Strategies to Improve Leadership Traits Through the Perspectives of Nursing Students: An Explanatory Sequential Design

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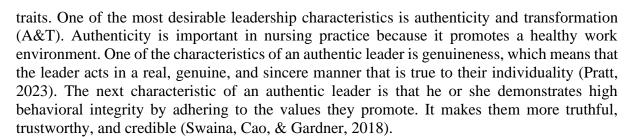*idauli.simbolon@unai.edu**

ABSTRACT

Background. The recent nursing students are the prospective future nursing leaders. Leadership is developed through behavioral theory. Therefore, nursing education and colleges are responsible to produce future nursing leaders by facilitating them to exercise 25 successful leadership traits. Therefore, nursing schools should assess their students' leadership skills in the beginning and also at the end of the program to identify which traits have been achieved and not achieved. This study informs the schools regarding the students' leadership traits and strategies that can be exercised to maximize the development of authentic and transformative leaders' traits. **Purpose:** The main purpose of this study is divided into two folds. The first one to describe the leadership traits among the nursing students, and the second one is to explore the strategies that can be involved to maximize the authentic and transformational leadership traits. **Methods:** The study was conducted through the explanatory sequential design in which the quantitative phase is followed by qualitative phase with the population of nursing students. The data gathering was conducted first to collect quantitative data and then qualitative data. **Findings:** The result of quantitative study revealed three of the most dominant characters that were always done by students. The first one is leadership trait number 24 in which students are always using stress strategies to reduce their stress (81,4%). It is followed by trait number three in which students always admit their fault (73.8%). In the third rank, 69.4% of students always support clear communication and collaboration. Through qualitative data, there are seven themes and 12 sub-themes emerged as strategies that can be used to improve their authentic and transformative (A&T) characters. The activities in each sub-theme proposed by the students are applicable to be exercised in supportive learning environment both inside the classroom and laboratory, and also outside the classroom. Exercising them more often potentially increases the ability to become an A & T leader.

Keywords: Leadership Traits, Nursing Students, Strategies to Increase A&T Traits.

INTRODUCTION

Today's nursing students are going to be prospective future leader in nursing. When they graduate and evolve into leaders, they will manage themselves, nursing staff and collaborators on the healthcare team, colleagues at various managerial levels in health-care organizations, and others (Sihombing et al, 2021). Leaders are developed based on theories. Nursing school is one of the institutions that produces leaders. Nursing schools teach a variety of leadership

traits. One of the most desirable leadership characteristics is authenticity and transformation (A&T). Authenticity is important in nursing practice because it promotes a healthy work environment. One of the characteristics of an authentic leader is genuineness, which means that the leader acts in a real, genuine, and sincere manner that is true to their individuality (Pratt, 2023). The next characteristic of an authentic leader is that he or she demonstrates high behavioral integrity by adhering to the values they promote. It makes them more truthful, trustworthy, and credible (Swaina, Cao, & Gardner, 2018).

According to a previous study, the percentage of students who consistently demonstrated the characteristics of an A&T leader remains low (50.8%). Among the 25 characters, character no.24 has the highest percentage, with 77.7% of students always practicing different stress management strategies to reduce stress. Between these 25 characters, another five characters consistently performed between 60% and 77.7% of the students, with the remaining characters performing below 60%. This study concluded that the percentage of students who engaged in certain authentic and transformational behaviors remains low. It means that those characteristics must be exercised in order to improve and develop to their full potential (Simbolon & Br Perangin-angin, 2020).

When nursing students at various levels are compared in terms of authenticity and transformative traits, three A&T traits are consistently demonstrated by batch 4 students with work experience. They include fairness, self-direction, clear communication, and collaboration. The study also found that there are mean differences in A&T traits among nursing students at each level. It was significant from batch 1 to batch 4, batch 1 to batch 3, and batch 1 to batch 4 for work experience. However, there is no significant difference between batch 2 and batch 3, batch 2 to batch 4 and batch 3 to batch 4. The study concluded that nursing students need to be more engaged with activities to develop A&T traits during the study in nursing school (Simbolon et al., 2023).

Based on previous studies, it is necessary to investigate what strategies can be selected and implemented to maximize the potential for developing A&T traits during the learning process. There is limited research on evaluating activities that must be conducted to maximize the development of leadership traits among nursing students. Further research on student leadership activities is necessary for nursing institutions to provide students with more opportunities to develop A&T skills during their college experience. Nursing schools should prioritize teaching A&T skills to ensure the profession's long-term success. Behavioral theory suggests that leaders are not born, but rather created. This approach emphasizes that anyone can become a leader by understanding what makes a successful leader tick. A good leader's traits can be identified through observation of their surroundings and events over time.

So, the main purpose of this study is to describe the A&T characteristics of nursing students, and to explore the strategies that may contribute to the development of A&T traits into the maximum levels.This study will benefit nursing schools by providing a description of their students' A&T characteristics. Determine which characters needed to be improved and which were already effective, and what strategies can be offered in the perspectives of the students. Developing nursing curricula to equip students with the necessary skills for A&T leadership

after graduation is crucial for nursing schools and administrators. Nursing students must recognize their own A&T behaviors to improve their leadership skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authenticity requires self-discipline and consistency. Authentic leaders must overcome pressure and stress to avoid clouded judgment and inconsistent behavior (Alilyyani, Wong, & Cummings, 2018). Self-discipline extends beyond the workplace. Authentic leaders prioritize self-discipline in all aspects of life, as inconsistencies between work and personal life can lead to mistrust and disrespect among followers (Johnson, 2019). Authentic leaders have personal beliefs, values, and passions. Passion for the purpose leads to intrinsic motivation. Authentic leaders use compassion to empower others. Authentic leaders often have personal experiences that foster compassion for others (Covelli & Mason, 2017).

Authentic leaders foster positive relationships with their subordinates and maintain connections with others. Today's followers prioritize personal relationships with their leaders before fully committing to their jobs. Building positive relationships with followers leads to increased trust, collaboration, engagement, and task performance (Alilyyani, Wong, & Cummings, 2018). Leaders who are authentic present a true self to close colleagues, family, and friends (Gardner et al., 2011).

Authentic leaders foster employee creativity, enabling them to overcome obstacles and challenges at work (Semedo, Coelho, & Ribeiro, 2018). "Positive leaders" are the glue that holds a productive workplace together. Transformational leadership can help foster a positive work environment. Authentic and transformational leadership differ, but are still closely related. Both have been linked in numerous studies. Transformational leaders shape a changing social architecture through proactive action, innovation, teamwork, and organizational learning. Clark (2009) identifies vision, passion, enthusiasm, and a celebration culture within their service.

Transformational leadership promotes a positive work environment. Authentic and transformational leadership differ, but remain closely related. Several studies have linked the two. Transformational leaders shape social architecture by being proactive, driving innovation, working collaboratively, and encouraging organizational learning. Clark (2009) describes their service culture as visionary, passionate, enthusiastic, and celebratory. Leaders balance productivity and efficiency while fostering trust within the company, creating a positive working environment for nurses. They involve employees in decision-making and manage the transition process. They established a learning organization within the company (Medicine, 2004).

Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of authentic and transformational leadership (A&T). A&T leaders have a significant impact on organizational performance, work-life balance, and overall effectiveness. It effectively reduced negative attitudes and actions among followers, such as anger, dissatisfaction, and absenteeism. Contented nurses with their employer. Patients received improved services as a result. As a result, patients feel more satisfied. Research indicates that patient safety and nurses' creativity are completely mediated (Choi et al., 2016; Datta, 2015; Ping et al., 2015; Weng et al., 2015). Transformational

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leadership can enhance nurses' performance when treating various clients, including tuberculosis.

METHODS

Design. This study is using a mixed method with the utilization of Explanatory Sequential Design. The research was conducted in Faculty of Nursing Universitas Advent Indonesia Bandung after IRB and permission from the University administrator. The population is a nursing student in the Faculty of Nursing Universitas Advent Indonesia Bandung. The Sample for quantitative phase is selected using total sampling of all nursing students from batch 1 to 4. For the qualitative phase all students were also invited for focus group discussion.

Data Gathering Process. Data for the quantitative phase were collected using A&T questionnaire which was developed by Clark (2009). The questionnaire was translated from English to Indonesia by two experts (one English professor and one nursing professor). Then, the translated questionnaire was validated by Simbolon & Br. Perangin-angin (2020). All 25 items are valid. Reliability of the questionnaire is tested by using SPSS in which the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.735. Data for the qualitative phase was collected using focus group discussion by zoom meeting. Those who were not able to attend the zoom meeting were also given the opportunity to submit their perspective through email or WhatsApp text. The process of FGD was recorded and transcribed into text. All of these texts are kept in a world file.

Data analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS using descriptive analysis to find out the mean for 25 traits for all of the students. Creswell's six-step methodology was used to analyze qualitative data. Transcriptions were read and checked multiple times before being compared to the recorded results. Coding was used to identify categories and themes. So, at this point, each theme has one or more categories or sub-themes. The next step was to connect each category or sub-theme within the theme to the participant's statement. If the participants' statements were similar, the author chose the most complete statement to quote.

Ethical Consideration and Trustworthiness. The researcher ensured that all stages of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis followed the stages of mixed method to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were ensured (Cresswell, 2016; Manen 1984). The credibility of the data from 20 participants was confirmed by one of the researchers, as well as previous studies and other sources of information. Figure 1 illustrates the triangulation process. The collected data is also available and auditable at any time when required. To ensure confirmability, the researcher asked another researcher to check that data collection and analysis followed methodology. The triangulation can be seen in Figure 1. Twenty participants, one researcher, and a literature review.

RESULTS

There are 183 students who are involved in quantitative study, the distribution for each level is describe as follow: Level 1 of 45 students (24.6%), level 2 of 31 students (16.9%), level 3 of 30 students (16.4 %), level 4 of 40 students (21.9%), and ners profession of 37 students (20.2%).   The distribution of the traits can be seen in table 1. Drawn from table-1, there are three of the most dominant characters that have always been done by students. The first one is

leadership number 24 in which students are always using stress strategies to reduce their stress (81,4%). It is followed by trait number 3 in which students always admit their fault (73.8%). In the third rank, 69.4% of students always support clear communication and collaboration. It can be interpreted that there is still enough room for improvement for the rest of A&T leadership characters.

Table 1. Distribution of Leadership Traits Using Descriptive Analysis

N0	A&T Characters	N	Never		Sometimes		Always		Total	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	I demonstrate care for others through sincere, practical deeds	183			70	38.3	113	61.7	183	100
2	I maintain consistency between words and actions	183	1	.5	86	47	96	52.5	183	100
3	I'm willing to admit when I'm wrong and move past it	183	2	1.1	46	25.1	135	73.8	183	100
4	I treat other people as equal partners	183	1	.5	60	32.8	122	66.7	183	100
5	I willing to spend time building professional relationships with other	183	4	2.2	74	40.4	105	57.4	183	100
6	I focus on doing what is right, not what other people tell me to do	183			64	35	119	65	183	100
7	I'm driven by a sense of a higher calling	183	6	3.3	73	39.9	104	56.8	183	100
8	I find a sense of meaning in my everyday Tasks	183	4	1.2	79	43.2	98	53.6	183	100
9	I promote values that transcend self-interest and profit	183	4	2.2	102	55.7	77	42.1	183	100
10	I focus in finding a sense of purpose and direction	183	4	2.2	67	36.6	112	61.2	183	100
11	I make sure everyone has a clear understand of our share vision	183	8	4.4	86	47.0	89	48.6	183	100
12	I lead by personal example	183	2	1.1	96	52.5	85	46.4	183	100
13	I allow myself to experiment and be creative	183	4	2.2	67	36.6	112	61.2	183	100
14	I am trustworthy and trust others	183	1	.5	76	41.5	106	57.3	183	100
15	I am reliable, when I say I'll do something, I do i	183	1	.5	63	34.4	118	64.5	183	100
16	I work to empower other	183	11	6.0	84	45.9	88	48.1	183	100
17	I support clear communication and collaboration	183	4	2.2	52	28.4	127	69.4	183	100
18	I make sure everyone who's involved gets a say in decisions affecting them	183	2	1.1	76	41.5	105	57.4	183	100
19	I act to encourage a feeling of physical and emotional safety wherever I am	183	6	3.3	69	37.7	108	59	183	100
20	I provide others with meaningful recognition for their achievement	183	5	2.7	79	43.2	99	54.1	183	100
21	I try to be a sense of family and cheer to fellow student	183	8	4.4	77	42.1	98	53.6	183	100
22	I allow others to be true to their core value, preferences and emotions	183	6	3.3	69	37.7	108	59.0	183	100
23	I share my life stories with others so we can understand each other perspectives	183	2	1.1	71	38.8	110	60.4	183	100
24	I reduce my stress by engaging in meditation, prayer, hobbies and other stress-reducing activities	183	2	1.1	32	17.5	149	81.4	183	100
25	I show other my principles, value, and ethics through my action	183	3	1.6	79	43.2	101	55.2	183	100

The qualitative phase involved 20 students who attended a focus discussion group. Results of qualitative data revealed seven themes and 12 sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes can be seen in table 2.

Table-2 Themes and Sub-themes of Qualitative Study

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Concern for others.	1) Empathy and concern
	2) Communication and Socialization
2. Consistency and Integrity	3) Consistency of Words and Actions
	4) Accountability and responsibility.
3. Responsibility and Independence	5) Personal Responsibility
	6) Independence and initiative
4. Self-Improvement and Personal Development	7) Character Development
	8) Creativity and learning
5. Communication and Collaboration	9) Effective communication
	10) Collaboration and cooperation

| 6. | Creativity and Innovation | 11) | Creativity and Experiment |
| 7. | Reward and Motivation | 12) | Respect and Appreciation |

Based on the table-2, there are seven themes that are unveiled related to strategies for training oneself to become an authentic and transformational leader. The seven themes and its sub-themes are described in narratives and followed by participant statements.

Theme: Concern for others.
This theme consists of two sub-themes, namely: 1) empathy and concern, and 2) communication and socialization.

Sub-theme 1) empathy and concern
Participants said that showing concern for other people can be done through voluntary activities. Apart from participating in voluntary activities, participants also said that asking and listening was an attitude of caring towards other people. Of course, concern for other people will be seen in a willingness to provide support. The following is the participant's statements:

> *"Taking part in volunteer activities helps me see the world from a different perspective and makes me feel more connected to my community." KI 1*
> *"By listening to the complaints of my classmates or freshman regarding the problems or challenges they face in studying, as a classmate and upperclassman I can understand their needs and can provide as much support as possible." KI 2*
> *"Providing emotional support makes me feel more satisfied because I can share knowledge and help them overcome their challenges" KI 2*

Sub-Theme 2: Communication and Socialization

Showing concern for other people can be done by participating in social activities. The following is the participant's statements:

> *"Participating in technical activities with the team helps build stronger relationships" KI 4*
> *"Participating in social activities can certainly build and improve relationships with others better" KI 3*
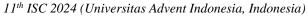> *"Building conversations not only with people who talk to me often but also with people who rarely talk to me helps me make friends and strengthen relationships" KI 2*

Theme: Consistency and Integrity

This theme consists of two sub-themes: 1) Consistency of Words and Actions, and 2) accountability and responsibility.

Sub-theme: Consistency of words and actions

Activities that can be done to increase consistency are by making a daily journal, weekly assignments and asking classmates. The following is the participant's statements:

"Writing a daily journal helps me track my words and actions, so I can be more consistent in what I do and do." KI 11

"Setting a weekly commitment makes me more organized and responsible in completing my tasks." KI 5

"Getting feedback from classmates about my consistency helps me correct my shortcomings and improve" KI 8

Sub-Theme: Accountability and Responsibility

Make an action plan, act following the plan, it is easier to see the progress of the assigned tasks that are the responsibility that must be fulfilled. The following are participant statements:

"Creating an action plan and monitoring my progress helps me stay focused on my goals and responsibilities." KI 1

Theme: Responsibility and Independence
Consists of two sub-themes: personal responsibility, and 2) independence and initiative

Sub-theme: Personal responsibility:
Being personally responsible includes having the courage to admit mistakes. No matter how small a mistake we make, it needs to be acknowledged and recorded so that it becomes a warning not to do it again. Apart from that, a proactive nature needs to be developed to become more responsible and more independent personally. The following is the participant's statements:

"Acknowledging mistakes helps me feel more comfortable about confronting and correcting mistakes" KI 12

"Noting mistakes and learning makes me more aware of areas that need improvement and how to fix them." KI 7

"Taking initiative for tasks that I often avoid helps me build a sense of responsibility and increases productivity." KI 5

Sub-Theme: Independence and Initiative
Independence and initiative need to be developed to become an A&T leader. Activities that need to be done are doing independent assignments, attending self-development classes or seminars, and facing challenges that arise independently. The following is the participant's statements:

"Working on independent projects gives me the opportunity to develop new skills and manage projects from start to finish" KI 15

"Taking personal development classes expanded my knowledge and increased my confidence in independence." KI 20

"The challenges faced included completing assignments without assistance increasing my independence." KI 4

Theme: Self-Improvement and Personal Development
This theme consists of Two sub-themes: 1) character development, and creativity and learning

Sub-Theme: Character Development

Self-development can be obtained by reflecting more often. Ask for advice from people who are more experienced and have a good personality, besides that reading books about self-development can help to improve certain character. The following are participant statements:

"Self-reflection helps me evaluate my attitudes and decisions, so I can continue to improve." KI 3

"I like to ask for advice from people who I consider to have good character and are worthy of emulation. This helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses, as well as how to further develop my character." KI 6

"Reading books about character development gave me insight and inspiration to implement positive changes in my life." KI 13

Sub-Theme: Creativity and Learning

Several respondents said that creativity could be increased by brainstorming, carrying out creative experiments and attending creativity workshops. The following is the respondent's statements:

"Brainstorming regularly helps me generate new ideas and increase creativity" KI 18

"Participating in creative projects provides an opportunity to try new ideas and develop innovative skills." KI 1

"The creativity workshop taught me new techniques for thinking outside the box and spurred innovation in my work." KI 12

Theme: Communication and Collaboration

This theme consists of two sub-themes: 1) effective communication, and 2) collaboration and cooperation.

Sub-Theme: Effective Communication

Communication in nursing is crucial so communication skills must be trained as much as possible while attending classes. The activities carried out by participants were presentation practice, attending communication classes, being involved in communication simulations. The following are participant statements:

"Presentation practice helped me feel more confident when speaking in public and conveying messages effectively" KI 2

"Communication classes provided practical skills that improved the way I interact and communicate with others." KI 10

"Communication simulations help me prepare for challenging situations and improve my speaking skills." KI 12

Sub-Theme: Collaboration and Cooperation

To improve collaboration or cooperation skills, there are several strategies mentioned by participants, including working on tasks together, listening to good feedback and interpreting it, and being an active listener. The following is the participant's statement:

"Being involved in group work allows me to learn how to collaborate and contribute effectively to a group" KI 3
"Feedback with the team provides valuable insight into how I can improve collaboration and work effectiveness" KI 6
"Active listening allows me to better understand others' perspectives and improves team communication." KI 9

Theme: Creativity and Innovation

To become a creative person, participants provide examples of activities that can be practiced every day. The following are the respondents' statements:

"Taking part in creative activities gives me the opportunity to innovate with fresh ideas." KI 20
"Experimental projects allow me to explore new approaches and learn from failures as well as successes." KI 1
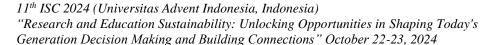*"Integrating creative activities into my daily routine helps me stay inspired and increases productivity." KI 13*

Theme: Reward and Motivation
Sub-Theme: Respect and Appreciation

Rewards are one source of motivation for a person to develop and improve performance. Giving appreciation is one of the criteria for an authentic and transformational leader. These activities need to be held and maintained. The following is the participant's statement:

"The awards I have received have given me motivation and confidence to be more active in improving my performance" KI 1

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis of quantitative, there is a need for students to improve their A&T Traits. Qualitative data serves several themes, sub-themes and activities that can be used to improve the attitude or character of an A&T leader. It starts with caring for others. According to students' perspective, caring for others involves empathy, effective communication, and concrete action in support of the community. Through activities such as volunteering, active listening, and participating in support programs, individuals can increase their understanding of and relationships with others, strengthen social networks, and have a positive impact on those around them. Salehian, et al. (2017) emphasized that caring in nursing education is built through faculty-student interactions based on ethical and humanistic principles. Caring values and moral principles are developed through educational processes, application of learning objectives, and dynamism in educational processes. The educational environmental support, ongoing human interaction, and understanding were the most successful in terms of internalizing caring. According to Izzah, et al. (2018), caring is an attitude and behavior that nursing professionals must incorporate into their performance because it not only improves client satisfaction but also benefits the health institution. However, it is difficult to change someone's caring behavior in a short period of time. It is a long learning process and it is also affected by the leader around them.

Consistency and integrity play an important role in promoting professional development and the nursing profession. Consistency and integrity are very important in building trust and credibility. By maintaining consistency between words and actions and being responsible for actions, individuals can show their integrity. According to students, activities such as daily journaling, action planning, and feedback from classmates help to ensure that personal values and commitments are consistently implemented. Cleary, Walter, Horsfall & Jackson (2013) and Hargett et al. (2017) emphasized the component of integrity that includes basic values such as honesty, trust, responsibility, respect, and fairness, as well as ethical principles such as autonomy, fidelity, and privacy. It also includes good governance, acting with personal integrity and professional ethical values, and effective communication.

Taking personal responsibility and demonstrating independence is key to personal and professional development. Through activities such as admitting mistakes, independent projects, and personal challenges, individuals can increase their sense of responsibility and develop the independent skills necessary to achieve personal and professional goals. Capturing personal responsibility is integral to successful nursing practice (Margrethe et al., 2024). Related to self-improvement and personal development it will involve developing character and creativity. Students emphasize that through self-reflection sessions, mentorship, and participation in creative activities, individuals can continue to develop and improve their abilities. These activities encourage the exploration of new ideas, skill development, and overall character improvement. The student's suggestion is similar to previous study that using self-reflection will help nursing students to improve their competences to solve complex problems in health care (Pai, 2015). Effective communication and good collaboration are the foundations for successful teamwork. According to students, presentation exercises, communication classes, and team projects help strengthen communication and collaboration skills. Integrating feedback and active listening practices also increases effectiveness in communicating and collaborating. This is in line with the previous study that collaboration goes beyond communication to include sharing, teamwork, and respect (Emich, 2018).

According to students, creativity and innovation are the keys to progress and new solutions. Through creative experimentation, and implementation of new ideas, individuals can drive innovation and find new approaches to existing challenges. These activities help maintain the creative spirit and find innovative solutions. Students stated that social awareness and duty involve attention to social issues and responsibility towards the community. Through participation in awareness campaigns, charitable activities, and social responsibility programs, individuals can make a positive impact and show concern for the welfare of society. In addition, students agree that providing rewards and maintaining motivation is important to improve performance and satisfaction. Through a monthly reward system, support programs, and ongoing motivation, individuals feel appreciated and motivated to continue striving. Rewards and positive support strengthen enthusiasm and commitment in achieving goals. Students also described that strong ethics and values guide daily actions and decisions. Taking ethics training, implementing a code of ethics, and being a role model help ensure that an individual's actions are consistent with espoused ethical principles and values. This builds trust and integrity in interactions and decisions. The students also added that improved performance and self-confidence are closely related to the ability to evaluate and improve performance continuously.

Activities such as performance drills, feedback sessions, and mentoring help individuals identify areas for improvement and increase their self-confidence. By focusing on self-improvement, individuals can achieve better performance and greater self-confidence in their roles.

CONCLUSION

The result of students' leadership traits assessment informs this particular nursing school that several traits still needed to be developed during the learning process. The activities that are suggested by the students are applicable to be exercised through the learning process with the support of a learning environment both in class and laboratory, and also out of the classroom. The quantitative result cannot be used to generalize other nursing schools because of the limitation of the population only to one nursing school. It is suggested to study a larger sample and different nursing schools to make generalizations.

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