

Table of Contents

1. <u>Introduction</u>	1
1. Background	1
2. Research question	3
3. Aims of the research	3
4. Discussion	4
2. <u>Methodology</u>	5
1. Research approach, methodology and design	5
2. Data Collection	6
3. Data analysis	7
4. Quality of the research	8
5. Ethical considerations	8
3. <u>Intended Outline</u>	9
4. <u>Time Plan</u>	10
5. <u>References</u>	11

1. Introduction

Student organizations are part of the history of many countries' higher education with the main purpose from inception to express the student's voice. They encouraged students to manage their free time through engagement in social, political and extracurricular activities. In addition, Amirianzadeh et al (2011) argue, that student organizations were established with the aim of enhancing the political, social, ethical, cultural and scientific levels of growth among students across the world. The significant role of student organizations was observed in the 18th and 19th centuries when students initiated rebellions against restrictive policies (Novak, 1977). In particular, student activism became a crucial function of the associations during the era of Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X with the aim of conquering racial discrimination in the United States. The two leaders (Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X) inspired many African American youths to pursue their dreams in leadership.

1.1 Background

The history of western higher education has witnessed many student movements owing to the unique nature of its campuses. In each period, there have been unique protests for students rights which represent the dynamic nature of these organizations (Broadhurst, 2014). The tactics used to attain student's goals have shifted from the use of violence to the use of negotiations led by student leaders. In this sense, it's clear that modern student organizations provide a better opportunity to nurture leaders.

Recently, the role of student associations has grown beyond political activism to growing interactions and nurturing leaders through exchange programs. The communication between students in these organizations aids the creation of diversity in universities and the inclusion of different viewpoints from students (Altbach, 1989). In addition, the rise in international student organizations has provided a platform where student leaders from different nationalities can interact and experience leadership on an international scale. This implies that there's a possibility of developing multinational leaders using international student organizations.

On the other hand, student development can be traced back in 1936 - a period associated with the beginning of American education. In this context, universities played the role of facilitators for the perfection of human skills via attainment of maturity among students. Miller (1997) articulated that student leadership development was an important part of a student's life to be provided by colleges and universities. It was basically the process in which an individual was subjected to changes that went on to elicit a somewhat complex behavior as a result of the capability to overcome the increasing life challenges (Austin, 1984). To this effect, Astin (1984) proposed that the universities and colleges played a critical role in the development of student leadership.

Similarly, Boyer (1987) argued that student development is one of the most significant experiences of university students and was, therefore, a duty of the higher learning institutions. In this context, he exhibited that the time spent by students in the university and the number of participatory activities characterizing their stay in the university had the potential to affect the quality of leadership experiences. In more specific terms, Astin (1993) showed that there was a positive relationship between student leadership development and certain critical environmental factors. These factors were: interaction between students, student to faculty interaction, volunteering activities, provision of tutoring service to other students, intramural sports, participation in group class projects, making presentations in class and fraternity membership.

Astin (1993) reinforced the development of student leaders through student organizations via his findings that students thrive when universities work together to enhance involvement in co-curricular activities. The leadership outcomes were more pronounced when students engaged

to practice what they learned in classrooms or service learning projects that had a direct relationship with class work. This means that student organizations could only yield leaders if the students enrolled for leadership courses in their respective colleges.

According to Astin (1984), students who involve themselves in university organizations or associations and those who assume leadership positions in university activities or in-class sessions have a higher chance of developing leadership qualities. The period of time that students spent on involvement in student activities had positive effects on the development of leadership (Astin, 1993). Students are likely to develop more leadership traits when they spend more hours in student associations (Guido-Dibrito and Bachelor, 1988). However, with the globalization and nowadays new technology, the role of the student organization has changed and as a result of this change, a new and different leadership skills and traits are required. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) will be used to find those skills. Founded on 16th October 1989, ESN grew significantly as an international student organization to become the largest student association in Europe which develops and promotes student exchange programs. The choice of the organization was influenced by several factors. First, it offers its services to a relatively large number of students (approximately 200,000 students per year). Secondly, ESN being an international student organization, will provide us with a diverse team of research subjects for the thesis. All that will be used to increase the significance of the results of this study.

1.2 Research question

The purpose of this research is to determine how taking leadership role in student organization affects the development of leadership skills of an individual. The ability of these organizations to facilitate student-student interaction and student-faculty interactions motivates the belief that international leadership organizations have the capacity to develop multinational leaders. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) which operates in Europe was used to advance the objectives of the research. Just like other international student organizations, ESN contributes to the experience of international students through mentoring and advocacy programs. The research will, therefore, be used to answer the question of how taking a leadership role in international leadership organizations actually affects the development of leadership skills of an individual.

1.3 Aims of the research

The research aims to use self-reported experiences of students (former and current participants) of the Erasmus Student Network who had been and are entrusted of a leadership role. It also aims to establish a direct relationship between participating in international student organizations and the presence of multinational leadership skills. It will, therefore, answer the following questions; (a) How taking a leadership position in a student organization affect the leadership development of an individual, (b) What leadership competencies could be learned by the students as the result of participation in a student organization, (c) How/In what ways can students get an insight into global cultures and develop cultural sensitivity through the participation in international student organization.

The responses by the participants of the study will be analyzed statistically to determine whether involvement in the organization was positively related to the development of leadership skills.

1.4 Discussion

Due to the unique challenges of the 21st century, universities train student leaders to adapt to the complex social, cultural and technological changes. This should enable them to confront the contemporary societal challenges. The long-term focus of the ecological leadership theory has on the future makes it suitable for the process of developing student leaders. It mainly

focuses on the responsibility of the individual, development of capabilities, a long-term perspective, adaptation, and harmonization.

First of all, the research will find out whether participation in student organization helps potential leaders to recognize the need for self-development. In an ideal environment, the exposure to distinct personalities and different behavioral styles through the mentors involved in the organizations should motivate students to identify their pathways in leadership in order to take the steps needed to attain multinational leadership behaviors. For example, the student leaders are likely to encounter Kronz's (2014) behavioral styles that range from the analyzer to the socializer, the director, and the relater. Based on their preferred leadership personalities, the students should recognize specific areas that need improvement.

Secondly, it will provide information regarding the leadership competencies offered by the student organization (ESN in this case) to the students. Being part of any organization around the globe, a person could gain a set of skills that help him to develop his or her leadership traits. Student organizations are one of the opportunities for students to explore and test their leadership abilities. However, many researchers did not provide enough attention to the role of student organizations in supporting and improving the development of knowledge, skills and competencies in students.

Thirdly, the research will evaluate whether the cultural diversity in international student organizations provides an environment within which participating students can develop cultural sensitivity. In this case, the organization can produce open-minded leaders who can manage diverse teams by accommodating different points of view. These types of leaders can, therefore, be in a position to perceive the needs of others and to appreciate them. The multicultural engagement among the students should give them the right leadership skills to practice in the complex environment of the 21st century. The experiences of engaging with students from different nationalities should also acquaint them with the skills required to work in different countries across the globe.

2. Methodology:

2.1 Research approach, methodology and design

"...Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3).

We chose the qualitative study approach for our thesis project for a number of reasons. First of all, qualitative research is defined to be an approach that allows to explore and understand the meanings that individuals ascribe to a particular subject matter (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, according to Patton's study in 1990 (cited in Newman et al., 1998), qualitative data can be defined as "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, observed behaviors, direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts" (p. 16). The interest of our study is concentrated on the experiences of the students, who took the leadership positions within Erasmus Student Network, in order to understand the effect of student organization on their personal leadership development. Thus, we believe that qualitative approach will provide the opportunity to reflect upon students' experiences and opinions, therefore, add value to find the answers for the research questions introduced earlier.

As such, we plan to perform an inductive study, which in contrast to deductive, is aimed to build a theory based on the data collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). We plan to begin our study by collecting relevant primary and secondary data associated with the leadership skills, student organizations and the process of leadership development and later analyze our findings

to build a certain theoretical framework. The use of inductive approach also implies the interpretive perspective, which was identified as “describing phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin, 1989). Based on this information, we believe it is necessary to study the subjective meanings that motivate students for their actions associated with taking a leadership role in order for us to understand those actions. Consequently, in order to identify and interpret those meanings, we are going to use the subjectivist approach. Based on the notions of subjectivism, we, as the researchers will reflect on our own experiences and values about the subject in an attempt to identify how those could affect the process and findings of our research project.

Another matter to be considered is the choice of a research design for our study. According to De Vaus (2001), “The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (p.9). Thus, we recognize the importance of choice of the most suitable and relevant research design in order to answer our main research question in the most accurate way possible. Since we are going to conduct our study on the basis of particular student organization – Erasmus Student Network, we plan to design our research as a case study project. Case study research is associated with a detailed study of an individual or a group of people. As such, we plan to collect the empirical data from a group of individual students who possess a leadership positions in their local organizations. It is also worth mentioning, that our research is a cross-sectional study due to time constraints of the academic course and according to Bell (1999), a case study approach provides an opportunity to study the subject matter in some depth within a certain time constraints and is, therefore, convenient for the individual researchers.

After having identified an inductive approach for our study, we believe the most suitable method for data collection is qualitative, non-statistical analysis method introduced below.

2.2 Data Collection:

Data collection is meant to be the process of gathering information from relevant sources in order to answer the research question of our study. According to Creswell (2003), the qualitative method usually associates with conducting the interviews to obtain respondents’ opinions, views, and attitudes. We, therefore, plan to use semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection method.

We believe that interviewing techniques will add value to the relevance, reliability, and validity of the answers collected. As it was described by King in 2004 (cited in Saunders et al. 2008), semi-structured interviews are often referred to as the most commonly used “qualitative research interviews”. Therefore, certain questions will be prepared beforehand, so that the discussion will facilitate answers to the particular research objectives of our study. In this way, semi – structured interview is intended to be used as a guide for interviewers. However, we choose this particular category of interviews, in contrast to structured and unstructured types (Denzin, 1989), in order to provide ourselves flexibility of omitting irrelevant or asking additional questions to disclosure or clarification of the important information to respondents which we may have not thought before.

Nowadays, due to technological advancements, there are multiple tools we could use in order to conduct the interviews with the potential to get in touch with individuals in any part of the world. Our study is based on various ESN sections around Sweden and we aim to have a conversation with the board members who took a leadership role in the local organizations located in different cities. Despite the fact that interviews will be conducted face-to-face whenever possible, due to physical distance constraints between us and the potential respondents, telephone interviews and internet-mediated video-calls are to be used as well.

When it comes to the procedure of conducting the interviews, initially, we plan to send the introductory letters to the potential respondents with the invitation to participate in our research study. Additionally, the consent form for taking part in the research will be sent, given we receive positive responses from potential respondents. Afterwards, we will confirm the method of communicating (face-to-face, phone, video call) and suitable dates/times with the participants and schedule the interviews, assuming one interview to last from 30 to 40 minutes.

The questions we are going to prepare for the interviews will involve certain topics associated with the leadership experiences of the board members. As such, we plan to ask questions regarding the participants' understanding of their roles within the organization in order to explore their own identity view. Also, we are interested in particular events or activities they experienced that respondents feel have contributed to their leadership skills. Additionally, we aim to identify if any of those opportunities provided by student organization have challenged them or had no significant impact on their leadership capabilities. Furthermore, questions will involve students' opinions whether participation in international organization added value to their intercultural communication skills and what are the benefits and drawbacks of taking a leadership role in general. We are also interested in collecting the answers from former ESN leaders who were involved in student organization activities previously and may provide insights whether student organization positively contributed to their leadership development and affected the path of their international career. The audio recording device will be used during the interview, provided that the permission of respondents is acquired, in order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the data collected.

2.3 Data analysis

As soon as a reasonable amount of data is collected we intend to perform a search for particular patterns of data that can be observed and then develop a theory that may explain those patterns based on our qualitative, inductive approach.

We will take into consideration the steps described by Saunders et al. (2009), in order to ensure the effective analysis of the data. According to authors, first stage involves trying to comprehend the data collected. We could implement this by integrating the related data from secondary sources with the audio-recordings taken during the interview sessions. Then, we would attempt to identify certain patterns by comparing the different responses from the research participants. The third step involves building a theory to observe the relationship between different patterns identified. At the end, we would conclude our findings and answer the research questions stated in the introductory chapter of our research. However, we further elaborate the data analysis process approach we plan to implement.

We plan to use the content analysis approach in order to systematically evaluate the data collected via interviews. According to Patton (2002), content analysis is defined as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p.453). In order to ensure systematic process for reliable and valid data analysis, certain steps have to be followed. First of all, the data will be converted from the oral interviews into the written text. Second, we will identify the unit of analysis for coding purposes. According to Robson (1993), the unit of analysis can be the sentence, the word, certain paragraphs or letters within the text analysed. As such, we are going to look for certain words/phrases related to the leadership skills to identify patterns. The next step is to develop categories and a coding scheme. First, we plan to develop the list of categories based on the existing model/theory for our analysis (Stage based model of leadership identity development/Chickering's Psychosocial theory). Then, we would modify the model based on the

new categories generated during the process of inductive analysis from the new data gathered. Finally, we would code all text and come up with the conclusions from the data coded. We will try to identify the relationship between different patterns and interpret meanings derived from the process of coding.

The process of content analysis is a crucial part of our research and has a significant effect on the overall success of our study. Therefore, the discussion of this chapter has a preliminary characteristics so that further discussion of this section will be developed as the process of data collection and analysis will begin. Additionally, the issues of reliability and validity of the data analysis will be identified and discussed further.

2.4 The quality of the research: Reliability and Validity of data

According to Bryman & Bell (2014), it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of reliability and validity of the data provided as the result of any research. Validity is intended to identify the appropriateness of the methods, design, approaches and tools used during the process of a research project which will identify the accuracy of the results. In order to ensure validity we considered carefully the appropriate and suitable research methodology, design and data collection methods for our study. Additionally, to improve the validity of the research findings, we plan to send the preliminary questions to the participants of our study before the actual interview. In this way, we will give participants an opportunity to think about their answers beforehand. From our side, we will try to eliminate any biases we might have based on our experience of being a part of student organization ourselves during the data collection and analysis stages. By recognizing this, we will try to be as objective as possible during the whole process of our study. We believe it could also be achieved by getting two of us interpret the same data independently and then compare the results.

The notion of reliability is linked to the consistency of the results if the research will be conducted some other time in the future. According to Robson (1993), being reliable in qualitative studies means being honest, and carry out the research in a careful manner. This involves various practical matters which may be anything from the accurate and understandable choice of wording for conducting the interviews to the manner of the interviews conducted. It is our intention to develop interview questions that will not possess double meanings as well as conduct the interviews in a similar way with all research participants in order to improve the reliability of our findings.

2.5 Ethical considerations:

Furthermore, there are ethical concerns that need to be addressed. According to Saunders et al. (2008), research ethics involves «...questions about how we formulate and clarify our research topic, design our research and gain access, collect data, process and store our data, analyse data and write up our research findings in a moral and responsible way» (p. 184).

In order to avoid any ethical misconduct, we plan to get familiarised with the terms and procedures associated with ethical study research - the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity developed by the European Commission in 2017.

First of all, we are going to explain the purpose and objectives of our study to the participants prior to starting the interviewing process. Secondly, as it was mentioned above, the consent form will be sent to the participants in order to familiarise them with the interviewing procedure. Also, the privacy and anonymity of the participants will be provided, when requested.

Thirdly, the participation in our research will be totally voluntarily with the right of the participants to withdraw from the process at any time. Therefore, avoidance of any stress and harm to the research participants, their safety and comfort while taking part in our research process will be guaranteed.

In conclusion, we strive for honesty and transparency regarding the whole process of our research from data collection to the results derived from that data. We will not falsify, fabricate or misrepresent any data collected. We will not discriminate or be biased to the participants of our study on the basis of their race, nationality, gender and other characteristics. We will strive for social responsibility by preventing any social harm of the research to the participants, colleagues, and the public in general.

3. Outline:

1. **Abstract:** The thesis paper will start with an abstract, a brief summary of our research, intended to provide key information about the subject, purpose and findings of our study.
2. **Introduction:** The introductory chapter of this thesis will include the background information about the topic of leadership, student organizations and their role in students' life. Then, problem discussion which leads to the research question for our study. At the end, the aim of our research project will be explained.
3. **Theoretical framework:** Theory chapter will include the literature review related to the topic of leadership and student organizations. The existing theoretical models will be analyzed and discussed in order to provide some insights and motivate our choice of choosing our research subject.
4. **Methodology:** In the methodology section, the approaches, strategies and the methods of collecting and analysing data as well as overall research design will be described.
5. **Empirical investigation:** In this chapter the process of our data collection will be explained and data collected through interviews presented.
6. **Data analysis:** This section will analyse the data collected through the interviews and secondary data which will lead to the conclusion of our research project.
7. **Conclusion:** Finally, the conclusion part will sum up our findings and answer the main research question of our thesis project. It will also contain discussion part that will provide limitations of our research and discuss possible implications of our study, as well as suggest direction for the further studies.
8. **References:** This part will contain list of references, the external secondary resources that we reflected upon, used and cited during the process of our research.
9. **Appendices:** Supplementary documents that support our study and findings.

4. Time plan of the research project:

Phase / Task	Mar	Mar	Mar	Mar	Apr	Apr	Apr	Apr	Apr	May	May	May	May	Jun
	<i>W10</i>	<i>W11</i>	<i>W12</i>	<i>W13</i>	<i>W14</i>	<i>W15</i>	<i>W16</i>	<i>W17</i>	<i>W18</i>	<i>W19</i>	<i>W20</i>	<i>W21</i>	<i>W22</i>	<i>W23</i>
Discussion and Choice of the research topic														
Literature review and Identifying research question														
Writing of Thesis proposal and seminar														
PM 1 and progress report seminar														
Data collection - Starting interviews														
PM 2 & PM 3 progress report seminar 2														
Continue with interviews														
Data analysis and Conclusion														
Final thesis report and Seminar														
Final adjustments and submission to DiVA														

References:

- Altbach, P. (1989). Perspectives on Student Political Activism. *Comparative Education*, 25(1), pp.97-110.
- Amiriazadeh, M., Jaafari, P., Ghourchian, N. and Jowkar, B. (2011). Role of Student Associations in Leadership Development of Engineering Students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, pp.382-385.
- Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), pp.297-308.
- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bell, J., (1999). *Doing your research project*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E., 2014. *Research methodology: Business and management contexts*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Boyer, E. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York [etc.]: Harper & Row.
- Broadhurst, C. (2014). Campus Activism in the 21st Century: A Historical Framing. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2014(167), pp.3-15.
- Denzin, N.K., (1989). *Interpretive biography* (Vol. 17). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- De Vaus, D.A. and de Vaus, D., (2001). *Research design in social research*. London: Sage.
- Guido-Dibrito, F. and Batchelor, S. (1988). Developing leadership potential through student activities and organizations. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1988(44), pp.51-62.
- Miller, T. (1997). *The book of professional standards for higher education*. Washington, DC: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.
- Newman, I., Benz, C.R. and Ridenour, C.S., (1998). *Qualitative-quantitative research methodology: Exploring the interactive continuum*. Carbondale: SIU Press.
- Novak, S. (1977). *The rights of youth: American colleges and student revolt*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Robson C. (1993). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students 5th edition*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Smith, L. and Chenoweth, J. (2015). The Contributions Of Student Organization Involvement To Students Self-Assessments Of Their Leadership Traits And Relational Behaviors. *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE)*, 8(4), p.279.