

The Habitualization of Leadership in “Tokkatsu”: Examining the Leadership Habitualization Hypothesis Through Text Analysis

Abstract

Research Overview

This study examines the educational effects of leadership experiences in "Tokkatsu" (special activities) in Japanese schools. While attracting international attention as a unique educational model, its actual effectiveness remains unclear. This study conducts a preliminary analysis using student survey data to explore how school experiences shape future leaders.

Purpose of Study

The primary objective of this study is to clarify the dynamics of leadership development in school settings by addressing the question: "Who habitualizes leadership?" In this study, leadership is defined as the behavioral pattern of assuming leading roles. The study examines two research questions: (1) what patterns of continuous leadership exist, and how are they distributed among students? and (2) does experience in vice-leadership roles foster subsequent leadership engagement? By addressing these questions, the study aims to elucidate the origins and branching points of Japanese-style leadership cultivated through “Tokkatsu”.

Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design based on a student survey on the educational effects of “Tokkatsu.” The data were collected in October 2025 from 300 university students in Japan (response rate: 79.2%), who retrospectively reported their leadership experiences in elementary, junior high, and high school.

To identify patterns of leadership development, the study first analyzes the distribution of leadership roles across school stages. It then examines transitions in leadership experiences across school stages by estimating conditional probabilities, allowing for the identification of continuous and “step-up” leadership trajectories.

In addition, open-ended responses regarding perceived learning outcomes from vice-leadership experience are analyzed using statistical text analysis with KH Coder. Co-occurrence network analysis is employed to examine patterns associated with vice-leadership experiences.

Results and Discussion

The results reveal two main aspects of leadership development across school stages.

First, leadership experiences tend to follow either stable or declining trajectories, depending on the type of role. For example, leadership roles in clubs remain relatively stable across school stages, whereas roles such as class representatives show a marked decline at the high school level. This suggests that institutional structures and participation opportunities differ across role types, influencing the continuity of leadership experiences. In addition, a substantial proportion of leadership experiences at the junior high and high school levels were held by first-time participants. Approximately half of these positions were occupied by students without prior experience at earlier school stages. This indicates that only a small minority of students continuously held the same leadership roles from elementary through high school.

To further examine how leadership experiences evolve across school stages, the study analyzes leadership trajectories using conditional probabilities based on prior experiences. The analysis identifies a prominent “step-up” pattern, in which individuals transition from minor or supporting roles (e.g., group leaders) in earlier stages to more central leadership positions (e.g., club leaders) in later stages. This suggests that early leadership experiences are associated with an increased likelihood of subsequent leadership engagement.

Second, students with vice-leadership experience in earlier school stages show a higher probability of assuming leadership roles in high school. Text analysis of open-ended responses suggests that such experiences are associated with greater awareness of others, including peers and teachers, as well as more reflective perspectives on leadership. Such findings indicate that vice-leadership roles may function as a transitional space where students develop interpersonal and situational awareness.

This function can be interpreted in light of the dual nature of vice-leadership roles. Individuals in such positions are required not only to support primary leaders but also to assume partial leadership responsibilities, which exposes them to multiple perspectives within

group dynamics. As a result, vice-leadership experience may facilitate the development of a more multifaceted understanding of leadership.

Taken together, the results indicate that leadership development in “Tokkatsu” is not solely based on repeated experience in the same role but is also shaped by progressive transitions and the formative effects of vice-leadership experience. This process may contribute to the habitualization of leadership, while also influencing individual decisions to pursue or avoid leadership roles.

Building on this interpretation, “Tokkatsu” may function not only as an incubator for leadership but also as a selection mechanism based on prior experiences. In Japan’s compulsory education system, many students experience some form of leadership, even in minor roles. However, leadership positions in later stages may be disproportionately occupied by individuals with prior experience, reflecting a system that rewards accumulated track records. This reliance on past track records may increase the likelihood of burnout among some students and potentially limit the emergence of new leadership opportunities.

Keywords: Tokkatsu, Leadership, Vice-Leadership, Text Analysis, Habitualization