

INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF UiTM KELANTAN STUDENTS' LEADERS: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This research article is titled Information-seeking behaviors of UiTM Kelantan students' leaders: exploratory research. This study aims to identify the information-seeking behaviors of Malaysian student leaders to meet their information needs with their information literacy. Personal interviews using the Voice Memos application by Apple Inc. were conducted as the methodology of the paper. Five club presidents from the UiTM Kelantan were chosen through purposive sampling to be interviewed to gain the result of this study. Eight primary contexts were identified for the information-seeking behaviors of the UiTM Students' Leaders; identifying information needs, determining the sources of information, the time for information acquisition, the medium used to meet information needs, verifying the information found, disseminating the information, information storage and limitations in meeting information needs. The paper emphasizes the significance of understanding information-seeking behaviors in enhancing problem-solving, organizational, and management skills among UiTM students' leaders to help them in student leadership. This study is a qualitative research paper.

KEYWORDS: Information-Seeking Behaviors, Student Leaders, Information Needs

Introduction

This study explores the information-seeking behaviour of student leaders at UiTM Kelantan. Understanding how these leaders acquire, process, and use information is essential for creating effective educational strategies and support systems. The study examines eight key themes: identifying information needs, the timeline for acquiring information, determining information sources, the mediums used, verifying information, disseminating information, storing information, and challenges in meeting information needs.

In today's rapidly evolving information environment, efficient information-seeking is crucial for student leaders. UiTM, like other higher education institutions, aims to develop students' leadership skills, including their ability to manage large volumes of information, assess source credibility, and communicate effectively. Previous research highlights the importance of information literacy, noting that skills gained during academic years are valuable in professional settings. This study focuses on the general information-seeking behavior of student leaders, without specific attention to gender differences.

UiTM Kelantan, a prominent institution in Malaysia, provides a unique context for this research. By examining this setting, the study seeks to offer detailed insights into the information-seeking practices of its student leaders. The goal is to improve information literacy programs and leadership training, benefiting not only UiTM Kelantan students but also enhancing the broader understanding of student leadership and information-seeking behavior in higher education.

Literature Review

Information-seeking behavior

In the digital age, effective information-seeking behavior is essential for student leaders as they use both traditional and digital resources (Guclu & Can, 2015; Alon, 2023). Defined as the purposeful search for information to achieve specific goals (Wilson, 2000), this behavior involves acquiring data from various sources like newspapers, libraries, and online platforms. Models such as Kuhlthau's Information Search Process and Ellis's framework detail the stages and activities involved in seeking information, highlighting its complex and iterative nature (Kuhlthau; Ellis, 1989). While digital platforms offer dynamic access to information, they also present challenges like information overload and misinformation (Wei Choo & Marton, 2003). For student leaders, developing skills in critical thinking, digital literacy, and information management is crucial for navigating these challenges and making informed decisions (Savolainen, 2023). Understanding the factors that influence their information-seeking can help design better interventions to improve their information literacy and leadership effectiveness (Given et al., 2023).

Student leaders

The way student leaders seek and use information greatly affects their success in leadership roles. Their methods for acquiring and applying knowledge impact their decision-making, problem-solving, and overall performance, which in turn influences their peers' experiences and outcomes. Effective information-seeking helps leaders make informed decisions, create inclusive environments, and drive positive change. Conversely, poor information handling can lead to misinformed decisions and reduced effectiveness, potentially harming the progress of their peers. Therefore, studying how student leaders manage information is crucial for enhancing leadership effectiveness and improving educational practices.

Information needs

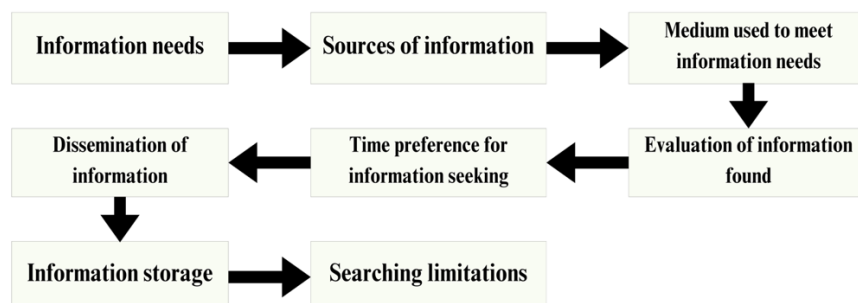
Understanding the information-seeking behavior of student leaders is key to identifying their information needs, as noted by Alon (2023). Information needs refer to the specific requirements and objectives that drive individuals to seek out information (Savolainen, 2016). For student leaders, these needs are shaped by their responsibilities, goals, and challenges. Their motivation to seek information is influenced by both immediate and long-term goals, with a focus on obtaining relevant, accurate, and timely information for their leadership tasks. By studying their information-seeking behavior, researchers can better understand how student leaders manage their information needs, leading to the development of targeted resources and support systems to enhance their effectiveness and growth (Alon, 2023).

Information-seeking behavior related to leadership

Leaders who engage in strategic and systematic information-seeking are better positioned to handle complex situations and make well-informed decisions, which is vital for effective leadership. In student organizations, such as clubs and committees, this behavior significantly impacts their operational and communicative effectiveness. For example, student leaders who actively seek relevant information tend to communicate more clearly, plan and execute strategies effectively, and address issues promptly (Stake, 1995). This proactive information-seeking helps them manage their organizations efficiently and respond to challenges adeptly. Additionally, leaders who consistently seek information can articulate their goals and strategies better, leading to a more cohesive and productive team environment (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Conversely, those who neglect information-seeking may struggle with leadership tasks and interactions with members (Savolainen, 2016). Understanding these practices can help researchers and educators support student leaders in developing the necessary skills for effective leadership and management (Alon, 2023).

Research Framework

Based on literature review, Figure 1 shows the research framework of this study which includes information needs of the students' leaders, the sources of information, medium used to meet the information needs, evaluation of the information found, time preference for information seeking, dissemination of information, information storage, and the searching limitations. These are the 8 themes for our findings, which is also adapted from the information lifecycle management elements:



**Figure 1: Information-Seeking Behavior Themes
Research Methodology**

This methodology allows for an in-depth examination of complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, providing valuable insights into the nuances of the subject matter.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used as the target of the research needs the respondents among the students' leaders to see their information-seeking behavior pattern and awareness. Purposive sampling means we target for a pre-determined target group as stated after taking into consideration the purpose of the research. The questions for the interview were specialized and targeted, so specific students, the club and committee presidents had to be selected. In the literature of purposive sampling, there is a common ascertainment that the size of the sample depends on the targets of the research. In the literature of purposive sampling, there is a common ascertainment that the size of the sample depends on the targets of the research (Apostolopoulos & Liargovas, 2016). The presidents had to fill in a form that we have provided with their experiences in leadership world during elementary and secondary schools, and university.

Personal Interview and Personal Text Message

Personal Interview

An invitation to the interview was sent through WhatsApp personal message to the presidents. The invitation guaranteed their club and committee's name in the research paper. We have ensured that privacy and confidentiality principles were respected at all research phases and the participants volunteered. Voice Memos application by Apple Inc. were used to record the personal interview as the data collection and pre-processing. The duration of each interview ranges from 30 to 50 minutes. After finishing the interview, we will be using the verbatim method and sort the information in a table afterwards. A pseudonym was assigned to each president. Afterwards, we had a personal text message session with them to ask more questions through WhatsApp.

Research Models

We have referred to Wilson 1996's model of information behaviour to construct the research questions. The model integrates Kuhlthau's stages (Savolainen, 2016) in Information Research Process and Ellis' characteristics in behavioural model of information-seeking behaviour (starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, and verifying) into one new model, global model (Wilson, 2000). The model describes that information-seeking behaviour includes passive attention, passive search, active search, and ongoing search. We have also referred with the cyclical model of review and development (Griffin et al., 2005)). The report of the cycle starts with the review needs, then plan the program, monitor the implementation, and evaluate the impact. We have constructed these research questions based on the models to identify the information-seeking behaviour of the club and committee presidents. The research question set consists of eight (8) primary dimensions:

- RQ1.* Why search for information?
RQ2. What kinds of sources of information and primary reference are used?
RQ3. What format of information is preferred when searching for information?
RQ4. What technology tools are used when searching for information?
RQ5. How much time in a day is used and preferred time to search for information?
RQ6. How are the information spread among the organization?
RQ7. How do they store information?
RQ8. What are the problems faced when searching for information?

Research Findings

Table 1 displays the profiles of the interviewees. This study involved five student leaders from the University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Branch, representing a mix of genders and coming from diverse academic fields and backgrounds. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The UiTM Kelantan, Machang campus specifically, located in a suburban area with fewer entertainment options compared to other universities, provided the context for this study.

All interviewees are presidents with significant leadership experience, having held similar roles since high school. They have previously served as club and committee presidents, which contributes to their extensive leadership experience. Among the five participants, two are pursuing degrees and three are pursuing diplomas. All participants are Malaysian citizens.

Table 1: Interviewee Profile

Interviewee	Club/ Committee	Position	Gender
A	Members of Bachelor's in Science Mathematics (MoBiSM)	President	Male
B	Diploma in Public Administration Club (DiPAC)	President	Male
C	Debating and Public Speaking Club	President	Female
D	College Representative Committee of Tun Hussein Onn (CRC THO)	President	Female
E	College Supreme Committee (CSC)	President	Male

** The letters used are only as a facilitator instead of the name of the interviewee*

Identifying information needs

Academic materials

Managing and developing academic resource platforms must be optimized as the insight and comprehension of the academic users' information needs are important (Qin et al., 2024). Interviewee D agrees that academic materials are crucial in adding more knowledge and help as an aid to their assessments as a student, as she said:

As a student, information is important because let's say we do not have any information, how can we proceed to commit in teamwork? Same as individual assignment, if we do not acquire information from our lecturers or seniors, how do we proceed to complete the assignment to carry our marks.

There is another interviewee that specifically needs information for her program. Interviewee C stated:

In term of academic, I use information for assignments, tasks, or notes that are useful for examination. Like me, my program is Diploma in Public Administration, hence information is very important as we need to execute history research and evaluation, and improve our assignments, which are not really related to calculation.

Politics and current issues

This information can be widely found, and even the information will approach the information users. Interviewee B has said:

I usually find for the latest news daily. For politics, including overseas politics such as elections, I will find the information relating to it online. This is because I see that it is vital for the students to be aware of the current issues. For instance, missing teenagers and murdered woman. The knowledge will create awareness if we keep on track with such cases. It leads to them being more careful and cautious in the future. It will also grow someone's mind to become more matured. You can tell the difference between people who handle a program for the first time compared to people who are familiar in handling a program.

Leadership and social knowledge

Interviewee A has provided insight on what information he searches when handling his organization:

I would usually find for information relating to the office number, persons in charge, vision, mission, and so on when our club is organizing an event.

In addition, interviewee C stated:

For our debating team, information is our best friend. This is because the topics that we debate are related to the current issues.

Preferred language

Majority of the students' leaders prefer Malay language. Interviewee E agrees:

I can find information in English and Malay languages, but I would prefer Malay language more as I want to sovereign our mother tongue. I am more fluent in Malay language, too.

Meanwhile, another interviewee, Interviewee B prefers to seek information using the English language more:

Most of the time I would prefer English language because I honestly want to improve in English. I rarely use Malay language.

Sources of information

Physical Resources

Physical resources remain as an important source among the students' leaders. However, the number of them are less than the online resources. Interviewee D said:

We usually find for academic information from our lecturers, they would give us notes as well, when seeking for the information from them. I would refer to my father, too as he constantly reads newspapers.

Interviewee A said:

When finding information relating to politics and public speaking, I always refer to people close to me, university staffs, and people with title. For me, it means the people are proven as leaders so we can take lessons from them in being a leader. Not just that, my father is a veteran army and was once the vice president of the army veteran of state level, so he is one of my sources of inspiration in term or leadership. Then, I would seek information from a few of my seniors. I will observe their performance before asking them.

Interviewee B said:

Relating to leadership, I would refer to my former president because I believe she understands deeper about our club compared to other people. Most of the time I would contact her when I have difficulties in making decision and when I need motivation. I will only refer to the club advisor if I need guide in handling programs.

Online resources

Online resources are the most-used source of information in this era of globalization. Interviewee B said:

I would usually find information through Google Scholars and lawyers pages. This is because there are articles that Google Scholars provide on certain specific subjects that meet my requirements.

Interviewee C said:

In seeking current issues information, I have done research through certain official websites such as Department of Statistics Malaysia, Harian Metro and so on. Other than official news site, I would use social media like Twitter, TikTok, and even WhatsApp channel. We can join any channel that are related to news. On Instagram, I would follow official news accounts and the accounts update frequently.

Searching medium used to meet information needs

Most of the presidents prefer seeking information using a laptop as Interviewee E stated:

I would prefer using my laptop as it is easier to find for information than other gadgets. For instance, we want to read a topic that would be easier to be read using a paper-sized gadget. It would be difficult for us to read if we must zoom in and so on.

On the gadgets, majority of presidents prefer watching videos. Interviewee B said:

I prefer watching videos, but most of the time I just hear them. Yes, I'm auditory learner.

Another president, interviewee D explained:

If there is an information that needs me to read an article, then I would. This is because the video is going to just explain the same information in video format.

The presidents all prefer using TikTok as their primary social media application in searching for information. As Interviewee B said:

Sometimes as a leader, you would probably get confused before deciding. Decision-making process needs me to watch TikTok on how to face the challenges in an organization and what are the criteria that needs to be considered by getting exposure on other people's perspectives and there are feedback sections for each video, which opens a room for discussion without wall. Well, there's not much about leadership.

Evaluation of the information found

The current top artificial intelligence application is ChatGPT. It is widely used among the students and their leaders to verify whether the information found is accurate. As Interviewee D stated:

I would refer to ChatGPT, too as it provides explanation from head-to-toe alongside double-checking the accuracy and the authenticity of the information. I should be verifying the information before spreading it.

Socializing is one key to another information. Some students' leaders would also verify their information by asking other people about it. An interviewee told that she would ask opinions from friends and the club advisor, who is Interviewee C:

I am more to auditory learner, because as for me, if we read, we would not fully understand, that's why I prefer socializing. I talk with people surrounding, my friends, and sometimes when I hear the conversation, I can understand deeper, that means I should ask more to understand more. Hence, verifying the information by asking other people is my way to go.

Some of the interviewees also believe that information produced by official corporate bodies are accurate and authentic. Interviewee B stated:

If the official website of UiTM releases the information, then we do not have to hesitate to receive the information. The information is guaranteed up-to-date and complete as it is handled by the Corporate Unit of UiTM.

Interviewee A said:

The profile and background of the source person influences the credibility of the inputs that we have gained.

Time preference for information-seeking

Most of the presidents prefer to search for information at night. As Interviewee E said:

I always browse for information at midnight because that's when my mind can function actively, and I would take a nap during afternoon to boost my energy for midnight session.

Interviewee C stated:

Evening is the time for myself, so I usually use the chance to add more knowledge.

The duration of the presidents' information-seeking process ranges from two (2) to five (5) hours and it can occur anytime. Interviewee E stated:

The time is kind of unlimited for me to find for information. For instance, when I need to search information, I will open my laptop and find it. But my estimation is about four hours per day. Especially during examination season like these days, I would find for information longer.

Dissemination of information

Interviewee C said:

It is quite difficult to gather every club member for a physical meeting. So, for my club, I would organize a meeting online to share information and we even run our debate training online. For the information in articles format, I would share it on WhatsApp.

One of the presidents, Interviewee E had stated that his organization has meetings almost every night:

I share information depending on the content. If the information can be easily misunderstood, I would call for a physical meeting. It is because most topics to be discussed are confidential and important, that's why we always have physical meetings. Sometimes, I share through WhatsApp. I have over 20 groups relating to leadership. And I would share through Telegram if the information were in media format. For the college residents, we would provide the basic information relating to our college on our specialized websites, I would call it as 'Frequently Asked Questions' page.

Information Storage

Interviewee E explained:

For me, I own iPhone, iPad, and MacBook, so I would store them in the iCloud, Apple environment I would say. I have two organizations so if I use WhatsApp only, it would be difficult for me to find the information next time. So, the iCloud has folders for each organization, making it easier for me to find the information I need.

Interviewee C stated:

For our debating training, we would collect the data and write it down with a marker on a paper. Like me, I would always give the order to my club members to use marker often. We will be keeping them in a big physical file. When writing the points using the method, we would understand them easier.

Searching Limitations in meeting information needs

Through WhatsApp message, Interviewee A told:

The current problem right now would be the internet connection. This is because usually when I want to find and access the information, the internet is always slow.

Interviewee E stated:

For me, the access towards the full information that I need must be paid, or else the access is limited, that is the most struggling part of finding information in my opinion.

Discussion and Recommendations

Information needs

For academic information needs, student leaders and even the others at UiTM benefit from specialized platforms tailored to their requirements. They can access notes through the UFuture database, where lecturers upload semester-specific materials, ensuring that the information is both relevant and up-to-date. For assessments, student leaders are advised to use the university's subscribed online databases, such as Emerald Insight, Scopus, ProQuest, and CLJ Prime, which provide comprehensive resources for academic research. Additionally, the Electronic Questions Paper System by Tun Abdul Razak Library is frequently utilized by students for referencing past-year questions during examination periods.

Meanwhile, we have found that the students' leaders also frequently visit the unauthorized source to seek non-academic information. For instance, topics relating to politics, current issues, and social knowledge. Thus, we suggest UiTM to provide the specialized platform for the students' leaders to share their knowledge with each other. As for our recommendation, UiTM Leadership Channel should be created.

Sources of information

Primary. These are the first reports of original work, like newspapers, journals, research papers, and theses. They are highly trusted for their authenticity and reliability. However, it's noted that club and committee presidents didn't refer to these sources, showing a gap in using the most reliable information for decision-making. Encouraging student leaders to use primary sources is important for accurate and credible information (Information Sources Constituting the Management Literature, 1986).

Secondary. These sources organize and make primary information easier to understand. Examples include handbooks, encyclopedias, and textbooks. They help by (1) organizing information from primary sources into a broader knowledge base, and (2) making it easier to find and use primary sources. Understanding secondary sources is important for student leaders to navigate and use information effectively (Information Sources Constituting the Management Literature, 1986).

Tertiary. These are tools that help find primary and secondary sources, like bibliographies and literature guides. They make gathering information easier but may sometimes show bias, especially in more general guides. It's important to carefully evaluate these sources to ensure they provide accurate and balanced information, which is crucial for making informed decisions (Information Sources Constituting the Management Literature, 1986).

Searching medium used to meet information needs

Efforts to improve information flow within organizations use various methods, including newsletters, memos, and official publications (Burke & Relations, 1996). Newsletters offer regular updates to keep employees, stakeholders, or members informed and engaged by sharing news, announcements, and upcoming events. Memos are brief and direct, used for communicating specific issues, instructions, or urgent updates swiftly, and can be distributed electronically or in print. Official publications, such as annual reports and policy documents, provide detailed and formal information about an organization's performance, strategies, and policies for both internal and external audiences.

For student leaders, it's essential to prioritize the quality and credibility of information sources. While engaging and easy-to-understand sources are preferred, they might not always be the most accurate or reliable. High-quality sources, such as peer-reviewed articles and reputable publications, are crucial for managing online public opinions, especially during emergencies (Ye & Liu, 2022). Ensuring that information comes from experts, verified through their qualifications and affiliations, maintains credibility. Publications by experts are often peer-reviewed and based on thorough research, making them reliable for decision-making. Books and primary sources, such as original research and official documents, provide detailed and reliable information, with books from reputable publishers offering comprehensive coverage and primary sources giving direct evidence. Using these sources helps student leaders gain a strong understanding of their topics and support their arguments with solid evidence.

Evaluation of the information found

To effectively evaluate information from electronic sources, it's essential to apply several key criteria. Majid and Fanilievna Abazova (1998) emphasize the importance of having a solid understanding of computer and retrieval techniques. According to Palmer and Van Lieu (2020), first, assess the credibility of the information by ensuring it comes from a trustworthy source, checking the author's qualifications, and avoiding sources with spelling or grammatical errors. Prefer sources from .gov and .edu domains over commercial sites. Next, consider the relevance of the information to your needs; it should support your message and be appropriate for your target audience. Evaluate the currency of the information, aiming for sources generally no more than ten years old, though older sources may be useful for historical context.

Ensure the information is accurate by verifying the author's and publisher's credibility, checking for recent updates, and cross-referencing with other sources. The information should be reasonable, making logical sense and fitting with your existing knowledge. Reliability is crucial, so choose sources that are unbiased and provide verifiable evidence, checking references or citations where available. Finally, seek objectivity by including sources that present multiple viewpoints to gain a balanced understanding and avoid bias (Palmer & Van Lieu, 2020).

Searching time preference of information-seeking

Academics and scientists demonstrate the value of scholarly articles through the time they spend reading and the variety of purposes for which they read. Tenopir et al. (2009) highlight a current trend where scholars are reading more in less time, driven by the constraints of their schedules. This shift emphasizes the need for information products and services that can help readers efficiently identify high-quality readings and process information quickly.

In the context of your research on the search time preference for information-seeking, this trend underscores the importance of optimizing how student leaders find and engage with information. Given the limited time available to them, developing strategies and tools that facilitate quick access to relevant and credible sources can enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. This approach aligns with the need to balance thorough information evaluation with the practical constraints of time management.

Dissemination of Information

Effective dissemination of information involves several key components: targeting the right receiver, ensuring message accuracy, and employing appropriate communication strategies. Identifying the target audience is crucial to ensure that the information reaches those who need it. Accuracy of the message is equally important to maintain reliability and trustworthiness.

Communication strategies should be tailored to the medium that best suits the context. For instance, using Telegram for scheduled messages and WhatsApp for broadcast announcements can enhance the efficiency of information dissemination. Choosing the right platform based on its features and audience engagement can significantly impact the effectiveness of communication efforts.

Information Storage

Storage Devices

According to (Enakrire & Baro, 2008) storage can be categorized into two main types: primary and secondary storage. Primary storage, or main memory, is volatile; its contents are lost when the computer is turned off. This volatility underscores the importance of frequently saving work to more stable forms of storage, such as disk drives, to prevent data loss.

Secondary storage, on the other hand, is non-volatile and retains data even when the computer is powered down. This type of storage is crucial for saving software and data files permanently. Among secondary storage options, cloud storage stands out due to its relevance and suitability for current needs. Cloud storage offers a reliable, accessible, and scalable solution for storing and managing data, making it a recommended choice for student leaders who need to securely handle and share information for their research and activities.

Searching limitations in meeting information needs

To address the limitations in meeting information needs, insights from traditional library models can be valuable. Traditionally, libraries aimed to provide patrons with accurate and reliable information at the right time and in the right format (Enakrire & Baro, 2008). This model underscores the importance of high-quality sources for informed decision-making. Libraries also serve as communal learning spaces where members exchange knowledge with the help of librarians (Lenstra, 2018). Similarly, student leaders can benefit from a library-inspired approach by accessing well-curated information and receiving support in navigating these sources to reduce the risk of using unreliable information.

Revisiting training programs for student leaders, like the Organization Management Camp and Student Icon Leadership Program at UiTM, is crucial. Tomlinson & Holmes (2001) emphasize the need for effective training to develop leadership potential. By integrating stronger practices for evaluating and using accurate information into these programs, UiTM can better prepare student leaders for informed decision-making.

Resistance to change is another challenge, especially when implementing new practices (Pardo Del Val & Martínez Fuentes, 2003). Student leaders often prefer simpler methods over more rigorous evaluation practices. To address this, improvements in information evaluation should balance high-quality methods with ease of adoption. Providing user-friendly tools and clear guidance can help student leaders embrace better evaluation techniques and improve the overall quality of information assessment.

Conclusion and Future Research

In conclusion, this study highlights several critical issues affecting student leadership at UiTM. The absence of a standardized syllabus for training student leaders appears to contribute to inconsistencies in leadership development and information-seeking behaviours. Additionally, the tendency of student leaders to make decisions without relying on factual evidence and to opt for simpler solutions without thorough evaluation highlights a need for more comprehensive training and support mechanisms.

Future Research

Future research should focus on several key areas to enhance student leadership and decision-making. First, investigating the development and impact of a standardized training syllabus at UiTM could reveal how structured training influences leadership effectiveness and information-seeking behaviors. Second, understanding and addressing the barriers to evidence-based decision-making is crucial for promoting the use of reliable information in leadership roles. Finally, examining why student leaders often prefer simpler solutions over thorough information evaluation could help in designing interventions that encourage more rigorous analysis and critical thinking. By exploring these areas, future studies can contribute to improving leadership training programs and decision-making processes.

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