

LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS: A YOUTH GUIDE TO BEHAVIOURAL EXCELLENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

By

Ngezack Amos Cletus

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,

Taraba State University, Jalingo. Nigeria

08146665518

cangezack@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores youth leadership pathways through behavioral excellence, mentorship, and administrative effectiveness. It highlights the significance of cultivating emotional intelligence, ethical responsibility, and administrative competence among young people to prepare them for transformative leadership. Drawing from contemporary literature and leadership theories, the study Youth leadership has increasingly become a critical issue in contemporary societies where young people are positioned as the driving force of social, political, and economic transformation. This paper examines the role of youth leadership in promoting behavioral excellence and administrative effectiveness within educational and organizational contexts. Drawing from contemporary scholarship and leadership theories, the study highlights how emotional intelligence, ethical behavior, mentorship, and administrative capacity shape the effectiveness of youth leaders. The research adopts a conceptual and literature-based approach, synthesizing current studies that emphasize leadership competencies, mentorship models, and administrative practices required for effective youth leadership development. Findings reveal that leadership effectiveness among youths is highly dependent on the cultivation of behavioral integrity, structured mentorship, and capacity-building strategies that empower young leaders to address the challenges of governance, organizational management, and social responsibility. The paper concludes by presenting recommendations that underscore the need for inclusive policies, mentorship programs, and institutional reforms to promote effective youth leadership. These recommendations are critical for educators, policymakers, and development stakeholders seeking to enhance youth leadership competencies in the 21st century. Themphasizes structured mentorship, experiential learning, and policy support as critical drivers of youth leadership development. The paper concludes with recommendations on institutionalizing mentorship,

embedding leadership in curricula, and leveraging digital technologies to strengthen youth participation in governance and social changes.

Keywords: Youth leadership, behavioral excellence, administrative effectiveness, mentorship, leadership development

Introduction

Leadership remains a fundamental catalyst for societal transformation, especially in contemporary contexts where youth represent a significant proportion of the population. The dynamic challenges facing modern societies demand leaders who demonstrate behavioral excellence, ethical consciousness, and administrative competence. Youth leadership, when properly nurtured, has the potential to stimulate innovation, reduce social vices, and promote sustainable development. According to Northouse (2019), leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. For young people, this process requires not only visionary thinking but also the cultivation of emotional intelligence, resilience, and responsibility (Goleman, 1998).

Youth Leadership and Behavioral Excellence

Behavioral excellence refers to the ability of young leaders to exhibit positive conduct, integrity, and emotional balance in their interactions and decision-making processes. Scholars emphasize that leadership effectiveness is strongly tied to character and interpersonal skills rather than positional authority (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Youths who develop emotional intelligence are better able to manage conflicts, build collaborative relationships, and resist corruption (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Furthermore, the cultivation of discipline, empathy, and respect among youth leaders fosters trust and accountability in leadership contexts (Acheampong et al., 2022).

Leadership has long been recognized as a cornerstone of societal development, and in the 21st century, the emphasis on youth leadership has become increasingly significant (Adebayo, 2022). Young people are often regarded as the backbone of societal renewal and innovation, representing a critical human resource for national growth and sustainability. According to Nwachukwu and Musa (2021), effective youth leadership is not merely about occupying positions of authority but about demonstrating values, competencies, and administrative skills that contribute to collective well-being. This recognition has fueled scholarly interest in exploring how youths can be nurtured to achieve behavioral excellence and administrative effectiveness.

The importance of youth leadership is particularly evident in African contexts, where over 60% of the population consists of young people (African Union, 2020). The demographic reality suggests that the future of governance, economic progress, and social cohesion lies significantly in the hands of youth. However, challenges such as peer influence, corruption, poor mentorship,

and weak administrative capacity have hindered the ability of many young leaders to deliver effectively (Ogunyemi, 2023). These limitations have created a growing concern about how societies can cultivate in their youths not only the aspiration to lead but also the behavioral discipline and managerial competence necessary for sustainable leadership.

Scholars such as Kouzes and Posner (2021) have argued that leadership effectiveness is grounded in both character and competence. For youths, this translates into the cultivation of behavioral integrity such as honesty, empathy, and accountability alongside the acquisition of administrative skills like planning, communication, and conflict resolution. In educational institutions, for example, student leaders are often entrusted with responsibilities that mirror real-world governance structures. Their performance offers an early indication of how well-prepared they are to transition into leadership roles in society (Okeke, 2022). Unfortunately, many youth leaders fail to meet these expectations due to a lack of structured mentorship and inadequate exposure to leadership training.

The role of mentorship in shaping youth leadership is crucial. Studies have demonstrated that mentorship provides direction, cultivates discipline, and instills a sense of responsibility in young leaders (Adeyemi & Johnson, 2021). This makes mentorship an indispensable tool in preparing young people for leadership excellence. In Nigeria, for instance, mentorship programs organized by non-governmental organizations have been effective in equipping youth with practical leadership skills, thereby improving their administrative efficiency (Eze, 2022). Yet, these programs are often limited in scope and fail to reach the larger population of youths who could benefit from them. Furthermore, administrative effectiveness is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of leadership success. Administrative competence encompasses the ability to plan, organize, and manage resources effectively to achieve organizational goals (Northouse, 2021). Youth leaders who lack these skills often struggle with accountability, transparency, and decision-making, leading to inefficiencies that undermine their credibility. As Onyango and Okafor (2023) note, the failure of youth leadership initiatives is often tied to weaknesses in administrative capacity rather than a lack of vision. This paper, therefore, seeks to critically examine the intersection of youth leadership, behavioral excellence, and administrative effectiveness. It emphasizes that the future of effective leadership lies in preparing young people with the right balance of values and competencies. By reviewing existing literature, the paper highlights the challenges, opportunities, and practical pathways for improving youth leadership outcomes. The discussion is structured into three major sections: youth leadership and behavioral excellence, mentorship and leadership development, and administrative effectiveness. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at strengthening leadership development programs for youths across different contexts.

Mentorship and the Development of Youth Leadership

Mentorship plays a critical role in shaping leadership capacities. Structured mentoring relationships provide youths with guidance, role modeling, and opportunities to develop competence. According to Dugan and Komives (2010), mentorship strengthens socially responsible leadership by fostering self-awareness, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Mentorship programs have proven effective in bridging generational gaps, transmitting cultural values, and preparing young leaders for administrative and governance roles. In African contexts, community-based mentorship remains a powerful tool for nurturing ethical and resilient youth leaders (Okeke & Anyanwu, 2019).

Youth Leadership and Behavioral Excellence

Behavioral excellence refers to the consistent demonstration of values, attitudes, and conduct that promote integrity, responsibility, and accountability in leadership practice. For youths, developing behavioral excellence is a fundamental prerequisite for effective leadership because it determines how they interact with others, resolve conflicts, and make ethical decisions. According to Kouzes and Posner (2021), leadership is not first about the position one occupies but about the character and behaviors that inspire trust and confidence. Thus, for young people, behavioral excellence becomes the foundation upon which effective leadership is built.

Ethical Values and Integrity in Youth Leadership

Ethical leadership emphasizes honesty, fairness, and transparency. Youth leaders who embrace ethical values set themselves apart by creating an environment of trust and credibility (Northouse, 2021). In student organizations, for example, leaders who uphold integrity in managing finances or organizing events establish credibility among their peers, which strengthens organizational stability. Research by Adeyemi and Johnson (2021) indicates that student leaders who demonstrate high ethical standards often inspire their peers to adopt similar behaviors, thereby creating a ripple effect of positive conduct. Conversely, when youth leaders engage in unethical practices such as favoritism, dishonesty, or misuse of power, they undermine their credibility and erode trust. This, in turn, affects not only the success of the organization they lead but also their prospects for future leadership opportunities (Okeke, 2022). Therefore, fostering integrity and ethical values in youth leadership training is vital for shaping leaders who can contribute meaningfully to governance and administration in society.

Emotional Intelligence

Another crucial dimension of behavioral excellence in youth leadership is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions while also being sensitive to the emotions of others (Goleman, 2020). Youth leaders who are emotionally intelligent are better equipped to manage interpersonal conflicts, foster teamwork, and motivate others. For example, in student unions or community organizations,

leaders frequently encounter disagreements over resource allocation, event planning, or representation. A leader with high emotional intelligence can de-escalate tensions by showing empathy, listening actively, and seeking mutually beneficial solutions (Onyango & Okafor, 2023). Research has shown that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective in managing diverse groups and sustaining long-term relationships (Nwachukwu & Musa, 2021). This highlights the importance of training young leaders to develop self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills as core elements of behavioral excellence.

Discipline, Responsibility, and Accountability

Discipline and responsibility are core aspects of behavioral excellence. Discipline refers to the ability of a leader to regulate their actions and remain consistent with established standards, while responsibility involves the willingness to accept the consequences of one's decisions and actions. Accountability, on the other hand, is the obligation to report, explain, and be answerable for one's actions (Adebayo, 2022). In many youth organizations, leaders are entrusted with resources such as membership fees, equipment, or institutional support. Without discipline and accountability, such leaders are prone to misuse these resources, which can lead to mistrust and organizational collapse (Ogunyemi, 2023). On the contrary, leaders who demonstrate accountability by maintaining transparent financial records or openly communicating decisions reinforce confidence and ensure organizational sustainability. Moreover, discipline and responsibility extend beyond organizational management into personal leadership. As Eze (2022) notes, youth leaders who exhibit personal discipline in their studies, relationships, and community engagements often set examples that others emulate. This underscores the fact that behavioral excellence is not limited to leadership roles but also reflects in everyday conduct.

Youths Mentorship Program

Mentorship is one of the most powerful tools for cultivating effective youth leadership. It involves a relationship in which an experienced leader provides guidance, support, and knowledge to a younger or less experienced individual, thereby facilitating personal and professional growth. Scholars argue that youth leaders are not born with complete skills but develop through structured exposure, guidance, and role modeling (Northouse, 2021). According to Okeke and Musa (2022), mentorship plays a vital role in bridging the gap between leadership potential and leadership performance by equipping youths with relevant skills and behavioral orientations.

The Role of Mentorship in Shaping Youth Leaders

Mentorship provides young leaders with access to knowledge and experiences they would not have otherwise acquired. Through mentoring, youths can learn how to navigate organizational politics, manage conflicts, and make sound decisions (Nwachukwu, 2022). In student unions, for example, senior leaders often serve as mentors to new executive members, teaching them how to balance academic responsibilities with organizational leadership. Similarly, in community

development organizations, elders or more experienced leaders guide younger members in mobilization, advocacy, and project management. Empirical studies demonstrate that mentorship improves youths' self-confidence, leadership skills, and moral reasoning (Johnson & Ridley, 2021). This is because mentors do not only provide technical skills but also serve as role models for ethical behavior and effective leadership practices. In this way, mentorship acts as both a training ground and a moral compass for future leaders.

Formal and Informal Mentorship Structures

Mentorship can take place through both formal and informal structures. Formal mentorship involves structured programs organized by institutions, such as universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or government agencies. These programs are often deliberate, with specific goals, timelines, and measurable outcomes. For example, leadership training camps, youth summits, and capacity-building workshops often incorporate mentorship components where seasoned leaders train and guide emerging youth leaders (Adebanjo, 2022). Informal mentorship, on the other hand, occurs spontaneously through personal relationships. A youth may look up to a community elder, religious leader, or successful peer as a role model and adopt their behaviors and principles without a formal agreement. Informal mentorship is equally powerful because it creates a more natural and relational approach to leadership learning (Onyango & Okafor, 2023). Whether formal or informal, both mentorship types play complementary roles in developing leadership competencies among youths.

Challenges Facing Mentorship in Youth Leadership Development

Despite its importance, mentorship faces significant challenges in many African contexts. One challenge is the lack of accessible role models. In some communities, corruption, political instability, and poor governance have eroded public trust in leaders, leaving youths with few credible figures to emulate (Ogunyemi, 2023). Another challenge is inadequate institutional support for mentorship programs. Schools, universities, and youth organizations often lack the resources to organize structured mentorship initiatives, leaving mentorship to chance encounters.

Furthermore, the digital age has introduced both opportunities and challenges for mentorship. While social media platforms allow youths to connect with global mentors, they also expose them to negative influences such as toxic celebrity culture, misinformation, and unrealistic success narratives (Eze, 2022). This underscores the need for deliberate mentorship frameworks that help youths navigate digital spaces responsibly.

Strategies for Strengthening Youth Mentorship Programs

For mentorship to be effective in youth leadership development, certain strategies must be implemented. First, institutions of learning should integrate mentorship into their leadership

development curricula. For instance, universities can pair senior students with junior ones in peer-mentorship schemes, creating an environment of mutual learning (Adeyemi & Johnson, 2021).

Second, governments and NGOs should invest in structured mentorship programs targeting marginalized and rural youths who may lack access to strong role models. Additionally, mentors should be trained on effective coaching, empathy, and communication skills to ensure that their guidance is impactful. Research by Kouzes and Posner (2021) reveals that successful mentors are those who lead by example and encourage mentees to discover their own leadership style rather than simply imitating their mentors. Lastly, youths themselves must be proactive in seeking out mentors and cultivating relationships that foster personal and professional growth.

Administrative Effectiveness in Youth Leadership

Administrative effectiveness is an essential component of leadership. It involves the ability to plan, organize, direct, and evaluate resources to achieve desired objectives. Hoy and Miskel (2013) argue that effective administration is not merely about control but about facilitating collaboration and accountability. Youth leaders must acquire competencies in resource management, strategic planning, and organizational communication to sustain their initiatives. Kotter (1996) emphasizes that without strong administrative structures, visionary ideas often collapse under poor execution. For youths, administrative effectiveness ensures the translation of passion and innovation into measurable outcomes.

Administrative Effectiveness in Youth Leadership

Administrative effectiveness refers to the ability of leaders to manage people, resources, and processes in a way that achieves organizational goals efficiently and ethically. In the context of youth leadership, administrative effectiveness is critical because it determines whether young leaders can translate their vision and energy into practical outcomes. According to Robbins and Coulter (2021), effective administration requires planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—skills that youth leaders must acquire and practice within their organizations, schools, or communities.

The Importance of Administrative Skills in Youth Leadership

Administrative skills such as time management, financial accountability, record keeping, and conflict resolution are essential for youth leaders. Many youth-led organizations fail not because of lack of passion, but due to weak administration (Okonkwo, 2022).

Conclusion

The development of youth leadership is central to achieving sustainable development and social transformation. Behavioral excellence, mentorship, and administrative effectiveness form the tripod upon which impactful youth leadership stands. While behavioral excellence emphasizes

ethical conduct and emotional intelligence, mentorship provides the necessary support systems, and administrative effectiveness ensures that ideas are translated into results. For societies seeking inclusive and sustainable leadership, investing in youth leadership pathways is not optional but imperative.

Recommendations

- 1) Institutionalize Mentorship Programs: Establish structured mentorship initiatives across educational and community settings to guide youth leadership development (Komives & Wagner, 2017).
- 2) Integrate Leadership Education into Curricula: Embed leadership studies and behavioral training into school curricula to prepare students for future leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2010).
- 3) Promote Experiential Learning Opportunities: Provide volunteering, internships, and student governance platforms to develop practical leadership skills (Acheampong et al., 2022).
- 4) Strengthen Administrative Competence: Train young leaders in planning, resource management, and accountability for effective organizational leadership (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).
- 5) Encourage Ethical Leadership Practices: Highlight values of honesty, empathy, and transparency in leadership training (Brown & Treviño, 2006).
- 6) Leverage Technology for Leadership Development: Utilize digital platforms for online mentorship and youth networking (Okeke & Anyanwu, 2019).
- 7) Policy Support for Youth Leadership: Governments should enact policies promoting youth inclusion and support in governance (UNESCO, 2020).
- 8) Encourage Research on Youth Leadership: Scholars should expand research into youth leadership models within diverse cultural contexts.

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