



Research Paper

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COGNITIVE STYLE AND LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SELECTED INSTITUTIONS OF COIMBATORE

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ABSTRACT

Educational institution is the basic platform where the students gain knowledge and develop their skills. The inculcated knowledge would influence the thinking style in students. The thinking style plays crucial role in different kind of decision-making process. This study aimed at examining the relationship among cognitive style and leadership preference among college students in an educational institution located in Coimbatore district. A sample of 103 participants was recruited using a purposive sampling technique. The Cognitive Style Inventory (Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha, 2018) and Leadership Preference Scale (L. I. Bhusan, 2011) administered as a data collection tool. The collected data was subjected to statistical analysis like descriptive and inferential statistics to test the hypothesis. The results revealed no significant gender differences in cognitive style or leadership preference. However, a significant relationship was observed between cognitive style and leadership preference. Finally, it is concluded that cognitive style plays important role in leadership preference among college students.

Keywords: *cognitive style, systematic style, intuitive style, leadership preference, college students, educational institutions.*

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive style signifies the habitual and distinctive manner in which a person perceives, processes, organizes, and understands information during thinking, learning, and problem-solving activities. It signifies an individual's favored method for managing cognitive tasks, as opposed to the degree of intelligence or capability that they have. People vary in their cognitive styles, including being more analytical or intuitive, reflective or impulsive, and visual or verbal in their thought processes. These styles affect how individuals comprehend information, make choices, engage with their surroundings, and react to various circumstances. Cognitive style tends to remain consistent over time, yet it can be influenced by elements like education, experience, and cultural context. It has a significant impact on domains such as learning, communication, and problem-solving, influencing how well an individual can adjust to different cognitive challenges.

Woolfolk (1998) proposed that cognitive style pertains to the manner in which an individual perceives and structures information, data from the external environment. Cognitive style serves as the foundational concept for processing information irrespective of the context in which it is utilized (Furnham, 1995).

TYPES OF COGNITIVE STYLES

Intuitive Style: An intuitive cognitive style describes a thinking approach that is quick, instinctive, and relies on emotions, gut feelings, or past experiences. People with this approach usually depend on “intuition” instead of thorough examination. They frequently take swift actions, grasp the big picture effortlessly, and feel at ease managing uncertainty. This approach is often linked to creativity and comprehensive thinking, yet it can occasionally result in mistakes if choices are made without adequate assessment.

Systematic Style: A systematic cognitive style includes methodical, careful, and rational thought processes. People with this approach meticulously

ly assess information, adhere to methodical processes, and ground their choices in evidence and logic. They favor organization, precision, and in-depth examination prior to drawing conclusions.

LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE

Leadership preference denotes a person's inclination or disposition to favor a specific leadership style or method, whether in their own leadership of others or in their preferred way of being led. It embodies individual beliefs, principles, perspectives, and previous experiences that influence what someone views as successful leadership. Leadership preferences can affect individuals' reactions to authority, teamwork in groups, and their effectiveness in organizational environments. It is influenced by elements such as personality, culture, situational requirements, and organizational context, rendering it a crucial concept for comprehending behavior in teams and work settings. Leadership is a skill that allows a person or a group to influence and guide followers or other members of a group, extending beyond just institutions or organizations. It is necessary when individuals must make significant choices regarding their personal and professional lives. It is necessary not only for decision-making but also for creating and sharing a clear vision, establishing achievable objectives, and providing members and oneself with the information and tools required to reach those objectives (Robinson, 2016).

Autocratic leadership: Autocratic leadership is a leader-focused approach where the leader retains total control and makes decisions alone, with minimal or no contributions from team members. This approach highlights control, discipline, and rapid decision-making, making it beneficial in scenarios that need prompt action or clear guidance; however, it might stifle creativity and diminish morale among team members.

Democratic leadership: Democratic leadership is a collaborative approach where the leader fosters participation from team members in the decision-making process. Communication is trans-

parent, and people are encouraged to express their thoughts and viewpoints, which can boost motivation, creativity, and team unity. While democratic leadership might involve longer decision-making processes, it typically results in greater satisfaction and enhanced commitment among members. The primary distinction is in participation levels: autocratic leadership depends on authority and control, whereas democratic leadership emphasizes collaboration and shared responsibility

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reviews on Cognitive Style

Laxman (2022) examined cognitive style among arts and science college students in Aurangabad District. The findings revealed a significant difference in cognitive style between students from science and arts faculties, indicating that academic discipline may influence the development of cognitive preferences.

Mittal and Kaur (2024) investigated cognitive styles among college students in relation to selected demographic variables. The study found no significant differences in either systematic or intuitive cognitive styles based on gender, locality (rural and urban), or type of institution (government and private colleges). Furthermore, arts and science students did not differ significantly in their systematic cognitive style; however, a significant difference was observed in their intuitive cognitive style.

Chakraborty, Das, and Jha (2025) explored the role of cognitive style in academic achievement and creative thinking among students. The results indicated that students with a systematic cognitive style demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement compared to those with an intuitive cognitive style. The study further reported that systematic thinkers consistently obtained better academic scores than their intuitive counterparts.

Reviews on Leadership Preference

Najar and Dar (2017) examined leadership pref-

erences among postgraduate students at Kashmir University. The findings indicated that students showed a greater preference for authoritarian leadership. Female students were found to exhibit a stronger preference for authoritarian leadership compared to male students. Additionally, students from nuclear families demonstrated a higher preference for authoritarian leadership than those from joint families. However, no significant differences were observed in leadership preferences between students from rural and urban backgrounds.

Mathew and Jethwani (2023) investigated the relationship between leadership style preference and motivation among young adults. The study revealed a significant positive relationship between leadership style preference and motivation, suggesting that individuals with stronger leadership preferences tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the cognitive style of the college students
- To assess the leadership preference of the college students
- To find out the relationship between the cognitive style and leadership preference among college students
- To identify the difference between male and female students in terms of cognitive style
- To identify the difference between male and female students in terms of leadership preference

METHODOLOGY

The contradictory findings of the previous researches the present study aims to find out the relationship between cognitive style and leadership preference among college students Further it also aimed to find whether there is any difference

between the male and female students in terms of cognitive style and leadership preference. The population for present study included the college students from selected institution in Coimbatore district from Tamil Nadu State, India.

The samples (N=103) were selected using purposive sampling method from selected institutions in Coimbatore.

TOOLS

The Cognitive Style Inventory (CS Inventory) was developed by Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha (2018) is a 5-point rating scale which contains 40 statements related to cognitive style under 2 different dimensions namely systematic style and intuitive style. The CS Inventory has good reliability coefficient: Systematic style (0.58) & Cognitive style (0.56) (Test-retest).

The Leadership Preference Scale (LP Scale) was developed by L. I. Bhushan (2011). The LP Scale consist of 30 statements that assess the preference of leadership style in a 5-point rating scale. The LP Scale has good reliability coefficient (0.79) (Test-retest).

The informed consent was obtained from the participants and their personal information was also collected. In order to assess the study variables, the Cognitive Style Inventory (CS Inventory) and the Leadership Preference Scale (LP Scale) was administered with the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed (Table – 1) that a notable correlation exists between cognitive style and leadership preference (N=103) in college students. Additionally, it indicates that the students exhibit an average (Mean=140.16) degree of cognitive style and a high (Mean=97.37) degree of leadership preference. Nevertheless, male students (Mean = 128.67; SD = 38.67) and the female students (Mean = 143.11; SD = 22.23) show no significant differences in their cognitive style. In the same way, male students (Mean = 99.19; SD = 11.61) and female students (Mean = 96.91;

SD = 11.59) do not show a significant difference in their leadership preference (Table – 2).

Based on two different cognitive styles, the male students (Mean = 64.33.67; SD = 19.57) and the female students (Mean = 73.17; SD = 11.46) show no significant differences in their systematic type of cognitive style. In the same way, male students (Mean = 64.33; SD = 19.43) and female students (Mean = 69.84; SD = 11.61) do not show a significant difference in their intuitive type of cognitive style (Table – 3).

The present findings indicate a notable relationship between cognitive style and leadership preference among college students, suggesting that the way individuals process, organize, and interpret information plays a significant role in shaping their preference on leadership styles. Students with particular cognitive style such as intuitive or systematic may be more inclined toward specific leadership orientations, reflecting a consistency between thinking patterns and decision-making tendencies in leadership contexts.

The research findings show no significant gender differences in cognitive style among college students, suggesting that both groups demonstrate relatively similar patterns of thinking and information processing. This implies that cognitive style, as a psychological construct, may be more influenced by individual differences and contextual factors such as educational experiences rather than gender alone. Similarly, the findings show no significant difference in leadership preference. This may reflect changing social norms and increased emphasis on gender equality in educational settings, where both male and female students are provided with similar opportunities to develop leadership skills. The lack of significant gender difference in leadership preference suggests that leadership orientation is shaped more by individual experiences, personality traits, and environmental factors rather than gender.

The findings indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students in both systematic and intuitive cognitive

styles and this findings align with an earlier study by Mittal & Kaur (2024) examining the cognitive style among college students in relation to some demographic variables, revealed that there is no significant difference in the systematic style and intuitive style between male and female students, rural and urban students and students studying in government and private colleges.

Systematic cognitive style is generally linked to logical, sequential, and analytical thought processes. Elements that lead to the creation of a systematic style encompass formal education, training in organized problem-solving, familiarity with scientific or mathematical reasoning, and assignments that necessitate thorough assessment and planning. Traits like conscientiousness and a liking for order could also enhance systematic processing. Factors in the environment, like teaching approaches that prioritize logical reasoning, evidence-supported thinking, and structured learning, enhance this style. Conversely, intuitive cognitive style encompasses fast, instinctive, and

experience-driven evaluations. It is frequently shaped by prior experiences, emotional reactions, and recognition of patterns. Elements contributing to an intuitive style encompass experiences with real-world scenarios, instinctive learning, ingenuity, and settings that promote adaptability and swift choices. Traits like openness to experiences and dependence on emotions can also encourage intuitive thinking. Cultural factors and social engagements could also influence the development of intuitive responses.

The presence of both styles in comparable amounts among male and female students indicates that cognitive processing is adaptable rather than static. People might alternate between systematic and intuitive methods based on the demands of the task, time limits, and the situation. Consequently, the results support the notion that cognitive styles are influenced more by situational, educational, and psychological elements than by gender differences alone.

TABLE 1: The Relationship between Cognitive Style and Leadership Preference among college students

Variables	n	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Cognitive Style	103	140.16	26.83	--	
2. Leadership Preference	103	97.37	11.57	0.130	--

TABLE 2: Difference between the male and female students in terms of Cognitive Style and Leadership Preference

Variables	Male		Female		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Cognitive Style	128.67	38.67	143.11	22.23	1.643	0.114 (NS)
Leadership Preference	99.19	11.61	96.91	11.59	- 0.802	0.424 (NS)

NS: Not Significant

TABLE 3: Difference between the male and female students in terms of Systematic style and Intuitive Style

Variables	Male		Female		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Systematic Style	64.33	19.57	73.17	11.46	1.983	0.059 (NS)
Intuitive Style	64.33	19.43	69.84	11.61	1.243	0.226 (NS)

NS: Not Significant

CONCLUSION

The current research shows that cognitive style and leadership preference are significantly connected, suggesting that how students understand and analyze information affects their leadership approach. However, the lack of major gender differences in cognitive styles (systematic and intuitive) and leadership preference indicates that these constructs are not dictated by gender but rather influenced by personal traits, educational backgrounds, and environmental factors. The results emphasize that both systematic and intuitive cognitive styles exist together in students and can be adaptively utilized based on situational requirements, underscoring the fluidity of cogni-

tion. The research highlights that leadership preference is significantly associated with cognitive abilities and is shaped more by psychological and contextual influences than by demographic factors like gender.

CONSTRAINTS

The sample size was relatively small in relation to the overall population. The study was limited to selected institutions only. The relationship between the study variables and socio-demographic variables was not examined.

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