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Development of the Emotional Stability Seen as a Personal Leadership Quality Using the Acmeological Approach in the Master's Students

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify how the leadership training programme based on the acmeological approach for the Master's students influences the students' emotional stability and how that programme was perceived by graduates. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to yield data. The dimensions of emotional stability such as behavioural self-awareness, communication and conflict management, emotional and behavioural self-efficacy, adaptability, and self-programming of a positive mental attitude were used as variables in the study. Three qualitative and quantitative tools were used in the study. Those were the adapted and modified Emotional Stability Scale in the leadership context, the focus group interview, and the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software. The IBM SPSS Statistics (25.0.0.1) was used to compute the yielded data. The study found that the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled "Crisis-driven Leadership" based on the acmeological approach fostered a statistically significant improvement in the Master's students' emotional stability. Moreover, the graduates perceived the programme positively and could more or less accurately explain how it enhanced their experience. The study upgraded the concept of leadership training by focusing on the development of the students' emotional stability. The latter was trained using the combination of the age psychology and cross-disciplinary games (gamified activities, simulations), online and offline personality-development-purpose learning, a project method, collaborative learning technologies. It increased substantially the effectiveness of both development of the students' emotional stability and leadership training. The study has brought a new psychological perspective to developing emotional stability in the students aged 20-22.

Keywords: Emotional stability, leadership, acmeological approach, master's students.

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Introduction

The emotional stability is seen as a key leadership trait because the successful leaders are expected to project confidence, ensure a psychologically safe atmosphere for their team so that their team members could predict the leader's reactions in the crises situations (Abdel-Fattah, 2020; Mind Resources Institute, 2020; Ray, 2017). According to Goudreau (2015), managers, who are able to manage theirs and other people's emotions make the emotionally intelligent leaders and competent 'superstar bosses'. Pijlman (2018) found that there is a positive effect of CEO emotional stability on organisational performance and strategic change. The investigation took place in the Crude Petroleum and Natural Gas industry. The acmeological approach – meaning development of a person relying on their natural capacity potential manifested at 'peak-age stages' – fits best to the Master's students from the perspective of psychology and physiology. The latter both state that the university age (between 17 and 22) is a 'peak' period of effectiveness of a person's cognitive and psychomotor functioning (Stafeeva et al., 2019). Though the emotional stability is seen as a stable trait, that does not dynamically change, the acmeological approach can encourage specific patterns of physiological self-regulation leading to change in the emotional self. In this regard, the acmeological approach to developing emotional stability in the context of developing leadership qualities in Master's students can be considered a feasible option.

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*Literature Review**The emotional stability and leadership*

The emotional stability, which is a construct of emotional intelligence, makes the leaders more influential and effective in their job (Alhebaishi, 2019; Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2019; Goudreau, 2015). In the literature, the structure of emotional stability is examined through a comparison of the degree of convergence and divergent validity of its relevant traits with regard to five dimensions of the Big Five personality model and emotional intelligence (Li & Ahlstrom, 2015). These dimensions comprising the model are as follows: extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. Emotional stability is the opposite concept to neuroticism and this implies the components of emotional stability and neuroticism can demonstrate similarities. According to Li and Ahlstrom (2015), emotional stability can be discriminated from the other Big Five-related personality traits and correlate with the neuroticism.

The emotional stability in the context of leadership is found to rely on leader's personal traits, social and emotional competencies such as emotional and behavioural self-awareness, communication and conflict management, emotional and behavioural self-efficacy (resilience), adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude (Jameson et al., 2016).

The acmeological approach and emotional stability

The acmeological approach is an age-driven psychological concept that draws upon the stimulation of a person's 'peak-age-related-stage' intellectual and social potential for self-development (Turgunbayeva et al., 2013). This self-improvement is aimed at achieving the person's 'akmē' [maturity, peak, zenith, or prime], which is characterised by certain knowledge and skills. In the context of the leadership and occupational training, the concept can be used to enhance the students' desire to self-develop both as a leader and as a professional (Huang et al., 2016; Sharma, 2018; Weiss, 2018). Furthermore, Silvers et al. (2012) experimentally proved that individuals aged between 10 and 22 are capable to show a significant change in self-regulation and emotional intelligence (emotional stability) which helps the young people to acquire the regulation strategies to be used in their adult life.

The typical acmeological activities used complementarily are as follows: cross-disciplinary games (gamified activities, simulations), online and offline personality-development-purpose learning, a project method, collaborative learning technologies, etc. The acmeological activities rely on the board conception of the emotional regulation and stability stating that individuals suppose benefit from regulating their emotions by obtaining some psychological 'perks.' The latter are related to three domains such as first, satisfaction of hedonic needs through using strategies of emotional regulation based on positive thinking or relaxing thoughts, second, simplification of goals and tasks through distraction themselves and cognitive reappraisal, and, third, ensuring the integrity of their personality system through training their mindfulness and doing relaxation exercises (Villani et al., 2018). The above implies that using the acmeological approach to developing emotional stability viewed as a key leadership quality in the graduate students can be effective.

The acmeological approach using specifically designed and organised activities could possibly improve the emotional stability the Master's Students, however, the literature revealing this topic was found to be still fragmented in terms of theoretical approaches, methods, and results.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify how the leadership training programme based on the acmeological approach for the Master's students influences the students' emotional stability and how that programme was perceived by the graduates.

To address the purpose of the study the below hypothesis has been proposed.

H_0 – the leadership training programme based on the acmeological approach for the Master's students will not have an impact on the students' emotional stability.

Methodology

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to yield data. The dimensions of emotional stability, specified Jameson et al. (2016), such as behavioural self-awareness, communication and conflict management, emotional and behavioural self-efficacy, adaptability, and self-programming of a positive mental attitude were used as variables in the study. In the pretest stage, the sampled students' homogeneity was measured using the LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software. The variables were measured in the pre-treatment and post-treatment phases of the study using the Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) in the leadership context (see Appendix A) that was adapted and modified from Li and Ahlstrom (2015) and Kesebir et. al. (2019). The ESS was a 36 item 6-point Likert frequency rating scale (with such alternatives as 'Always', 'Very Frequently', 'Occasionally', 'Rarely', 'Very Rarely' and 'Never') which was previously developed and revised by the research team members who had a background in Psychology and by the lecturer in the Master of Mediation and Conflict Management Program, who was a key expert for this. The scale relied on the psychometric principles (bimodality) of the development of tests (Irwing et al., 2018). The perception of the programme by the randomly selected programme participants was explored through a focus group interview.

Research design

The study was quasi-experimental research that used the pretest-posttest design conducted without a control group (Salkind, 2010). It lasted from September 2019 to the end of February of 2020 in “KROK” Business School (Kyiv, Ukraine) (KROK is an international name that means Education and Human Resources Development Corporation). The research was initiated by KROK Business School Research HUB. The research was organised in three phases (see Figure 1). The first phase involved the investigation of relevant best practices in the development of the emotional stability in the Master’s students in the run of leadership training which can be updated using the acmeological approach. Furthermore, in this stage, the measurement tools were developed and the programme in leadership was upgraded in terms of adding the acmeological approach. The third phase was dedicated to computational analysis of the yielded data and providing the conclusions. The latter was used to improve the programme content and delivery.

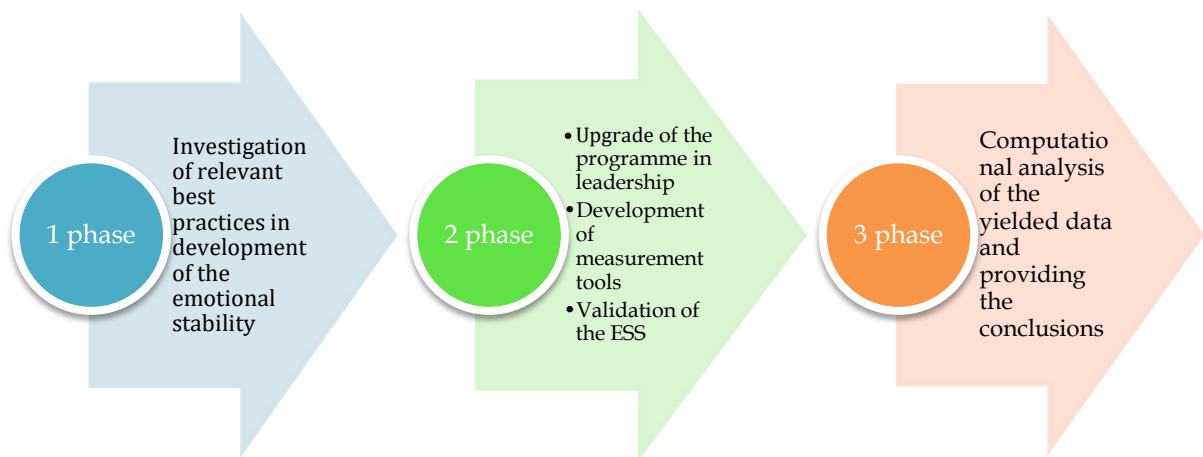


Figure 1. Research design

Description of the leadership training programme based on the acmeological approach

This was designed to be a train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled “Crisis-driven Leadership”. This included a beforehand created and customized leadership online training course based on the Leadership Training Programme. The students were also engaged in the “21-day Mental Habits Marathon” that was aimed to train the students’ resilience skills, positive thinking, and encouraging other people (sharing enthusiasm). Each student was trained to be an emotional mentor for one of their groupmates. They were responsible for their peers’ controlled behaviour in the simulated crisis-caused situation with the pressure imposed on the students (see Figure 2).

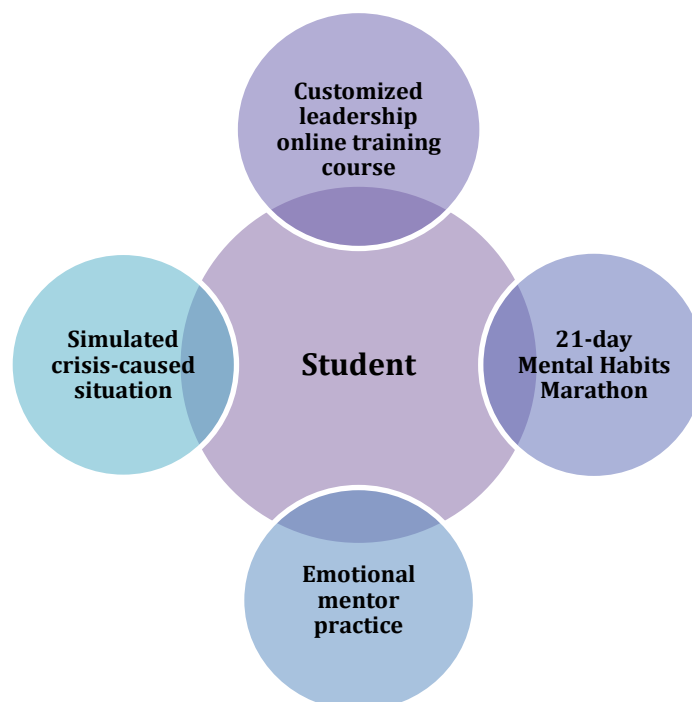


Figure 2. Simplified visualised design of the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled “Crisis-driven Leadership”

Sampling

The convenience sampling technique was used to select 27 participants, aged 20-22, for the leadership training programme based on the acmeological approach for the Master's students. Those were the students for the programme of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) run by "KROK" Business School (Kyiv, Ukraine). The demographic data of the sampled students were as follows: the sampled group consisted of 17 males (62.96%) and 10 females (37.04%) with Bachelor degree-related backgrounds in Business ($n=5$, 18.06%), Law ($n = 4$, 14.92%), Medicine and health ($n = 3$, 11.22%), Public service ($n = 2$, 7.41%), Food and catering ($n = 4$, 14.92%), HoReCa ($n = 2$, 7.41%), Tourism and Hospitality ($n = 3$, 11.22%), Education ($n = 2$, 7.41%), Other ($n = 2$, 7.41%).

According to the results of the analyses based on the personal writing pieces, and professionalism-related writing (the variables were as follows: analytic, clout, authenticity, emotional tone) using the LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software the sampled students were homogeneous. The LIWC software provides both results of the analyses and benchmark values (or reference values) for the researcher to compare with. It is also programmed to produce about 90 different output dimensions and the summary variables such as analytic, clout, authenticity and emotional tone. Analytic variable is about analytical or formal thinking. Clout refers to authoritative or confident writing, and exhibits leadership. Authenticity means personal and honest writing. Emotional tone is expressed in values that are interpreted as follows: higher numbers are more positive and upbeat and lower numbers are more negative. The instrument relies on the research-proven 100-point scales with 0 = very low along the dimension and 100 = very high. The software provides the average mean values for the specific type of writing which were used as benchmark values (or reference values) in this study. The benchmark values for analytic and clout variables are different because the first refers to personal experiences and is based on a factor-analytically derived dimension that is based on eight function word dimensions, and the second refers to interacting with others to show the social status.

According to Table 1, the samples students had leadership potential, having the Mean value being higher than the benchmark one in the clout variable. However, they underperformed in other variables.

Table 1. Results of the analyses the participants' personal writing pieces, professional & scientific writing and professional correspondence ($n = 27$)

Variable	Mean	SD	Margin of Error*	Benchmark value or reference value (as provided by the LIWC)
Analytic	33.16	1.228	33.16±1.077 (±3.25%)	44.88
Clout	40.86	1.190	40.86±1.167 (±2.86%)	37.02
Authenticity	66.91	7.055	66.9133±5.646 (±8.44%)	76.01
Emotional tone	51.10	0.674	51.105±0.661 (±1.29%)	38.60

Note: Analytic – analytical or formal thinking; Clout – authoritativeness, confidence, and leadership; Authenticity – honesty; Emotional tone – the higher the score, the more positive the emotional tone is. *confidence interval – 95%.

Instruments

Three qualitative and quantitative tools were used in the study. Those were the adapted and modified Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) in the leadership context (see Appendix A), the focus group interview, and the LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software. The IBM SPSS Statistics (25.0.0.1) was used to compute the yielded data.

Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) in the leadership context

The scale was a self-administered online questionnaire consisting of 36 statements that covered four dimensions of emotional stability such as behavioural self-awareness, communication and conflict management, emotional and behavioural self-efficacy, adaptability, and self-programming of a positive mental attitude. It relied on the 6-point Likert frequency rating scale. The validation procedure of the scale included the pilot testing of the scale that was administered on 41 members (aged 30-45) of the Business School Alumni who were randomly selected. That randomised selection was performed to avoid the risk of volunteer bias. The Single Sample t-Test (available through the link: <https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/tsinglesample/default.aspx>) was used to calculate the hypothesised value of the Mean (μ) values in the population. The t -values ranged from 2.60543 ($p = .017564$) to 7.294477 ($p < .00001$). The result was significant at $p < .05$. The index of internal consistency was calculated using the Cronbach's alpha. The Alpha coefficient for the scale as a whole was .89 which is considered good internal consistency (Taber, 2018). It was .88 for Behavioural self-awareness domain of the scale, .90 for Communication and conflict management domain of it; .89 for Emotional and behavioural self-efficacy, and .89 for Adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude domain. The inter-correlation between its dimensions and total scale was computed to analyse the construct validity of the scale. The yielded values ranged from .112 to .511 which suggested the inter-correlation was significant at $p < .01$. The content validity procedure was conducted by 5 experts with a Ph.D. degree in Psychology and Leadership Management. First, they analysed each item of the scale individually, and then as

a team. The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was used to measure the interrater reliability of the scale. The mean value for the scale item scores was 0.65 (95% CI=0.59–0.71).

LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software

The LIWC is a research-based online tool using 100-point scales to measure analytical or formal thinking, leadership manifestations, emotional tone, and uniqueness of a written piece. It has been validated by the developers. With respect to the purpose of this study, this tool addressed a dual purpose: first, leadership traits were identified, and second, emotional reactivity was categorised.

A semi-structured focus group interview (n=11)

The interview that relied on 4 open-ended questions was structured and administered as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2014). The validation of the content and discourse of the questionnaire was carried out by the research team members. The interviews were administered by the Business School Alumni members in a quiet place to avoid distraction or tension. Each interview took approximately 15-20 minutes. The interviews were recorded then transcribed. The latter was followed by the thematic analysis of the content of the responses. Each theme was assigned the code and they were used to analyse the students' responses. The open-source and web-based Voyant Tools (VTs) which are available at <https://voyant-tools.org/> were used to analyse the text corpus of responses through the investigation of patterns of words/concepts (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2015). These tools have been commonly used for research purposes (Boyle & Hall, 2016).

1. What do you think of the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled "Crisis-driven Leadership"? Explain your reasons.
2. What benefits did the programme bring to you? Illustrate your answers with examples.
3. What caused your negative impressions of the programme? Illustrate your answers with examples.
4. What improvements could be made to update the programme and increase its effectiveness? Explain your reasons.

Results

It was found that the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled "Crisis-driven Leadership" based on the acmeological approach fostered a statistically significant improvement in the Master's students' emotional stability. Moreover, the graduates perceived the programme positively and could more or less accurately explain how it enhanced their experience. This was supported by the pre-treatment and post-treatment measurements based on the used of a paired sample *t*-test and using the Emotional Stability Scale showed a positive change in the students' behavioural self-awareness (Mean difference = -1.46), students' communication and conflict management (Mean difference = -1.31), emotional and behavioural self-efficacy (Mean difference = 1.66), and in the students' adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude – there was a Mean difference of -1.61 (Table 2). The observed effect size *d* is large, with the value of 0.98. The students emphasised that they benefited from the programme by having improved their self-control and control of their emotions. The respondents also reported that they acquired the skills or rather habitual behaviours of self-control of their emotions, resilience skills, and positive thinking capabilities. They learned to mentor other people to control their emotions and encourage their peers when they are under pressure or in a difficult situation.

Below are presented the results of measurements and the interview.

Table 2. Results drawn from the Emotional Stability Scale using a paired sample t-test

Dimension	Pre-treatment Mean	Post-treatment Mean	SD	t – value	Normality p-value (Sahpiro Wilk test)	df
BSA	4.00	5.46	0.044	30.8238	0.5602	26
CCM	3.91	5.22	0.018	73.317	0.2323	26
EBSE	3.67	5.33	0.0366	45.1831	0.9085	26
ASP	4.11	5.72	0.108	14.207	0.1323	26

Note: BSA – Behavioural self-awareness; CCM – Communication and conflict management; EBSE – Emotional and behavioural self-efficacy; ASP – Adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude; confidence level – 95%.

The results of the pre-treatment and post-treatment phases of the study using the Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) in the leadership context

The results of the analyses the responses drawn from the semi-structured focus group interview questionnaire (n = 11).

The students' answers for the first question of the interview were transcribed and consolidated as Word.docx. Following that, the open-source and web-based Voyant Tools (VTs) was used to analyse it. First, there were found in the corpus the most frequently used terms and identified what terms the most frequently used ones are related to and how strong these relations were (Platte, 2017).

Question 1. The content analysis of the responses provided by the focus group volunteers showed that the five most frequently used words to answer this question were: control, self, emotions, benefits, easy (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. The content analysis of the responses provided by the focus group volunteers to the first question

The correlation of the terms frequencies of the words such as control, self, emotions, benefits, easy is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of correlations of analysis of the terms

Term 1		Term 2	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Significance
control	← →	easy	-0.248452	0.48883566
easy	← →	emotions	-0.2182179	0.5447373
easy	← →	self	-0.20100756	0.5776352
improved	← →	self	-0.20100756	0.5776352
benefits	← →	easy	-0.1111111	0.759923
benefits	← →	control	0.248452	0.48883566
positive	← →	self	0.30151135	0.39720383
benefits	← →	emotions	0.50917506	0.13280109
control	← →	self	0.6741999	0.0325156
benefits	← →	self	0.80403024	0.00505611
control	← →	emotions	0.81325006	0.0042191
emotions	← →	self	0.9211324	0.0001537

Given that the Pearson's correlation coefficient that approaches 0 (zero) indicates little or no correlation, the one approaching 1 means the words closely go together, the coefficient approaching -1 means that words vary contrariwise, the values in Table 3 suggest that the strong correlation with the significance of less the .05 occurred in the pairs of words such as benefits-control, positive-self, benefits-emotions, control-self, control-emotions, emotions-self. The result implied that the students emphasised that they benefited from the programme by having improved their self-control and control of their emotions.

Question 2. Eleven students reported that they acquired the skills or rather habitual behaviours of self-control of their emotions, resilience skills, and positive thinking capabilities. They also learned to mentor other people to control their emotions and encourage their peers when they are under pressure or in a difficult situation. Below are the quotes of some students:

[... 'cause of the constant stress, before the course, I always under-slept, had a bad appetite, and watched a lot of action or horror movies. I felt relief after the 12th day in the Marathon and my mentor cheered me up all days...]

[... my Mom often asked me to drop the MBA, 'cause any her attempt to calm me down just sparked my anger and we had a row. The course really helped me to cope with this...]

Question 3. Nine people confessed that it was simulated crisis situations that often made them discouraged. The students explained that those situations caused an 'emotional clutter' which sometimes exhausted them. Two people claimed that expected a more tailored approach in terms of their learning needs.

Question 4. Six students recommended using yoga and meditation. These are proved to be an effective way to relax. Four students suggested introducing more team-building activities. These are helpful in mentoring. One student stated that there should be more toughness in the programme.

Discussion

The study is novel because it upgraded the concept of leadership training by focusing on the development of the students' emotional stability. The latter was trained using the combination of the age psychology and cross-disciplinary games (gamified activities, simulations), online and offline personality-development-purpose learning, a project method, collaborative learning technologies. It increased substantially the effectiveness of both development of the students' emotional stability and leadership training. The study has brought a new psychological perspective to developing emotional stability in the students aged 20-22.

It was found that the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled "Crisis-driven Leadership" based on the acmeological approach fostered a statistically significant improvement in the Master's students' emotional stability. Moreover, the graduates perceived the programme positively and could more or less accurately explain how it enhanced their experience.

The pre-treatment and post-treatment measurements based on the used of a Paired Sample *t*-test and using the Emotional Stability Scale showed a positive change in the students' behavioural self-awareness (Mean difference = -1.46), students' communication and conflict management (Mean difference = -1.31), emotional and behavioural self-efficacy (Mean difference = 1.66), and in the students' adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude – there was a Mean difference of -1.61 (Table 2). The observed effect size *d* is large, with the value of 9.98.

The result of the semi-structured focus group interview implied that the students emphasised that the benefited from the programme by having improved their self-control and control of their emotions.

The results are consistent with the previous international research in this field. This study extended the theory in mood management discovering that not only the combination of the age psychology and cross-disciplinary games, online and offline personality-development-purpose learning, a project method, collaborative learning technologies are important but also the satisfaction of the intrinsic needs of gaining competence and autonomy contributes to overall emotional stability and mood control (Alcañiz et al., 2014). It goes in line with Johar et al. (2013) who revealed the positive effect brought by the emotional self-regulation of the leader on their subordinates' motivation and work performance. It goes in line with Duygulu and Kublay (2011) suggesting that training programme should be transformational in terms of leadership. It also agrees with the findings of Conte et al. (2013) who emphasised the effectiveness of the use of simulations in different contexts. It boosted the practice of using train-the-trainer programmes in the second cycle of education (Ritchie, 2016). It contributed to the investigation of the problem of development of the emotional stability in young people (Peditzi & Spigno, 2019; Quiroz et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The study found that the train-the-trainer leadership programme entitled "Crisis-driven Leadership" based on the acmeological approach fostered a statistically significant improvement in the Master's students' emotional stability. Moreover, the graduates perceived the programme positively and could more or less accurately explain how it enhanced their experience. The study upgraded the concept of leadership training by focusing on the development of the students' emotional stability. The latter was trained using the combination of the age psychology and cross-disciplinary games (gamified activities, simulations), online and offline personality-development-purpose learning, a project method, collaborative learning technologies. It increased substantially the effectiveness of both development of the students' emotional stability and leadership training. The study has brought a new psychological perspective to developing emotional stability in the students aged 20-22. Further research is needed to review best practices in the development of emotional stability.

Recommendations

The practitioners are recommended to administer more pre-treatment psychological tests to explore the personality trait and learning styles of the sampled students. Since some students find it a sign of their weakness to speak or discuss their problems with a teacher, it would be a solution to make a special box for anonymous complaints.

The researchers are recommended to investigate the use of the acmeological approach in co-teaching as it allows for more intense and student-tailored instruction.

Limitations

The instruments and sample size might be regarded as a limitation to this study. The instruments used in the study leave the possibility of residual confounding because the behavioural self-awareness, communication and conflict management, emotional and behavioural self-efficacy, adaptability, and self-programming of a positive mental attitude include latent features. The sample size leave the possibility of bias or under coverage.

Acknowledgement

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix: Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) in the leadership context

Dimension	Item	6-point Likert frequency rating scale					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Behavioural self-awareness	I can predict how I behave in any circumstances.						
	I am strong in delegating tasks and controlling people.						
	I take responsibility for my actions and words.						
	I can scary people by the way I look at them.						
	I get offended easily.						
	Disagreement with me wrecks my nerves.						
	Other people usually follow my advice.						
	I am good at persuading others.						
	I demonstrate my feelings, emotions, and attitudes.						
	People say that I am crazy.						
	I take pills to calm down.						
	I like speaking in front of a lot of people.						
	I like gambling or activities causing euphoria and adrenalin.						
Communication and conflict management	It is typical for me to be engaged in a conflict.						
	I argue until I win the argument.						
	I use "white lies" to calm people down.						
	Blaming others in the failures to have occurred is my favourite communication strategy.						
	When trying to resolve the conflict, I concentrate on the solution rather than the causes of the problem.						
	Looking for the compromise helps me to deal with the conflict.						
	Being assertive is my favourite conflict management style.						
Emotional and behavioural self-efficacy	I am able to control my behaviour through controlling my thoughts.						
	I am able to deal with stress easily.						
	I concentrate better in a stressful situation.						
	When some trouble happens to me, I call my Mom.						
	All my programme groupmates are stupid and I hate them.						
	I train my positive thinking.						
	The TV news causes me to worry.						
	I am sure that people show disrespect to me.						
	Nothing bothers me.						
	I am a continuous learner.						
Adaptability and self-programming of a positive mental attitude	I make my life and career mistakes corrected.						
	I give the people a second chance.						
	I change my mind.						
	I take the things that are out of my control easy.						
	I read a lot of books about personality development and the lives of successful people.						
	I ask other peoples' advice when I am in trouble.						

Note: 1 – 'Always'; 2 – 'Very Frequently'; 3 – 'Occasionally'; 4 – 'Rarely'; 5 – 'Very Rarely' and 6 – 'Never'.