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## Event-based Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme: Enabling Authentic Engagements in Student Leadership Praxis

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of event-based bilingual bicultural studies programme on student-leaders by establishing their perspectives on the programme, identifying the most valuable activity, and determining how events affected their outlook as young leaders. This is a qualitative case study that focuses on participants' take about event-based leadership platform within bilingual and bicultural learning environment. This study employed purposive sampling and data were generated using semi-structured interview. The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed the following themes which emphasised answers for each of the three questions on how event-based bilingual bicultural study programme influenced student-leaders under question 1, how they perceived the programme: a) cultural immersion, (b) empowerment, and (c) broadened perspectives; under question 2, the most valuable activity: a) public speaking or debating, (b) educational trips, and (c) community service; under question 3, how the events affected their outlook as young leaders: a) increased self-confidence, and (2) empowered maturity. Moreover, by employing purposive reflection on the findings, this study offers deeper insights on how students' involvement in objective-driven school events could serve as enabler and centrepiece of students' leadership capabilities.

**Keywords:** bilingual bicultural studies programme, event-based leadership, authentic engagement, Bina Bangsa School, purposive reflection, reflexive thematic analysis.

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### 1. Introduction

Honing a student's leadership capability is at the core of one's education, and providing opportunities for such objective is a worthy pursuit for schools (Hodkinson, 2017). Student leadership relates to personal development of learners and, in effect, the progress of society (Pu Wang, 2023) and depriving them of that opportunity is tantamount to neglecting a universal mandate and reason, apart from academics, why in the first place they go to school. Schools do offer programmes whereby students can nurture their leadership traits, incorporating their interests into their roles as well as discover new passions (Smith, 2018). Some of these are effective (Marckeiti et al., 2011) and some though believed to be effective unintentionally stunt the growth and development of the students instead (Vandervelden, 2019). Schools are responsible for providing tasks to students where they will flourish and gain effective skills in

leadership (Kapur, 2019). This responsibility needs to be aligned to the students' interests (Fulmore et al., 2022) in order for them to find meaning in what they do as they explore opportunities where they can concretely make sense of their leadership potential. While different school settings afford varied platforms for students to develop leadership skills, this particular study is hinged to the influence of event-based student leadership approach within a bilingual and bicultural learning community.

The environment that schools provide is one important factor in student leadership (Rodriguez & Villareal, 2003). Educational institutions need to consider a mindful eye in determining how this environment can be realised. One of the many leadership affordances in schools is carried out by implementing various classroom activities. Group work which demands teamwork is one of these. According to Chen (2019), leadership can be cultivated in students through participation in teamwork activities in classes. In like manner, positive effects in student leadership is reached by implementing cooperative learning where tasks are more interactive (Petre, 2020). However, the presence alone of sets of classroom activities that are believed to help students realise themselves around leadership is not enough (Buchanan, 2017; Wildermuth et al., 2015 as cited in Scott Andreu et al., 2020) to allow growth and development. Apart from being enjoyable, activities need to be ascertained for students to meaningfully engage and tap into their potential leadership abilities (Klesse & D'Onofrio, 2000 as cited in Ahmad et al., 2015).

Another way is by engaging students' participation and involvement in group project completion with defined roles. According to Rahim et al. (2023), group work brings forth positive leadership and motivational experiences. Moreover, the assignment of leadership role is important in promoting effective group work (Hiromori, 2023). However, student's leadership that make way in group interactions can lead to dominating and/or shared leadership (Leskinen, 2020). On the one hand, the tendency for a student to dominate defeats the essence of desirable leadership, as it can lead to a dramatic impact on engagement (Leeming et al., 2021) especially when there is opposition to such domination. On the other hand, shared leadership builds consensus.

Regardless of the way leadership is accorded, students' harnessing their capability to lead can be better achieved when they experience taking roles and reflect on such roles (Sessa, 2016) at the same time. These learnings are realised through their participation in authentic activities where they get to engage with other students (Leskinen et al., 2020) and learn from each other (Chandra, 2021). Also, when students engage in actual scenarios and learn from them, their learning is meaningfully etched in their acquisition of skills and the value of achieving thereof in a broadened view of leadership capacity (Ramamoorthi et al., 2023).

There are several factors that need to be considered in putting up activities for students to grow in their leadership attributes. Among these are the language and culture that they engage in the community where they learn. The essence of language (Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022) and substance of culture (Lyons et al., 2018) in bringing aspired acquisition of skills for students to develop in leadership play a major role. In this case, the dual nature of language comes in the context of bilingualism and the practice of blended culture comes in terms of biculturalism. Although language and culture come together, each has a specific function in making the students learn and progress in the area of leadership. In the aspect of communication for example, activities aligned to their mastery of preferred language bring

confidence and motivation (El Morabit, 2024) for them to become potential leaders as they develop positive attitudes and proficiency in delivering presentations (Radosavlevikj, 2022). The cultural aspect of learning and leading on the other hand occurs as students immerse themselves in their active community involvement, locally or abroad.

Given the many studies already conducted about student leadership through various strategies and approaches in different platforms, not much has been said so far about event-based leadership approach specially in the context of bilingual and bicultural learning environment. It is for this reason that this particular study on event-based student leadership is reached.

Specifically, this study comes in the case of engaging students in different school events to hone their leadership skills. The school setting, being the Bina Bangsa School – Pantai Indah Kapuk Campus, promotes various student-initiated programmes which are created for and run by the students themselves. There are also school-organised programmes and one of those is the Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme.

The Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme (BSP) of Bina Bangsa School (BBS), Indonesia was conceived to emphasise the significant interplay of two languages and cultures existing and being offered in the school curriculum in its six campuses across the country. The school offers Cambridge curriculum and subscribes to ‘...nurturing leaders who strive to be the best that they can be through lifelong learning...’ and ‘...enabling students to realise a clear sense of self-worth, discipline, open-mindedness, integrity, and courage...’ throughout their learning journey as encapsulated in its vision and mission. Apart from its academic programmes, the school encourages and promotes students’ participation in various school events particularly in the Secondary and Junior College Levels.

The BSP is a 6-year programme starting from Secondary 1 to Junior College 2 which aims to nurture a select group of BBS students in a bicultural and bilingual orientation and develop confident and eloquent speakers who share an interest in the Western and Eastern Cultures and the contemporary society (Mazlinda Salleh Huddin & Zhang Hui, 2020). This programme is mainly composed of events such as Harvard Model Congress Asia, Habitat for Humanity, Taiwan Educational Trips, Reach Cambridge, among others. The prevailing languages involved in this programme are Chinese Language and English Language.

Programme membership is open to all interested students from Express and Accelerated streams from Secondary 1 to Secondary 4 and Junior College 1 levels who are qualified to apply. To graduate from the programme, members have to complete the following requirements: (a) Part 1A – Western Immersion and Study Trip, (b) Part 1B – Eastern Immersion and Study Trip, (c) Part 2A & 2B – Participate in either one international or one domestic competition, (d) Part 3A & 3B – Attend at least 10 hours of Eastern and 10 hours of Western Cultural Courses, (e) Part 4A & 4B – Attend Bilingual and Bicultural Conference, (f) Part 5 – Publish at least two articles in newspapers, school newsletter and/or participate in one of BBS News Flash Episodes, (g) Part 6 - Start at least one project that has significant and meaningful impact and influence on the society, (h) Part 7 – Enroll and achieve distinctions in ‘AS’ Chinese 8681 or ‘A’ Level Chinese 9175, and IGCSE First Language English 0500. Completing the seven requirements entitles the member to a BSP Cultural Ambassador Title.

Despite the number of activities implemented across all levels via intra and inter-campus engagements in the BBS system, particularly in relation to the BSP programme, there

has been no study conducted yet to investigate how these events influence students' development particularly in the area of leadership through their active involvement; thus, this study.

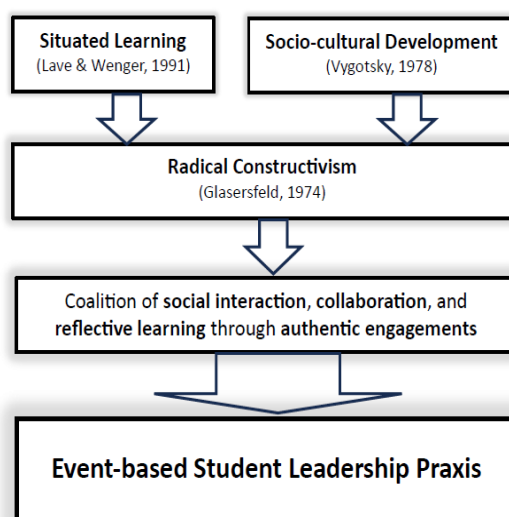
### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's *socio-cultural development theory* which places prime value on the importance of social interaction as the key catalyst to augment the depth of acquired knowledge and skill. Learners adopt socially shared experiences and acquire strategies and knowledge as they work with others on various tasks (Scott & Palincsar, 2013 as cited in Allman et al., 2023).

Another learning theory to which this study subscribed to is that of Lave's *situated learning theory* where it argues that what people learn, see and do is situated in their role as a member of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Key components of learning activities consistent with this theory include authentic settings for the application of knowledge and an emphasis on social interaction and collaboration (as cited in de la Chica, 2004).

More particularly, this study adheres to the principles of *radical constructivism* by Ernst von Glasersfeld. Constructivism refers to a view of learning derived from Piaget's concepts of assimilation and adaptation. This view of constructivism can be appropriately termed, pedagogical constructivism. However, according to Ernst von Glasersfeld the philosophy of radical constructivism, "discards the notion that knowledge could or should be a representation of an observer-independent world-in-itself and replaces it with the demand that the conceptual constructs we call knowledge be viable in the experiential world of the knowing subject". Ernst von Glasersfeld's position is the linkage of pedagogical constructivism with radical constructivism, and that it is 'this construction of the individual's subjective reality which...should be of interest to practitioners and researchers of education (Glasersfeld, 1989 as cited in Cobern, 1990).

### Conceptual Framework



**Graphical illustration of event-based student leadership praxis as interpreted in this study.**

*(Researcher's depiction)*

## 2. Literature Review

Event-based learning refers to teaching activities that employ either historical or emerging events from the real world to achieve a pre-defined set of learning objectives (de la Chica, 2004). Students engaging in event-based learning platform experience not only the positive results of their actual involvement but also the ability to internalise the mechanisms surrounding the event itself particularly in language improvement. It is argued that event-based learning can be enjoyable and lead to deep processing of the language used due to the positive pressure such events create (Higginbotham, 2009). In one study about students' experience in acquiring skills via online platform during the pandemic, the students recognised that their actual participation in such learning occasion, despite being online, the benefits of developing digital skills, communication, resilience, adaptability, and confidence formed essential elements in hosting student-led in person events conducted as they transitioned to managing in-person activities (Goldie et al., 2023). Such skills to organise and run onsite activities borne out of realisation of the significant influence of student engagement serve as testimony to the indispensability of event-based leadership practice.

In a wider scope, learning outcomes from different learning areas should be integrated to create events where deliverables are achieved through a series of activities (Latheef, 2018) and that a review of what has been learnt should be undertaken via reinforcement (Osborne, 2014) for such learning to be retained and eventually become applicable. Moreover, learning occurs where students may be. Such learning depends on the context of surrounding the students make interactions with. In one study, foreign sites serve as learning context to support students' learning by (a) providing cues to understand new knowledge from different perspectives; (b) providing a context to understand the meaning behind words; (c) providing minute details tying facts towards abstract knowledge; and (d) creating a space for stimulating emotional attachments (Chang, 2021). This situationally contextualized support on student learning provides an understanding on the formation of attributes contributory to the development of the learner, including leadership traits.

The employment of event-based approach brings in the aspect of bilingualism. This is a growing phenomenon particularly in the field of education due to the advancement in technology and the promotion of the concept of internationalisation in education. In a study on bilingual education conducted during a 50-year period, results showed an increase in publications, mainly in the form of research articles, making bilingual education a truly consolidated and evolving research field (del Mar Sanchez-Perez & Manzano-Agugliaro, 2021). This evolution comes as globalisation and an interest to allow learning to become more inclusive. There is a consistent support on the study of bilingual education and the efficacy of the various approaches to teaching bilingual students (May, 2017) and this continues to gain traction. In learning via event-based approach where language is of importance, bilingualism may pose a concern as it is shadowed by a common myth that bilinguals have equal and perfect knowledge of their languages (Grosjean, 2010, 2013 as cited in Grosjean, 2015). Thus defining bilinguals in terms of fluency is problematic (Grosjean, 2015) and comes as a challenge to event-based learning.

Furthermore, biculturalism alongside bilingualism comes in as another aspect to consider. In one commentary paper, it suggested that biculturalism involves synthesising one's

own heritage and that of the receiving cultures into a unique and personalised blend where the bicultural individual selects aspects from the heritage and receiving cultures and integrates them into an individualised culture that is not directly reducible to either the heritage or receiving culture streams (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). From this perspective, the blending of heritage and culture comes with linguistic acquisition alongside adaptation of cultural behaviour as major aspects of learning in a bilingual bicultural learning community.

#### *Student leadership development in bilingual and bicultural learning environments*

The subject on the determination of student leadership in bilingual and bicultural learning environments is a challenging matter to establish. This is due to possibilities where one might be more observable or dominant over the other, for example, bilingualism is more adhered to over biculturalism, vice-versa. In a study on language learning and leadership, for example, an imbalance between interest to enroll in language classes and desire to just speak heritage language (monolingual) was evident. There was low enrolment in language classes whereas preference to speak heritage (Spanish) language was high (Peart et al., 2020). In this case, the students' interest to thrive bi-culturally is well subscribed but their low interest to learn another language comes in the way in achieving higher development. The aim of the institution to cultivate global leadership among the studentry is affected as bilingual competence is passively welcomed. Meanwhile, competence in dual language could give rise to the enrichment of biculturalism (Wulbecker, 2019). This illustrates that language comes before culture. This example asserts that another culture would be appreciated and eventually accepted when cultural aspects are conveyed via mutually understood language. If this is realised by the students and schools, leadership within bilingual and bicultural learning community would be less challenging as leadership, local or global, has to respond to its mandate through communicative competence. However, in the case of Peart et al. (2020), language instructors attracted language learners by incorporating skills transferable to the real world, embedding leadership in the process.

Diversity is a given when it comes to teaching and learning in a bilingual and/or bicultural learning spaces. This diversity poses promising features for the students to adjust and learn not only dual language but also the varying cultures that exist therein. In the study of Cordova (2020) about teachers' experiences in an immersion environment, it was demonstrated that it is best to capitalise on the diverse strengths of every teacher on campus to work collectively. This strength points to the role of the teacher in cascading learning avenues down to the students, which in effect a way to cultivate leadership in them. Moreover, in a study about a two-way immersion program in the US that offers a dual language model, it was revealed that students from different backgrounds may have equal status in mutually beneficial environments, and can become bilingual and bicultural (Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). When such recognition of equal status is established and the same is felt in a multicultural learning environment, efforts on realising the leadership potential of the students may not be much of an issue. Furthermore, racial biases that may tend to hamper harmony in diversity is tackled.

It is clear that nurturing student leaders in a bilingual and bicultural learning environment is not easy. It would face obstacles apart from the identification of leadership styles and inclinations the students may potentially have. But in approaching such challenge, institutions and educators alike that fall under the growing demand of bilingual vis-à-vis

bicultural learning spaces and communities could circumvent the hurdles by allowing students discover their leadership potential regardless of setting and instruction. An event-based approach to cultivating such potential, setting aside conventional rigidity in participation requirements and involvement, and instead, acting on what may be interesting to students would fit in this gap.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

The data were gathered using one-on-one in-depth interview (IDI) via online communication app Zoom. The interviews were conducted from July 17 to July 20, 2021. The researcher used semi-structured questions from an interview guide as the instrument. The language used in the conduct of interview was English. The participants were advised to freely express themselves in that language.

All interviews were video recorded in the device, a laptop, used in the process. Direct video recording was made possible using the Zoom recording feature capturing both the audio and the facial expressions and gestures of the participants while the interview was going on. When all of the interviews were concluded, the researcher transcribed the data by manually typing in word document the questions asked and the replies given in the interview. Each completed transcript was labeled with initials that would represent the participant. Completed interview transcripts became the data corpus.

The participants of the interview were a combination of student-leaders from Junior College levels who were purposely chosen for the study. All of them were active BSP participants when the interview was conducted. Each interview lasted for about 45-60 minutes.

The interview was conducted online on pre-scheduled dates. Ethical considerations were observed in the conduct of the interviews and the participants were informed of the following: (a) that they were participating in research; (b) the purpose of the research; (c) the benefits of the research; (d) the procedures of the research; (e) the voluntary nature of research participation (discussion of their feedback); and, (f) the procedures to be used to protect required confidentiality.

Specifically, the researcher introduced himself to the participants indicating the purpose of the interview. They were informed of the reasons for taking part in the said interview.

In order for the participants to feel at ease, they were informed further that the interview would be for research purposes only and that their answers would not be taken against them. After they were briefed on the purpose of the study, the interview began, and they replied to the questions in English.

#### *Data Gathering Procedure*

The interview used the following questions:

1. How do you perceive bilingual bicultural learning experience?
2. What kind of activities in BSP did you find valuable? Why?
3. How did your involvement in BSP affect you as student leader?

As this was a semi-structured interview, follow-up questions for each of the above questions were asked by the researcher where it was deemed necessary.

#### *Sample Size*

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 1990).

In this study, the researcher secured permission to conduct interview of the participants who were actively involved in the programme. A semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interview (IDI) with student-leaders for 45 minutes to 1 hour each interview was conducted. There were eight (8) girls and three (3) boys who were interviewed. A total of eleven (11) participants were interviewed for the study.

### *Sampling Technique*

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling (Patton, 1990).

Only those student-leaders who have actively participated and got involved in the events of the BSP programme and completed their basic education (all were Junior College graduating students at the time) retaining their student-leader capacity were chosen as participants in this study. The rationale behind this selection was anchored on the BSP's aim of nurturing select student-leaders, and the researcher believes that a prerequisite to this comes through participants' consistent and active involvement in the programme.

### *Research Instrument*

This study employed semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interview (IDI) with student-leaders who were purposively chosen for the study.

### *Data Analysis*

This study used thematic analysis, particularly reflective thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2019). Thematic analysis is a popular method for analysing data in many disciplines and fields and can be applied in different ways to lots of different data sets to answer different research questions. It is one of a cluster of methods that focuses on identifying patterned meaning across a data set.

Reflexive thematic analysis in particular is advantageous in this study as it is theoretically flexible which means that it can be used within different frameworks to answer quite different types of questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Moreover, reflexive thematic analysis was used in this study because the researcher believed that there was a good fit between the theoretical framework of the study which is anchored on the constructivist theory vis-à-vis the narrative paradigm and the nature of research questions being addressed which sought to understand a set of experiences and thoughts across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012 as cited in Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The following phases were covered in doing the analysis for this study using reflexive thematic analysis. Although these phases are sequential, and each builds on the previous, analysis is typically a *recursive process*, with movement back and forth between different phases. These are not *rules* to follow rigidly, but rather a series of conceptual and practice



oriented ‘tools’ that guide the analysis to facilitate a rigorous process of data interrogation and engagement.

1. Familiarisation with the data | *This phase involves reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content.*

The data were gathered via Zoom app with participants’ cameras on. Participants’ answers to the interview questions were recorded in the same device (laptop) used in the conduct of the interview.

At this phase, familiarisation with the data was done by viewing and re-viewing the recorded video interviews with the participants. Their responses were listened to repeatedly before transcribing a particular recording. Gestures, facial expressions, and other observable body language while participants were speaking were also noted. Transcription of each interview recording began as the researcher felt ease in manually writing down responses. All transcriptions were manually type-written on word document, labeled indicating the identity of the participant. When transcription of all interviews was completed, the data were read and re-read for further familiarisation.

2. Coding | *This phase involves generating succinct labels (codes!) that identify important features of the data that might be relevant to answering the research question. It involves coding the entire dataset, and after that, collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, together for later stages of analysis.*

At this phase, the entire dataset were coded using Quirkos, a qualitative data analyser software. The licensed version of this software was used. The research questions were used as labels in assigning codes to the data. This way, the responses were coded according to the interview questions for a better organisation of coded responses. The software was used to employ a faster and more organised arrangement of data coding. Some data set were coded more than once as they also provided meaningful answer to other questions. Organisation of ideas was made by the researcher and not by the software.

3. Generating initial themes | *This phase involves examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). It then involves collating data relevant to each candidate theme, so that you can work with the data and review the viability of each candidate theme.*

At this phase, the codes were examined, read, and re-read in search for patterns in the collated data. Based on coded responses under each research question, significant broader patterns of meaning were identified. These patterns of ideas were worded and became the initial themes for codes falling under such category. This process of finding themes was done for coded data under each research question.

4. Reviewing themes | *This phase involves checking the candidate themes against the dataset, to determine that they tell a convincing story of the data, and one that answers the research question. In this phase, themes are typically refined, which sometimes involves them being split, combined, or discarded. In our TA approach, themes are defined as pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept or idea.*

At this phase, themes were reviewed against the data set. Codes assigned under each theme were also reviewed and verified whether the meaning they intended to convey fell under the theme they have been assigned to. Sub-themes were created as a result of

realising broader patterns of meaning within initial themes. Codes were also assigned to these sub-theme upon checking that the meanings they created more appropriately fell under the sub-theme.

5. Defining and naming themes | *This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the 'story' of each. It also involves deciding on an informative name for each theme.*

At this phase, themes were defined and named more appropriately to the unified ideas the codes under them conveyed. The names labeled were based on the general idea that they posed under each research question.

6. Writing up | *This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualizing the analysis in relation to existing literature.*

*Source: Guidelines for reviewers and editors evaluating thematic analysis manuscripts (April 2019) by Braun and Clarke.*

#### 4. Results and Discussion

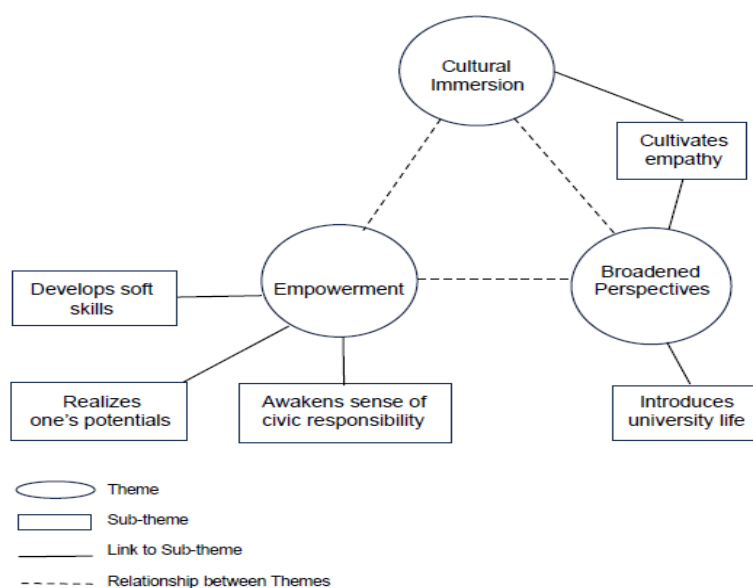
The ideas reflected in presented thematic maps are the results of the data analysis capturing the encompassing and converging patterns of thoughts which are reflective of the perspectives of student- leaders on the influence of event-based Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme in honing student leadership skills by answering the following questions:

1. How do you perceive bilingual bicultural learning experience?
2. What kind of activities in BSP did you find valuable? Why?
3. How did your involvement in BSP affect you as student leader?

The above questions are answered in the form of thematic maps followed by discussion on the findings. As presented below, this section explains at length on the findings of the study.

##### 1. Student-leaders' perspectives of bilingual bicultural learning.

Thematic Map 1 – Student leaders' perspectives of bilingual bicultural learning.



The results for question one are presented in the thematic map above. The findings for the first question revealed that student-leaders' perspectives of bilingual bicultural learning are anchored on three themes, namely: (a) cultural immersion (*...get to learn about many different cultures... whether eastern or western... -SL5*), (b) empowerment (*...I met a lot of different people, from different walks of life... hearing what they want... their aspirations in life, and for me that was really a powerful experience... -SL2, ...allows me to be more confident in expressing myself... -SL7*) and (c) broadened perspectives (*...the world isn't that bad, and there are a lot of things waiting for me outside... -SL9*). These three themes complement each other, with 'empowerment' taking the progressive aspect stemming from both 'cultural immersion' and 'broadened perspectives'. Moreover, 'broadened perspectives' emanates from 'cultural immersion' where widened understanding of people and their culture brings cultural learning more prominent than language acquisition. Such prominence breeds student-leaders' empathy for others and direction on what to pursue in their education. This perspective confirms the study that compound bilinguals (simultaneous dual language acquisition) blend two cultures to a greater extent than sequential dual language acquisition (Nguyen & Ahmadpanah, 2014). Although a specific theme attributable to language is not present in any of the themes, the role of dual language engagement (Chinese and English) presupposes the emphasis on cultural blend as byproduct of interplay between the two languages. The collaborative nature of these linguistic and cultural experiences is demonstrated in participants' identity inclinations after their involvement (Newcomer, 2019) with cultural characteristics being more observable.

Empowerment stemming from both 'cultural immersion' and 'broadened perspectives' underscores the effect participants gained from real experience. As cited by responses of the following participants:

*'...it's a fresh programme that allows you to take in everything that will help you in the long run and also introduces you to new things...' -SL10*

*'...it also helped me to talk to people outside of my comfort zone...' -SL9*

Student-leaders see BSP as portal to new beginnings, one that pulls them away from their comfort zones so that they might be able to discover new things beneficial to them as young leaders. This functionality is innate in the programme itself rather than on student-leaders' profile. Here, it can be observed that it is with the programme's initiatives that students find more of what they can do through their active involvement. It is a fact on the student-leaders' end that they have the capability in treading the path to leadership, but it is on the programme's end to make such capability and promising leadership inclinations realised.

The theme on 'empowerment' is further stretched into three sub-themes in that bilingual bicultural learning experience: (a) develops soft skills, (b) realises one's potential, and (c) awakens sense of responsibility among student-leaders.

develops soft skills:

*'...from all these experiences I can perceive that the bicultural learning experience..uhh..really helps us in a non-academic way for us to develop our soft skills such as maybe like for MUN I feel that we should really start out of our comfort zone and build our speaking abilities...' -SL1*

realises one's potential:

*'I thought I have so much to learn from these people and talking to a lot of my seniors.. talking to a lot of people within my committee..uhh..and hearing what they want, their aspirations in life, their target universities, it made me feel like I could do that too, and for me that was really a powerful experience...'* -SL2

awaken one's sense of responsibility:

*'...my colleagues and I, we actually found this special needs group where we're able to interact on a firsthand experience with 'differently-abled learners' and for us to also invite our BBS colleagues where we also exposed them to another side of society where you don't see on a daily basis and for us to contribute back to our society and teach these differently-abled learners on how maybe they should interact in our society... and for us to be able to treat them with care as I think it's a human right where we want them to feel belonging and not exclude them in our daily activities..'* -SL1

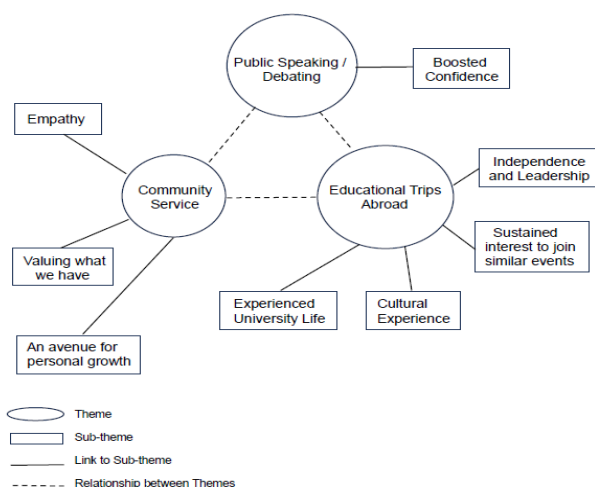
Taking the above responses collectively, it can be gleaned from their expressions that the programme can be considered as initiator of opportunities apart from the acquisition of language skills alone. Developing their soft skills lie primarily in communication where student-leaders build confidence in their speaking skills. This confirms the study of Radosavlevikj (2022) where the development of leadership skills come alongside the expression of positive attitudes and proficiency when delivering an oral presentation. This is attributed to the nature of the programme as a collective vehicle to allowing student-leaders further see their potential communicatively. This communicative development commences as they sustainably engage in the activities related to events that appertain to languages, afforded by the degree of participants' involvement in the same. But deeper than that, however, student-leaders see more of themselves in terms of civic maturity as they delve deeper into the different events attached to the programme.

The themes 'cultural immersion' and 'broadened perspectives' produce the sub-theme 'cultivates empathy' (*...by learning firsthand, we're able to understand what people go through... -SL1*) while 'broadened perspectives' is also seen as an avenue that 'introduces university life (*...I felt that by going to Taiwan, I've actually experienced a university student's perspective...-SL1*).' The cultivation of empathy as byproduct of cultural immersion and broadened perspectives encapsulates the understanding that student-leaders involved in the programme appreciate a positive outlook about different culture. Broadened perspectives signify a characteristic among student-leaders which is appropriately expected of them. Them being Junior College students see empathy as an important mature component making them ready for university life.

It is notable though that the participants accented more on the cultural output of the programme, with bilingualism being on the side. This contradicts the general notion that bilingual and bicultural identities are interrelated. The idea of feeling bilingual and bicultural are quite distinct notions (Fielding & Harbon, 2013).

## 2. Kinds of activities the student-leaders found valuable in the BSP programme, and why.

Thematic Map 2 – Kinds of activities the students found valuable, and why.



The results for question two are presented in the thematic map above. The findings for question two revealed that BSP programme participants valued activities that are anchored on three themes, namely: (a) public speaking or debating (*...I went to the BSP to learn more about public speaking, to be more articulate...-SL2*) (b) educational trips (*...with BSP I started joining events...-SL4; (...I found it interesting because one of the requirements to be a BSP ambassador was to attend eastern trips and western trips...-SL6*) and (c) community service (*...we tend to raise awareness for differently abled learners and how we can treat them as we don't exclude them in our society...-SL1*). These three themes complement each other.

Student-leaders' identification of public speaking and/or debate underscores the relevance of the programme primarily in languages whereby their speaking skills are developed. This is because the events that are included in the programme provide specific platforms for the students to speak leading to a boost in confidence. This also highlights their leadership trait where ones speaking skills are highly important. Leadership for them begins when one is able to send a message across audience and to be able to stand for the cause of that message. Similarly, the mentioning of educational trips highlights the value of learning via outdoor engagement. This outdoor experience allows them to see the realities of life, laying down the foundation to acknowledge the importance of engaging in community service.

These three events comprise the core components of the programme. Of the three, it can be gleaned that student-leaders' recognition of educational trips and community service underscore their tendency as community leaders to explore opportunities for leadership advancement by navigating through the engaging promises of educational trips and altruistic rewards of doing community service. The programme in this case affords application of their learning from the environment to applying them meaningfully in society in a larger sense. It is very interesting to note that the progression from the acquisition of knowledge to imparting them to society is indeed characteristics of dynamic young leaders. This dynamism is translated in the way they see other activities that form part of the BSP programme, significantly about the eastern and western culture. This can be gleaned from the following extract from one of the participants:

*'I would say that it would be different because BSP means that I have been involved in the activities that are related to the eastern and western culture..but if we're not part of BSP we might even join in this immersion programme like individually..but then in BSP it means that we students have participated in a lot of activities that are related to both cultures, not only this one particular programme. So I feel like being a BSP student is different, and as a student leader we also lead the student population and have more experience in this two cultures.'* – SL7

Each of the three themes is further stretched into sub-themes. The theme public speaking or debating produced the sub-theme 'boosted confidence'. The theme educational trips produced the sub-themes 'independence and leadership', 'sustained interest to join similar events', 'cultural experience', and 'experienced university life'. The theme community service produced the sub-themes 'empathy', 'valuing what we (student-leaders) have', and 'an avenue for personal growth'. This is emphasised in the following extract:

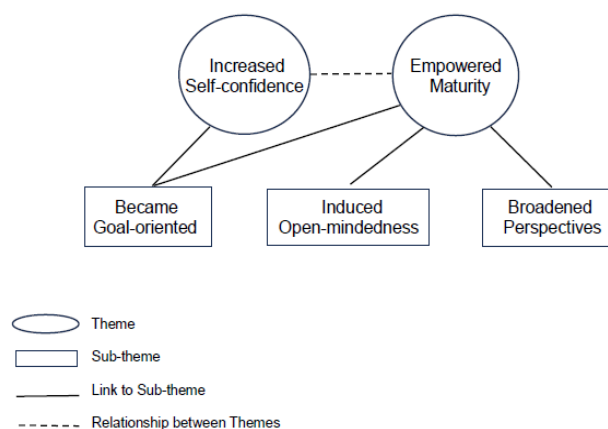
*'I think even without BSP I could still experience both HMCA and Reach Cambridge, and maybe some other activities, but the BSP programme helped me centralize everything...organise everything..and it definitely motivated me to join more of these things..activities that I would have not joined or overlooked at the time.'* – SL5

The identification of boosted confidence in speaking leads to independence. This independence allows realisation of other opportunities making them see the programme as one that brings motivation to student-leaders to remain interested and attuned to the events under the BSP. This leads further to cultural experience which they see as important element for them to perform in the university. The inclusion of community service surfaces the embedding of personal traits in the student-leaders' capacity. Moreover, the prominence of 'empathy' as theme in question 1 and its iteration in question 2 corroborates a study that individuals who learn a second language in a bicultural context may also have a more developed sense of social justice because of their increased empathy for cultural diversity (Crosbie, 2014 as cited in Chen & Padilla, 2019). This is one important element that BSP is honing in the student-leaders.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the three sub-themes of community service namely: 'empathy', 'valuing what one has', and 'an avenue for personal growth' characterise traits of a leader where understanding others' plight can be understood deeper when a person learns to value what he has. The eventual growth that springs from this perspective defines a service-oriented leader. The programme's formation of such idea in the minds of its leader participants may be dependent on the individual character and profile of the participants, and as such, this observation is subjective rather than directional.

## 3. How student-leaders' involvement in the BSP programme affected them as young leaders.

Thematic Map 3 – How student leaders' involvement in bilingual bicultural study program affected them as leaders.



The results for question three are presented in the thematic map above. The findings for question three revealed that as student-leaders, joining in the Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme affected them in the following areas as surfaced by the following themes: (a) increased self-confidence (*... through the BSP I learnt to become more confident because after the BSP I felt that I had a stronger grasp of the whole thing...-SL2*) and (2) empowered maturity (*...I think it's our obligation for us to inspire other people so they can become leader in their own ways...-SL1*). Both 'increased self-confidence' and 'empowered maturity' formed dynamic interactions and produced common sub-theme which is 'becoming goal oriented' (*...This confirms the study of Kim and Wargo (2022) where it was established that students' self-perception of leadership skills was the most important predictor of community values of development outcomes. The sub-theme 'becoming goal oriented' in encapsulating the combined influence of 'increased self-confidence' and 'empowered maturity' comes as a polished initiative and a realised call to action for the student-leaders as they engaged in various activities of the programme. This is acknowledged by one of the participants saying;*

*'As a student leader in BBS, I feel like there is an expectation in being a role model and I think that this BSP Programme really helps us on how we can mold our values, character, and how to lead by example.'* -SL1

This initiative to become goal-oriented as a result of the student-leaders joining the events is expounded by another respondent saying:

*'...for me, that's the role of the leader, it's to consider where everybody wanna go and lead the car somewhere...if there's no driver, the car goes no where, right...? and this driver needs to have confidence and communication skills among other really important skills, and I think that through the BSP I learnt to become a more confident driver..and not that without it, but I think that BSP is definitely a catalyst...'* -SL2

On its own, the theme 'empowered maturity' is further stretched into two sub-themes, namely 'induced open-mindedness' and 'broadened perspectives.' These sub-themes are interrelated and recognise an outcome that when one begins to be open-minded, broadened perspectives or a deeper understanding of issues happening within their mobility follows. This is cited by one of the participants saying:

*'...through BSP, you learn to communicate your thoughts with different people with different interests...you get to learn the perspectives of people from different countries, different campuses...and I felt a lot more open-minded...'-SL2*

However, mere membership and participation in the different events offered by the programme may not guarantee a definitive learning experience as cited by one of the respondents saying:

*'I think if we look at it from a big..like with Reach Cambridge and HMCA included, I think those two events contributed the most towards me..opening myself up..and learning about how to communicate with people from different backgrounds and different cultures, but if we're looking at it from a specific point of view, so, from when I officially became a BSP member, unfortunately I didn't get to do much and I think it didn't really contribute much towards my ability as a student leader.'* -SL8

The above extract, though it implies a disconnect between the programme and the various events it provides, casts a spotlight on the positive influence of events alone on student leadership where students are exposed to communicative interaction with their peers in realising their potential as young leaders, even when the said events are contextualised outside a programme such as the BSP. Although the emphasis here is mainly on the development of one's communication skills, such emphasis traverses between the themes 'increased self-confidence' and 'empowered maturity' underpinning the idea that even if a programme member may not have had much chance to join the comprehensive events covered by the programme, the strong influence of event-based leadership affordances cannot be undermined in honing the skills and leadership growth of young leaders, in this case the student-leaders of the Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme.

## 5. Summary of Findings

This section summarises the main research findings of the study. The main research question is: How does event-based learning influence students' leadership skills? The study sought to provide answers to this basic question by answering more specifically the following three sub-questions.

### 1. *Student-leaders' perspectives of bilingual bicultural learning.*

The findings for the first question revealed that that student-leaders' perspectives of bilingual bicultural learning are anchored on three themes, namely: (a) cultural immersion, (b) empowerment, and (c) broadened perspectives. These three themes complement each other, with 'empowerment' taking the progressive aspect stemming from both 'cultural immersion' and 'broadened perspectives'. Moreover, 'broadened perspectives' emanates from 'cultural immersion'.

### 2. *Kinds of activities the student-leaders found valuable in the BSP programme, and why.*

The findings for question two revealed that bilingual bicultural study programme participants valued activities that are anchored on three themes, namely: (a) public speaking or debating, (b) educational trips, and (c) community service. These three themes complement each other.

Each of the three themes are further stretched into sub-themes. The theme public speaking or debating produced the sub-theme 'boosted confidence'. The theme educational



trips produced the sub-themes ‘independence and leadership’, ‘sustained interest to join similar events’, ‘cultural experience’, and ‘experienced university life’. The theme community service produced the sub-themes ‘empathy’, ‘valuing what we (student-leaders) have’, and ‘an avenue for personal growth’.

### 3. *How student-leaders’ involvement in the BSP programme affected them as young leaders.*

The findings for question three revealed that as student-leaders, joining in the bilingual bicultural study programme affected them in the following areas as surfaced by the following themes: (a) increased self-confidence, and (2) empowered maturity. Both ‘increased self-confidence’ and ‘empowered maturity’ formed dynamic interactions and produced common sub-theme which is ‘becoming goal oriented’. The sub-theme ‘becoming goal oriented’ in encapsulating the combined influence of increased self-confidence and empowered maturity comes as polished initiative and a realised call to action of the student-leaders as they engaged in various activities of the programme.

## 6. Conclusions

1. This study aimed to investigate the influence of event-based learning in honing students’ leadership skills through their active participation and involvement in authentic activities.
2. This is a qualitative case study that sought participants perspectives on student leadership through authentic engagements.
3. The design of the study being qualitative and the composition of participants whose sharing were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2019) provided rich sets of information in finding answers to the research questions.
4. The results of data analysis pointed to the clarification and validation of the positive influence of event-based programme within the participants’ context.
5. Event-based approach to developing students’ leadership skills was found influential in allowing student-leaders find their potential, strengths and areas for improvement.
6. Student leaders found that Bilingual Bicultural Studies Programme (BSP) served as agent in
7. harnessing their leadership skills further. Although, for emphasis, it was the set of events that defined the programme, not one’s mere participation nor membership in it.
7. The results reached here do not intend to put forward a conclusive generalisation about event-based leadership programmes. This study is limited to Bina Bangsa School, Pantai Indah Kapuk Campus where respondents came from and whose shared experiences generously provided rich insights into the positive influence of event-based programme in student-leadership praxis in a bilingual and bicultural context.

## Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions of this study, the following are suggested:

1. A school should provide programmes concentrating on students’ development, particularly their leadership skills, through their participation and involvement in comprehensive events.

2. Consistency in participation and involvement in the programme by the students should be sustained and manifested.
3. Objectives of event-based programme should be emphasised, with student participation and involvement monitored, and programme outcomes evaluated.

### **Suggestion for Further Study**

A study on the influence of event-based programme in school setting (such as or similar to BSP) may be explored and compare findings herein to establish wider range of results and applicability.

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### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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