

ABSTRACT

Early childhood experiences play a critical role in shaping and developing leadership in adulthood. Looking around us, we find teen leaders all around who eventually go on to bring meaningful change around them. Studies on leadership have been going on for decades. However, most of the research has emphasized on adult leadership behavior, thereby ignoring the leadership potential in young adults. We investigated the psychological foundations of leadership potential among young Indian adults through a multi-study, theory-driven investigation. Study 1, a qualitative exploration, sought to identify potential leadership markers among young adults through interviews and thematic analysis. Study 2 aimed to construct and validate a standardized psychometric tool for assessing leadership potential in the Indian context. Study 3 employed Structural Equation Modeling on a sample of 652 participants to examine the antecedents of leadership potential. Findings revealed that Epistemic Curiosity significantly predicted Growth Mindset and exerted a direct positive influence on Leadership Potential, indicating partial mediation. Additionally, Proactive Personality, Emotional Intelligence, and Grit emerged as key direct predictors, while Extraversion and Light Triad traits influenced leadership potential indirectly through proactivity. These findings suggest that leadership potential is shaped by an interplay of cognitive curiosity, moral orientation, emotional regulation, and behavioral initiative. The study contributes to leadership psychology by proposing an integrative model that connects curiosity, character, and competence as foundational components of leadership development. It further underscores the need for interventions that cultivate curiosity-driven learning, emotional intelligence, and proactive behavior among young adults aspiring to lead.

Keywords: Leadership potential, Young adults, Epistemic curiosity, Proactive personality, Emotional intelligence, Growth mindset