

## **Exploring Important Leadership Qualities and Characteristics among Adolescent Students**

Smruti Shah<sup>1</sup>, Dr.Kirti Pathak<sup>2</sup>

*SNDT Women's University  
Dr. BMN College of Home Science*

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**Abstract:** *Broad topic of leadership study has been narrowed down in this study to leadership among adolescents in school setting. The current paper focuses on important characteristics possessed by student which makes them leader and qualities of ideal student leader. Students were asked to list any 5 qualities that they expect their class leader to have and checklist of 47 characteristics was provided to students for selecting characteristic of students whom they consider leader in their class. The data was collected from 500 Students across 12 schools in Mumbai. Data was analyzed. Results depicted most students who were considered class leader by their classmates were friendly, likable and are attentive in classroom. Honesty and confidence are two qualities considered as one of the top five qualities of an ideal student leader. Following research paper focuses has elaborated results in details.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership; Students; Qualities; Characteristics; Adolescents.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The history of the world is witness to many leaders in diverse fields who have shaped the socio-economic-intellectual life of the contemporary societies. Leadership has been defined from several perspectives. Every field has its own ways of defining, who leader is, what functions does a leader perform, what qualities a leader ought to possess, how leadership is developed etc.

The field of psychology deals with leadership as a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task (Chemers, 1997) This definition considers leadership as a process and the leader is the one who has some influence. Important function of leadership is to aid and support followers to accomplish common task.

Every individual may get an opportunity to be a leader at some point of time in his life span in some specific situations. However, he may not be an effective leader. Effective leadership requires special skills and qualities. Question as to whether leaders are made or born has intrigued thinkers for centuries. Do the leadership qualities develop after a person becomes leader or do they have qualities which make them a leader? Many thinkers say that good leaders are made, not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience (Jago, 1982).

#### **Theories of Leadership:**

Several theories of leadership have been developed over many years some of which include:

##### **1. Personality Theories of Leadership:**

Personality theories focuses on personal qualities of traits of leader, either inborn or acquired. The great man theory and trait theory of leadership falls in this area.(Vijayaragavan, 2008).

##### **2. Great Man's Theory of Leadership:**

According to this point of view, great leaders are simply born with the necessary internal characteristics such as charisma, confidence, intelligence, and social skills that make them natural-born leaders. Great man theories assume that the capacity for leadership is inherent – that great leaders are born, not made. These theories often portray great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed. The term "Great Man" was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership (Cherry, 2012).

##### **3. Trait Theory:**

An advancement and modification of the great man theory is the trait theory, which argues that leadership qualities or traits can be acquired. According to trait theory, leaders need not be born, they can be made. The trait theory considers personality, social, physical and intellectual traits to differentiate leaders from

non-leaders. The trait theory states that there are certain identifiable qualities or characteristics which are unique to leaders and good leaders possess such qualities to a considerable extent (Vijayaragavan, 2008).

### **Leadership during Adolescence:**

Researches on adolescent are increasing with more focus on development of leadership through training (Li & Wang, 2009). One of the main reasons for increase in interest in adolescent leadership is that adolescent leaders develop from both pro-social and anti-social constructs. Educators must recognize the unique power of both the leadership funnels while training them. Pro-social leaders are inclusive and build affiliation, while anti-social leaders are exclusive and rely on power (Whitehead, 2009).

Another important aspect of researches on adolescent leadership is the selection of leaders among adolescents. An individual adolescent can be part of several groups; and leaders for each group could require different skills or qualities to take a lead (Russian, 1975). For example, skills and qualities required for taking lead in sports team would be different from qualities required to lead in any religious groups or intellectual groups. However, in any kind of group, adolescents feel that their leader represents them in eyes of people in environment where they stay, where they study or where they work. Therefore they want leaders of superior ability who will be admired and respected by others and who in turn, will reflect favourably on them (Rodman, Vyodanoff, & Lovejoy, 1972).

### **Student Leadership:**

One extremely significant group for an individual during years of early adolescence is group formed in school. Most of the active time of an adolescent is spent in school setting. Therefore, many adolescent may try to take up the role of student leadership during this stage of life span (Joseph, 1969). Student leadership is simple as leadership on a student level. This is important characteristic to have in school because each school, whether small or large, has similar attributes to those of a community (Nelson, 2003). "Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy."

-Adam Fletcher (2005)

Important leadership qualities are developed or are brought into limelight among school peer group. Thus, schools develop their own set of leaders who in turn would become leaders in larger arena as years pass by. Famous British Public School of Eton is known for nurturing future leaders and as the saying goes, "War of Crimea was fought on the play fields of Eton and Brighton."

### **Selection of Student Leader:**

In school, the representatives are elected by the students themselves after school administration nominates candidates for various positions (Fletcher, 2005). Many schools also have their own student council body, which has its own different hierarchy. Such student councils consist of Student President, Vice-President, House Captains, Class Representatives, etc. Every member in student council is considered as leader in some or the other sense, as they tend to fulfil most of the roles described above for student leaders. In other cases, students are allowed to nominate and elect their own leaders. In classroom setting, student leaders are chosen mostly on the basis on majority votes by fellow students or chosen by teachers. Terms like Monitor, Prefect, Class representative, class leader are used to denote that one student who maybe a leader among all.

### **Rationale of the Study:**

As discussed, student leader has many roles to perform and has to undertake many responsibilities, which every student are not capable of holding. There are many ways in which leaders emerge in school setting; it could be through nominations, teacher's appreciation, popularity among other students, initiative that students take by coming ahead and taking up responsibility. Yet main question remains, why are students who are elected as student leader actually elected to be a student leader? Do they possess any special qualities? Could these qualities be developed over time so that every student can become a leader? Is there any way to measure these leadership qualities and functions? This study hence focuses on understanding important leadership qualities possessed by student leader and qualities of ideal student leader.

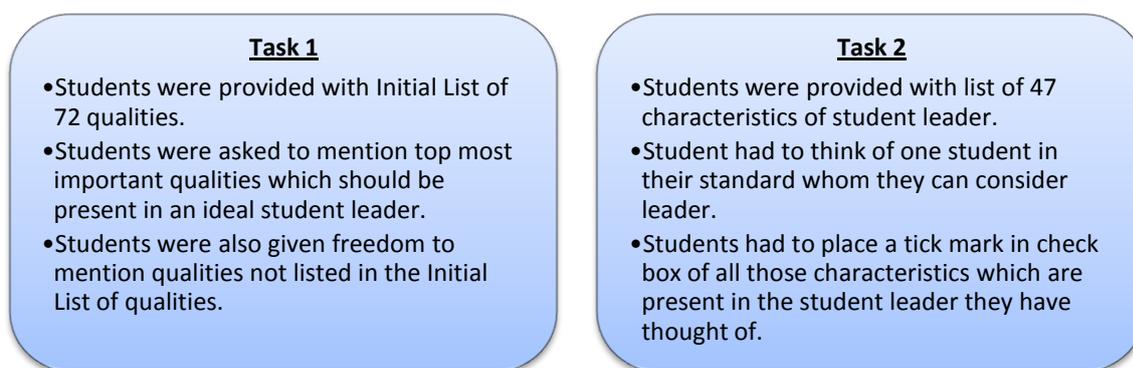
**Methodology Section:** Current research was exploratory in nature, exploring different qualities and characteristics of student leader.

### **Tool:**

A self-developed questionnaire which consisted of two tasks was used for collecting, tool was then pilot tested on 100 students across 3 schools for each task individually. After modifying tool on basis of pilot test, tool for data collection was finalized.

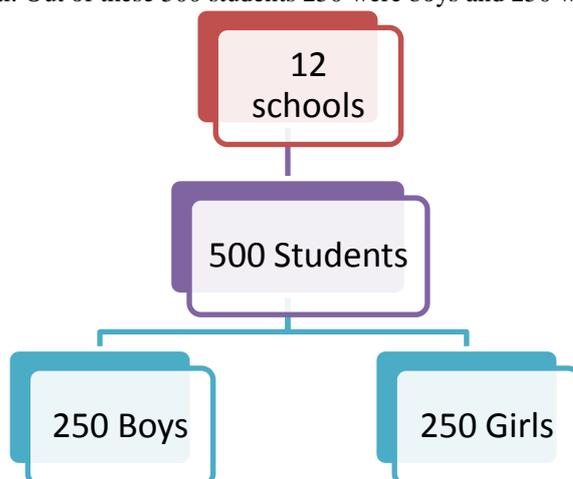
Task 1 of the tool was an open-ended question, where students had to list any 5 qualities, which they considered to be important in an ideal leader. List of 72 qualities were provided to students for reference, however, they had freedom to mention qualities NOT listed in the list.

Task 2 of the tool consisted checklist of 47 characteristics. Students had to think of one student from their own standard (grade) whom they would consider to be perfect example of leader (student leader) among them, and place a tick mark on those characteristics which were of the “student leader” they have thought of. This list of characteristics was developed on basis of literature review. Additional space was provided to students for adding characteristics which might have been missed, but is seen in student leader.



**Figure 1: Summarizing two tasks of the Tool used for Data Collection.**

**Sample:**Data was collected from 500 adolescent students (i.e. students studying in any grade from 7 to 12) from 12 schools across Mumbai. Out of these 500 students 250 were boys and 250 were girls.



**Figure 2: Sample at Glance**

**Analysis of Data:**

For Task 1, list of all qualities mentioned by each student leader were counted, and percentage of students considering each quality as one of the important quality of ideal student leader was calculated. For Task 2, percentage of student leader displaying each characteristic was found out.

## II. Findings

Table 1: Student's Perception about Important Qualities in Ideal Student Leader		
Qualities	Number of Students*	Percentage
Top 10 from the Initial List		
Honesty	271	54.20
Confidence	141	28.20
Respect others	128	25.60
Problem Solver	100	20.00
Maintains Discipline	96	19.20
Good Speaker	94	18.80
Courage	74	14.80
Intelligent	73	14.60
Hard Working	70	14.00
Wise	64	12.80
Unlisted Qualities		
Helpful	31	6.20
Loyal	6	1.20
Lowest Score in the Initial List		
Competence	2	0.40
Develops Working Environment	2	0.40
Visionary	0	00
Insightful	0	00
* Number of Students indicates the number of students out of 500 who considered specific quality as one of the top five qualities in ideal student leader		

For Task 1, maximum number of the students, i.e. 54.20% (271 students out of 500) considered **Honesty** as one of the most important qualities in a student leader. This is followed by **Confidence** at 28.20%.

**Helpfulness** was added to the list of 72 qualities by 31 students (6.20%), and **loyalty** was added to the list by 6 students (1.20%). These qualities are important to be considered as important, as these qualities were NOT promoted by list.

Qualities of Competence and Development of Working Environment from the Initial List were considered least important by the students. Only 0.40% of students considered these qualities as one of the top five qualities in a student leader.

Qualities of Visionary and Insightfulness were not considered by any student as significant for leadership.

As the data collected included a large sample of 500 students, the final list comprised of 107 qualities by adding 35 unlisted qualities to the Initial List. As the selection of important qualities was spread over a large Initial List of 72 qualities, percentage of students considering each quality as one of the top five quality is low, with the highest being 54.4%. One of the reasons for Honesty to be selected as one of the top five qualities could be that it was the first one in the Initial List of the questionnaire of students.

**Table 2:**

Realistic Characteristics of Student Leaders as Observed by Students		
Sr. No	Skills/Characteristics of Leader.	Percentage
1	Is likable, friendly and easy to be with	87.20
2	Pays attention in classroom	82.30
3	Takes part in Competition and Activities in School	73.60
4	You can trust the decision taken by this person	72.60
5	Completes given work on time	70.20
6	Attends school regularly	68.20
7	Help others find solution through proper knowledge and resources	67.80
8	Completes homework MOST of the time	65.00
9	Provides other students in need with materialistic (pen, pencils, books) help.	64.60
10	Can be funny, when situations demand, by delivering appropriate joke on appropriate time.	64.60
11	Respects school properties and protects it	64.40
12	Treats his friends and other classmates equally	63.80
13	Are always presentable with nicely comb haired and ironed clothes	63.20
14	Is kind to other people and polite while talking	63.00
15	Has positive attitude towards school	63.00
16	Helps teacher manage classroom	62.40
17	Enjoys every task he/she performs, including studying, helping other students, extra-curricular activities, visits made by school, etc.	62.40
18	Respects non-teaching staff	62.00
19	Appreciates others and helps them to improve (if he/she feels there is some fault)	61.80
20	Motivates other people to do well in class	61.40
21	Is punctual in class	61.40
22	Participates in class discussion and answers in class	61.20
23	Takes permission from any teacher or older authority before conducting any task.	61.00
24	Does well academically	60.60
25	Shows curiosity and excitement to learn new things	60.60
26	Is well-behaved in absence of teacher	59.60
27	Is aware about things to be done, and develops proper plan to complete given task.	59.60
28	He or she is good with creative things, like drawing and crafts	59.40
29	Volunteers in helping with work around school	56.40
30	Shares experience of success and failures in positive way so as to motivate others.	55.80
31	Constantly tries to improve himself in every field	55.60
32	Accepts his/her own mistakes and apologizes for the same.	54.00
33	Can take decision in any uncertain situation.	53.80
34	Has lead some kind of team- sports, reading, class, etc.	51.00
35	Teaches other students and provides proper guidance regarding academic topics to other student who is weak	50.60
36	Acts as a good mediator between other students and teachers or higher authority	49.20
37	Has awareness of world around him/her	49.00
38	Accepts feedback (Advice/ criticism)	48.80
39	Convinces other students to participate in activities designed by school	48.20
40	Makes innovative suggestion to teacher	48.00
41	Strives to maintain their own excellence in any performance	47.80
42	Is mostly calm and composed in nature (not too aggressive)	47.00
43	Is winner in MOST competition in which he/she participates	46.00
44	Is often selected to represent school in important events	45.20
45	Avoids passing any negative comment about other students.	44.80
46	Networks and engages everyone in the room	42.80
47	Has hosted some events in school	42.00

\* N=500 Students

For Task 2, 87.2% of the student leaders perceived to be **Friendly and easy to deal with**. This is followed by 82.3% **Attentive in classroom**.

Results also suggest that student leaders are often the ones who can be **good mediators between teachers and other students**. Students who are attentive to teacher and lessons taught in classroom are often the ones chosen by teacher and their friendly nature makes them popular among students. Hence, with acknowledgment from teachers as well as students make them good mediators between them.

At the same time, characteristic least present in a student leader is that of hosting some kind of events in a school. Most of the characteristics which are found with lower percentage are the ones associated with taking leadership at school events.

### **III. Summary And Conclusion**

Contemporary leadership scholars and researchers have often questioned place of leadership within the academy. However, much of the confusion surrounding leadership as a field of study may be attributed to a lack of understanding regarding trans-disciplinary, inter- disciplinary, and multi- disciplinary academic fields of study in general. Most of the theories established and researches conducted in the field of leadership focus on organizational leadership and on adult pattern of leadership and leadership development. Very few researches have been conducted to find important leadership qualities and characteristics among school students. Most of the research available on measuring leadership qualities among school students has been conducted in non-Indian context. Therefore, this research was initiated with the aim of developing a tool for measuring leadership qualities among adolescents in Indian school. This aim of research was achieved by attaining main objectives of the research.

One of the main objective of this research included finding out important leadership qualities and characteristics of student leader as perceived by students. In this research, questionnaire was developed consisting of 47 characteristics that may or may not be in student leader along with question focusing on 5 qualities of an ideal student leader. Data was collected from 500 students and analyzed.

To conclude, honesty and confidence are the two most important qualities considered by students in an ideal student leader. Characteristics of Being Friendly and Likable, along with Attentiveness were observed in the maximum number of actual student leaders identified by the students.

### **IV. Recommendation**

Students could have been provided with list of definition for each of the 72 qualities along with questionnaire, so that they could easily identify idealistic qualities of student leader. It was easier to collect data using checklist for finding important characteristics of student leader, some similar method of data collection could have been used to list important qualities of ideal leader.

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### **Biography of Authors**

Smruti Shah has completed her graduation with BA (Psychology) from D.G. Ruparel College of Arts, Science and Commerce, and has completed her Masters in Human Development from SNDT University. Currently pursuing MA (Educational Technology), her interest of research lies in heutagogy, process of learning and teaching strategies, cognitive psychology, and educational technology, social and behavioural sciences.

Dr. Kirti Pathak is currently Head of Human Development Department of Home Science in Dr. BMN College of Home Science. She has completed her Ph.D in Human Development (Early Childhood Education), and her interest areas include women empowerment, youth development and gerontology.

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