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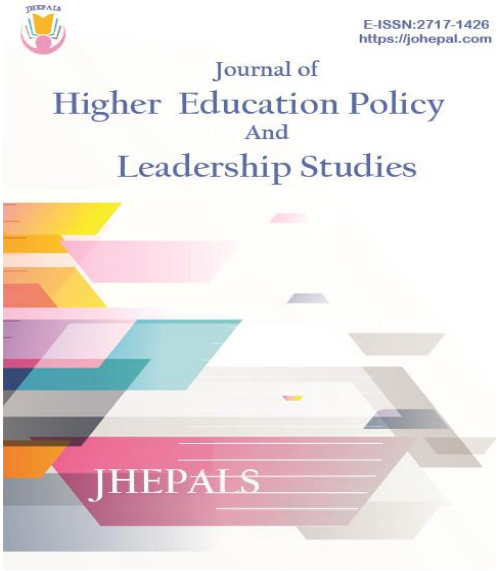

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Leadership Skills of Undergraduate Students at the Hashemite University and Sultan Qaboos University: Comparative Study

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Abstract

Undergraduate students have identified several skills that should be developed during their college years, such as leadership. A comparative study was conducted to assess the leadership skills of undergraduate students at public universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman. A descriptive method was used, and the S-LPI instrument with five dimensions was applied to the 394 participants in Hu and SQU. The results showed that the students had moderate levels of leadership skills in three dimensions, and female students had a higher degree of leadership skills related to Encouraging the heart than males. No differences in leadership skills between the students' colleges. Students with university clubs' membership have a positive effect on the leadership skills of their members, with all five dimensions being significantly improved. This suggests that students already possess some leadership skills when they enter university, and university administrators should take this into account when creating clubs and encouraging students to join them. The study results enrich the researchers look into how universities can foster an environment where students can develop networking capabilities, and how to collaborate with others in order to achieve their goals.

Keywords: Students Leadership Skills; HE Leadership Training; The Hashemite University; Sultan Qaboos University; Jordan; Sultanate of Oman

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Introduction

University students face a variety of activities and opportunities for personal and professional development. From student government and clubs to research projects, these activities offer invaluable educational and leadership experiences. Participating in such activities helps students develop a wide range of leadership skills, such as communication and problem-solving abilities and discipline complementary skills and competencies (Buckley, & Lee, 2021). It encourages them to think critically and creatively, while honing their organizational and managerial skills. Furthermore, students who participate in activities and projects often gain valuable experience and connections with faculty and graduate students, which can lead to career success. In summary, undergraduate students can gain many benefits from participating in activities and developing their leadership skills. These activities not only provide educational and professional growth opportunities, but also prepare them for the future (Petre, 2020; Mafa, 2016; Arminio et al., 2000).

For many years, there have been efforts towards developing leadership skills in young people. Research has shown that involvement in organized leadership programs, sports, volunteer activities, extra-curricular activities, camps, and career success all link to the development of youth leadership. There is also a spectrum of student voice and participation, ranging from "speaking out" to having decision making power and authority, as well as a pyramid of student voice that goes from being heard to developing capacity for leadership (Chan, 2016; Thompson et al., 2013; De Simone, 2012; Hancock et al., 2012; Chelladurai, 2011; Al-Omari et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007; Holdsworth, 2000; Mitra, 2006; Larson et al., 2005; Hansen et al., 2003).

Nowadays, students are confronted with a variety of issues such as career challenges, employment difficulties, and the clash between idealism and practicality. To overcome these issues, they must possess leadership qualities to accept challenges, solve problems, and make decisions about their career path. Employers usually search for applicants who have a bachelor's degree and a wide range of skills (Aksoy, 1998). Many employers particularly look for leadership qualities when recruiting graduates (Stronge, 1998; Kerka, 1990). Companies are usually more drawn to students who are leaders (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). According to the students themselves, college is the perfect time to cultivate a variety of abilities. Students listed reading skills, public speaking, and time management as essential college success skills (Gallagher et al., 1992).

Participation in leadership activities has been linked to various kinds of development, such as practical and interpersonal competence, intellectual development, and altruism (Shahabul et al., 2022; Kuh, 1993; Magolda, 1992; Pascarella et al., 1988). Leadership development initiatives have become an important part of student affairs divisions' holistic student development objectives (Arminio et al., 2000).

Research has suggested that involvement in student organizations can positively affect students' academic experiences (Cooper et al., 1994). Early leadership experiences give people the skills they need to succeed academically and professionally, as well as in other areas of life (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Giving adolescents specific and structured opportunities to develop their leadership skills can help them tackle society's complex issues in the future (Aymoldanovna et al., 2015; Seemiller, 2018).

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Leadership Skills of Undergraduate Students

The Deanship of Student Affairs in higher education institutions strives to develop students' personalities on all levels, both physically, cognitively, socially, and psychologically. This is to ensure students can become good citizens, have the necessary skills to become leaders in the future, and manage and plan social and cultural activities. The Deanship of Student Affairs in the Hashemite University also oversees student councils, groups, and clubs, including the Cultural and artistic Club, cycling club, engineering club, medical club, Arab content club on the internet, media club, the great Arab revolt club, smart app club, Political Development Club, Holy Quran club, Club Rhymes poetry, food security club, community peace club, and environmental astronomical club (Deanship of Students Affairs HUa, 2023). In addition to that Student Council; the administrative body of the council is elected in the second semester of the academic year by enrolled students: The Council's objectives: deepening the spirit of belonging to the country and the political system, following up on students 'issues, and organizing events and activities in accordance with the university regulations (Deanship of Students Affairs HUb, 2023).

One of the aims of this pioneering university according to deanship of students' affairs at SQU is to raise the level of students, to refine their talents, to enrich their creativity and to highlight their academic, cultural and athletic achievements. Including the English club, and the group handicrafts. In addition to that there are theatre society, media group, music group, photo society, Islamic culture society, information technology society, society friends group, fine arts society, SQU debate society, photo society, development voice group, history and archeology group, Alkhaleel for literature group, English translations society, SQU rovers (Deanship of Students Affairs, 2023). According to Thompson (2013), research has predominantly shown that students not involved in leadership activities are rarely evaluated in terms of.

The findings of multiple studies are inconsistent when it comes to the leadership abilities of men and women. Posner and Brodsky (1994) argue that there is generally little evidence to support any connection between leadership and gender, while other academics suggest that there is no difference in ability levels between men and women (Bass, 1990; Komives, 1991). Additionally, research on leadership styles has not been able to explain the differences between men and women's leadership approaches.

However, other research point to the fact that women tend to possess more advanced leadership skills than men, even with limited total leadership experience. This includes an ability to enable others to take action (Komives, 1994). Women are known to place more of an emphasis on developing relationships than males, and learn leadership skills through trial and error, observation, and other practical methods. Such abilities include improved public speaking and interpersonal skills, an understanding of the value of motivation, and managing conflicts as well as self-knowledge (Romano, 1996).

In one study, both men and women discussed the differences in their leadership styles, with males being more direct and to-the-point while females preferring to think things through and engage in conversations. One woman argued that men were likely to be stricter with rules whereas women would form relationships (Arminio et. al., 2000). Additionally, Rehman and Farooq's (2017) research found discrepancies in terms of gender when it came to cognitive development and critical analysis abilities, as well as differences based on course type for technology skills.

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While there is a sizable amount of literature that suggests there is no difference in leadership skills between men and women (Bass, 1990; Komives, 1991; Posner & Brodsky, 1994), other studies have found that women possess advanced leadership abilities (Komives, 1994). Romano (1996) specifically identified higher levels of interpersonal skills and problem-solving ability amongst women. Additionally, there is a great deal of research that supports the use of various technologies for improving student learning outcomes (Litchman, 1998; Reinen & Plomp, 1997; Shashaani, 1997; Spotts et al., 1997).

College leadership has been widely studied (Cox & Miranda, 2003; Romero-Aldaz, 2001; Cress et al., 2001; Turrentine, 2001; Graham & Cockriel, 1997; Cooper et al., 1994). Research has suggested that cooperative learning activities can enhance students' leadership skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, decision making, and teamwork (Petre, 2020). Participation in student organizations has also been linked to better academic performance (Cooper et. al., 1994), while other research has highlighted the importance of certain abilities like self-management, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, and cognitive development for displaying successful leadership.

A comparative study of the activities of students and their development of leadership skills at public universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman is a worthy research topic. In this study, one should explore the various student activities and initiatives taken by Jordanian and Omani universities to develop and hone the leadership skills of their students. This includes looking into the types of activities that are offered and how they cultivate or help to build a student's leadership capacity. Additionally, it should look into the various programs, scholarships, and other resources available to students to learn and practice leadership. Furthermore, research should be done to compare the effectiveness of leadership initiatives in both countries, to understand what kind of differences (if any) exist between them and if any particular ones are more successful than the others. Lastly, the research should seek to uncover what leadership skills universities and other educational institutions in both Jordan and Oman prioritize and promote, and how these leadership skills can be transferred and utilized in the social, political, and economic sectors. By researching these activities and initiatives, this study would provide valuable insights into the current status of student leadership development in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman and allow for the formulation of strategies and recommendations on how to reach even higher levels of success.

Research Questions

This research aimed to explore the leadership skills of undergraduate students at Hashemite University (HU) and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), as indicated by The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI). The two questions posed were:

1. What are the leadership skills of undergraduate students in the Hashemite University and Sultan Qaboos University?
2. Are there any differences in the leadership skills of university undergraduates based on university, sex, and college and university club membership?

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Importance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its ability to identify the most effective ways of fostering leadership among students in both Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman. This will not only benefit these two countries and their respective educational systems, but it could also provide valuable insights into how other countries can develop their own student leadership initiatives. Furthermore, a comparative study of student activities and development of leadership skills at public universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman will help to bridge the knowledge gap between the two nations, enabling people from both sides to learn and benefit from each other's experiences and successes. Ultimately, this research could act as a stepping stone for developing the leadership capacity of all students in the region, allowing them to make meaningful contributions to society in the future.

This research was very important in terms of its implications for future teaching, research, and policymaking in higher education in Jordan. It provides faculty with useful data about students' leadership qualities, which can then be used to create educational opportunities for fostering leadership development. For student affairs professionals, this study offers insight into the leadership skills that are already present among applicants, and can therefore be leveraged for assessing the effectiveness of their programs. Students, on their part, can use this data to track their own progress and set goals for further developing their leadership skills.

Research Methodology

Sample

The study focused on the undergraduate students taking an elective course at HU and SQU during the 2022/2023 academic year. A total of 394 students completed the survey, with 264 in HU, and 133 in SQU, and 204 being female and 190 males.

Instrumentation

The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI) used in this study depends on (Kouzes and Posner, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2012) work that they developed the Leadership Practices Inventory, which consists of a series of statements describing different leadership actions and behaviors. Participants were asked to rate each statement of S-LPI on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagree and 5 strong agree. This allows one to determine how often a leader exhibits certain leadership practices - higher values indicating more frequent use of such behaviors.

The S-LPI assesses the behaviors and actions that students believe are necessary for their successful leadership. Thirty statements related to five competency areas were compiled in this inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This tool helps to identify when students are performing their best as leaders (Posner, 2004).

1. Challenges the process: The student looks for challenging chances to learn, grow, and be creative. Leaders model this kind of behavior by experimenting, taking risks, and learning from their missteps.
2. Inspiring a shared vision: It involves creating a common goal that speaks to the values, aspirations, interests, and dreams of the team or organization.

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3. Enabling others to act: Allowing others to act includes strengthening followers by offering choices and training them in important tasks.
4. Modeling the way: It involves setting an example that is consistent with the shared values of the group.
5. Encouraging the heart: Recognizing individual contributions and celebrating team successes are key parts of "encouraging the heart" leadership practice.

Data Collection

Data collection for this research include quantitative method. Quantitative methods involve collecting data from surveys to assess the attitudes and opinions of students involved in leadership development activities at universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman.

The google form used and allowed the students to take the questionnaire during the first semester of 2022/2023. The students received written instructions outlining the purpose of the study and explaining how to answer the questions. They were advised that there weren't any right or wrong responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS, v.23. First, the data were coded. Second, respondents were asked to report their university, sex, and college and university club membership, and then turned to the research questions posed in the study. Then calculated the mean scores for each item on each S-LPI dimensions for the first question. Next, conducted a series of independent t-tests to examine if there were significant differences in mean scores among groups on the scales. All t-tests were conducted at the p=0.05 level of significance.

Results

Question One: What are the leadership skills of undergraduate students in the Hashemite University and Sultan Qaboos University?

The question aimed to discover the leadership skills of undergraduate students at HU and SQU. Table 1 summarizes the mean and standard deviation from the descriptive statistics results. The data revealed that the participants rated Encourage the heart highest (M=3.77, SD=0.91) with high leadership skills, while scoring lowest on Inspiring a shared vision (M=3.45, SD=0.87) with medium leadership skills.

Table 1.
Leadership Skills of undergraduate students at HU and SQU

Dimensions/ Items	M	SD	
Model the Way	3.63	0.97	Medium
1- Sets personal examples of what is expected	3.55	0.85	Medium
2- Maintains a system of standards	3.79	0.92	High
3- Follows through on promises and commitments	3.89	0.84	High
4- Seeks feedback actions on performance	3.44	0.82	Medium
5- Develops a common set of values	3.51	0.84	Medium
6- Has a clear leadership philosophy	3.62	0.73	Medium
Inspiring a Shared Vision	3.45	0.87	Medium
7- Talks about future trends	3.56	0.93	Medium
8- Describes the image of the future	3.61	0.82	Medium
9- Shares dream of future with others	3.23	0.74	Medium

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10- Enlists a common vision	3.18	0.83	Medium
11- Paints the "big picture"	3.53	0.72	Medium
12- Speaks with conviction of the purpose	3.62	0.84	Medium
Challenges the Process	3.66	0.88	Medium
13- Seeks challenging opportunities	3.59	0.85	Medium
14- Challenges people to be innovative	3.63	0.83	Medium
15- Looks outside the boundaries	3.65	0.72	Medium
16- Asks "What can we learn?"	3.63	0.86	Medium
17- Sets achievable and measurable goals	3.68	0.92	High
18- Takes risks and experiments	3.78	0.75	High
Enabling Others to Act	3.73	0.79	High
19- Develops relationships	3.65	0.91	Medium
20- Listens to diverse points of view	3.82	0.89	High
21- Treats people with respect	3.99	0.82	High
22- Supports others decisions	3.63	0.83	Medium
23- Freedom to choose your work	3.69	0.94	High
24- Ensures that others grow	3.58	0.87	Medium
Encourage the Heart	3.77	0.91	High
25- Praises people for job well done	3.91	0.92	High
26- Expresses confidence in others' abilities	3.79	0.95	High
27- Rewards people for their contributions	3.72	0.91	High
28- Recognizes commitment to values	3.71	0.84	High
29- Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments	3.60	0.83	Medium
30- Shows appreciation and support	3.87	0.85	High
Total	3.65	0.94	Medium

Question 2: Are there any differences in the leadership skills of university undergraduates based on university, sex, and college and university club membership?

University:

This question investigated if there were any differences by university when it comes to exhibiting leadership skills. According to the results of a t-test, there was no statistically significant difference between the universities (HU and SQU) were found.

Table 2.
T-Tests on differences in Leadership Skills of undergraduate students based on university (HU, and SQU)

Scale	Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Model the Way	HU	261	3.59	0.98	392	1.106	.269
	SQU	133	3.71	0.97			
Inspiring a Shared Vision	HU	261	3.42	0.98	392	0.882	.378
	SQU	133	352	0.97			
Challenges the Process	HU	261	3.62	0.83	392	1.233	0.218
	SQU	133	3.75	0.95			
Enabling Others to Act	HU	261	3.71	0.85	392	0.506	0.615
	SQU	133	3.77	0.84			
Encourage the Heart	HU	261	3.72	0.96	392	1.116	0.265
	SQU	133	3.85	0.95			
Total	HU	261	3.61	0.94	392	1.055	.292
	SQU	133	3.72	0.96			

** Significant at p=0.05*

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Sex:

This question investigated if there were any differences by sex when it comes to exhibiting leadership skills. According to the results of a t-test, a significant difference (p=0.05) was found on "Encouraging the heart" scale in favor for female students. There was no statistically significant difference between the sexes were found to other scales.

Table 3.
T-Tests on differences in Leadership Skills of undergraduate students at (HU and SQU) by sex

Scale	Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Model the Way	Male	190	3.58	0.81	392	1.021	0.308
	Female	204	3.68	0.93			
Inspiring a Shared Vision	Male	190	3.45	0.76	392	0.133	0.894
	Female	204	3.46	0.96			
Challenges the Process	Male	190	3.62	0.83	392	0.755	0.451
	Female	204	3.70	0.98			
Enabling Others to Act	Male	190	3.64	0.85	392	1.671	0.108
	Female	204	3.81	0.98			
Encourage the Heart	Male	190	3.68	0.89	392	1.610	0.042*
	Female	204	3.85	0.86			
Total	Male	190	3.59	0.86	392	1.140	0.255
	Female	204	3.70	0.88			

** Significant at p=0.05*

College:

The question inquired if any distinction by college existed in the leadership skills of the participants. A t-test was conducted on every one of the five scales and the results are provided in Table 4. The analysis found no significant difference (p=0.05) in all five scales.

Table 4.
T-Tests on differences in Leadership Skills of undergraduate students at (HU and SQU) by college (Humanities=201, Scientific=193)

Scale	College	M	SD	df	t	p
Model the Way	Humanities	3.61	0.94	392	0.516	0.606
	Scientific	3.66	0.91			
Inspiring a Shared Vision	Humanities	3.45	0.77	392	0.174	0.862
	Scientific	3.46	0.72			
Challenges the Process	Humanities	3.61	0.99	392	0.911	0.363
	Scientific	3.71	0.93			
Enabling Others to Act	Humanities	3.73	0.89	392	0.013	0.990
	Scientific	3.72	0.88			
Encourage the Heart	Humanities	3.73	0.87	392	0.618	0.537
	Scientific	3.80	0.88			
Total	Humanities	3.62	0.91	392	0.491	0.524
	Scientific	3.67	0.99			

University Associations and Clubs Membership:

The research asked if there were any differences by college in the leadership skills of participants. A t-test was conducted on each of the five scales, and Table 5 provides a summary of the results by college. Results indicated that no significant difference was found for all dimensions of leadership skills.

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Table 5.
T-Tests on differences in Leadership Skills of undergraduate students at HU and SQU by university club membership (Member=171, Non-member=233)

Scale	University Club Membership	M	SD	df	t	p
Model the Way	Non-Member	3.54	0.87	392	1.603	0.00
	Member	3.70	0.80			*
Inspiring a Shared Vision	Non-Member	3.44	0.80	392	0.252	0.00
	Member	3.47	0.71			1*
Challenges the Process	Non-Member	3.56	0.94	392	1.439	0.00
	Member	3.73	0.83			*
Enabling Others to Act	Non-Member	3.69	0.84	392	0.691	0.00
	Member	3.76	0.84			*
Encourage the Heart	Non-Member	3.73	0.89	392	0.604	0.02
	Member	3.80	0.86			0*
Total	Non-Member	3.59	0.95	392	0.994	0.02
	Member	3.69	0.94			0*

** Significant at p= .05*

Discussion and Conclusion

This study can be a great way to further develop and refine leadership skills among students. By engaging in meaningful conversations and debates in a supportive environment, students can both express their ideas and opinions and gain new insight into different points of view. It can also help to build team cohesion, as well as the ability to communicate effectively with others. Universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman could implement regular conversation sessions and seminars where students can interact with experts and professionals in various fields in order to gain a better understanding of different topics and issues. This would give them valuable experience in expressing their ideas and opinions as well as provide an opportunity to learn from others.

The first research question in the study explored the leadership skills of undergraduate students by examining the five dimensions of the S-LPI. The mean scores obtained across all five dimensions were close to the medium, ranging from a high score of M=3.77, SD=0.91 in the "Encouraging the heart" area to a low score of M=3.45, SD=0.87 in the "Inspiring a shared vision" area. This suggests that the students in the study had achieved some level of leadership skills, though not to a great degree.

This study found that respondents exhibited moderately mid-level leadership skills across the five examined dimensions. However, these findings contradict the existing literature which has typically reported higher levels of leadership skills among college students (Cress et. al., 2001; Cooper et. al., 1994; Pascarella et al., 1988). In particular, Cress et al. (2001) argued that student leaders possess a greater willingness to take risks and perform under pressure which is not supported by the findings of this study. Furthermore, while they reported high levels of "enabling others to act", "encourage the heart" and moderately levels of other three areas, which also contradict Cress' claims.

The present study compared the leadership skills of male and female students and found that overall, they have the same degree of leadership skills. However, the findings did reveal a difference in the "Encouraging the heart" area in favor for female students, and with no differences in the other four dimensions. The literature generally agrees that there are no differences in leadership skills by sex (Posner & Brodsky, 1994; Bass, 1991; Komives,

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1991;), though some studies have pointed to increased levels of leadership skills amongst women, specifically in the areas of Enabling Others to Act and challenging the process (Romano, 1996; Komives, 1994).

A significant difference was found when comparing leadership skills between students who are members of university clubs and those who are not. Members reported a significantly greater degree of leadership skills related to all five dimensions. This is in line with existing research which suggests involvement in student organizations and clubs can have a positive impact on leadership development and academic performance (De Simone, 2012; Anderson et al., 2007; Cooper et. al., 1994).

The findings of this study suggest that undergraduate students possess moderate degrees of leadership skills. This has led to an increased demand for workshops and programs to help students develop and enhance their leadership competencies, with such initiatives becoming increasingly popular in institutions of higher education across the country.

This study's findings have established a baseline of leadership skills among undergraduate students, which is particularly important considering the increasing number of institutions that promise their students will graduate with these skills. As a result, there has been growing support for leadership development initiatives in higher education, as well as an increase in outcomes assessment that includes leadership competencies. Higher education institutions should take note of these findings and promote follow-up research that further builds upon these results, so that leadership is not only a common promise but also something that is actively practiced.

Recommendations

One recommendation that can be made based on the results of this research is for universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman to create better platforms and programs that are specifically designed to develop leadership skills among its student body. This could include dedicated courses, seminars, and workshops with teachers, directors, and professionals who have experience in developing and honing leadership qualities. Additionally, universities in both countries should provide more resources and opportunities for students to learn practical leadership skills through activities such as team sports, model United Nations, student government, and community service. By doing so, they will be able to cultivate a pool of motivated and knowledgeable student leaders who can drive positive change in their respective communities.

The findings of this study have several implications for those who teach classes in leadership, run leadership workshops and programs, as well as other administrators. Leadership program coordinators should focus more attention on a wider range of leadership skills, such as those related to community development, service learning, ethics and morality, and global leadership. Administrators should also assess students' leadership skills upon entering and exiting college in order to guarantee that the funds allocated are producing the desired results.

Future studies on student activities and development of leadership skills at public universities in Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman could look into the impact of these initiatives on student engagement and performance. Additionally, research could be done

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to assess the effectiveness of different approaches to leadership development and identify best practices that could be adapted and adopted by other universities and educational institutions. Furthermore, future studies should also look into how universities can foster an environment where students can develop strong networking capabilities, increase their resilience, and learn how to collaborate with others in order to achieve their goals. By researching these topics, more comprehensive and effective strategies for developing leadership among university students can be identified and put into practice.

Future studies could investigate the leadership skills of students from different academic backgrounds such as science and humanities. Additionally, research could be done to explore differences in leadership characteristics between men and women, so as to provide a more complete understanding of what constitutes leadership skills which can then be used to better assess students.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Human Participants

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