Research Article

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Teachers' Perspectives on the Dilemmas of Leadership Education for Middle-School Students: A Grounded-Theory Study

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Abstract

This study creates a grounded conceptual framework to comprehend these difficulties by examining instructors' perceptions on the difficulties of teaching middle school students leadership. The study used a grounded-theory methodology to conduct semi-structured interviews with eighteen teachers. Open, axial, and selective coding were used to examine the interview data. Twelve axial categories, four higher-order dimensions, and 22 fundamental categories were created from the analysis's 43 original notions. The results show that four interrelated dimensions, mechanism construction, teacher-student perspective, teaching process, and learning content, reflect the challenges of leadership education. These characteristics include curriculum and resource conditions, instructional implementation, teacher and student attitudes and involvement, and institutional and organisational conditions. The four dimensions offer a multidimensional conceptual synthesis of the difficulties teachers see, as opposed to a linear or causal process. Implications for bolstering institutional structures, increasing teacher-student involvement and shared objectives, improving teaching strategies and assessment, and creating suitable curricula and educational materials are suggested based on this paradigm. The paper offers an empirically supported framework for comprehending the structural challenges of middle school leadership education and offers useful recommendations for educational institutions and practitioners looking to enhance its execution and calibre.

Keywords: *Leadership education; Middle-school students; Teachers' perspectives; Educational dilemmas; Grounded theory.*

1. Introduction

According to Coffey and Lavery (2018), leadership is a skill that helps people who take on leadership responsibilities accomplish their objectives. The growth of leadership among middle school students has drawn more attention in various educational contexts as educational reform has progressed. Leadership can be cultivated in students thru educational experiences and

involvement in school life, rather than being restricted to those who hold official leadership positions. According to this viewpoint, schools play a crucial role in giving students the chance to learn about, practise, and grow as leaders.

The growing focus on student leadership, however, does not guarantee that leadership education is used successfully. Concerns about formalisation, shallow implementation, "fast-food" techniques, and utilitarian attitudes have surfaced as middle school leadership education has grown. These inclinations may reduce the educational value of leadership development and restrict students' access to relevant leadership education (Duignan, 2007). According to Chao Yufang (2020), there are more problems with student leadership education than only one educational model, incompetent teachers, and a lack of awareness. Inadequate student engagement, a lack of well-developed and broadly applicable models, challenges with evaluation, and a lack of agreement on educational content and structure are some of the deeper issues. In a similar vein, Cardno (2020) emphasised the significance of tackling evaluative and structural problems in educational leadership practices.

These issues have drawn more attention since they could have an impact on middle school leadership education's efficacy and calibre. Leadership education must also transcend methods that highlight particular heroes in the quest for high-quality education. The difficulties of recreating leadership in ways that eschew the conventional "heroic" vision of leadership centred on specific important persons were covered by Schweiger et al. (2020).

According to this viewpoint, leadership education should give students more opportunities to acquire leadership-related information, skills, attitudes, and engagement rather than merely replicating positional or individualistic views of leadership. Furthermore, thru internal quality-management systems and external quality supervision, Hilman and Tejawiani (2025) highlighted the close relationship between leadership education and organisational conditions and institutional management. Therefore, the success of leadership education cannot be fully understood in terms of classroom activities alone; it is also influenced by institutional arrangements, teachers' perspectives, educational methods, and the learning environments that are available.

While prior research has identified a number of challenges related to student leadership education, the current discourse tends to focus on specific concerns, such as curriculum, evaluation, teacher ability, instructional methods, and student participation. Less focus has been placed on how teachers deal with these various challenges collectively and how they might be conceptually incorporated into a multifaceted framework.

It is still necessary to specifically look at how educators perceive the importance and significance of leadership education, what challenges they face when putting it into practice, and how these challenges relate to one another on an institutional, perceptual, instructional, and curricular level. Because it allows categories and their links to gradually emerge from participant accounts rather than imposing a preset explanatory framework, a grounded-theory approach is suitable for this goal.

In order to investigate teachers' opinions on the challenges of leadership education for middle school pupils, this study uses grounded theory. The study methodically analyses the interview data and creates a conceptual framework based on instructors' experiences using open, axial, and selective coding. Mechanism creation, teacher-student perspective, teaching method, and learning material are the four interrelated dimensions of leadership education into which the analysis incorporates the results after moving from beginning conceptions and basic categories to higher-order categories. Therefore, the study aims to explain how these factors collectively characterise the obstacles of implementing leadership education in middle schools, in addition to identifying specific dilemmas.

This study makes two contributions. Theoretically, it creates a multifaceted, empirically supported conceptual framework that incorporates the various challenges of leadership

education from the viewpoints of educators. The framework offers a conceptual synthesis of the institutional, perceptual, instructional, and curricular factors found in the interview data rather than a predefined causal model. In a practical sense, the study offers educational practitioners and schools a methodical resource to enhance the quality and execution of leadership education for middle school pupils.

Based on the above considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1 : How do teachers understand the meaning and value of leadership education for middle-school students?

RQ2 : What dilemmas do teachers perceive in the implementation of leadership education for middle-school students?

RQ3 : How do teachers believe these dilemmas can be addressed, and how can their perspectives be integrated into a conceptual framework of leadership education?

2. Literature Review

Research on young leadership first emerged in corporate and organisational settings before progressively spreading to youth development and education. Leadership has been emphasised more and more in relation to students' personal growth, involvement, accountability, teamwork, and ability to influence others as the idea has permeated educational environments. Growing interest in youth leadership, college student leadership, and, more recently, middle school student leadership has resulted from this trend.

However, there is still no agreed-upon definition of leadership education, and the idea is still open to various interpretations. With implications for more general educational development, leadership education has been characterised in terms of qualitative development, task- and person-oriented growth, inspiration, and mobilisation (Vrabii, 2022). In a similar vein, Jain et al. (2022) stressed the significance of leadership and management for student growth and participation in educational activities.

"There are almost as many definitions (of leadership) as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept," according to Stogdill (1974). The current study employs Yukl's (2008) definition of leadership, which reflects this conceptual diversity, as a process by which people influence others, create common understandings of what must be done, and support both individual and group efforts toward common goals. Because it emphasises influence, teamwork, and common objectives and expands leadership beyond official roles, this definition is especially pertinent to school-based leadership education.

2.1 Leadership education in educational settings

According to available research, leadership education has been studied from a number of complimentary angles, including its theoretical underpinnings, instructional strategies, leadership development initiatives, and empirical assessment. With universities creating organised programs, theoretical models, hands-on activities, and a variety of teaching methodologies, leadership development in higher education has become more institutionalised. The "Excellence in Leadership Education" program at Ball State University, the "Leadership Training Program" at the University of Detroit, and the "Hong Kong 200" initiative of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups are a few examples of university-based leadership development programs and youth leadership initiatives. Despite the fact that their settings and target audiences are different from those of middle school education, these examples show the growing institutionalisation and diversification of leadership education.

Prior studies have used quantitative and review-based methods to investigate leadership

interventions and training initiatives at the empirical level. While Lacerenza et al. (2017) used meta-analytic techniques to assess leadership training literature, Avolio et al. (2009) looked at leadership interventions.

Although the development and efficacy of leadership interventions are supported by these research, their main emphasis is on more general leadership development rather than the particular application of leadership education in middle schools. Vogel et al. (2021) identified significant research trends and directions by using bibliometric tools to analyse the evolution of the leadership development literature. These studies are helpful in comprehending the field's overall evolution, but they don't directly address how middle school instructors interpret and use leadership education.

2.2 Leadership education for middle-school students

The literature evaluated for this study contains relatively few empirical studies that particularly look at leadership education for middle school students when compared to the larger literature on leadership development. For instance, Lavery and Coffey (2021) investigated middle school students's perceptions of leadership by looking at the kinds of leadership they disapproved of, the kinds of leadership they thot were suitable, and potential explanations for these preferences. This study highlights the significance of taking into account students' personal conceptions of leadership and shows that young people may interpret leadership differently from traditional adult-oriented leadership models.

Additionally, recent research has started to look at middle school kids' leadership development from more focused educational viewpoints. For instance, Luo et al.'s study on middle school leadership development shows that younger students' leadership is receiving more scholarly attention (2025). Nonetheless, the conceptualisation, educational setting, and methodological approach of the current literature continue to be varied. Specifically, a large portion of the current literature concentrates on students' leadership development, leadership traits, or particular educational interventions, whereas teachers' interpretations of the real-world challenges associated with implementing leadership education in schools have received relatively less attention.

This distinction is crucial because teachers play a major role in the planning, execution, and assessment of school-based leadership education in addition to providing instruction in the classroom. Their perspectives may highlight real-world problems that are difficult to identify thru student outcome metrics or program descriptions, such as ambiguous learning objectives, a lack of institutional support, inadequate teacher preparation, limited opportunities for leadership practice, inappropriate curriculum content, poor assessment, and a lack of educational resources. Therefore, a practice-oriented understanding of how leadership education is experienced and implemented at the school level can be obtained by looking at these topics from the viewpoint of teachers.

2.3 Research gap and rationale for the present study

Although the body of current literature offers useful conceptual and empirical underpinnings for comprehending leadership education, there are still a number of gaps. First, it is challenging to ascertain how leadership education is perceived and used in middle school settings since studies of leadership development have frequently concentrated on general leadership training, college students, or particular treatments.

Second, research on middle school leadership in particular has yielded valuable insights into students' perspectives and leadership growth; yet, teachers' perspectives on the actual challenges faced during implementation have received less attention. Third, only a small number

of research have attempted to incorporate instructors' descriptions of institutional mechanisms, teacher-student perspectives, teaching procedures, and learning content into a cohesive conceptual framework. Instead, the majority of studies that are currently available focus on specific aspects of leadership education.

In terms of methodology, the literature analysed for this study include bibliometric reviews, intervention research, quantitative studies, and qualitative investigations. The current study does not, however, assert that grounded theory has never been applied to leadership education research. Instead, the literature reviewed here indicates that further qualitative research is required to enable the systematic comparison and conceptual integration of teachers' experiences. Because it allows categories and linkages to be constructed inductively from teachers' accounts while being sensitive to the practical context in which leadership education is practiced, a grounded-theory method is therefore acceptable.

As a result, the opinions of teachers are the particular focus of this study. The study aims to offer an empirically supported and context-sensitive explanation of the implementation challenges of middle-school leadership education by concentrating on teachers' interpretations rather than claiming to reflect the experiences of all stakeholders.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

A Straussian grounded-theory technique was used in this investigation (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Concepts and categories can be gradually formed from empirical facts rather than being imposed as preset theoretical explanations thanks to grounded theory, an inductive method that intimately links data gathering and analysis. Because it offers a methodical process for creating concepts and categories thru open, axial, and selective coding, the Straussian approach was chosen.

The study was exploratory in nature and examined instructors' perceptions of leadership education, the challenges they saw in its application, and potential solutions. In order to establish the study backdrop and guide the interview design, a survey of pertinent literature was carried out. However, preexisting notions and theories were not regarded as preset coding categories. The researchers utilised continual comparison and analytical memoing to analyse developing concepts and linkages throughout data analysis, mostly relying on participant narratives. As a result, the framework that was created from the interview data was then analysed in light of pertinent literature. The overall research procedure is presented in Figure 1.

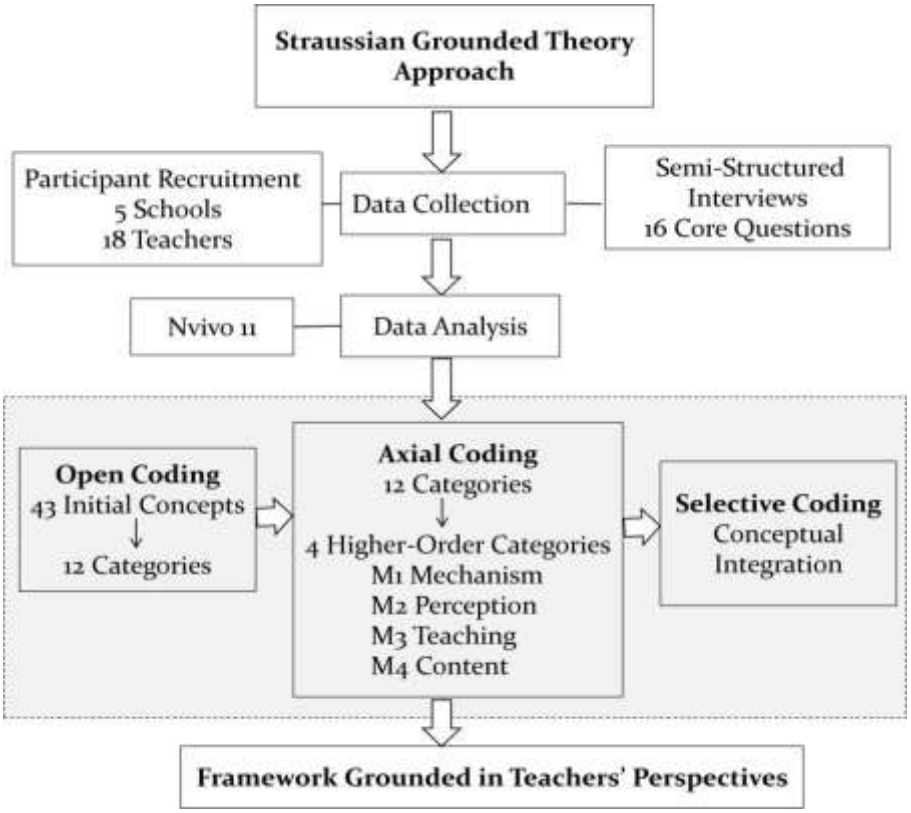


Figure 1. Research procedure and grounded-theory coding process.

3.2 Sample selection and data collection

Eighteen in-service teachers were selected from five middle schools using a selective sampling technique. While instructors were chosen to represent variations in gender, subject matter expertise, professional title, and classroom management experience, schools were chosen to offer variance in educational setting. Table 1 presents the participants' fundamental characteristics.

Table 1. Basic information about the interviewees.

Participant	Gender	Subject	Teaching Experience	Professional Title	Education	Class Management Experience
A1	Male	Maths	2	Junior	BA	Yes
A2	Male	English	6	Intermediate	MA	Yes
A3	Female	English	4	Junior	BA	No
A4	Female	Chinese	7	Junior	BA	Yes

B1	Female	History	23	Senior	BA	No
B2	Male	Politics	12	Intermediate	BA	Yes
B3	Female	Art	4	Junior	BA	No
B4	Female	Maths	13	Intermediate	BA	Yes
C1	Male	English	10	Intermediate	BA	Yes
C2	Female	PE	3	Junior	BA	Yes
C3	Female	Chinese	6	Junior	MA	Yes
D1	Male	Politics	23	Senior	BA	No
D2	Female	Art	12	Intermediate	BA	Yes
D3	Male	Chinese	11	Intermediate	BA	Yes
D4	Female	English	3	Junior	BA	No
E1	Female	History	7	Intermediate	BA	Yes
E2	Male	Maths	5	Junior	BA	Yes
E3	Male	English	7	Junior	MA	Yes

Note. Professional titles refer to the Chinese teacher professional-title system. "Junior," "Intermediate," and "Senior" indicate successive levels of professional qualification and rank.

The Chinese province of Anhui was home to the five participating schools. Schools were chosen because they were reachable for recruiting and satisfied the study's inclusion requirements. Eighteen teachers accepted the invitation to participate. All 18 participants were in-service teachers; none of them were students, parents, school administrators, or curriculum officials.

Table 2. Characteristics of the 5 schools.

School	**Country**	**Region**	**Public / private**	**Urban / rural**	**Interviewed teachers**
A	China	Anhui Province	Public	Rural	A1, A2, A3, A4 (n=4)
B	China	Anhui Province	Private	Urban	B1, B2, B3, B4 (n=4)
C	China	Anhui Province	Private	Rural	C1, C2, C3 (n=3)
D	China	Anhui Province	Public	Urban	D1, D2, D3, D4 (n=4)
E	China	Anhui Province	Public	Urban	E1, E2, E3 (n=3)

16 core questions were included in a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). Teachers' perceptions of the value of leadership education, its current availability, teaching strategies, teacher preparation, goals and planning, assessment, opportunities for leadership practice, curriculum content, resources, student participation, institutional support, theoretical and cultural fit, implementation challenges, potential solutions, and opposing or minority viewpoints were all covered in the questions. While follow-up questions were modified based on participants' answers and experiences, the same basic questions were utilised with every participant.

Participants were made aware of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, how the data will be used for research, and the anonymisation processes before to each interview. The interviews were audio recorded with consent from the participants. The duration of each interview was roughly sixty minutes. While 14 interviews with teachers from Schools B–E were done remotely by WeChat video, WeChat voice, QQ voice, or phone, four interviews with instructors from School A were done in person. Participants' accessibility and practical situations were the main factors that dictated the usage of various interview modalities.

Chinese was used for the interviews. Prior to analysis, the recordings were anonymised and transcribed. The researchers translated the interview extracts from the original Chinese transcripts into English, taking care to preserve the context and meaning of the statements made by the participants.

The study dataset contained all 18 interviews. The interviews were split into an initial analysis set and a reserved set for the initial coding and saturation processes. Prior to the primary coding procedure, the allocation was decided. In particular, six interviews were set aside for the ensuing saturation evaluation, while twelve interviews were utilised for the initial coding and category construction.

3.3 Coding procedure

The three-stage coding procedure of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding was used to analyse the interview data using a Straussian grounded-theory method (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This method was chosen because the study aimed to rigorously examine linkages among developing categories while creating an empirically grounded conceptual framework from instructors' narratives.

The two researchers independently went line by line thru the transcripts during open coding to find key phrases, preliminary ideas, and categories. Similar concepts were constantly compared between interviews and combined when they reflected overlapping meanings. As the analysis developed, the researchers debated variations in interpretation and improved the coding system. Twelve categories and forty-three initial thoughts were produced as a result of this procedure.

The characteristics, dimensions, and conceptual connections between the 12 categories were then examined using axial coding, which was also utilised to incorporate related categories into higher-order categories. In order to identify which categories could be meaningfully merged, the researchers employed constant comparison and analytical memoing instead of imposing predefined causal links. Four higher-order categories emerged from this process: learning content, teaching procedure, teacher-student perspective, and mechanism construction.

The four higher-order categories were then integrated and their conceptual links to the research topics of the study were determined using selective coding. Rather than being a causal model or a comprehensive depiction of students' experiences, the resulting framework was viewed as a conceptual interpretation of teachers' viewpoints.

Analytic memos were used throughout the study to record decisions made during coding, category definitions, evolving interpretations, and linkages between categories. When a

comparison of subsequent transcripts or a debate among the researchers revealed that a category needed to be clarified or improved, the coding system was updated. Instead of eliminating an idea based only on its low frequency, the researchers also took into account minority and divergent viewpoints.

Rather than imposing predefined categories on the interview data, prior literature was mostly used to inform the study backdrop and make the researchers more aware of the wider area. As a result, the researchers continued to pay attention to ideas that surfaced from participant narratives, even if they deviated from previous studies.

3.4 Data saturation

The saturation evaluation consisted of an initial analysis phase and a subsequent saturation assessment phase, in accordance with the organised technique suggested by Francis et al. (2010). To create the first coding structure and determine the emergent categories, the first twelve interviews (A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, D1, D2, E1, and E2) were evaluated. In order to determine whether extra data produced new concepts, categories, qualities, dimensions, or linkages, six more interviews (A4, B4, C3, D3, D4, and E3) were particularly examined (Appendix B).

Following the establishment of the preliminary coding framework, the six consecutive interviews were evaluated as part of the complete interview dataset. Therefore, rather than being a distinct or omitted dataset, they functioned as a subsequent evaluation of the sufficiency and stability of the developing categories. Constant comparison was used to compare the later interviews with the existing coding system. Throughout these six interviews, no fundamentally new beginning notions or basic categories were found, and the preexisting axial categories continued to apply to the new material. The established category associations did not need to be significantly altered.

The absence of significantly new beginning thoughts, fundamental categories, or significant changes to the preexisting category structure over the ensuing interviews served as the stopping criterion. Six interviews in a row satisfied this requirement. The lack of fresh conceptual insights from these interviews demonstrated that theoretical saturation had been reached and that additional data gathering was unlikely to significantly advance the evolving theoretical framework.

To differentiate the initial analytic stage from the subsequent saturation evaluation, Appendix B reports the order and distribution of the interviews. Expert review was not employed as proof of theoretical saturation; rather, it was carried out independently as an extra evaluation of the conceptual framework's coherence and plausibility.

4. Findings

4.1 General Findings

4.1.1 Open Coding

In order to find significant remarks in the interview data and to conceptualise and classify them thru continuous comparison, open coding was used. Both researchers used NVivo 11 to code the interview data line by line using the Straussian grounded-theory method. Participants' utterances were used to construct initial conceptions, which were then contrasted and merged with conceptually related meanings. Ideas that did not have enough empirical backing were examined and, if necessary, removed from the final coding scheme.

43 initial concepts were found and arranged into 22 fundamental categories as a result of this procedure. Following a comparison and integration of these fundamental categories into 12

axial categories, axial and selective coding were used to further synthesise these categories into four higher-order selective categories. As a result, the coding structure went from raw interview statements to basic categories, axial categories, higher-order/selective categories, and initial concepts.

Statements characterising a limited comprehension of leadership, for instance, were recorded as initial concepts such leader-oriented education and one-sided understanding. These ideas were related to the axial category of educational cognition after being placed into the basic category misperception of leadership. In a similar manner, statements pertaining to limited teaching formats were categorised into limited teaching formats, coded as basic teaching forms, and connected to the axial category teaching method.

Table 3 shows a selection of instructive instances instead of the whole set of 43 starting concepts and 22 basic categories because the entire coding procedure produced a significant number of concepts and categories.

Table 3. Open coding examples.

Raw words	Source	Initial concept	Basic category	Axial category
S2	"Leadership education for middle school students is sometimes equated with promoting individualism or personal heroism."	a18 One-sided understanding	B01 Misconception of leadership	F1 Educational cognition
S3	"Leadership is narrowly equated with becoming a leader or official, positional power, or an innate trait."	a1 Leader-oriented education	B01 Misconception of leadership	F1 Educational cognition
S6	"Leadership education is mainly delivered through training, lectures, and experience sharing."	a6 Simple teaching form	B02 Limited teaching formats	F2 Teaching approach
S10	"Leadership education has not yet been systematically incorporated into the school's talent-development system."	a3 Failure to plan ahead	B08 Lack of top-level goal setting	F5 Goal guidance
S25	"The top-down 'pyramid' environment leaves students with limited autonomy to make decisions and exercise leadership."	a22 Hierarchical "pyramid" environment	B10 Organizational culture constraints	F6 Spatio-temporal relation
S4	"Schools do not allocate sufficient time to leadership-related knowledge, skills, and practice."	a25 Lack of time	B11 Insufficient time and practice space	F6 Spatio-temporal relation
S22	"Leadership education sometimes copies foreign theories and models without sufficient localization."	a26 Westernization and copying	B19 Insufficient localized theory	F10 Theoretical precursor
S37	"Leadership courses are not	a41	B21	F11 Material

	closely connected with second-classroom and extracurricular practice."	Disconnection from the second classroom	Classroom/second-classroom disconnection	resources
S1	"Frequent motivation of students can increase their motivation."	Incentive-related initial concept	B16/B17 Incentive mechanism	F9 Incentive

4.1.2 Axis Coding

To further arrange the categories produced by open coding and investigate their connections by determining their characteristics and dimensions, axial coding was used (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Conceptually relevant categories were incorporated into higher-order categories while retaining their links to the interview data thru continuous comparison.

Four higher-order categories (mechanism creation, teacher-student perception, teaching process, and learning content) were created by integrating the 12 axial categories. Rather than a predetermined causal sequence, these categories reflect four interrelated elements of the challenges instructors face while implementing leadership education for middle school students. Table 4 lists the four higher-order categories along with the axial categories that correspond to them. To create an integrated framework based on instructors' viewpoints, their conceptual linkages were further investigated thru selective coding.

Table 4 . Higher-Order Categories Developed through Axial Coding

Higher-order category	**Conceptual focus**	**Axial categories**	**Interpretation**
M1 Mechanism construction	Institutional and organizational conditions	F5 Goal guidance; F9 Incentives; F10 Theoretical guidance	Clear goals and plans; effective incentive mechanisms; localized and systematic theoretical guidance
M2 Teacher-student perception	Perceptual and participatory conditions	F1 Educational cognition; F7 Educational attitude; F12 Engagement	Understanding of leadership education; supportive attitudes; broad and active student participation
M3 Teaching process	Implementation practices	F2 Teaching approach; F3 Teacher structure; F4 Evaluation and assessment	Diversified and experiential approaches; professionally prepared teachers; systematic assessment and feedback
M4 Learning content	Curricular and resource conditions	F6 Spatio-temporal conditions; F8 Curriculum knowledge; F11 Material resources	Adequate time and space; age-appropriate and coherent curriculum; current and integrated learning resources

4.1.3 Selective coding

The higher-order categories were integrated and the main plot that emerged from the instructors' statements was identified using selective coding (Glaser, 1978). Building on the findings of open and axial coding, the study looked at the conceptual connections between the four higher-order categories and how they collectively represented the challenges seen in middle school students' implementation of leadership education.

Four interrelated dimensions were found in the analysis: learning content, teaching method, teacher-student perspective, and mechanism construction. As the higher-order categories emerged from the selective coding procedure, these four dimensions were kept. They capture various but connected facets of leadership education as reported by the participating teachers, as opposed to depicting a linear or causal order. Teaching process refers to the actual execution of educational activities; learning content refers to the suitability and accessibility of curriculum and learning resources; teacher-student perception reflects how teachers comprehend and value leadership education and how they perceive student engagement, and mechanism construction refers to the institutional and organisational conditions surrounding leadership education.

While keeping an eye out for variations and opposing viewpoints in the interview data, the researchers investigated recurrent links among these dimensions thru continuous comparison and analytical memoing. Therefore, rather than offering a causative or predictive framework, the resulting framework offers a conceptual synthesis of instructors' perceived challenges. Table 5 displays the four higher-order dimensions of the integrated framework.

Table 5. Conceptual Integration of the Four Higher-Order Dimensions.

Higher-order category	**Conceptual role in the framework**	**Relationship to other dimensions**	**Central interpretation**
M1 Mechanism construction	Institutional and organizational context	Shapes the conditions under which leadership education is planned and implemented	Leadership education is constrained when goals, theoretical guidance, and incentives are unclear or insufficient.
M2 Teacher–student perception	Perceptual and participatory dimension	Interacts with institutional arrangements, teaching practices, and learning content	Teachers' understandings and attitudes, together with students' engagement, influence how leadership education is received and enacted.
M3 Teaching process	Implementation dimension	Connects institutional arrangements with educational practice	Teacher preparation, teaching approaches, assessment, and opportunities for practice affect the implementation of leadership education.
M4 Learning	Curricular and	Supports and	Appropriate

content	resource dimension	interacts with teaching practices and participants' perceptions	curriculum, learning materials, and sufficient time and space provide conditions for meaningful leadership learning.

4.2. Main Findings

Mechanism creation, teacher-student perspective, teaching method, and learning material are the four interrelated characteristics of the challenges teachers perceive when implementing leadership education for middle school students, according to the investigation. As seen in Table 4, each higher-order category consisted of three axial categories. The patterns that emerged from the interview data are the main emphasis of the conclusions below, which are contextualised and supported by pertinent literature.

4.2.1 Mechanism construction

The institutional and organisational circumstances pertaining to leadership education were the focus of mechanism construction. Goal guidance, incentives, and theoretical guidance were found to be the three axial categories.

Goal advice addressed whether formal school planning included leadership education and whether it was backed by specific objectives. Participants reported that while leadership education was acknowledged as important for kids' overall development, it was not always methodically included in strategies for talent development or school improvement. "The school recognises leadership as part of students' comprehensive development, but it has not yet become a clear and continuous component of the formal development plan," according to B2. This result points to a disconnect between the institutionalisation of leadership education in school planning and its widespread acceptance. The coherence and efficacy of educational programs can be enhanced by having defined instructional goals, according to prior studies (Herring & Williams, 2000; Warahmah, 2023).

The methods utilised to promote involvement and maintain leadership-related activities were referred to as incentives. Although participants acknowledged the potential benefits of encouragement in boosting student participation, the interview data indicated that incentive methods were not always systematic or adequately effective. According to C1, "Students' motivation can increase with frequent motivation." This result shows that although incentives were thot to be important for maintaining engagement, their use was inconsistent. The importance of suitable rewards in boosting student motivation and engagement has also been emphasised by earlier studies (Anderson, 2016).

The availability and suitability of theoretical frameworks for directing leadership education were the focus of theoretical advice. Participants stated that certain current approaches were not adequately localised and that leadership education did not always have a clear theoretical foundation. "We have ideas about developing student leadership, but there is no very clear theoretical framework to guide what should be done at each stage," A1 clarified. Concerns over the direct acceptance or replication of foreign theories without adequate adaptation to the local educational setting were also revealed by the coding data. These results suggest that leadership education needs more precise and contextually relevant theoretical direction.

Overall, the results show that deficiencies in formal planning, incentive systems, and theoretical direction limited leadership education. One significant aspect of the problems that

the participating instructors recognised was these institutional circumstances.

4.2.2 Teacher-student perception

Teacher-student impression included how students participated in leadership-related activities and how educational participants understood and valued leadership education. Educational cognition, educational attitude, and engagement were found to be the three axial categories.

Participants' comprehension of the definition and application of leadership and leadership education was the focus of educational cognition. According to the statistics, leadership was occasionally viewed in terms of formal posts, student cadres, future leadership responsibilities, or positional authority. "Some teachers still think leadership is something for class cadres or people who will become leaders, rather than a capability relevant to every student," stated B1. The perceived applicability of leadership education to a larger student body may be limited by such a position-oriented view. This result is in line with the larger body of research highlighting the significance of teachers' and students' comprehension in influencing involvement and instructional strategies (Pedler et al., 2020).

Teachers' and other educational actors' level of emphasis on leadership education was referred to as their educational attitude. Participants suggested that leadership education's implementation might be weakened by a lack of recognition. According to C2, "Students also find it difficult to take it seriously when teachers themselves do not attach enough importance to leadership education." According to the findings, teachers' views may have an impact on how leadership activities are carried out as well as how students react to them. A helpful learning environment and more fruitful educational interactions can be facilitated by positive educational attitudes, according to prior study (Stepanenko et al., 2022).

The scope and calibre of student involvement in leadership education were considered aspects of engagement. Participants stated that while regular students had less opportunity to engage, leadership-related activities may be emphasised among student cadres. "Leadership activities often reach student cadres first," A3 clarified. Even tho regular students also require similar experiences, they might not have as many opportunities. This result suggests that restricted participation and unequal access were significant issues in the execution of leadership education. Active student participation has also been connected in the past to more significant learning outcomes and experiences (Ayaya, 2021).

When considered together, the results demonstrate that leadership education was influenced not just by institutional structures but also by how teachers saw and valued it, as well as by the degree of student participation.

4.2.3 Teaching process

The practical application of leadership education was the focus of the educational method. Three axial categories were found: evaluation and assessment, teacher structure, and instructional methodology.

The delivery of leadership education and the degree to which students were given opportunities for hands-on and experiential learning were key components of the teaching approach. Participants stated that while there were few opportunities to practise leadership in real-world settings, leadership education was frequently provided thru lectures, brief training sessions, and experience sharing. The majority of activities are still lectures, brief training sessions, or experience sharing, according to A2. There aren't many opportunities for students to practise in authentic settings. This result suggests a disconnect between experiential leadership development and knowledge-oriented delivery. The significance of structured leadership courses and opportunities for students to build leadership thru learning and practice has also been

highlighted by recent research on middle school leadership development (Luo et al., 2025).

The teacher structure was concerned with who was in charge of those teachers' professional development and leadership education. Participants said that student affairs or subject teachers, who may have practical experience but may not have systematic knowledge of leadership education, were frequently in charge of organising leadership-related events. According to D1, "teachers who plan these events are typically subject or student affairs teachers." They might have real-world experience, but they might not have a thorough understanding of leadership education. This result implies that the availability and professional training of suitable teaching staff have an impact on the implementation of leadership education.

Assessment and evaluation dealt with how leadership learning and the efficacy of leadership exercises were evaluated. According to the interview data, assessment was frequently informal and lacked systematic means to track changes in students' leadership development. "We may ask students to write reflections after an activity, but there is no systematic tool to assess whether their leadership has actually improved," according to E1. This conclusion implies that it was challenging to identify learning outcomes and to use evaluation results to enhance subsequent educational activities due to a lack of assessment and feedback. Educational evaluation can offer feedback for both learning and instructional development, according to prior research (Okoye, 2023).

In general, the teaching process was marked by shortcomings in teacher preparation, systematic assessment, and instructional diversity. These elements had an impact on the conversion of educational goals into real learning opportunities in leadership education.

4.2.4 Learning content

The curriculum, temporal, geographical, and material contexts that underpinned leadership education were the focus of learning content. Three axial categories were found: curriculum knowledge, material resources, and spatiotemporal conditions.

The time, location, and opportunities for students to practise leadership were all part of the spatiotemporal conditions. According to the participants, leadership education may be hampered by a lack of time and practice opportunities. Divergent experiences were also included in the statistics. "Our school has relatively sufficient playtime and activity time, and students can take part in various activities," D2 said, describing a somewhat encouraging environment. These chances aid in their leadership development. This contradicting situation suggests that not all participating schools were subject to the same limitations on time and activity space. The significance of suitable temporal and spatial arrangements for students' learning experiences has also been emphasised by earlier research (Du, 2022).

Overly theoretical content, out-of-date resources, and inadequate adaptability to middle school pupils were among the issues noted by the participants. "Some content is too theoretical or outdated for middle school students," said E3. It must be rearranged such that students can comprehend and experience the scenarios. The random compilation of curricular content was also mentioned by other attendees. These results show that curriculum information was not always adequately matched to students' practical learning demands or developmental traits. The significance of well organised curriculum knowledge in promoting educational progress has been highlighted by earlier study (Rodberg, 2017).

Participants noted that several of the resources were out-of-date and that they were frequently dispersed rather than methodically created and linked to leadership-learning exercises. "Some materials are old and do not reflect current student life," noted B3. Additionally, resources are typically dispersed rather than methodically generated and utilised. This result implies that the problem encompassed not just the amount but also the quality, relevance, and integration of the available resources. The importance of suitable teaching materials and learning

resources for student learning and development has also been highlighted in earlier studies (Smith & Baik, 2021).

These circumstances offered a crucial contextual basis for the application of leadership training.

5. Discussion

Even tho leadership education presents many challenges, the evolution of reality compels us to increase knowledge and find solutions. Thus, the promotion techniques are suggested based on the earlier study. Techniques for encouraging middle school pupils to learn about leadership are highlighted.

5.1 Summary of the findings

This study adopts the method of grounded theory to progressively code and systematically analyze the relevant textual information on leadership education, and specifically draws the following conclusions:

(1) A framework of the reality dilemma of leadership education in middle schools was constructed based on the grounded theory: mechanism construction (goal guidance, theoretical precursors, and incentives), teacher and student perception (educational cognition, educational attitude, and participation), teaching process (faculty structure, appraisal and evaluation, and teaching approach), and learning content (objective conditions, textbook resources, and learning content), and the dilemma of middle school students' leadership education mainly stems from these four aspects.

(2) Based on the framework of the real-life dilemma of middle school students' leadership education, a promotion strategy is proposed: mechanism construction is the antecedent element of students' leadership education; teacher-student perception is the main element of students' leadership education; the teaching process is the intermediary element of students' leadership education; and the learning content is the safeguard condition of students' leadership education.

5.2 Framework of the reality dilemma of leadership education in middle schools

Through coding and analysis, the categories and dimensions were summarized and their relationships sorted out to systematically reveal the reality dilemma of leadership education for middle school students, as shown in Figure 2. The mechanism construction is the antecedent element; the teachers' and students' perceptions are the subject element; the teaching process is the intermediary element, and the learning content is the guarantee condition. Based on "mechanism construction - teacher-student perception - learning content - teaching process", this study constructed a multidimensional integration model of the dilemmas of leadership education in middle schools, as shown in Figure 2.

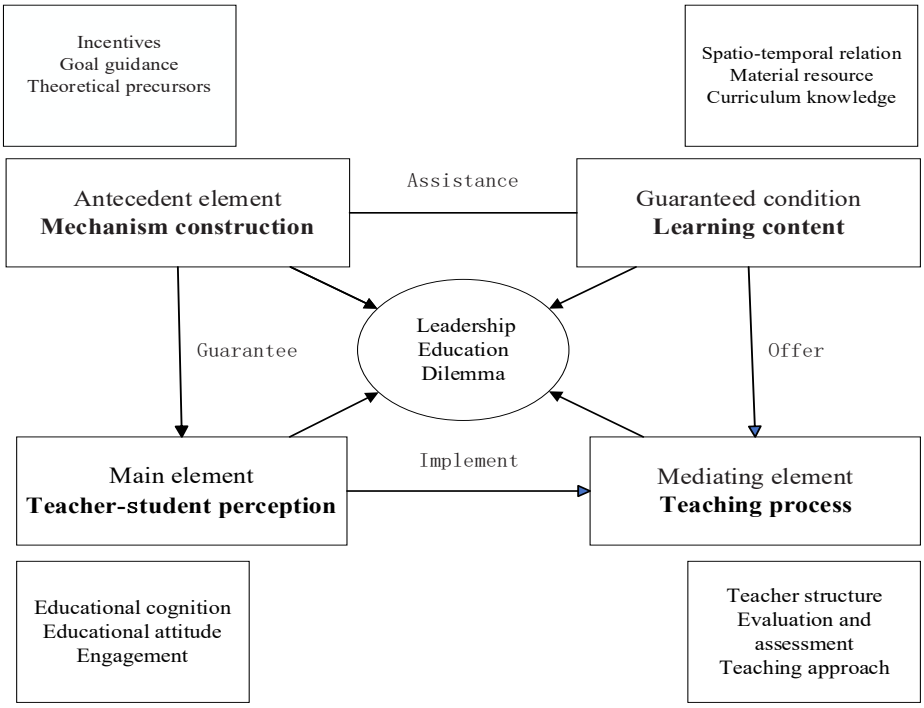


Figure 2. A multidimensional integration framework of the dilemmas of leadership education in middle schools.

5.2.1 Mechanism construction as an antecedent element of leadership education for middle school students

According to Niewoehner-Green et al. (2025), mechanism construction entails a number of stakeholders and cultivation ties in a big and complex system. It must stand at the top of the system, employ methodical thinking, and create an acceptable design for the entire system as well as each element and link. Mechanism construction is primarily viewed from the perspective of the organiser or management. It primarily consists of the establishment of finance mechanisms, evaluation organisations, and system assurance mechanisms.

Behavioral science theory holds that the size of human behavioral motivation and the resulting positivity depends on the strength of the excitation force (McClelland, 1985). According to American psychologist U.H. Vroom's expectancy theory, the excitation force is equal to potency * expectancy, meaning that the strength of the excitation force is determined by the value judgement of the object to be motivated on the degree to which the behavior's outcomes can satisfy their own needs (potency) and the estimated likelihood of achieving it (expectancy) (Yoes & Silverman, 2021). Therefore, a balance between the two crucial components of motivation, potency and expectation, is necessary for the realisation of financial motivation mechanisms.

Evaluation mechanisms are systems that accurately represent the impact of education, and their creation is used to carry out leadership education cultivation activities for middle school pupils. The organic system of feedback on the impact of leadership education thru thorough and rigorous evaluation is referred to as the evaluation mechanism of leadership education. Building

a set of efficient evaluation procedures is essential to guaranteeing that the assessment of leadership training is conducted in the proper direction, in a scientific, organised, and coordinated manner.

The institutional protection mechanism's structure ensures that all measures can be effectively implemented and realised. Because people, time, money, and building materials are at the core of the system assurance mechanism. Its goal is to guarantee that different processes are implemented, making this a crucial mechanism. Other mechanisms are definitely in the air because there is no institutional assurance of people, time, money, and materials; other mechanisms are certain to be a dead letter.

5.2.2 Teacher-student perception as a main element of student leadership education

From the viewpoints of both teachers and students, improvements in views might be taken into consideration. According to Tan et al. (2019), interaction and feedback are crucial elements of teacher-student perception. They can enhance communication and comprehension between teachers and students as well as increase the effectiveness and interest of their learning. Using multimedia, the Internet, and other technological tools to provide rich and varied educational resources and activities to encourage students' active engagement and creative thinking are some approaches to establish contact and feedback. creating appropriate assessment techniques, such as emphasising students' process performance and ability growth and providing prompt, detailed, and varied feedback.

Develop your capacity for independent study. According to Uus et al. (2020), autonomous learning ability is the capacity of students to choose, plan, carry out, monitor, and assess their own learning activities in a planned and methodical manner based on their own objectives, interests, traits, and other factors. They can also modify their learning strategies and behaviours in response to feedback. The following strategies can be used to foster students' capacity for independent learning: providing appropriate guidance, resources, and services in accordance with the needs of various learning levels, types, and stages; guiding students appropriately based on their capacity for reflection; based on students' active participation, demonstrating students' thinking process, and guiding students to complete it independently; and stimulating students' capacity for learning thru innovative educational methods.

Forming common goals. In the context of education, common goals are the outcomes or effects that educators and learners strive for or anticipate. According to Le et al. (2018), shared objectives can foster a sense of accountability and cooperation as well as the development of awareness among educators and learners.

The creation of shared objectives can be accomplished in the following ways: defining the objectives, i.e., clearly communicating or discussing the kinds of objectives teachers and students wish to achieve or accomplish before the start of the educational activities or during the process of carrying them out, and agreeing with them; assigning tasks, i.e., assigning tasks according to the goals of various levels, types, and stages; supervising and evaluating, i.e., routinely checking, during the process of carrying out the educational activities, whether each person is completing the work in accordance with the tasks and providing timely and useful feedback. job and provide prompt, insightful comments.

5.2.3 The teaching and learning process as a mediating element in student leadership education

The teaching process is the process by which teachers teach students to develop their intellectual and physical strength, form a scientific worldview, cultivate their moral qualities, develop their personalities, and master systematic cultural and scientific knowledge and basic skills in a purposeful and planned manner in accordance with the goals and tasks of teaching and the

characteristics of students' physical and mental development. Both the scientific and ideological aspects of the teaching process contribute to its improvement.

The following elements demonstrate how the teaching process is scientific. deciding on educational goals. The desired outcomes of educational activities are known as educational objectives, and they serve as the fundamental foundation for directing the choice and arrangement of instructional materials. The demands of the nation, society, and individuals should all be fully taken into account when establishing educational goals, and it should be made clear what skills should be developed as well as what information, skills, and attributes should be acquired.

The term "improvement of teaching methods" refers to the tools and strategies that educators employ during the teaching process, such as inquiry, discussion, or conversation methods. It might take on the primary function of pupils and increase their excitement and interest in learning. enhancement of assessment in education. The process of evaluating and appraising the educational process and outcomes is known as educational evaluation. By creating a scientific assessment system, enhancing the objectivity and scientificity of evaluation, and improving evaluation standards and techniques, educational evaluation can improve both the educational process and the quality of education (Fadhilla, 2023).

Herbart proposed the idea of "educative teaching" as early as the 19th century, and it has since formed the foundation of education (Rucker, 2023). Since then, Zankov (Guseva & Solomonovich, 2017) proposed the idea of developmental teaching, which emphasises instruction to support students' physical and mental development. Teaching is a cognitive process that fosters pupils' mental and physical growth (Cherukunnath & Singh, 2022). The primary goals of teaching are to help students comprehend and grasp information, develop skills and procedures, and advance their critical thinking. However, there are also other factors at play, such as the emotions and will of the students.

5.2.4 Learning content is a guaranteed condition for student leadership education

The process of choosing, organising, and arranging instructional materials in a planned and intentional manner in accordance with the learning objectives, teaching guidelines, and student characteristics is known as learning content construction. This ensures that the instructional materials are in line with the teaching process, tailored to the students' developmental stages, and produce the desired educational effects (Hidayati, 2020).

Both national and online instructional resources should be created. Generally speaking, the curriculum creation system comprising the trinity of knowledge transfer, value leadership, and capacity development must be followed. The relevance of leadership education should be adequately acknowledged by the national education department. In order to prevent the emergence of "inappropriate teaching materials," it should be reviewed by the relevant departments before being incorporated into the classroom teaching material system. Otherwise, it will not be permitted to circulate and be used.

However, the network resources. ought to be served. In the present environment, enhancing student leadership education can fully utilise the tools of science and technology. Students have the freedom to select online courses based on their own circumstances, which can reduce expenses and financial resources. Learning objectives and instructional guidelines must be taken into consideration when creating educational content.

The desired outcomes of educational activities are known as teaching objectives, and they serve as the fundamental foundation for directing the choice and arrangement of instructional materials (Demchenko et al., 2021). The objective law that, in some circumstances, influences the teaching and learning process is known as teaching law, and it plays a significant role in guaranteeing the efficacy and quality of education (Lovat & Clement, 2008).

5.3 Research Limitations and Prospects

It's also important to recognise a few limits. The results should be interpreted as a contextual conceptual interpretation rather than a statistically generalisable model because the study used a qualitative grounded-theory design and concentrated on instructors' opinions. Second, although theoretical saturation was assessed systematically through the interview data, the sample was drawn from a limited number of school contexts, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other educational settings.

Third, there was conceptual integration but no quantitative testing of the links between the four dimensions. In order to further investigate and improve the links found in this study, future research might involve students, parents, and school officials, look at the framework in various school and regional contexts, and employ mixed-method or quantitative methodologies.

In the meantime, there is still a dearth of theoretical study on the topic, thus more corresponding theoretical guidance is still required, even tho this paper theoretically examines the challenges of leadership education for middle school children based on practical reports.

6. Conclusion

This study used a grounded-theory approach to examine the challenges of leadership education for middle school students from the viewpoint of the teachers. The analysis found 43 beginning concepts, 22 basic categories, 12 axial categories, and four higher-order categories using open, axial, and selective coding. The results show that the problems with middle-school leadership education are spread over four interrelated dimensions: mechanism construction, teacher-student perception, teaching process, and learning content

Goal guidance, incentives, and theoretical guidance are all part of the first dimension, mechanism construction. The results indicate that leadership education is more challenging to maintain when its goals are not adequately institutionalised, incentive systems are inadequate, or theoretical guidance is ambiguous or not sufficiently localised. Student involvement, educational attitude, and educational cognition make up the second dimension, teacher-student perspective.

These results emphasise the significance of how teachers and students perceive and value leadership education, as well as whether a wide spectrum of students have access to meaningful involvement opportunities. The teaching strategy, teacher structure, and evaluation and assessment make up the third dimension, the teaching process. This dimension illustrates the discrepancy between the goal of offering leadership education and the actual ability to provide varied, hands-on, and well evaluated learning opportunities. Curriculum knowledge, material resources, and spatiotemporal conditions make up the fourth dimension, learning content. These circumstances give students the curricular and practical assistance they need to participate in meaningful leadership learning.

Instead of viewing these four dimensions as a fixed causal sequence, the integrated framework created in this study conceptualises them as related analytical dimensions. Learning content is a supporting condition, the teaching process is an implementation dimension, teacher-student perception is a perceptual and participation dimension, and mechanism creation is an antecedent institutional condition. Their interplay offers a more thorough description of how leadership education challenges are encountered and maintained in educational settings.

Both theoretical and practical contributions are made by the study. By creating an empirically supported paradigm that incorporates the institutional, perceptual, instructional, and curricular aspects of educational issues, it theoretically expands research on middle-school leadership education. The paradigm emphasises the various factors that influence the execution of leadership education rather than limiting it to certain student traits or discrete instructional

activities. In practical terms, the results offer educational institutions and stakeholders a systematic foundation for enhancing leadership education, especially thru more precise educational objectives, suitable incentive systems, pertinent theoretical guidance, increased student involvement, improved teacher preparation, a variety of teaching strategies, methodical evaluation, and more suitable curricula and learning materials.

This study offers a multifaceted and informed explanation of the challenges associated with teaching middle school students about leadership. It provides a foundation for additional theoretical development and empirical research on leadership education in many educational contexts by tying together institutional factors, participant views, teaching methods, and learning-content conditions within a single framework.

AI Declaration

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist with language editing and proofreading during the preparation of this manuscript. The use of AI was limited to improving grammar, sentence structure, clarity, and readability. AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, determine research findings, or develop the study's conclusions. The authors independently conducted the research, interpreted the data, and verified all content presented in the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work.

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Appendix A Interview guide

Introduction:

With your consent, I will record our talk during this roughly 60-minute interview so that I can accurately capture all the information you give. I want to make it clear that any information you submit will be kept private and utilised exclusively for this study. If you are uncomfortable or do not want to answer any questions, you are free to end the interview at any moment.

Language: Chinese and English

Time of Interview: 60 minutes

Interview question:

No.	Main questions	Probing questions	Topic focus	RQ
Q1	How do you understand "leadership" and "leadership education" for middle school students?	What qualities or abilities does student leadership include? Is leadership relevant only to student leaders? Can leadership be developed through education?	Understanding of leadership	RQ1
Q2	Do you think middle school students need leadership education?	What benefits or risks do you see? How do teachers, administrators, parents, and	Necessity and value	RQ1

No.	Main questions	Probing questions	Topic focus	RQ
	Why or why not?	students generally view it?		
Q3	What leadership-related courses, activities, or programs are currently provided in your school?	Formal curriculum? Class meetings? Student organizations? Training, lectures, camps, projects, community service, second-classroom activities?	Current provision	RQ2
Q4	How is leadership education usually delivered? Which approaches are most or least effective?	Lectures versus practice; simulations; teamwork; experiential learning; project-based learning; opportunities to take responsibility.	Teaching approaches	RQ2
Q5	Who is responsible for leadership education in your school, and how well prepared are they?	Sources of teachers; professional knowledge; practical experience; age/subject structure; training needs.	Teachers and staffing	RQ2
Q6	Does the school have clear goals or a systematic plan for student leadership development?	Is leadership included in talent-development plans, curriculum planning, or school development plans? Is provision long-term or temporary?	Goals and planning	RQ2
Q7	How does the school evaluate students' leadership learning or the effectiveness of leadership activities?	Assessment tools; student feedback; teacher feedback; recognition; whether evaluation results lead to improvement.	Assessment and feedback	RQ2
Q8	What time and space are available for students to practice leadership?	Timetable pressure; recess/activity time; student organizations; practical platforms; decision-making opportunities; hierarchical school culture.	Time, space, and opportunities	RQ2
Q9	What content is taught, and how appropriate is it for middle school students?	Theory versus skills and values; age appropriateness; outdated/complex content; local relevance; curriculum coherence.	Curriculum and learning content	RQ2
Q1	What teaching materials and other resources are	Textbooks; quality and timeliness; resource	Resources and	RQ2

No.	Main questions	Probing questions	Topic focus	RQ
0	available?	development; integration with extracurricular/second-classroom activities.	materials	
Q11	Which students participate, and how actively do they participate?	Student leaders versus ordinary students; voluntary versus passive participation; reasons for low/high engagement; differences among student groups.	Participation and engagement	RQ2
Q12	How supportive are school leaders and relevant departments? What incentives or constraints affect implementation?	Human/financial investment; teacher/student incentives; formalism; implementation gaps; administrative attitudes.	Institutional support and incentives	RQ2, RQ3
Q13	What theories or models guide leadership education in your school? Are they suitable for the local context?	Use of Western models; localization; lack of theoretical guidance; cultural expectations about authority and leadership.	Theoretical and cultural fit	RQ2, RQ3
Q14	From your experience, what are the three most important difficulties in developing leadership education for middle school students?	Ask for concrete examples, who is affected, and why the problem persists.	Key dilemmas	RQ2
Q15	If you could redesign leadership education in your school, what changes would you prioritize?	Goals, curriculum, teachers, practice, assessment, resources, incentives, participation, localization.	Countermeasures	RQ3
Q16	Are there any common views about student leadership education that you disagree with?	Ask for examples where leadership education worked well or where a commonly identified problem was not present.	Contradictory,minority views	RQ1,RQ2, RQ3

Pilot Study

Prior to the primary data collection, a one-week pilot research was carried out to improve the semi-structured interview guide. Participants who shared traits with the targeted study participants were asked to evaluate the interview questions' comprehensibility, relevancy,

and clarity. In order to better elicit teachers' experiences, perceived challenges, and suggested improvements regarding leadership education for middle-school students, a few questions were reworded and rearranged based on their feedback. Additionally, participants were asked to go over their transcribed answers and provide any necessary corrections or clarifications.

Transcription and translation procedures

With the participants' permission, audio recordings of every interview were made. The researcher used speech-to-text transcription software to first transcribe the recordings, then compared the transcripts to the original recordings to fix any omissions, transcription mistakes, or ambiguous terminology.
The preferred language of the participants was used for the interviews. With special attention to maintaining the original content, context, and intended statements of the participants, the researcher transcribed the transcripts into English for data analysis and reporting. In order to reduce the possibility of meaning loss during translation, key terms associated with leadership education and school procedures were also thoroughly examined.

Appendix B Saturation Assessment

Table B1. Saturation Assessment Across Interview Sequences.

Stage	#	Participant	Analytic purpose	Coding outcome	Saturation assessment
Initial analysis	1	A1	Initial coding	Initial concepts and basic categories began to emerge through open coding	Not assessed
	2	A2	Initial coding and constant comparison	Existing concepts were compared and additional concepts were developed	Not assessed
	3	A3	Initial coding and constant comparison	Concepts and categories were refined through comparison with previous interviews	Not assessed
	4	B1	Initial coding and constant comparison	Additional and overlapping concepts were compared and integrated	Not assessed
	5	B2	Initial coding and constant comparison	Existing categories were further elaborated and refined	Not assessed
	6	B3	Initial coding and	Concepts and	Not assessed

			constant comparison	categories were further developed and compared	
	7	C1	Initial coding and constant comparison	Additional empirical evidence was incorporated into the developing coding structure	Not assessed
	8	C2	Initial coding and constant comparison	Existing concepts were refined and consolidated	Not assessed
	9	D1	Initial coding and constant comparison	Categories were further compared and their properties clarified	Not assessed
	10	D2	Initial coding and constant comparison	Existing categories were elaborated through additional interview evidence	Not assessed
	11	E1	Initial coding and constant comparison	Coding structure was further refined and consolidated	Not assessed
	12	E2	Completion of initial analysis	43 initial concepts and 22 basic categories were established; these were subsequently organized into 12 axial categories	Initial coding completed
Saturation assessment	13	A4	Reserved saturation interview	No new initial concepts or basic categories identified; existing categories remained applicable	No new information
	14	B4			
	15	C3			
	16	D3			
	17	D4			
	18	E3			

Note: Open, axial, and selective coding were used to analyse the first twelve interviews, which made up the original analysis sample. The six interviews that followed (A4, B4, C3, D3, D4, and E3) were set aside for the evaluation of saturation. The lack of novel beginning notions or fundamental categories during these six consecutive interviews was used to gauge saturation. Four higher-order categories, M1 Mechanism construction, M2 Teacher-student perception, M3 Teaching process, and M4 Learning content, were created by integrating the 12 axial categories. Teachers from Schools A-E are identified by participant identifiers A1-E3.