The connotation and influencing factors of student leadership

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Abstract. Student leadership refers to a series of related abilities that students have or need to acquire in leadership roles or non-leadership roles, which includes both self-leadership and team leadership. In the present-day society, student leadership education is a subject of great significance, which is related to the personal development of students and the progress of society. This study discusses the connotation, influencing factors and cultivation strategies of student leadership from the perspective of student leadership education. Through the method of literature review, this paper synthesizes a variety of leadership theories, analyzes the main factors affecting the formation and development of student leadership, including school education, personality traits, family upbringing, and age, and so on, and proposes corresponding cultivation strategies, including classroom teaching, extracurricular activities, and social practice. This article argues that student leadership is a multidimensional composite ability, including self-knowledge, self-management, self-motivation, communication and collaboration, innovative problem-solving, service to others, and so on, which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, constituting a complete ability system. This article has shown that through an in-depth discussion of student leadership, it can contribute to improving the quality of students, cultivating future social elites and promoting social progress.

1 Introduction

Leadership is the ability to influence others to achieve common goals, and it plays a vital role in personal and social development. Leadership is not only reflected in positions or power but also in personal qualities and key competencies, which can be improved and perfected through education and training. Students are the pillars and leaders of future society, and having leadership has a profound impact on their growth and learning. The research and practice of student leadership have received wide attention from the education and academic circles. Scholars have different understandings of student leadership. On the one hand, they have carried out work such as concept definition, connotation analysis, theory construction, influencing factor exploration, and cultivation strategy proposal for student leadership from different angles and levels, providing rich and diverse perspectives and resources for student leadership education. On the other hand, there are also some differences and shortcomings. For example, in terms of concepts, some scholars confuse or blur student leadership with other related concepts such as leadership talent, leadership quality, leadership skills, and so on. These concepts, although related, are not exactly equivalent. They have different definitions, connotations, characteristics, criteria, etc., and cannot simply be substituted for each other or treated in the same way.

In terms of connotation, some scholars simplify or complicate student leadership too much, ignoring its relationship with educational environment, cultural background, individual differences and other factors [1]; these factors can affect the formation and development of student leadership and need to be analyzed and adapted on a case-by-case basis, not generalized or blindly applied. In terms of theory, some scholars lack in-depth exploration of the development laws and mechanisms of student leadership, and only stay at the descriptive or empirical level [2]. Student leadership not only improves students’ academic performance and social adjustment but also enhances their self-confidence and creativity. For example, a survey of high school students in the United States found that students who were involved in leadership organizations, such as student government, were more likely than other students to receive scholarships, honours and leadership positions during their college years. These differences and shortcomings have brought some confusion and challenges to student leadership education.

This article aims to use the method of literature review to systematically sort out and analyze the connotation, influencing factors and cultivation strategies of student leadership, in order to answer the following research questions:

What are the concepts and connotations of student leadership?

What factors affect the formation and development of student leadership?

These questions are of great significance for student leadership education, because they can help us more clearly understand the nature and characteristics of student leadership, more scientifically evaluate and improve the educational practice of student leadership,
and more effectively promote the exertion and contribution of student leadership.

The structure of this article is as follows: The first part is the introduction, which introduces the research background, purpose, questions, methods and structure; The second part is the literature review, which summarizes and reviews the research in China and other areas from three aspects: concept, connotation, influencing factors; The third part is the discussion, which analyzes and explains the results of the literature review, pointing out some implications and suggestions; The fourth part is the conclusion, which summarizes the main points and conclusions of this article, puts forward some limitations and future research directions.

2 Literature review

2.1. The connotation of student leadership

The term ‘leadership’ first appeared in the 1950s and has been translated as the qualities that a leader must have. Over the decades of leadership-related research, due to the differences in the scholars’ fields of specialization (management, leadership, psychology, and so on.), these scholars have come up with the definitions of student leadership.

In its 30-year history, student leadership theory has evolved from trait, behavioral, and leadership style theories to situational and transformational theories. Leadership connotation definition has also developed from the early way of dividing leadership trait dimensions to emphasize the leadership behaviors that leaders need to have, to the current gradual formation of a multi-dimensional framework of leadership skills complex. No matter which theory underpins it, some representative definitions of leadership include the dimension of teamwork, and most of the goals to be achieved by a leader are to lead team members to realize the shared vision of the team. The role of student leadership also focuses on influencing others rather than on self-development, which is different from the understanding of Chinese scholars. Different scholars have different understandings of the connotation of student leadership, which can be summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>The Connotation of Student Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Townsend &amp; Carter</td>
<td>Student leadership consists of five main skills: teamwork, understanding yourself, communication, decision-making, and leading [3].</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Kouzes &amp; Posner</td>
<td>Leadership is the art of motivating others to work towards a common vision for the group. The art of leadership can be mastered not only by leaders but also by ordinary people. Leadership is the process of bringing out the best in oneself and others [4].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Van Velsor &amp; McCauley</td>
<td>Student leadership is a complex of competencies that develops individuals and organizations to effectively perform leadership roles and leadership behavioral processes, including inward-looking literacy, i.e., self-planning, self-reflection, etc., as well as outward-looking literacy, i.e., teamwork, and planning awareness [5].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Hay &amp; Dempster</td>
<td>Student leadership is a composite of multiple interpersonal skills along with cognitive skills, which include skills such as project planning, reflection, problem-solving, team building, decision-making, and goal setting [6].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Ward &amp; Ellis</td>
<td>Six leadership traits are needed for adolescent students to attract peer followers: leadership traits that provide social support, build close friendships, elevate status by emulating the leadership behaviors of a role model leader, similarity in values with peers, potential for idealized influence, and the ability to be friendly with others [7].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Dye</td>
<td>Student leadership is a combination of intelligence, self-confidence, charisma, determination, socialization, integrity, leadership effectiveness, and decision-making effectiveness [8].</td>
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</table>

Table 1 shows the different perspectives of student leadership from various scholars. For example, some scholars believe that student leadership includes two aspects: self-leadership and team leadership, while some scholars believe that student leadership is a multidimensional composite ability, including self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, communication and collaboration, innovation and problem-solving, service to others, etc. Some scholars believe that student leadership is a combination of implicit and explicit abilities, including personality traits, emotional intelligence, social interaction skills, innovation skills, etc.

In the past decade, China has gradually paid more attention to individual leadership, especially student leadership, and the research content related to student leadership has developed substantially, with a rapid increase in the understanding of student leadership. The definitions of student leadership by Chinese scholars are summarized in Table 2.
Table 2. Chinese Scholars' Understanding of The Connotation of Student Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>The Connotation of Student Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Yang Guiping</td>
<td>Youth leadership refers to a wide range of related competencies that young people in leadership positions or leadership roles already possess or need to acquire [9].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Chang Xueqin</td>
<td>There are two kinds of student leadership: self-leadership and team leadership. The core elements of student leadership education are the ability to organize and manage and students' sense of social responsibility, and student leadership should be a quality required and cultivated as a basic education [10].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Zhang Zhuoyu</td>
<td>Student leadership is an individual competency that is independent of the body of knowledge taught in the discipline. Student leadership is first and foremost about student self-leadership and secondly about coaching teams. Leadership should be regarded as an important managerial competency [11].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Wang Fang</td>
<td>Leadership is the ability to clarify the mission of a team and to motivate people to work hard around that mission [12].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Weng Wenyuan &amp; Zhao Shiming</td>
<td>Middle school student leadership is a variety of core qualities and comprehensive abilities that middle school students should possess in the process of assuming leadership roles or non-leadership roles, which is a prerequisite for effective leadership. Leadership skills of secondary school students include foresight, creative thinking, teamwork and competition, social responsibility, effective communication and problem-solving skills. It is the process by which an individual expresses the quest to unify his or her own values with those of society [13].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Liu Weihong &amp; Liu Jinghua</td>
<td>The essence of leadership for middle school students is influence, including self-leadership and team leadership. Of the two, self-development is the key; and influencing others is the core [14].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Yang Yugang et al.</td>
<td>Student leadership is a process that promotes positive and effective social change and cooperation, and it is a competency that is needed for the development of any individual and can be nurtured through cultivation [15].</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Wang Bin, Li Chang &amp; Li Min</td>
<td>Both middle school students and high school students have leadership skills. Middle school student leadership is the ability of leaders to lead themselves to achieve set goals and to attract followers to achieve common goals. Leadership skills of middle school students include the ability to analyze their own weaknesses, self-confidence, a strong sense of responsibility, smooth communication, teamwork, decision-making, problem-solving, and career planning [16].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Fang Weivei</td>
<td>College students' leadership is divided into two categories: implicit and explicit abilities. Implicit abilities include learning ability, students' political literacy, leadership awareness, and emotional intelligence. Explicit abilities include interpersonal relationship and communication ability, self-management ability, innovation ability, teamwork ability, and so on [17].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Tian Aili</td>
<td>The core elements of leadership for middle school students include the following five categories: the value of serving others and society, the spirit of innovation and social responsibility, the character traits of self-confidence and perseverance, the team spirit of good communication and cooperation with others, and the comprehensive quality of both academic achievements and personal strengths [18].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Lu Jun</td>
<td>College students' leadership is divided into two categories: exoteric abilities and implicit traits. Epiphenomenal abilities include social communication ability, problem-solving ability, decision-making ability, organizational and coordinating ability, interest and expertise, and external attractiveness. Implicit traits include character, personality traits, emotional intelligence, and power motivation [19].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Liu Pengzhi &amp; Jin Qi</td>
<td>Student leadership contains two categories: leadership quality and leadership ability. Leadership quality includes three aspects: psychological quality, responsibility awareness and legal concept. Leadership ability includes five aspects: communication and persuasion, interpersonal communication, organization and planning, public opinion guidance and flexibility [20].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By combining the views of many Chinese scholars, the existing definitions of adolescent student leadership can be summarized into two general categories. The first category refers to the ability of adolescent students to lead themselves. It is the process by which students recognize themselves, live independently, and positively influence themselves. In this process, adolescent students analyze their strengths and weaknesses and plan for their own development and career. The second category is the adolescent student's ability to influence others through interpersonal interactions. This is the process by which students influence the thoughts and behaviors of others through their own actions and active interpersonal interactions, thereby guiding the actions of others.

Student leadership is interpreted from different theories: trait theory focuses on the internal characteristics of the individual, and considers student leadership to be the characteristics as well as the qualities that are developed in the course of practice to fit the leadership role. Behavioral theories, on the other hand, emphasize the external manifestations of the individual and consider student leadership to be a composite of a series of outwardly visible behaviors that are characteristic of leadership. Leadership style, contextual, and transformational theories define student leadership in terms of an individual's environmental field, and suggest that student leadership is the ability of a student to influence an individual's environment. The definition of student leadership varies slightly depending on the field of specialization or school of thought of the scholars.

The conceptualization of student leadership under different theoretical analyses has different emphases due to the different starting points of the theories. By comparing the various conceptualizations horizontally and taking into account the commonalities of the existing definitions, this study defines student leadership as a
combination of the skills that students possess to influence themselves and others to achieve a common vision for the team.

3 Factors influencing student leadership

3.1 School education

As the primary place where students' education takes place, schools naturally have an important responsibility for student leadership development. Schooling is effective in predicting the leadership performance of student leaders and the leadership practices of student leaders are adequately enhanced in the school ecosystem. According to Murphy and Johnson, the formal training and practice activities provided by the school can stimulate the leadership potential of students [21]. Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen argued that teachers' daily classroom teaching can subtly help students understand leadership, awaken leadership awareness, and strengthen students' leadership potential [22]. Sui and Li suggested that the activity teaching method in the classroom can cultivate students' communication and coordination skills, organization and planning skills, decision-making and execution skills, and so on [23,24]. Extracurricular activities organized by the school are an important link in the cultivation of student leadership. Sports activities can improve individual self-confidence, self-esteem, social cooperation skills, etc., which can be regarded as effective components of leadership skills [25]. It has been proven that participating in sports activities can promote individual development and personality characteristics, strengthen willpower, simplify teamwork, ensure cooperation, and improve self-confidence and self-control abilities, and help students' academic performance [26]. Research on world-renowned high school leadership development programs has shown that schooling that encourages early leadership behaviors in students can refine their future leadership development. High school students are at a critical stage in their development, a time when they are forming their worldviews and values, as well as in their leadership development. Fertman and Van Linden pointed out that school education encourages students' early leadership behavior, which can improve students' future leadership development [27]. They also claimed that developing leadership skills in high school students is more meaningful in the long term because it can enhance individual self-esteem and prevent risky behaviors. Communication skills, coordination and creativity are important components of leadership, and they should be nurtured at an early stage of an individual's development in order to be more effective.

3.2 Personality trait

Leadership trait theory is a representative theory that effectively reflects the correlation between individual characteristics and leadership. Several scholars have used leadership trait theory to explore the correlation between leadership influences and traits. Hohmann believed that personality traits are good predictors of leadership, including sensitivity to the needs of others, acceptance of the contributions of others, tolerance of individual differences, and confidence in the skills and knowledge they possess [28]. Karnes and Bean proposed that students with the following traits have higher leadership potential: willingness to accept challenging things, problem-solving ability and creative thinking, critical thinking ability, ability to motivate others to achieve team goals, excellent communication skills, and stability of thinking and action [29]. Ward and Ellis identified six personality traits that attract adolescent peers to follow: willingness to provide social support, willingness to establish intimate friendships, enhancing status by imitating popular leaders, similarity with peer values, the possibility of idealized influence, and the possibility of getting along well with others [30]. Zhang and Wu pointed out that students' individual subjective factors have an impact on student leadership, including cognition of leadership, leadership potential, willingness to participate in leadership courses, and cognition of fair opportunities for leadership training [31]. Li found that students' cognition and willingness to participate in organizations are highly correlated with their leadership performance [32]. These subjective perceptions of an individual can significantly and positively influence leadership. Many studies have also confirmed that individuals possess certain personality traits that are linked to leadership. Chen analyzed the influencing factors of college student leadership and concluded that personal traits and personal charisma have the greatest impact on college student leadership [33]. Yang confirmed this conclusion in their survey [34]. This conclusion was verified in the investigation of Feng Yanyang [35]. Li and Wang proposed that individuals form self-concepts after perceiving and evaluating their own abilities, and self-concepts are an important mediating variable that affects the impact of students’ participation in extracurricular activities on leadership. That is, students are internalizing external environmental factors into their own internal psychological characteristics, which are then translated into external leadership practices [36].

3.3 Parenting style

Teri Elkins and Robert T Keller stated that adolescent students acquire leadership skills in a similar way to how they acquire other skills from childhood to adulthood, that is, by imitating the leadership behaviors of the adults they admire, and most adolescents choose their parents as the first objects to imitate [37]. Bass pointed out that a harmonious relationship between parents and less punishment of children are more conducive to the development of student leadership potential [38]. Three important factors that affect the leadership level of high school students are high self-discipline of family members, equality and harmony of family atmosphere, and dual-parent family structure. The performance of student leadership is influenced by some factors related
to the family, such as the order of birth, the style of parenting, and the type of attachment between parents and children. Authoritative parenting is a parenting style that promotes student leadership development more than the other three. Warm acceptance, behavioral control, and psychological control in parenting styles are important factors that influence student leadership, and they can have an effect on students' self-perception, self-management, and self-motivation. To summarize, an intact family structure in which parents are demanding but not strict with their children is the most conducive parenting style for student leadership.

3.4 Age

Li analyzed the student leadership status of different school stages and verified that as the age of the student group increased, the leadership skills of the student group also gradually improved [39]. At the same time, high school students scored higher than junior high school students in four dimensions: team cooperation, self-understanding, communication, and decision-making. Zou also obtained similar results from a survey of 1,050 junior and senior high school students in Hubei Province, that is, high school students scored higher than junior high school students in all dimensions of leadership [40]. However, there was no significant difference in student leadership between different grades within each stage, that is, the leadership performance levels of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors were similar. This shows that the high school stage is indeed a period for student leadership improvement, but the specific grade does not affect student leadership.

4 Conclusion

In society at present, student leadership education is a subject of great significance in relation to the personal development of students and the advancement of society. Student leadership refers to a series of related abilities that students have or need to acquire in leadership roles or non-leadership roles, and it includes both self-leadership and team leadership. This paper aims to systematically sort out and analyze the connotation and influencing factors of student leadership through the method of literature review, so as to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for student leadership education.

This paper defines the concept and analyzes the connotation of student leadership from different theoretical perspectives, pointing out that student leadership is an individual ability, not an innate or fixed trait or behavior. This paper combines a variety of leadership theories such as trait theory, behavioral theory, situational theory, transformation theory, etc., and argues that student leadership is a kind of ability that can be improved and perfected through education and training, and it includes two aspects: self-leadership and team leadership. Self-leadership refers to students' ability to recognize, manage and motivate themselves, which is the foundation and premise of student leadership. Team leadership refers to students' ability to communicate, collaborate, innovate and serve others, which is the core and goal of student leadership.

After that, this paper discusses the main factors affecting the formation and development of students' leadership from the aspects of school education, personality traits, family upbringing and age, and analyzes the interactions among them. This paper argues that school education is the main way and platform to develop students' leadership, which can provide students with knowledge, skills and experience of leadership through classroom teaching, extracurricular activities, social practice and other ways. Personality traits are the internal factors affecting students' leadership, which include self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, creativity and other psychological traits that can influence students' attitudes and behaviors towards themselves and others. Family upbringing is an external factor that influences student leadership, and it includes a variety of family variables such as family climate, parental roles, and family support, which can influence students' perceptions and values of leadership. Age is a developmental stage factor that influences student leadership and determines the different types or levels of leadership that students need or are appropriate to acquire at different ages.

Last, this paper puts forward effective strategies for cultivating students' leadership from classroom teaching, extracurricular activities, social practice and other aspects, and puts forward some existing problems and future research directions. This paper argues that classroom teaching should focus on cultivating students' innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities, and stimulate students' initiative and participation through case analysis, group discussion, role-playing and other teaching methods. Extracurricular activities should focus on cultivating students' communication and collaboration and the ability to serve others, and provide students with leadership opportunities and practice platforms through a variety of activities such as clubs, volunteer services, and student unions. Social practice should focus on cultivating students' social responsibility and civic awareness, and enhance students' social participation and social influence through community participation, social investigation, social innovation and other forms of practice. This paper also points out some existing problems, such as the lack of systematic and standardized student leadership education, the lack of scientific and effective assessment methods of student leadership, and the disconnection between the theory and practice of student leadership education, etc., and proposes future research directions, such as establishing the theoretical framework and model of student leadership education, developing the measurement tools and assessment system of student leadership, and exploring the best practices and cases of student leadership education. best practices and cases, and so on.

From the perspective of student leadership education, this paper composes and analyzes the connotation, influencing factors and cultivation strategies of student leadership, so as to contribute to the improvement of students' quality, the cultivation of future social elites
and the promotion of social progress. This paper argues that student leadership is a multi-dimensional composite ability, including self-knowledge, self-management, self-motivation, communication and collaboration, innovative problem-solving, service to others, etc., which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, constituting a complete ability system. This paper hopes that through the in-depth discussion of student leadership, it can provide theoretical support and practical guidance for student leadership education.

References
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