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Can learning experience in pharmacy school shape a competent leader? A cross-sectional study on leadership development, mental wellbeing, and Islamic values

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Abstract

Background and purpose: The contemporary healthcare landscape dictates that pharmacists demonstrate comprehensive leadership competencies alongside advanced clinical expertise to navigate complex patient-care environments effectively. While academic curricula and extracurricular engagements are recognized as primary mechanisms for cultivating these professional proficiencies, the psychological impact of assuming such roles—particularly the manifestation of academic burnout and stress—remains critically underexplored within the literature. This study investigates undergraduate pharmacy students' perceptions of how curricular

frameworks and extracurricular activities contribute to leadership development, concurrently evaluating the mental wellbeing of student leaders and exploring the mitigating influence of culturally integrated ethical frameworks on psychological resilience. Educational activity and setting: A cross-sectional study was conducted among undergraduate pharmacy students (Years 2 to 4) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The data collection instrument assessed leadership skills acquisition, perceptions of the pharmacy curriculum, the influence of extracurricular involvement, and eleven core leadership competencies. Mental well-being was assessed using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). Non-parametric statistical analyses, supplemented by the calculation of appropriate effect sizes, were employed to evaluate the data and determine practical significance. Findings: A total of 183 students responded; mostly female (63.9%) and in their final academic year (42.1%). A substantial majority (80.3%) affirmed that the formal academic curriculum facilitated their leadership development, although 53.8% advocated for the integration of dedicated, leadership-focused coursework. More than half of students reported moderate mental wellbeing (54.6%). Substantive differences in mental wellbeing were observed relative to the year of study, academic performance, intrinsic motivation to pursue pharmacy, and the volume of extracurricular participation, with these associations supported by moderate effect sizes. Discussion and summary: The findings elucidate the dual capacity of pharmacy curricula and extracurricular activities to foster essential leadership competencies while simultaneously highlighting the concurrent psychological demands placed on students. To optimize professional identity formation, pharmacy education programs must balance rigorous leadership training with robust, preemptive wellbeing support mechanisms. Furthermore, the integration of culturally specific paradigms, such as the Islamic concept of moderation (wasatiyyah), offers a valuable pedagogical framework for sustaining student resilience, preventing overcommitment, and navigating the complexities of modern pharmacy practice. © 2026

Author keywords

Curriculum; Extracurricular activities; Islamic values in pharmacy; Leadership; Malaysia; Mental health; Pharmacy students

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