

MEDIATING EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS

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Abstract. Positive social support, social interaction, and vocational studies are key to understanding how leadership skills develop in adolescents. With half of the global population under 30 years, fostering youth leadership is crucial for societal progress. Despite its importance, various regional barriers limit young people's ability to develop leadership skills. This study examines the relationship between social interaction, vocational studies, and youth leadership skills, and explores the mediating role of social support in these relationships. Quantitative approach was employed, using questionnaires to collect data from 381 Lagos State Polytechnic students through multistage random sampling. Data were analyzed using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Findings showed no significant relationship between social interaction and leadership skills. However, vocational studies positively influenced leadership skills. Social support also had a positive relationship with youth leadership skills and mediated the link between vocational studies and leadership. Surprisingly, social support did not mediate the relationship between social interaction and leadership skills. Findings reveal vocational studies significantly predict youth leadership skills, while social interaction does not. Additionally, social support mediates only the relationship between vocational studies and leadership skills. These findings highlight the need to integrate leadership development into school curricula, enabling students to cultivate leadership skills through structured academic programs.

Keywords: *social support, social interaction, vocational studies, communities, youth leadership skills*

Introduction

Youth leadership skills have gained increasing prominence at both national and international levels as essential for preparing young people to contribute effectively to society (Bates et al., 2020; Redmond and Dolan, 2016). Involving youth in community and economic development initiatives not only equips them to become effective leaders but also fosters positive youth development by cultivating life skills through interpersonal interactions. Such engagement enables young people to address pressing issues, such as environmental degradation, and develop practical solutions (Newman et al., 2023; Bates et al., 2020). However, numerous barriers impede the development of youth leadership skills globally, including limited awareness, inadequate information, poor communication between youth and adults, poverty, and cultural constraints (Henry, 2019; Osmane and Brennan, 2018). Additionally, factors such as insufficient social support, limited social interaction, and inadequate vocational studies further hinder the cultivation of these skills (Freeman, 2021; Ungar, 2011). Social support is assistance from others with potential benefits for physical well-being and health (Thoits, 1982), fulfills fundamental human needs such as esteem, belonging, and security through interaction and cooperation. It also aids coping, stress management, proactive behavior, and resource utilization. Moreover, social support enhances leaders' ability to

foster creativity, adapt to change, and motivate others (Charoensukmongkol and Suthatorn, 2022). Given the increasing prevalence of emotional distress and mental health challenges, social support is vital for youth development and skill-building (Brady et al., 2015).

Conversely, social interaction establishes and sustains communication channels, which foster community agency, resilience, and social support (Brennan, 2008). It encompasses relationships with close family and friends, acquaintances, and coworkers, all of which provide essential social support (Dai et al., 2021; Redmond, 2013). These interactions disseminate knowledge, raise awareness, and create opportunities through social network support (Redmond, 2013). Strong ties, such as close relationships, offer emotional support, while weak ties, including acquaintances, provide informational support (Krämer et al., 2021). Social capital, characterized by strong bonds, and bridging social capital, defined by weaker connections, are both crucial for community development (Rachmawati et al., 2021; Flora and Flora, 2015). Vocational studies on the other hand encompass activities aimed at improving local conditions, benefiting others, or shaping the future of communities and nations (Osmane and Brennan, 2018). Practical vocational training is crucial for youth development, enhancing global competitiveness, and fostering national progress (Okwelle et al., 2017). It promotes employment, raises living standards, reduces poverty, and mitigates unemployment-induced social vices (Shefiu and Ayika, 2019). Nations that prioritize vocational education have achieved significant industrialization by equipping youth with lifelong skills (Ikponmwosa, 2017). However, socially excluded youth often lack the social networks and resources necessary for positive development (Raffo et al., 2020). Youth leadership programs complement vocational studies by teaching problem-solving and leadership skills, enabling young people to contribute meaningfully to national development. Thus, vocational studies play a critical role in productivity and economic growth across civilizations.

African governments face significant challenges in creating jobs and economic opportunities for approximately 200 million young people. Youth are regarded as future leaders and vital contributors to societal progress (Ebebe and Onyenze, 2023). With over 50% of the global population under 30 (Bokova, 2012), equipping young people with leadership skills is essential for personal fulfillment and societal contributions (Yusuf et al., 2024). The world faces numerous threats, including unemployment, economic crises, poverty, conflicts, and climate change, many of which are predicted to intensify due to economic instability (Oparinde et al., 2017). In Nigeria, challenges such as armed robbery, unemployment, and strikes highlight the urgency of addressing youth development. Investing in youth skills and leadership is crucial for enabling them to become agents of change, addressing these pressing issues, and contributing to sustainable development. Empowering youth through active involvement in social, political, and economic activities is essential for national growth, as they represent a critical labor force and drivers of socioeconomic progress (Odalonu and Adigu, 2023). Hence, adequate motivation and recognition are key to sustaining youth leadership and engagement. Youth leadership skills represent a developmental process that equips young individuals to navigate the challenges of adolescence and adulthood while reaching their full potential. This process is facilitated through activities and experiences that promote social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies. As the foundation of a nation's present and future, the thoughts, emotions, and actions of young people significantly influence their societal impact

(Morton and Montgomery, 2013). However, a lack of belonging may hinder their ability to contribute effectively to their community and country.

Youth in Nigeria are highly vulnerable to socio-economic instability despite their significant potential. They face numerous challenges, including unemployment, corruption, poor leadership, political instability, insecurity, poverty, and inadequate economic governance. Many lack the physical skills, motivation, and meaningful experiences necessary for personal and community development. Deficits in empathy, self-control, peer interaction, and relationship-building further hinder their growth. Odalonu and Adigu (2023) highlight that previous generations have left the youth with education devoid of substance, unfounded rumors, superficial understanding, and unresolved societal issues, fostering a cycle of corruption, greed, and underdevelopment. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is fraught with challenges, making youth empowerment critical. Without proper development, these issues will persist, further destabilizing the nation (Odalonu and Adigu, 2023). However, most youth lack the ability to act as agents of change, and while leadership research has primarily focused on adults, there is a gap in understanding how to develop young leaders. This study aims to address Nigeria's youth crisis, focusing specifically on Lagos, where over 20 million people reside, with youth comprising slightly more than half of the population. Despite the state's natural wealth, its youth face challenges such as unemployment. Given that youth represent a significant portion of Lagos' population, equipping them with life skills and technological training is vital for fostering self-sufficiency. The study aims to investigate the relationship between social interaction, vocational studies and youth leadership skills and also examine the mediating effects of social support on social interaction and vocational studies towards youth leadership skills among polytechnic students in Nigeria.

Theoretical background

Behavioral Theory of Leadership was developed to explain leadership as a function of observable behaviors rather than innate traits. This framework posits that effective leadership in any context, including social interaction, social support, vocational support, and youth leadership is characterized by actions that promote group productivity and foster psychosocial development. Behavioral theories typically differentiate between task-oriented behaviors (often described as initiating structure) and people-oriented behaviors (referred to as consideration), or a blend of both. Central to this perspective is the belief that leadership skills are not inherent but are acquired through learning, practice, and ongoing social interactions. In this regard, the theory emphasizes that actions resulting from educational activities, interpersonal exchanges, and personal reflection are key developmental outcomes. These outcomes enable youth to internalize and translate values, principles, and knowledge into practical experiences that bolster their leadership capacities. Thus, by viewing leadership as a set of learned behaviors, this approach provides a valuable framework for enhancing social interaction, social support, vocational development, and youth leadership skills. It underscores the importance of experiential learning and self-reflection in cultivating the competencies necessary for effective leadership across various domains.

Literature review

This section critically examines existing literature to establish the research context for youth leadership skills, social interaction, social support, and vocational studies, serving as the foundation for the development of the research hypothesis (*Figure 1*).

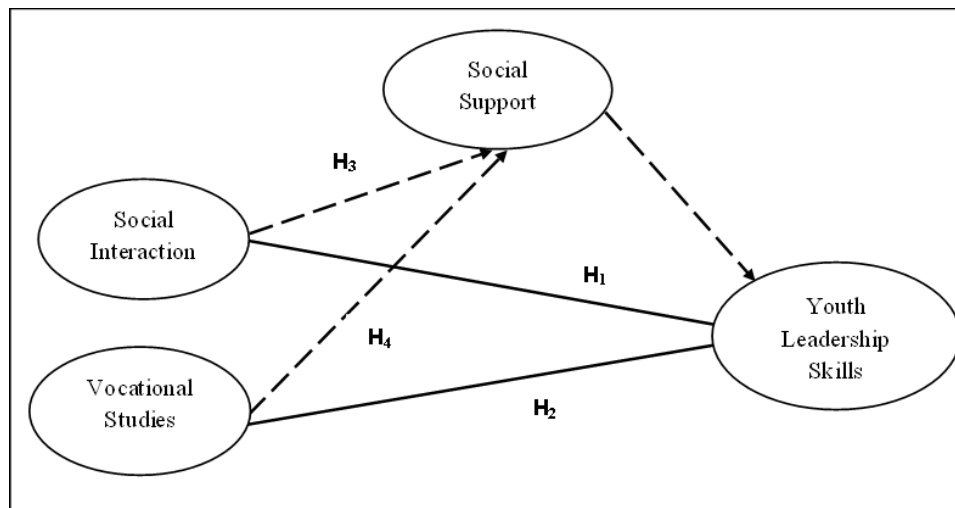


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

Youth leadership skills

Youth leadership skills are an internal and external capability. Hine (2014) believes youth leadership in communities is vital and warrants additional study. In another research, Groves (2014) emphasizes the importance of developing young leaders to spread change from schools to the community. Groves (2014) approaches his job pedagogically, asking teachers to recognize their role in developing future leaders in their classrooms. Leadership experiences help young people develop, he says. His findings show that youth and student leadership boost personal growth, school and community culture. Despite his considerable research, Grove (2014) does not sufficiently explore the possible influence of youth and student leadership on society. His approach emphasizes youth and school development without considering society. However, his findings are well-received because it is one of the few publications to explore leadership from a young person's perspective.

Social interaction

Social interaction is essential when building a nation or a community. The premise upon which all communities are built is that of human contact (Flora and Flora, 2015). A sense of community can flourish when people from different backgrounds engage with one another. The conditions for action to take place are created when enough different parts of society interact with one another (Luloff and Bridger, 2003). This illustrates how social interaction, rather than innate social structure, is the primary cause of community formation. According to Osmane and Brennan (2018), youths who are actively involved in their communities are more likely to be civically engaged than their less active peers. Harris and Jones (2023), discovered that when it comes to honing one's abilities, social interaction is crucial, their findings reveal that social networks were a more effective way for people to hone their negotiating and communication abilities than formal workplace training programs. Research by Oke (2020) shows a strong correlation between adolescent involvement and interaction, and between

involvement and leadership capacity. Interactions between youths of many racial and ethnic backgrounds enriched their leadership development and cultural understanding (Saud, 2020). As a result of the obvious impact parents have on their children's growth and development, numerous studies have examined parent-child interactions (Osher et al., 2021). According to Waite and Cressell (2015), children whose parents had stronger interactions with them had better developmental outcomes. Although one's social network is the primary source of their social support, having more friends and acquaintances is no assurance that you will have a strong social support system (Redmond, 2013). While social networks can certainly help people out, they also have the potential to cause societal problems. Sequel to the above, youth leadership abilities are positively or negatively impacted by the nature and strength of their social networks, it is hypothesized that:

H1. Social interaction plays a significant role in youth leadership skills among Lagos state polytechnic students, Nigeria.

Vocational studies

It is often believed that Nigeria is one of Africa's most advanced industrial nations. The nation ought to rise to the occasion of a rapidly evolving industrial revolution. Ogbuanya and Arimonu (2015) argues that vocational education should be accessible to all age groups, especially young people, and should be able to demonstrate and explain the latest economic, industrial, and social developments; because it offers a broader range of abilities, from entry-level basics to more advanced technical knowledge requiring a high level of specialization and competences, vocational and technical education should make a significant contribution to youth leadership development. To sustainably empower the youths, vocational and technical education must play the role of equipping Nigerian youth with versatile skills and competencies for the workforce, promoting early vocational choices, utilizing technology and ICT for development, enhancing vocational and technical abilities, exposing them to diverse occupational opportunities, encouraging the use of natural resources for job creation, and empowering them in various sectors to increase productivity and alleviate poverty (Shefiu and Ayika, 2019).

It is critical to provide young people with the practical skills and information they'll need to survive in an uncertain place. Occupational training is how one gains these abilities and knowledge. The fundamental goal of vocational education is to train students for certain jobs (Oviawe, 2017). Acquiring scientific knowledge and practical, applied skills are both made easier through technical education. According to Fletcher et al. (2013), career and technical education (CTE) is a series of courses and experiences designed to help students explore and ultimately choose a career path, develop their academic and life skills, become effective leaders, be ready to enter a specific occupation, and continue their education beyond high school. Ogbuanya and Arimonu (2015) argues that technical and vocational education should aim to do the following: address society's demand for workers, broaden students' career options, help them make an informed decision about their future, and prepare them for employment in their chosen field. Technical and vocational education play a significant role in preparing young people for future occupations, but according to Nathaniel et al. (2019), a country's economy needs to evolve for this to happen. The vocational nature of university-based professional training in fields such as engineering, medicine, law,

pharmacy, and agriculture stems from its primary goal of preparing students for careers in highly specialized fields. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for admission and advancement in a profession are the essential components of vocational education (Okoye and Arimonu, 2016).

Regrettably, Nigeria appears to neglect the importance of technical and vocational education, which is contributing to the increasing rates of unemployment, poverty, and the frightening surge in crime within society. Omotade and Ajao (2018) also argued that the lack of attention given to technical education, including insufficient staffing, financial resources, and facilities to promote technical and vocational education, is depriving the country of the valuable contributions that the graduates could make to the national economy. According to Asuk and Asuk (2017), it is crucial to shift people's focus towards self-sufficient and long-lasting methods of earning a living, which can be achieved through vocational education. Thus, the focus should be on fostering the growth of technical, vocational, and professional skills. Okolie et al. (2021) said that Nigerian Universities have been hesitant in creating departments of vocational education, maybe because some persons within the academic community believe that universities should not be involved in vocational and technical education. Based on the above literature, it is hypothesized that:

H2. Vocational studies play a significant and major role in youth leadership skills among Lagos state polytechnic students, Nigeria.

Social support

Social support is vital to youth mental health, it significantly reduces stress and boosts self-esteem and self-efficacy in youth (McGrath et al., 2014; Redmond, 2013). The degree of social support young people receive is vital to their development (Yusuf et al., 2021). According to Redmond (2013), leaders who have access to support networks can also access resources that can help them in their specific field of leadership. Hancock et al. (2012) discovered a substantial correlation between the leadership abilities of high school students engaged in extracurricular activities and the level of support they received from their parents and other adults. The students' perceptions of their own leadership abilities were best predicted by the support. The leadership program was the subject of experimental research by Redmond (2013); by the third data collection phase, which occurred six months following the program delivery, his study demonstrated that social support was a predictor of leadership skills. Well-being was most strongly predicted by social support and how satisfied one was with one's education (McGrath et al., 2014). In contrast, McGrath et al. (2014) found that social support positively correlates with self-esteem and self-efficacy. Research on social support as a mediator between social interaction and vocational studies is scarce. Dolan (2022) explores societal and individual levels of social support. Dolan (2022) then defined community social support as the community's ability to help its people informally and formally, as human's require social support to overcome daily challenges.

Several authors considered social support complex and multifaceted. Redmond and Dolan (2016) farther stressed the importance of support, dedication, and belonging for young people's progress; the support young people receive from their families, schools, communities, and organizations is evident. Programs should be established to teach students about meaningful friendships and their emotional and psychological well-being

(McGrath et al., 2014). Additionally, loving adults help youngsters form attachments to organizations, clubs, and extracurricular activities. A mentor who can provide support, advice, and information helps adolescents develop leadership qualities (Redmond and Dolan, 2016); to increase young engagement, it is important to think about ways to cultivate such ties (McGrath et al., 2014). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3. Social support significantly mediates the effect of social interaction on youth leadership skills among Lagos state polytechnic students, Nigeria.

H4. Social support significantly mediates the effect of vocational studies on youth leadership skills among Lagos state polytechnic students, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

The research employs quantitative design utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze cross-sectional data, addressing gaps in existing literature. The study targets youths of Lagos State Polytechnic, Nigeria, with a total population of 45,815 students, both male and female. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size calculation table, a representative sample of 381 students was selected. A multistage random sampling technique was employed, and data was collected through questionnaires distributed via Google Forms with assistance from departmental heads. The study utilizes standardized instruments to assess key research variables: the Life Leadership Skills Scale (Mincemoyer et al., 2005) to measure leadership skills, the Social Provision Scale (Dolan, 2006) for social support, a social interaction scale adapted from Brennan (2008), and the Vocational Skill Assessment Questionnaire (VSAQ) by Ayonmike et al. (2015) for vocational studies. All instruments are measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Results and Discussion

The model to test the validity and reliability of the constructs was assessed. SEM was used to test the hypotheses. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to assess the convergence and discriminant validity of the scales using SMART PLS. In the study, the internal consistency reliability was measured using composite reliability all items internal consistency was above 0.7 as requirements (Hair et al., 2012). With regards to the convergent validity, convergent validity in this study was determined using composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in *Table 1*, CR is higher than 0.7 and AVE is higher than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 1. Factor loadings: CA, CR and AVE.

Construct	No. of items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Social Interaction	4	.72 - .82	.776	.783	.598
Social Support	13	.70 - .81	.937	.939	.569
Vocational Studies	23	.71 - .87	.979	.980	.681
Youth Leadership Skills	21	.71 - .81	.966	.967	.596

Discriminant validity

In this study, discriminant validity was measured using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, as this method was reported as the reliable

method for measuring discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2016). The Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio reported that discriminant validity was satisfied in this study. The HTMT values were within the yardstick of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2016) (Table 2).

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

Category	Social interaction	Social support	Vocational studies	Youth leadership skills
Social Interaction	0.773			
Social Support	0.897	0.754		
Vocational Studies	0.788	0.653	0.825	
Youth Leadership Skills	0.338	0.297	0.440	0.772

Sample characteristics

The demographic data reveals a predominantly female sample (70.1%), with males comprising 29.9%. The majority (68.8%) fall within the 18-23 age range, indicating a young population. In terms of institutional level, most participants (61.3%) are in their first year of the Ordinary National Diploma (OND1), while the least represented group is Higher National Diploma Year 2 (HND2) at 10.4%. This distribution suggests that the sample consists mainly of young students at the early stages of their diploma programs (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive of respondents' characteristics (gender, age, and institutional level).

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	115	29.9
Female	270	70.1
Age		
18-23	265	68.8
24-29	89	23.1
30-35	31	8.1
Institutional level		
HND1	52	13.5
HND2	40	10.4
OND1	236	61.3
OND1	57	14.8

Note: HND=Higher National Diploma, OND=Ordinary National Diploma.

The structure model

To test the path coefficients' significance, a bootstrapping was employed via 5000 subsamples which provide t-values and p values of the parameters (Leguina, 2015). Regarding the R² values, the study model explains 81.1% of the youth leadership skills variance. Therefore, social interaction and vocational studies were significant contributors to the prediction of youth leadership skills in this study. Also, the study model explains 19.6% of social support which is reported by the R² values. Therefore, youth leadership skills explain 19.6% on social support. The findings indicated no positive relationship between social interaction and youth leadership skills ($\beta=-0.130$; $t=0.817$; $p=0.415$). The findings indicated a positive relationship between vocational studies and youth leadership skills ($\beta=0.475$; $t=4.774$; $p=0.000$). Finally, social support was found to mediate the relationship between vocational studies and youth leadership skills ($\beta=-0.202$, $t=3.543$, $p=000$). Surprisingly, no mediation effect of social support

was found in this study on the relationship between social interaction on youth leadership skills (*Table 4*).

Table 4. *Structural model assessment.*

Path	Beta values	Std. Dev.	T statistics	P values	Decision
Direct effect					
SI -> YLS	-0.130	0.159	0.817	0.415	Not Supported
VS -> YLS	0.475	0.100	4.774	0.002	Supported
SS -> YLS	-1.363	0.499	2.732	0.006	Supported
Indirect (mediating) effect					
SI -> SS -> YLS	-0.243	0.324	0.750	0.453	Not Supported
VS -> SS -> YLS	-0.202	0.057	3.543	0.000	Supported

Note: SI=Social Interaction, VS=Vocational Studies, YLS=Youth Leadership Skills, SS=Social Support.

Prior literature has contributed to developing an understanding of youth leadership skills. These studies underpinned antecedents such as social interactions, vocational studies and social support that predict youth leadership skills. However, interestingly most of these studies only researched whether the social factors (Boyd, 2021) or individual psychological traits (Brennan, 2008) determine youth leadership skills. These studies endure a void in literature and to our knowledge, no prior studies integrated these facets to understand the phenomenon of youth leadership skills. However, in this study the mediating influence of social support was not identified as a mediating variable among the relationship between social interaction and youth leadership skills. Only, mediation of social support was found significant between vocational studies and youth leadership skills. Although this is not surprising seemingly, because practically any youth who garnered the social support of either parents or community coupled together with his or vocations skill has a very good potential of acquiring the necessary youth leadership skills to become future leader and self-reliant. This is consistent with behavioural theory which simply stipulated that multiple factors equally influence youth leadership skills. For example, according to behavioural theory, actions are developmental outcomes of educational activities, social interactions, learning, and personal change. This theory further stressed that an effective leader in any achievement context is one who exhibits the behaviors that are most conducive to group productivity and group psychosocial growth. Behavior theories examine whether the leader is task oriented (initiating structure), people oriented (consideration), or both. The theory assumes leaders acquire skills through learning, leaders are not born rather they acquire skills through learning and practice.

Youth leadership skills and social support have demonstrated a positive and direct relationship ($\beta=-1.363$; $t=2.732$; $p=0.006$). The importance of utilizing diverse forms of leadership throughout communities is demonstrated by these results. When it comes to community issues, young people are more commonly viewed as helpless victims than as potential solutions. Consistent with previous research, the results show that young people may make valuable contributions to leadership roles when given the necessary support and chance to develop their skills (Redmond, 2013). The findings corroborate those of previous research demonstrating the positive effects of youth leadership development programs. The outcome will be a far more positive perception of youth leadership abilities and community decision-making among the younger generation. According to researchers in experiential learning, young people learn best when they are actively immersed in what they are learning; given the necessary social support (Kolb et al., 2014; Ord, 2012). So, it seems reasonable to assume that what Mezirow (2018)

referred to as "transformative learning" can assist youth in developing more positive views of adults by altering their outlook. It is crucial for communities and organizations to offer young people a positive experience and support that is equivalent to them achieving a healthy and productive adult life. For young people to acquire the necessary skills to take on leadership responsibilities, it is crucial for them to have strong connections and support from and with adults and their community, as affirming relationships are at the core of effective youth development. Studies have indicated that emphasizing intergenerational experiences, in which young people and adults engage and collaborate towards shared objectives, might mitigate negative attitudes that hinder the development of youth leadership (Harris and Jones, 2023; Song and Hur, 2022).

In investigating the relationship between vocational studies and youth leadership skills among Lagos state polytechnic students, Nigeria, using polytechnic students. The results of the analysis of the study show that the two constructs have a positive direct relationship between them ($\beta=0.475$; $t=4.774$; $p=0.000$). This discovery aligns with Brumbaugh (2013) viewpoint that many experts in leadership studies and youth development recognize the significance of adolescent leadership skills but frequently neglect the aspect of youth development and vocational education. According to Kuranchie and Affum (2021), the cultivation of youth leadership skills significantly benefits both young individuals and their communities. It enables young people to acquire leadership abilities, equipping them to effectively address community issues and actively engage in civic activities. Integrating leadership education into the standard school curriculum is a strategic approach to fostering students' leadership skills and competencies. Incorporating leadership exercises into daily classroom activities is vital for nurturing these abilities. Essential leadership-enabling qualities include interpersonal communication, motivational skills, engagement capabilities, problem-solving abilities, and more. Schools can enhance students' leadership potential by supporting extracurricular programs and encouraging participation in clubs and co-curricular activities that promote leadership development. Involvement in school governance is equally important, as it allows students to engage in decision-making processes and take on leadership responsibilities within the school system. Facilitating opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership within the educational environment is instrumental in building their leadership capacity. Furthermore, establishing a leadership forum within the school can provide a platform for interactive activities that develop critical leadership attributes, such as attentiveness, decisiveness, dedication, self-assurance, and confidence in social interactions.

Conclusion

Social support and vocational training have been identified as effective strategies for equipping young Nigerians to contribute to national peacebuilding. This study highlights significant implications for youth empowerment by pinpointing opportunities within the labor market where young individuals can acquire training and potentially establish their own businesses. Effective implementation of youth empowerment programs focusing on vocational skills can facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of young people, steering them away from criminal activities and other socially detrimental behaviors that threaten national peace. Research indicates that providing young people with essential vocational skills can enable them to become productive members of society, reduce their propensity for violence, encourage personal

responsibility, and decrease dependence on traditional white-collar employment opportunities. The dependence on foreign labor would be significantly reduced, providing employers with a skilled and qualified workforce. As youths engage in vocational training, parents would observe their transformation into responsible family representatives. Additionally, societal attitudes toward vocational programs would improve, positioning them as a valuable means of preparing young people for active citizenship and employment. This shift would contribute to a substantial reduction in crime and violence. Consequently, as Nigerian youths become more responsible and law-abiding citizens, the nation's substantial expenditure on crime control would decline significantly, freeing resources for youth empowerment and development.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that youth leadership skills are pivotal to societal development. Accordingly, youth leadership should serve as a framework for guiding individuals in the planning, implementation, utilization, and evaluation of development programs within their communities. Furthermore, youth leaders should be actively involved at every stage of community or societal development initiatives. As the youth of any nation are consistently recognized as valuable assets that must be nurtured and equipped to meet future challenges, schools and communities play a critical role in fostering leadership development. This can be achieved by creating more opportunities for students to assume leadership roles both within and beyond the classroom. The study also revealed that young people's perspectives can improve significantly when they are given opportunities to engage in political activities, and it highlighted the role of experiential learning in cultivating essential leadership skills among youth. When fostering young leaders, it is essential to offer them practical, real-world experiences while enabling adults to demonstrate their support and expertise as allies. Communities gain significant advantages from the presence and contributions of young individuals. However, for their efforts to have a meaningful impact, they must be provided with opportunities and access to the knowledge required to empower them as agents of change.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study. It was carried out solely through the authors' personal efforts and resources, without any commercial or financial support from external parties, thereby ensuring the absence of conflicts of interest.

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