Leadership Characteristics of University Students Engaging in Volunteer Activities

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the youth leadership qualities and characteristics of university students who volunteer at the Elazig Youth Center, Turkey. The population of the study consisted of 146 university students, 86 females and 60 males. Youth Leadership Qualities Scale, which was developed by (Cansoy & Turan, 2016), was used as the data collection tool. Within the scope of the study, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was determined as 0.91 for the entire youth leadership qualities scale and it was observed that the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients varied between 0.70 and 0.80 calculated for the reliability of the factors. Thus, it was determined that the scale was a valid and reliable measurement tool. In the study, non -parametric tests were used in the data analysis. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test was to determine the difference between the groups in binary variables while the Kruskal-Wallis test was used for the variables with more than two groups. In the Kruskal-Wallis test, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine between which groups the difference existed. The analysis of the data was conducted using the licensed SPSS 25 software. In conclusion, it was determined that female students were more reliable in terms of leadership characteristics and their sense of responsibility was higher than male students. Moreover, it was determined that as the age of the students increased, their problem-solving skills also increased. Furthermore, university students who engaged in volunteer activities viewed themselves as successful in the activities they participated in based on youth leadership characteristics.

Keywords: youth leadership, university students, volunteer activities

1. Introduction

When we examine the sector, it is observed that if the volunteers do not take part in sports festivals and wide-ranging events, it is difficult to carry out these activities. The reason why people seek activities that realize their purposeful spare time and abilities is the development of the concept of volunteering as a leisure time activity. Volunteers often encounter practical and psychological barriers that are set against them. On the other hand, sports events are common events for individuals to devote their time to others while being attractive to individuals. Volunteering organizations and activities often vary and the role of volunteers differs depending on the activities. The reason for this is that society does not understand volunteering in general terms while the complexity of explaining volunteering in terms of a leisure-time activity contributes to this notion. Moreover, it is not accurate to define volunteers as a comprehensive and unified group (Krajnakova et al., 2018).

Inspired by the concept of solidarity, participation, commitment, etc., volunteering has become an integral part of human relations. Most importantly, volunteering, which has become a symbol of citizenship, also contributes to the welfare of the individual and society. Different from what is known all over the world, volunteering in Turkey has existed for a very long time. Although Turkish society has not yet fully embraced and utilized the various potential contributions of volunteering, it has traditionally valued volunteering (Un, 2013).

Volunteering covers activities that contribute to physical and mental development, socially benefit the profession, affect personal skills, and positively affect situations such as purposeful behavior. Volunteering, which managed to become a popular activity among people of different ages, can also be diversified as a form of leisure. There are also

potential volunteers who face psychological and practical barriers to volunteering. Volunteering as a leisure time activity creates harmony between an individual and society (Krajnakova et al., 2018).

Volunteering, which is a complex concept, is an activity that can be freely chosen while religious, cultural, and personal interests are the driving force of volunteering. Although volunteering is a phenomenon that creates value for individual volunteers in an invisible or non-reflective way and creates value for voluntary organizations, it does not provide an income. Volunteering is not accepted as a form of work or free time. Three composition parts can be beneficial in volunteering education. The first of these is predominantly free service activities while the other is active judgments in addition to the last one, which is known as volunteering as a popular form of leisure (Krajnakova et al., 2018).

An example of the continued interest in the concept of leadership for centuries is its spread from Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, to many groups in the field of management and leadership (Bolden, 2004). In psychology, it was emphasized that volunteerism was very important in providing conceptual and empirical studies (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group, often involving the structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of its members. Leadership occurs when a group member changes the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Any member of the group can show leadership (Bass, 1990). "Leadership is the process by which a person sets a goal or direction for one or more people and moves them with and with him or her in that direction with effectiveness and full commitment" (Jaques & Clement, 1994). For these young generations, gaining leadership qualities is one of the first ways that can facilitate their development and an approach that provides a positive perspective (Turan & Cansoy, 2015).

The reason for many studies conducted on leadership is that leadership has provided a multidimensional, comprehensive, complex, and rich perspective on the historical process (Saygınar, 2006: 37-38). The leader's discovery of his/her personality and taking the first steps to know him/her can affect the following individuals. At the same time, the leader begins to learn about the world while realizing that the process of being a good individual is a positive situation, and of course, his/her ability to express himself/herself and comprehend the world is an undeniable fact (Bektaş & Turan, 2014).

The development of youth emerges as a field that provides a different kind of competence and includes features such as responsibility awareness, team consciousness, visionary perspective, etc. within the scope of youth leadership. This development of young people includes the youth in terms of leadership (Edelman et al., 2004). Working together with a visionary perspective around a common goal and leadership is within the scope of youth leadership (Redmond & Dolan, 2014). It is also one of the duties of a youth leader to develop the weak aspects of an individual, support them, and psychologically follow up and help the young individuals' perception of weakness (Bayturan, 1995). Leadership education for young people provides young people the opportunity to lead and discover themselves. Within this context, serious efforts should be made to leadership education that can ensure the leadership development of young people (Turan & Cansoy, 2015). Producing, ensuring the development of basic leadership characteristics, collaborating closely with other people, and the ability to think socially are among the main objectives of leadership training programs (Redmond & Dolan, 2014).

The leader does the work, and the work done creates the leader. In mythology and stories, leaders are usually lonely heroes. When this image meets with faulty and troublesome stories, it can be observed that the concept of leadership is attached to a wrong meaning. Leaders demonstrate their effectiveness when they can influence and guide people quite efficiently in the light of their goals. Thus, it becomes clear that leaders are not just heroes. Leaders also need certain characteristics (Aypay & Tanrıöğen, 2013).

When certain common characteristics are examined, it can be observed that leaders establish synergetic teams, communicate, exemplify, inspire, instill confidence, motivate, show sensitivity to people, have a visionary perspective, and make quick and effective decisions while they are modest, good listeners, knowledgeable, altruistic, and passionate. Leaders should embrace the existence of a sense of justice, blend their expectations with their vision, act faithfully and decisively, use time effectively, adopt a flexible and development-oriented structure, and be reliable, consistent, and innovative while establishing open communication (Özden, 2010). Within this context, the current study aims to examine the youth leadership characteristics of university students who volunteer at the Elazig Youth Center, Turkey.

2. Method

The sample of this study, which was conducted to examine the youth leadership characteristics of university students

who volunteered at the Elazig Youth Center, Turkey, consisted of 146 university students. Youth Leadership Qualities Scale, which was used as a data collection tool in the study, was developed by (Cansoy & Turan, 2016). In the study, confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory factor analysis were performed within the scope of the construct validity of the measurement tool. As a result of these analyzes, it was observed that the scale consisted of 40 items and 7 factors. These factors included endeavor and the setting of a target (7 items), the ability to communicate (7 items), group skills (7 items), trusting and being trustworthy (6 items), decision-making skills (4 items), problem-solving skills (4 items) and responsibility (5 items). The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale and includes responses such as never (1.00-1.80), rarely (1.81-2.60), sometimes (2.61-3.40), often (3.41-4.20), and always (4.21-5.00) for the scoring. In this study, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the entire Youth Leadership Qualities Scale was determined as 0.91. It was also observed that the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated for the reliability of the factors varied between 0.70 and 0.80. Therefore, it was determined that the "Youth Leadership Qualities Scale" was a valid and reliable measurement tool.

According to the results of the normality test performed on the subscales and the total scores of the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale, it was observed that the kurtosis and skewness values were not between +1.5 and -1.5. Therefore, non-parametric tests were conducted. To determine the difference between the groups in binary variables, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted while the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted for the variables with more than two groups. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine between which groups the difference existed in the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test. The analysis of the data was conducted using the licensed SPSS 25 package software.

3. Findings

In Table 1, it was observed that 86 individuals are females while 60 individuals were males. Additionally, 82 individuals were between the ages of 18-21 while 64 individuals were 22 years old and older. Accordingly, it was determined that 100 individuals participated in volunteering activities for 1 year or less while 23 people participated in volunteer activities between 2 and 3 years. Furthermore, the number of those who participated in volunteering activities for 4 years or more was 23 people. While it was observed that 130 individuals thought they were successful in volunteering activities, 16 individuals considered themselves unsuccessful in these activities. Additionally, it was observed that 27 individuals led the activities while 119 people stated that they did not lead in these activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Independent Variables

Variables	Groups	N	%
Gender	Male	60	41.1
	Female	86	58.9
Age	18-21	82	56.2
	22 and older	64	43.8
Year of Volunteering	1 year and shorter	100	68.5
	2-3 years	23	15.8
	4 years and longer	23	15.8
Do you think you are successful in volunteering activities?	Yes	130	89.0
	No	16	11.0
Leadership in Volunteering Activities	Yes	27	18.5
	No	119	81.5

According to the results of the normality test performed on the subscales and the total score value of the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale, it was observed that the skewness and kurtosis values were not between +1.5 and -1.5 (Table 2).

Table 2. Normality Test Results

		Statistics	Standard error
Total	Skewness	-1.603	0.201
	Kurtosis	4.419	0.399
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	Skewness	-1.234	0.201
	Kurtosis	1.814	0.399
Being Able to Communicate	Skewness	-1.138	0.201
	Kurtosis	2.406	0.399
Group Skills	Skewness	-1.436	0.201
	Kurtosis	2.941	0.399
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	Skewness	-1.197	0.201
	Kurtosis	1.707	0.399
Decision-Making Skills	Skewness	-1.405	0.201
	Kurtosis	3.085	0.399
Problem-Solving Skills	Skewness	-1.060	0.201
	Kurtosis	1.710	0.399
Responsibility	Skewness	-1.599	0.201
	Kurtosis	3.139	0.399

When the subscales and mean total scores of the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale were examined based on a full score of 5 points, it was observed that the mean scores obtained in the analyses were well above the average (Table 3).

Table 3. Subscales and Mean Total Scores

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
N	146	146	146
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	4.17	4.28	0.656
Being able to communicate	3.99	4.07	0.648
Group Skills	4.23	4.35	0.698
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	4.27	4.50	0.641
Decision-Making Skills	4.17	4.25	0.701
Problem-Solving Skills	4.19	4.25	0.668
Responsibility	4.34	4.60	0.705
Total	4.19	4.25	0.551

When the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale was examined in terms of gender variable, it was determined that the difference in the "Endeavor and the Setting of a Target" and "Responsibility" subscales of female students was statistically significant in favor of female students compared to male students ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between the genders ($p > 0.05$) (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test Based on the Gender Variable

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Total	Male	60	64.92	3895.00	2065.00	0.040*
	Female	86	79.49	6836.00		
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	Male	60	68.72	4123.00	2293.00	0.252
	Female	86	76.84	6608.00		
Being Able to Communicate	Male	60	65.65	3939.00	2109.00	0.060
	Female	86	78.98	6792.00		
Group Skills	Male	60	67.63	4058.00	2228.00	0.159
	Female	86	77.59	6673.00		
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	Male	60	63.31	3798.50	1968.50	0.014*
	Female	86	80.61	6932.50		
Decision-Making Skills	Male	60	65.63	3937.50	2107.50	0.057
	Female	86	78.99	6793.50		
Problem-Solving Skills	Male	60	66.42	3985.00	2155,00	0.087
	Female	86	78.44	6746.00		
Responsibility	Male	60	62.56	3753.50	1923.50	0.008*
	Female	86	81.13	6977.50		

When the Youth Leadership Scale was examined in terms of age variable, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups in the "Problem-solving skills" subscale in favor of those who were 22 years old and older (p<0.05). When the total score of the scale and scores of the other subscales were examined, it was observed that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant (p>0.05) (Table 5).

Table 5. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test Based on the Age Variable

	Age	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Total	18-21	82	67.94	5571,00	2168	0.101
	22 and older	64	80.63	5160,00		
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	18-21	82	68.45	5613.00	2210.00	0.959
	22 and older	64	79.97	5118,00		
Being Able to Communicate	18-21	82	73.66	6040,00	2611.00	0.231
	22 and older	64	73.30	4691,00		
Group Skills	18-21	82	69.82	5725,00	2322.00	0.081
	22 and older	64	78.22	5006.00		
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	18-21	82	68.13	5586.50	2183.00	0.057
	22 and older	64	80.38	5144.50		
Decision-Making Skills	18-21	82	67.69	5550.50	2147.50	0.859
	22 and older	64	80.95	5180.50		
Problem-Solving Skills	18-21	82	72.96	5982.00	2579.50	0.024*
	22 and older	64	74.20	4748,00		
Responsibility	18-21	82	66.59	5460.50	2057.00	0.072
	22 and older	64	82.35	5270.50		

When the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale was examined in terms of the perception of success in volunteering activities, the differences between the groups in the total scores of the scale and all the subscales were statistically significant (p<0.05) (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test Based on Success in Volunteering

	Success in Volunteering	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Total	Yes	130	78.08	10150.00	445.00	0.000*
	No	16	36.31	581.00		
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	Yes	130	78.87	10253.00	342,00	0.013*
	No	16	29.88	478.00		
Being Able to Communicate	Yes	130	76.55	9951.50	643.50	0.000*
	No	16	48.72	779.50		
Group Skills	Yes	130	77.84	10119.50	475.50	0.000*
	No	16	38.22	611.50		
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	Yes	130	77.97	10136.50	458.50	0.011*
	No	16	37.16	594.50		
Decision-Making Skills	Yes	130	76.59	9956.50	638.50	0.004*
	No	16	4841	774.50		
Problem-Solving Skills	Yes	130	76.99	10008.50	586.50	0.012*
	No	16	45.16	722.50		
Responsibility	Yes	130	76.54	9950.00	645.00	0.000*
	No	16	48.81	781.00		

Table 7. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test Based on Voluntary Leadership

	V Leadership	N	Mean R	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Total	Yes	27	90.06	2431.50	1159.50	0.096
	No	119	69.74	8299.50		
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	Yes	27	85.70	2314.00	1277.00	0.072
	No	119	70.73	8417.00		
Being Able to Communicate	Yes	27	86.65	2339.50	1251.50	0.003*
	No	119	70.52	8391.50		
Group Skills	Yes	27	95.00	2565.00	1026.00	0.171
	No	119	68.62	8166.00		
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	Yes	27	83.50	2320.00	1336.50	0.087
	No	119	71.23	8453.50		
Decision-Making Skills	Yes	27	85.93	2321.00	1271,00	0.135
	No	119	70.68	8411.00		
Problem-Solving Skills	Yes	27	84.35	2277.50	1313.50	0.086
	No	119	71.04	8453.50		
Responsibility	Yes	27	85.96	2321.00	1270,00	0.024*
	No	119	70.67	8410.00		

When the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale was examined in terms of the variable of voluntary leadership, statistically significant differences were observed between the groups in the "Being Able to Communicate" and "Responsibility" subscales ($p<0.05$). Furthermore, there was no statistically significant difference between the other subscales and youth leadership qualities characteristics ($p>0.05$) (Table 7).

Table 8. Results of Kruskal-Wallis Test Based on the Years of Volunteering

Variable	Year of Volunteering	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p	Difference
Total	1 Year and Shorter	100	71.02	5.099	0.78	
	2-3 Years	23	66.41			
	4 Years and Longer	23	91.37			
	Total	146				
Endeavor and the Setting of a Target	1 Year and Shorter	100	73.82	1.387	0.500	
	2-3 Years	23	65.54			
	4 Years and Longer	23	80.09			
	Total	146				
Being able to communicate	1 Year and Shorter	100	69.77	4.166	0.125	
	2-3 Years	23	73.57			
	4 Years and Longer	23	89.65			
	Total	146				
Group Skills	1 Year and Shorter	100	69.45	6.654	0.036*	A-C
	2-3 Years	23	70.35			
	4 Years and Longer	23	94.26			
	Total	146				
Trusting and Being Trustworthy	1 Year and Shorter	100	72.74	1.159	0.560	
	2-3 Years	23	68.78			
	4 Years and Longer	23	81.52			
	Total	146				
Decision-Making Skills	1 Year and Shorter	100	69.75	2.672	0.263	
	2-3 Years	23	79.61			
	4 Years and Longer	23	83.72			
	Total	146				
Problem-Solving Skills	1 Year and Shorter	100	72.47	1.278	0.528	
	2-3 Years	23	69.33			
	4 Years and Longer	23	82.15			
	Total	146				
Responsibility	1 Year and Shorter	100	70.58	9.007	0.011*	A-C
	2-3 Years	23	63.04			B-C
	4 Years and Longer	23	96.67			
	Total	146				

When the Youth Leadership Qualities Scale was examined in terms of the variable of years of volunteering, it was observed that the difference between the groups on the mean total scores of the scale was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). When the subscales were examined, a statistically significant difference was observed between the groups in the "Group Skills" and "Responsibility" subscales ($p<0.05$). According to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which was conducted to determine between which subscales the difference was, it was observed that the mean scores in the "Group skills" subscale were higher than the "4 years and longer" response. In the "Responsibilities" subscale, it was observed that the mean score of the "4 years and longer" response was higher than the "1 year and below" and "2-3 years" responses (Table 8).

4. Discussion

According to the gender variable, it was observed that female participants had a higher mean score than male students in the subscales of trusting and being trustworthy and the responsibility subscales while the result was in favor of the female participants. In the study conducted by (Wang et al., 2012), no difference was observed between females and

males in the subscale of leadership skills. However, if the leadership subscale and the responsibility subscale for females were examined, it was determined that the scores were significantly higher than males according to the results of the study conducted by Tanrıbakan in 2003.

In another study, when the subscales were examined, it was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the Youth Leadership Qualities, "Communication", "Trusting and Being Trustworthy", "Decision-Making Skills" and "Problem-Solving Skills" according to gender. Additionally, this difference was in favor of female students (Cansoy, 2010). The difference between the subscales of trusting and being trustworthy and the gender variable provided results in the same direction in the current study. Accordingly, it can be stated that the female students were more reliable in terms of leadership characteristics and qualities and had a higher sense of responsibility compared to the male students.

In the current study, there was a significant difference in the age groups of university students participating in volunteering activities, which was between the problem-solving skills subscale of the youth leadership qualities scale and only those who were 22 years old and older. However, there was no significant difference between the other subscales of the youth leadership qualities scale and the age groups of the students. Accordingly, it can be said that as the age of the students increases, their problem-solving skills become greater than their leadership characteristics. Experiences in the past are thought to be effective within this context.

In our study, it was determined that the students who volunteered in youth centers viewed themselves as successful in volunteering in terms of youth leadership characteristics. (Abban, 2016) examined the students studying at Yalova University in the study titled "Volunteering Levels and Expectations of Youth in Voluntary Organizations". In this study, 71.1% of the participants stated that taking part in voluntary activities contributed to their career planning. The results of this study support the findings of the present study. Moreover, this study supports the present study in terms of the results in terms of the "endeavor and the setting of a target" aspect. In a different study, results such as enabling young people to acquire new skills, developing existing talents, establishing social communication, self-realization, and appreciation of volunteers were obtained through the activities of youth centers. Accordingly, it can be said that the results obtained in this study are in line with the findings of being able to communicate, be trustworthy, and be reliable in the current study (Yılmaz et al., 2019). Moreover, it can be stated that the students participating in the volunteer activities exhibit their decision-making and problem-solving skills as individuals who compete in terms of youth leadership characteristics, communicate well, use group skills, and are trusted while they view themselves as successful in their sense of responsibility.

Additionally, it was observed that the group skills and responsibility levels of the students who participated in volunteering activities for 4 years or longer were higher than the students who participated in volunteer activities for shorter periods of time.

In another study, when the relationship between leadership tendencies and the duration of serving as volunteers as the camp leader was examined, statistically significant differences were observed in the levels of political leadership and structural leadership. Accordingly, it was determined that the political and structural leadership orientations of the camp leaders with a serving period of 3 years or longer were at higher levels compared to the camp leaders with a serving period of shorter than 1 year (Yılmaz & Yenel, 2020). Accordingly, it can be stated that as the duration of participation in volunteer activities increases, the group skills and responsibility levels of the students also increase.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it was determined that female students were more reliable in terms of leadership characteristics and had a higher sense of responsibility than male students. Moreover, it was determined that as the age of the students increased, their problem-solving skills increased. In the study, university students who engaged in volunteer activities viewed themselves as successful in terms of youth leadership characteristics in the activities they participated in. Finally, it was observed that the leadership roles of the participants in volunteer activities had a positive effect on their communication and responsibility levels while the group skills and responsibility levels of the students who participated in volunteering activities increased as the participation time in the activities increased.

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