

Leadership experiences of gifted students: A meta-synthesis of qualitative studies

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a meta-synthesis method to holistically analyze qualitative research on the leadership experiences of gifted students from a multidimensional perspective. It examines approaches to leadership's nature, its conceptualization, students' experiences, conditions for emergence, limiting factors, and development recommendations. Following a systematic literature review across three databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses) and the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses process, five qualitative studies were included, reflecting an inclusion rate of just 0.48% that underscores the scarcity of qualitative research in this area. Thematic coding, cross-case, and interpretive synthesis were used for analysis. Findings reveal leadership is shaped by social-emotional skills, identity, culture, and educational opportunities, not just cognitive ability. Experiences oscillate between empowerment and vulnerability. While academic achievement, responsibility, and self-efficacy support leadership, its development is limited by low self-confidence, social anxiety, teacher expectations, inequality, and prejudice. Minority students particularly experience a pronounced burden of representation and invisibility. Fostering leadership in gifted students requires a multidimensional program integrating individual potential, social interaction, pedagogy, and cultural context. Theoretically, the synthesis extends developmental and relational models of leadership to the field of gifted education, showing that leadership talent is best understood not as a fixed individual trait but as a capacity co-constructed at the intersection of cognitive potential, social-emotional development, identity, and cultural context.

Keywords: gifted students, leadership, meta-synthesis, leadership development, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Gifted students are widely recognized as individuals who possess considerable leadership potential and are expected to contribute to the future development of societies (Lee et al., 2021a; Ogurlu & Emir, 2014; Sisk, 2013). Accordingly, leadership is frequently identified as one of the distinguishing characteristics of gifted individuals in the literature (Lee et al., 2021a; Peairs et al., 2019; Yusof et al., 2015). However, research also indicates that this potential is not demonstrated equally by all gifted students, suggesting that leadership development is a more complex process than the mere presence of high ability. Although gifted students are often assumed to possess strong leadership capacities, how these capacities develop, how leadership is experienced, and which factors facilitate or constrain these processes remain insufficiently understood. This gap may be explained by the fact that leadership is a

multidimensional construct encompassing not only managerial competencies but also social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Meyer & Rinn, 2021).

Existing evidence suggests that both individual and contextual factors influence the extent to which gifted students translate their leadership potential into observable leadership behaviors. Social-emotional characteristics, including emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and communication skills, differ across gifted students and may either facilitate or hinder the expression of leadership skills (Muda & Kamaluddin, 2025). Likewise, environmental factors such as family support, teacher guidance, and opportunities to assume leadership roles substantially contribute to leadership development (Hébert, 2018). Moreover, individual and contextual variables, including perfectionism, lifelong learning skills, gender differences, and school climate, have been identified as important determinants of leadership enactment (Dagyar et al., 2022;

Gecer et al., 2024). Consequently, the limited display of leadership skills among some gifted students should not be interpreted as an absence of leadership potential; rather, it reflects the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and environmental conditions (Bean & Karnes, 2015; Meyer & Rinn, 2021).

Understanding the leadership experiences of gifted students is crucial for the development of educational policies and practices (Subotnik et al., 2011). To enable these students to fully realize their leadership potential, a comprehensive examination of the experiences they undergo, the obstacles they encounter, and the support they require is necessary (Demir, 2022; Karnes & Bean, 1990).

However, a review of the literature reveals that a significant portion of research on the leadership experiences of gifted students relies on quantitative methods (Akyurek, 2020; Chan, 2007; Edmunds & Yewchuk, 1996; Gecer et al., 2024; Kim, 2009; Lee et al., 2021b). While quantitative studies make important contributions by identifying the level of leadership skills and some related variables, they may be limited in explaining how students experience leadership and the meanings they ascribe to these experiences (Meyer & Rinn, 2021). Therefore, examining this phenomenon through qualitative research can contribute to a contextual and in-depth understanding of the leadership experiences of gifted students (Ogurlu & Sevim, 2017; Vidergor, 2020).

Meta-synthesis, a qualitative research method, is a robust approach that enables the systematic aggregation of findings from individual qualitative studies to construct a more holistic and in-depth understanding (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Thomas & Harden, 2008). However, a review of the literature reveals no meta-synthesis study that holistically addresses the leadership experiences of gifted students.

Although individual qualitative studies have documented these experiences in various contexts, their findings remain fragmented across different cultural settings, age groups, and educational programs, and have not yet been systematically integrated. This fragmentation makes it difficult to determine which individual and environmental conditions enable or constrain leadership in gifted students, and which pedagogical practices most effectively support their development. A meta-synthesis that consolidates this dispersed evidence is therefore needed. Addressing this gap, the aim of this research is to examine existing qualitative studies on the leadership experiences of gifted students using the meta-synthesis method, thereby identifying the common themes, determining factors, and research trends in this field. It is anticipated that the findings will contribute to practices in gifted education and inform future research endeavors.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Leadership in Gifted Education

Leadership can be defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2025). In the context of gifted education, this process is associated with productive behaviors emerging from the combination of higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and task commitment (Renzulli, 2012). Within this framework, leadership is conceptualized as a multidimensional developmental process that not only relates to the cognitive superiority of these individuals but also encompasses the cultivation of their social and emotional skills and the support of their leadership potential (Cross, 2021; Renzulli, 2012). This perspective posits that social-emotional development and leadership education play a significant role in transforming the potential of gifted individuals into meaningful societal contributions.

To effectively cultivate the leadership potential of gifted students, it is essential to systematically observe these students from an early age and provide appropriate educational environments that support their individual characteristics (Bean & Karnes, 2015). On the other hand, leadership in the context of gifted students is not merely a phenomenon dependent on individual traits. Rather, it is a dynamic construct shaped by social interactions, experiences, and learning processes (Renzulli, 2016). This necessitates that the leadership experiences of gifted students be examined not only in terms of the level of leadership skills they possess, but also by considering the developmental processes of these skills and the contextual conditions in which they emerge.

Factors Influencing Leadership Development in Gifted Students

The literature indicates that factors influencing leadership development in gifted students are addressed within the framework of individual and environmental variables (Gagné, 2004; Gecer et al., 2024; Subotnik et al., 2011). Among the individual factors, characteristics such as social-emotional skills, self-regulation, empathy, and motivation are noted to play a significant role in the emergence of leadership behaviors (Bean & Karnes, 2015; Muda & Kamaluddin, 2025; Mukhametkairov et al., 2025).

Environmental factors, on the other hand, encompass elements such as family support, teacher guidance, the school environment, and the leadership opportunities provided to students (Lee et al., 2021a; Miedijensky, 2025; Yu & Kuo, 2026). In this context, it is noted that enriched educational programs and student-centered practices, in particular, support the development of responsibility-taking and decision-making skills in gifted students (Brown et al., 2022; Yoon et al., 2020).

Furthermore, research indicates that the presence of role models and peer interactions can also be decisive in the development of leadership behaviors (Bean & Karnes, 2015; Muda & Kamaluddin, 2025).

In conclusion, it can be stated that explaining the leadership development of gifted students solely on the basis of individual characteristics is insufficient; rather, this development is shaped within a reciprocal and dynamic interaction process between individual traits and environmental conditions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For many years, leadership was predominantly conceptualized as a phenomenon explained through individual traits and innate inclinations. The great man theory, which emerged in the 19th century, posited that leaders are born with specific characteristics that distinguish them from other individuals. This approach regarded leadership as an inherent ability (Northouse, 2025; Spector, 2016; Yukl, 2013). Subsequently, the trait approach similarly emphasized the innate nature of leadership, attempting to explain it through individual qualities such as personality traits, intelligence, charisma, and self-confidence. During these periods, the debate over whether leaders are “born or made” persisted as a prominent topic in the literature (Judge et al., 2009; Kalish & Luria, 2021; Zaccaro, 2007).

Contemporary approaches have rejected the claims that leadership is innate, asserting that an individual's cognitive and personality traits cannot serve as the sole criterion in this context. These approaches propose that leadership is a developmental process shaped by the interaction of elements such as social interactions, educational experiences, and cultural context (Day et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2020). Accordingly, leadership is now recognized not as a fixed trait, but as a dynamic construct that evolves over time, deepens through experience, and is influenced by environmental factors (Maritsa et al., 2022; McCauley & Palus, 2020).

An examination of the literature within the context of gifted education reveals no assertion directly supporting the assumption of “innate leadership.” Instead, it is noted that high cognitive capacity combined with personality traits constitutes a potential for leadership. However, for this potential to be transformed into actual leadership behavior, environmental conditions, planned educational interventions, and social experiences are necessary (Bean & Karnes, 2015; Gagné, 2004; Meyer & Rinn, 2021). In this context, Subotnik et al. (2011) state that without the provision of systematic and structured support mechanisms for gifted students, their inherent leadership potential may not translate into high-level performance.

When examining theoretical approaches to the concept of leadership, it is understood that leadership is defined as a relational process. According to this perspective,

leadership is not merely the ability to direct or establish authority, but rather the capacity to communicate effectively with others, foster collaboration around shared goals, share responsibility, and manage group processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Wood & Dibben, 2015). This viewpoint reveals that, in educational settings, leadership is more closely associated with social interaction and co-construction processes than with individual achievement (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Helstad & Møller, 2013). In the context of gifted students, this underscores that leadership must be evaluated in conjunction with characteristics such as academic performance, social skills, empathy, taking responsibility, and ethical sensitivity (Abu Bakar et al., 2014; Demircelik et al., 2017).

It can be asserted that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in the leadership development of gifted students (Smyth & Ross, 1999). Systematic reviews in the field of leadership development highlight the importance of the transformational leadership approach in identifying and cultivating leadership skills in gifted children (Meyer & Rinn, 2021).

Leadership is also recognized as a process intertwined with identity development. Particularly during adolescence, individuals begin to reflect on how they are perceived and what role they wish to assume within society (Lerner et al., 2015). In this process, leadership experiences can contribute to the development of students' self-efficacy perceptions, sense of responsibility, and awareness of their social roles (McCarron et al., 2023; Owen, 2023). Therefore, leadership is not merely a set of skills but is also connected to an individual's process of self-definition and positioning within the social world (Epitropaki et al., 2017). This developmental and relational view is further illuminated by social cognitive theory, which holds that perceived self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute the actions required to manage given situations—is a central determinant of whether individuals choose to take on challenging roles, how much effort they sustain, and how they cope with setbacks (Bandura, 1997). Applied to leadership, this framework suggests that the willingness of gifted students to assume leadership roles depends not only on their abilities but also on their efficacy beliefs, which are shaped by mastery experiences, social modeling, and feedback from teachers and peers. This perspective is particularly relevant for interpreting the findings of the present study regarding self-confidence and anxiety as conditions enabling or constraining leadership. Beyond the individual's self-efficacy beliefs, the broader cultural context also plays a critical role in shaping leadership perceptions and practices.

Culture is another critical element that shapes leadership practices by establishing behavioral norms within organizations (Hanges et al., 2016). In leadership processes, employees' perceptions and practices of leadership, as well as leader-follower interactions, are influenced by the broader societal culture. This dynamic relationship between leadership and culture leads to a

diversification of leadership approaches across different countries (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024). In the leadership development of gifted students, the cultural dimension also causes perceptions and expectations of leadership to vary according to the cultural context. These differences subsequently impact the leadership skills and aspirations of gifted students (Lee et al., 2021a). For instance, a study by Lee et al. (2023) found that teachers in South Korea, Australia, and the United States evaluated the leadership abilities of gifted students differently.

Accordingly, while teachers in South Korea tended to associate leadership potential more with social harmony and group achievement, individual abilities and person-oriented characteristics were more prominent in Australia and the United States. In this context, it can be argued that cultural norms are a determining variable in shaping the leadership understandings of gifted students.

Considered holistically, it can be asserted that a multidimensional theoretical perspective is necessary to explain leadership in gifted students. This perspective views leadership as a developmental process emerging at the intersection of individual potential, social interaction, educational experience, and cultural context. Such a theoretical framework provides a crucial conceptual foundation for explaining the dynamics through which the leadership potential of gifted students emerges, the environmental and educational conditions under which it develops, and the contextual factors that may limit it.

Research Aim

This qualitative meta-synthesis study aims to examine the leadership experiences of gifted students from a multidimensional perspective. The research seeks to address approaches to the nature of leadership, how leadership is defined, students' leadership experiences, the conditions under which leadership emerges, factors limiting leadership development, and recommendations for cultivating leadership skills. In line with this objective, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What approaches to the nature of leadership in gifted students are prominent in the literature?
2. How is leadership defined and conceptualized in the context of gifted students in the literature?
3. How do gifted students experience leadership?
4. Under what individual, social, and educational conditions do leadership behaviors emerge in gifted students?
5. What factors limit or suppress the development of leadership in gifted students?
6. Based on findings in the literature, what educational practices are recommended for developing leadership skills in gifted students?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed the meta-synthesis method to examine the leadership experiences of gifted students from a multidimensional perspective. Meta-synthesis is a research method used to systematically aggregate findings from individual qualitative studies, aiming to construct a more comprehensive and integrative understanding (Walsh & Downe, 2005). This method serves as the qualitative counterpart to quantitative meta-analysis, interpretively synthesizing the findings of multiple qualitative studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The meta-synthesis process involves reinterpretation of themes, concepts, and relationships identified in the findings of the reviewed studies, leading to the development of a higher-level conceptual understanding. In this study, the meta-synthesis process was conducted based on the meta-ethnographic approach of Noblit and Hare (1988) and the qualitative meta-synthesis framework of Sandelowski and Barroso (2007).

Selection of Studies

In this study, the research process was conducted systematically, with a literature review carried out across three databases: Scopus ($n = 427$), Web of Science ($n = 247$), and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses ($n = 357$). Various combinations of terms corresponding to the concept of giftedness—such as “gifted,” “talented,” “high ability,” “gifted student,” and “gifted child”—along with terms corresponding to leadership—such as “leadership,” “leadership development,” “leadership experience,” and “leadership skill”—were used in the search. The search was limited to studies published in English.

The studies were selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria required that the studies:

- (a) employed a qualitative research method,
- (b) involved participants who were gifted students,
- (c) focused directly on leadership experiences, perceptions, behaviors, or leadership development,
- (d) included participants under the age of 18, and
- (e) were published as articles in peer-reviewed journals or as doctoral/master's theses.

Conversely, the exclusion criteria encompassed studies that:

- (a) used quantitative or mixed methods,
- (b) involved participants who were not gifted,
- (c) did not focus on leadership,
- (d) included participants aged 18 and over, and
- (e) were not peer-reviewed.

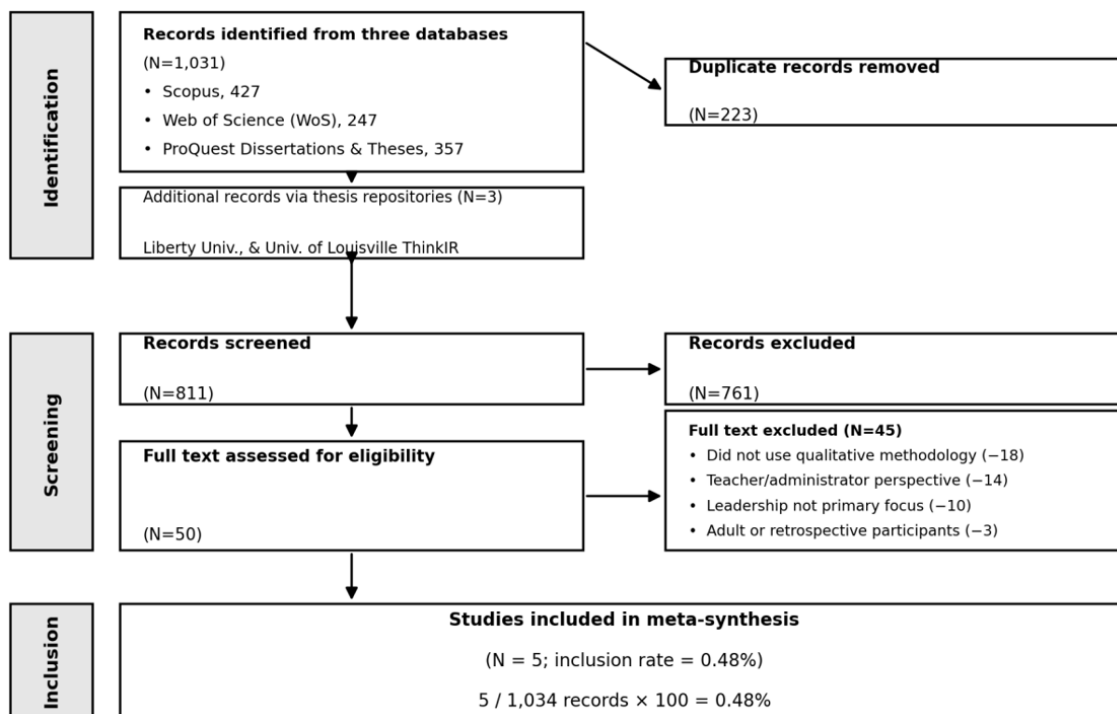


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram (adapted from Page et al., 2021)

The study selection process was conducted in four stages following the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. In the identification phase, a total of 1,031 records were identified across the three databases (Scopus = 427, Web of Science = 247, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses = 357). An additional three studies were identified through institutional thesis repositories (Liberty University and University of Louisville ThinkIR), bringing the total to 1,034 records. Of the 1,034 records identified, 223 duplicate records were removed, leaving 811 unique studies for screening. During the screening and eligibility assessment phase, 761 records were excluded based on title and abstract screening. The remaining 50 studies were assessed for eligibility through full-text review. Subsequently, 45 studies were excluded from the research scope.

The reasons for exclusion were: 18 studies did not use qualitative methodology; 14 did not focus on student leadership experiences (focusing instead on teacher or administrator perspectives); 10 did not have leadership as a primary focal point; and 3 included adult or retrospective participants over the age of 18. In the final stage, five studies that met all the criteria were included in the meta-synthesis. Accordingly, the inclusion rate was calculated as 0.48% (5/1,034). The PRISMA flow diagram for this process is presented in **Figure 1**.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in a multi-stage and systematic manner. In the first stage, each study included in the meta-synthesis was examined in detail. Within this scope, the methodological characteristics, participant profiles, data collection methods, and main findings of the studies were carefully read and systematically recorded

using a standardized data extraction form. This process was carried out to ensure a holistic understanding of the studies and to create a comparable dataset.

In the second stage, thematic coding was performed. During the coding process, dimensions such as the type of qualitative methodology used, participant characteristics, leadership focus, main themes and findings, student perspectives, social context and identity factors, motivations and barriers, and developmental processes were taken into consideration (**Table 1**). This stage facilitated the identification of conceptual patterns across the studies. Although the coding was carried out by a single researcher, several strategies were employed to enhance its consistency and trustworthiness. The data were re-coded at different points in time and the resulting codes were compared with one another to check for stability, ambiguous or inconsistent codes were re-examined and refined through repeated readings of the source studies, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions was maintained throughout the process.

In the third stage, cross-case synthesis was first employed to group the themes derived from individual studies in accordance with the research questions. Subsequently, the similarities, differences, and potential contradictions among the studies were analyzed. During this process, the reciprocal translation and line of argument synthesis techniques, as proposed within Noblit and Hare's (1988) meta-ethnography approach, were utilized. This ensured conceptual coherence across the five studies and strengthened the explanatory structure.

In the fourth stage, the findings obtained through cross-case synthesis were structured to correspond to the six main research questions, leading to the development of

Table 1. Coding scheme

Theme	Category	Code
Research methodology	Qualitative approach	• Phenomenology, case study • Grounded theory • Ethnography, content analysis
Participant characteristics	Data collection method	• Interviews • Focus groups • Written reflections, documents
Participant characteristics	Gifted definitions age group	• Gifted, talented, high ability • Children, adolescents • Age range
Leadership focus	Leadership experiences/perceptions leadership development	• Responsibility, motivation • Barriers, social context • Identity formation
Key findings	Major themes student perspectives social context & identity factors	• Grouped by key themes in studies • Self-views • Peer dynamics • External influence • Motivation factors • Developmental processes • Obstacles & challenges

higher-order themes and a conceptual framework. This stage enabled the findings to be organized at a more abstract and conceptual level.

In the final stage, an interpretive synthesis was conducted, bringing together all themes and sub-findings from a holistic perspective. Thus, a comprehensive, integrative, and interpretive synthesis regarding the leadership experiences of gifted students was presented. In this process, an in-depth analysis was carried out that considered not only thematic similarities but also developmental, contextual, and identity-based dynamics.

Validity and Reliability

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. First, the literature was reviewed systematically using multiple databases, and studies were selected based on clear, pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process supports the transparency and replicability of the research.

Furthermore, adhering to the principle of transparency throughout all stages of the research, the analysis process, coding steps, theme development, and synthesis decisions were reported in detail. Additionally, to ensure methodological and contextual diversity, studies encompassing different qualitative research types, participant groups from diverse samples, and various social contexts were included in the meta-synthesis. This broadened the scope of the findings and enhanced their analytical depth.

Moreover, the research did not only focus on convergent findings but also paid attention to divergent results. In this context, negative case analysis was conducted, whereby contradictory findings were systematically examined and reported. Finally, the findings were presented with detailed and rich descriptions, preserving their contextual characteristics. This strengthened the interpretive validity of the research.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Included Studies

The studies within the scope of this meta-synthesis were conducted in different countries, across various educational levels, and employed diverse qualitative research designs. The study by Vidergor (2020), conducted in Israel with 24 gifted elementary school students, was designed as a qualitative case study, collecting data through semi-structured interviews, written reflective logs, and a future scenario product. Begnaud (1999) conducted a case study in the United States with gifted 5th grade students, collecting data through an eight-month observation period. In Turkey, Ogurlu and Sevim (2017) employed qualitative content analysis with 65 gifted middle school students, gathering data through focus group interviews. Behrend (2013) utilized a phenomenological design in the United States with seven gifted 11th and 12th grade students and three teachers, collecting data via in-depth interviews. While Behrend's (2013) primary focus was on the self-perceptions of high-achieving and underachieving gifted students in relation to their learning environments, the study yields important indirect evidence regarding leadership: teacher expectations, supportive feedback, and classroom dynamics emerge as decisive contextual factors shaping students' leadership behaviors and motivations. Similarly, George (2018) conducted a phenomenological study involving ten 6th to 8th grade African American male students, collecting data through semi-structured interviews and photo-assisted focus group interviews. Although George's (2018) primary focus was on the lived experiences of gifted African American males within gifted programs—encompassing representation, racial identity, and peer dynamics—leadership emerged as a central theme through students' identity negotiations, self-efficacy beliefs, and resistance strategies, making the study directly relevant to understanding the cultural and social

Table 2. Studies included in the meta-synthesis

Code	Author(s) and year	Country	Participants	Grade level	Method	Data collection
N001	Vidergor (2020)	Israel	24 gifted students	Primary school	Qualitative case study	Semi-structured interviews, reflective logs, scenario product
N005	Begnaud (1999)	United States	Gifted students	5 th grade	Qualitative case study	8-month observation
N006	Ogurlu and Sevim (2017)	Turkey	65 gifted students	Middle school	Qualitative content analysis	Focus group interviews
N015	Behrend (2013)	United States	7 gifted students + 3 teachers	High school (grades 11-12)	Phenomenology	In-depth interviews
N016	George (2018)	United States	10 African American male students	Grades 6-8	Phenomenology	Semi-structured interviews; photo-elicitation focus group

dimensions of leadership development in gifted minority students.

When these studies are evaluated collectively, it is evident that qualitative research conducted in diverse contexts and with methodological variety forms the foundation of this meta-synthesis (Table 2).

Prominent Approaches to the Nature of Leadership in Gifted Students

Based on the findings of the five studies included in this meta-synthesis, three primary approaches to the nature of leadership in gifted students emerge:

- (1) leadership as an innate trait,
- (2) leadership as a developable skill, and
- (3) leadership as a socially constructed process.

The findings indicate that these perspectives offer complementary frameworks, elucidating different dimensions of leadership.

The innate trait approach posits that certain individuals are born with leadership potential. This perspective is supported by a statement from Betty, the teacher of a student named Hallie in Begnaud's (1999) study: "I haven't taught Hallie anything about leadership abilities; she's got it." Similarly, in the study by Ogurlu and Sevim (2017), some students expressed views aligning with this approach. For instance, student S60 stated, "Leadership is a genetic trait; it is inborn."

The developable skill approach argues that leadership can be cultivated through appropriate educational interventions, structured programs, and experiential learning processes. Vidergor's (2020) multidimensional curriculum model, within which students achieved systematic gains in leadership skills, supports this view. In this context, one student's reflection, "problem solving stages showed me how I can take the knowledge on leadership and define a specific problem and then solve it," illustrates that leadership can be developed through planned activities. Furthermore, in the research by Ogurlu and Sevim (2017), some students expressed the belief that leadership can be discovered and developed through education. For example, student S29 noted that he agreed with the idea of leadership training in schools "because people with leadership potential can develop their skills."

The socially constructed process approach contends that leadership is shaped within its specific social, cultural,

and historical context. In his study, George (2018) examined the leadership experiences of gifted African American students in relation to their racial identity, the discrimination they faced, and the resistance strategies they developed in response. The findings of this study demonstrate that leadership emerges not merely from individual traits but as a product of societal conditions and identity negotiations. Additionally, Brad's experience in Begnaud's (1999) research illustrates how leadership is established within social interaction. Brad described the idea-development process he shared with his peers, stating, "Sometimes you lead, sometimes you follow, but you're all going the right way!" This articulates that leadership is not a fixed role but a reciprocal, relational, and collective process within a group.

Definition and Conceptualization of Leadership in the Context of Gifted Students

The studies included in this meta-synthesis reveal that leadership, in the context of gifted students, is approached within a framework that is relational, value-based, transformational, and identity-centered. The findings indicate that definitions of leadership focus less on abstract lists of traits and more on concrete behaviors, ethical stances, and patterns of social interaction.

The research emphasizes relational and value-based conceptualizations. In Begnaud's (1999) study, the emergence of leadership across themes such as knowing self, building relationships, planning, and evaluating can be assessed within this scope. In that study, students defined a good leader as "someone who cares, shares, cooperates, is helpful, considerate, diplomatic, influential, decisive, and fair to all parties." This definition is a concrete indicator of leadership being linked to ethical responsibility and social sensitivity. Concurrently, teachers in the same study attempted to explain leadership through characteristics such as independent thinking, self-discipline, self-confidence, being a role model, problem-solving, open-mindedness, curiosity, and motivation. Similarly, in George's (2018) research, leadership was associated with traits like being successful and responsible. In this study, a student named Allen explained the importance of succeeding with these words: "To be an African American male, you've gotta do well. It might be challenging down the road, but you gotta get through it. Once you become successful, it'll all pay off." Benjamin, on the other hand,

expressed that leadership is a collective responsibility, stating: "So being one of the only Black kids in the class, you have to do your best for all the kids that are not in there." These findings demonstrate that leadership is conceptualized through character-based and behavioral dimensions.

Resilience and identity-based conceptualizations shed light on the socio-cultural dimension of leadership. In this context, in George's (2018) study, gifted African American students defined leadership not merely as individual achievement or a sphere of influence, but also as a struggle for representation and justice. A student's remark, "We are tired of being underrepresented," serves as an example of this definition. From this perspective, leadership functions as a tool for developing resilience in defending collective identity and combating structural inequalities.

Leadership Experiences of Gifted Students

The studies examined within this meta-synthesis reveal that the leadership experiences of gifted students constitute a dynamic process shaped within the framework of personal awareness, social interaction, and identity construction. The findings emphasize that knowledge, responsibility, and contextual sensitivity underline the leadership experiences of gifted students.

On a cognitive level, the leadership experience reveals that students interpret leadership as a multi-layered knowledge structure and a reflection of academic achievement. In this regard, a student participating in the leadership course based on Vidergor's (2020) multidimensional curriculum model stated: "Most of the characteristics great leaders had in the past are also relevant today. But today leaders need some extra characteristics like good looks, better verbal skills, and knowing how to use computers and media." This perspective indicates that leadership is evaluated from a historical and contextual viewpoint. Furthermore, based on this view, it can be said that students reinterpret leadership within temporal transformation and associate it with contextually appropriate skills.

The relationship between academic achievement and leadership is clearly evident in participant statements. In Behrend's (2013) study, Monica expressed:

"I try to do outside activities because colleges like to see that as well as your academics. And then I made sure I'd stick with these things for at least two to four years; I know colleges don't like to see you start something and then drop out. I make sure I take the right classes so when I go to college I'll have enough AP courses, I'll be in the top ten, and my GPA is high enough."

Additionally, in George's (2018) study, Amari shared:

"I feel I'm a pretty intelligent person. I've always liked school and it's not really ever been hard for me. I

think my work ethic is pretty good. I'm proud I could say that I'm in a gifted program."

Furthermore, Allen, viewing academic success as an element of identity, stated: "Just any academic achievement like doing well on a test or doing good on any work, I see it more as an accomplishment, where others might see it as just an everyday grade. Just even small grades, I see them as really big accomplishments."

The dimension of responsibility and impact in the leadership experience manifests as a powerful life motivator for some students. In this context, the motivation observed in students appears to be fueled by external expectations, and they act with a sense of responsibility to meet these expectations. In Behrend's (2013) research, a student named George articulated this: "Since I'm a basketball player, people look towards me to be a certain type of person." For him, basketball served as a source of motivation that made him want to "do better than just pass those classes."

Conversely, for some students, the leadership experience is closely related to feelings of exclusion and perceptions of fairness. In Begnaud's (1999) study, Elise voiced the inequality in leadership opportunities: "Why is it that the quiet ones end up being the followers, but the loud ones get to be the leader even if the quieter one would do a better job?" The same student also commented on the permanence of leadership roles in specific individuals: "Everybody thinks that once they are a leader, they'll always be the leader, and they never give anybody else a chance." These views indicate that the leadership experience cannot be explained solely by individual competencies; it is also related to group dynamics, visibility, and perceived fairness.

Cultural and identity-based experiences are considered an influential factor complicating the leadership process. Curtis, a participant in George's (2018) study, articulated the dilemma of being a gifted African American student: "There are African American gifted males in this world and I feel like we shouldn't be overlooked. We should be welcomed. We should be accepted. We should have opportunities. We should have more support. I would say as a whole we are tired of being underrepresented." This statement highlights that the leadership experience is intertwined with identity and social acceptance processes.

On the other hand, some gifted students experience leadership through lack of self-confidence and social anxiety. In the study by Ogurlu and Sevim (2017), student S14's anxieties regarding leadership are evident: "I do not want. I think it might be difficult. I am not sure that I can control others when I become a leader. I am afraid that they would not listen to me." Additionally, in George's (2018) study, Philip's experience with bullying clearly reveals the feelings of exclusion in teamwork. On this matter, the student stated:

"They called me 21 savage. It just made me really sad. I just didn't feel accepted in a group where everyone else didn't like me and I was trying to participate in

something where we all had to work together as a team.”

These views demonstrate the existence of students among the gifted population who experience vulnerability in the context of social leadership.

Under What Individual, Social, and Educational Conditions Do Leadership Behaviors Emerge in Gifted Students?

The studies within the scope of this meta-synthesis indicate that leadership behavior in gifted students does not emerge spontaneously but develops through the interaction of elements such as the social environment and educational opportunities. The findings reveal that personal experiences, family and peer support, enriched learning environments, and teacher attitudes are decisive factors behind the emergence of leadership behavior.

The research results show that social conditions, particularly family support, play a significant role in the leadership development of gifted students. In George's (2018) study, Chris expressed that his family has high expectations and constantly encourages him to do better, stating: “My whole family pushes me, my mom pushes me a lot too and my dad would be like, you did this, but you can go higher.” Conversely, in Begnaud's (1999) study, the criticisms from Barbara's mother regarding the enrichment program for gifted students highlight that student motivation can be negatively affected in situations where family support is limited. These findings reveal that the family environment is an important variable that can either support or limit leadership development.

Peer interactions are considered an influential factor in the emergence of leadership behaviors in gifted students. A student in Behrend's (2013) research expressed the impact of being in an environment with gifted students by saying, “Wow! These people are so smart. I want to be just like them.” Similarly, in Begnaud's (1999) study, it was stated that in a separate classroom environment where gifted students were homogeneously grouped, students could express their ideas more freely and a learning climate based on mutual respect could be established. On this matter, Penny, a teacher in Behrend's (2013) study, also expressed:

“To be completely honest, I think that in this day and this time that's the only way kids who are gifted can excel higher [by being in homogeneous classes], and kids who are the lower-level learners can get the help that they need as well [by being grouped in homogeneous classes with peers of like ability]. So if you group these kids together [gifted and regular students in inclusive classes], the lower-level kids will feel defeated, they'll feel like they can't comprehend it, whereas the higher-level kids will be so bored, if you take down a notch – it will be something that's very redundant and very boring for them.”

These findings demonstrate that the quality of the peer group is an important factor in making leadership behaviors visible.

The research results indicate that enriched instructional programs are of great importance in the development of leadership behaviors. In practices based on Vidergor's (2020) multidimensional curriculum model, students had the opportunity to experience leadership skills practically through activities such as thought maps, problem-solving processes, and future scenarios. Similarly, in Begnaud's (1999) study, it was found that activities like shadow puppetry, dissection, and company simulations developed students' collaboration, planning, and responsibility-taking skills. In this study, a student's comment, “It was not a mistake, it was an opportunity for discovery,” shows that these activities supported risk-taking and the learning process. This situation reveals that leadership behaviors can be observed more clearly in structured and experience-based learning environments.

It can also be said that teacher attitudes and expectations are an important element in the emergence of leadership behaviors in gifted students. In Behrend's (2013) research, a student expressed their teachers' high expectations by saying, “Every teacher I have this year expects the students to do something great, to go to college. And I want to be in that group – to do the best I can,” and stated that these views increased their motivation. Similarly, in George's (2018) study, Curtis's views highlight the importance of teacher support:

“Ms. J, she's been one of those people who, you'll be having a bad day, or you'll just be in need of a friend, or support, and she'll just say something to you, and it'll motivate you to do something or brighten your day. She's one of those people who are just a constant support system.”

These statements show that teachers play roles not only as academic, but also as emotional and social support providers.

Factors Limiting or Suppressing Leadership Development in Gifted Students

The five studies examined within this meta-synthesis reveal that leadership development in gifted students is shaped by a set of barriers operating at individual, institutional, and cultural levels. The findings indicate that the factors limiting the emergence of leadership behaviors stem from reasons such as individual psychological anxieties, teacher attitudes, inequality of opportunity, and cultural prejudices.

Individual psychological barriers are among the most significant factors restricting leadership development. In particular, anxiety about taking responsibility, fear of failure, and perfectionist tendencies can lead students to avoid assuming leadership roles. In this context, the views of student S39 in Ogurlu and Sevim's (2017) study, “It requires a significant responsibility and being perfect. I do

not want to take that responsibility,” and student S57’s statement, “There are a lot of responsibilities, and I can’t take such responsibility,” reveal the anxiety experienced by gifted students. Similarly, Curtis’s reflections in George’s (2018) research also highlight this situation:

“I was really discouraged at the beginning of 7th grade. My GPA dropped. It went from 4.0, to 3.4, to 3.2. It went up after the first few grading periods. I felt like some of the small things, they eventually get to you and it’s like, why am I even trying when I feel like I’m not gonna get anywhere?”

Institutional and systemic barriers are also significant elements limiting the development of gifted students. In Behrend’s (2013) study, a teacher told George to “just drop her class and take an easier class where they just let you get by,” adding that she “didn’t think [he] could change.” Such low-expectation messages exemplify how teacher attitudes can communicate doubt about gifted students’ potential, even when individual students manage to overcome them. Similarly, in George’s (2018) research, Chris drew attention to perceived differential treatment by teachers, explaining that he feels accepted only when treated the same as everyone else:

“If a teacher wanted them to work harder, but didn’t really care for me as much, and didn’t want me to work as hard, then that makes me feel like I’m not accepted, because it feels like you’re really not in it, I guess.”

These statements reveal how implicit biases can manifest in the classroom and how students perceive differential treatment. On the other hand, issues arising from the unequal distribution of leadership opportunities within institutional practices are also evident. For example, Erin’s statement in Begnaud’s (1999) study serves as an illustration: “Sometimes in my regular class, I don’t get a chance to be a leader because they think I get a lot of chances at GT.”

Cultural and racial prejudices appear to significantly and negatively impact leadership development, particularly for gifted students belonging to minority groups. In this regard, Felix in George’s (2018) study expressed his feeling of exclusion: “We had to pick groups and nobody would pick a group with me. I would just work alone sometimes. Sometimes my friends wouldn’t include anybody of my race.” In the same study, although Allen had not personally experienced such a situation, he did not dismiss the possibility, as is clear from his words: “It might not be now, but maybe later you’ll come across people that’ll see you differently because of your skin color, but you can’t let what they say determine your future.” Furthermore, students in the same study recounted having their academic competence implicitly questioned through remarks such as “Why are you in this GT class?” and “I thought you had to pass the GT test to get into this class, or did someone take it for you?” Such experiences can create feelings of

invisibility and exclusion in students, thereby diminishing their desire to assume leadership roles.

The nature of the classroom environment is also a significant factor in the leadership development of gifted students. Behrend’s (2013) research suggests that the mismatch between the learning pace and expectations of gifted students in heterogeneous classrooms can limit leadership behavior. On this point, one student stated: “People were talking. We weren’t getting things done... I could see a difference in how I learn and how the others learn.” In this context, Carl’s emphasis in the same study, highlighting the separate education of gifted and other students in homogeneous classrooms with the phrase “... not necessarily somebody slowing them down at all,” reflects the potential disadvantages heterogeneous classrooms may pose for gifted students.

Educational Practices Recommended for Developing Leadership Skills in Gifted Students

The studies included in this meta-synthesis emphasize that the development of leadership skills in gifted students should be supported through systematic, structured, and inclusive educational practices. The findings reveal that leadership development is related to the quality of the learning environment, teacher attitudes, peer interaction, and the practical opportunities afforded to students.

The research generally highlights that learning environments grouped by ability support leadership development. In this regard, Carl, a teacher in Behrend’s (2013) study, stated: “I think gifted classes should pretty much be on the same level. They’re probably going to get challenged more overall, and they’re going to engage in more stimulating conversations consistently.” Additionally, a student in the same study expressed: “I definitely think it’s better to be in a class with peers like you because it makes you want to learn and you become self-confident.” These views indicate that interaction with peers of a similar cognitive level positively impacts self-efficacy perceptions and leadership behavior. Similarly, Begnaud’s (1999) research found that students in homogeneous groups were able to express their ideas more freely and assume leadership roles more easily.

Enriched and practice-based programs are considered a crucial element in developing the leadership skills of gifted students. In this context, Vidergor’s (2020) study revealed how a leadership course based on the multidimensional curriculum model enhanced students’ leadership skills and self-confidence. On the other hand, Begnaud’s (1999) study notes that practices where students take active responsibility in their learning processes positively affect planning, cooperation, responsibility-taking, and decision-making skills. In this context, Lucy, a teacher in Behrend’s (2013) study, highlighted the importance of practice-based programs by stating, “Another way to motivate a gifted learner is to provide opportunities and experiences to explore how much further they can push their envelope.” Furthermore, it is evident that giving students real

responsibilities and ensuring they take an active role in projects and teamwork is of great importance for leadership development. In the research by Ogurlu and Sevim (2017), it was determined that students believed their leadership skills developed through activities such as teamwork, role-playing activities, club activities, and project work. In this regard, student S37 stated: "Role play and teamwork can help future leaders to develop their skills."

The role and attitudes of teachers are also shown to be fundamental elements supporting the leadership development of gifted students. Behrend (2013) found that teachers' high expectation levels, supportive feedback, and role-modeling behaviors directly influence students' leadership levels. In this context, Betty articulated the teacher's impact, stating:

"And some teachers kind of make you want to do well so you have to keep up with what you're going to do. Some teachers make you feel like you don't want to be the one who doesn't do as well as others."

Additionally, Monica's views clearly demonstrate the influence of teachers in this regard:

"With teachers it makes a difference about what you want to do. Like that history class [a class she had mentioned earlier that she found quite boring] – I hated going to that class every single day. So teachers make a big difference to me if they motivate you."

The creation of inclusive and identity-affirming learning environments is particularly important for gifted students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. George (2018) determined that the recognition and validation of students' ethnic and cultural identities increase the self-confidence of gifted students in assuming leadership roles. Conversely, the same research shows that students often face being ignored, which negatively affects their motivation. In the study, Allen's drawing, associated with the concept of "invisibility," illustrates how gifted African American male students perceive themselves as disconnected and invisible members of the gifted classroom. During the focus group interview regarding this drawing, comments such as Lee's "Does the teacher even see me?" and Curtis's "I'm tired of being overlooked" underscore the need for inclusive practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this meta-synthesis support the developmental and multifaceted nature of leadership. Early leadership theories, which historically explained leadership through innate traits (Northouse, 2025; Spector, 2016; Yukl, 2013), have limited explanatory power in the context of gifted students. The findings reveal that leadership cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics; rather, it is a developmental process shaped by the interaction of

elements such as cognitive capacity, personality traits, social experiences, and educational opportunities. This finding supports Gagné's (2004) differentiated model of giftedness and talent, according to which natural abilities can only be transformed into competencies through systematic education, social experience, and environmental catalysts. Furthermore, this finding aligns with modern leadership theories that conceptualize leadership as a dynamic construct developing over time rather than a fixed trait (Day et al., 2014; Maritsa et al., 2022; McCauley & Palus, 2020).

Moreover, the meta-synthesis findings reveal that leadership for gifted students is not a linear or purely empowering experience. Leadership is experienced as an emotionally complex process oscillating between empowerment, vulnerability, the burden of responsibility, and the weight of visibility. These experiences challenge the assumption that gifted students inherently possess "natural leader" potential. The tendency of some gifted students to avoid leadership, particularly due to a lack of self-confidence and fear of responsibility, demonstrates that leadership is not solely related to cognitive capacity. This emotional complexity is highlighted in several studies. For instance, Yusof et al. (2015) found that despite possessing high leadership traits, gifted students in Malaysia encountered problems such as low motivation, lack of confidence, and emotional issues. Additionally, Lee et al. (2021b) noted that gifted students' beliefs regarding their own leadership efficacy are underexplored, representing a significant gap in the literature. In this context, it can be argued that the leadership potential of gifted students may not fully emerge unless supported socially and emotionally (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006; Muda & Kamaluddin, 2025). This emotional dimension can be situated within the emotional intelligence framework, which conceptualizes the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate one's own and others' emotions as a set of abilities distinct from cognitive intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). From this perspective, the self-confidence and anxiety that surfaced in the present synthesis are not peripheral to leadership but central to it: the ability to manage performance anxiety, tolerate the discomfort of visibility, and remain attuned to group emotions is itself part of the leadership capacity. Read alongside social cognitive theory, this suggests that gifted students' reluctance to lead often reflects low leadership self-efficacy rather than an absence of ability (Bandura, 1997), reinforcing the view that social-emotional support is a precondition—not an optional supplement—for leadership development.

Another notable finding concerns the perception of leadership as a relational process. The findings indicate that students define leadership not merely as directing or establishing authority, but as the capacity to communicate, foster collaboration, share responsibility, and manage group processes. This finding aligns with approaches that define leadership as a process based on social interaction (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Wood & Dibben, 2015). Furthermore, the literature emphasizes that in educational settings,

leadership is also associated with social capital generation, empathetic communication, and collective problem-solving skills (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Helstad & Møller, 2013). In the context of gifted students, this underscores that leadership is a multidimensional construct not limited to academic achievement (Riggio, 2024; Riggio & Reichard, 2008). In parallel with the literature, the findings reveal that gifted students associate leadership with honesty, empathy, ethics, responsibility, and social contribution.

One of the most striking findings of this study pertains to the experience of exclusion, particularly among gifted African American students in the United States. Social stereotypes and prejudices can hinder these students' access to leadership roles. This dynamic can be understood in part through the concept of stereotype threat, the risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one's group, which has been shown to depress the performance and engagement of stigmatized students even when ability is held constant (Steele & Aronson, 1995). For gifted minority students, the prospect of occupying a visible leadership role may activate precisely this threat, adding an affective burden that their majority-group peers do not carry. This points to a paradox of visibility: while leadership ordinarily makes gifted students more visible and recognized, for minority students heightened visibility can become a source of scrutiny and pressure rather than affirmation, such that the very prominence leadership confers is experienced as a burden of representation. The literature indicates that despite high standardized test scores, these students are often underrepresented in gifted programs due to teacher biases and racial discrimination, and those living in rural areas face challenges such as social isolation and cultural invisibility (Davis et al., 2020; Grissom & Redding, 2015). Such circumstances make it difficult for these students to enact leadership roles (Ford, 2014; Terzian, 2021). However, despite these challenges, the fact that these students position leadership within the framework of representation and the struggle for justice can be interpreted as an indicator that they exhibit transformational leadership behaviors. Concurrently, the literature contains findings indicating that transformational leadership programs enhance the leadership behaviors of gifted students (Meyer & Rinn, 2021; Smyth & Ross, 1999). In this context, transformational leadership programs could potentially enable gifted students to cope with these disadvantaged situations more effectively.

A further finding that warrants discussion concerns the role of ability grouping in leadership development. The data from Behrend (2013) and Begnaud (1999) suggest that homogeneous grouping—placing gifted students together in dedicated classes or pullout programs—may create more conducive conditions for leadership emergence. Students reported that learning alongside intellectual peers enabled them to express ideas more freely, take on leadership roles with greater confidence, and engage in more stimulating academic discourse. This finding is consistent with a body of research demonstrating that ability grouping can positively influence the academic and social-emotional

development of gifted learners (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Rogers, 2007). However, it is important to approach this finding with nuance. Advocacy for homogeneous grouping as a universal solution carries significant social justice implications. As George (2018) illustrates, even within gifted programs, African American students can experience feelings of isolation, invisibility, and systemic exclusion—suggesting that the quality and inclusivity of the learning environment matter as much as its composition. Furthermore, ability grouping has been critiqued for its potential to deepen educational inequalities if not accompanied by equitable identification practices (Ford, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2015). Accordingly, homogeneous grouping should not be viewed as an end in itself but as one element within a broader framework of inclusive, culturally responsive gifted programming that actively supports the leadership development of all students, regardless of background.

In conclusion, the findings of this meta-synthesis support the multidimensional leadership model proposed in the theoretical framework. Leadership in gifted students is a dynamic process that emerges and develops at the intersection of individual potential, social interaction, pedagogical experiences, and cultural context. Therefore, fostering leadership development requires an environment where cognitive capacity, identity development, psychological safety, and cultural sensitivity can co-evolve. This research is significant as it elucidates the environment necessary for the leadership development of gifted students and reveals the diverse experiences of these students across different cultural contexts.

Implications

This research reveals that leadership development in gifted students does not occur spontaneously but represents a developmental domain requiring pedagogical support. Based on these findings, significant implications emerge for educational practices, teacher training, and educational policies.

Implications for educational programs

When evaluated in terms of educational programs, it is understood that curricula designed for gifted students should not focus solely on enhancing academic achievement. The findings indicate that leadership skills develop through opportunities for taking responsibility, decision-making, collaboration, and creating social impact. Therefore, to cultivate leadership skills in gifted students, activities involving genuine responsibilities—such as project-based learning, group work, peer collaboration, and community service initiatives—need to be systematically planned.

Implications for teacher training

In the context of teacher training, the findings highlight that teachers need support in areas such as recognizing leadership potential, structuring students' social interactions, providing feedback that encourages

leadership behaviors, and approaching individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds without prejudice. Consequently, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed, both in pre-service and in-service training, on topics related to the characteristics of gifted students, their social-emotional development, and the creation of inclusive classroom environments that enhance student participation.

Implications for educational policies

From the perspective of educational policies, it is deemed necessary to establish a prevailing understanding that supports the holistic development of gifted students to facilitate their leadership growth. Furthermore, the need for a long-term approach to planning practices that support leadership development is emphasized, along with an approach that ensures the integration of in-school and out-of-school learning experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the studies included in this meta-synthesis differ in their methodological characteristics, sample sizes, and contextual features. Furthermore, only studies meeting specific criteria were incorporated into this research. Out of the initial 1,034 records identified across three databases, only five met all inclusion criteria (inclusion rate: 0.48%), underscoring the scarcity of qualitative research on gifted students' leadership experiences. Additionally, the fact that the studies focused on specific age groups, educational programs, or particular cultural contexts limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that two of the five included studies—Behrend (2013) and George (2018)—did not investigate leadership as their primary focus. Behrend (2013) primarily examined gifted students' self-perceptions of their learning environments, while George (2018) focused on the lived experiences of gifted African American males in gifted programs. Leadership-related findings in these studies were interpreted within broader frameworks of academic self-efficacy, identity formation, and environmental conditions. This indirect engagement with leadership represents a limitation in the coherence of the evidence base and should be considered when interpreting the synthesized findings.

Another limitation is that the majority of the studies reviewed were conducted in the United States, and only studies published in English were included. This may have resulted in the exclusion of research conducted in other languages. Such a limitation highlights the risk of publication bias, which is often unavoidable in meta-synthesis studies.

Moreover, this study is based on findings interpreted by the original researchers. Consequently, the themes derived were obtained through the reflection of participant experiences via secondary interpretations. This underscores the need for caution in interpreting the findings.

Considering the scarcity of studies on the leadership development of gifted students, it is recommended that future research prioritize conducting more studies on this topic. Additionally, longitudinal research examining the leadership development of gifted students over time could make significant contributions to the literature. It is also suggested that mixed-methods of research, combining qualitative and quantitative data, be conducted in this area. Furthermore, comparative studies carried out in different cultural contexts could more clearly elucidate the role of culture in the leadership development of gifted students. Finally, intervention studies are needed to test the effectiveness of leadership development programs for gifted students. In particular, evaluating culturally responsive programs designed to support the leadership development of gifted students from minority backgrounds would address a significant gap in the literature and help translate the present findings into equitable practice.

CONCLUSION

This meta-synthesis study reveals that the leadership behaviors of gifted students do not emerge spontaneously but are shaped by the reciprocal interaction of social interactions and educational context. The findings demonstrate that leadership cannot be explained solely by cognitive superiority; rather, it gains meaning through dimensions such as taking responsibility, ethical sensitivity, and creating a positive impact on others.

The research shows that the leadership behaviors of gifted students are shaped by both empowering and challenging elements. While leadership develops aspects such as students' self-efficacy and visibility, it also encompasses emotional burdens like expectation pressure and performance anxiety. This is a concrete indicator that leadership can develop within supportive and psychologically safe learning environments.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the prejudices and experiences of being ignored that gifted African American students, particularly in the United States, encounter in their leadership experiences. In this respect, it can be said that leadership also represents a struggle for existence for these students. This situation is of great importance as it reveals the significant impact of the cultural environment on leadership development.

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