rarely been developed so far.

4. Relational Leadership Theory.

According to this approach of leadership, a good leader works on the unity of the group. It mainly focuses on the synergy that is created through the unity of the group and the potential capacity of the group which is increased through collaboration. The leader builds up a good relationship with her/his team which creates a sense of affiliation in the group. Hence, the goals of the leader become their goals and they work with their full capacity. The head of the family usually follows this type of leadership style where the goals of all the family members are common.

The knowledge of the student is usually based on clichés and stereotypes about the world (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003). Interpreting social information is usually done through these schemes: personal, situational and role-based. The role-based scheme may be associated with a designation or status in a group. Any scheme used by the leader is an indication of certain behavior or incitement. The consistency of this behavior results in the birth of leadership stereotypes. To reduce the variation between actual behavior and the prospect arising from stereotypes, the leader reacts according to the situation and ignore the inconsistencies.

Methods.

The methodology of this research includes surveys, testing, qualitative and quantitative analysis, and statistical data processing. The research consists of a Leadership Stereotypes Questionnaire. A sample size of 392 students studying through distance education model of learning is selected, with the age group between 18 and 25 years, who are from the two universities in Pakistan. The tests run on the data are Twenty Statements Test (TST) in Bogomolova's modification and the J.L. Moreno's sociometric test to identify informal kinds of leadership and to trace the flow of energy through the

social association in a group. Similarly, a Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was applied in Rean's modification (Eacott, 2015; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Farkas & Wetlaufer, 1996).

The data set used for processing is t-distributed. Correlation and cluster analyses are included additionally. Three blocks of questions are involved in the Leadership Stereotypes Questionnaire.

Block 1. This block includes question relevant to the leadership stereotypes, the role of the leader, the gender and type of leadership (i.e. formal or informal).

Block 2. This block comprises of questions related to the dependency of their opinion on others, elements that influence the social insight of the students.

To determine the benefits of directly applying the format and medium of learning outside the educational institution induction methods are also applied in addition to the aforementioned methodology. Similarly, the synthesis method is applied to identify the implications of distance education on educational institutions. System-based analysis in institutions is also used to determine the worth and effectiveness of distance education in the conventional education system.

Results.

Imparting the correct information into the society, it is directly affecting the education system. There are certain features that are very crucial for human survival like freedom of expression and security, protection of rights and the choice of professional activity.

These characteristics motivate individuals to opt for distance education by different age groups. As compared to the conventional system, in extramural education an individual need not to be physically present in the same space as the teacher. The demographics of the student does not affect the learning process of the individual. Information technology has made this world a global village where we can access each other with nominal cost and in no time. The student can spare specific time for the education at her/his own convenience, whereas the teacher can also access the system at her/his

convenience. In distance education the courses have been developed, lesson plans are shared, discussion boards are created, and assignments and quizzes are announced on the dates as announced through the lesson plans. These activities make the student more active and motivated. Similarly, the student is seeking education at her/his own convenience with more time in her/his hands to spare and quality time to dedicate towards her/his education.

The choice of selection and commitment to seek knowledge incite the student to be more punctual. The student is more disciplined, keep track of the progress, easily access the whole course of education and manages the time accordingly.

It is crucial to realize that extramural education (i.e. homeschooling for children and distance education for adults) does not mean that the learning process has been left ungoverned. This type of learning has proper tracking tools for the progress of the student. Information technology used for this purpose allows the supervisors to access all the information relevant to the student like monthly performance, quizzes, assignments, lectures, etc. Distance schooling does not mean that the students are skipping the classes, rather they are using their time more productively. They can allocate their prime time to study their program and can concentrate on the areas of interest. This way the students can grab a better knowledge of the concepts in distance education as compared to conventional learning. Similarly, in the conventional learning system, the quality of education does not distribute equally to all the students. Whereas in the extramural education the student can learn according to her/his own capacity and caliber.

To be physically present in the class, every student under the conventional education system has to spend a lot of their time to reach the institution. Similarly, it takes several hours of daily routine to be present in school. (6-10 hours a day, 5-6 days a week, from 6 to 18 years). This usually works for the students at younger ages, when children learn through metaphorical examples rather than studying logic (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2011).

The freedom of a child is restricted on a daily basis due to the mandatory physical appearance of the student in an educational institution, which also limits the choice of selection of time to be allocated for academic activities. Similarly, the student is bound to restrict her/his social and extracurricular activities to a certain time of the day.

Therefore, a new educational system appears in a society which is termed as “Virtual School”. In this system, the student can seek both types of educations (i.e. general and higher education). All the procedures and interpersonal communication in this system are based on information technology which should be accessed easily and from a distant space. The space created by the virtual interface makes it less stressful for both students and the lecturer because of increased physical distance. This has a favorable impact on the interpersonal communication of both the leader and follower. In this type of interaction, the level of subordination reduces, stereotype shrines and social clichés diminish. As the level of subordination reduces, the learning system becomes more efficient and the teaching styles become more trustworthy (Giessner, & Schubert, 2007).

The distance created through this unconventional extramural education system does not necessarily create isolation or a lack of group dynamics experience. A well-oriented and professionally formulated lesson plan in distance education motivates the student to involve in group discussion and teamwork on a permanent basis; for example, a group of several students might come up together to attend a forum where they can learn lessons from a teacher who can virtually teach them the defined courses. Similarly, the students can interact with the teacher in different ways such as live chat, video call, conference call, and other discussion and message boards.

During such interaction, students may work with each other and discuss the topics to be at the same level of understanding. This forum under the distance education system creates a great opportunity for both the teacher and students to be involved in interpersonal communication and to learn from

this group dynamics. Similarly, the students may learn from each other and develop leadership skills through interaction with their classmates.

A study has indicated that a leader has different signs of recognition. The factor which is considered most important is, how much the students themselves gauge the teacher. The aspects which are considered by most of the group members to take someone as their leader are; behavior (80%), open mind and intelligence (50%), and appearance (i.e. charisma and other physical attributes, style, etc.) (15%).

Some of the traits which are considered by most of the respondents are; Responsibility (85%), intellect (81%), determination and strong character (75%), sympathy (75%), uprightness (62.5%), perseverance (50%), sense of humor (50%), emotional intelligence (50%), vigor (50%), benevolence (50%), and composed personality (45%).

Three leadership dimensions have been determined for leaders on the basis of the sociometric test.

1. Absolute Leaders – Students who have been involved in both formal and informal leadership
2. Instrumental Leaders – Students who have been noticed for their behavior of being focused on the completion of the task.
3. Expressive Leaders – Students who have traits of higher emotional intelligence.

TST has been applied to answer “Who is a Student Leader?” Its descriptors involve narratives about personal traits of a leader and related role model:

1. Leadership role quality or socio-demographic characteristics of a leader.
2. Personal attributes:
 - Appearance (Charisma and the way of dressing etc.).
 - behavioral and communication attributes.
 - Attributes of the person (sharp, sympathetic, etc.).

The distance education system generates opportunities for group inclusion, and it develops qualities of inclusiveness in the students. This group of students may include an adult, a student differently-abled or a person with chronic disease or a lack of appearance.

The features and attributes listed above surely enhance their leadership skills in this learning process. The skills needed for leadership may be used in different groups having similar students. This narrative is established on the basis of the fact that the replies to questions asked were assessed through content analysis and according to the elements discussed here:

1. *Leadership attitude* – efforts and decisions which portray the concern of the respondent for the leadership role. Therefore, the replies received from every respondent has been taken under the following categories: Positive, Negative, Mixed, volatile.

2. *Femininity/masculinity* – Attributes and stereotypes of leadership roles related to gender. The replies by the respondents have been categorized into four classes: masculinity, Femininity, androgynous, undifferentiated.

According to the findings of TST, most of the respondents (80.5%) do honor those leaders who have personal attributes. The respondents have categorized these features into the following order; personal attributes, interpersonal communication, charisma, and traits in a leadership role. Personal attributes can be differentiated as compassion, aptitude, uprightness, charisma, responsibility, determination, being composed, etc. The survey has revealed that these traits have attributed to call a person a great leader.

The students pursuing distance education have gained leadership skills that help them groom their personality and excel in life. distance education has created more opportunities to fight the hardships of education-related challenges. These challenges have been crucial for the majority of dropouts at different stages of the intramural education system.

Discussions.

The Extramural education system has been helpful in stimulating leadership skills and interpersonal communication in students, teaching staff, researchers, and other managerial staff of the education system.

This has been established through the elements given below:

- Cutting down training cost of students, teachers, and trainers (There is no expense of rent for the spaces for school, transportation expense for the daily commute of the students and teachers, furniture and fixtures expenses to be used in school, etc.)
- The time taken to travel to school and getting ready to attend school is saved and it can be productively used towards other activities.
- The student can smartly manage their time to read the learning materials. They can use any time and place which is feasible for them.
- A huge number of students can be provided quality education within a small budget.
- Modern technology can be used to improve the quality of education. For example, e-books reduce storage space used for libraries.
- The unique and cohesive nature of the distance education system provides equality for all students, which is crucial for corporate training (Waters, T. & Marzano, R., 2006).

Similarly, as compared to the conventional education system, distance education provides a highly interactive and wide range of courses. These courses provide an easy learning environment for all the students of different age groups at the individual level. The students can adjust their schedules, needs, and prospects under this education system. This kind of platform is reliable for the grooming of a leader in getting know-how about society (Becker, Ayman, & Korabik, 2002).

The course of action taken by leaders, both men, and women, in different situation is different from each other, based on the qualities they have built up through-out their life span (Bush, 2010; Hank, 2010; Rego et al., 2007; Bush & Glover, 2004). Female leaders have been noticed to be lenient and democratic at large. They are of the view that sympathy, flexibility, friendliness, and politeness are attributes of women (Waters & Marzano, 2006). There are common features of female leaders. Some of these are; aptitude, being creative, high achiever, proficiency, self-importance (Boling et al., 2012; Mitgang, 2012; Heck & Hallinger, 2005).

Female leaders have self-respect, clearer vision of their goals, calm and composed nature, self-awareness, and high stamina. They are usually highly paid and focused on interpersonal communication. They lead in group, unprejudiced, and are highly interactive with their staff members. There are three classes of theories that explain the reasons for gender disproportion in leadership. Theories on gender, leadership, and theories equating both of these elements. Six concerns have been discussed in most of the research studies done on gender and leadership:

- 1) The number of men and women as leaders.
- 2) Style of leadership and behavior of the leader.
- 3) Efficacy of the leader.
- 4) Group composition based on gender.
- 5) Struggle for leadership.
- 6) Gender identity of leaders (Eacott, 2015; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

One of the most important attributes of a good leader in an educational institution is the effectiveness of her/his interpersonal communication. Similarly, the leader should introduce a cohesive system of communication, where access to information becomes easier. The education system in distance education has made it possible to make communication more effective and efficient.

CONCLUSIONS.

A student has the capacity to lead a certain group, only if she/he has the qualities needed to be a good leader. Anyhow, a leader starts leading a group way before she/he becomes officially the group leader. The distance education system might be more productive for this purpose. Some of the studies suggest that most of the students believe in both genders equally competent to become leaders regardless of their gender.

The elements affecting the perception of a member about treating someone as a leader are; the structure of an organization (which can be formal or informal) and the aspect of the relationship among the group members (which can be emotional or instrumental). The research has shown that the concept of leader stereotype is indistinct now. These findings can be utilized to make online courses for the extramural learning system in institutions with respect to dissimilarities in requests for training and susceptibility to leadership.

Leadership is a crucial element of every individual, who thrive for success in this society and struggle hard to achieve it. In this era of technology, education systems should work in collaboration with information technology. IT makes it easy to access information and learn new skills, irrespective of the demographic constraint. distance education has proved to be efficient in learning leadership traits without the impact of stereotypes, clichés, and other challenges.

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DATA OF THE AUTHORS.

1. **Zaffar Ahmed Shaikh**. Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University, Lyari, Karachi, Acting Registrar and Assistant Professor. Pakistan. E-mail: zashaikh@bbsul.edu.pk

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