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The Role of Student Societies in Developing Future Leaders: A Quantitative Study Based on The Positive Youth Development 5 C's Model in South Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract:

Background: Student societies have been viewed as important for developing leadership skills in the youth. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of empirical literature on how individual developmental competencies can be converted to leadership potential especially in the South Punjab, Pakistan.

Purpose: This paper explores both direct and indirect impacts of the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development (Confidence, Competence, Connection, Character, and Caring) on Future Leadership potential with Positive Youth Development (PYD) as an intervening variable.

Methodology: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was carried out on 384 university students of seven public universities in South Punjab, Pakistan. The analysis of data was done with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and SPSS.

Results: Character ($\beta=0.566$, $p<0.001$) and Caring ($\beta=0.244$, $p<0.001$) had the strongest direct effects on PYD. Connection (0.227, $p<0.001$) and Competence (0.033, $p<0.05$) also exhibited significant (but less strong) effects. Confidence was not significantly directly impacting PYD or Future Leaders. PYD itself was a good predictor of Future Leaders (0.245, $p<0.001$) and was a significant partial mediator of Character, Caring, Connection and Competence. **Conclusion:** Student societies that promote character, caring, and connection are best in producing future leaders. Confidence cannot be just enough without being based on ethical and relational competencies.

Keywords: Student Societies, Positive Youth Development (PYD), Future Leadership, Character, Caring, South Punjab, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

In a fast-changing socio-economic environment of Pakistan, where young people make up almost sixty-four (64) percent of the population (Kundi, 2018), educating youth to be future leaders is not only an educational aim but a national priority. The student societies and clubs in universities provide students with a low-risk, exclusive setting to build critical leadership skills like communication, teamwork, ethical thinking, and problem-solving (Oparinde et al., 2017; Haines, 2019). Nevertheless, there is a huge gap in knowledge of how such societies change youth. The literature is mainly concentrated on the rates of participation and not the psychosocial mechanisms involved (Cáceres-Reche et al., 2021). This paper fills this gap considering the Positive Youth Development (PYD) model, namely the 5 C's Model (Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring) by Lerner et al. (2005). The main idea of PYD is that young people are thriving when their assets are matched with favorable developmental environments- a factor that ideally coincides with the role of student societies. The model tested in this paper is that in which the 5 C's developed as a result of participating in student societies affect the Positive Youth Development of a student as a whole, which in turn predicts his or her future as a leader. The study is placed in the context of South Punjab

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where there are unique educational and socioeconomic issues and therefore, it is of critical case study in the development of youth leadership.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Positive Youth Development (PYD) and 5 Cs Model

The PYD model is also a change toward not looking at youth through a deficit lens (with problems such as delinquency) but through a strength lens (with skills to flourish) (Lerner et al., 2005). The 5 C model assumes that building Competence (social, academic and vocational skill), Confidence (overall self-worth and self-efficacy), Connection (positive relationships with peers, family and the community), Character (respect towards societal rules and sense of right and wrong), and Caring (sense of sympathy and empathy towards others) results in positive youth outcomes.

2.2 Student Societies as Contexts of Development

The 5 C's are best developed in natural contexts, student societies (Green et al., 2021). For example: The competence is developed during the planning and budgeting of events and management of projects (Leventhal et al., 2022). Character development is through the process of overcoming ethical dilemmas, resource distribution, and peer representation (Ramey et al., 2017). Caring: Caring is nurtured by community service, mentoring and social cause activities.

2.3 Hypotheses Development

According to the literature, this research hypothesizes:

H1-H5: Confidence, Competence, Connection, Character and Caring all demonstrate a strong positive correlation with Positive Youth Development.

H6: Future Leadership potential has a positive and significant relationship with Positive Youth Development.

H7-H11: Positive Youth Development plays a significant mediation role in the relationships between each of the 5 C's (Confidence, Competence, Connection, Character, Caring) and Future Leadership.

2.4 Conceptual Model

The theoretical model assumes that the 5 C's are independent variables, that PYD is the mediator, and Future Leaders is the dependent variable. Figure 1, shows the conceptual/ research model and Figure 2; shows the 5C's those are taken as dimensions of positive youth development through student societies.

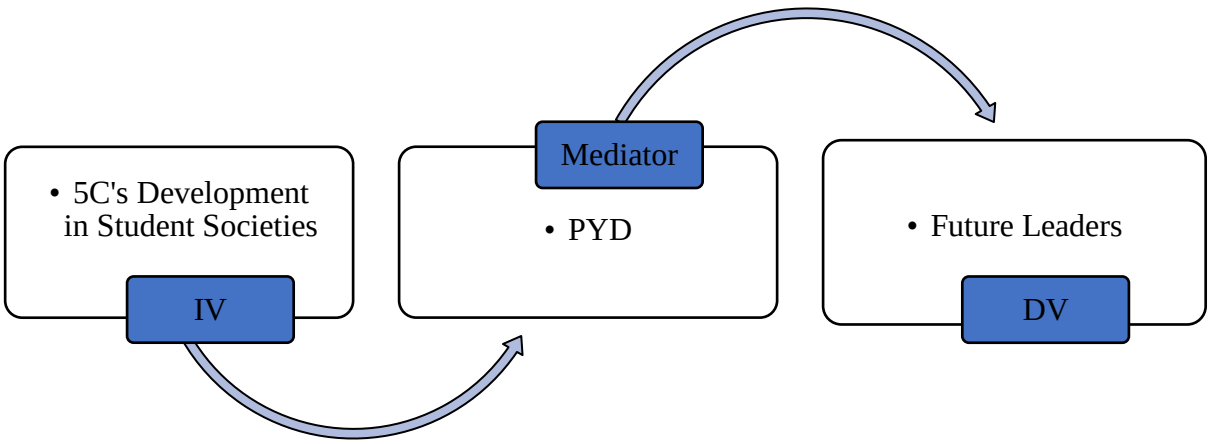


Fig. 1 Theoretical Framework (Research Model)

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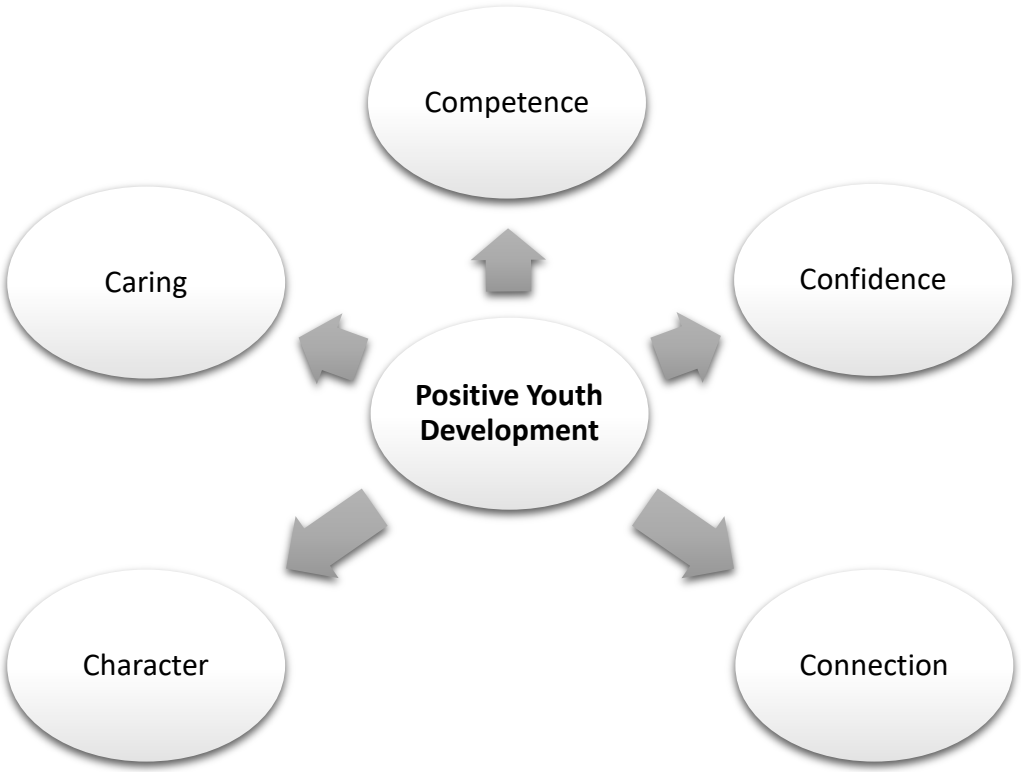


Figure 2: ***Theoretical Framework of Study PYD 5 C's Model***

3. Methodology

The research design and sample will be discussed as follows:

3.1. Research Design

The design applied is a positivist, quantitative and cross-sectional design. A sample of 384 students taken in seven public universities in South Punjab (e.g., Islamia University of Bahawalpur, BZU Multan) was selected using the table presented by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). A mixed sampling method (purposive to convenience) was adopted so as to address students who had experience in student societies.

3.2. Data Collection and Instrument

The data were gathered through a structured questionnaire that was given online (Google Forms). The instrument was composed of: A: Demographics (university, gender, age, education). B: University experience (involvement, time investment, leadership roles). C: The 5 C's and PYD scale (60-item) based on Arnold et al. (2012) and Kim and Wargo (2022) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

3.3 Data Analysis

The SPSS was used to analyze the data in terms of descriptive statistics and reliability (Cronbach 0.968 =). The measurement model (validity, reliability) and the structural model (path coefficients, mediation) were tested with the help of PLS-SEM (Smart-PLS 4).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Findings

Among the 384 respondents, 77.1% had been part of a student society. The majority were female (61.7%), aged 18-25 (86.7%), and pursuing a 16-year Bachelor's/Master's degree (51.3%). The majority of the participants were not leaders (only 3.6% had been president) but general members (54.7%). 57.3% had 1 hour or less per week on society activities.

4.2 Measurement Model

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There was good reliability and validity in the measurement model. All constructs exceeded the thresholds Composite Reliability > 0.70, Cronbachs Alpha > 0.65 and Average Variance Extrated (AVE) > 0.50 (see Table 1). The HTMT criterion was used to establish discriminant validity (all values less than 0.85, with a slight overlap between Character and Caring at 0.869, which is still acceptable).

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Caring	0.924	0.937	0.624
Character	0.941	0.949	0.609
Competence	0.902	0.919	0.560
Confidence	0.877	0.902	0.536
Connection	0.926	0.938	0.602
Future Leaders	0.652	0.788	0.563

4.3 Structural Model (Direct Effects)

Table 2 presents the direct path coefficients. Character ($\beta = 0.566$, $p < 0.001$) and Caring ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$) had the strongest positive effects on Positive Youth Development (PYD). Connection ($\beta = 0.227$, $p < 0.001$) and Competence ($\beta = 0.033$, $p = 0.027$) also showed significant positive effects. **Confidence did not have a significant direct effect on either PYD ($\beta = -0.013$, $p = 0.303$) or Future Leaders ($\beta = -0.003$, $p = 0.336$).** PYD had a strong, significant effect on Future Leaders ($\beta = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2: Direct Relationships

Relationship	Path Coef. (β)	T-Statistics	P-Value	Decision
Caring → PYD	0.244	17.269	0.000	Supported
Character → PYD	0.566	28.111	0.000	Supported
Competence → PYD	0.033	2.218	0.027	Supported
Confidence → PYD	-0.013	1.031	0.303	**Not Supported**
Connection → PYD	0.227	14.360	0.000	Supported
PYD → Future Leaders	0.245	6.133	0.000	Supported

4.4 Mediation Effects (Indirect Effects)

As shown in Table 3, Positive Youth Development significantly mediated the relationship between Future Leaders and four of the five C's: Caring ($\beta=0.060$, $p<0.001$), Character ($\beta=0.139$, $p<0.001$), Competence ($\beta=0.008$, $p=0.044$), and Connection ($\beta=0.056$, $p<0.001$). The mediation effect for Confidence was not significant.

Table 3: Mediation Effects (Indirect)

Indirect Relationship	Path Coef. (β)	T-Statistics	P-Value	Mediation Type
Competence → PYD → Future Leaders	0.008	2.012	0.044	Partial
Confidence → PYD → Future Leaders	-0.003	0.962	0.336	None
Connection → PYD → Future Leaders	0.056	5.493	0.000	Partial
Caring → PYD → Future Leaders	0.060	5.929	0.000	Partial
Character → PYD → Future Leaders	0.139	5.991	0.000	Partial

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5. Discussion

This paper sought to empirically explore how student societies make the youth future leaders. The results are quite supportive of PYD framework in South Punjab, Pakistan. *The Primacy of Character and Caring:* The findings clearly indicate the Character (integrity, responsibility) and Caring (empathy, sympathy) to be the strongest predictors of Positive Youth Development and, consequently, future leadership. This is in line with the increasing focus on the ethical and servant models of leadership (Johnson, 2022). It indicates that the student societies that are concerned with community service, ethical decision-making, and social responsibility have a better chance of producing leaders compared to student societies that are concerned with social networking. *The Role of Connection and Competence:* Connection (social bonds, belonging) was also a major factor, which proved leadership to be a relational process (Grazia & Molinari, 2021). Competence, although important, had a much lesser impact. It means that although it is essential to learn some practical skills (e.g., budgeting, planning) to develop in leadership, it is not so important as ethical and relational qualities. *The Unanticipated Conclusion about Confidence:* The most unexpected conclusion is that there is no significant direct effect on Confidence. This goes against the conventional perceptions of leadership that tend to make self-confidence a precondition. The most logical reason is that in the Pakistani cultural background (which is mostly collectivist), confidence, without the support of good character, caring or social networks, can be considered arrogant or may not be enough to get people moving. Confidence can be a result of the other 4 C's, rather than a driver on its own.

6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The current research improves the PYD model by stating that the 5 C's are not equally weighted. Character and Caring are possibly the underlying meta-capacities that allow the effective utilization of Confidence and Competence. Practically: South Punjab Universities need to restructure student society programs so as to emphasize ethical training, community service initiatives, and inclusive practices that foster empathy, as opposed to placing a narrow emphasis on skill-development or public speaking contests that only increase confidence.

7. Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

This study finds that student societies are important and quantifiable in changing the youth to become future leaders through Positive Youth Development. Character and Caring are the major driving forces of this change mediated by a supportive developmental environment. Surprisingly, confidence did not have a direct influence on leadership potential. Looking from the aspects of limitations, the study is cross-sectional, limiting causal claims. It is based on self-reported information on a convenience sample, which is mainly in one region (South Punjab), which can be limiting to generalizing. The Future Leaders were measured on perceived potential, rather than actual performance in leadership.

8. Recommendations for Future Research

Following are the future research directions of the research:

1. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to monitor the changes of the 5 C's over time in the student societies.
2. Explore cultural peculiarities of the Confidence finding with the help of the qualitative interviewing of students and alumni.
3. Compare participants in the student society to a control group who are non-participants to isolate the effect of student society itself.

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