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Research Brief

EPL IMPACT

Presented by

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**Empowering Student Voice
with Student Leadership**



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Introduction

Most educators would agree that leadership is a valuable skill for young people to possess to facilitate their future careers but more deeply, perhaps, to enable them to contribute more effectively to their schools and communities. In this study, 14 to 18 year old students attending the global network of Round Square schools and their teachers were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on student leadership. The study addressed a missing lens in research on how students articulate, experience and perceive leadership, given that most leadership research conducted in schools has focused on adults. Using a mixed-method research design, quantitative online survey data from 6,760 students and 1,695 teachers across 34 countries and, therefore, diverse cultural contexts were explored. This data informed the framing, collection and analysis of the qualitative interview data from 93 students and 21 teachers at 12 schools worldwide. The findings of this study can inform about what leadership means to young people; the most effective experiences for building leadership skills; and the potential impact of student leadership. Furthermore, the findings underline the value of practical leadership experience, the leadership potential that young people have and their capacity to drive positive change, and demonstrate how important it is for schools to provide students with opportunities to experience leadership in some form not only for their personal development but to empower them to be able to contribute to their school, society, and worldwide.



Key Issues and Significant Findings

- 1 The students believed communication, confidence, honesty, responsibility, and listening skills to be the most important qualities of effective leaders.
- 2 The students reported holding more systemic than hierarchical leadership attitudes and beliefs.
- 3 Although many students perceived an intergenerational gap existing with adults, there was more uniting than separating students and teachers in conceptualising leadership.
- 4 Both students and teachers valued leaders who support and positively influence others whilst working collaboratively towards a shared objective.
- 5 The top five participatory activities reported by the students for building their leadership skills were groupwork, projects, presentations, hobbies, and sports; whereas the teachers considered groupwork, volunteering, projects, sports, and presentations to be their top five.
- 6 Students and teachers both emphasised learning through diverse activities and experiences, inside and outside of the classrooms, involving leadership responsibilities whilst working collaboratively towards a shared objective.
- 7 More formal leadership roles and structured training can be valuable for building leadership, but may not increase self-efficacy as students become more self-aware and self-critical of their abilities.



- 8 Students recommended that schools expand leadership opportunities allowing all students to experience leadership.
- 9 Students and teachers were confident everyone has the potential to be an effective leader, and leadership can be learnt through experience. They appreciated, however, that being a leader is more accessible for some and leadership styles vary.
- 10 Leadership experience should be integral to schools; it provides students with personal benefits and enables them to contribute.
- 11 Students have significant potential to bring about positive change.
- 12 Students should be included in decision-making processes so that their potential can be leveraged in order to make a positive impact on schools, societies, and globally.

Main Stakeholders and Engagement with Them

- The main stakeholders were students attending Round School schools and their teachers.
- This was a large-scale study divided into two main parts: online survey data gathered from 6,760 students and 1,695 teachers, followed by interviews were conducted with 93 students and 21 teachers.



Recommendations and Implications for Schools

The study can inform schools worldwide about:

- What leadership means to young people;
- The most effective experiences for building leadership skills; and
- Who can be a leader and the potential impact of student leadership.

The findings:

- Underline the value of practical leadership experience, the leadership potential of young people, and their capacity to drive positive change.
- Point to the importance of schools providing opportunities for all students to experience leadership for their personal development and to empower them to contribute to schools, societies and globally.



For more Information:

- 1 Wright, E., Walker, A., Bryant, D., Lee, M., Hassan, K. S., & Choi, S. (2021). *A cross-cultural study of student leadership in Round Square schools*. Round Square ([Click to read](#))
- 2 For enquiries, please contact Dr Ewan WRIGHT by etmwright@eduhk.hk.



Video Interview

