



## PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY MEMBERS ON THE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY OF THEIR STUDENTS AT VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HO CHI MINH CITY

 Minh-Quang Duong

Faculty of Education, University of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Email: [duongminhquang@hcmussh.edu.vn](mailto:duongminhquang@hcmussh.edu.vn) Tel: (+84)90-6959890



### ABSTRACT

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The aim of this research was to investigate faculty members' perceptions of their students' leadership capacity and evaluate the correlation between students' university experiences with their leadership capacity. A questionnaire survey was disseminated to 266 faculty members from five of the member universities of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The empirical results indicated that most faculty members held moderate fairly high opinion of their students' leadership capacity, and that the personal attributes of faculty members and the experience gained by students while attending university both had a statistically significant impact on students' leadership capacity. The findings of this study carry both theoretical and practical implications for Vietnamese higher education. The suggestions inferred for university administrators and policymakers are also discussed.

**Contribution/Originality:** This is one of very few studies investigating faculty members' perceptions of their students' leadership capacity in Vietnamese higher education institutions. Its primary contribution comes from the findings on the development of leadership programs, which was confirmed as the main responsibility of universities.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education students in Vietnam account for a small but significant proportion of the population recognized as a prestigious elite. However, students with a high level of education do not seem to meet the manpower needs for development in Vietnam: businesses complain of the shortage of skilled, especially management, personnel (Pham & Fry, 2004; Tran, 2013).

Developing students' competencies to meet employers needs is a huge challenge for Vietnamese universities, and such curriculum objectives as problem-solving, teamwork, multimedia communication, and leadership capacities are becoming an urgent issue. Therefore, an empirical investigation into the quality of university education and student outcomes is now crucial to appropriately training the personnel demanded and supporting development in Vietnam.

Guthrie and Jones (2012) showed that universities play a critical role in developing students' leadership capacity, which is one of the most important outcomes in higher education (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011). Moreover, Kouzes and Posner (2013) emphasized the importance of equipping all students with leadership skills because an ever-changing world relies on leaders prepared to face future challenges. However,

universities fail in their main responsibility when students lack the opportunities to develop their leadership skills (Smart, Ethington, Riggs, & Thompson, 2002).

There is relatively little literature on the effect of higher education on students' leadership capacity (Dugan & Komives, 2007); however, some overarching problems are evident: a notable gap between theory and practice, confusion in universities about the need for developing of students' leadership skills, and uncertainty about the impact of the university environment on leadership development. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap in the literature, for both theory and practice.

There are various leadership approaches, such as ethical and service (i.e., respecting and serving others) (Rhode, 2006), quantum (i.e., coping with and adapting to rapid change) (Wheatley, 1996), cognitive (i.e., understanding and appropriately managing situations) (Bolman & Deal, 2003), and socially responsible (i.e., acting for the public good) (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 1996). Both the studies of Astin and Astin (2000) and Hoy and Meisel (2008) demonstrated the importance of the socially responsible approach for leadership development in universities. This social change model (HERI, 1996) was designed specifically for leadership development programs offered to university students, incorporating individual, group, and community values (Dugan & Komives, 2010), which this study will use to assess students' leadership capacity.

The most effective way in which universities could develop students' skills in leadership, media communication, teamwork, problem-solving, responsibility, decision-making, and ethics is considered to be through group work (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004). In Vietnam, Tran (2000) found that leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, time management, prioritization, and information management skills were particularly valued.

Previous studies have identified relationships between leadership capacity and different variables, including: demographics (Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wu, 2011), college environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Smart et al., 2002), positional leadership roles (Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), interactions with and mentoring by faculty members (Komives, Longersbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Thompson, 2006), community service (Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Thompson, 2006), participation in leadership programs (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), and interracial relationships (Antonio, 2001). However, few have examined the connection with psychology, curricular engagement, and cocurricular involvement.

Consequently, this study investigates faculty members' perceptions of their students' leadership capacity and evaluates the relationship between students' experiences at university and their leadership capacity; therefore, answers to the following questions will be sought:

1. How do faculty members rank their students' leadership capacity?
2. Do students' leadership capacity differ according to faculty members' gender, educational attainment, and country of graduation?
3. How is students' leadership capacity affected by their university experiences?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Participants

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 300 faculty members from the five member colleges of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM), which ranked at the peak of the 235 universities in Vietnam (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2018). Of these 300, 266 faculty members participated in this study (Gonyea, 2005), resulting in an 88.7% return rate far exceeding the 30% response rate for analysis purposes (Dillman, 2000).

The demographics for this sample population were as follow: 39.8% female, 60.2% male; 36.8% attained master's degrees and 63.2% doctorates; and 52.3% graduated from domestic universities, while 47.7% graduated in overseas countries and territories.

## 2.2. Variables

In this study, students' leadership capacity became the dependent variable, comprising the three values—individual, group, and community—of the social change model (HERI, 1996). These three values were assessed through 12 questionnaire items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree" to determine faculty members' assessment of their students' leadership capacity. Furthermore, the validity and reliability of the research was checked factor analysis, variance explained, and internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) (see Table 1 for coding scheme).

**Table-1.** Coding schemes and independent variables in this research.

<b>1. Demographic factors</b>
<i>Gender</i>
Female = 0, Male = 1
<i>Educational attainment</i>
Master's = 1, Doctorate = 2
<i>Country of graduation</i>
Domestic = 1, Overseas countries and territories = 2
<b>2. University experiences</b>
<i>Curricular engagement</i>
Teaching methods: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always (M = 4.01, SD = 0.37)
Learning outcome assessment methods: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always (M = 3.86, SD = 0.48)
Curriculum emphasis: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always (M = 4.07, SD = 0.37)
<i>Cocurricular involvement</i>
Student government: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Very low to 5 = Very high (M = 3.36, SD = 1.07)
Social service: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Very low to 5 = Very high (M = 4.24, SD = 1.01)
Sports: using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Very low to 5 = Very high (M = 3.99, SD = 0.84)

Note: Every variable is measured by one questionnaire, item.  
M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

The factor-loading values for each of the 12 questionnaire items ranged from 0.73 to 0.92, which were all higher than the 0.5 threshold (Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 2009). Moreover, the cumulative explanation (i.e., variance explained) ranged from 61.72% to 69.58%, which were also above the 60% threshold (Hair et al., 2009). Finally, the internal consistency analysis for each of the three values yielded Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.84, once more exceeding both thresholds 0.6 (Hair et al., 2009) and 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, all twelve questionnaire items for the three values were able to establish students' leadership capacity (see Table 2).

The independent variables comprised the faculty members' demographic factors and students' university experiences categories. The former consisted of gender, educational attainment, and country of graduation, and the latter comprised curricular engagement and cocurricular involvement, which were used to determine any correlation with students' leadership capacity at VNU-HCM. (see Tables 3 and 4 for statistical analysis).

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent *t*-test, and multiple regression analysis. The descriptive statistics of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) (McNabb, 2008) revealed the faculty members' perceptions of their students' leadership capacity. The independent *t*-test was performed for the two independent variable categories (Hair et al., 2009) which was formulated to determine whether faculty members' demographic factors and students' university experiences influenced leadership capacity. In addition, a multiple regression analysis enabled the relationship between the dependent variable—students' leadership capacity—and several independent variables—students' university experiences—to be examined (McNabb, 2008) and discover the influence of each type of experience factors on the three leadership values.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Faculty Members' Perceptions of Students' Leadership Capacity at the VNU-HCM

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable—students' leadership capacity—based on the results from the twelve questionnaire items assessing the three leadership values—individual, group and community. With the overall means and standard deviations for each value yielding  $M(SD) = 3.87(0.56)$  for individual values,  $M(SD) = 3.56(0.56)$  for group values, and  $M(SD) = 3.61(0.58)$  for community values, the findings reveal that most faculty members hold fairly high opinion of their students' leadership capacity ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ).

**Table-2.** Descriptive statistics and construct validity and reliability for students' leadership capacity according to faculty members.

Leadership values	M	SD	Factor loadings	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Students' leadership capacity</i>	3.68	0.44			
<b>1. Individual values</b>	3.87	0.56			
High self-esteem	4.24	0.59	0.77	61.72	0.79
Usually self-confident	4.05	0.87	0.80		
Consistent with student values	3.73	0.71	0.73		
Focused on student responsibilities	0.45	0.69	0.84		
<b>2. Group values</b>	3.56	0.56			
Work well with others	3.40	0.56	0.80	67.00	0.82
Work with others toward common goals	3.62	0.61	0.75		
Recognized by others in group	3.56	0.57	0.84		
Open to others' ideas	3.68	0.98	0.88		
<b>3. Community values</b>	3.61	0.58			
Responsibilities to student community	3.62	0.81	0.81	69.58	0.84
Activities contribute to the common good	3.75	0.57	0.84		
Allow student to contribute to their community	3.48	0.74	0.76		
Work toward community goals	3.60	0.70	0.92		

Note: Principal component analysis was performed on the data.

Of individual values, high self-esteem ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) and self-confidence ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) are scored highest, while student responsibilities the least ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). For group values, all are scored similarly, although working well with others is relatively lower ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). Finally, the community values are also scored well, ranging from  $M(SD) = 3.48(0.74)$  to  $M(SD) = 3.75(0.57)$ .

#### 3.2. Comparison between Faculty Members' Demographic Factors and Students' Leadership Capacity

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and independent  $t$ -test results for the relationship between students' leadership capacity and faculty members' demographic factors.

**Table-3.** Statistical analysis for faculty members' demographic factors and their students' leadership capacity.

Demographic factors	Individual values		Group values		Community values	
	t-value	M(SD)	t-value	M(SD)	t-value	M(SD)
<i>Gender</i>						
Female	-2.595*	3.75(0.62)	-1.809	3.49(0.64)	.898	3.65(0.71)
Male		3.94(0.51)		3.62(0.50)		3.59(0.48)
<i>Educational attainment</i>						
Master's	1.266	3.81(0.46)	-.089	3.57(0.51)	-1.273	3.67(0.47)
Doctorate		3.90(0.62)		3.56(0.60)		3.58(0.64)
<i>Country of graduation</i>						
Domestic (Vietnam)	-4.98	3.88(0.60)	-2.074*	3.63(0.57)	.798	3.59(0.53)
Overseas countries and territories		3.85(0.53)		3.50(0.55)		3.64(0.63)

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Overall, only individual and group values show a statistical difference with demographic factors: male faculty members score higher than their female counterparts for leadership individual values ( $M = 3.94 > 3.75$ ;  $t = -2.595$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ); those who graduated in Vietnam score higher for group values than their colleagues who qualified in overseas countries and territories ( $M = 3.63 > 3.50$ ;  $t = -2.074$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the findings suggest that there is no significant relationship between faculty members' demographic factors and their students' leadership capacity.

### 3.3. Effect of University Experiences on Students' Leadership Capacity at the VNU-HCM

In Table 4, the results of the multiple regression analysis reveal the effect of students' university experiences on their leadership capacity; the  $\beta$  coefficient  $> 0$  indicating a positive impact on leadership capacity. Regression analysis demonstrates different levels of influence on the three leadership values from the university experiences of curricular engagement and cocurricular involvement: 73.3% (Adj.  $R^2 = 0.733$ ) for individual, 69.5% (Adj.  $R^2 = 0.695$ ) for group, and 63.9% (Adj.  $R^2 = 0.639$ ) for community values.

Most students' university experiences have significant relationships with all three leadership values. Other than curriculum emphasis, all curricular engagement and cocurricular involvement activities have significant relationships with students' leadership individual values. Model 1 in Table 4 suggests that the curricular engagement activities of teaching methods and learning outcome assessment methods ( $\beta = 0.093$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and  $\beta = 0.478$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively) as well as the cocurricular involvement activities of social service and sports ( $\beta = 0.252$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $\beta = 0.371$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively) are positively correlated with students' individual values. In contrast, management activities ( $\beta = -0.222$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrate no (a negative) correlation with their individual values.

Table-4. Regression analysis for effect of university experiences on students' leadership capacity.

University experiences	Individual values (Model 1)	Group values (Model 2)	Community values (Model 3)
	Beta ( $\beta$ )		
<i>Curricular engagement</i>			
Teaching methods	.093*	.019	-.020
Learning outcome assessment methods	.478***	.668***	-.374**
Curriculum emphasis	-.053	-.239***	-.123*□
<i>Cocurricular involvement</i>			
Management activities	-.222***	-.192**	-.164**
Social service activities	.252***	.038	.607***
Sport activities	.371***	.252***	.204***
F	122.259***	101.419***	79.145***
Adjusted $R^2$	.733	.695	.639

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

For students' group values, Model 2 indicates that only learning outcome assessment methods from curricular engagement activities ( $\beta = 0.668$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and sports activities from cocurricular involvement ones ( $\beta = 0.252$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) yield positive effects. However, curriculum emphasis ( $\beta = -0.239$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and management activities ( $\beta = -0.192$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) are shown to exert negative effects.

Model 3 shows that all university experiences, except teaching methods, have a significant impact on students' leadership community values ( $p < 0.01$  and  $0.001$ ). Some results in Model 3 are similar to those in Models 1 and 2: while social service cocurricular involvement activities ( $\beta = 0.607$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly and positively affect students' community values in Models 1 and 3, sports activities ( $\beta = 0.204$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) yield the same effect in all three models; likewise, management activities impacts, negatively, although significantly ( $\beta = -0.164$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in the three models. For the curricular engagement activities, although curriculum emphasis in both Models 2 and 3 ( $\beta = -0.239$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $\beta = -0.123$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) display a negative association, learning outcome assessment methods

have a positive relationship in Model 2 ( $\beta = -0.668, p < 0.001$ ) while that in Model 3 remains negative ( $\beta = -0.374, p < 0.05$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show how faculty members perceive their students' leadership capacity and how those students' university experiences affect their leadership capacity at VNU-HCM. The findings will help fill gaps in the literature on the theory and practice of developing of students' leadership capacity in higher education institutions, particularly Vietnamese universities. Most of the previous research, not only in Vietnam but also globally, has examined students' assessments of their own leadership capacity, rather than evaluations by faculty members; thus, difficulties arise when discussing any comparisons with this study. However, it is possible to discuss the findings from this and earlier studies on the relationship between leadership capacity and the perceptions of faculty members and students, respectively.

The findings of this study indicate that most faculty members hold a fairly high opinion of their students' leadership capacity, which supports research conducted by [Duong and Le \(2018\)](#) that found technical students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam reported their level of leadership capacity to be high. However, [Wu \(2011\)](#) discovered that Taiwanese freshman judged their leadership capacity as weak, while junior students rated theirs as only average. Furthermore, [Dugan, Komives, and Segar \(2008\)](#) revealed that there was no consensus among American university students on their leadership capacity, with Asian Pacific students consistently assessing their leadership capacities at a lower level. Despite the difference in the results of this and earlier studies, there is still much scope for development, particularly for VNU-HCM. Consequently, higher education institutions have a responsibility to develop leadership programs as a core part of student learning ([Smart et al., 2002](#)).

Very few research studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between faculty members' country of graduation and students' leadership group values; thus, the findings from this research cannot be discussed. Hence, further research in this area is essential to bridge this gap in the literature.

In this study, male faculty members score higher than their female counterparts for students' leadership individual values. However, previous studies based on students' self-reported leadership capacity found that female students scored higher on all leadership factors, including individual values, except the community value of change, in American universities ([Dugan et al., 2008](#)), and more likely to undertake leadership roles in elite Chinese universities ([Wu and Bao, 2013](#)). Conversely, other research discovered that female students exhibited lower aspiration for and effectiveness in leadership roles in higher education institutes ([Adams & Keim, 2000](#); [Boatwright & Egidio, 2003](#)). This means a detrimental gap exists between female students' leadership capacity and self-efficacy, which higher education institutions must counter by ensuring a gender balance in university activities to enable all students to experience leadership roles and develop their leadership capacity in preparation for such roles in society. A significant correlation between university experiences and students' leadership capacity is in fact evident from not only this study but also [Wu \(2011\)](#).

Previous studies found that student-centered and process-focused approaches ([De La Harpe, Radloff, & Wyber, 2000](#)), and teacher-student interactions ([Duong & Le, 2018](#)) were effective methods for developing university students' competencies, such as leadership capacity. None have shown the relationships between learning outcome assessment methods or curriculum emphasis and students' leadership capacity, though, preventing further discussion of the significant impacts on leadership group and community values in this study. Nevertheless, administrators and policymakers at VNU-HCM should include these curricular engagement activities when designing curriculum, as well as cocurricular activities, to enhance students' leadership capacity.

The benefit of curricular engagement to Vietnamese students' leadership capacity students proved comparable cocurricular involvement. [King \(1997\)](#) indicated that although challenging, developing students' leadership skills is important in colleges and universities, and depends on both curricular and cocurricular programs ([Astin & Astin,](#)

2000). Moreover, Dugan (2006) demonstrated that undertaking leadership roles in community service organizations rather than students' higher education institutions was preferable for developing leadership capacity. Indeed, Biddix, Somers, and Polman (2009) determined that leadership roles in activism developed leadership capacity by means similar to those in traditional student organizations. In Vietnam, however, students are too focused on examination results (Kelly, 2000) and unaware of the benefit of cocurricular activities to competency development (Duong, Wu, & Hoang, 2019), while their parents often disapprove of cocurricular involvement (Tran, 2013). Thus, policymakers and administrators at VNU-HCM should acknowledge the leadership opportunities offered by integrated curricular and cocurricular activities and identify ways to develop students' leadership capacity; meanwhile, Vietnamese parents should adopt a more progressive attitude toward education and support their children's involvement in cocurricular activities.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although the findings of this study carries both theoretical and pedagogical implications, further research comprising a larger sample population from all disciplines across all universities in Vietnam should be undertaken to collect extensive empirical information on the learning experiences and outcomes among Vietnamese university students. Nevertheless, this research provides an insight into the leadership capacity for students at VNU-HCM, helping policymakers and administrators to understand the relationship between their students' needs, university experiences and the current curriculum and offering a practical basis for developing appropriate leadership capacity programs in Vietnamese universities. In conclusion, an in-depth understanding of students' leadership capacity is crucial in designing programs to provide a range of suitable that will prepare students for global citizenship.

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