

The GX Framework for Evaluating Student Leadership Development Programmes in South African Universities

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Abstract

This article presents a framework for evaluating Student Leadership Development Programmes (SLDPs) in South African universities. The researcher conducted a comprehensive literature review of various models and frameworks used for assessing leadership development programs, interviewed 27 student affairs professionals, and distributed a questionnaire, receiving responses from 227 student participants across six South African universities. There is a widespread belief that SLDPs offered by universities foster critical thinking, lifelong learning, and self-directed work habits, thereby contributing positively to the holistic development of students. However, mere participation in these programs does not guarantee that students will achieve the intended learning outcomes. Hence, there is a pressing need to evaluate whether student participants actually realize these outcomes. Given the lack of empirical research supporting the effective implementation of SLDPs in South Africa, this article aims to assess the effectiveness of SLDPs across various universities and propose a suitable framework for future evaluations. The proposed framework comprises four dimensions designed to enhance the effectiveness of Student Leadership Development Programmes in South African universities.

Keywords: student leadership development programmes, student affairs professionals, programme evaluation, design, communication, usability, impact, framework, South Africa, higher education

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Résumé

Cette étude présente un cadre d'évaluation des programmes de développement du leadership étudiant (SLDP) dans les universités sud-africaines. Le chercheur a procédé à une analyse documentaire complète des différents modèles et cadres utilisés pour évaluer les programmes de développement du leadership, interrogé 27 professionnels des affaires étudiantes et distribué un questionnaire. Au total les réponses de 227 étudiants participants affiliés à six universités sud-africaines ont été reçues. Il est généralement admis que les programmes de développement du leadership proposés par les universités favorisent la pensée critique, l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie et les habitudes de travail autonome, contribuant ainsi de manière positive au développement holistique des étudiants. Cependant, la simple participation à ces programmes ne garantit pas que les étudiants obtiennent les résultats d'apprentissage escomptés. Il est donc urgent d'évaluer si les étudiants participants obtiennent réellement ces résultats. En Afrique du Sud, il n'existe pas de recherche empirique sur l'efficacité de la facilitation des SLDP. Par conséquent, l'objectif de cette étude était d'évaluer l'efficacité des SLDP dans diverses universités et de proposer un cadre approprié pour les évaluations futures. Le cadre proposé comprend quatre dimensions conçues pour améliorer l'efficacité des programmes de développement du leadership étudiant dans les universités sud-africaines.

Mots-clés : Programmes de développement du leadership étudiant, professionnels des affaires étudiantes, évaluation des programmes, conception, communication, facilité d'utilisation, impact, cadre, Afrique du Sud, enseignement supérieur.

Introduction

It is vital to cultivate leadership skills for the future (Tabb & Montesi, 2000). However, those investing in leadership development must recognize that it is not enough to be ready to provide rigorous leadership training; the intervention itself must also ensure the readiness of the context in which those leaders will serve (Avolio, 2016).

There is widespread belief that Student Leadership Development Programmes (SLDPs) offered by universities—such as those targeting Student Representative Councils (SRCs), Residence Committees (RCs), Student Faculty Councils (SFCs), and various student clubs and societies—are instrumental in shaping critical thinkers, lifelong learners, and self-driven individuals who contribute positively to the holistic development of students (Hine, 2014; Mandew, 2003; Magolda, 2005). These programmes

employ diverse pedagogical approaches to leadership development, including experiential learning opportunities such as seminars, workshops, mentoring, guest speakers, service and volunteer placements, leadership courses, outdoor education, and conferences (Haber, 2006).

While many researchers support these conclusions, they caution that mere participation in SLDPs does not guarantee learning. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate whether students who participate in these programmes actually achieve the intended learning outcomes (Guthrie & Jones, 2012; Brooks, Vorreyer, & Gambino, 2011). Hence, it is crucial that the services and programmes offered to students are grounded in applied research (Mandew, 2003; McRee, & Haber-Curran, 2016).

Adding empirical outcome data to leadership development programmes could assist scholars in determining which programmes are most effective and which may need modification, thereby allowing successful programmes to be replicated in the future 'Powless et al. (2017)'. Accordingly, the researcher has created a framework that student affairs professionals from different universities can use to evaluate the effectiveness of their Student Leadership Development Programmes.

Literature Review

The literature review covers four areas: (1) Higher Education in South Africa, (2) Student Affairs, (3) A Case for Evaluating Student Leadership Development Programmes, and (4) Models for Evaluating Leadership Development Programmes.

Higher Education Landscape in South Africa

The South African post-schooling system is categorized into four sectors: public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, and private colleges (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2017). The DHET oversees this system, which provides education and training for those who have completed school, those who did not finish schooling, and those who never attended school (DHET, 2013). The public higher education sector consists of 26 universities, categorized into 11 traditional universities, nine comprehensive universities, and six universities of technology (DHET, 2017). This study focuses on the student affairs divisions responsible for delivering Student Leadership Development Programmes (SLDPs) at six South African public universities. South African universities enjoy institutional autonomy by law and design.

This autonomy allows them to adopt and implement frameworks that best suit their unique contexts and operational environments. Consequently, while the proposed framework offers valuable insights for SLDPs, it is essential to recognise that institutions may continue to use established frameworks that have proven successful in their settings. Given the historical, diverse, and complex nature of South African universities, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be feasible unless uniformly supported by government funding, which has been declining. Therefore, this framework should be seen as one of several options available for universities to enhance student leadership development.

Student Affairs

Student Affairs, also known as Student Support or Student Services, is a department or division within higher education institutions that provides services and support to enhance student development during their academic experience (NASPA, 2012). Brooks et al. (2011) argue that the division of student affairs is a complex organization with various units, each playing a unique role in meeting student needs and fostering a vibrant campus life. Pansiri and Sinkamba (2017) suggest that Student Affairs Departments have grown significantly over the years, evolving from a discourse with little academic relevance to one that contributes to student attraction, retention, and graduation. Schreiber (2014) notes that student affairs divisions in developing countries are not as professionalized as those in developed nations, a sentiment echoed by Ciobanu (2013), who points out that while student affairs is well-defined in some countries, it remains an emergent field in others.

In contrast to the United States, where student affairs is a formal academic discipline, South Africa has yet to reach this level of professionalization (Mandew, 2003). Selznick (2013) highlights that student affairs professionals in Africa play vital roles in the daily lives of students, yet Speckman et al. (2014) lament the lack of homegrown student affairs literature and resources in South Africa.

A Case for Evaluating Student Leadership Development Programmes

Programme evaluation is crucial for the continued success of leadership development programmes (Purser & Kennedy, 2011). Nishishiba and Kecskes (2012) argue that dynamic curricula require systematic review and ongoing evaluation to improve outcomes. In a context of limited resources and increasing public accountability, Dugan et al. (2011) emphasize that leadership educators must ensure that leadership programmes have a

demonstrable impact. Powless et al. (2017) agree that adding empirical outcome data to leadership development programmes can help identify effective programmes and guide necessary modifications for future replication. Brooks et al. (2011) also stress the importance of determining whether students who participate in SLDPs have achieved measurable learning and development.

Several studies have evaluated leadership development programmes. Taylor (2016) assessed the effectiveness of the "Girls on the Move Leadership Development Programme" and found a range of positive outcomes. Bunting (2017) developed an evaluation tool for the Outdoor Leadership Development Series at the University of Wyoming, demonstrating the importance of feedback for continuous improvement. Powless et al. (2017) examined how peer leadership and self-efficacy were affected by participation in a multi-tier leadership development programme. They concluded that strict attendance policies increase the likelihood of programme success.

Although many studies focus on students' motivation and perceived benefits of SLDPs (Dial, 2006; Reed, 2001; Robinson, 2009; Baccei, 2015; Immerman, 2008), fewer emphasize evaluating the actual impact of these programmes. Avolio (2010) suggests that organisational leaders must assess whether they are investing in the most optimal training processes, considering both training costs and outcomes.

Models for Evaluating Leadership Development Programmes

The researcher reviewed eight models used to assess leadership development programmes to develop a framework suitable for South African universities. Table 1 provides an overview of these models:

Several studies have applied these models in various contexts. For example, Wu et al. (2015) used Kirkpatrick's model to evaluate ICT professional development for teachers in Shanghai. Anh et al. (2016) explored training evaluation practices among hotel managers using Kirkpatrick's and Phillips' models. Similarly, Carlford et al. (2017) used the Kirkpatrick model to evaluate training at Linköping University in Sweden.

Keeling (2010) investigated the influence of CAS standards on academic advising programmes, while Young and Janosik (2007) measured learning outcomes in CAS-compliant students compared to non-compliant peers. Fullmer (2009) conducted a systematic assessment of a programme using CAS standards and SWOT analysis at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania.

Table 1. Models for evaluating Leadership Development Programmes

Model	Description
Kirkpatrick's Model (KPM)	Organised around four levels of impact: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results; widely used for evaluating social, business, health, or education interventions.
Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)	Develops standards to enhance the quality of students' learning experiences in higher education; self-assessment and improvement.
Utilisation Focused Developmental Evaluation (UFDE)	An approach that emphasises evaluation usefulness to intended users.
Ready, Willing, and Able Model (RWA)	Evaluates leadership capacity based on three constructs: leadership self-efficacy (Ready), motivation to lead (Willing), and leadership skill (Able).
Evolutionary Evaluation (EE)	Considers complex factors in larger systems within which a programme is embedded, providing a foundation for planning and evaluation.
Programme Theory (PT)	Provides a roadmap describing the sequence of events connecting the need for a programme to its desired results.
Success Case Method (SCM)	Identifies best practices and evaluates the success of an intervention by discovering what is working or not.
Leadership Audit Model (LAM)	Systematic process for identifying experiences that help students develop leadership abilities.

Keeling (2010) investigated the influence of CAS standards on academic advising programmes, while Young and Janosik (2007) measured learning outcomes in CAS-compliant students compared to non-compliant peers. Fullmer (2009) conducted a systematic assessment of a programme using CAS standards and SWOT analysis at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. Rehman et al. (2017) used UFDE to evaluate a medical curriculum at Bahria University Medical & Dental College. Armstrong (2009) applied UFDE to evaluate a mental health programme for youth. Ramírez et al. (2015) explored the combination of UFDE with Developmental Evaluation through practical experience.

Collins and Rosch (2018) used the RWA model to study racial diversity's effect on leadership programme outcomes. Keating, Rosch, and Burgoon (2014) examined undergraduate students' leadership capacity changes through participation in a leadership theory course. Grohmann and Kauffeld (2013) utilized EE to develop a time-efficient training evaluation questionnaire, while Urban et al. (2017) followed EE to evaluate the Inspire>Aspire programme. Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter (2012) applied PT to evaluate the plausibility of an induction programmes intended outcomes.

Beets and Goodman (2012) used SCM to investigate the application of knowledge and skills from an executive coaching programme, while Mbada (2013) employed SCM to evaluate the effectiveness of an HIV/AIDS schools programme in South Africa. In South Africa, Programme Theory and SCM are commonly used for evaluating workplace-based interventions, while CAS and RWA models are frequently used in student development, particularly in the USA. This study highlights the need for a context-specific framework to evaluate SLDPs in South African universities.

Study Objectives

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Student Leadership Development Programmes (SLDPs) offered by various universities in South Africa and use the outcomes to develop a suitable framework for evaluating SLDPs.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- a. Objective 1: To evaluate the existing design, presentation, and evaluation practices of the SLDPs currently offered by universities in South Africa.
- b. Objective 2: To gain insights from student affairs professionals who deliver these SLDPs regarding their experience with design, presentation, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms related to the SLDPs.
- c. Objective 3: To measure students' perceptions of the SLDPs in terms of value and impact.
- d. Objective 4: To develop a framework for evaluating SLDPs for South African universities.

Research Design

This study utilised a mixed-methods research design. The researcher followed a convergent/concurrent strategy, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and then compared. This

study is primarily qualitative, with quantitative data supplementing the qualitative findings.

To address objectives 1 and 2, a qualitative research approach was employed, providing the researcher with the opportunity to understand participants through their own descriptions of the world, as suggested by Mouton (2001). For objective 3, a quantitative research approach was used. This component was descriptive and cross-sectional, utilizing a survey design to provide a numeric description of participants' opinions (Salleh et al., 2017). To address objective 4, a qualitative approach was again employed, using focus groups. This objective was addressed at the end of the study, after the analysis of documents, interview data, and questionnaire responses. The focus group was used to test the new framework for evaluating SLDPs for completeness and suitability.

Population and Sampling

The study collected data from 20 student affairs professionals through interviews, 217 students through an online structured questionnaire, and 33 programme documents provided by the six participating universities. The student affairs professionals were purposively selected due to their critical role in designing, presenting, evaluating, and communicating SLDPs. Data collection for these professionals was guided by the saturation point, which was reached after the 20th interview.

A purposive sampling method was also used to select a panel of six experts to serve as soundboards in testing the plausibility and suitability of the new Framework for Evaluating Student Leadership Development Programmes (FE_SLDPs).

The researcher, being a student affairs professional, was able to make informed decisions about the most relevant student groupings to participate in the study. Only students who completed the full duration of their SLDPs were considered; those who dropped out were excluded. To select the participating universities, cluster sampling was used. This approach divided the universities into three clusters: traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data Analysis

Data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using Tesch's (1992) method of qualitative analysis, as described by Creswell (2009). The

recorded information was transcribed verbatim and analysed according to themes and categories, which were then coded. Tesch's systematic approach involves eight key principles:

- a. **Familiarization:** Reading transcripts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.
- b. **Coding:** Identifying and labeling significant units of meaning within the text, such as key phrases or concepts.
- c. **Categorization:** Grouping related codes into broader themes.
- d. **Association:** Exploring connections between categories to identify overarching patterns or relationships.
- e. **Systematization:** Creating a visual representation of the categories and their relationships using a thematic map.
- f. **Definition of Categories:** Ensuring clarity and consistency in the interpretation of themes.
- g. **Interpretation:** Drawing conclusions based on the identified themes and patterns.
- h. **Validation:** Ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through member checking and triangulation.

Data collected through the survey questionnaire were captured on an Excel spreadsheet and imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Factor analysis was conducted to reduce the number of variables to be analysed (Field, 2013). The data were then analysed using descriptive statistics, with frequency tables used to profile and interpret the data.

The Gugulethu Xaba (GX) Framework for evaluation of Student Leadership Development Programmes in South African universities

After reviewing the literature on developmental education, specifically models and frameworks used in both business and student affairs for evaluating leadership development programmes, the researcher consolidated the findings into a single framework named "The Gugulethu Xaba (GX) Framework for the Evaluation of Student Leadership Programmes in South African Universities" (see Figure 1).

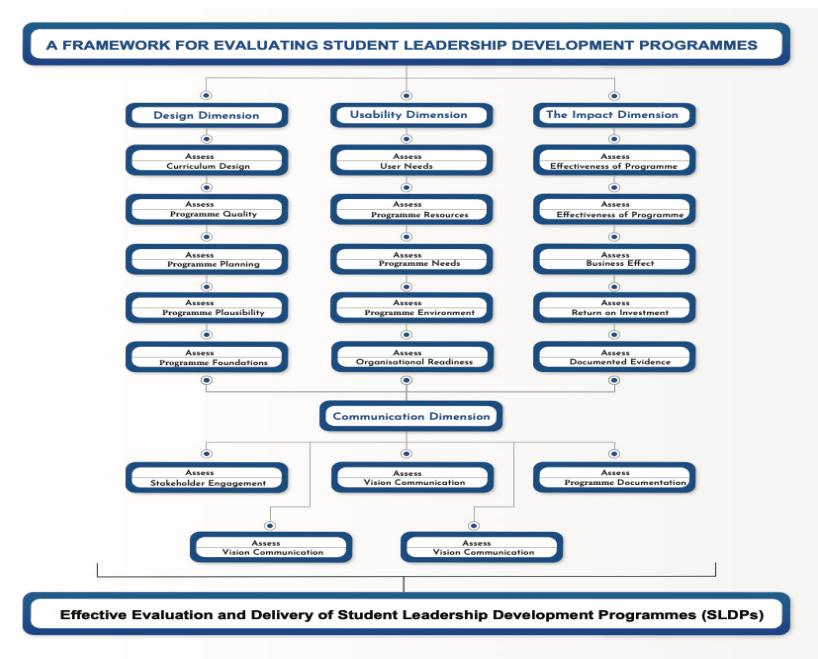
Student affairs professionals, including those responsible for presenting and evaluating SLDPs at various universities, can utilise this framework to enhance the programmes they offer. The GX Framework provides evidence that the programmes contribute to the improvement of students' leadership capacity. The GX Framework consists of four key dimensions that should

be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of SLDPs:

- a. Design Dimension
- b. Usability Dimension
- c. Impact Dimension
- d. Communication Dimension

The next section describes each dimension of the framework in detail. Figure 1 presents a diagrammatic representation of the GX Framework.

Figure 1: The GX Framework for Evaluating SLDPs



Source: Xaba

Description of the GX Framework Dimensions

Design Dimension

The design dimension evaluates whether SLDPs are properly designed to achieve their intended objectives and desired results. According to the GX Framework, programme designers should assess the following aspects:

- a. *Assess curriculum design:* Evaluate the content, environment, and methods used for programme delivery.

- b. *Assess programme quality*: Determine whether the programme is achieving its objectives, based on solid evidence and adherence to policies and standards.
- c. *Assess programme planning*: Conduct a needs assessment, link the programme to specific goals, determine the organisational capacities required for success, document the plan, and monitor implementation periodically.
- d. *Assess programme plausibility*: Evaluate whether the programme has met its original goals and identify any necessary improvements.
- e. *Assess programme foundations*: Ensure that the programme is grounded in appropriate student development theories and models, and that its goals align with the university's mission, strategic plan, and funders' expectations.

Usability Dimension

The usability dimension evaluates the usefulness of the SLDP and whether it meets the needs of its users, including students and student affairs professionals. The GX Framework suggests the following assessments:

- a. *Assess user needs*: Understand the needs of both student participants and student leadership educators, including what methods yield the best response.
- b. *Assess programme resources*: Identify whether all resources needed for successful programme implementation are available and establish checklists or inventories of requirements.
- c. *Assess programme needs*: Identify and prioritise the resources required for programme success, including budgeting and programme spending.
- d. *Assess programme environment*: Evaluate whether the SLDP's learning environment is suitable for both students and student affairs professionals, considering factors such as new knowledge, technology, and current student language.
- e. *Assess organisational readiness*: Determine if the student affairs unit is prepared to offer SLDPs, ensuring proper approval, licenses, and team readiness through readiness checklists and pretesting.

Impact Dimension

The impact dimension evaluates the effect of the SLDPs on student participants. The GX Framework recommends assessing the following elements:

- a. *Assess leadership capacity*: Determine whether the programme can measure leadership outcomes through changes in student behavior and productivity.
- b. *Assess response to institutional needs*: Evaluate whether the SLDP

- contributes to the university's strategic objectives and the academic mission of teaching, learning, and community engagement.
- c. *Assess business effect*: Ensure that the programme is designed to produce both immediate and long-term changes in student leadership capacity.
- d. *Assess return on investment*: Demonstrate the tangible benefits of investing in SLDPs through documented outcomes.
- e. *Assess documented evidence*: Review whether SLDP results are documented and archived according to required standards, and whether students perceive the programmes benefits.

Communication Dimension

The communication dimension evaluates the effectiveness of communication between stakeholders throughout the SLDP lifecycle. This dimension influences all other dimensions. According to the GX Framework, programme designers should assess the following areas:

- a. *Assess stakeholder engagement*: Evaluate whether there is a relationship management plan for all stakeholders, formal platforms for consultation, and sufficient resources for stakeholder engagement.
- b. *Assess programme reporting*: Check that reporting standards are set, including the type of reports required by stakeholders and whether the reports address key areas and demonstrate programme impact.
- c. *Assess vision communication*: Ensure that all stakeholders understand the vision for the SLDP and that university leadership communicates expectations to programme presenters. Verify that presenters are qualified and able to deliver the programme effectively.
- d. *Assess programme documentation*: Confirm that all programmes are properly documented, with supportive tools such as standard operating procedure (SOP) manuals to ensure consistency and scalability.
- e. *Assess feedback and reflection*: Ensure that feedback from students is gathered and used to assess programme effectiveness. This involves creating opportunities for participants to give feedback and using their input to improve future SLDPs.

Findings of the Study on the Four Dimensions of the GX Framework

Design Dimension

The findings reveal that the design dimension of SLDPs across the South African universities studied encompasses several key aspects outlined in the GX Framework. Participants unanimously agreed on the importance of a well-structured curriculum, clear objectives, and measurable outcomes

for SLDPs. Students prefer to be informed about their programmes from the outset, rather than taking a passive role. Effective curriculum design should balance contact and virtual sessions, providing opportunities for students to practice their learning, such as through community service.

However, document analysis indicated weaknesses in the way some universities documented their programmes, thereby compromising overall quality. This inconsistency raises concerns about whether these programmes are achieving their intended objectives. Although most participants reported engaging in structured planning—such as annual planning meetings and pre-implementation sessions—some relied on desktop planning approved by line management, without broad stakeholder involvement. Only a few institutions involved students and other stakeholders in the planning process, highlighting a gap in comprehensive programme planning.

Concerning programme plausibility, many participants expressed uncertainty about whether their programmes had fully attained their original objectives, pointing to a lack of systematic evaluation to determine the need for improvements. Additionally, most participants indicated that their SLDPs lacked a grounding in specific student development theories. While universities claimed to base their programmes on strategic objectives and graduate attributes, many participants were unfamiliar with relevant theories, despite their experience in student affairs. This lack of theoretical grounding raises concerns about alignment with the universities' missions and strategic plans.

Usability Dimension

The findings on the usability dimension emphasise the importance of understanding student needs and aspirations to design effective SLDPs. All participants agreed that it is essential for facilitators to understand students' expectations and motivations prior to the commencement of activities. Aligning programme design with these aspirations enhances student participation and engagement.

Participants identified a significant gap in programme resources, with all participants perceiving their SLDPs as underfunded and lacking necessary resources. They unanimously suggested that increased funding would improve both student enrolment and programme delivery quality. Diversifying delivery methods was highlighted as crucial, but current methods are limited due to financial constraints. Budgeting and programme spending were critical areas needing attention to ensure programme viability and the achievement of intended outcomes. Prioritizing resources

emerged as essential for addressing concrete needs and achieving programme objectives effectively.

Participants also indicated that learning environments should be adaptable to the changing preferences of students, incorporating modern methods and technologies to enhance leadership development. The assessment of organisational readiness revealed that many units were not adequately prepared for SLDP implementation. Recruiting skilled facilitators and securing necessary approvals were identified as key areas requiring attention to ensure successful programme delivery.

Overall, while participants recognised the importance of user needs and resource availability in SLDP usability, addressing challenges related to funding, learning environments, and organisational preparedness is critical for improving programme effectiveness.

Impact Dimension

The findings related to the impact dimension suggest that participants generally perceived SLDPs as impactful, although assessments often relied on anecdotal evidence rather than systematic measurement. Some participants noted that students who participated in SLDPs became more active in campus life, taking on leadership roles in student governance and societies. However, there was a lack of structured evaluation to assess behavioural changes and leadership outcomes.

While participants believed their programmes contributed to the universities' strategic objectives, there was little documentation to confirm alignment with institutional goals. The reliance on anecdotal feedback hindered a clear assessment of how SLDPs met institutional needs. Although participants recognised the importance of identifying desired leadership changes in students, there was a notable gap in programme design that allowed for measuring both immediate and long-term impacts. Many expressed a desire for more structured evaluation processes to assess the effectiveness of SLDPs.

Challenges in demonstrating the tangible benefits of SLDPs were also reported. Most participants lacked formal systems for evaluating outcomes, relying instead on informal feedback. This limitation prevented them from quantifying the return on investment in SLDPs. Additionally, while documenting programme results was acknowledged as important, significant gaps were identified in standards for documentation, including

the use of evaluation forms and student portfolios. Addressing these challenges is vital for improving accountability and enhancing the impact of SLDPs.

Communication Dimension

The findings on the communication dimension highlight both strengths and weaknesses in the communication practices within SLDPs across South African universities. Some institutions had established stakeholder engagement channels, but these varied widely in effectiveness and consistency. Many stakeholders reported insufficient feedback mechanisms and the absence of structured relationship management plans, resulting in missed opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Participants emphasised the need for formal platforms to consult stakeholders, identify their needs and concerns, and allocate resources for effective engagement.

Significant variability in programme reporting was observed, with some departments providing detailed reports while others delivered vague and insufficient information. This inconsistency highlights the need for clearer reporting standards that demonstrate SLDP impact and document lessons learned. Establishing such guidelines would ensure that stakeholders receive comprehensive updates on programme progress and outcomes.

A gap between university leadership and programme facilitators regarding the strategic vision of SLDPs was also identified. Participants expressed a desire for improved communication about the university's overarching goals, suggesting that more frequent workshops or training sessions are needed to align programme initiatives with institutional objectives.

Inconsistencies in programme documentation were also observed. Some SLDPs followed standard operating procedures (SOPs), while others lacked current documentation. Participants suggested that better organisation of training materials and supportive tools would improve programme effectiveness. Moreover, mechanisms for feedback and reflection were insufficient. While some participants acknowledged the importance of collecting student feedback, gaps existed in how this feedback was processed and used for programme improvement. Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing SLDP effectiveness. Overall, while some communication practices are in place, significant challenges remain in stakeholder engagement, reporting consistency, strategic alignment, documentation, and feedback mechanisms. Improving these areas will maximise the success and impact of SLDPs in South African universities.

Addressing Gaps in Existing Evaluation Models: The Case for the GX Framework

This section critically evaluates existing evaluation models, highlighting their gaps and advocating for the relevance of the GX Framework.

Kirkpatrick's Model

The Kirkpatrick Model is one of the most widely used frameworks for evaluating various programmes. Its four-level evaluation system—reaction, learning, behaviour, and results—provides a foundational structure for measuring the impact of training or development initiatives. However, the Kirkpatrick Model primarily focuses on outcome measurement, overlooking the contextual nuances of student leadership development in a university setting. Specifically, it fails to consider the complex socio-cultural and institutional dynamics prevalent in South African universities.

The GX Framework addresses these gaps through its design dimension, which evaluates not only the quality of programme outcomes but also the curriculum design, programme planning, and alignment with organisational objectives. This ensures that SLDPs are impactful and tailored to the specific strategic goals of the university, which is critical in contexts where leadership development is linked to broader educational missions.

Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS] in Higher Education

CAS standards are recognised in student affairs and higher education but were primarily developed for institutions in the United States. This U.S.-centric nature poses challenges for adapting these standards to the South African context, where socioeconomic factors and the higher education landscape differ significantly. The impact dimension of the GX Framework explicitly addresses this gap by incorporating institutional needs and aligning SLDP outcomes with university strategic objectives. It ensures that SLDPs are evaluated in relation to the broader educational and societal goals of South African universities, making the GX Framework more suitable for this context than CAS standards.

Utilisation-Focused Developmental Evaluation (UFE)

Utilisation-Focused Developmental Evaluation (UFE) emphasises the usefulness of evaluations for intended users, concentrating on real-time feedback and adaptability. While this model encourages responsiveness, it lacks a structured approach to systematically evaluate the design, implementation, and stakeholder communication aspects of SLDPs.

The usability dimension of the GX Framework offers a more comprehensive assessment of programme relevance and user experience. By evaluating user needs, programme resources, and organisational readiness, the GX Framework ensures that SLDPs are designed and implemented in a manner that meets the requirements of both student participants and leadership educators. This systematic approach extends beyond UFE's focus on utilisation, providing a robust evaluation of both programme design and practical application.

Ready, Willing, and Able (RWA) Model

The RWA model assesses leadership development based on three constructs: self-efficacy (Ready), motivation (Willing), and leadership skills (Able). While these constructs are useful, they do not provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating the structural and institutional dimensions of leadership development programmes.

The design dimension of the GX Framework ensures that SLDPs are evaluated for their curriculum quality and alignment with organisational missions, while the impact dimension guarantees measurable outcomes beyond self-efficacy or motivation alone. The GX Framework allows for a deeper analysis of whether the programme fulfils its educational and leadership objectives within a specific institutional context, addressing the RWA model's limitations in complex university environments.

Evolutionary Evaluation

Evolutionary Evaluation (EE) is an adaptable approach that considers the broader systems within which programmes are embedded. However, it lacks specific mechanisms for evaluating stakeholder communication and feedback, which are critical for understanding how leadership development programmes are perceived and improved over time.

The communication dimension in the GX Framework addresses these deficiencies by ensuring that all stakeholders are actively engaged throughout the programme lifecycle. The GX Framework emphasises stakeholder consultation, feedback mechanisms, and continuous reflection, ensuring that SLDPs remain responsive to both student needs and institutional requirements. This focus on communication strengthens the evaluation process, allowing leadership programmes to evolve in alignment with institutional and student expectations.

Programme Theory

Programme theory provides a logical framework for evaluating programme implementation and intended outcomes. However, it lacks a detailed

approach for assessing the real-time usability and practical constraints of leadership development programmes. The usability dimension of the GX Framework bridges this gap by evaluating programme resources, needs, and environmental suitability. This ensures that SLDPs are not only theoretically sound but also practical and effective in real-world execution. Furthermore, the communication dimension ensures that ongoing stakeholder engagement and feedback are integral to the evaluation process, an aspect not emphasised in Programme Theory.

Success Case Method

The Success Case Method (SCM) focuses on identifying and documenting success stories to motivate future participants and improve programme delivery. However, it does not provide a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to evaluating programme design, implementation, or stakeholder communication.

The GX Framework's impact dimension addresses this gap by ensuring that leadership outcomes are evaluated holistically, including behavioural change, institutional response, return on investment, and documented evidence. This offers a broader and more systematic evaluation than SCM, which primarily emphasises isolated success cases.

Leadership Audit Model

The Leadership Audit Model systematically identifies the experiences through which students develop leadership abilities. However, it does not comprehensively assess programme design, usability, or stakeholder communication. The GX Framework addresses these gaps through its four integrated dimensions, particularly its emphasis on communication and usability. These dimensions ensure that SLDPs are not only designed effectively but are also continuously refined through feedback from both students and educators, ensuring that programmes remain responsive and adaptable to changing needs.

Conclusions

This study recommends that South African universities adopt the GX Framework for their Student Leadership Development Programmes (SLDPs) to effectively address gaps in measuring impact. The GX Framework offers a comprehensive, contextually relevant, and multi-dimensional approach to evaluating SLDPs. By bridging deficiencies in existing models, it ensures that SLDPs are well-designed, practical, and aligned with institutional goals while being responsive to student needs and capable of demonstrating tangible impacts. Its four dimensions—design,

usability, impact, and communication—create a robust evaluation system essential for enhancing leadership capacity within the unique context of South African higher education. Thus, the GX Framework is proposed as a superior model for evaluating SLDPs, offering valuable insights and guidelines for future programme development.

The design dimension is crucial for establishing a standard format and guidelines, ensuring consistency in training material development. As Hanza (2012) emphasises, foundational decisions regarding content, delivery methods, time allocation, and assessment tools must precede any training design. Furthermore, a well-designed SLDP fosters a common language within the sector. Seemiller and Murray (2013) assert that utilising student leadership competencies as learning outcomes facilitates the translation of curricular and co-curricular programmes into academic contexts.

The usability dimension embraces student-centered principles, reflecting the missions of many South African universities. Davis (2014) suggests that leadership development planners should engage professionals and senior leaders in the planning process, alongside external providers to ensure active input from organisational sponsors.

The impact dimension is significant for two primary reasons. First, South African universities are legally required to conduct institutional audits, which include evaluations of student affairs services (Council for Higher Education, n.d.). Second, demonstrating the impact of SLDPs can help secure funding in a challenging financial landscape. Naidoo and McKay (2018) highlight that universities face competing priorities and funding shortfalls, necessitating strong evidence of return on investment (Bhuyan, 2016). Such data can substantiate funding requests and lead to organisational benefits such as increased output, time savings, and improved quality control.

The communication dimension is essential for reporting progress and engaging stakeholders throughout the SLDP lifecycle. Haskins and Shaffer (2009) emphasise that comprehensive communication plans should facilitate two-way dialogue between participants and facilitators, promoting a supportive environment for development activities. Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) also note that effective communication is critical for ensuring that evaluation findings are used appropriately and that feedbacks integrated throughout the project lifecycle.

Moreover, there is a pressing need to systematically integrate student affairs theories and models into SLDPs. Universities should mandate grounding

these programmes in relevant theoretical frameworks, as advocated by Long (2012), who emphasises the importance of theoretical foundations in the design of educational experiences. Partnerships with U.S. universities could enhance staff development in student affairs, fostering local benchmarking exercises to facilitate resource sharing and knowledge transfer. Mosier and Schwarzmüller (2002) affirm that benchmarking is effective for improving services and navigating rapid changes in student affairs through the identification of best practices.

Future research should address the concept of recognition within SLDPs. Recognising student achievements can foster motivation and a sense of belonging, enhancing the overall effectiveness of such programmes. Subsequent studies should explore methods to integrate recognition into the framework for evaluating SLDPs. Additionally, conducting structured pilot studies over one or two years is vital for testing and refining the proposed framework. Such studies will provide valuable insights into the practical application of the framework across diverse university contexts and ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of students and institutions alike.

While this study focuses on SLDPs within South African universities, the insights and findings are equally pertinent across the African continent, highlighting the potential for collaboration and shared learning among institutions to foster stronger relationships and enhance leadership development initiatives throughout the region

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