

Empowering Tomorrow's Changemakers: Youth Leadership in Student Representatives Councils  
(*Memperkasakan Penggerak Perubahan Esok: Kepimpinan Belia dalam Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar*)

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the role of youth leadership in student representative councils (SRCs) and its impact on empowering young individuals as changemakers for nurturing a generation of responsible and compassionate leaders who can drive positive change, create stronger communities, and work towards a better future for all. The research addresses the following questions: How can SRCs serve as platforms for nurturing and developing youth leadership skills? How can youth leadership within SRCs drive positive change within educational institutions, and how does youth leadership development in SRCs benefit the individuals involved? The qualitative method involved face-to-face interviews with respondents who support the SRCs at the University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), focusing on student priorities. The selection of this informant is based on youth leadership in SRCs at UNIMAS. The data were analysed using thematic analysis by identifying and interpreting recurring themes or patterns in the qualitative data. The research observes and evaluates the key aspects of their leadership styles: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills. By shedding light on the effectiveness of youth leadership in SRCs, this paper seeks to inspire and encourage the development of future leaders committed to making positive changes in the development of students and the betterment of society at large.

Keywords - Youth Leadership, Student Representative Councils (SRCs), Empowerment, Positive Change, Skill Development, and Changemakers.

ABSTRAK

*Kertas penyelidikan ini meneroka peranan kepimpinan belia dalam majlis perwakilan pelajar (MPP) dan impaknya ke atas memperkasakan individu muda sebagai pembuat perubahan untuk memupuk generasi pemimpin yang bertanggungjawab dan penuh belas kasihan yang boleh memacu perubahan positif, mewujudkan komuniti yang lebih kuat dan berusaha ke arah masa depan yang lebih baik. Untuk semua. Penyelidikan menjawab soalan berikut: Bagaimanakah JPP boleh berfungsi sebagai platform untuk memupuk dan membangunkan kemahiran kepimpinan belia? Bagaimanakah kepimpinan belia dalam JPP dapat memacu perubahan positif dalam institusi pendidikan, dan bagaimana pembangunan kepimpinan belia dalam JPP memberi manfaat kepada individu yang terlibat? Kaedah kualitatif melibatkan temu bual bersemuka dengan responden yang menyokong JPP di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), memfokuskan kepada keutamaan pelajar. Pemilihan informan ini adalah berdasarkan kepimpinan belia di JPP di UNIMAS. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan mengenal pasti dan mentafsir tema atau corak berulang dalam data kualitatif. Penyelidikan memerhati dan menilai aspek utama gaya kepimpinan mereka: komunikasi, kerja berpasukan, penyelesaian masalah dan kemahiran penyelesaian konflik. Dengan memberi penerangan tentang keberkesanan kepimpinan belia dalam JPP, kertas kerja ini berusaha untuk memberi inspirasi dan menggalakkan pembangunan pemimpin masa depan yang komited untuk membuat perubahan positif dalam pembangunan pelajar dan peningkatan masyarakat secara amnya.*

*Kata Kunci - Kepimpinan Belia, Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar (MPP), Pemerkasaan, Perubahan Positif, Pembangunan Kemahiran dan Pembuat Perubahan.*

## INTRODUCTION

Youth leadership plays a crucial role in fostering the development of young leaders, and we can ensure that our community is well-positioned to address the challenges and opportunities of the future. For years, leadership scholars and practitioners have strived to define youth leadership and design models to illustrate its structure for practical use in leadership education (Douglas et al., 2008). At the heart of this transformative movement lies the dynamic interplay between youth leadership in Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and institutions that hold the potential to cultivate the next generation of changemakers. This paper explores "Empowering Tomorrow's Changemakers: Youth Leadership in Student Representative Councils," seeking to unravel the intricate relationship between youth leadership, SRCs, and their collective potential to drive positive change.

As educational landscapes evolve, SRCs have evolved beyond their traditional governance roles to serve as fertile grounds for nurturing the leadership prowess of young individuals. The shift towards harnessing the power of youth leadership within these councils has sparked a wealth of discussions and studies. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of youth involvement and leadership development, this knowledge framework has limitations and conflicts. Notably absent is a comprehensive understanding of the precise mechanisms SRCs can effectively mould responsible and compassionate leaders capable of instigating meaningful change.

Because of these knowledge gaps, the pressing need for an in-depth examination of youth leadership within SRCs becomes evident. This study seeks to address this need by probing the intricate dynamics that underlie youth leadership development in SRCs and its subsequent impact on future youth leadership development.

The central problem at the heart of this inquiry revolves around understanding how SRCs can optimally serve as platforms for nurturing and honing youth leadership skills. Additionally, the study seeks to uncover how youth leadership within SRCs can be harnessed as a driving force for positive change within educational institutions. Exploring how such leadership experiences within SRCs shape the individuals involved and equip them for a future as responsible and compassionate leaders is essential.

In pursuit of these objectives, the study employs a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research can help researchers access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, enabling the development of

an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Face-to-face interviews are conducted with respondents who are actively engaged in student leadership roles within the SRCs of the University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This informed selection of informants ensures a focused exploration of youth leadership practices and their implications within a real-world context.

The subsequent sections of this paper will delve into the findings obtained through thematic analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis (TA), as a qualitative analytic method, is widely used in health care, psychology, and beyond (Sutton & Austin, 2015). By meticulously examining these young leaders' leadership styles, communication proficiencies, teamwork dynamics, problem-solving strategies, and conflict-resolution abilities, the paper uncovers invaluable insights into the effectiveness of youth leadership within SRCs.

Ultimately, this paper aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential embedded within youth leadership and SRCs. By illuminating the impact of these leadership experiences, this research aims to inspire the development of future leaders who possess the capabilities to incite positive change within their academic environments and, by extension, within society at large. Through this exploration, we aim to equip tomorrow's changemakers with the tools to catalyse a better future for all.

## RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The findings of this study offer a nuanced understanding of how youth leadership within SRCs can be a driving force for positive change. The research bridges the knowledge gaps outlined in the introduction by examining student leaders' leadership styles, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution abilities. This work elucidates mechanisms for effective youth leadership development and its potential impact on future leaders. Using qualitative interviews provides depth and authenticity to insights, enhancing the study's validity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Location of research

The research area is the most crucial aspect of a scientific study of geography because, according to the definition of the term itself, geography can refer to the science of studying where something is located on

the earth's surface and the reasons for the occurrence of that fact. As a result, the location of a place may be separated into numerous categories, including place name, position, and mathematical location. This research was conducted at UNIMAS, a member of the SRCs Cabinet.

### Research design

In this research, the interpretivism method is employed to explore the role of youth leadership in SRCs and its impact on empowering young individuals as changemakers. An interpretive research design facilitates exploring and comprehending participants' context, meanings, and interpretations concerning the events or phenomena under examination.

### Research sampling

A propositional sampling approach was used in this study to select initial respondents from the UNIMAS SRCs. Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques where units are chosen because they have the required characteristics in the sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling.

To achieve the study's objectives, selecting accurate information is very important. This is so because the objective research set can help the researcher select the information suitable for the research being conducted. The researcher has selected a total of five informants to obtain research data. The selection of informants was focused on Cabinet Members of the SRCs UNIMAS. The primary purpose of the researcher in selecting SRC members is based on the leadership of the SRCs at UNIMAS, which is to explore their experience and involvement in leadership. Therefore, the selection information is based on the following criteria:

- i. Male and Female.
- ii. Cabinet Member of the SRCs UNIMAS.
- iii. Involved in leadership programs inside and outside the University.
- iv. Student at UNIMAS.

The number of samples for qualitative studies is small. Study sampling is an important element that researchers need to focus on in order to obtain more accurate and detailed data and information based on the study population. This study uses a purposive sampling method. The researcher used the sampling method to achieve an objective study that requires information from people with extensive experience and who have

been involved in leadership programs. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that determines the study sample with specific criteria to obtain more accurate data. In addition, the use of sampling aims to assist the researcher in identifying the involvement of information, whether directly or indirectly, when obtaining information and data.

### Data collection

To collect data from research participants, this study used qualitative methodologies. As a result, the researcher used qualitative research methods to research the role of youth leadership in student representative councils and its impact on empowering young individuals as changemakers through a face-to-face interview protocol with UNIMAS SRCs participants. This is an interpretive strategy influenced by humanities and social science studies of the time in connection to the qualitative method. Qualitative research investigates phenomena using the philosophy of interpretivism.

### Data analysis method

Braun and Clarke (2006) described that the thematic data analysis approach is utilised to analyse the data by identifying patterns or themes within the gathered information. This method is particularly effective in qualitative studies aimed at exploring connections between patterns in a phenomenon and explaining the extent of its occurrence from the researcher's perspective.

The research focused on the SRCs Cabinet at the UNIMAS, utilising an interpretivism method for an exploratory study on youth leadership. The study employed a propositional sampling approach, specifically purposive sampling, to select five informants based on criteria such as gender diversity, cabinet membership, and leadership program involvement. Data collection involved face-to-face interviews influenced by humanities and social science studies. Thematic data analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the qualitative data. The methodology aimed to comprehensively explore the role of youth leadership in SRCs and its impact on empowering young individuals as changemakers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Student leadership within SRCs is pivotal in driving positive change within educational institutions.

Advocacy and student voice: student leaders in SRCs advocate for the student body, voicing their concerns and needs to the administration. These leaders can influence institutional policies, curriculum development, and campus facilities by effectively conveying student perspectives, resulting in a more student-centred environment. Furthermore, the benefits of student representation are manifold: enhancement of educational quality through the inclusion of student voice in university governance and growth of capabilities and skillsets of student representatives (Douglas et al., 2008).

Collaborative decision-making: SRCs promote collaborative decision-making by involving students in discussions about curriculum, facilities, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of campus life. This inclusive approach empowers students to co-create their educational environment, making decisions more attuned to their preferences and needs. International conventions and protocols such as Article 12(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 2015 require universities to provide students with the right to express their opinions or concerns freely regarding the decision-making processes and practices that affect them. In so doing, the UDHR creates a universal standard for university governance. Moreover, inclusive participation in collaborative decision-making involves inviting students from diverse backgrounds and academic levels to participate. This ensures a representative mix of opinions and perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive decision-making process. Collaborative decision-making strengthens the relationship between students, faculty, and administration. It promotes mutual understanding, respect, and shared commitment to educational excellence.

Community engagement activities organised by youth leaders within SRCs profoundly foster a sense of community and shared responsibility among students. These initiatives go beyond academics and create a holistic and enriching campus experience. Community engagement initiatives contribute to a positive campus atmosphere by personally benefiting students both presently and in the future. Students who volunteer for just one hour or more a week are 50% less likely to abuse alcohol and cigarettes, become pregnant, or engage in other destructive behaviours. Volunteering in community service will also develop soft skills among students, such as respecting others, being helpful and kind, understanding people's differences, developing leadership skills, becoming more patient, and better understanding of citizenship. These community engagement activities allow students to connect with

their peers, faculty, staff, and the local community. This interaction bridges gaps, breaks down barriers, and creates a more connected campus environment. Participating in events and projects organised by SRCs helps students feel like an integral part of the campus community. A sense of belonging enhances overall satisfaction, motivation, and academic success. Research indicates a sense of belonging is positively associated with academic success and motivation. This shared responsibility cultivates a culture of active involvement and collaboration, enriching the overall student experience.

SRCs serve as valuable platforms for nurturing and developing youth leadership skills.

SRCs indeed serve as valuable platforms for nurturing and developing youth leadership skills. These councils provide an environment where students can engage in various leadership roles and responsibilities, allowing them to cultivate essential skills and qualities crucial for their personal growth and future endeavours.

SRCs fulfil this role with leadership opportunities: SRCs offer various leadership opportunities, such as executive positions, committee memberships, event organising, and spokesperson roles. These positions enable students to take on leadership responsibilities, make decisions, and guide initiatives. Executive positions: SRCs typically have executive positions such as president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. These roles mirror executive leadership in organisations and provide students with firsthand experience in managing teams, setting agendas, and overseeing operations. Next, committee memberships: SRCs often have specialised committees focusing on academics, student welfare, events and communication, foreign and international relations, and human capital development. Students who join committees learn the dynamics of working in smaller groups, collaborating on specific tasks, and contributing to the overall objectives of the council. In addition, SRCs plan and execute events in event organising roles, which require organisational and project management skills. Students in event organising roles within SRCs learn to coordinate logistics, manage budgets, and ensure smooth execution – skills applicable to leadership roles in various contexts. Students learn together to ensure the program or event runs smoothly and well.

Similarly, the role of a spokesperson is to be a spokesperson for the SRCs, which involves representing the student body in discussions with faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders. This role develops effective communication skills the ability

to articulate student concerns, and negotiate on their behalf (Sebastien, 2017). Students learn to articulate their ideas, listen to others, and convey messages clearly; this skill is vital for effective leadership.

The SRCs strive to develop youth leadership to benefit the individuals involved.

Here are some crucial factors to consider in attaining this goal efficiently. As a result of the responses of the responder participants, SRCs has undertaken a Structured Leadership Program. They plan and carry out an organised leadership development program that includes a range of workshops, seminars, and training sessions. Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, and public speaking are all covered in the program. This program is suitable for the needs and interests of student participants. Furthermore, Foreman and Retallick (2016) state that a large body of research supports the idea that student involvement in various programs and activities across the university has a significant impact on their leadership skills.

In addition, mentoring and guidance. Pair experienced leaders (lecturers, older students, community members, etc.) with SRC members as mentors. These mentors can provide guidance, advice, and a supportive environment for MPP members to learn and develop their leadership skills. This concept has been used and widely interpreted in an organisational context, for example, in universities where social responsibility among SRCs is encouraged through their training and voluntary programs (Jabbour, 2010).

Next, responsibility. This concerns the roles and responsibilities that are meaningful to SRC committee members. This role can involve event planning, community outreach, project management, and more. By entrusting students with real responsibility, they can learn through hands-on experience. This matter is also in line with higher institutions responsible for forming future leaders with solid character (Skalicky et al., 2018).

#### Comparative Analysis between UNIMAS SRCs and UMS SRCs

Total Number of Cabinet Members: UNIMAS SRCs comprise 15 cabinet members, while UMS SRCs comprise 35 cabinet members, indicating a significant difference in size. The larger cabinet size in UMS SRCs may suggest a more diverse representation of perspectives and responsibilities within the student body than in UNIMAS SRCs.

Program Involvement: UNIMAS SRCs and

UMS SRCs likely involve members from various academic programs within their respective universities. However, the extent and nature of program involvement may differ. In UNIMAS SRCs with a smaller cabinet size, each member may have a broader range of responsibilities, potentially leading to more cross-disciplinary collaboration. Conversely, in UMS SRCs with a larger cabinet size, more specialised roles may correspond to specific academic programs, allowing for deeper focus and expertise in respective areas.

Management Involvement in Leadership: The level of management involvement in leadership roles within UNIMAS SRCs and UMS SRCs could vary based on university policies and organisational structures. In both cases, university administrators may have different degrees of influence or oversight in student governance. However, the larger size of UMS SRCs may necessitate more structured management involvement to ensure effective coordination and communication among cabinet members and between the student body and university administration. In contrast, the smaller size of UNIMAS SRCs may allow for more direct interaction and autonomy in decision-making among cabinet members.

## CONCLUSION

The theories and discussions presented throughout this paper culminate in a comprehensive understanding of the significance of youth leadership within SRCs and its transformative potential. The exploration of how SRCs serve as platforms for nurturing and developing youth leadership skills has illuminated the multi-faceted nature of this process. As highlighted earlier, SRCs provide students with diverse leadership opportunities, enabling them to cultivate essential traits, skills, and values that contribute to responsible and compassionate leadership.

Through a deep dive into the mechanisms of collaborative decision-making, community engagement, and the promotion of positive change within educational institutions, it becomes evident that youth leadership in SRCs is not confined to governance but extends to shaping an academic institution's culture, environment, and collective mindset. The role of SRCs in driving positive change, fostering inclusivity, and nurturing proactive problem solvers underscores their transformative role in moulding tomorrow's leaders.

Notably, this paper underscores the pressing need for such youth leadership development. It addresses the knowledge gaps within existing literature and emphasises the essential role SRCs can play in

cultivating students' leadership potential. The conclusion reaffirms the paper's stance on the positive impact of SRCs in preparing responsible, compassionate, and forward-thinking individuals who are equipped to drive meaningful change within educational institutions and society as a whole.

This study sheds light on the intricate dynamics of youth leadership within SRCs and emphasises their collective potential to catalyse a brighter future. The conclusion reiterates the significance of investing in developing young leaders through SRCs, highlighting their role in shaping a more inclusive, responsive, and empathetic educational environment. As we contemplate the insights gained from this research, it is clear that empowering tomorrow's changemakers through youth leadership is a journey with far-reaching implications, ultimately leading us towards a more positive and promising future.

The discussion outlines the key findings, emphasising the role of SRCs in driving positive change, promoting collaborative decision-making, and engaging in community activities.

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