

Navigating Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Female Cadets in Maritime Education

Joseph Martin B. Garcia¹, Karl Zachary Deliola², Carl Rasel A. Estella³, Marvin Labrador⁴,
Arjay Lelis⁵, Earl Jonash O. Loayon⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Asian Institute of Maritime Studies, Pasay City, Philippines

Corresponding Email: rrpardo@aims.edu.ph

Available Online: August 2026
Revised: July 2026
Accepted: July 2026
Received: June 2026

Volume IV Issue 3 (2026)
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22043791
E-ISSN: 2984-7184
P-ISSN: 2984-7176
<https://getinternational.org/research/>

Abstract

This study explored the motivations, achievements, leadership experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of female cadets who assumed student leadership roles at the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS), a predominantly male educational environment. Using qualitative interviews with twelve female cadets actively engaged as student officers, organization leaders, marchers, or institutional representatives, the study found that their motivation to seek leadership positions was influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal motivations included self-improvement, confidence building, preparation for maritime careers, and the desire to overcome gender-based barriers in leadership. External factors comprised the presence of female role models, prior organizational involvement, mentorship, and institutional support. Findings revealed that leadership participation contributed significantly to the cadets' personal growth, enhancing their confidence, responsibility, communication skills, resilience, and sense of service. Female cadet leaders played active roles in organizing school activities, managing organizational responsibilities, leading community outreach programs, and representing the school in institutional and inter-school events. Despite these achievements, the cadets encountered challenges such as academic pressure, time constraints, emotional stress, fear of judgment, and balancing leadership and academic responsibilities. Notably, these challenges fostered adaptability, perseverance, and emotional maturity. Overall, the study highlights the transformative leadership journey of female cadets and underscores their potential to promote inclusive leadership and positive change within maritime education.

Keywords: *leadership development, maritime education, female cadets, phenomenological research, gender equality*

Recommended Citation:

Garcia, J. M. B., Deliola, K. Z., Estella, C. R. A., Labrador, M., Lelis, A., & Loayon, E. J. O. (2026). Navigating leadership: A phenomenological study of female cadets in maritime education. *GET International Research Journal*, 4(3), 15–33.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22043791>

INTRODUCTION

The maritime sector is traditionally recognized as a male-dominated industry, shaped by persistent gender stereotypes and hierarchical norms that restrict women's participation and advancement. Despite global efforts to promote gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in seafaring, accounting for only about 1.2% of the global maritime workforce. As noted by **Kitada (2021)**, women continue to occupy a minority of positions, particularly in leadership roles, reflecting enduring structural and cultural barriers within the industry. Addressing these inequalities requires not only reforms within the workplace but also interventions in maritime education, where future maritime professionals develop the skills, values, and leadership competencies needed for their careers. Maritime education institutions serve as critical environments for cultivating leadership potential and encouraging inclusive participation among cadets, particularly women.

Motivation plays a critical role in students' academic and leadership success. Xiaoqing Qin emphasized that motivation influences learning strategies, persistence, and achievement (Qin, 2002). In maritime education, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as career aspirations, mentorship, institutional support, and opportunities for leadership engagement, shape cadets' willingness to assume leadership responsibilities. The **International Maritime Organization (2017)** further underscored the importance of targeted initiatives to enhance women's participation and leadership in the maritime profession, beginning with educational institutions that prepare future industry leaders. Aligning with these global initiatives, the overarching objectives of this study are deeply anchored in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, this research supports SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). By exploring how educational institutions foster female leadership and help cadets overcome gender-based barriers in a male-dominated field, this study directly addresses SDG Target 5.5, which aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life (**United Nations, n.d.-b**). Furthermore, by assessing the development of leadership competencies and providing equal developmental opportunities among female cadets, the research supports SDG Target 4.5, which seeks to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training (**United Nations, n.d.-a**).

Research suggests that increasing women's representation in leadership positions promotes inclusivity, improves decision-making, and challenges traditional gender stereotypes (**Eagly & Carli, 2007**). Within maritime education, student leadership experiences provide valuable opportunities for developing confidence, communication skills, and professional competence. At the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS), female cadets have increasingly assumed leadership roles in student organizations and institutional activities, demonstrating resilience, competence, and active engagement despite operating within a traditionally male-oriented field.

Objectives

This study aims to explore the motivations and achievements of female cadets at the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS) who pursue student leadership roles. It seeks to identify the factors that influence their engagement in leadership positions and to examine how these experiences contribute to their academic, personal, and professional development.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What factors motivate female cadets to pursue student leadership roles at AIMS?
2. What accomplishments, personal growth, and contributions do female cadets demonstrate through their leadership roles?
3. What challenges and obstacles do female cadets encounter in assuming and performing student leadership responsibilities?

METHODS

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine and interpret the experiences of cadet women from the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS) and their journey toward becoming student leaders.

Phenomenology, as described by **Moustakas (1994)** and grounded in Husserl's phenomenological philosophy (**Husserl, 1970**), is a research approach that aims to capture and describe the essence of a phenomenon based on the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. This approach was most suitable for exploring the motivations, barriers, and perceived growth of female cadets pursuing leadership roles. Choosing a phenomenological design was driven by its focus on gaining an in-depth and rich understanding of shared experiences rather than producing generalized statistics. It is concerned with what participants experienced and how they experienced it. This aligns with the purpose of the study, which is to explore not only how female cadets seek leadership positions but also the core of how they define and understand their motivation, experiences, achievements, and challenges along their journey (**Ishtiaq, 2019**).

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised all the female cadets who were currently studying at the Asian Institute for Maritime Studies (AIMS) during the 2024-2025 school year. This sample comprised female cadets of all class levels who were engaged in campus life and were involved, or were expected to be involved, in the student leadership positions. This study used purposive sampling to identify the participants because it focused on female cadets who were actively engaged, or were expected to be engaged, in a leadership role. The participants in this study were school officers, organization leaders, marchers, and female cadets who served as representatives of the school in the Tournament of Maritime Schools Association (TOMSA) and the Tournament of Maritime Schools in the Philippines (TOMSP). We identified these participants because they demonstrated visibility and leadership within the institution and were therefore appropriate respondents to help us understand motivation and achievement, along with female cadets. The process of recruitment was done in coordination with class advisers, organization moderators, and selected student leaders who helped us identify appropriate female cadets invited to participate voluntarily.

The researchers interviewed 12 participants using purposive sampling guaranteed that the information gathered was relevant and applicable in responding to the research questions, resulting in more focused and meaningful outcomes.

Research Instrument

The researcher prepared an interview guide question as part of the data collection tools used in this study. The primary tool for data collection was a face-to-face interview guide. The interview questions were validated by the maritime education experts and an additional researcher from the Center for Research and Institutional Development to ensure clarity and relevance to the study. With the participants' consent, the validated interview questions were distributed to them separately. The female cadet interview guide at the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS) student leader members during S.Y. 2023-2025 gathered detailed and rich data on cadet motivations and leadership accomplishments.

Data Gathering Procedure

The interviews were based on the motivation and leadership accomplishments of participants. To carry out this research, the researcher adhered to the procedure of a one-on-one interview questionnaire to gather the required data. The researcher employed the non-directive method of interviewing by utilizing open-ended questions that permitted respondents to respond freely and manage the pace and content of the interview. The data from the interview were gathered using hand-written notes and an audio recorder. The interview questions addressed motivation, leadership styles, and success in cadetship. The interviews brought out participants' experiences as leaders as well as the challenges they faced.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each participant granted permission for the researcher to report his or her feedback. The researcher took care that the participants' participation remained confidential and anonymous throughout. After transcription of the interviews, the researcher sorted and checked the data to make it ready for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The AIMS female cadets' interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. This process sought to identify and organize the repeated themes and ideas that emerged in the participants' statements. Here, attention was drawn to school leaders' motivation, accomplishment, issues, and strategies for coping. Then, the interviews were transcribed, and in this manner, the researcher is in a position to familiarize themselves with the data. Then, significant quotes were coded and categorized into themes that were generated, which were merged into higher-order themes. These answers research questions as well as the aspects of the conceptual framework, such as intrinsic motivation, gender stereotypes, time allocation, academic success, and leadership.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table1

Themes on the Sources of Inspiration for the Respondents in Pursuing the Role

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A, E	<i>"I am inspired by the female captains I hear about, and I want to become one of them. They motivate me."</i>	Good example and Inspiration	External Influences as Catalysts for Leadership Motivation
B, C, D	<i>"I was inspired to take this role when I was scouted and invited to join the Nautica Society during my first year. The organization motivated me as it encouraged students to become leaders. I was appointed as vice president in my second year, and now I have moved up to president."</i>	Impact of organizational involvement	
F	<i>"Since elementary and high school, I have been involved in various student council projects, and those experiences motivated me to continue strengthening my leadership skills in college. Because of my past involvement, I pushed myself even more to grow and build my capabilities as a student leader."</i>	Institutional experience	Internal Motivation and Self-Driven Leadership Aspirations
G, J	<i>"I took this role because it boosts my confidence and prepares me for the responsibility of handling people in the maritime industry. I want to start training myself early to become a good leader."</i>	Self-motivation and personal growth	
H	<i>"Sir Kylie Gutierrez, last year's student council secretary, inspired me by showing how the council can help the school and its students."</i>	Guided by exemplars	External Influences as Catalysts for Leadership Motivation
I	<i>"Honestly, I wasn't particularly inspired or motivated to take on this position. It was a role that was simply assigned to me, and none of my peers wanted to take it on. Since there was no one else willing to accept it, I had no choice but to step into the role myself. At first, I felt hesitant and unsure because it wasn't something I actively sought out. However, over time, I've come to see it as an opportunity to contribute and learn, even if it wasn't something I initially aimed for."</i>	Motivation through enduring circumstances	Internal Motivation and Self-Driven Leadership Aspirations
K	<i>"My sister inspires me. Since childhood, I have seen her demonstrate leadership, and I view her as a role model. I believe that attempting things you think you cannot do challenges you to grow and discover abilities you never knew you had."</i>	Sources of Inspiration	External Influences as Catalysts for Leadership Motivation
L	<i>"I took this role to show that women can succeed in a male-dominated maritime field."</i>	Breaking the gender barriers	Internal Motivation and Self-Driven Leadership Aspirations

Table 1 indicates that the respondents' motivation to pursue leadership roles is shaped by both **external influences** and **internal aspirations**. External factors, such as role models (e.g., female captains, mentors, and family members) and organizational involvement (e.g., Nautica Society and prior student leadership experiences), serve as key catalysts that inspire participants to take on leadership positions. At the same time, internal motivations, including the desire for personal growth, confidence-building, preparation for future responsibilities, and the intention to challenge gender norms in a male-dominated field, sustain their engagement in leadership. Notably, some participants initially assumed their roles due to circumstance rather than intention; however, their motivation developed over time through experience. Overall, the findings suggest that leadership motivation among female cadets is dynamic, emerging from the interaction between environmental influences and individual agency.

The findings suggest that student leaders at AIMS develop valuable maritime leadership competencies through their experiences in navigating responsibilities, interpersonal dynamics, and organizational challenges. Respondents B and C demonstrated commitment, accountability, and sound judgment in fulfilling leadership roles, reflecting qualities expected of future maritime officers. Additionally, participation in organizations and prior leadership experiences contributes to the development of leadership skills and readiness for higher roles, consistent with studies emphasizing the value of practical institutional exposure (**Sumague, 2023**). Moreover, self-motivation and the desire for personal growth further drive engagement in leadership, as these experiences enhance confidence and equip cadets with competencies essential for the maritime profession.

Table 2

Themes on Personal Leadership Goals of Respondents

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEME
A	"...I didn't want many achievements, I only wanted one which is that the People/group I handle would be at peace. For example, in our section, I want peace, and I want them to have discipline..."	Implementing Peaceful Guidance	INTERNAL B, C, D, G, I, J, K Personal Competence and Growth as Leadership Foundations
B	"Personally, I want to overcome my struggle of staying in my own comfort zone, so I wanted to go beyond what I have, I wanted to go beyond my capability, so that's why I kept on joining and participating in extracurricular activities and different organizations."	Growth through Challenge	
C, G	"My initial goal was to join a group skilled in handling diverse Personalities. My leadership aim is to strengthen multiple skills, including developing greater personal confidence through continuous Engagement. This also involves crucial social growth, requiring me to adjust and be flexible to collaborate effectively and prevent arguments with people of various temperaments."	Adaptive Leadership for Diverse Personalities	EXTERNAL A, E, F, H, L Interpersonal Dynamics as Catalysts for Leadership Impact
D, J	"My core objectives as a leader are clear because I aim to enhance my leadership skills, acquire enough confidence to lead effectively, and realize a passionate sense of fulfillment."	Skillful and Confident Leadership	
E	"..being a leader where every member needs my attention, my ability, my experience and my presence to lead the situation there and in need of a leader."	Achievements through Leading others	
F	"When you correct a cadet or cadet for something they did wrong, they will follow your guidance and even teach	Teaching and Inspiring Others	

	<i>others. Whatever you do to guide one person, they will carry it forward and do the same for others."</i>		
H	<i>"...to prove that I can lead. With the minimal knowledge I have as a leader since I have minimal experience and also of course proving that I can help people through leading them and also in a way through using the platform I can have advocating their voices and also being someone that can relate their problems to people who can take charge for it."</i>	Leading and Advocating	
I	<i>"I think focusing on financial habits as a leader would help me learn better how to manage and handle financial matters."</i>	Managing Finances	
K	<i>"Since I am the Marcher of MT32A2, my goal is to always prioritize my work. It also serves as practice for the future. Organizations that I want to join someday, and it strengthens my background in leadership."</i>	Practice Prioritizing Tasks	
L	<i>"As a leader, my goal is to make a positive impact on my team and to learn as much as possible."</i>	Positive team impact	

Table 2 indicates that the personal leadership goals of the respondents revolve around two central themes: Personal Competence and Growth as Leadership Foundations and Interpersonal Dynamics as Catalysts for Leadership Impact. A majority of participants (B, C, D, G, I, J, K) emphasized self-development goals, such as enhancing confidence, overcoming personal limitations, improving adaptability, and acquiring leadership skills, suggesting that leadership is perceived as a means for continuous personal growth and preparation for future responsibilities. Conversely, other participants (A, E, F, H, L) highlighted goals focused on influencing and supporting others, including promoting discipline and harmony, guiding and mentoring peers, advocating for group concerns, and creating positive team outcomes. These responses reflect an understanding of leadership as a relational and service-oriented role that extends beyond individual achievement. The findings demonstrate that female cadets view leadership as a dual process involving both self-improvement and the ability to foster positive relationships and group development, underscoring the integration of internal competence and external impact in effective leadership.

The theme Internal Motivation and Self-Driven Leadership Aspirations reflects how female cadets view leadership as a means of personal growth, self-improvement, and professional preparation within the maritime field. Participants G and J demonstrate intrinsic motivation by using leadership roles to build confidence and develop competencies, while participant L highlights a strong internal drive to challenge gender stereotypes in a male-dominated profession. Similarly, participant I illustrates how motivation can evolve, as an initially imposed role becomes an opportunity for growth and contribution. These findings tell that leadership not only refers to being personally driven but also shaped through experience and reflection. Moreover, respondents emphasized goals such as fostering harmony, discipline, and positive group environments, aligning with studies that view leadership as a relational and development-oriented process in which individuals grow through interactions and shared experiences (**Uhl-Bien, 2006**). The importance of confidence, adaptability, and the ability to work with diverse individuals further underscores leadership as a challenge that pushes individuals beyond their limits while inspiring others to do the same (**Center for Creative Leadership, 2020**). Additionally, mentorship and guidance emerged as essential aspects of leadership, supporting the idea that effective leaders empower others and cultivate future leaders through support, coaching, and example (**Dzickowski, 2013; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020**). The findings indicate that leadership among female cadets is grounded in intrinsic motivation, continuous self-development, and a strong commitment to guiding and influencing others.

Table 3

Narratives of Pride: Experiences, Projects, or Activities Accomplished During the Term

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A, K	<i>"Proud of conducting a barangay outreach program; upholds "being able to give to others" as a leader. Proud of helping poor/indigenous children and caring for stray animals."</i>	Community-Centered Leadership; Compassionate Service	Leadership Through Experience and Resilience Strategic and Responsible Leadership Skills
B	<i>"Proud of hosting/facilitating the Women's Month Program invited AIMS alumni speakers to share experiences."</i>	Women Empowerment Advocacy; Event Facilitation	
C, D	<i>"Proud of all Nautica events and first time hosting; gained confidence but still managing anxiety. Proud of first silent drill (and training others); overcame stress and felt recognized."</i>	Confidence-Building; Overcoming Anxiety	
E	<i>"Proud of balancing/managing funds for a school-wide organization."</i>	Financial Management; Accountability	
F, I	<i>"Proud of correcting cadets with wrong uniforms; promotes discipline with kindness. Volunteered to be section marcher; helped resolve a professor/subject issue for irregular students."</i>	Discipline with Compassion; Peer Support	Leadership That Promotes Approachability and Emotional Support
G	<i>"Proud of handling their section and ensuring classmates submitted work on time, leading to collective passing."</i>	Task Coordination; Accountability	
H	<i>Proud of being an approachable support system that students can turn to with problems."</i>	Supportive Leadership; Emotional Guidance	
J, L	<i>"First time leading the costume team and they won two medals. Made props/costumes in 2 days and they won Best Costume."</i>	Creative Leadership; Team Pressure Management	

Table 3 reveals that the respondents' narratives of pride are rooted in meaningful leadership experiences that foster both personal growth and social impact. Participants expressed pride in engaging in community service, organizing events, and supporting others, reflecting community-centered and compassionate leadership (A, K, B). Others (C, D) highlighted overcoming anxiety and building confidence through leadership tasks, demonstrating resilience and personal development under pressure. Practical responsibilities such as financial management (E), task coordination (G), and maintaining discipline (F, I) further emphasize the development of accountability and organizational skills. Additionally, participants (H, J, L) underscored the importance of emotional support, creativity, and teamwork, particularly in helping peers and achieving group success. Overall, the findings suggest that leadership experiences among female cadets cultivate a combination of confidence, responsibility, empathy, and adaptability, contributing to their growth as effective and well-rounded leaders.

Several respondents highlighted community service activities, such as organizing outreach programs, assisting marginalized children, and caring for animals, demonstrating their active contribution to societal development.

The findings support previous research that student leadership is often shaped through meaningful engagement in organizational and community activities, which serve as important venues for leadership development and learning (Sessa et al., 2014). Furthermore, the respondents' involvement in organizing institutional events, such as alumni programs, reflects the important contributions that women leaders make in fostering participation, learning, and organizational development within traditionally male-dominated environments (Midgley et al., 2023; Al Mazrouei & Pech, 2015). Participants also highlighted overcoming personal challenges, including anxiety and stress, as significant accomplishments that contributed to their confidence, resilience, and leadership growth. These findings underscore the importance of adaptability, confidence, and resilience as essential qualities that contribute to both academic success and effective leadership.

Table 4

Changes in Self-Perception as a Leader Resulting from Project Involvement

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A, B, I, J, L	"I am proud of leading events, programs, and competitions, as well as taking initiative to resolve issues when no one else volunteered. These experiences showed me that I am capable of guiding others and making meaningful contributions as a leader."	Event, Program, and Leadership	Leadership of Women in Maritime Education
E, F, G	"I am proud of managing responsibilities, whether its handling organizational funds, ensuring classmates meet requirements, or maintaining proper conduct. Fulfilling these duties taught me accountability and discipline."	Learning Accountability and Performing Obligations	Student Leaders of AIMS as a Foundation of Discipline and Unity
C, D	"I am proud of the experiences that helped me build confidence, overcome anxiety and pressure, and improve my skills, such as public speaking, performing, and creative problem-solving. These moments contributed greatly to my personal growth."	Self-improvement under Pressure	Motivation as a Key to Success in Academic and Personal Growth
H, K	"I am proud of being approachable and supportive to others, whether classmates, children from marginalized communities, or animals. Helping and caring for others has given me a sense of purpose and satisfaction."	Fulfillment from Supporting Others	Impact of Community Empowerment Training on Cadets

Table 4 shows that participation in leadership projects significantly enhanced the respondents' self-perception as leaders, particularly in terms of confidence, responsibility, and sense of purpose. Many participants (A, B, I, J, L) recognized their ability to lead and contribute meaningfully through managing events and solving problems, while others (E, F, G) developed a stronger sense of accountability and discipline through handling responsibilities. Participants C and D highlighted improvements in confidence and skills as they learned to overcome pressure and anxiety, reflecting personal growth under challenging conditions. Meanwhile, respondents H and K emphasized fulfillment derived from helping others, indicating a deeper appreciation of leadership as service. Overall, the findings suggest that project involvement plays a crucial role in shaping leadership identity, competence, and purpose among female cadets.

The findings indicate that participation in leadership programs has a significant positive impact on the respondents' confidence, responsibility, motivation, and sense of purpose. Through leading events, managing

initiatives, and taking responsibility for decision-making, the respondents recognized and strengthened their ability to lead effectively, supporting the view that leadership skills are developed through experience in institutional contexts. Tasks such as financial management, adherence to rules, and maintaining discipline further enhanced their accountability and reinforced their identity as responsible leaders capable of guiding others. Additionally, engaging in leadership roles enabled them to overcome challenges such as anxiety, public speaking, and problem-solving, thereby increasing both confidence and motivation (Martin et al., 2013). Moreover, involvement in community-oriented activities fostered a deeper understanding of leadership as a service, emphasizing empathy, social responsibility, and fulfilment derived from helping others (Greenleaf, 1977; Northouse, 2022). Leadership grounded in empathy and service has been shown to strengthen relationships, trust, and positive social impact. These findings suggest that leadership experiences play a crucial role in shaping both the motivational levels and leadership identity of female cadets, ultimately contributing to their effectiveness and growth in leadership positions.

Table 5

Feelings of Pressure and Responsibility in Leading Others

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A, J	" when you embrace that pressure, that's how you achieve your goals. It motivates you, so you can do better the next day or the next time. So yes, pressure is actually a big help because it changes the way we think."	Good example of Leadership experience	Stress and academic pressure influence achievement and motivation.
B, C	"..I feel the pressure when leading others, when it comes to going to my role and position as the president of the whole batch of Marine Transportation students, so in Nautica, although I have pressure of this mine, to do well, to serve the student body, I don't let it show, so I feel the pressure just inside me and I don't let know to other people."	Responsible Decision-Making	.
D, I	"...student leaders have experienced being afraid of judgment and criticism. But during my journey, I used those comments in a positive way. In the sense that, whether the comments were negative or positive, I used them for my self-improvement."	Leading Through Service	Leaders guide peers in activities, fund management, and programs.
E, F, G	"Feeling pressure is a normal thing for being a leader because the pressure is the stepping stone to lead anyone and if you haven't feel pressure you are not an effective leader because they just follow your orders without thinking that you are not the leader..."	Growing Through Encouragement	.

H	<i>"...I'm an introvert and it's a hard journey when you're someone who cannot talk loudly. Even if I'm a performing artist, I'm learning that specific field but it's hard to communicate, especially when you have limited social battery or there are times that your mind is just really tired from all the tasks that you are going to do or activities that you are going to do..."</i>	Quiet Leadership Challenge	Developing Confidence as a Core Leadership Competency
K, L	<i>"At first, yes I felt a lot of pressure. But over time, I learned how to overcome it. The people supporting me trust me, and because of that, I try to remove the pressure so they won't doubt my ability to lead."</i>	Confident Leadership to handling Situation	

Table 5 reveals that pressure and responsibility are central experiences in student leadership, but are generally perceived as positive and developmental influences. Most participants acknowledged that pressure is an inherent part of leadership, which motivates them to perform better and achieve goals (A, J, E, F, G). Others (B, C) indicated that they internalize pressure to maintain composure and effectively fulfill their responsibilities, reflecting a sense of accountability and professionalism. Participants D and I further demonstrated that feedback, including criticism, is used constructively for self-improvement, highlighting resilience and a growth-oriented mindset. Meanwhile, participant H emphasized the challenges faced by introverted leaders, particularly in communication, while participants K and L showed how confidence and social support help in overcoming pressure over time. Overall, the findings suggest that pressure, although challenging, serves as a key driver of motivation, confidence-building, and leadership development, enabling female cadets to adapt, grow, and perform effectively in their roles.

Participants D and I exhibited resilience and a growth-oriented mindset by using feedback and criticism as opportunities to strengthen their leadership capabilities. Likewise, respondents K and L emphasized the importance of building trust, fostering teamwork, and maintaining positive relationships within their organizations, underscoring the collaborative nature of effective maritime leadership. These experiences align with **(Qing, 2002)** and **(Li & Pan, 2009)**, who identified adaptability, interpersonal competence, and effective communication as essential attributes of contemporary maritime leaders. Furthermore, challenges such as introversion, fear of criticism, and increased accountability became significant learning experiences that enabled respondents to cultivate confidence, inclusivity, and leadership maturity, consistent with the leadership framework proposed by **(Eagly & Carli, 2007)**. The varied approaches adopted by the respondents, ranging from reserved leadership styles to highly engaged participation, further highlight how individual motivations and experiences contribute to leadership growth and identity formation **(Qing, 2002)**. Overall, the findings demonstrate that student leadership experiences at AIMS serve as a valuable platform for developing the leadership skills, professional attitudes, and decision-making capabilities necessary for future careers in the maritime industry, emphasizing the importance of supportive and inclusive environments in preparing competent maritime leaders.

Table 6*Challenges Encountered in Balancing Studies and Leadership Roles*

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A	"...sometimes there are really people who won't understand you no matter what explanation."	Communication Barriers	Leadership Challenges and Pressures
B, C, J	"...the pressure is real, especially when things don't go according to plan during an event. Like during the back-to-back Maritime Week events, one of the venues wasn't set up properly — and that's the one where we were supposed to host. Thankfully, we arrived early. We messaged and got help from free Nautica officers and members to fix the venue. It all worked out in the end, and we were able to get ready for hosting. The event turned out successful, even though we were a bit unprepared for that part. Good thing Nautica's members were so helpful and cooperative. Also, since I'm working with people who have different work personalities, it's important to know how to adjust and to ask for updates to make sure the work is progressing."	Leadership Under Pressure and Team Collaboration	Acquiring the powerful process of leadership growth through pressure in difficult times of student leaders
D, I	"...pressure is part of being a leader. But when you embrace that pressure, that's when you achieve your goals. It motivates you, so you end up doing better the next day, the next time around..."	Pressure as Motivation	
E	"...over time, I learned how to overcome it. The people supporting me trust me, and because of that, I try to remove the pressure so they won't doubt my ability to lead."	Growth Through Leadership Experience	
F, I	"...pressure is a normal thing for being a leader because the pressure is the stepping stone to lead anyone and if you haven't feel pressure you are not an effective leader because they just follow your orders without thinking that you are not the leader..."	Pressure as a Measure of Effective Leadership	
G	"...I feel the pressure when leading others, when it comes to going to my role and position as the president of the whole batch of Marine Transportation students, so in Nautica, although I have pressure of this mine, to do well, to serve the student body, I don't let it show, so I feel the pressure just inside me and I don't let know to other people."	Internalized Leadership Pressure	
H, L	"...handling a responsibility, it automatically has pressure because one mistake can affect your plans in any part of the journey."	Responsibility-Induced Pressure	
K	"sometimes there are just people who won't listen to you no matter how much you explain."	Resistance to Leadership Communication	

Table 6 indicates that female cadets encounter multiple challenges in balancing academic responsibilities and leadership roles, primarily centered on pressure, communication difficulties, and role-related expectations. Many respondents identified communication barriers, such as being misunderstood or facing resistance from peers (A, K), as

significant obstacles that complicate leadership tasks. Additionally, participants (B, C, J) emphasized the challenges of managing unexpected situations and working with diverse personalities, underscoring the need for adaptability and teamwork. Pressure emerged as a pervasive experience among respondents, with several participants (D, I, F, G, H, L) describing it as an inherent aspect of leadership tied to accountability, performance expectations, and fear of making mistakes. Despite these difficulties, many respondents interpreted pressure positively, viewing it as a motivating factor that enhances performance and fosters growth (D, I, E). Others demonstrated the ability to internalize and manage pressure while maintaining responsibility (G), or to overcome it through experience and support systems (E, K, L). Overall, the findings suggest that while balancing leadership and academic roles presents significant challenges, these experiences contribute to the development of resilience, adaptability, and effective leadership skills among female cadets.

The results suggest that leadership experiences within maritime education play a significant role in developing the competencies required of future maritime professionals. Student leaders are often required to navigate complex responsibilities, make decisions under demanding circumstances, and coordinate with diverse groups, providing valuable opportunities to strengthen their leadership capabilities. These experiences contribute to the development of adaptability, communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills, which are recognized as essential competencies for maritime leaders and officers (**International Maritime Organization, 2017; Manuel, 2017**). This qualitative observation is strongly supported by recent quantitative assessments within the same institution, which demonstrate that interpersonal and conceptual leadership skills—specifically the ability to collaborate under pressure and synthesize complex information—are the most significant predictors of a cadet's overall shipboard preparedness (**De Leon et al., 2026**). Furthermore, the ability of these student leaders to navigate such demanding circumstances relies heavily on underlying psychological mechanisms; as **Macalnas et al. (2026)** established, adaptive personality traits and high leadership self-efficacy directly empower student leaders to execute collaborative and confident decision-making. Participation in leadership roles also enables students to cultivate professional attitudes such as accountability, resilience, and commitment to organizational objectives, preparing them for the responsibilities of the maritime industry.

Table 7

Coping Habits and Stress-Management Practices of Student Leaders

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A	<i>"I always remind myself that this won't last forever. We all go through a process where things get hard, and there are moments when we feel stressed. But I keep thinking that all these hardships and all this stress will eventually bring something good back to me. We can't become strong if we never feel pressure or struggle. Yes, it's difficult at first, but we should always remember that good things will still come — rewards for the challenges and stress we face."</i>	Positive Reframing of a Growth Mindset	"Adaptive Coping Strategies for Effectively Managing and Navigating Stress in Leadership Roles"

B, C, J	<i>"One example I can give for handling stress is practicing proper time management. As a student leader, it's important to know what to prioritize and when to do each task. If you simply set things aside without clear priorities, it won't help. Effective student leaders must know what to focus on first, and that's achieved through proper time management."</i>	Implementation of Time Management/ Prioritization	
D	<i>"The practices that helped me handle stress start with accepting every situation and responding to it properly. One example is learning to act as a role model. I'm naturally a jolly person, but in school, especially as someone involved in many organizations, I need to carry myself responsibly. Now in my third year, I can say I've built a good image because of that."</i>	Role Modelling and Self-Acceptance	
E	<i>"I handle stress by drinking water, thinking before I speak, and taking a five-minute break. When you're overwhelmed with emotions, you can't manage things well. You can't be an effective leader if you're leading with emotions instead of clear thinking."</i>	Emotional Regulation and being Mindful	
F, I	<i>"I feel pressured when I hear people say things like, 'You're an officer, you should know everything.' It makes me feel stressed, even though that shouldn't be the expectation. We're still normal cadets too."</i>	Pressure of Role Expectations	
G	<i>"When academics get tough, I talk to God for guidance and wisdom. I remind myself that everything He gives me has a purpose. That inspires me to do better and keep going."</i>	Purpose – Faith Driven Mindset	
H, L	<i>"There are many things that help me manage my stress. One of the most important is getting enough sleep, because it allows me to recharge and regain my energy. Another thing that really helps is balancing my responsibilities with my hobbies. I make time for reading, watching movies, or even exercising, and those activities help me relax and keep myself grounded."</i>	Regulating Self-Care	
K	<i>"Whenever I feel stressed, especially when my responsibilities and workload become heavy, I talk to my friends — the people who support me. I ask for their opinions or whether what I'm doing is right. Receiving</i>	Social Validation and Peer Support	

	<i>positive feedback from them helps relieve my stress."</i>		
--	--	--	--

Table 7 presents the coping habits and stress-management practices of student leaders, revealing that respondents employ a range of adaptive strategies to manage the demands of leadership roles. These strategies are anchored in the theme Adaptive Coping Strategies for Effectively Managing and Navigating Stress in Leadership Roles and include both cognitive and behavioral approaches. Several participants (A, B, C, J) emphasized positive reframing and time management, demonstrating how a growth mindset and prioritization help them handle pressure effectively. Others (D, E) highlighted the importance of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and responsible behavior, reflecting the role of mindfulness in maintaining effective leadership. Additionally, respondents (H, L) underscored self-care practices, such as adequate rest and engaging in hobbies, as essential for sustaining well-being, while participant G relied on faith-based motivation to find purpose and resilience during stressful situations. Social support also emerged as a crucial coping mechanism, with participant K emphasizing the value of seeking encouragement and feedback from peers. Overall, the findings indicate that student leaders utilize multidimensional coping strategies—including cognitive reframing, behavioral regulation, social support, and personal values—to effectively manage stress and maintain their performance in both academic and leadership responsibilities.

The findings suggest that the leadership experiences of student leaders at AIMS serve as valuable opportunities for developing competencies essential to future maritime professionals. Through their involvement in student organizations, respondents navigated complex responsibilities, coordinated with diverse groups, and exercised decision-making and accountability, all of which are fundamental aspects of maritime leadership. Participants demonstrated the ability to lead under demanding circumstances while maintaining commitment to organizational goals, reflecting the adaptability and resilience expected of maritime officers. These experiences also enhanced their interpersonal and communication skills, enabling them to build trust, foster teamwork, and maintain productive relationships within their organizations. Such qualities are consistent with the leadership competencies identified as essential in the maritime profession, including effective communication, collaboration, and leadership adaptability (Qing, 2002). Furthermore, experiences involving feedback, criticism, and increased responsibility contributed to the respondents' leadership maturity and confidence, allowing them to refine their leadership approaches and become more inclusive and responsive leaders. Consistent with Eagly & Carli (2007), these challenges became developmental experiences that strengthened their capacity to lead diverse groups. The varied leadership approaches demonstrated by the respondents, ranging from reserved yet reflective leadership to highly engaged and proactive participation, further illustrate how leadership experiences contribute to the formation of leadership identity and professional readiness. Overall, the findings highlight that student leadership opportunities at AIMS provide a practical foundation for cultivating the knowledge, attitudes, and competencies required of future maritime leaders.

Table 8

Advice for Fellow Female Cadets Facing the Same Problems

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	CODES	THEMES
A, F, K	<i>"I believe that a leader should never give up, as challenges are part of leadership and help build strength and resilience. Experiencing difficulties early prepares me for future demands, while maintaining</i>	Perseverance Through Challenges	Acquiring the skill of Leadership of Women in Maritime Field/ Specialization

	<i>motivation allows me to continue leading effectively. Through hardship and overcoming fear, I grow stronger and become more capable of handling future challenges, while also inspiring and encouraging others to pursue leadership roles."</i>		
E, I, J	<i>"I believe that staying calm and composed is essential in leadership, as emotions can hinder effective decision-making. I do my best without creating unnecessary pressure, focusing only on what I am capable of handling. When leadership feels overwhelming or support is lacking, I seek guidance from experienced individuals who can help me manage responsibilities and pressure effectively."</i>	Handling Leadership Pressure	
B, G, L	<i>"I believe that female cadets should not feel intimidated in a male-dominated field. Although discrimination and being underestimated may occur, I do not allow others' opinions to define my worth. By trusting myself, staying confident, and recognizing that my presence belongs here, I prove that courage and leadership are not defined by gender."</i>	Confidence in a Male-Dominated Field	National and International Legal Frameworks Advancing Gender Equality
C, D, H	<i>"I believe that effective leadership starts with self-care, self-awareness, and knowing my worth. By setting clear boundaries, taking breaks, and allowing time for rest and reflection, I protect my long-term goals and maintain the energy needed to lead. Embracing my uniqueness and celebrating both small and big accomplishments help me continue growing and becoming the best version of myself."</i>	Personal Boundaries	

The advice provided by female cadets in Table 8 reflects a collective and experience-based understanding of effective leadership, emphasizing resilience, emotional control, confidence, and self-awareness. Respondents A, F, and K highlighted the importance of perseverance, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth and sources of strength that prepare them to mentor others. Similarly, respondents E, I, and J underscored the need to remain calm and composed in stressful situations, demonstrating that emotional regulation and seeking guidance from experienced individuals are essential for sound decision-making. Meanwhile, respondents B, G, and L emphasized the importance of self-confidence in navigating a male-dominated environment, asserting that leadership effectiveness should not be limited by gender stereotypes. This perspective aligns with the principles of empowerment and gender equality emphasized in the Magna Carta of Women, which recognizes women's participation, empowerment, and leadership as essential components of national development. Furthermore, the emphasis on self-care, balance, and self-awareness reflects findings that effective leadership requires an understanding of one's strengths, limitations, and well-being, enabling leaders to make sound decisions, foster positive relationships, and maintain effectiveness in fulfilling their responsibilities (Da Fonseca et al., 2022; Eurich, 2018).

Overall, the data suggest that resilience, self-confidence, emotional balance, and continuous self-reflection are key attributes that enable female cadets not only to overcome leadership challenges but also to inspire and guide others in similar situations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the motivation of female cadets at the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS) to assume student leadership roles is shaped by a dynamic interaction of both internal and external factors. Internally, the cadets are driven by a strong desire for personal and professional growth, increased self-confidence, and a commitment to challenge gender barriers within a traditionally male-dominated field. Externally, the presence of role models, opportunities for organizational involvement, and institutional support significantly influenced their decision to engage in leadership roles.

In terms of outcomes, the study highlights that female cadet leaders actively contributed to various areas such as community service, academic initiatives, and organizational leadership, demonstrating their capacity to lead effectively. Despite encountering challenges—including academic pressure, time management difficulties, and high expectations associated with leadership roles—the respondents demonstrated commendable levels of resilience, adaptability, and emotional maturity. These findings underscore that leadership experiences not only enhance their competencies but also strengthen their identity as capable and empowered leaders within the maritime sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- For Maritime Institutions. Maritime academies are encouraged to strengthen leadership development and mentorship programs for female cadets, alongside gender-sensitivity initiatives, to promote inclusivity and empower women in leadership roles.
- For Female Cadets. Female cadets are encouraged to actively engage in leadership opportunities and student organizations to enhance their confidence, develop essential leadership skills, and contribute to reducing gender stereotypes in the maritime field.
- For Student Leaders and Organizations. Student leaders should foster inclusive and collaborative leadership practices by promoting peer mentoring, leadership training, and equal participation, thereby creating a supportive leadership environment.
- For Future Researchers. Future studies may further explore gender, motivation, and leadership in maritime education using diverse or mixed methodologies to support the development of more inclusive policies and programs.

REFERENCES

- Al Mazrouei, H., & Pech, R. J. (2015). The expatriate as company leader in the UAE: Cultural adaptation. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 36(1), 33–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-08-2013-0067>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2020). *Adaptable leadership: What it takes to be a quick-change artist*. <https://www.ccl.org>
- Da Fonseca, S., Myres, H., & Hofmeyr, K. (2022). The influence of self-awareness on effective leadership outcomes in South Africa. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 53(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v53i1.2720>
- De Leon, J., Gutierrez, M. S., Mueden, J. C., Peralta, C. P., Pastrana, M. V. L., Rosos, G. G., & Vera, C. G. (2026). Beyond administrative proficiency: Interpersonal and cognitive leadership as the key drivers of shipboard preparedness. *GET International Research Journal*, 4(2), 125–135. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20352444>
- Dziczkowski, J. (2013). Mentoring and leadership development. *The Educational Forum*, 77(3), 351–360.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Eurich, T. (2018). What self-awareness really is (and how to cultivate it). *Harvard Business Review*, 96(1), 114–124.
- Hastings, L. J., & Sunderman, H. (2020). Evidence-based practices in mentoring for leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 168, 75–84.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (D. Carr, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
- International Maritime Organization. (2017). *International convention on standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers (STCW Convention and Code)*.
- Ishtiaq, M. (2019). Book review: Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *English Language Teaching*, 12(5), 40.
- Kitada, M. (2021). Women seafarers: An analysis of barriers to their employment. *The world of the seafarer*, 65.
- Li, P., & Pan, G. (2009). The relationship between motivation and achievement: A survey of the study motivation of English majors in Qingdao Agricultural University. *English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 123–128.
- Macalnas, N., Mangali, L., Martinez, H., San Juan, J., & Sevilla, I. (2026). Unlocking leadership potential: How personality traits shape styles and self-efficacy in student leaders. *GET International Research Journal*, 4(1), 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18787825>

- Manuel, M. E. (2017). Vocational and academic approaches to maritime education and training (MET): Trends, challenges and opportunities. *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 16(3), 473–483.
- Martin, A. J., Nejad, H. G., Colmar, S., & Liem, G. A. D. (2013). Adaptability: How students' responses to uncertainty and novelty predict their academic and non-academic outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 728–746. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032794>
- Midgley, C., Lockwood, P., & Hu, L. Y. (2023). Maximizing women's motivation in domains dominated by men: Personally known versus famous role models. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 47(2), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231156165>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (9th ed.). Sage.
- Qin, X. Q. (2002). The internal structure of non-English majors' learning motivation. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 1, 51–58.
- Republic of the Philippines. (2009). *Republic Act No. 9710: The Magna Carta of Women*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2009/08/14/republic-act-no-9710/>
- Sessa, V. I., Morgan, B. V., Kalenderli, S., & Hammond, F. E. (2014). Key events in student leaders' lives and lessons learned from them. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 13(2), 1–28.
- Sumague, R. P. (2023). Influence of involvement in clubs and organizations on the leadership development of students. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 17(2), 404–407. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2023.17.2.0228>
- Uhl-Bien, M. (2006). Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing.
- United Nations. (n.d.-a). *Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators
- United Nations. (n.d.-b). *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5#targets_and_indicators