

Evaluation of an intensive service leadership program using the subjective outcome evaluation approach

**Moon YM Law¹, BSW, MSW, DSW, RSW,
Daniel TL Shek^{2,*}, PhD, FHKPS, BBS,
SBS, JP, and Jiayi Zhang², MA**

¹School of Social Sciences, Caritas Institute of Higher Education, Hong Kong, PR China

²Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, PR China

Abstract

The fifth cohort of SOAR Youth Leadership Program 2017/2018 was launched in Beijing in the summer of 2018. A 21-hour intensive “Service Leadership” course was conducted with 43 undergraduate students who studied at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and the Peking University (PKU). This study employed a mix-method approach that integrated both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of the “Service Leadership” course, including students’ views on the program content, lecturers, and overall satisfaction. Consistent with previous studies, the three dimensions were significantly correlated. Students’ responses collected through quantitative and qualitative methods were generally positive, suggesting that the program could promote service leadership qualities in the program participants.

Keywords: Service Leadership, mix-method study, client satisfaction approach, qualitative approach

Introduction

Apart from providing professional knowledge, university also shoulders the responsibility to nurture future leaders for the society. In the book “Excellence without a soul,” Harry Lewis stated that although university has the responsibility to nurture students to obtain autonomy, resilience, and responsibility from higher education, not all universities achieve this fundamental purpose (1). Moreover, over-emphasis on funding and research grants has become prevalence and universities have lost their mission to nurture students’ holistic development. Tull argued that Lewis’s observations can be applied to many other institutions of high education (2). Instead of facilitating the development of students’ inner life and character, universities over-emphasize students’ achievements (3). Unfortunately, this development cannot respond to emerging adolescent developmental

* **Correspondence:** Daniel TL Shek, PhD, FHKPS, BBS, SBS, JP, Associate Vice President (Undergraduate Programme), Chair Professor of Applied Social Sciences and Li and Fung Professor in Service Leadership Education, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hunghom, Hong Kong, PR China. E-mail: daniel.shek@polyu.edu.hk

issues such as substance abuse, mental problems, delinquency, narcissistic personalities, and egocentrism (4). Also, employers are not satisfied with graduates' interpersonal cooperation and maturity when they worked in their first jobs (4). In view of this situation, how to promote adolescents' holistic development becomes crucial and critical.

Shek and Ma (5) argued that it is helpful to nurture adolescents through the development of credit-bearing courses on positive youth development. The Service Leadership subject is grounded in the positive youth development approach, which emphasizes adolescents' potentials and capability, instead of their problems. Positive youth development assets are closely correlated with adolescent developmental outcomes. Specifically, the more developmental assets adolescents have, the less risky behaviors they would display; hence resulting in more positive development outcomes (6). There are two types of developmental assets: external (e.g., support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, etc.) and internal assets (e.g., commitment to learning, positive values, and social competencies) (7). Catalano and his colleagues (8) identified 14 developmental assets (5), including promotion of bonding, cultivation of resilience, promotion of social competence, promotion of emotional competence, promotion of cognitive competence, promotion of moral competence, cultivation of self-determination, and fostering prosocial norms. Shek and Ma (9) asserted that these positive youth developmental constructs would help to shape leadership qualities in university students. Since the Service Leadership subject is implemented, there are many students of different professional disciplines taking the subject. The subject has been kept updating and developing throughout the years. A range of evaluation studies have shown the effectiveness of the Service Leadership subject.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods, both of which have their own merits and shortcomings, are the two main strategies used in natural and social science. Quantitative research is used to examine the relationships among variables, which intends to predict, interpret, and control phenomenon (10). The method has been widely adopted in social science. There are several characteristics of quantitative research methods. First, quantitative data, standardized measures, and uniform procedures in

quantitative research can provide accurate and objective evidence to predict and explain the phenomenon (11). The standardization and objectivity of quantitative research make it a practicable method to validate, compare, or repeat research study. Furthermore, probability sampling makes the findings generalizable (12). Researchers' biases can be minimized through standard procedure (13). Compared to qualitative research, quantitative research is more economical in terms of study duration or human and fiscal capacity (14). Although there are many merits of the quantitative approach, whether it can be used in investigating social and human world remains controversial, especially on the sides that the reality could not be fully explained by numerals and it could be difficult for the observers to have total objectivity (13).

Qualitative research is employed to gather non-numerical data (15), which focuses on the essence of social phenomena (16). As Peshkin (17) stated, the main objectives of qualitative research are description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation. To achieve these objectives, the most common methods used in qualitative research are interviews, documents, and observations (18). Although the methods used in different studies might be varied, they shared the same strengths. First, the methods applied in qualitative research are diverse and flexible, which include action research, case study, ethnography, and other related methods. Second, qualitative research allows us to collect data without simplifying the complexity of reality. The research questions can function as a guide on choosing the most appropriate methods (19), which can facilitate researchers to be close to reality (11). However, qualitative research highly depends on researchers' interpretation, which leads to the question of whether researchers' bias may affect the validity and reliability of findings. Sample representativeness and findings' generalization are also in doubt.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods can provide a holistic perspective on understanding the reality of the social and human world. This approach may have various names, such as multi-methods (20), mixed methodology (21), mixed-methods (22), and multi-strategy research (23). Researchers adopting the mix-method approach could reap the advantages of each method and minimize the

shortcomings (24). As a result, a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter can then be obtained (25,26). In other words, this type of approach can fulfill the needs to understand the information encoded in the variables, which makes the interpretation more meaningful and accurate (27,28). Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (29) illustrated five reasons to utilize mix-method approach, which are triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. Irrespective of the justifications in choosing mix-method research, participants and researchers' involvement in this approach is enhanced (30).

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the perceptions of undergraduate students on the "Service Leadership" course of the "SOAR Youth Leadership Program" (SOAR) using a mix-method approach. This one-year credit-bearing program was jointly hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Peking University. SOAR is the abbreviation of "Serving Heart," "Open-mindedness," "Aspiration," and "Responsibility." The goals and objectives of this program are to nurture all-rounded youth leaders of tomorrow and create an international exchange platform for youth leaders. In July 2018, SOAR Youth Leadership Program 2017/2018 was launched in Beijing. A total of 43 undergraduate students were recruited in the study, including 21 students from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and 22 from Peking University.

The "Service Leadership" course was the conceptual framework of the program, which was defined by the Hong Kong Institute of Service Leadership and Management Limited (HKI-SLAM) as "satisfying needs by consistently providing quality personal service to everyone one comes into contact with, including one's self, others, communities, systems and environments" (Chung, 2011). Different from other paradigms of leadership, this theory emphasizes that it is equally significant to satisfy the needs of self, others, and systems (i.e., three realms of Service Leadership). Instead of manipulating others with the authority to satisfy one's own needs, an effective service leader should respect others, care about subordinates' needs and welfare, and transcend self-interest to satisfy the needs of others and systems. An excellent service leader will influence others with good

character, such as empathy and caring (31). According to the theory, the service object includes self, others, and systems, which means if one leads himself or herself well, then he or she can serve others well. Specifically, a capable service leader ethically improves his or her competence and manage himself or herself, which enables him or her to lead others and optimize the effect of the service to the communities, societies, and environment (32).

As Chung and Elfassy stated, $E = MC^2$, where "E" represents effective service leadership, "M" means leaders' moral character, and "C" stands for competencies and caring disposition (33). Moral character refers to the moral values and integrity an effective leader should have, such as authenticity, honesty, and credibility. In other words, the leader should know what to do and what not to do. Competencies included leadership competence, interpersonal competence, intrapersonal competence, and business competence (34). To guide leadership practice, an effective leader should possess the competencies listed above. Caring disposition is related to love, listening, and empathy. Rather than manipulating followers to fulfill his or her own needs, a leader with caring will respect his or her followers and concern with their benefits.

The HKI-SLAM proposed 7 core beliefs of Service Leadership. First, leadership is a kind of service, serving self, others, and systems in an ethical way. According to Chung's definition (35), service is the activities featured by human interaction. To serve is leadership's basic precondition. Second, everyone has the chances to assume a leadership position in daily life and has the potential to improve leadership's quality and effectiveness. Leadership is not inherent nor owned by the high-powered people. Everyone can practice his or her leadership skills through daily service transactions. Third, the effectiveness of leadership counts on both leader's specific competencies related to the task and his or her moral character and caring disposition valued by subordinators and receivers. The moral behavior (36) and caring disposition (37) of service providers have a profound effect on customers' loyalty and commitment. Fourth, to satisfy others' needs, a leader should ethically improve his or her competences, abilities, and willingness. Chung insisted that without

a healthy mind, body, and spirit, leaders are unable to optimize their ability to serve others (35). Fifth, personal service in high quality should be constantly provided to the people that the leaders encountered with, including leaders themselves. Consistency and personalization of the service were highlighted in this belief. Sixth, as a business model, service leadership is not only the most competitive but also the longest surviving model of leadership. In other words, this is an adaptive group model, which focuses on collaborative service-focused thinking and behavior. Seventh, people who want to obtain leadership positions with high pay, high status and management promotions in current society should possess service leadership competencies, moral character, and caring disposition.

The primary goal of this course is to nurture students' holistic development. The knowledge of the service leadership model, seven core beliefs, and three components were included in the lectures through role play, group discussion, self-reflection, drawing, and other activities. The integration of academic content and students' real-life experiences are expected in the course. Several intended learning outcomes are: 1) understand the basic models of leadership and core beliefs about service leadership; 2) comprehend the three major elements (MC²) of effective service leadership (E); 3) reflect on one's leadership qualities and develop the basic qualities an effective service leader needs; and 4) appreciate the potential application of knowledge learnt from this subject to oneself.

The positive outcomes of the Service Leadership subject and students' satisfaction have been evaluated by a variety of evaluation mechanisms, such as objective outcome evaluation, subjective outcome evaluation, process evaluation, focus group interview, and case study (38). Generally speaking, the effectiveness of this course was supported and well received by the students. Specifically, the positive changes of students can be observed from the results of quantitative evaluations (39), especially in the outcome measures of moral competences and life satisfaction. On the other hand, the findings observed from the qualitative evaluation showed that students who attended this course valued it as useful, interesting, and meaningful. Besides, students stated

they obtained practical knowledge of service leadership, and their leadership qualities were promoted after joining the course (40) (41). These findings showed that the Service Leadership subject was well designed (42).

The course conducted in SOAR Youth Leadership Program 2017/2018 was a 21-hour intensive Service Leadership program. Whether the intensive course is as beneficial as the full-term service leadership course to the students, and whether this intensive course is well received are explored in this paper.

Methods

In the summer of 2017/2018 academic year, "SOAR Youth Leadership Program" conducted the intensive "Service Leadership" course in Beijing. The participants were students from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (n = 21) and Peking University (n = 22). Upon completion of the course, the students were invited to complete two forms, namely course evaluation form and personal reflection form. Student consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation which they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without any consequences. A total of 41 sets of questionnaires were collected, with a response rate of 95.35%.

Instruments

The evaluation of this study consisted of quantitative and qualitative data which were collected through the Course Evaluation Form and Personal Reflection Form.

Course Evaluation Form (Quantitative and qualitative data)

The Course Evaluation Form was used to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership series courses with sound psychometric properties (43). It composed of five parts as follows:

1. Students' views on course content, which included 10 items covering course objectives, activities, classroom atmosphere, learning experience, etc.
2. Students' views on lecturers, which included 10 items on teaching-skills, attitudes toward profession, class interaction, mastery of the course.
3. Students' views on the extent to which the course has helped them, such as enhancement of social competence and resilience (18 items).
4. Overall satisfaction with the course (3 items), including whether suggesting this course to their friends, intending to participate in similar courses, and satisfaction with this course.

A 5-point Likert Scale was utilized in the first four parts, with ratings of "4" and "5" indicating positive responses.

5. Four open-ended questions: (a) important things they learned from this subject; (b) one thing they appreciate most in this subject; (c) comments about the lecturers; and (d) aspects should be improved.

Personal Reflection Form (Qualitative data)

In the qualitative study, we used the Personal Reflection Form to capture the course's effectiveness focusing on two parts:

6. Three words or phrases to express students' perception and comment on this course.
7. One metaphor with a brief interpretation that can represent the course.

Data analyses

Quantitative and qualitative data are collected through the course evaluation form. For the quantitative data analyses, reliability analyses were first conducted to test internal consistency. Second, descriptive statistics were conducted to evaluate the participants' perceptions to better understand the responses of students. Thirdly, correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships amongst the subscales. Coding and counting positive response rate were used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the four open-ended questions.

Based on the previous studies (40,44), responses collected from the Personal Reflection Form were transcribed and coded. If one descriptor had two or more meanings units, they would be separated and categorized as two or more meaning units. For example, a student wrote "*touching and helpful*" as one descriptor, which could be divided into "touching" and "helpful" as two meaning units. On the other hand, if two or more descriptors shared one meaning, these descriptors would be merged as one category. The meaning units were subsequently categorized as "Positive," "Neutral," "Negative," or "Undecided."

The coding method was utilized in the metaphors as well. Metaphors were first classified as "Positive," "Neutral," "Negative," or "Undecided." If the explanation had more than one meaning units, the metaphor would be derived into several meaningful units accordingly. Then, the derived items would be coded into different categories. To test the consistency of coding, 20 descriptors and 20 metaphors were selected randomly to test the intra-rater and inter-rater reliabilities. Two coders coded the selected items separately to examine the intra-rater reliability; then, another two coders were invited to code the same set of items to test the inter-rater reliabilities.

Table 1. Mean, Standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and mean of inter-item correlations amongst the variables

	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha	Mean [#]
Program content (10 items)	4.50	.36	.77	.25
Program implementers (10 items)	4.73	.37	.90	.54
Program effectiveness (18 items)	4.25	.60	.96	.55
Total effectiveness (38 items)	4.44	.43	.96	.39
Overall satisfaction (3 items)	4.20	.69	.82	.66

Note: Mean[#]: inter-item correlation.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the reliability analyses of the Course Evaluation Form had an acceptable internal consistency: program content (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77), program implementers (Cronbach's

alpha = 0.90), program effectiveness (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96), total effectiveness (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96), and overall satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the participants' evaluations on the program content

Participants' views towards the program contents:		1		2		3		4		5		Content	
		Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Positive responses (Options 4-5)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	The objectives of the curriculum are very clear.	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	39.0	25	61.0	41	100.0
2.	The content design of the curriculum is very good.	0	0	0	0	8	19.5	20	48.8	13	31.7	33	80.5
3.	The activities were carefully arranged.	0	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	13	31.7	26	63.4	39	95.1
4.	The classroom atmosphere was very pleasant.	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	19.5	33	80.5	41	100.0
5.	There was much peer interaction amongst the students.	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	24.4	31	75.6	41	100.0
6.	I participated in the class activities actively (including discussions, sharing, games, etc.).	0	0	0	0	4	9.8	18	43.9	19	46.3	37	90.2
7.	I was encouraged to do my best.	0	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	16	39.0	23	56.1	39	95.1
8.	The learning experience enhanced my interests towards the course.	0	0	1	2.4	2	4.9	15	36.6	23	56.1	38	92.7
9.	Overall speaking, I have a very positive evaluation on the course.	0	0	2	4.9	1	2.4	12	29.3	26	63.4	38	92.7
10.	On the whole, I like this course very much.	0	0	0	0	5	12.2	18	43.9	18	43.9	36	87.8

The descriptive analyses showed that the participants rated positively about this course in Table 2. In the ten items that assessed the course content, positive response ranged from 80.5% (n = 33) to 100% (n = 41). Specifically, all 41 participants agreed that curriculum objectives were clear and atmosphere of the class was pleasant, and they enjoyed the interaction between peers. In the open-ended question of "the most appreciate things in the course," 28 out of 38 (73.68%) responded with positive comments (see Table 7) that are related to the well-arranged activities, peer interaction, and pleasant atmosphere. For the metaphors about the program content, there were 19 meaningful units (see Table 9).

Referring to the perception of the lecturers (see Table 3), all participants (n = 41) responded with a positive evaluation of the lecturers. There were 6 items with 100% positive responses, which included "lecturer well prepare the lessons," "showed good professional attitudes," "lecturers involved in the class," "encouraged students to join the activities," "cared students," and "ready to provide help to students." Although the positive response ratio of "teaching skills" was lower than other items, there were still 90.2% (n = 37) students responded positively on the teaching skills of lecturers. "Professional," "Caring," and "Patience" were the most frequently appeared phrases in the open-ended

question (see Table 7) as well as the interpretations of metaphors related to lecturers (see Table 9).

Table 4 presents the findings on the program effectiveness perceived by the students. All participants (n = 41) admitted that the course has helped them to comprehend the importance of situational task competencies, character strength, and caring disposition in successful leadership. There were 97.6% (n = 40) of the participants agreed that the course enabled them to cultivate compassion and caring for others; 39 out of 41(95.1%) participants gained knowledge (e.g., theories, research, concepts, etc.) covered in the course, which allowed them to understand the characteristics that successful service leaders need. Besides, students' responses to the first question showed additional effects (see Table 7), such as accommodating others' opinions and enhance communication skills. These effects also appeared in the descriptors and metaphors (see Tables 8 and 9).

Regarding overall satisfaction, 40 participants (97.6%) agreed that they were satisfied with the

Service Leadership course. There were 85.4% of participants willing to recommend this subject to their friends, while only 25 out of 41 (61%) participants would consider to register a similar course in the future. The students also offered suggestions for course improvement in the fourth open-ended question (see Table 7), some of which also can be seen in the metaphors' explanations. Furthermore, Pearson correlation analyses showed that all the subscales were significantly correlated (see Table 6).

Table 8 presents the results of descriptors coding. A total of 120 out of 134 (89.55%) descriptors were coded as positive. The top three most mentioned descriptors were "Inspiring/Inspired/Enlightening," "Helpful/Useful/Benefit" and "Interesting/Fun/Attractive," with 19, 15, 11 times mentioned respectively. The numbers of descriptors regarded as neutral, negative and undecided were 11 (8.21%), 2 (1.49%), and 1 (0.75%).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the participants' evaluations of the program implementers

Participants' views towards the program implementers:		1		2		3		4		5		Content	
		Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Positive responses (Options 4-5)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	The lecturer(s) had a good mastery of the course.	0	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	12	29.3	27	65.9	39	95.1
2.	The lecturer(s) was (were) well prepared for the lessons.	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	17.1	34	82.9	41	100.0
3.	The teaching skills of the lecturer(s) were good.	1	2.1	0	0	3	6.3	11	26.8	26	63.4	37	90.2
4.	The lecturer(s) showed good professional attitudes.	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	22.0	32	78.0	41	100.0
5.	The lecturer(s) was (were) very involved.	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	24.4	31	75.6	41	100.0
6.	The lecturer(s) encouraged students to participate in the activities.	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	19.5	33	80.5	41	100.0
7.	The lecturer(s) cared for the students.	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	12.2	36	87.8	41	100.0
8.	The lecturer(s) was (were) ready to offer help to students when needed.	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	14.6	34	70.8	41	100.0
9.	The lecturer(s) had much interaction with the students.	0	0	0	0	1	2.4	10	24.4	30	73.2	10	97.6
10.	Overall speaking, I have a very positive evaluation on the lecturer(s).	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	31.7	28	68.3	41	100.0

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the participants' evaluations of the program effectiveness

Participants' views towards the program effectiveness		1		2		3		4		5		Content	
		Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Positive responses (Options 4-5)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	It has enhanced my social competence.	1	2.4	1	2.4	2	4.9	22	53.7	15	36.6	37	90.2
2.	It has improved my ability in expressing and handling my emotions.	0	0	2	4.9	6	14.6	18	43.9	15	36.6	33	80.5
3.	It has enhanced my critical thinking.	0	0	4	9.8	4	9.8	17	41.5	16	39.0	33	80.5
4.	It has increased my competence in making sensible and wise choices.	0	0	1	2.4	7	17.1	18	43.9	15	36.6	33	80.5
5.	It has helped me make ethical decisions.	0	0	2	4.9	4	9.8	18	43.9	17	41.5	35	84.3
6.	It has strengthened my resilience in adverse conditions.	0	0	0	0	7	17.1	24	58.5	10	24.4	34	82.9
7.	It has strengthened my self-confidence.	1	2.4	2	4.9	6	14.6	18	43.9	14	34.1	32	78.0
8.	It has helped me face the future with a positive attitude.	0	0	0	0	6	14.6	15	36.6	20	48.8	35	85.3
9.	It has enhanced my love for life.	0	0	2	4.9	6	14.6	16	39.0	17	41.5	33	80.5
10.	It has helped me explore the meaning of life.	1	2.4	1	2.4	9	22.0	14	34.1	16	39.0	30	73.2
11.	It has enhanced my ability of self-leadership.	0	0	0	0	3	7.3	16	39.0	22	53.7	38	92.7
12.	It has helped me cultivate compassion and care for others.	0	0	0	0	1	2.4	15	36.6	25	61.0	40	97.6
13.	It has helped me enhance my character strengths comprehensively.	0	0	2	4.9	4	9.8	18	43.9	17	41.5	35	85.4
14.	It has enabled me to understand the importance of situational task competencies, character strength and caring disposition in successful leadership.	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	48.8	21	51.2	41	100.0
15.	It has promoted my sense of responsibility in serving the society.	0	0	1	2.4	3	7.3	19	46.3	18	43.9	37	90.2
16.	It has promoted my overall development.	1	2.4	0	0	5	12.2	17	41.5	18	43.9	35	85.4
17.	The theories, research and concepts covered in the course have enabled me to understand the characteristics of successful service leaders.	0	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	18	43.9	21	51.2	39	95.1
18.	The theories, research and concepts covered in the course have helped me synthesize the characteristics of successful service leaders.	0	0	2	4.9	4	9.8	17	41.5	18	43.9	35	85.4

Table 5. Summary of the participants' perceptions toward other aspects

		1		2		3		4		5		content	
		Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Positive responses (Options 4-5)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	Will you suggest your friends to take this course?	0	0	1	2.4	5	12.2	13	27.1	22	53.7	35	85.4
2.	Will you participate in similar courses again in the future?	1	2.4	2	4.9	13	31.7	13	31.7	12	29.3	25	61.0
3.	On the whole, are you satisfied with this course?	0	0	0	0	1	2.4	22	53.7	18	43.9	40	97.6

Table 6. Pearson correlations among program content, instructors, and effectiveness

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Program content (10 items)	-				
2. Program instructors (10 items)	.61**	-			
3. Program effectiveness (18 items)	.70**	.73**	-		
4. Total effectiveness	.81**	.84**	.97**	-	
5. Overall satisfaction	.68**	.67**	.89**	.88**	-

Table 7. Summary of students' written comments on the course (N = 41)

	Positive responses	Total responses	Percentage (%)	Highlights
1. The most important thing(s) learned in the course	36	41	87.8	"I learned that sympathy and empathy are two different concepts and we should show empathy, not sympathy, to people in need." "The ways to be a self-leader" "I have learned the nature of intellectual quotient, AQ, EQ and emotional control"
2. The things that appreciated most in the course	38	41	92.7	"1. Pleasant atmosphere 2. Enough space and time for us to express and share 3. teachers are all caring" "I appreciate the efforts paid by the lecturers. It was really well-prepared. And the class atmosphere was really pleasant" "The interactive activities. The use of other medias (video, /role play), Many spaces for students to think deeply in topic."
3. Comments on the lecturer(s)	23	41	56.1	"The lecturers are nice and cheerful as they gave us physical and mental support throughout the trip" "I think the lectures are helpful and joyful. The lecturers are well-prepared, kind and willing to communicate with us" "They are professional, friendly. Warm-hearted"
4. Areas for improvement	24	41	58.5	"Can involve more interaction and discussion" "More videos and specific strategies. Some contents in the course is a little bit abstract" "Schedule too tight (sometimes), lack of interaction between groups"

Table 8. Categorization of descriptors used by the participants to describe the course

Descriptors	Nature of the response				Total
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Undecided	
Inspiring/Inspired/Enlightening	19	-	-	-	-
Helpful/Useful/Benefit	15	-	-	-	-
Interesting/Attractive/Fun/Funny	11	-	-	-	-
Meaningful/Profound/Influential	10	-	-	-	-
Informative/Fruitful/Comprehensive	10	-	-	-	-
Enjoyable/Joyful/Happy/Cheerful	10	-	-	-	-
Eye-opened/Broaden my horizon/Enrich inner self	8	-	-	-	-
Touching/Warm/Beloved/Inter-connected	6	-	-	-	-
Impressive/Unforgettable/Memorable	4	-	-	-	-
Excited/Exciting	3	-	-	-	-
Creative/Flexible	3	-	-	-	-
Contact with excellent students/Cooperative	3	-	-	-	-
Efficient/Condensed	2	-	-	-	-
Satisfied/Worthy	2	-	-	-	-
Interactive	1	-	-	-	-
Practical	1	-	-	-	-
Other positive responses	6	-	-	-	-
Innovation/Cooperation/Role play/Challenging	-	5	-	-	-
Learnt service leadership/Think the part of service and leadership/Prefer group activities	-	3	-	-	-
Other neutral responses	-	3	-	-	-
Sad	-	-	1	-	-
Tired	-	-	1	-	-
999	-	-	-	1	-
Total Count (N):	120	11	2	1	134
Total Count (%):	89.55%	8.21%	1.49%	0.75%	100.00%

Table 9. Categorization of the metaphors used by the participants to describe the course

Metaphors	Nature of the metaphor					Number of codes derived from the metaphor and its nature				
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Undecided	Total	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Undecided	Total
Crepe cake/Buffer/ A rich French dinner/Apple/ Oliver fruit	7	-	-	-	-	10	-	1	-	-
Party/Melting pot	4	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-
Lollipop/Candy	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Light/Bulb	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
A sapling/An apple tree	2	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Seed	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Lighthouse	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Gym room/Barbell	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Knowledge trip/Train	2	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
a Doraemon	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Butterfly	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Other positive responses	11	-	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	-
Balsam pear	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Total Count (N):	40	0	1	0	41	49	0	2	0	51
Total Count (%):	97.56	0.00	2.44	0.00	100.00	96.08	0.00	3.92	0.00	100.00

To test the consistency of coding, 20 items of the descriptors were randomly selected to examine the reliabilities. To assess intra-rater reliabilities, the raters who participated in the coding process are invited to rate the 20 items one more time. To assess inter-rater reliabilities, another two research assistants who were not involved in the original coding process were invited to rate the 20 items. The intra-rater agreements were 90% and 95%, and the inter-rater congruence were both 95%.

In Table 9, 40 out of 41 (97.56%) original metaphors were considered as positive. Among the derived items, 49 (96.08%) of them were coded as positive, with only 2 (3.92%) items were coded as negative. A total of 13 categories were generated after coding. The three categories as examples are listed below:

The first category was brought up by seven students. The metaphors in this category indicated that this course included a wealth of knowledge.

- *Buffer*: “the lessons are fruitful and interesting. I gained much knowledge and fun during the lesson. The lessons provided me with a large variety of knowledge regarding leadership and equip me with the knowledge to deal with the challenge I may face in the future.”

Four students expressed similar meaning in second category. This category mainly referred to the diverse background of participants.

- *Melting pot*: “the people attendants are from different backgrounds, all the diverse thinking patterns, languages and cultures come together, melt with each other, forming an unbelievably perfect class. Everyone learns something about who they are, what other culture is like as well as most importantly, now to be a service leader.”

The third one was mentioned by three students, referring to the happiness that could be created by using the knowledge learnt from the course.

- *Lollipop*: “we may change someone's life by doing something out of kindness.”

Similar to the descriptors, 20 items of metaphors were selected randomly to test the intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. The intra-rater agreement coded by two separate coders at two-time points were 90% and 100%, and the inter-rater reliability coded independently by two extra coders were both 95%. The results of both descriptors and metaphors supported the observation that the “Service Leadership” course was beneficial to the majority of the participants.

Date	Session	Lecture topic
July 4, 2018 (Wednesday)	Afternoon (2pm-5pm)	Lecture 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Service Leadership and SOAR Program • Realms, Models of Service Leadership, and differences between the manufacturing economy and service economy
July 5, 2018 (Thursday)	Morning (9am-12pm)	Lecture 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven Core Beliefs of Service Leadership • E (Effective Service Leadership) = MC² (Moral character × Competence × Care)
	Afternoon (2pm-5pm)	Lecture 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrapersonal Competencies and Service Leadership • IQ (task-relevant knowledge, problem solving, and decision making); EQ (understanding and managing emotion effectively); AQ (adversity quotient); SQ (spiritual quotient)
July 7, 2018 (Saturday)	Morning (9am-12pm)	Lecture 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal competencies and Service Leadership (Communication skills; positive social relationship building; conflict resolution) • Promoting Positive Social relationship
	Afternoon (2pm-5pm)	Lecture 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character Strengths and Service Leadership (love of learning, honesty, courage, perseverance, humility, and gratitude) • Character Strengths in Chinese Philosophies (integrity (lian), shame (chi), loyalty (zhong), filial piety (xiao), benevolence (ren), affection (ai), trustworthiness (xin), righteousness (yi), propriety (li), wisdom (zhi), harmony (he) and peace (ping))
July 8, 2018 (Sunday)	Morning (9am-12pm)	Lecture 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring Disposition and Service Leadership (Universal dimensions of social cognition (warmth and competence); primary elements of care (love, listening, and empathy) • Becoming Caring Service Leaders
	Afternoon (2pm-5pm)	Lecture 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental Asset (Self-esteem, self-efficacy, purpose in life and optimism about future) • Self-Leadership and Service Leadership • Recap of Service Leadership and Core Beliefs • Sharing and reflections

Figure 1. Course arrangement and content outline of the 21-hour course in 3.5 days.

Discussion

This study examined the perceptions of 43 undergraduate participants from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Peking University on the intensive “Service Leadership” course. Several observations are consistent with the previous studies (43, 45): the internal consistency of Course Evaluation Form is acceptable; the content, lecturers, and effectiveness of the program were significantly correlated. The findings based on the quantitative and qualitative data are overwhelmingly positive.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings showed that student participants notably benefited from the “Service Leadership” course. First, students’ communication skills and the ability to regulate emotions were promoted. Students strongly agreed that they have learned the knowledge about how to control and express emotions as well as how to cultivate

compassion and care for others. They practiced these skills through the activities organized in the courses, such as role play and self-reflection, which were rarely employed in other subjects. Second, the “Service Leadership” course strengthened the student participants’ responsibility and capacity of self-leadership. Majority of them stated that they learned how to meet the needs of self, others, and community. Third, the “Service Leadership” course enhanced their willingness for service. Even though it was the first time they heard about the concepts related to Service Leadership, they developed the sense of the core components as a service leader and how to best serve others in such a role. Last but not least, many student participants revealed that the course fostered their confidence and awareness to be a leader. The theory behind “Service Leadership” upholds that every person has the potential to make use of their strengths and become a leader during the collaboration (31). It raises the students’ awareness on

acknowledging their potential and helps them to understand that everyone can occupy a position of leadership in daily life.

The quantitative and qualitative research employed in the study are complementary. On the one hand, the credibility of the study can be promoted (46). Besides, the validity and reliability of the study have been tested, which provide the base for replication and generalization available in the future. Besides, Toomela (27) stated that the mix-method approach provides a deeper understanding of the information we encoded.

Unlike other leadership models, Service Leadership Model starts from self-leadership and ends with serving others and the systems. Service Leadership theory emphasizes on self-leadership as the primary condition before one can serve others and systems (47). Benefits of developing self-leadership have been explored in literature. For example, Prussia and colleagues' (48) study showed that self-leadership could promote academic achievement effectively through enhanced self-efficacy. Also, Dolbier, Soderstrom, and Steinhardt (49) found that self-leadership is positively related to higher psychological function and better health status.

Furthermore, in another study which the corporate employees were employed, they found that self-leadership has positive correlation with not only health (e.g., greater perceived wellness, less work stress) but also work outcomes (e.g., more efficiency communication, greater work satisfaction, higher quality management, better working relationship) (49). Learning service leadership can contribute to adolescents' academic performance and their future work. In other words, not only a short-term effect but also long-term influence can be acquired from service leadership training.

On the other hand, the Service Leadership subject is dedicated to nurturing adolescents to be caring service leaders (50). Caring thinking and behavior facilitate leaders' personal development and self-actualization (51). For the ones whom they lead, caring will inspire them to be more autonomous in their daily work (51). For the communities, the social atmosphere, which is full of caring, respect, and love, will be established. Self, others, and systems all can be benefited from the caring behaviors. Everyone can be benefited from the Service Leadership subject. In

short, the significance of developing and broadcasting Service Leadership subject is profound.

Nevertheless, the present study has several limitations. First, after students completed the rating scales in the course evaluation form, they may be reluctant or impatient to answer the open-ended questions in the last part which aimed at assessing the same aspect. Second, the "Service Leadership" course conducted in the SOAR program was an intensive mode. Although the result of the intensive course was positive, we could study further whether the differences between the intensive conducted courses and regular schedule courses exist.

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Ethical compliance

The authors have stated all possible conflicts of interest within this work. The authors have stated all sources of funding for this work. If this work involved human participants, informed consent was received from each individual. If this work involved human participants, it was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. If this work involved experiments with humans or animals, it was conducted in accordance with the related institutions' research ethics guidelines.

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