

DETERMINATION OF UNDERGRADUATES' ATTITUDES REGARDING LEADERSHIP

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The concept of leadership is complex. It is a sound relationship between leader and followers, which directs their effort towards achievement of a common objective. Attitudes are very important as it strongly influence thoughts and behavior of people.

The general objective of this study was to determine the leadership attitudes possessed by undergraduates in the University of Peradeniya. The specific objectives were to identify the employability skills that employers look for when recruiting a graduate, to determine the attitudes of undergraduates towards the importance of leadership, to determine the undergraduates' level of confidence regarding leadership and to assess the level of leadership skills in undergraduates.

The study was limited to the Faculties of Agriculture, Science and Arts in the University of Peradeniya. Multistage stratified random sampling method was used to select 200 students from the Faculty of Agriculture. Simple random sampling method was used to select 50 students each from the Faculties of Science and Arts. A Likert scale was used to measure the attitudes of students. Initially a 60-item leadership attitude scale was developed by modifying statements from available sources. The validity of this scale was checked by the experts. According to the comments and advice the most valid 45 statements (15 for each segment) were selected for inclusion in the psychometric instrument. This instrument was used to obtain the attitudes of undergraduates. By taking the mean and the standard deviation of the scores the students were categorized into three groups. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Some of the employability skills identified were teamwork, reliability, good communication, strong work ethic, willingness to keep learning, flexibility etc. Importance, confidence and leadership skills sub scales were significantly correlated to each other and the reliability coefficient was 0.89 for the 45 statement attitude scale compared to 0.80 for the 3 sub scale scores separately. Thus, a total score emphasizing all 45 items was taken to find out the attitudes regarding leadership. Undergraduates' attitude score ranged from 134 to 210. The total score distribution was a normal distribution. The majority of the students belonged to average attitudinal category (166-181) followed by high attitude students (>181). Undergraduates' Grade Point Average (GPA), participation in societies, being a leader in the school or in the University and their Faculty were the significant factors that had an impact on the students' attitudes regarding leadership. Thus participation in extra curricular activities should be encouraged. It was seen that students with a higher GPA had a higher attitude regarding leadership. When the students' involvements in societies were high their attitude regarding leadership was also high. Those who had been leaders had favorable attitude than those who were not leaders. Of the students in the Faculty of Agriculture, 32% had high attitude. Although the majoring module was not statistically significant there seems to be a trend in some departments. Factors like district, parents' occupation, A/L marks, semester and job preference did not have any significant impact on students' attitudes.