



Leadership Skills of Organization Advisers, Students' Attitudes and Their Engagement Toward Environmental Stewardship

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Abstract

This quantitative descriptive-correlational study examined the leadership skills of Youth for Environment in School Organization (YES-O) advisers, students' environmental attitudes, and their engagement in environmental stewardship in selected secondary schools in the Schools Division of Zamboanga del Norte. 180 YES-O officers and members served as the study's respondents determined through stratified random sampling from small, medium, and large schools. Data were collected using validated researcher-made questionnaires assessing advisers' leadership skills in organizational planning, communication, collaboration, and monitoring and evaluation; students' proactive, cognitive, and affective attitudes; and engagement in participation, initiative, sustainability, and advocacy. Results revealed that advisers demonstrated very high leadership skills, while students exhibited highly positive environmental attitudes and high levels of engagement. Significant relationships were found between advisers' leadership skills and student engagement, as well as between students' attitudes and engagement. Further analysis indicated that specific dimensions of leadership practices and student attitudes significantly influenced engagement levels. The findings highlight the importance of effective adviser leadership and positive student attitudes in promoting active and sustained environmental stewardship, and support strengthening leadership development and student-led environmental initiatives.

Keywords

Environmental stewardship, Leadership skills, Student attitudes, Student engagement, YES-O advisers

1. Introduction

Leadership plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of environmental programs in schools, influencing not only program outcomes but also students' awareness, attitudes, and long-term commitment to environmental stewardship. Moreover, when effectively practiced, leadership ensures that environmental initiatives are integrated into the school culture as meaningful learning experiences rather than isolated activities (Department of Education – Division of Zamboanga del Norte [DepEd ZDN], 2021).

In this context, advisers or adult facilitators are central to this process, serving as planners, mentors, coordinators, and motivators of student-led environmental initiatives. Furthermore, effective leadership practices, particularly those that involve mentoring, inspiring, and mobilizing students, significantly enhance student engagement and environmental responsibility (Cadiz & Cortez, 2025). Through this lens, through strategic planning and guidance, advisers help align school-based environmental activities with broader sustainability goals.

In addition, contemporary leadership approaches emphasize collaboration, community engagement, and contextual relevance. For instance, community-based leadership connects school initiatives with



local environmental concerns and encourages stakeholder participation (Bensemman et al., 2021). Similarly, leadership characterized by resilience, teamwork, and self-regulation enables advisers to effectively manage the complexities of environmental programs (Bäcklander et al., 2021). Moreover, leaders with strong psychological capital—defined by hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience—create supportive environments that motivate student participation (Dawkins et al., 2021), particularly when reinforced by a school culture that promotes environmental responsibility (Bhardwaj, 2022).

On the other hand, students' environmental attitudes are equally significant, as they influence their willingness to engage in stewardship activities. Specifically, positive attitudes, including a sense of responsibility and value for sustainability, are associated with higher levels of participation (Bangao, 2022; Imran et al., 2024). However, an attitude-behavior gap persists, wherein favorable attitudes do not consistently translate into action. Consequently, students often demonstrate moderate or inconsistent environmental behaviors unless supported by strong leadership, experiential learning, and engaging instructional strategies (Berame et al., 2022; Schneider & Popp, 2023). In response, approaches that incorporate real-world relevance and participatory learning have been shown to strengthen this relationship (Frodeman & Holley, 2021; Schneider & Popp, 2023).

Furthermore, environmental stewardship is a key component of holistic education, fostering responsible and environmentally conscious citizens. Accordingly, integrating environmental education into school programs enhances knowledge and promotes sustainable practices (Debrah et al., 2021). Likewise, innovative approaches such as experiential learning and simulations further deepen students' engagement and motivation (Sapawi et al., 2024; Tan & Nurul-Asna, 2023). In practice, schools implement activities such as clean-up drives, tree planting, and waste management initiatives, often supported by community partnerships that promote shared responsibility (DepEd ZDN, 2024; Turaya, 2024).

Despite these efforts, gaps remain in understanding how leadership practices and student attitudes interact within specific local contexts. In particular, cultural and institutional factors may influence student engagement, and the persistence of the attitude-behavior gap highlights the need for stronger alignment between attitudes and action.

This study examined the relationship between advisers' leadership practices, students' environmental attitudes, and their engagement in environmental stewardship. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform policymakers, school leaders, and educators in strengthening environmental programs, enhancing leadership development, and promoting sustained student participation in environmental initiatives.

2. Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate how the leadership skills of YES-O advisers and the attitudes of students influenced students' engagement in environmental stewardship in the Schools Division of Zamboanga del Norte.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of leadership skills of the YES-O advisers in terms of:
 - 1.1 Organizational Planning,
 - 1.2 Communication,
 - 1.3 Collaboration, and
 - 1.4 Monitoring and Evaluation?
2. What is the level of students' proactive, cognitive, and affective attitudes toward environmental stewardship?



3. What is the level of students' engagement toward environmental stewardship in terms of:
 - 3.1 Participation,
 - 3.2 Initiative,
 - 3.3 Sustainability, and
 - 3.4 Advocacy?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of leadership skills of the YES-O advisers and the students' engagement toward environmental stewardship?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the level of students' attitudes and the students' engagement toward environmental stewardship?
6. Which of the independent variables predicts the students' level of engagement toward environmental stewardship?

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Method Used

This quantitative study employed a descriptive–correlational design to assess YES-O advisers' leadership skills, students' environmental attitudes, and their engagement in environmental stewardship. It described variable levels and examined relationships among them, enabling analysis of associations and predictive influences without manipulating conditions (Devi et al., 2022).

3.2. Research Setting

This study focused on selected secondary schools in the Schools Division of Zamboanga del Norte implementing the YES-O program. Schools conducted environmental initiatives and collaborated with agencies such as DENR to promote awareness and student engagement through activities like tree planting, waste management, and environmental campaigns (DepEd–SDZDN, n.d.).

3.3. Respondents of the Study

The study involved 180 YES-O students (74 officers, 106 members) from selected public secondary schools in the Schools Division of Zamboanga del Norte for SY 2025–2026. Using stratified random sampling, respondents were proportionally drawn from big (60%), medium (30%), and small (10%) schools, ensuring representative participation.

3.4. Instruments of the Study

Data were collected using three researcher-developed questionnaires. The YES-O Adviser Leadership Skill Questionnaire assessed advisers' leadership across four domains using a five-point Likert scale and demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.917$). The Students' Attitude toward Environmental Stewardship Questionnaire measured cognitive, affective, and proactive dimensions, yielding strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.860$). The Students' Engagement toward Environmental Stewardship Questionnaire evaluated participation, initiative, sustainability, and advocacy, with high reliability ($\alpha = 0.861$). All instruments underwent content validation and pilot testing with respondents outside the main sample to ensure clarity, relevance, and suitability. Standard five-point Likert scales were used across all instruments to measure levels of leadership, attitudes, and engagement, with corresponding descriptive interpretations ranging from very low to very high or very negative to very positive.

3.5. Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the Graduate School of Misamis University and the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Zamboanga del Norte. Informed consent was secured from all respondents after explaining the study's purpose and significance. Data were collected within school premises through the supervised administration of survey questionnaires to ensure accuracy and completeness. The researcher monitored the process to facilitate full participation and



efficient retrieval of responses. Collected data were subsequently organized, analyzed, and interpreted in accordance with the study objectives.

4. Results

4.1. Level of Leadership Skills of YES-O Advisers

The results revealed that YES-O advisers demonstrated a very high level of leadership skills ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.65$). Among the domains, communication ($M = 4.50$) ranked highest, followed by organizational planning ($M = 4.47$), collaboration ($M = 4.45$), and monitoring and evaluation ($M = 4.42$). These findings indicate that advisers effectively guide, coordinate, and sustain environmental programs, fostering strong student participation and program continuity.

4.2. Level of Students' Attitudes Toward Environmental Stewardship

Students exhibited a very positive environmental attitude overall ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.64$). Cognitive and affective dimensions obtained the highest means ($M = 4.48$), while proactive attitude ($M = 4.26$) remained very positive. This suggests that students are knowledgeable, emotionally engaged, and generally willing to act on environmental issues.

4.3. Level of Students' Engagement Toward Environmental Stewardship

Students demonstrated a high level of engagement ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.76$). Sustainability ($M = 4.28$) and participation ($M = 4.20$) were highest, while advocacy ($M = 4.08$) and initiative ($M = 3.84$) were slightly lower. These results indicate strong involvement in structured activities but comparatively less independent action.

4.4. Significant Relationship Between Leadership Skills and Student Engagement

All leadership domains showed significant positive relationships with student engagement ($p < .001$). Strong correlations were observed between monitoring and evaluation and participation ($r = 0.654$), and between collaboration and participation ($r = 0.623$). These findings indicate that effective leadership enhances students' participation, initiative, sustainability, and advocacy.

4.5. Significant Relationship Between Students' Attitudes and Engagement

Students' attitudes were also significantly correlated with engagement ($p < .001$). Proactive attitude showed the strongest relationship with participation ($r = 0.793$), followed by cognitive and affective dimensions. This suggests that students with stronger environmental attitudes are more actively engaged in stewardship activities.

4.6. Predictors of Students' Engagement

Regression analysis revealed that proactive attitude ($\beta = 0.588$), monitoring and evaluation ($\beta = 0.211$), and affective attitude ($\beta = 0.178$) significantly predicted student engagement, explaining 72.10% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.721$). Proactive attitude emerged as the strongest predictor.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that YES-O advisers demonstrate very high leadership competence, particularly in communication and planning, which supports effective implementation of environmental programs. Strong leadership fosters structured activities, clear guidance, and collaborative environments that enhance student participation and program sustainability.

Students' very positive attitudes suggest that environmental education programs successfully develop knowledge and emotional connection to environmental issues. However, the slightly lower proactive scores reflect the common attitude-behavior gap, where awareness does not always translate into independent action.



Student engagement was high, particularly in sustainability and participation, indicating that students actively practice eco-friendly behaviors and engage in organized activities. However, lower initiative and advocacy scores suggest a need to strengthen student autonomy and leadership in environmental actions.

The significant relationships between leadership, attitudes, and engagement confirm that both external (adviser leadership) and internal (student attitudes) factors influence environmental stewardship. The strong predictive power of proactive attitude highlights the importance of fostering action-oriented mindsets. Similarly, monitoring and evaluation as a predictor emphasizes the role of feedback and structured systems in sustaining engagement.

Overall, the findings support the idea that effective leadership combined with positive student attitudes leads to meaningful and sustained environmental engagement.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that YES-O advisers exhibit very high leadership skills, which significantly influence students' engagement in environmental stewardship. Students possess very positive environmental attitudes; however, there is still a need to strengthen proactive and initiative-driven behaviors. Student engagement is generally high, particularly in participation and sustainability, but opportunities remain to enhance advocacy and independent action. Furthermore, proactive attitude, affective attitude, and monitoring and evaluation were identified as key predictors of engagement, highlighting the combined influence of personal and leadership factors.

The study recommends that school leaders and program coordinators strengthen leadership development programs for YES-O advisers, particularly in monitoring and evaluation practices. Schools should design more student-led, action-oriented environmental activities to enhance initiative and advocacy. Additionally, integrating experiential learning, environmental campaigns, and community-based projects can help bridge the gap between attitude and action. Continuous mentoring, structured feedback systems, and opportunities for student leadership should be provided to sustain engagement and develop environmentally responsible learners. Future studies may explore other influencing factors such as school climate and community involvement to further enhance environmental stewardship programs.

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