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Developing leadership skills in Peruvian high school students

César Morales, Peru

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School context

Colegio San Andres is situated in Lima, the capital city of Peru located in South America. Peru boasts a rich diversity of cultural backgrounds, making it a multi-ethnic country. Our official languages are Spanish, Quechua and Aymara, reflecting the varied linguistic heritage of our nation. With a population of approximately 30 million people, Peru is a vibrant and dynamic country.

About the author


César Morales is Headmaster of Colegio San Andres in Lima, Peru. He has a Doctorate in Education (BIOLA University, USA) and a Master's degree in Theology (Queen's University, Belfast, NI). César has published two books in Spanish: *The Catalyst Sermon* and *Renaissance: John Mackay and the Centenary of the independence of Peru*.



Key learnings

This research investigated the perspectives of students to design a leadership programme for teenagers.

- Students are deeply committed to actions that involve positive changes in the future of their society and their school.
- The intentional collaboration of the key stakeholders in the school is needed to implement a leadership programme for students that can promote real and significant changes within the institution and beyond.
- Shaping leadership in students meant making changes in policies in order to listen to their voices. Forming new leaders involved empowering them to disagree with our decisions.
- Integrity and consistency between words and actions, and good communication are skills that students seek in future leaders.
- Students look for a future with greater hope than their teachers; this shows that teachers play an important role in building students' dreams.



It is highly encouraging that students are deeply committed to actions that involve positive changes in the future of their society and their school.

A leadership programme should focus on developing the practical skills of adolescents in real-life situations.

Action research rationale

This topic is important to explore because leadership is a current issue in Peruvian society, as well as several countries in Latin America. Students need not only to be taught according to what literature says about leadership but also, they need to identify people as leaders and to develop leadership skills. However, students and teachers also need to understand what is their own definition of leadership and what attitudes and behaviours they value in their leaders. They also need to identify if their preferences are influenced by their culture. From this understanding, it will be possible to build a programme of leadership for students.

Exploratory research questions

1. What do senior students in Peruvian high schools currently think about leadership?
2. In what ways do the perceptions of leadership of senior students at Colegio San Andres differ or mirror those held by their teachers?
3. Considering their views on leadership, what essential components do senior students think should be included into a leadership programme designed specifically for Peruvian high school senior students?

Data collection procedures

The objective of this research is to investigate the perspectives of senior students concerning leadership and the topics that should be incorporated into a leadership training programme for teenage students aged 15 to 17 years at San Andres School in Lima, Peru.

The primary research method employed in this study is the use of focus groups. Each focus group will be tasked with responding to a set of 10 standardised open-ended interview questions.

These focus groups will comprise individuals of the same age or academic year, and each session is expected to last for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). It is important to note that the focus group interviews are not designed as problem-solving sessions; rather, they are structured to encourage discussion, allowing for both agreement and disagreement among participants, with the potential for discerning patterns through group interaction.

In this investigation, two focus groups will be established, each consisting of 6 to 10 participants from San Andres School.

All senior students will be invited to take part, and the two groups will be divided at random. However, the researcher will ensure a balanced distribution in terms of both numbers and gender within these groups.

The second method of enquiry in this study involves conducting interviews with teachers, totalling two participants, with the intention of contrasting their viewpoints with those of the students. It is crucial for this research to incorporate diverse opinions in the development of the programme. Furthermore, a Journal Reflection will be utilised as a tool to evaluate the researcher's own thoughts and viewpoints regarding the findings of the study.

Before commencing the research, consent will be sought from all participants, ensuring that they have a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives and their rights. In the case of students, parental or guardian consent will be a prerequisite, with parents/guardians receiving an information sheet and consent form akin to those provided to the students. All-important information will be given to participants.



Figure 1: Focus group with students, listening to their views on leadership.

Key findings from the exploration

- All participants agreed that effective leadership is possible in Peru and that effective Peruvian leaders seem to be more oriented toward people than to the task. Integrity and honesty were two main characteristics mentioned by the participants as important for good leadership in Peru.
- According to the interviews, Peruvian leaders will be more effective if they take seriously what followers believe concerning leadership and adapt themselves accordingly. Good communication is very necessary for being a good leader in Peru but it doesn't guarantee that his/her leadership would be really effective. Peruvian leaders look to be a combination of charismatic/value-based leadership, autonomous leadership, and self-protective leadership.
- The data reveals that students have greater hope for the future than teachers. That may be due to adults' experiences of disappointment. Additionally, teachers showed a greater preference for task-oriented leaders than people-oriented leaders. Both groups agree on preferring leaders who show values in their leadership.
- Although the teachers believe that a leader must be a good communicator, they stated that they were very distrustful of a leader who speaks well but does not demonstrate delivery.

- Both groups agree on carrying out a leadership programme for adolescents. However, while students demand more freedom to make decisions, teachers want more control over the decisions students make. Students want a leadership programme that contains more practical elements than theoretical (lectures). Both groups agree that communication is a skill that should be taught to future leaders, but they also both agree that communication alone, without values, is not enough for effective leadership.

Action plan

- Setting up a leadership development plan for adolescents is important and necessary due to the country's social situation. However, certain requirements must be considered. The programme should focus on developing practical skills of adolescents in real-life situations. This involves experiences that can be promoted in real contexts. The involvement of the whole school is required to establish an appropriate context for this.
- Real situations must focus on developing values and not just solving common problems. The programme must have a larger objective than mere personal control.
- The programme should involve learning communication skills such as public speaking and assertive communication.

Forming new leaders involves empowering students to disagree with our decisions, granting them the opportunity to influence important decisions, and understanding that this will bring positive consequences for everyone.

Action plan implementation

Although students who originally participated in the study graduated by the end of 2023, a small implementation programme based on the original project was carried out with the current senior students. A group of students with similar characteristics to the original group was assembled and invited to participate using informed consent. This new group was briefed about the findings of the original study.

Subsequently, they were asked to develop an ideal plan for the development of a leadership programme. Two main objectives were established:

1. A leadership development programme should foster hope that changes can be made for improvements.
2. Shaping leadership in students involves making certain changes in the school's educational policies in order to listen to the voices of the students.

Key findings after implementation

- It is highly encouraging to know that students are deeply committed to actions that involve positive changes in the future of their society and their school.
- The intentional collaboration of the key stakeholders in the school is needed in order to implement a leadership programme for students that can promote real and significant changes within the institution and beyond.
- Integrity, consistency between words and actions, and good communication are skills that students seek in future leaders.

Conclusions on research

Leadership is important for a country. Poor leadership that has been in place for a long time can discourage people from making necessary changes or aspiring for a better future. It is remarkable to realise that students look for a future with greater hope than their teachers; this shows to the researcher that teachers have an important role in building students' dreams.

It is also important to highlight that we must listen to the voices of our own students regarding what they think about our schools and how we can improve what we teach them. Forming new leaders involves empowering them to disagree with our decisions, granting them the opportunity to make and influence important decisions, and understanding that those decisions will bring positive consequences for everyone.

References

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Throughout the course of this research, artificial intelligence has been utilised for translation purposes only, as the questionnaires and interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Students have greater hope for the future than teachers; this shows that teachers have an important role in building students' dreams.