

**The mind of our future leaders:**  
**How do Indonesian girls who have participated in**  
**#GirlsTakeOver leadership programs perceive youth leadership**

**Master Thesis**

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## Abstract

**Purpose.** Leadership experience is regarded as one of the essential components of learning leadership. Even though there is some progress in gender-related issues, Indonesian females, including girls, still frequently experience inequality in leadership. This study aims to find how Indonesian girls who participated in youth leadership program make sense of youth leadership and enrich the academic youth leadership literature. Investigating this subject is practically and socially relevant for it explores and answers the societal issue that still exists and connects to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Results from this study can also be used to design a comprehensive youth leadership development program.

**Method.** A qualitative study with a narrative approach was conducted to explore how girls make sense of youth leadership. This study used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, investigating the role of social environment, motivation, competencies, and the challenges regarding leadership. The interview was completed by 30 Indonesian girls aged 18-24 who participated in #GirlsTakOver youth leadership development program.

**Results.** Youth's exposure to leadership experience comes from family, school, and community organizations. Trust from others is one of the main determinants that motivate them to pursue and participate in leadership activities. The experiences they have influence youth's perception of leadership. Rather than someone with a formal role, youth perceive leaders as someone who can be trusted, influence, and make positive change. They also noted leadership as a continuous learning process. Girls experience socio-cultural challenges such as gender and age in leadership, and they are motivated to overcome these challenges by gaining more experience. These leadership experiences improve youth skills and also influence their future leadership objectives.

**Conclusion.** Each participant's leadership experience is unique but also has similarities: the critical aspect of youth leaders is the ability to influence and make change. Many resources can be considered beneficial to help youth make sense of youth leadership, such as a supportive social environment and leadership opportunities. Purposeful and meaningful leadership activities or programs in the community can improve youth's understanding of leadership and extend their conception of leadership and social purpose. Youth who practice leadership to make a change or meet the needs of others may feel a deep sense of fulfillment that will influence their present and future leadership objective.

Keywords: Youth leadership, gender and leadership, leadership development, Indonesia, leadership experiences.

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesian women's involvement in the public sphere, particularly in leadership roles, continues to be a challenge in the twenty-first century (Juwitasari, 2022). Women are seen as a secondary group in society, and often women and leadership are portrayed negatively with the stereotype of women being ineffective leaders (Juwitasari, 2022; Rinjani and Pertiwi, 2021). Many efforts have been made to change this stigma and to prove that women and girls have a significant role in shaping society. One of the efforts is embodied in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-2030 to ensure fair access to education, political participation, and decision-making (Longman, 2018).

Prominent youth leaders like Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai show how youth can influence peers and world leaders to act and make impactful changes that reflect the interests of younger generations. Their actions have become an inspiration for other youth (Kraemer, 2021), as they show how ordinary people can make a difference (Sabherwal et al., 2021). A study by De Simone (2012) found that youth will benefit from leadership development in various ways, with increased self-esteem, confidence, resiliency, and self-efficacy. These benefits will be helpful for their present and future life.

Leadership is an integral part of experiential learning (Ammann, 2010). According to Van Linden and Fertman (1998), experiential learning occurs when an individual engages in an activity, evaluates it critically, decides about the insights that they should retain or find useful, and then applies that knowledge to other activities. However, in society, leadership is still often referred to as a male-dominated subject (Juwitasari, 2022; Muganda, 2021). As this current male-dominated mindset still exists, it is intriguing to understand how girls experience leadership as a youth, for example, how they dismantle the gender barrier or develop better leadership competencies as youth leaders. Kjellström et al. (2020) proposed that people actively create meaning in their experiences, including leadership development experiences. So it is crucial to explore how youth as part of society make sense of leadership and its development.

Youth is best described as the transition period from dependent childhood to independent adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997), which makes the definition of youth more fluid compared to the other fixed age group. The United Nations (UN) defines the youth age group as persons between the

ages of 15 and 24. In comparison, the youth law in Indonesia categorizes youth as individuals aged 16-30 (<https://www.youthpolicy.org>, 2014). This study refers to youth in the age range the UN proposed.

Youth leadership opportunities offer youth a sense of social contribution, feeling able to make changes, and allowing them to develop other essential qualities (Ammann, 2010; Jones, 2009). Critical leadership qualities, including effective communication, problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and goal-setting, could help the youth to cope with the challenges in their surrounding while preparing them to solve future challenges (Ammann, 2010; Seemiller, 2018). The youth are now more aware of various societal issues than ever. Girls in Southeast Asia have various gender transformation and social inclusion concerns. They have actively used many platforms to voice their messages, such as public rallies, campaigns, and press releases. (Megaw et al., 2021).

Preparing and empowering girls to take leadership roles in all sectors is crucial. But the transition to the youth phase also comes with different expectations for girls and boys. A study by Brady and Khan (2002) found that boys are more likely to enjoy privileges in their transition to youth. On the contrary, many girls feel they can openly express their thoughts and feelings in their childhood, but when they hit puberty, they may feel divided between pressures to fit in with traditional notions of femininity and the need for independence (Baric et al., 2009). In addition, because of the lower social status stigma, girls often become more vulnerable during their youth phase (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008). This dynamic might influence the way girls experience and view leadership.

This study aims to enrich the leadership literature, which often excludes the youth group. Leadership studies are often adult-centred, and a youth-centred approach will provide a richer perspective on academic leadership literature. As leadership is still often associated with a male-dominated subject, this study focuses the spotlight on the female youth leaders who enrolled in the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program and explored their journey in leadership. The main research question in this study is: How do Indonesian girls participating in leadership programs make sense of youth leadership? Three sub-questions are formulated to answer this question.

1. How do female youth leaders gain experience in youth leadership?
2. How do female youth leaders perceive youth leadership?

3. What are the female youth leaders' perspectives on competencies, barriers, and future leadership objectives?

The findings of this study will be practically beneficial for youth leadership development initiatives that prepare for the arrival of a new era of leaders. Data collection will also provide useful insight into how Indonesian youth or youth from other developing countries interpret leadership and their reasons for participating in it when so many of their peers do not have the opportunity.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 The Essential Components of Leadership**

Many studies have explored various approaches to find the best possible definition of leadership. Northouse (2018) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.43), while a study by Fischer et al. (2016) defines leadership as "a social and goal-oriented influence process, unfolding in a temporal and spatial milieu" (p.1). Yukl (2012) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p.7). These definitions help us to identify some essential components that revolve around the leadership phenomenon, such as (a) Leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influencing others, (c) leadership occurs within a group context, (d) leadership involves accomplishing goals, and (e) shared common goals by leaders and followers (Rowe, 2007). These components provide an understanding that leadership is not a linear process. It is a two-way dynamic interaction between leaders and followers where both parties can affect or be affected by each other to achieve common goals (Rowe, 2007). This study acknowledges that leadership is available to everyone and not exclusively owned by individuals *born with it* and not only restricted to those in the formal position of power (Northouse, 2018).

According to Northouse (2018), there are four approaches to leadership: traits, skills, behavioral, and situational. The traits approach exclusively focuses on the leader's character and personality. The skills approach focuses on the competencies that leaders can learn to achieve effective leadership in the process. The behavioral approach concentrates on how a leader acts rather than who leaders are. And the situational approach's main premise is that leadership depends on the situational context between leader and followers.

Northouse (2018) argued that the first three approaches might not be equally effective across all situations. The situational approach, as the name suggested, acknowledges that every situation is unique and complex, so leaders and their leadership need to be adaptive. This approach requires leader participation to evaluate their dynamic with followers to achieve the common goals, which are also essential components in leadership. The situational approach might be beneficial to understanding the process of an individual a learn and gaining the necessary skills to become an effective leader and develop their leadership.

### **2.1.1 Leaders and Leadership Development**

Leader development and leadership development are two different subjects. Studies suggest that leaders' development highly depends on individual capabilities to absorb competencies, automatically improving their leadership (Day, 2000; Velsor et al., 2010). On the other hand, leadership development emphasizes interpersonal connection, collaboration, and resource exchange from multiple individuals, teams, and organizations (Day, 2014; Kjellström et al., 2020). Even though both are different, leadership development and leadership development should be viewed as concepts that are linked and complement each other. Leadership development should not diminish leader development; Both are equally important and necessary to increase effectiveness, especially in the organization (Day, 2001).

Kegan (1994) study proposed that we should not choose one side but bridge leader and leadership development equally. Intrapersonal capacities in leader development can become the foundation for growth in leadership development. Dalakoura (2010) suggests that integrating leader and leadership development to a new leadership perspective aligned with organization strategy will significantly improve organizational performance. Leader development is an essential part of leadership development. According to Lord and Hall (2005), as leaders evolve, their attention shifts from individual to collective level identities, both for the leader's self-identity and the identities of their followers. Changes in the leader's



identity impact the readily accessible leadership knowledge, goals, and interpretative structures. When leaders shape the identities of their followers, their intentions and behaviors may be influenced as well.

Classroom training and experience are some of the sources that may develop leaders and leadership (Hernez-Broome et al., 2004; Mccall, 2004). Hernez-Broome et al. (2004) proposed that while training may be essential for leadership development, developmental experiences are most likely to have the most significant influence if they can be connected or incorporated into the individual work and are part of a comprehensive set of experiences. McCall (2004) adopted a broader perspective and argued that even though the experience is valuable, it is not created equally. People do not get immediate lessons from experience, and the impact will differ depending on the individual.

Leadership development itself does not solely depend on external stimuli such as training and experiences. Various studies have identified that internal stimuli play a role in influencing individual leadership development, such as emotional resonance, interest, and motivation (Hernez-Broome et al., 2004; Chan and Drasgow, 2001). Thus, leaders' proactive efforts to grab the available opportunities are necessary to develop their leadership.

### **2.1.2 The Role of Motivation in Leadership**

Motivation is essential to leadership processes (Yukl, 2012), as taking or filling a leadership position is usually a voluntary action (Bergner et al., 2018). Chen et al. (2018) identified motivation as a process that describes an individual's strength, direction, and perseverance to accomplish goals. Motivation can be one of the determinants that drive individuals' endeavors to reach their purpose. Bergner et al. (2018) found that individuals with a stronger motivation or desire to lead others to devote more effort to developing personal resources in their leadership.

Motivation to lead can influence leaders' performance and participation in leadership roles and activities within these roles (Bergner et al., 2018; Kark and Dijk, 2007). Motivation to lead (MTL) can be viewed as the distinctive individuals' feature "that affects a leader's or leader-to-be's decisions to assume leadership training, roles, and responsibilities and that affects his or her intensity of effort at leading and persistence as a leader" (Chan and Drasgow, 2001, p. 482). Chan and Drasgow also noted that MTL is dynamic; it can shift with leadership experience and training.

Based on the finding from Chan and Drasgow's (2001) study, three distinct but interconnected components become the fundamental of individual differences in MTL. The first component is affective MTL, in which people are motivated to lead because they enjoy leading other people. The second component is social normative MTL, which suggests that a sense of social duty and obligation motivates people to lead. The third component is non-calculative MTL, which refers to the state and individual not considering the cost and benefit of participating in leadership.

Another finding is reported by Stango (2022), who categorized motivation to pursue leadership for youth in college as internal, external, and indifferent. Internal motivation highlights factors such as a sense of community/belonging, making friends/connections, self-improvement, a sense of accomplishment, career or academic motivation, or passionate feeling about the organization as part of the reason to pursue leadership. External motivation implies that environmental factors, like people or situations around, become the reason to pursue leadership, such as the felt need to make a difference or encouragement by others. Indifferent motivation shows that individuals sometimes lead because they coincidentally fall into the role or keep busy (Stango, 2021). It is also possible for an individual to have multiple determinants such as a combination of internal and external that motivate them to pursue leadership.

According to Neureiter and Traut-Mattausch (2016), people who like to lead show high affective-identity motivation to lead (p.4). These individuals believe they possess leadership qualities and place a high value on competitiveness and achievement. They are outgoing and eager to try new things. They also have strong self-efficacy and are confident in their own leadership abilities.

Regarding gender, females may be less motivated to pursue leadership roles or become leaders, Li et al., (2011). It could be due to a lack of leadership self-efficacy and general career motivations, which could go back to a lack of relative experiences (e.g., National Services) compared to males. In line with Chan and Drasgow's (2001) study, Li et al. (2011) suggested that providing a supportive environment and more relevant experiences or training might contribute to improving the self-efficacy and development of females with leadership motivation to become leaders.

## **2.2. Youth Leadership**

Adult leaders have dominated the focus in leadership fields, and adult leadership theories are often not relevant to the youth group (Karagianni and Montgomery, 2017; Moguel, 2015). Through one study, Macneil (2006) identified that adult leadership often centers on authority, while youth leadership puts learning as the focus. On a similar note, a study from Mortensen et al. (2014) proposed that youth leaders emphasized more on leadership outcomes rather than power, authority, or other traits from adult leadership theories. Youth leaders focus on the difference they can make rather than the power they have over others (Moguel, 2015).

Many studies have established that youth can take leadership roles and have leadership abilities within themselves (Karagianni and Montgomery, 2017; Kress, 2006; Linden and Fertman, 1998). Linden and Fertman's (1998) study found that youth present their leadership in subtle ways to their surroundings, such as home, peers, school, and neighbor relationships in their communities. The research also noted that youth attitudes towards leadership are gained

from experiences and continuous learning processes. This source for this learning process can come from direct instruction, being influenced by others, or by adopting a social role. A study by Mortensen et al. (2014) discovered some aspects that youth value in leadership: change, collective action, mentorship, strong character, and the belief that anyone can be a leader.

To understand youth leadership, it should be viewed flexibly (Conner & Strobel, 2007), for youth may present leadership differently in a different context. Even though it may vary in context, the core of youth leadership involves connecting with others, gaining competencies, creating positive contributions to the surrounding social environment, and empowering others to reach their potential (De Simone, 2012; Edelman et al., 2004; Kress, 2006; Oparinde et al., 2017). This study describes youth leadership as the process of youth participating and influencing the people around them to achieve a positive common purpose. Through this understanding, we consider leadership to be accessible to everyone, including the youth.

Youth leadership programs can provide opportunities and experience for the youth to expand their skill set, collaborate with others, lead change, and use their creativity to benefit themselves and society. Youth leadership development organizations and programs have existed for decades. Seemiller (2018) identified various sectors that exposed youth to their leadership development, such as formal leadership programs (in or out of school), sports, faith-based and service activities, youth-run community programs, extra-curricular activities, and camps.

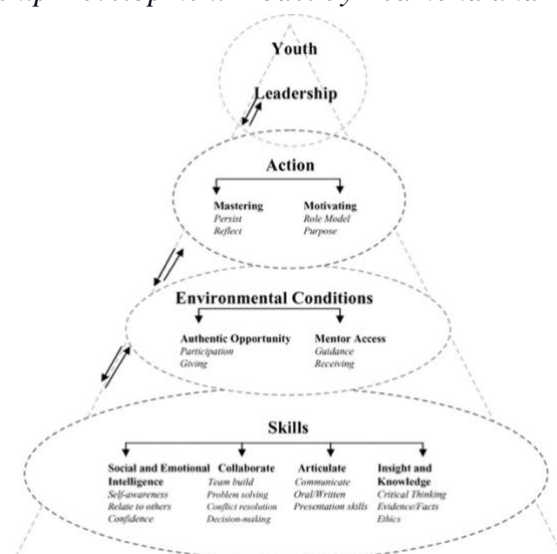
Many studies have tried to incorporate the many factors that play role in youth leadership development (Komives et al., 2007; Murphy and Johnshon, 2011; Ricket and Rudd, 2002; van Linden and Fermant, 1998). But currently, no comprehensive youth leadership model can capture the whole dynamic (Redmond and Dolan, 2014). Through their study, Redmond and Dolan (2014) argue that some studies developed a model that emphasizes skills but failed to highlight the need for authentic opportunities or influence of the surrounding

environment to practice the skills and vice versa. They then develop a conceptual model that is expected to be able to integrate and assimilate all the essential components to create an active youth leadership model. This model emphasizes skills development, environmental conditions, and action as important components in youth leadership. With youth leadership at the top level, Redmond and Dolan (2014) highlight that each stage is interlinked and portrays the ideal condition for youth to develop their leadership.

Redmond and Dolan (2014) proposed that in terms of skills, this model emphasizes the importance of ideas like social and emotional intelligence, collaboration, articulation, insight, and knowledge in developing a youth leader. For youth leadership development, proper environmental conditions are also necessary. Redmond and Dolan define the environmental condition as having authentic leadership opportunities and access to mentors who can assist an individual in their leadership development. The model's final component is action. After the youth have acquired the necessary abilities and have had the opportunity to practice them, they must take action, for there can be no leadership without action. By definition, youth leadership is action-oriented. Motivating others to follow their lead and learning to master a new skill set are both important aspects of action.

**Figure 1**

*Youth Leadership Development Model by Redmond and Dolan (2014)*



The model's most important feature is its emphasis on committed action through mastering and motivating in-focus areas of leadership. Youth can develop their leadership abilities when given the right environment to practice them safely, as suggested by Redmond and Dolan's (2014) youth leadership model. The proposed framework will be applied throughout this study to explore how the dynamic of skills, social environment, and action help youth to make sense of youth leadership.

### **2.3. Fostering Youth Leadership**

Society's role is vital in embracing youth's social participation in the community. Ho et al. (2015) proposed that society will get multiple benefits, especially when youth are engaged in their community's available empowerment and development opportunities. As part of society, NGOs also play a role in supporting the development of youth leadership potential and connecting them with decision-makers and other organizations so that the youth can maximize their contribution to society (Shephard, 2017). This participation also benefits the youth, as it can lead to developing leadership, social, and life skills (Flanagan and Christens, 2011; Jones, 2009; Suhaimi et al., 2018). Various approaches can be strategically designed to engage youth and foster their leadership development.

#### **2.3.1 Positive Youth Development**

Positive youth development (PYD) is one of the approaches among youth leadership development programs. PYD is a strengths-based approach to youth development that focuses on discovering resources in the community and honing talents, competencies, and interests to help the youth attain positive support, experience, and potential (Jones, 2009; King et al., 2011). PYD approach frequently targets disadvantaged youth, especially those from developing countries (Hull et al., 2021).

The PYD approach highlights the versatility of youth to grow and change and emphasizes the youth's active participation in their development journey (Lerner et al., 2007;

King et al., 2011). PYD views youth as "resources to be developed" instead of "problems to be managed" (Lerner et al., 2007, p.7). According to Lerner et al. (2005), through PYD, youth will positively contribute to their own growth, family, and their surrounding community when they "...have mutually beneficial relations with the people and institutions of their social world..." (p.12).

PYD views development as the result of an interaction between youth's internal assets and the external environment they are involved with (Arshad et al., 2021; Abdul Kadir et al., 2021). To understand this interaction, PYD adopts the concept that captures the nature of internal and external assets and is assumed to optimize the aspect of youth developmental growth, thriving potentially, and well-being (Abdul Kadir et al., 2021). In the years of PYD development, the concept has evolved from 4Cs, 5Cs, and 6Cs to the most recent 7Cs, namely, competence, confidence, character, caring, connection, contribution, and creativity (Dimitrova and Wium, 2021).

Lerner (2004) proposed the big three design features PYD consists of: (1) providing opportunities for youth to participate in and leadership of family and community activities; (2) put life skill development in the spotlight and; and (3) involving the context of a sustained and caring adult-youth relationship. PYD engages with youth, which means it does not "teach" but involving youth to experience and let them learn from these experience. As leadership is experiential learning, these features become an ideal foundation to analyse how youth experience in #GirsTakeOver programs impact their youth leadership development.

### **2.3.2 Mentoring and Role Model**

Researchers and practitioners have agreed that providing the youth with more exposure to professional training and mentoring and exemplary role models may improve youth leaders' participation in nation-building. Activities such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, and

360-degree feedback have become more critical components of leadership development programs (Hernez-Broome et al., 2004). Previous studies have revealed the correlation between mentoring and its role in improving youth's social-emotional, cognitive, and identity skills (DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2005; Rhodes and Dubois, 2008), which might be beneficial for youth leaders. Mentoring provides the youth an opportunity to grow leadership skills, and the benefits that youth gain from leadership mentoring are linked to the criteria for good youth development (Arshad et al., 2021).

In general, mentoring can be viewed as a two-party relationship in which one party (the mentor) helps the other (the protégé or mentee) through a period of transition and toward a mutually agreed-upon goal or assists them in becoming acquainted with a new situation (Kay and Hinds, 2012). Mentoring relation is unique for it involves a more personalized mutual interaction and is designed as "intentional and helpful"; where the mentor intends to provide direction and support to the protégé (mentee), and the mentee accepts it (Jacobi, 1991; Rohrich and Durand, 2020). According to Jacobi (1991), mentors serve three purposes: 1) emotional and psychological support, 2) direct career and professional development help, and 3) role modeling.

Role models can profoundly influence individuals. Wright et al. (1997) reported the influence of "sufficient" interaction with a role model on individual career choices. Redmond and Dolan (2014) proposed that youth leadership development requires participatory learning and role models who can be copied. A broadly similar result was stated in a study by Taylor et al. (2008). They found that aspiring leaders have viewed role modelling as one of the effective strategies for learning leadership abilities. Role model itself can source from individuals who interact directly and have an influential role to a leader, such as parents, teachers, or mentors but can also in an embodiment of a historical person or someone a leader never met directly (Gibson, 2004; Rohrich & Durand, 2020).



According to Arshad et al. (2021), mentoring allows the youths to develop and polish their youth leadership skills while also maintaining the interaction between them (mentee) and adults (mentor). Balcazar and Keys (2013) argued that when the mentor and the mentee spend significant amounts of time together regularly, it strengthens the youth mentoring relationship. But the quality of the interaction might also be essential to be reviewed, as other studies from Ehrhardt and Ragins (2019) underlined the paradox of "too much of a good thing" that possibly emerged in mentoring relationships. This concept highlights the possibility of mentees to decrease their psychological attachment or withdraw from mentor relationship when the mentor does not meet their specific learning needs. It is good to say that to develop effective youth mentoring programs, good planning of leadership development programs may be needed.

### **2.3.3 Youth Activism**

Activism can be channeled on various levels, from an individual level, youth or campus organization, non-government organization, or even broader collective work like social movement (Atkinson, 2017; Earl et al., 2017; Raby, 2014). Youth can embody their activism through many forms such as protest, information dissemination to peers and the community, leading workshop, boycotting, or collaborating with other youth activists (Ardizzone, 2007; Earl et al., 2017; Zukin et al., 2006).

Activism and leadership have a reciprocal relationship. Various studies have noted that youth activism is essential to developing critical awareness and leadership capacities (Cammarota & Fine 2008; Dolan et al. 2015), and vice versa. A recent study from Carrol and Firth (2020) shows growing interest in concepts like power, voice, and involvement in youth leadership development. Those who participate in community or youth activism emphasize that youth are aware of issues of injustice, oppression, and change, claiming that youth can

recognize, analyze and propose tactics to solve social issues or problems around them (Govan et al., 2015).

Some challenges still exist in the youth activism dynamic. In terms of gender, girls experience more parental opposition to their involvement in activism, causing them to drop out more frequently than male youth Earl et al. (2017). Earl et al. study also found that youth often have to deal with the same sexism experience in youth activist organizations. This challenge is similar to what adult women face in a similar environment, resulting in youth male activists dominating the debate and leadership roles.

The core of youth activism can be viewed as the youth's effort to express awareness and the process of influencing their surroundings to work on an issue. To organize this effort, activists need essential skills that are also attached to leadership dimensions, such as communication, critical thinking, purpose, will, and motivation. (Komives et al., 2007; Martin & Coy, 2017; Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013; Van Linden & Fertman 1998). Thus youth activism can become one of the posts for youth to build their leadership, which can also determine their understanding of leadership.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

In conclusion to this literature study, it is clear that leadership belongs to everyone, including youth. But youth leadership remains as a dynamic and complex process, and a more integrated leadership framework may be needed. Based on the literature, youth leadership involves participation or collective actions, influence, and positive change. The literature also suggested that youth leadership can be developed through experiences, and the social environment plays a role in fostering youth leadership development. This study believes experiences have a significant impact on helping youth make sense of youth leadership.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research aimed to understand how the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program participants view youth leadership. Through a qualitative approach, this study explored their effort to find opportunities and obstacles to develop their leadership capabilities and lead social change in their community. More specifically, a narrative approach with an in-depth interviews was used to explore the story of the #GirlsTakeOver Indonesia leadership program participants. The narrative focuses on the stories that participants tell in the interview.

Participants' willingness to reflect and share the experiences they gained during their leadership journey was an essential requirement for this study. The narrative approach provided unique insights into procedural and impalpable components of participant experience, informing project design and highlighting context-based impact (Mohajan, 2018). This study also acknowledged and questioned the participants' values and personal interpretations of their leadership experience.

The ethical review process for this thesis was completed in March 2022. Before the interview, all participants first agreed to sign a formal consent letter to confirm their participation in this study from Yayasan Plan International Indonesia as the organization that connects us to participants. Each participant's consent was also verbally requested before the interview began.

#### **3.2 Research context : #GirlsTakeOver program**

The #GirlsTakeover: Sehari Jadi Pemimpin (A Day to Be Leaders) program is an annual global campaign initiated by Plan International to celebrate International Girls' Day on October 11. Before the day, selected participants must join the leadership mentoring, workshop, and preparation from the participating organization leaders. Since 2016, Yayasan Plan International in Indonesia has facilitated more than 650 children to take over various strategic positions. In

Indonesia, Yayasan Plan Indonesia has facilitated dozens of girls who have held five ministerial positions and 20 other high-ranking positions.

Plan Indonesia #GirlsTakeover 2021 event collaborated with the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) and Srikandi (women-led) BUMN in early October 2021. All the participants in this event joined the leadership class, where they learned and expanded their horizons while competing to be selected as the finalist who will take over the leadership positions Yayasan Plan International Indonesia has prepared. The #GirlsTakeover 2021 is part of a series of #RaisetheBar campaigns to promote gender equality and women's leadership in the work environment.

### **3.3 Participants**

This study interviewed 30 youth participants from 2019, 2020, and 2021 #GirlsTakeOver leadership classes. All participants are female youth from all Indonesian zone areas, west, central and eastern areas, with various social backgrounds (i.e., religion and ethnicity). These also include diverse educational backgrounds (i.e., high school students, university students, and fresh graduates who recently worked or became an entrepreneur). These social and educational backgrounds are interpreted in the transcription process; because some of the information might be too personal to be asked directly. All participants already have at least one leadership role experience in their life. This research follows the proposed age range for the youth group by the United Nations, which is from 18–24-year-old. All participants are contacted with the permission of the Yayasan Plan International Indonesia.

### **3.4 Data collection and interview guide**

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to gain personal and rich narratives about youth leadership. The questions were designed to only focus on the

participants' personal experiences and self-reflection and aimed to explore participants' drivers to grow their leadership potential, their obstacles and how they overcome the challenges, their ambition, and what they have done. This study also explored their motivation to join the #GirlsTakeOver leadership class program and the impact of their view on their leadership potential.

This study highly involved participants' self-reflection and what they learned from their leadership experiences. A set of interview questions were developed in line with the theoretical framework to answer research questions and sub-questions. The list of questions can be accessed in the appendix section.

The first set of questions aimed to identify participants' trajectories toward leadership; the questions allowed the participants to reflect on and comprehend their earlier exposure to leadership experiences and the motivation behind their participation in leadership activities. Then, the participants were asked to think about significant experiences that they consider important in shaping their understanding of youth leadership and their view on what leadership and being leaders mean. These questions were aimed to answer the main research question, how youth make sense of youth leadership. The next question set was constructed to find the influence of social environment on participants' leadership journey; these include mentors and role models and the challenge they face as leaders. The last questions focused on competencies and participants' future purpose as leaders. The last question asked participants to reflect on their overall experience and understanding, what they gained and how they will use it in the future.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one and online from 29th March to 10th May 2022, with the Zoom video platform. All interviews session were recorded with the consent of participants. Participants were allowed to deactivate the video camera if they felt more comfortable.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Jansen (2022) proposed that stories help individuals make sense of the world. This research used narrative analysis to comprehend the result of data collection. The narrative analysis puts participants' stories in the spotlight and analyzes what the stories mean. Narrative analysis can provide a bridge to learning about how people deal with and make sense of reality by analyzing their stories and how they are delivered.

Before analyzing the data, the audio interview recordings were transcribed into text. After the transcription, the researcher continued to do a holistic content reading to familiarize himself with the transcripts. Nasheeda et al. (2019) suggested that the familiarization process helps researchers identify the key process, people, places, and times of events in the narratives. This can be achieved by frequently listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts. This process helped the researcher to immerse in the data and constituted familiarity with the data.

This research used an inductive approach during the analysis process. Sharp et al. (2019) define inductive analysis as the practice of deriving categories and themes directly from the data. According to Berg (2004), inductive analysis allows the researcher to ground categories inside the data and thus most directly portray participant perspectives; nevertheless, it is also legitimate for researchers to draw on their own experience with the subject phenomena during analysis.

## 4. Findings

The responses collected from interviews with 30 girls' youth leaders about their leadership journey can be classified into three broad themes: leadership journey, leadership experiences, and future leadership objective. This chapter will review the findings for each topic. The leadership journey section highlights the personal establishment of leadership, who and how the social environment influences their leadership journey, and motivation to join leadership activities. The leadership experience part accentuates the participants' significant leadership experiences and explores all essential elements that help youth make sense of youth leadership. Mastering leadership underlines how participants plan to use their leadership skills and understanding for the future. Samples from the in-depth interviews are also included in the document as the foundation to support the findings.

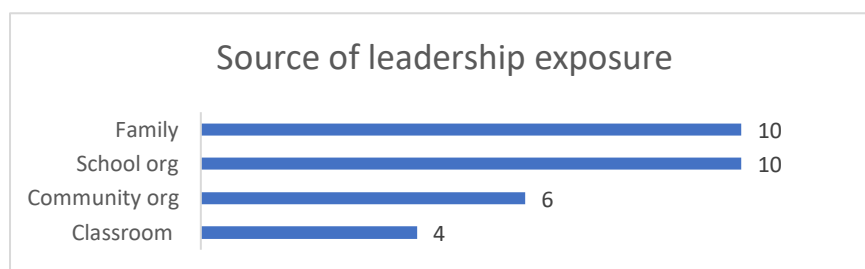
### 4.1 Leadership Journey

#### 4.1.1 Exposure to leadership

As youth translate leadership differently, the first journey is different for everybody, including the participants. 10 out of 30 participants each mentioned family and school organization as their first exposure to leadership followed by community organization and classroom activity. The leadership journey is not a linear path for every participant; some might get a glimpse of leadership from a family member at the beginning, but considering other sources gives more impactful leadership exposure to them.

**Figure 2**

*Source of leadership exposure*



## *Family*

One-third of the participants mentioned family as one of their earliest sources of exposure to leadership, primarily core family members such as parents and siblings. According to the participant, their involvement in a small-scale duty with specific responsibilities during the early childhood stage contributes to the participants' early perception of leadership. Some of the duties they experienced, such as deciding their interest (e.g., choosing a school, taking an extra course, etc.) or family activities (e.g., leading the road, choosing a family holiday, eating out.) As children, when the youth get the opportunity to be involved in the process, it makes them feel like their voice matter and lead to their early comprehension of the concept of leadership, where they can lead themselves or their sibling.

*"My initial exposure to leadership is coming from my family. For example, my parents always involved me in choosing schools or when I wanted to participate in all kinds of competitions. It gives me an early understanding of leadership by leading myself." (P22)*

In this stage, the participants considered leaders as individuals whose voices are heard and who take the decision or lead a group of people. These understandings came from what they saw in their social surroundings as some family members, like their father, mother, or older siblings, have leadership roles in their community. When the participants see their family members have a leadership position, it often sparks participants interest in pursuing leadership..

*"Since I was a child, I have often seen my parents lead meetings or big events in my community like that because my father was a former village head. Following this, the village head's wife usually automatically becomes the head of the women's community group, so I also see how my mother leads the women's group in my community. I see how they talk to people, and I also reflect on what they do as parents and leaders at home." (P30)*

*"I was introduced to the idea of leadership by my parents. I am the youngest child, and all my older siblings have leadership positions in one agency. In our family, we have family time where my family tells their experiences as leaders. So, from there, I became interested and inspired by them to become a leader." (P26)*



## *Classroom*

Participants also recognized leadership exposure from the sources outside the family environment. Participants generally acknowledged classroom activities as the first opportunity to expand their understanding of leadership. These are channelled through leading small study groups, leading peers, or becoming head of the classroom role. By leading the study group or class, participants realize they are interested in leading, organizing, listening, and discussing with their colleagues.

*"We all have experienced group assignments at school. Of course, in that group, there must be someone who leads so that all members can achieve certain group objectives or goals; for example, one of the goals is to get an A grade. As a leader, we must lead and direct the group; we are also monitoring so that the results align with our goals. Leading this group to become one of my earliest experiences with leadership." (P19)*

*"When I work in a study group, I am always the group leader. From there, I saw the pattern. It turned out that being a leader of this small group gave me enthusiasm, and I felt comfortable too. Finally, what if I try to lead even more and feel capable of becoming head of the classroom." (P20)*

The experiences and trust participants gained as leaders of a small group, or in the classroom has a role in enhancing their interest and confidence to pursue more significant leadership roles in the school-level environment. For the position of classroom head, participants were commonly appointed by the teacher or voted by the students. In the head of the classroom role, participants began to understand that trust in others and responsibilities are essential to leadership.

*"When I was at school, I led the study group. So, from that experience, I realized that I like to listen to the aspirations of other friends, continue to organize, organize, discuss." (P21)*

*"What was on my mind at that time was being able to take responsibility for the class. So, for example, when the teacher is absent, the teacher needs something, or something happened in the class; usually, they will ask the head of the class to organize the support needed. I have to be responsible for anything that happens in class." (P11)*

### *School based organization*

Within the school environment, the student-based organization becomes one of the significant sources that exposed participants to a broader understanding of leadership. In this environment, participants are exposed to more significant responsibilities (e.g., leading student movement, school-external responsibility, and challenges (e.g., gender inequality, peer pressure, demotivating environments). In this stage, participants are motivated to pursue and receive more prominent leadership roles such as student president, head of student division, and chief of the extracurricular team in school.

*"I had experience as student president when I was in junior high school. But it turned out that there was still discrimination in the vocational school where I went to study, which did not allow female students to become the student council president. So, I was only able to become the vice student president. We fight for this case back then." (P14)*

*"So, when my friend and I, both females, nominate ourselves as student president, we enter the top 3 candidate pairs at that time. But then there was resistance come from the teachers at my school. She said it seems that the female students will only fit to become the secretary and the treasurer; you don't have to be the chairman. Just let the male student become the student president." (P9)*

*"As the student president, I want to add another sport to the class meeting competition. But my initiative was opposed by some of the annual class winners, and I received pressure from them to cancel the initiative. We even had to conduct a quick meeting with teachers to facilitate the discussion, which resulted in my initiative being taken down." (P27)*

### *Community based organization*

The school environment is not the only source of exposure in the participant leadership journey. Community-based organization is also mentioned as the source for participants to channel their interest to give a social contribution, leading the change in an issue they are concerned about or when their interest is not facilitated through the school environment. Participants are joining the community organization that fits their interests with the various role, from a volunteer, member, vice, or even the head of the organization.

*“I like volunteering. I was allowed to take on more responsibilities in volunteer activities. And I learned about leadership when I joined the community named Tenggara NTT...And there, I have started to have more confidence in leadership.”(P18).*

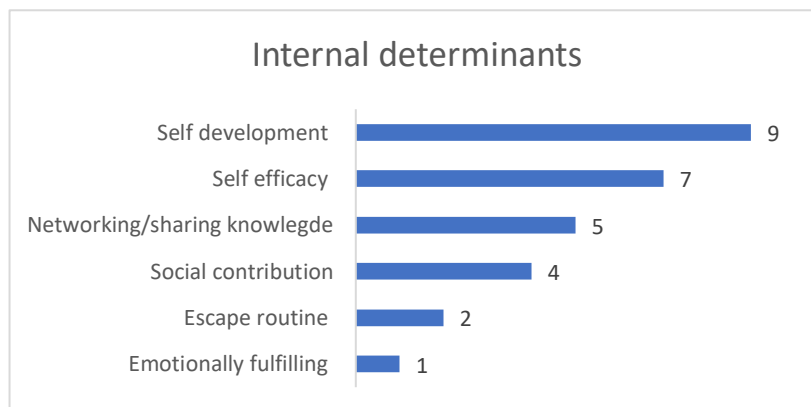
While the community organization they join is mostly developed by the Indonesian government or International NGOs based in Indonesia, some participants also mention they build their self-initiated community to answer their interests and become the leader in the organization. The participants also faced socio-cultural challenges such as ageism and a bureaucratic government environment in the community-based organization environment..

*“I also learned from personal experience because I had the opportunity to create a community named “Magelang Cerita”, join organizations and also participate in a self-development project. From there, I directly learned about the experience of being a leader. (P15)*

#### **4.1.2 Motivation to join leadership activities**

This research categorizes the participant response related to motivation to lead into two groups: internal and external determinants. The internal determinants highlight the factors or senses that come from within participants' aspects, while external determinants focus on the stimuli derived from the environment around participants. More than half (seventeen out of thirty) of the participants' responses demonstrate that they have internal and external determinants that motivate them to join leadership activities.

**Figure 3**  
*Internal determinants*



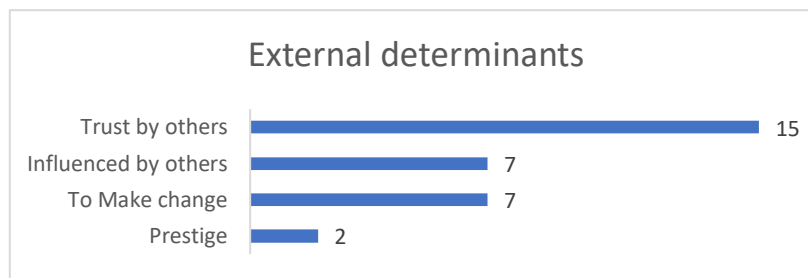
Within the internal determinants category, most participants emphasized the desire for self-development and self-efficacy as two dominant factors that drive them to join leadership activities. Besides those two, participants also mentioned that their interest in social issues motivates them to lead so they can contribute or share knowledge about the issue. A small number of participants also stated that they join leadership activities because it is emotionally fulfilling and to escape their daily routine.

*"I am aware that there are many things that can be explored and the experiences in the organization or leadership are beneficial to increase my capacity, and it can also shape me to many other positive things. And I'm sure it will be useful in the professional world later." (P21)*

*"So the motivation is more to the trust of other people's beliefs that are given to me. and I want to try to challenge myself to take responsibility for the trust others give" (P27)*

**Figure 4**

*External determinants*



The participants referred to trust by others, influence by others, and making change as the leading external determinants. As the research also questions participants about their challenges, participants' awareness of sociocultural challenges such as gender inequality and ageism also become the sources of motivation for participants to pursue and develop their leadership potential. With two participants also included prestige as the reason they joined leadership activities.

*"...after I have a conversation with the teachers and student council advisor, they kept convincing me by saying, you can do it, you have the quality... So yeah, that seems to be what motivates me. I have this principle to give a contribution, and many people believe in my abilities, so why don't I try to believe in myself." (P6)*

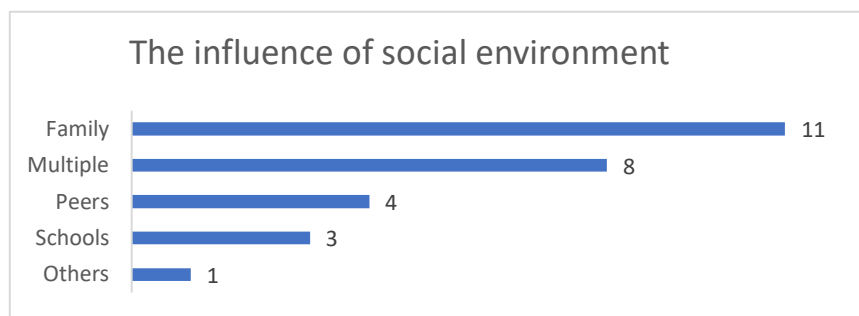
*"Maybe because I saw my mother, for there are only a few women in Indonesia who can work and lead at her age. So I think it will be very cool if I can be a leader." (P3)*

Participants cited self-development, familiarity with the gender inequality issue, prestige, and familiarity with the organization or figures as the primary motivation to join the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program.

#### **4.1.3 The influence of social environments**

**Figure 5**

*The influence of social environment*



In the participants' responses about the influence of social environment, most of them explicitly agreed that a supportive social environment helped them to pave their journey to leadership, especially when there is an opportunity for youth leadership development. Influence and support from the core family member are considered the most impactful source, followed by peer, school, and community organization support. The interview result also indicated that participants could have multiple sources of social environment support that enhanced their understanding and potential for leadership.

*"Maybe it was pretty smooth for me because my parents and other social environment gave me enough space to continue to join in and develop my leadership potential. At school, there are also many opportunities for you to be a leader and provide options for me to join and develop in various leadership activities." (P4)*

*"My parents and family are very supportive. Although, for example, I often heard that being a leader was difficult, my parents tried to convince me that I could do it. Just enjoy it, even though the duties and responsibilities are heavy. That's what really pushed me to become a leader, even though in my environment, as I described earlier, the patriarchy was still dominating, where men were considered more worthy of being leaders." (P5)*

Participants also considered that leadership opportunities around them contribute to shaping their understanding of leadership as a youth. These opportunities can be embodied in the form of a leadership role in various social institutions, youth leadership development programs, and access to a mentor. Participants cited education institutions, community organizations, and the workplace as the vital source of opportunities for the participants to learn more, contribute and participate in leadership.

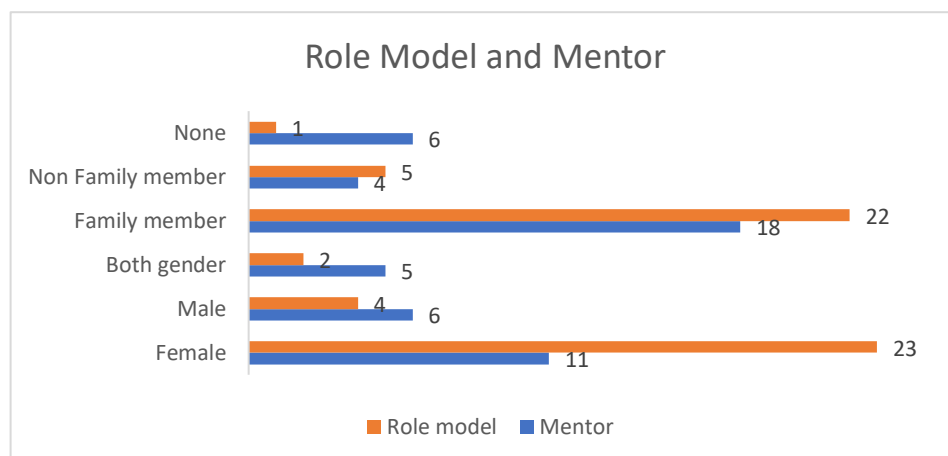
*"...I think my leadership is growing from all sources like communities and organizations that I joined...and in the workplace. I have worked in this kindergarten school for three years. The first year, I was still a monitor teacher, then I went up to be a supervisor and homeroom teacher, until now while I am a homeroom teacher, I'm also the acting principal for the kindergarten" (P29)*

*"I joined the junior high school student council (OSIS) when I was elected as treasurer. Then I continued in high school by participating in community organizations outside of school. I joined the children's forum in the city of Kisaran, where I began to understand more about what leadership is and how it really is." (P17)*

Technology has a specific role in being the source of information that give participants exposure to other youth leadership development opportunities. Social media (Instagram and TikTok) are the primary channel that exposes participants to the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program, followed by peers and organization affiliates.

**Figure 6**

*Role model and mentor*



Participants acknowledge the role of mentor and role model where they can receive additional values and perspectives and influence their view and growth as youth leaders. Most participants generally referred to females from external or non-family members as their role models and mentor in leadership. But several responses also cited males, both gender (male and female), and their family member as role models and mentors.

*"Najwa Shihab is a very cool lady and inspiration because she knows her vision, mission, and values. She is brave to leave a tv program that makes her name big on TV and decide to build her own media that might be able to provide the values she wants, and that is in line. And that's why she is a leader role model for me." (P2)*

*"I feel more deeply connected with the female leaders. Because it's like we can see ourselves, we can be like that in the future. Because we are fellow women, and we have the same potential. That's also probably why I have a lot of female role models, but that doesn't mean I don't have male lead role models." (P23)*

The participants find that female leaders' representation matters for them in the role model context for their leadership journey. As for a mentor, the participants view the experience as the dominant factor. Because participants can also have the opportunity to interact more closely with a mentor, closeness becomes one of the essential factors participants consider for a mentor, followed by value similarity, how they give motivation, and gender relatability.

*"I saw from the mentor that she was very supportive and believed in what I was doing. She also allowed me to experiment and try and invited me to reflect on how to be a leader. She shared her experiences and gave me space to try. And her presence also made me more confident that I made the right decision." (P25)*

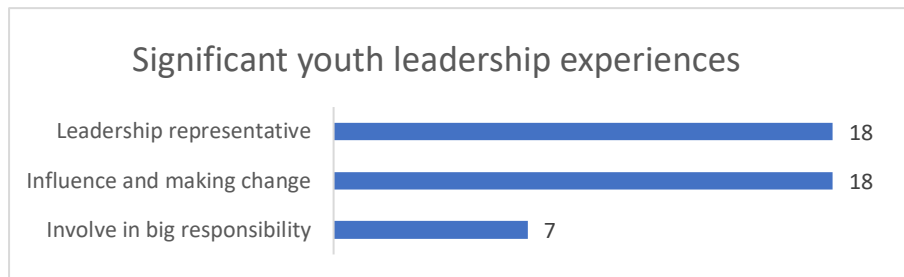
*"Personally, I also see my father as a mentor because we are close and can interact quite intensively. He continuously checks about my progress and what is happening with my life. And like before, whenever there was a problem, I always told him and asked my father for advice because I see him as an experienced figure. He became one of the figures who inspired me, too. His social and leadership skills are incredible, and it inspires me. (P19)*

#### **4.2 Youth Leadership Perception**

Participants treasure every little leadership experiences they had. These experiences shape their view and understanding of leadership, interpretation of what being a leader means, and the essential qualities of good leadership. Overall, participants' responses indicated the leadership experiences that significantly impact them in three forms: scope of responsibility, influence

and making change, and leadership representative. The participants mentioned that they could simultaneously encounter these forms of experience in certain moments..

**Figure 7**  
*Significant youth leadership experiences*



The experience of being chosen as a leadership representative significantly contributes to participants seeing themselves as youth leaders. There is some additional condition or situation cited by youth in this experience, for example, the position level (school, town, regency, national, or international), the number of individuals they led, or the situation where they become the youngest or only female in the group they lead.

*“For me, the most significant maybe when I have experience in #GirlsTakeOver and take over the minister position. Even though I have previously led a work unit or when I was in college. But it feels like the scope of leadership is not as big as when I became the minister that day. I may lead a maximum of 20 people in college and at work. That moment, I am a 24-year-old girl can lead state-owned enterprise (SOEs) as a minister and lead hundreds of SOEs and hundreds of thousands of people” (P24)*

*“As the youngest person in this national organization developed by the ministry, I was entrusted to become the head of this department, where I have to lead other team members who are older and more senior in terms of educational and professional background. But when I gave suggestions or opinions, they listened and worked well according to their roles. This leadership experience taught me that leadership is not defined by age.” (P13)*

Participants also consider experiences that involve them in significant responsibilities, such as decision-making, resolving conflict in school, leading emergency responses in their hometown, or other social responsibilities, as critical leadership experiences. But the participant also noted that even though they have a leadership role, if decision-making



or other significant responsibilities are still significantly controlled by an adult supervisor, they do not consider it a meaningful leadership experience.

*"So, when I was in middle school, I didn't think I was a leader even though I became the leader of pramuka (extracurricular). It felt just like a formality because the activities and decisions were all regulated and taken by the supervisory board. So, it made me feel that I had no right to decide or manage my team by what I had in mind. That's what I still regret now. Why can't I lead well back then?" (P16)*

Lastly, the participants also emphasized the experience of giving significant influence and making positive social changes to their surrounding environment (friends, community, or even government) as one of the notable leadership experiences.

*"As a leader in the children's forum, I do not just lead the children in the children's forum, but I also feel that I have a great influence on the decision-making process at the Musrembang (community town hall meeting). There was still very small representation of women and youth at that meeting. There, I raised my hand and spoke out loud, voicing my concern that may often be ignored and not heard. Well, that's one of the points of experience where I feel like I'm a youth leader. When adults dominate as the decision-maker, I continue to come forward and speak up and be heard. That's the moment when I feel like I am a youth leader." (P25)*

Even though participants' leadership experiences widely involved formal leadership titles (e.g., minister, student president, founder and co-founder, chief, national representative, etc.), they emphasize that formal titles are not essentially required to be a leader. As long as they can give impact and influence, the participants consider themselves leaders. A few interviewees suggested that the formal title necessities fit a particular situation, specifically for organizational task distribution purposes.

*"When I was in the ALSA organization in the college, even though I wasn't the chairman, every time there was an important decision making related to the organization, they really listened to me and my views and opinions. They also listened when I said some things may still need to be improved. So, I feel that to be a leader; we don't have to be in leadership positions. It is about how we carry ourselves, make people see and hear us." (P20)*

#### **4.2.1 Defining who leaders are**

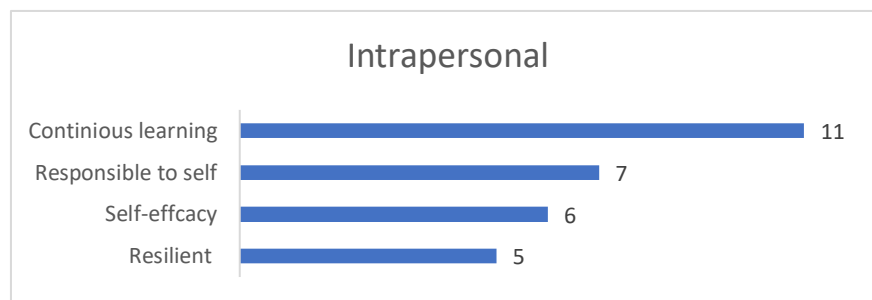
Participants expressed a variety of perspectives when the question about what being a leader means; participants reflected on their experiences as well. The questions' responses could be

grouped into the following categories: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive sense. Intrapersonal themes focus on the answer that focuses on the connection to themselves. In contrast, the interpersonal underlines participant relation to others, and the cognitive categories weigh into participant understanding of socially constructed concepts. Generally, the participant has a combination of each theme within their understanding of a leader.

*"Being a leader means you are always willing to learn. Why do I think it's important? Because often, when we are already at the top, we are easily feeling satisfied. And in my opinion, that's not good. Because to help a community or organization to grow and be sustainable, a leader must be willing to learn. Learn from its members, from its vice chairman, basically from anyone. That's what I have experienced." (P11)*

**Figure 8**

*Intrapersonal*



In the intrapersonal category, four primary responses emerged amongst participants about what being a leader means. First, it is a continuous personal learning process where participants gain knowledge or bring value to themselves. Leaders can achieve this by listening to others, receiving input, or learning from other sources. Second, being responsible to self for all the actions they have taken as a leader, self-efficacy is embodied in brave to make the decision and overcome challenges. Lastly, willingness and resiliency to go the extra mile to incorporate the personal vision they bring.

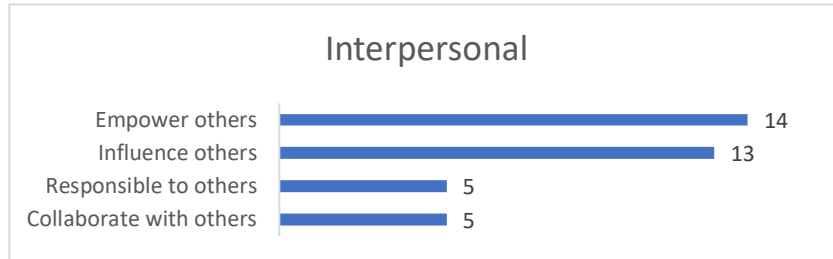
*"In my opinion, leaders must also be responsible, for what they say, what they do, or at least must be able to minimize the negative impact of what they do for the people around them." (P7)*

*"For me, being leaders clearly means that they must be able to be tough and resilient with every challenge. Because it is not easy being a leader—because there are so many people who will see and judge from behind, but the core is you must stick to your responsibilities, vision, and principles. If it is a constructive opinion, accept it, but if it*

*is a negative or destructive one, ignore it. Because it will just become the source of burdensome for the future. (P14)*

**Figure 9**

*Interpersonal*



In the interpersonal category, the participants also consider that being a leader means they have to empower or contribute to others' development, influence and gain trust from others, and give attention to collaboration. As a youth leader, each accomplishment and contribution motivate the participants to act, give, and help others more.

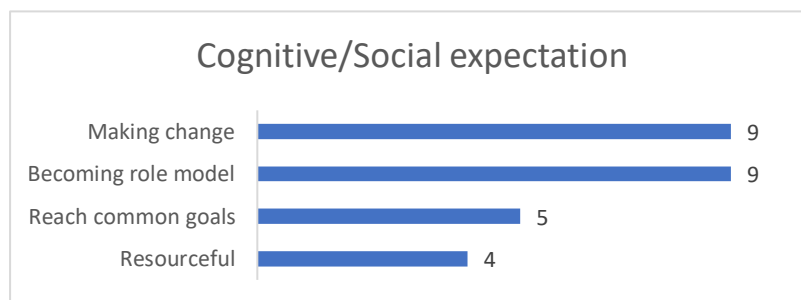
*"Being a leader means we are responsible for others and will impact many people. Even if we only lead three or two people, or even just ourselves, it will surely influence other people." (P13)*

*"For me being a leader means how we can influence and empower others around us to make that change happen." (P12)*

*"If I can simplify it, being a leader means first being able to embrace or reach out to the people we lead. Second, as leaders, we also spark their potential development so that we can reach our goals together." (P28)*

**Figure 10**

*Cognitive/social expectation*



The cognitive category underlined participants' social perspectives on what being a leader means. Participants consider that being a leader in a social context means that they should become role models, be brave to voice their concerns and make social changes, and guide the organization and its member to reach common goals with their knowledge. Leaders are seen as individuals with the capability and expertise to become the frontrunner of an organization and understand the strategy to keep it sustainable. The fact that participants view themselves as change-makers and role model to society is intriguing and motivating.

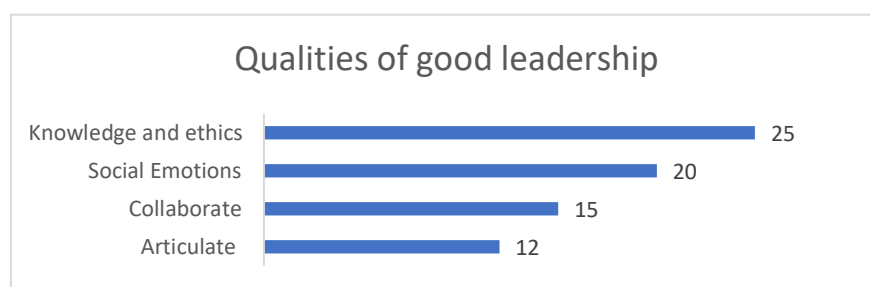
*"Being a leader means having the courage to go forward using their power, voice, and all the power they have as a leader to support, help, and empower the vulnerable groups. I see a leader as one of the funnels to shift the power. Because we know leaders are gifted with good positions, strategic ones, and qualified resources, I see leaders as people who are willing to shift the power to others." (P25)*

*"For me, being a leader is being someone who can be a role model for others, both in attitude and character. Second, they can bring changes to their surrounding environment, even though it's not big, that's okay because we will never know, sometimes we think it's small, but it's very impactful to other people. Third, they can motivate others to be more enthusiastic and believe in themselves." (P8)*

#### 4.2.2 Qualities of good leadership

**Figure 11**

*Qualities of good leadership*



In general, all responses from the participants referred to qualities of good leadership as the skills theme in Redmond and Dolan's conceptual model. The answers are categorized according to the concept and the following theme; social-emotional intelligence, collaborate, articulate, and insight and knowledge. The participants mentioned more than one qualities in

their responses. All participants agreed that all skills are equally important, but the theme insight and knowledge and ethics in the form of responsible, integrity, and critical thinking become the most mentioned by the participant as the qualities of good leadership sequentially followed by social-emotional skill, collaborate, and articulate.

*“For me the first qualities is maybe integrity to the point of talk the talk, walk the walk. I think it's really important in leadership. Second is being consistent, because in my opinion you cannot build something without being consistent. So no matter how bored you are or as many wild ideas as you can, we have to be consistent in something. The third one I think is resilience. Because in leader position, not everyone will agree with you. So if you don't have resilience, in my opinion, it's can be dangerous. Good communication skill also good qualities. A leaders should able to communicate ideas assertively but you also need to listen and when people communicate their ideas to you, even if you don't agree but you can validate their feelings and ideas and uphold it as effectively as possible. Maybe that's just what comes in my mind.” (P29)*

The participants also consider social-emotional skills essential and can be incorporated in the form of empathy, confidence, and resilience. Participants believe that having social-emotional skills helps youth leaders to listen more and relate to other people or challenges around them. Social-emotional skills also link with the collaborative skill required for youth leaders. The participants realized they could not achieve the common goals or objectives by themselves, so leaders should be able to work in a team and resolve conflicts and problems. Participants also consider oral and written communication skills are essential for good leadership. This is because leaders often have the opportunity to speak in front of many people from various social backgrounds. Communication skills are needed so leaders can express their ideas and motivate or deliver influence well.

*“First is emotional intelligence, second is knowledge, third is how to speak... We need emotional intelligence or emotional stability because when we become leaders, there must be a lot of potential for conflict. There are so many things that stress us out and make us feel depressed. If we don't have good emotional management skills to solve it, we will lose ourselves... As for knowledge, a leader always becomes the source of answers when there are questions. Maybe this thought comes from the reflection on my experience. When I became the leader, many people around me asked me to solve things... So, like it or not, I have always to learn and find the answer from the sources I read...lastly communicative because being a leader means you must communicate*

*with various kinds of people with various backgrounds. Sometimes we may meet people who are more mature, younger, or more powerful than us." (P15)*

### 4.3. Future leadership objectives

#### 4.3.1. Overcome challenges

As youth leaders, participants agree that self-reflection and evaluation are crucial to a leader's growth. Through this process, participants acknowledge the challenges they experience personally and learn to find the best strategy to overcome them. In general, participants are aware of the internal and external challenges they face. Internal challenges can be viewed as constraints and barriers that participants realize within the participant as an individual. In contrast, external challenges refer to the challenges they face in their surrounding environment.

**Figure 12**

*Challenges girls' youth leaders face*



*"Personally, I still feel that I am not brave enough to take a step or to make decisions or express opinions. I feel sometimes I don't have that strong confidence, especially when I see there are other people who have more ability and experience than me." (P4)*

Participants' responses to the internal challenges unanimously referred to skill-related challenges. Social emotion skill challenges are the most mentioned. Participants felt they still needed to develop and increase their confidence and self-esteem because they often thought of self-doubt, insecurity, or being too empathetic as youth leaders..

*“I realize that an overthinker and I struggling to adapt, especially in my current college environment at SBM, all of them are very cool in their respective fields. In this environment there is social grouping, and because I consider myself as an individual with dominant personality, I struggle when I meet a group that filled with dominant people too. Likewise, I am often insecure, because I see that the children at SBM (the college) have above average leadership abilities. So, when I joined in this type of group, I chose to just become a good subordinate team member” (P16)*

Participants said they have challenges to managed time and their expectations in leading others within the insight and knowledge category. Several participants also realized they still need to learn how to communicate more effectively as a leader, for they also consider leaders should have a good communication style. In the collaborate category, some challenges participants expressed were that they are too dominant, have trust issues, and are indecisive. None of the responses from participants include moral themes as part of their challenges, which may be indicated the participants have a strong capability to receive trust from others and be responsible for it.

*“In this community organization that we build, we operate in one of the villages in Asahan where the child marriage rate is high. We give socialization to the people there. But I remember when during the socialization process, I was scolded because they see our age and gender. The people there say, aren't you still a child? and you're also a woman, what do you want to do with something like this? can you really be responsible for our children? Yes, that's the sentiment given by the people there.” (P17)*

For external challenges, the participants mainly cited socio-cultural challenges, such as gender inequality and ageism, as their main challenges. Since they grew up in a patriarchal community, participants often experience gender inequality while pursuing leadership roles. Age sentiment also became one of the challenges participants face, for they are often considered too young to lead, to have the responsibility, and set priorities. The age sentiment challenge also sometimes makes participants feel a little reluctant to give suggestions or orders to someone older than them. Besides gender and age, a small number of participants also mention peer pressure, family pressure, and bureaucracy as the additional challenge they face as youth leaders.

*“In my community, if we as girls being socially active to lead, there is social commentary or perspective where they say it is basically pointless because girls will end up in the kitchen.. I tried to change that perspective starting from my family, I share what I have learned from leadership and its impact to me to them so it can open their mind. But I am not going to lie, there is still a big challenge for girls to lead in my community.” (P1)*

Generally, all participants realized that facing these challenges affected their confidence and temporarily made them less motivated to lead. But as the participants gained more knowledge, they became aware of their self-efficacy. The challenges also pushed them to break the stigma and find a strategic way to overcome these challenges, which then enriched their leadership knowledge and confidence.

#### **4.3.2 Motivation and future purpose**

The opportunity to join leadership development activities such as girl leadership class in #GirlsTakeOver enhanced the participants' leadership potential. The participants acknowledged that the leadership program contributed to them gaining more confidence in leading, making them more willing to accept the challenge and sparking higher ambition to lead the future.

*“And because of the opportunity from #GirlsTakeOver as an ambassador, it opened up a lot of opportunities for me. I was invited to be a speaker which also opened opportunities for me to share and practice communication skills, how to convey the messages, so that people understand what I mean. It also eases the process for me to join any forum...and I feel more confident as a leader... Like now, I become a mentor for some friends who are carrying out environmental actions in their area which also expands the issue I can learn. And of course, with this experience comes expectations from others for me, but I consider it as a positive expectation for me to be able to develop myself. For me, this experience had a lot of domino effects on me and gave me a new perspective on leadership.” (P13)*

Joining leadership activities also made participants aware that they have broader knowledge and skill about leadership, such as finding leadership styles that fit with them, public speaking, and learning how to apply them in current and future leadership opportunities. It also opened many opportunities for participants to spread their potential as a leader. Another interesting finding is that joining this leadership activity also gives the participant the sense of

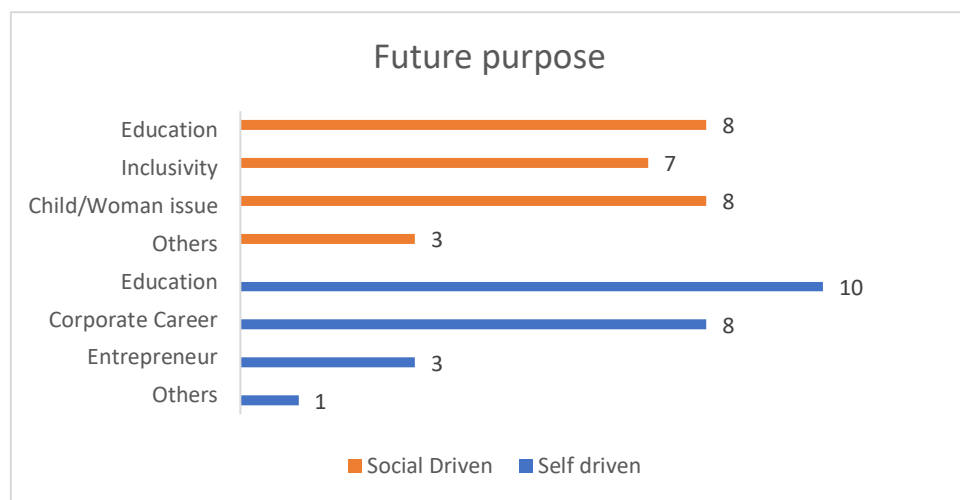


social responsibility to give back to the community by contributing from behind or becoming a role model.

*“... in this program that I will develop, I want the youth who are younger than me to be the leaders. I want to give them the opportunity to develop their leadership potential. I do not mind working from behind and become the engine that push them to move forward. After all, for me being a leader doesn't mean you have to own title such as head or chief, for me it just a title.” (P1)*

**Figure 13**

*Future purpose*



When the participants were asked about their goals after participating in leadership development activities, the response generally indicated two purposes: personal and social. Personal purposes focused on specific achievement or growth as an individual, while social purpose highly referred to participants' contribution to community or social issues. Pursuing higher education, in this case, a master's degree became the most cited in individual purpose, followed by a specific top-level role in a corporate career and becoming an entrepreneur. For social purposes, the participants were highly eager to contribute to equality and inclusivity issues in many sectors, such as gender, education, children, youth, and the workplace.

*"So, one of my future plans is to become the CEO of SOEs (BUMN) that has a focus on the environment, because I have big interest about the environmental issues in Indonesia. Especially in Kalimantan my hometown because I see there are so many overlapping policies... This situation also sparks my interest to to start an environmental movement...but I must take it slow because I realize I am not the mayor*

*or the head of the office, so with my experience in the children's forum, I can help to start advocacy about this issue” (P10)*

*“I already planned to make an activity that focus on promoting gender equality and the importance of women's roles in leadership. I plan to carry out this activity in the next month, because here there is also a youth Posyandu (integrated community meet up) activity so it can be combined with that activity.” (P9)*

To achieve these future goals, the participants stated that morals, collaboration, and knowledge as the most beneficial leadership skills that were the most important to be used for the future. But participants also acknowledged the function of social and emotional skills and articulation.

## **5. Discussion**

This chapter concentrated on analyzing and relating all the research findings to address the research questions posed in the first chapter. The results were then analyzed and reviewed with other literature on youth leadership. This chapter also explains the limitations and ideas for future research.

### **5.1 Main findings**

The current study's findings show that youth exercise influence in their leadership. They understand that the influence should be directed to positive change. The youth also acknowledge that being a leader is not always simple and that they are still in the continuous learning process to grasp influence and leadership. Youth leaders feel that having knowledge and ethics, being socially aware, and setting an example are more important leadership qualities than relying on position and authority to lead. They also highly value trust in their social surroundings, which plays a vital role in their leadership development. Youth should have an encouraging social environment both from adults and peers to help them reach their maximum potential. Additionally, purposeful and meaningful leadership experiences in the community can improve youth's understanding of leadership and extend their conception of leadership and social purpose.

This study confirms that leadership experiences play a significant role in youth leadership development. When youth get the opportunity to experience a leadership role that allows them to have control and autonomy, it develops their leadership potential. This study supports the finding obtained by Amman (2010) that noted leadership as part of experiential learning, and that leadership can be learned from experiences. The participants have engaged in various leadership activities, actively evaluated it then decided on the critical knowledge that they find helpful or can be applied to future leadership activities.

Youth gain and learn leadership experiences from various sources, such as family, classroom, school, or community organization. They are fully aware of which source that the most impactful to them. The participants cited leadership experience they gained from family, classroom activities, or school organizations to strengthen their motivation to pursue particular leadership roles or participate in other leadership development activities. According to Murphy and Johnson (2011), early leadership experiences likely catalyze leadership development. Early leadership experiences foster youth to participate more in future leadership activities.

Trust is also critical for youth and influences them to pursue leadership roles or experiences. Griffith and Larson (2015) defined trust as confidence in another person. Youth interpret trust from others as a form of validation of their potential or capability to lead. It makes them believe in their capacity and gives or strengthens their motivation to join leadership activities. They identified trust from many sources, core family members, peers, teachers, or other social environments, including mentors. From the finding, this study proposed trust should be seen as one of the embodiments of a positive social environment. It should be considered one of the critical elements in youth leadership development experience.

The positive youth development (PYD) approach puts trust, particularly adult-youth trust, as one of the key features that can help achieve the maximum desired outcomes in youth development. PYD considered positive, long-lasting, and trustworthy interactions between youth and responsible and capable adults are essential. Youth-adult interactions must foster a sense of trust and sense of belonging and be centred on each youth's personal development. (Lerner et al., 2011). One of these approaches is embodied through the mentor-mentee relationship that participants experience. The mentors usually are adults who they consider to have more experience than them as youth.

It should be noted that participants also mentioned that peers to peers or youth-to-youth relationships also significantly impact youth leadership development. The participants'

responses also say peers or youth of a similar age as someone they consider as a mentor and role model. This is because they see peers as someone relatable and give constant positive support. This trusting environment can also help youth be more willing to take a leadership role and develop better leadership skills, as also found by Bean et al. (2017). Participants confirm that their leadership experiences throughout their life influenced their perception of leadership as youth and what being a leader means, which supports a previous study conducted by Sherif (2019).

Youth perception of leadership constantly develops along with their available resources, practice, and other people's ideas. Even though each leadership experience is unique, in general, most participants perceived leadership as part of a group effort rather than individual abilities or traits. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing leadership as a collective process to accomplish common goals (Northouse, 2018; Yukl, 2012). Participants also view their leadership involvement in leadership activities as one of their effort to make a social change in their surroundings. These results support Mortensen et al. (2014) research, which views youth leadership as the capacity to influence and impact surroundings.

As leaders, youth believe that trust is essential in leadership because to achieve common goals collectively, leaders need to trust their team and vice versa. According to participants, there are various ways for leaders to develop trust, for example, by openly admitting the mistake, caring and actively listening, and proving they are resourceful or knowledgeable. Youth highly value ethics (e.g., trust and morale) and knowledge in leadership and consider these qualities as the most beneficial for their future or when they become adult leaders later. Trust and knowledge are interrelated; knowledge help leaders make the best and most ethical decision; when leaders can do that, they are seen as trustworthy. When leaders can make an ethical decision, they base their decisions on high moral standards, which can become the foundation of trust between leaders and followers (Daft, 2011).

Another interesting finding from this study is that youth perceive leaders as someone who continuously learns and strive for personal growth. This perception also influences their perspective on challenges; they see it as part of their leadership development. They believe challenges can gradually be overcome by learning and gaining more experience. This study reveals that participants shared similar challenges in their leadership experiences as girls. The participants face socio-cultural challenges such as gender inequality and age sentiment for being young and seen as incapable of leading. Their involvement in various leadership experiences has a role in helping them overcome this challenge.

Participation in #GirlsTakeOver is cited as one of the most significant leadership experiences girls consider in their leadership journey. It also impacts them in various ways, such as breaking the gender stigma that is often stuck in their mind, enhancing their confidence and self-esteem as a leader, sparking social responsibility, and gaining more knowledge and other skills or competence. These results are aligned with previous studies which found youth engagement in leadership experiences and programs essentially improves their overall development, including self-awareness, self-esteem, knowledge, and other skills such as communication, critical thinking, conflict resolution, etc. (Conner and Strobel, 2007; Karagianni and Montgomery, 2017; Sacks, 2009).

Conner and Strobel (2007) study found that youth and leadership development programs have mutual benefit relations. Positive experiences in youth leadership development experience make participants more thoughtful about their personal and group vision, goal, and development. As the outcome of a positive leadership development experience, youth become more motivated to fulfill their leadership potential. Thus youth can be viewed as active participants who can contribute to their leadership development, for example, by exhibiting characteristics such as self-control or self-direction (Hammond-Diedrich and Walsh, 2006; de Simone, 2012).

This study finds youth participation in leadership development programs or activities at any level has a role in shaping their future leadership plan. Participants start defining their short- and long-term goals that can only be achieved through their efforts as they continue to build their leadership potential. The most visible responses are participants explicitly included social purpose for their leadership plan in the future. This situation is possibly impacted or strengthened by their participation in various leadership activities with a social sense, including the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program.

## **5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implication**

This study offers supplementary empirical support to the existing youth leadership theory that emphasizes leadership as an experiential learning process and investigates how youth experiences define leadership. This study also suggests creating more rich youth leadership development models and programs that closely align with the vital elements of youth leadership.

In this study, the youth demonstrated trust as an essential element in the leadership experience learning environment. Trust has been considered a significant component in the positive youth development approach and primarily focuses on the youth-adult level relationship. Still, it is not yet included as an essential component in the youth leadership framework. Youth feel more empowered to be a leader when surrounded by a trusting environment, not only by adults but also by their peers. This situation also makes them view leaders as some who can be trusted. This finding shows trust can help create a stable foundation for youth to grow, adapt and face change as a leader. Thus, this study proposed that the youth leadership framework should incorporate trust and peers.

One critical subject that NGOs can also implement is consistently supporting youth and making a long-lasting positive change to their social surroundings. Youth view positive change as one of the main goals of leadership. But they still face various challenges that require

grassroots change and positive reinforcement. Allowing youth to make a difference might inspire them to act as leaders at present and in the future. Additionally, by providing youth with various leadership role models from the community, purposeful and meaningful leadership activities in community and service learning can widen and deepen their understanding of leadership.

Besides trust, youth also value collective action when working to make the change. These initiatives should be collaborative, allowing youth to work together with their peers. Fostering relationships with adults through mentors, role models, and school or community organizations might also be beneficial in supporting youth in their efforts to reach their maximum leadership potential.

The sample of girls' leaders who participate in leadership activities in the Yayasan Plan in Indonesia reveals that the leadership development program has significant practical benefits in increasing the confidence, knowledge, and social awareness of girls leaders. Yayasan Plan can also claim this achievement can contribute to general leadership academic studies. Even though this result cannot be generalized, Yayasan Plan or other child and youth focus NGOs can conduct another analysis using different age groups, in-depth social environment comparison, or mixed gender populations.

### **5.3. Limitation**

In co-creating knowledge through interpreting human experiences, constructivist research depends on developing a connection and trust between the researcher and participants. The relationship that developed between the interviewer and the subject of the study is one of constructivism's key advantages (Mutepa, 2016). For the interview done through video call, the researcher's attempts to engage with the participants were frequently undermined by connectivity problems and sometimes background noise. This situation may have caused the participant to not-give deeper reflection.



There is also a nuisance that may also impact the interaction between researcher and participant. Because of the time difference between Indonesia and the Netherlands, most video interviews were done in the afternoon or evening in the Indonesia time zone, after the participants finished school, work, or other activities.

For this study, the interview with participants is done only once. Participants can reflect on their experience with only one and a half hours maximum interview duration. Still, the duration is probably relatively short of capturing the total participants' authentic developmental growth experience. Recall bias may also become an issue because participants in this study were asked to contemplate their previous experiences. If the interviews were performed in a longer time frame, maybe before and after the participants' engagement in the #GirlsTakeOver leadership program may reveal more about the dynamic of leadership in participants' lives as youth.

Yayasan Plan International representative facilitated the participant's approach and selection process. For all of the participants who were alumnae of the Yayasan Plan #GirlsTakeOver leadership program, there is a possibility that the participants are biased to only present their positive experiences and insight, especially to the program. As this study only involves girls leaders, there might be biased results specifically for the role of gender representation for role models and mentors in leadership development.

#### **5.4 Suggestion for future study**

It is undeniably necessary to conduct further study to develop the youth leadership literature to reflect the demands and preferences of today's youth. In this study, the youth participants were only questioned once; but since leadership understanding also changes over time, it will be intriguing to examine the long-term significance and impact that participants experience when they become adult leaders. A longitudinal study comparing youth who participate in a youth leadership program and those who do not may give a richer perspective on the importance of

youth leadership. Researchers could also assess changes in leadership understanding, abilities, and identity more precisely using a long-term study involving interviews with the same youth at regular intervals over several years. Studying other viewpoints on topics like how to foster trust, how it relates to youth-youth or youth-adult level relationships, and how trust could be co-constructed as a joint process might enrich the youth leadership development

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Youth leadership is a continuous learning process for youth to exercise and develop their potential to lead, influence, and make the change. Leadership experiences play an important role in youth leadership development. Youth reflect and make sense of leadership through leadership experiences, giving opportunities to improve their skills and determine their future leadership plan. Each participant has unique and personal leadership experience, but all youth agree that critical aspects of youth leaders are the ability to influence and make a change. A trusting and positive social environment fosters youth participation in leadership development activities. Youth who practice leadership to make a change or meet the needs of others may feel a deep sense of fulfilment that will influence their present and future leadership objective.

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## Appendix

### Interview questions

1. How did you find about the leadership? What motivates you to join it?
2. What is your earliest memory of you being a leader?
3. Can you share an experience where you consider yourself a youth leader? ... Why?
4. Who are your role models as a leader?
5. What do you think being a leader means?
6. In your perspective, what are the qualities of good leadership? Why?
7. Can you share the barriers you face in your leadership journey? ...how have you overcome it?
8. can you share how your surrounding environment influence your leadership development?
9. Can you share about your experience in #GirlsTakeOver leadership camp?
10. How do you plan to use the leadership knowledge you have gained? (Exploring the purpose, current or future personal ambition, social challenge they care about, youth organization)