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Developing leadership skills in university students

Meruyert Uaikhanova[1]*, Aiman Zeinulina[1], Murat Pshembayev[2] and Albina Anesova[1]

Abstract: The authors offer their own program that allows leadership development and provides knowledge about leadership in an integrated way in higher education. The study aimed to test this program's effectiveness using multitest instruments in the form of a survey. The study was conducted with 196 students of Toraighyrov University in the conditions of representative sampling. The experimental group used the proposed method during the semester, the control group did not. Before and after the semester, the following tests were conducted: diagnostics of leadership abilities (Zharikov and Krushelnitsky), Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states, and methods for identifying communicative and organizational abilities (COA-1). The obtained results were compared using the Student's t-test to identify significant differences. In all tests, the experimental group showed statistically significant improvement in all indicators. Similarly, significant statistical differences were also found between the results of pre- and post-test, which allows one to assert that the proposed method contributes to leadership qualities development and reduction of negative emotions in students. Thus, the experimental group scored an average of 26.71 (out of possible 50 points) on the pre-test and 37.01 on the post-test, demonstrating a significant increase in the level of leadership qualities from weakly expressed to strongly expressed. According to the post-test results, the difference between the groups becomes statistically significant for both communicative and organizational tendencies ($p = 0.023$ and $p = 0.027$, respectively). In practice, the study results can be used to implement leadership development programs in universities.

Subjects: Multidisciplinary Psychology; Educational Research; Higher Education

Keywords: ability development methodology; English; leadership; nonlinguistic students; university

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1. Introduction

Leadership skills development in young people is relevant due to the importance of leadership topic itself throughout the world and due to the fact that there is little research on this topic. A state and society understand that young people need to be educated as leaders, special disciplines are introduced in universities, but there is a lack of fundamental and scientific research on leadership development in students. There are many different seminars on leadership qualities development in people, but they are no substitute for a quality scientific basis on this topic. There are also works on political leadership. The current study focuses on leadership abilities of each student, which will help him/her not only in his/her future work, but also in his/her adult life.

Leadership in contemporary studies is defined more as the ability to independently set goals and involve others in the process of achieving common goals or realizing shared values (Grigoropoulos & Grigoropoulos, 2020; Kratzer et al., 2008). Leadership can appear in any field and is given special attention in pedagogy. Within different learning types, leadership occupies an important place as one of the important outcomes of student development that teaching methods strive to achieve (Hishamuddin & Shukor, 2021; Villera Herrera & Pinto Lucas, 2020). Leadership can act as a significant predictor of graduates gaining a place in the labor market, as well as being a significant career-building factor.

In the structure of professionally important skills of a future specialist in the foreground today is their ability to show leadership qualities in different directions of social and professional activities (FarajAllah et al., 2018). In the stream of digital transformation, the determinant of leadership as a key element in any process of civilizational change remains a weighty aspect of the transformation of the learning process. The globalization of the use of information systems in educating students across disciplines is a great challenge to developing better leadership programs in the academic community (Rocha et al., 2022).

At the same time, leadership acts in connection with many other factors of students' psychological development. In many cases, empirical studies record increased motivation and decreased anxiety in learning in those who demonstrate or develop leadership qualities (Rau, 2018). Leadership can also manifest itself as a certain activity of a student, which is already characteristic of him/her and must be developed (Ewing et al., 2009; Mizintseva et al., 2018; Yu, 2019). Most often, leadership is seen as a quality that is developed in the process of collaborating with other students, interacting with an instructor, and communicating online (Tanaka-Ellis & Sekiguchi, 2019; Tatman, 2021).

The significant role of leadership in shaping future teachers is not in question, and leadership training for language teachers is the focus of much current research (Villera Herrera & Pinto Lucas, 2020). There is a particular focus on linking teachers' skills to online learning, which has become more relevant in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hishamuddin & Shukor, 2021; Klus & Müller, 2020). A teacher's ability to act as a leader, as some studies have documented, can be passed on to students in the form of leadership enhancement and understanding the skills needed for leadership (Thomas et al., 2019).

1.1. Literature review

Leadership researchers look at the issue from different perspectives. For example, Belgian scholars in a recent study considered leadership theories, focusing on an effective leadership school, particularly on methodology and school climate, examined effective professional development of school leaders, and emphasized that this topic needs further research (Danels et al., 2019). American scientists offered a methodology for developing students' leadership abilities through experiential-learning projects, which in their view build worldviews, rational communication, and "heart". They stated that during the study, the experimental group students had higher results in leadership abilities development and results in the subject than the control group students (Facca-Miess, 2015). Another American scholar bases his concept of leadership training on the cultural-psychological approach

proposed by educational psychologist and educator Bruner. The researcher notes that this approach adds value to student leadership training methods (Grimes, 2015). As can be seen from the bibliography, there is a special American journal dedicated to the problems of leadership research.

Modern research rarely uses leadership assessment with multiple overlapping scales at the same time, so that their results would make the overall result more reliable, accurate, and valid. There is also a kind of gap in the academic literature devoted to research and evaluation of individual leadership training strategies, techniques, and programs that are integrated into the core professional course and are not fully specialized programs (Patterson, 2012; Stephenson, 2020; Villera Herrera & Pinto Lucas, 2020).

Asbari et al. (2020) classified students' leadership abilities into three types: hard competencies (e.g., using a computer effectively), soft competencies (e.g., time management), and mixed competencies (e.g., interviewing a subordinate); 86% of the core competencies for hospitality management are soft competencies. These include work ethic, communication skills, teamwork, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, and adaptability. This is a clear indication of the feasibility of developing special programs to improve the leadership abilities of future professionals (Barnes, 2020).

The novelty and significance of the study consist not only in the development of leadership abilities in students, but also in the fact that the development of these abilities is proposed for students of non-language specialties. The authors suggest that leadership skills can be developed not only in a special leadership course, but also by incorporating special techniques into other disciplines, such as, in the case of this project, language studies. The relevance of the study is related to the special role of students' leadership in the context of online learning and further entry into labor market full of digital business tools. This necessitates the greater autonomy, self-awareness, and leadership qualities of any professional (Ewing et al., 2009). The role of leadership in foreign language teacher training is also relevant (Yu, 2019).

1.2. Problematic issues
At the current stage of the transformation of education in all corners of the world in the context of global challenges for professional staff, many studies cover the development of leadership as a basic competence of a student. However, it should be noted that a theoretical review of the psycho-emotional entrainment of this competence is not enough to form a complete paradigm of its unified implementation. It is necessary to consider not only the specifics of a student's future specialty, but also its demographic, social, and anthropogenic components. From this perspective, the lack of experimental judgments and applied practices on the implementation of specific tools to improve leadership in higher education institutions should be looked at against the background of the Russian education system.

The purpose of the work is to study the effectiveness of the proposed program to improve students' leadership qualities in connection with English studies. To realize the research goal, the following tasks were set:

- analyze Russian students' leadership qualities, leadership inclinations, and self-assessment of their emotional state with the help of leadership ability diagnostics (Zharikov and Krushelnitsky), Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states, and the method of identifying communicative and organizational abilities (KOA-1),
- implement in the training of the experimental sample the authors' methodology for the development of leadership qualities of students and the basic model and concepts of leadership structural components,
- investigate the change in leadership qualities and aptitudes criteria and the reduction of negative emotions after implementing the program by means of repeated tests.

2. Research methods

2.1. Research design
The authors' methodology was tested in English lessons for non-language students of Toraighyrov University. Experimental training took place in the 2nd semester of 2020–2021 academic year.

Having studied the scientific literature on the topic, the authors came to the conclusion that leadership structurally includes three components: cognitive, motivational, and activity.

The cognitive component includes understanding the set tasks, knowledge of leadership techniques and strategies, algorithms of organizational activity in the group, and ability to think practically.

The emotional and evaluative component is characterized by an internal readiness to accept the role of a leader, a desire to perform leadership functions, and an interest in organizing activities.

The activity component implies a developed ability to take practical leadership actions, the ability to use the available knowledge about leadership in practice, and the quickness of finding the optimal solution to managerial problems.

These activity types were used as the basis for the learning process and individual tasks in the proposed methodology of leadership development in students. These components were not measured separately in the statistical study, which was conducted in the form of a survey, but were used as a support for the methodological part of the intervention.

English classes are organized based on three groups of learning tasks: tasks aimed at the cognitive component; tasks aimed at the emotional and evaluative component; and tasks aimed at the activity component.

The first group includes tasks that are based on problematic methods

The second group includes the following learning task for the development of critical

The third group includes practical tasks—exercises that form learning and language skills; communicative exercises and tasks, etc.

The researchers did not collect, use, or store any personal information about the participants. The research did not affect academic assessment of student work and learning outcomes.

2.2. Research environment
The number of students who participated in the experiment was 196. Of these: the control group—127 students (64 women and 63 men), the experimental group—69 students (33 women and 36 men). All participants were 19–21 years old. The selection of participants was based on a random sample of first-year university students. The permissible sampling error does not exceed $p = 1.39$, taking into account the total value of the general sample and the conditional share of the trait. Thus, the sample can be considered representative.

2.3. Research instrument
During the experiment, to diagnose students' leadership abilities and their changes as a result of the proposed leadership development technique, the authors applied the following methods and questionnaires:

- diagnostics of leadership abilities (Zharikov and Krushelnitsky; Fetiskin et al., 2002); when selecting the basic methodology for achieving leadership ability, attention was paid to the

universality of the test form (suitable for any profession) and the intensity of its use in Eastern European countries. Diagnostics of leadership abilities as a test includes 50 questions, each with a "yes" or "no" answer. A point is awarded for each positive answer. Depending on the number of points, the level of leadership qualities development is determined: less than 25, leadership qualities are weakly expressed; within 26 to 35, leadership qualities are expressed moderately; from 36 to 40, leadership qualities are strongly expressed. The sum of points over 40 indicates that this person as a leader is prone to dictate.

- Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states (Stolyarenko, 2002); this questionnaire was created based on the author's development of a new typological approach to the study of personality (its choice was justified by sufficiently high validity and reliability coefficients, it is widely used in practical psychodiagnostics of the phenomenon of leadership). H. Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states offers a questionnaire containing 40 questions devoted to revealing respondents' assessment of their psychological state in relation to 4 emotional states: anxiety, frustration, aggression, rigidity. According to the key table, each of the questions can be scored from 0 to 20 points maximum: 0 to 7 points indicate a lack of certain emotion; from 15 to 20 points indicate a very high level of this emotion.

- methods for identifying communicative and organizational abilities (COA-1) (Sinyavskiy and Fedorishin; Istratova & Eksakusto, 2006). COA-1 includes 40 questions, 20 of which are aimed at studying communicative aptitudes and 20 characterize organizational aptitudes, but they are mixed together and are determined with the help of a key table. In each of the propensity types, the maximum score can be 20 at most, indicating the maximum propensity. In this case, a slightly modified version of this questionnaire with a simpler method of evaluation is used.

All three techniques have high validity and have long been used by Russian researchers to study leadership and emotional state among adolescents, young adults, and students.

2.4. Data gathering procedure
Interviews were conducted face-to-face with all participants, divided into several groups in different rooms and during the time recommended by the authors of these test methods. The tests were conducted twice in groups immediately before the start of the academic term using the described methodology (pre-test) and immediately after the end of the academic term (post-test). During the surveys, the researchers observed that there was no direct communication between the participants when they filled out questionnaires.

2.5. Analysis of data
The results of descriptive statistics for each of the tests were processed separately. Besides, for each of the tests (using Student's t-test), the presence of a statistically significant difference for control and experimental groups in the pre- and post-test was determined. The results were also compared using Pearson Chi-Square test and p-criterion.

Statistical software package SPSS 22.0 was used for statistical research.

2.6. Research limitations
This study was conducted at only one university and did not cover specialized institutions where leadership training is present. The study sought to identify the effectiveness of one particular methodology; no specialized research on the significant factors involved in shaping participant leadership was conducted.

3. Results
The first of the tests used in the study concerns leadership skills development. The results of this test are presented in Table 1. It shows that the t-test in relation to the measurements of control and experimental groups during the pre-test does not show any statistically significant differences

Table 1. Results of pre-test and post-test for diagnostics of leadership abilities (Zharikov and Krushelnitsky) and Student's t-test results

	pre-test		post-test		pre-test /post-test assessment, p-value
	mean	**SD**	**mean**	**SD**	
Experimental group	26.71	1.78	37.01	1.99	0.039
Control group	27.19	2.09	28.93	2.95	2.198
p-value	1.463		0.032		

in the scores obtained for this test. Similarly, there were no significant differences in the pre-test and post-test results in the control group. At the same time, p = 0.039 for the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group, indicating that the difference in the mean test values obtained in this group is significant and not random. The experimental group averaged 26.71 (out of possible 50 points) on the pre-test and 37.01 on the post-test, demonstrating a significant increase. On the scale (described by the authors of this test), the experimental group students' assessment increased from "leadership qualities are weakly expressed" to "leadership qualities are strongly expressed".

The second test dealt with determining two types of tendencies in leadership development, communicative and organizational (Table 2). No significant differences were noted between experimental and control groups during the pre-test before applying the proposed leadership development methodology. According to the post-test results, the difference between the groups becomes statistically significant for both communicative and organizational tendencies, p = 0.023 and p = 0.027, respectively.

The third test was a study of self-assessment of mental (negative) states. For all four assessed states, the negative state decreased in the experimental group. However, only in the case of anxiety (p = 0.048) and frustration (p = 0.026), there was statistical significance of positive changes compared to the control group and compared to the pre-test. For aggressive-ness, p = 0.054 is almost statistically acceptable difference between the mean values. Nevertheless, based on a rigorous assessment of the p-criterion, this value is not considered to be significant. For the control group, no significant difference in scores on the pre- and post-test was recorded, as in the previous tests (p = 0.368). For the experimental group, the difference in pre- and post-test scores for all four studied emotions on average reaches p = 0.035, i.e., it is significant (Table 3).

The pre-test results showed that control and experimental groups had approximately the same baseline data on leadership abilities level at the beginning of experiential learning. Pre-test results for all three tests showed statistically indistinguishable values for experimental and control groups, and then recorded significant positive changes for the experimental group with no significant changes in the control group.

As can be seen from the comparative tables, the experimental training results showed an increase in some indicators in both groups. However, in the control group, this growth is not significant and, as the authors think, is connected with the general preparation of students at the university. In the experimental group, this growth is significant and statistically different from the pre-test values and from the control group assessments. It is possible to consider that this growth is connected with the application of the developed leadership technique among students in English classes at the univer-sity. Thus, the authors made a conclusion that the developed leadership methodology is effective for nonlinguistic students in English classes at a university and can be recommended for use.

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Table 2. Results of pre-test and post-test for COA-1 method (Sinyavskiy and Fedorishin) and Student's t-test results															
	Communication tendencies				Organizational tendencies										
	pre-test		post-test		pre-test		post-test								
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD							
Experimental group	11.21	2.15	16.02	1.77	9.52	0.79	14.67	1.36							
Control group	10.25	2.91	11.78	1.09	11.91	1.36	12.31	2.03							
p-value	0.975		0.023		0.864		0.027								

Table 3. Results of pre-test and post-test for Eysenck's method and Student's t-test results

	Anxiety		Frustration		Aggressiveness		Rigidity		pre-test/post-test assessment, p-value
	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	post-test
Experimental group	14.25	7.86	16.28	9.15	10.05	5.14	11.76	6.83	0.035
Control group	13.89	11.12	16.02	14.86	12.09	11.92	12.11	9.15	0.368
p-value	0.087	0.048	1.12	0.026	0.389	0.054	0.862	0.39	

4. Discussion

The methodology used in this study includes specific test methods developed by Russian researchers, the effectiveness of which has been repeatedly confirmed in Russian practice. Similar types of empirical research can be found in a number of works by contemporary researchers (Carnabuci et al., 2018; Song et al., 2020). They usually apply one version of the questionnaire to determine some of the leadership components or the level of leadership development in a particular type of training or for a particular audience (Geyer et al., 2017; Henley et al., 2017). Leadership, as a rule, is studied as an independent phenomenon. In the present study, the focus was on the impact of a specific leadership development methodology.

The study of leadership's influence on various emotional states, in particular motivation or anxiety, has also been studied by researchers earlier (Drake, 2016; Rau, 2018). At the same time, leadership development always demonstrates both improved motivation and engagement in learning process, and a reduction in negative states, in particular anxiety and insecurity (Danels et al., 2019; Mikhno & Gres, 2017). The present study confirms these findings, but also extends their interpretation through simultaneous assessments of leadership development and students' organizational and communication tendencies.

Some of the results were not statistically valid. These are precisely the results that relate to the positive changes demonstrated by students in reducing aggressiveness and rigidity. Interpreting these results can be somewhat difficult, but both measures were still relatively low in the pre-test. Some researchers have already pointed out that measurements that show low primary rates may not be statistically valid (Thomas et al., 2019).

Many researchers pay attention to leadership as a predictor of success of a future specialist in labor market (Danels et al., 2019; Mizintseva et al., 2018). The significant increase in both organizational and communicative inclinations of the respondents in the present study can testify to this. Researchers have pointed out (in empirical studies and research reviews) that it is the ability to self-organize and communication skills that largely determine a graduate's success in labor market (Grigoropoulos & Grigoropoulos, 2020).

Leadership plays a significant role in shaping the basic skills of the 21st century, as presented by researchers (Klus & Müller, 2020). The importance of leadership is determined by greater individual freedom of expression, access to digital resources, and is stimulated by the personal uniqueness of each individual market participant. Without leadership, it is difficult to imagine a new economy based on information resources, unique human capital, and creativity (Grimes, 2015). The present study does not directly address the issue of the digital environment and online learning, however, the manifestation of a tendency to organize and increase communication in the experimental group can be interpreted as the increased capacity of these future leaders in the digital environment. This is also evidenced by a number of studies in which increased leadership skills correlated with increased effectiveness of online learning (Hishamuddin & Shukor, 2021; Tanaka-Ellis & Sekiguchi, 2019). The opposite also seems to be true, that is, adequate methods of online learning can contribute to the development of leadership as an independent quality (Klus & Müller, 2020).

Leadership development in both students and teachers in the process of learning English as a foreign language was considered. Students' leadership qualities are usually considered not in the context of education itself, but in the context of developing social skills, interaction with peers and teachers (Abe, 2020; Karagianni & Jude Montgomery, 2018). The present article considers methodology that, in contrast, attempts to integrate leadership development and leadership studies directly into the learning process.

In-depth, free-style interviews with open-ended questions were often used to assess leadership and other qualities of students (Tiew, 2018). This method can detect some important factors affecting both language learning and leadership, but the authors of the current study used

rigorous validated tests to get an accurate assessment using psychometric scales. This approach is more consistent with the task of assessing the impact of a particular method on student learning.

At the same time, analyzing the basic level of students' leadership skills in the Russian Federation, Pastukhova et al. (2020) point out that these abilities are mostly at an average level and need to be developed. As possible directions of solving the problem of students' leadership qualities' development, they offer introduction of special disciplines into the educational process, use of technologies and methods of organizing educational and pedagogical activity, focused on activation of students' leadership potential. The authors have developed a methodology of developing leadership abilities of nonlinguistic university students in English classes. This methodology consists of a set of tasks and exercises applicable in the course of studying English. The methodology is planned in the form of a special textbook for students who want to learn English while developing their leadership skills. This textbook is recommended for university English classes

5. Conclusions

In the structure of professionally important skills of a future specialist in the foreground today is their ability to show leadership qualities in different directions of social and professional activity. During the semester, the proposed methodology was used in the experimental group; it was not applied in the control group. For pre-test and post-test, there were surveys using diagnostics of leadership abilities (Zharikov and Krushelnitsky), Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states, and methods for identifying communicative and organizational abilities (COA-1). The obtained results were compared using the Student's t-test to identify significant differences between the mean values in the response samples. The English language program was organized based on three groups of learning tasks: tasks aimed at the cognitive component; tasks aimed at the emotional and evaluative component; and tasks aimed at the activity component. In all tests, the experimental group demonstrated improvement in all measures, confirmed as statistically significant differences, except for self-assessment of aggression and rigidity. The results of the pre- and post-test revealed significant statistical differences, which suggests that the proposed methodology contributes to leadership development and reduces the manifestation of negative emotions in students. Thus, the experimental group scored an average of 26.71 (out of possible 50 points) on the pre-test and 37.01 on the post-test, demonstrating a significant increase in the level of leadership qualities from weakly expressed to strongly expressed. According to the post-test results, the difference between the groups becomes statistically significant for both communicative and organizational tendencies ($p = 0.023$ and $p = 0.027$, respectively). The practical results obtained during the study can be integrated into leadership development programs for students in other universities.

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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability
Data will be available on request.

Ethics approval
The authors declare that the work is written with due consideration of ethical standards. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles approved by Toraighyrov University.

Consent to participate
All participants participated in the study based on the voluntary consent. The researchers did not collect, use, or store any personal information about the participants.

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