

Conceptual Review of Positive Youth Leadership

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Abstract

Positive youth leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the future of society by empowering young individuals to become effective leaders and change agents. This paper highlights who is a positive youth leader, the key components of positive youth leadership, the significance of positive youth leadership, the positive impact it has on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Also, the study review ways on how someone can become a positive youth leader. The study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory developed by Downton and further expanded upon by Burns. The study concluded that positive youth leaders can cultivate an environment that promotes personal and collective growth, encourages innovation, and instills a sense of purpose and commitment to creating a better future. It was suggested among others that educational institutions can create an environment that nurtures positive youth leadership, empowering young individuals to become influential change agents and leaders of tomorrow.

Keywords: Youth, Leader, Youth Leadership, Positive Youth Leadership

Word Count: 151

Introduction

Positive youth leadership involves cultivating leadership skills, fostering positive values, and promoting constructive behaviours among young individuals. It recognises the unique perspectives, talents, and potential

of young people, providing them with opportunities to develop and exercise their leadership abilities. By empowering youth to take initiative and make a difference, positive youth leadership aims to create a generation of responsible, compassionate, and proactive leaders.

This study will review on the following subheadings:

- positive youth leader
- key components of positive youth leadership
- significance of positive youth leadership,
- impact of positive youth leadership on individuals,
- impact of positive youth leadership on communities, and society as a whole,
- ways on how someone can become a positive youth leader,
- Transformational Leadership Theory,
- conclusion
- suggestions

Positive Youth Leader

A positive youth leader encompasses a diverse group of young individuals who demonstrate exemplary leadership qualities and actively engage in making positive changes within the communities he/she belong and even beyond (Arshad, Khan & Ismail, 2021). Such individual can be found in various domains, including but not limited to: student leaders, youth activists, community organizers, entrepreneurial leaders, peer mentors and global youth leaders.

Student leader is that young individual who takes leadership roles within educational institutions, such as class governor/captain, students' council member, school club president, or team captain to mention a few. That individual often organizes events, classes to be taken by lecturers, advocate for student needs, rights, and promote a positive school culture. Youth activist is that person who is a passionate advocate for social and environmental causes. The individual actively participate in movements, protests, and campaigns, using his/her voices to raise awareness and drive positive change on issues like climate change, all kind of assaults, harassments, gender equality, racial justice, and more. In 2020, Nigeria had an experience of such tagged “#EndSARS.” It was a decentralised social movement across the country, and series of mass

protests, demonstrations, online activism, civil disobedience, and marches against police brutality. The movement calls for the disbanding of the Nigerian Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigerian police with a long record of abuse on Nigerian citizens. Community organiser is another positive youth leadership that works towards addressing local challenges, such as poverty, homelessness, access to education, or community development. They mobilise resources, coordinated volunteers, and initiate projects that benefit the communities. There are some youth organisations that take care of the communities like: Boy Scouts, Red Cross, and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) to mention a few, which can even be church-based. Entrepreneurial leader is a young entrepreneur who start businesses with a social or environmental focus can be considered positive youth leader.

He/she combines innovative ideas with a sense of purpose, aiming to create sustainable solutions and contribute to the betterment of society. Peer mentor is a young individual who serves as a mentor or role model for his/her peers. The person provides guidance, support, and encouragement to help others overcome challenges, makes positive choices, and develops personal leadership potential. This can happen during tutorial class when someone will try to explain difficult topic for others to understand. Global youth leader is a type of positive youth leadership with a global perspective and impact. Such a person participates in international conferences, youth forums, and exchange programmes, collaborating with young leaders from different countries to address global issues, promote intercultural understanding, and foster peace and cooperation.

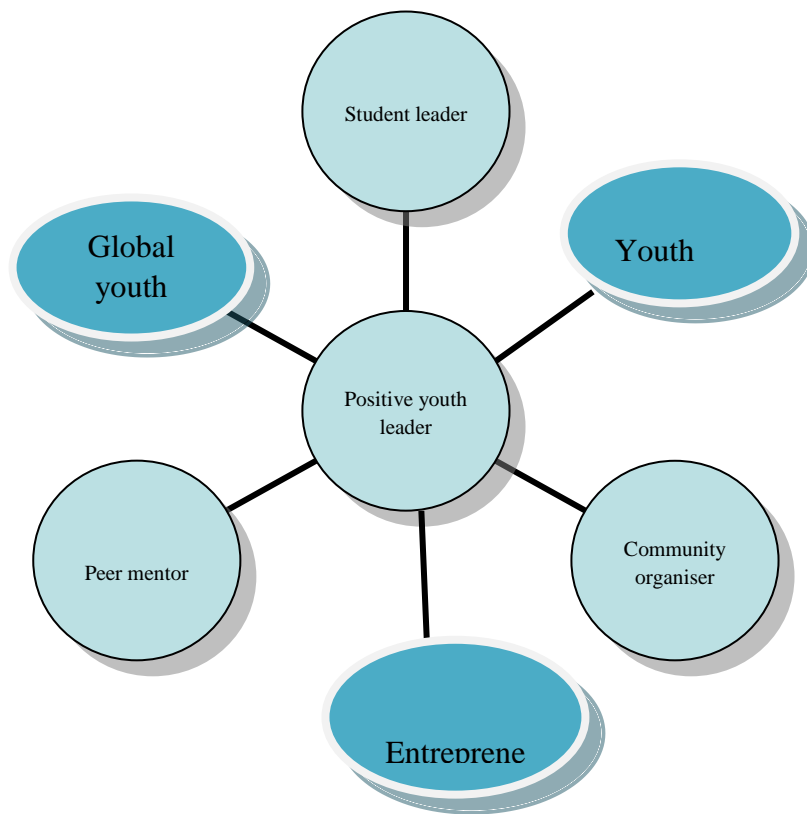


Figure 1: Positive youth leader

Key Components of Positive Youth Leadership

Positive youth leadership involves nurturing and empowering young individuals to take on leadership roles while promoting positive values and behaviours (USAID, 2016). The keys components are vision goal setting, inclusivity and diversity, recognition and celebration, ethical decision-making and effective communication. Encouraging youth leaders to create a clear vision and set achievable goals. The goals should be ‘SMART’, that is, the goals should be specific and not vague. ‘S’ is for Specific. Specific goals lead to specific objectives and results at the end. Specific goals should be able to answer questions like; who needs to be involved to achieve the goals?, what is the individual trying to accomplish?, why are goals important?, which resources or obstacles are involved in achieving the goals?, and when should the goals be achieved?.

'M' is for Measurable. The goals should be measurable to track the progress and ensure that the goals set are realistic and challenging enough. Measurable goals should be able to answer questions like; how much?, how many?, what are the indicators of progress?, and how will the goal setter know when the goals are reached?. The letter 'A' is for Achievable. The goals should be achievable, that is, goals should be realistic. This may depend on how important the end result is, the individual might need to develop new skills and attitudes. The letter 'R' is for Realistic. In setting achievable goals, there is need to consider, how does the individual reach the goals?, how realistic are the goals?, are the necessary tools and skills available?, what would it take to attain the goals?, and which tools and skills will be required to achieve the goals?.

'T' is for Time-bound. Goals should be relevant to align with the broader goals which may be the organization or community or society at large as the case may be. Relevant goals should answer some questions like; does the goal seem worthy enough?, does it reflect other efforts and needs?, is it assigned person the right one to carry out this goal?, and is this an appropriate goal for the current social and economic environment?. Goals should be time-bound or a target end date. When setting up a time frame for a goal, some questions should be answered like; when will the goals be achieved?, what can be done few months from now?, what can be achieved few weeks from now?, and what can be accomplished today?. SMART goals foster ambition and provide direction for the efforts.

Inclusivity and diversity is a key component of positive youth leadership within the community because it emphasises the importance of respecting and valuing different perspectives and backgrounds where more holistic and well-rounded leadership is encouraged. Inclusivity and diversity is a way of involving youth leaders in community initiatives and service projects. Engaging with the community helps young leaders develop a deeper understanding of societal issues and stills a sense of social responsibility.

Recognition and celebration is a way of recognizing and celebrating the achievements and contributions of youth leaders in the community they belong. Positive reinforcement and acknowledgment can motivate who to continue the leadership journey. Also, creating a supportive and safe environment can encourage young leaders to take

risks, learn from experiences, and grow without fear of harsh criticism or judgment.

Ethical decision-making and integrity is a key component in positive youth leadership. Youth leaders should be guided by strong moral principles to make responsible choices. This can make youth leaders to cultivate resilience and perseverance helping them to bounce back from setbacks and challenges. Challenges, obstacles and problems are bound to take place but all these qualities are essential for overcoming adversity. Effective communication is another key component in positive youth leadership. Positive youth leader should have good effective communication skills by being an active listener and to be able to articulate his/her words correctly. These skills are crucial for building relationships, resolving conflicts, and inspiring others.

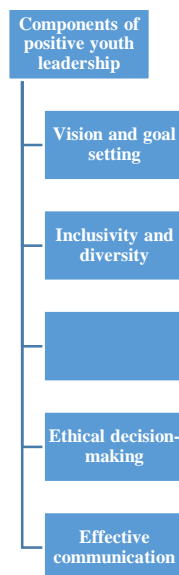


Figure 2: Components of positive youth leadership

Significance of Positive Youth Leadership

Positive youth leadership holds immense significance for both the individuals involved and the broader society. The significance includes empowerment and confidence, skill development, social responsibility, positive role models, reduces risky behaviours, and building a stronger future among others.

Positive youth leadership empowers young individuals, giving them a sense of agency and self-confidence. When young people are empowered, they are more likely to take initiative, set goals, and pursue their aspirations with determination. Organising youth leadership programme that focus on developing a wide range of skills, including communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and decision-making will not only enhance their leadership abilities but also prepare them for success in various aspects of life (Kress, 2006). Engaging youths in activities, things or programmes either, in the church, mosque, society or community will make youths to learn about needs, and challenges of their communities. Not only that, they will also learn how to handle situations. This fosters a sense of social responsibility and encourages them to become active participants in addressing societal issues. Invariably, the positive youth leadership will serve as role models for their peers and younger generations after them. Their ethical and responsible conduct inspires others to follow suit and make positive contributions to their communities.

Positive youth leadership programmes have a long-term impact on young individuals. The skills, values, and experiences gained during their involvement can shape their future educational and career paths, as well as their personal lives. Studies have shown that youth engaged in positive leadership activities are less likely to engage in risky behaviours like substance abuse or violence (Schutt, Gecker & Zaykowski, 2020). Above all it is worth noting that positive youth leaders are the future leaders of society. Investing in their development ensures that the next generation is equipped with the tools and mindset to tackle complex challenges and create the expected positive change.

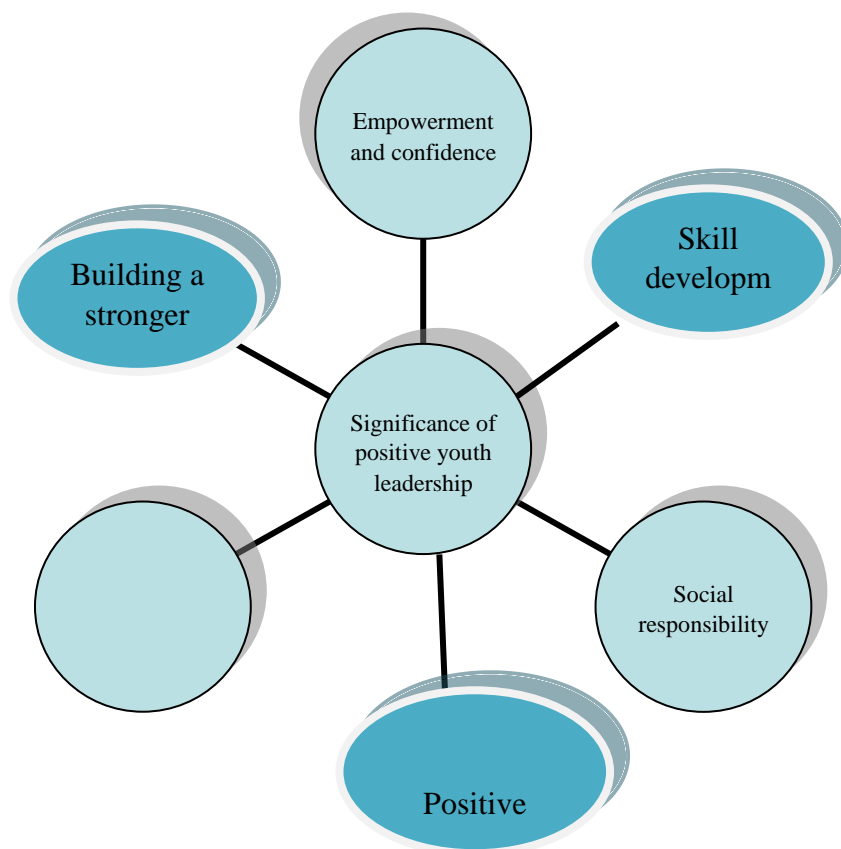


Figure 3: Significance of positive youth leadership

Impact of Positive Youth Leadership on Individuals

Positive youth leadership has a profound impact on individuals, fostering personal growth and development in various ways like: having sense of purpose, resilience and adaptability, social and emotional intelligence, civic engagement, and positive identity and values, to mention but a few.

Positive youth leadership provides young individuals with a sense of purpose and direction. Having meaningful responsibilities and contributing to a cause they care about gives their lives greater meaning and fulfillment. Leadership roles often involve facing challenges and setbacks. Positive youth leaders learn to be resilient, bouncing back from failures and adapting to changing circumstances with a positive mindset.

Leading others requires understanding and managing emotions, as well as empathizing with the needs of others. Positive youth leadership fosters social and emotional intelligence, which is vital for building strong relationships. Positive youth leadership encourages active civic engagement (Kress, 2006). Young leaders become more aware of community issues, and their involvement in addressing these challenges promotes responsible citizenship. Through the involvement of positive youth leaders in leadership roles, they often develop a stronger sense of identity and values. They understand what they stand for and become more committed to ethical and responsible behaviour.

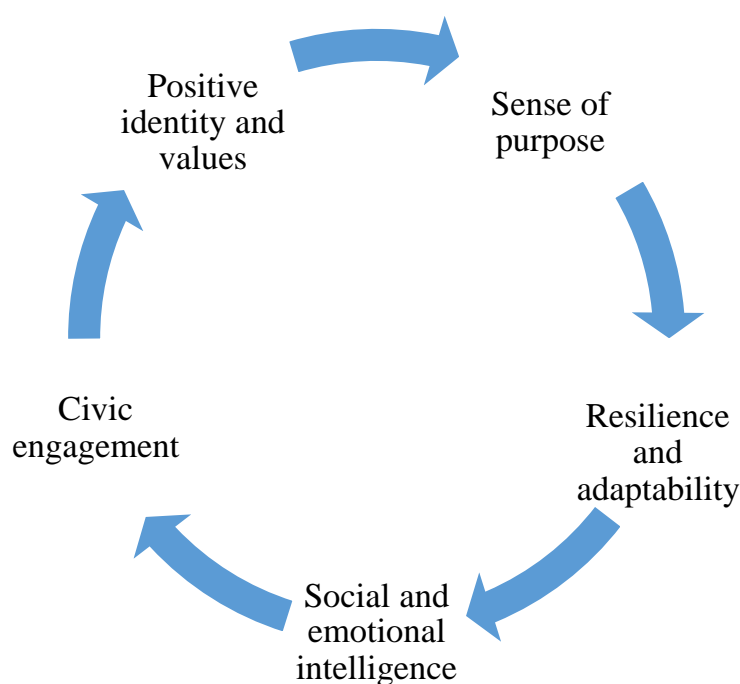


Figure 4: Impact of positive youth leadership on individual

Impact of Positive Youth Leadership on Communities, and Society as a Whole

Positive youth leadership has a far-reaching impact on society, as it empowers young individuals to become responsible, engaged, and compassionate citizens. Some of the key ways in which positive youth

leadership contributes to positive changes in the community and society at large are; fosters social cohesion, positive influence on policy and programmes, promotes a culture of giving back, promotes positive well-being, and community engagement and service.

Youth leaders often work to bring people together and build strong social connections and networks within their communities. This fosters a sense of belonging and social cohesion, reducing conflicts and promoting cooperation. Youth leaders advocate for policies and programmes that address the needs and concerns of young people and the broader community. The input of youths can lead to more effective and inclusive policies (Jones, 2009). Positive youth leadership instills a sense of social responsibility, encouraging young individuals to give back to their communities throughout their lives. This creates a culture of volunteerism and community service which may be in form of cash or kind to one's alma mater. Engaging in positive youth leadership activities can positively impact the mental and emotional well-being of young individuals. When young people feel a sense of purpose and connection to their community, it contributes to their overall happiness and fulfillment. Positive youth leaders actively participate in community service projects and initiatives. Their involvement helps address various social issues, improving the lives of those in need and enhancing the overall well-being of the community.

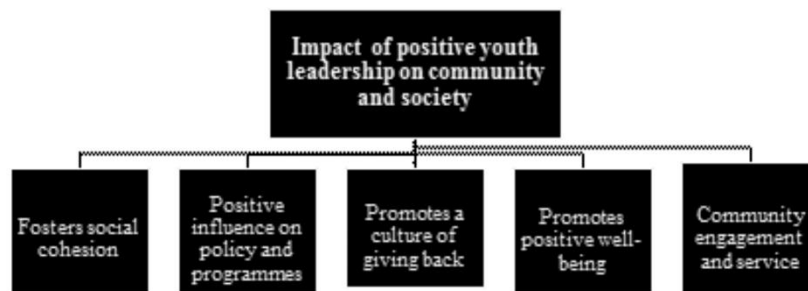


Figure 5: Impact of positive youth leadership on community and society

Ways on How Someone can Become a Positive Youth Leader

To become a positive youth leader involves a combination of personal growth, efforts, skill development, and active engagement within the community. Firstly, there is need to identify someone's passion and interest. The young individual needs to reflect on the issues or causes that matter most to him or her. Identify one's passions and areas to make difference. This will help to focus on ones efforts and find a purpose that drives leadership journey. Secondly, the young individual will gradually build the skills which can be developed and honed over time. Skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, decision-making, and empathy to mention a few. The young individual will seeks out opportunities to improve these skills through workshops, training programmes, online courses, or by actively participating in group activities. Thirdly, the young individual seeks mentorship and guidance. People, who can guide and support the leadership journey, offer advice, share experiences, and provide valuable insights to help navigate challenges and enhance leadership abilities. The next step is that the young individual will begin to get involved in the community activities and initiatives. Volunteer for local organizations; participate in community service projects, or positive clubs and organisations that align with ones interests. By actively participating, the young individual can develop a deeper understanding of community needs and contribute to positive change. The next step is that the young individual will begin to take on leadership roles within the school, community, or extracurricular activities. This could involve serving as a club officer, team captain, event organiser, or spokesperson. Actively contribute his/her ideas, take initiatives, and inspire others to get involved. Next step is that the young individual will begin to connect with other like-minded individuals and collaborate on projects or initiatives. Engage in discussions, attend conferences, join youth forums, or participate in online communities focused on leadership and social change. Networking can expand the knowledge, provide support, and create opportunities for collaboration and shared learning. The next thing is that the positive young leader will begin to be a positive role model by demonstrating positive values and behaviours in his/her interactions with others. The positive young leader will be being to show empathy, respect, and inclusivity. Also be supportive and encourage others to unleash their potential as well. At

this level, the actions of the positive young leader can inspire and motivate others to become leaders themselves. Lastly, the positive young leader will Continue to Learn and Grow (CLG). The positive young leader will embrace a growth mindset and seek opportunities for continuous learning and personal development. Also, the positive young leader will stay informed about current issues, trends, and innovations in areas that interest him or her. He/she will be attending workshops, conferences, or seminars to broaden knowledge and perspectives.

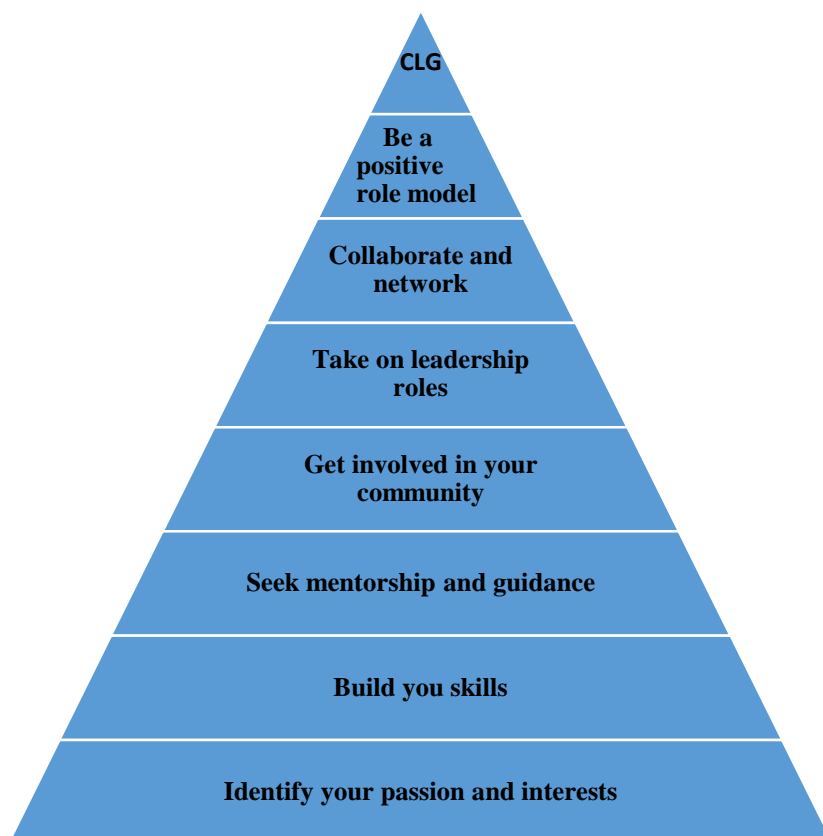


Figure 6: How to become a positive youth leader

Transformational Leadership Theory

One of the prominent theories that can anchor on positive youths leadership is the Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT). It was

developed by James V. Downton (1973) and further expanded upon by James MacGregor Burns (1978). This theory emphasizes the positive and inspiring qualities and their ability to bring about transformative change. According to the TLT, positive youth leaders can have a profound impact by inspiring and motivating others to exceed their own expectations and work towards shared goals. These leaders exhibit the following key characteristics; charisma and inspiration, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence.

Transformational leaders have a charismatic presence and inspire others through their passion, vision, and enthusiasm. They articulate a compelling future and motivate youth to become agents of change. Positive youth leaders demonstrate genuine concern and support for the individual needs and aspirations of their followers. They provide mentorship, guidance, and personalized attention, empowering each youth to develop their unique leadership potential.

Leaders encourage creativity, innovation, and critical thinking among youth. They challenge conventional thinking, promote intellectual curiosity, and foster an environment that encourages young individuals to question assumptions and explore new possibilities. Positive youth leaders serve as role models and embody the values they promote. They maintain high ethical standards, act with integrity, and exemplify the behaviours they expect from others. Their authenticity and consistency inspire trust and respect from people.

The TLT posits that positive youth leaders can have a transformative impact on individuals, groups, and communities. By fostering a sense of purpose, empowerment, and collective identity, they enable youths to unleash their potentials, take initiative, and contribute positively to their surroundings. This theory aligns well with positive youth leadership as it emphasises the importance of personal growth, inspiration, and the ability to bring about positive change. It recognises that leadership is not solely about authority or control but also about empowering others, creating a shared vision, and mobilizing efforts towards a common goal. By anchoring on the TLT, positive youth leaders can cultivate an environment that promotes personal and collective growth, encourages innovation, and instills a sense of purpose and commitment to creating a better future.

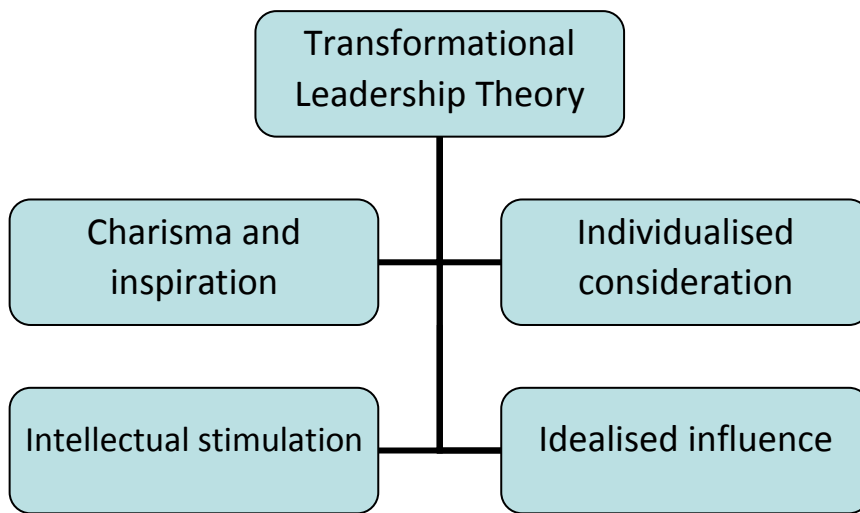


Figure 7: Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT)

Conclusion

In conclusion, positive youth leadership plays a pivotal role in empowering young individuals to become effective leaders and change agents. Positive young leaders should be provided with the necessary tools, skills, and opportunities. Positive young leadership has a transformative impact on communities and society as a whole in addition to the individuals engaged. Positive youth leadership provides young people with crucial experiences, beliefs, and abilities that help them grow personally and set them up for success in a variety of spheres of life. A better and more promising future is also created for everyone by empowering and assisting young leaders. It is important to note that positive youth leaders can emerge from any background, irrespective of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, or educational attainment. What unites them is commitment to making a positive difference and their ability to inspire and mobilize others towards shared goals.

Suggestions

1. Schools at all levels should establish mentorship programmes where experienced leaders can guide and support young individuals in developing their leadership skills.
2. Youths need to be willing, patient, not allowing negative peer influence, and ready to learn from elders. Be expectant with focused vision, determined to pursue, and always have self-examination at all times.
3. Government, religious leaders, society and communities should create inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity and encourage youth from different backgrounds to participate and contribute their little quota.
4. Tertiary institutions should support networking and collaboration of research which will facilitate mentorship, and opportunities for youth leaders to connect with one another, both locally and globally.
5. Parents, religious leaders, society and communities to encourage youth to actively participate in community service activities and engage in initiatives that address social issues.
6. Schools at all levels to encourage collaboration and teamwork in projects and activities that require youth to work together towards common goals.

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