Exploring the Relationship between Course Curriculum and Leadership Skills Development among Business Graduates in Bangladesh

Mohammed Harisur Rahman Howladar, Md. Sahidur Rahman and Md. Abu Taher

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the relationship between business course curriculum and leadership skills development among a sample of business graduates. The required data were collected through a questionnaire administered to MBA and final semester BBA students of different public and private universities in Bangladesh. The total number of respondents in the study was 226. The students were selected using a convenience sampling method. To examine the hypotheses, multivariate correlation and ANOVA tests were used. The results showed that a business course curriculum has a positive impact on leadership skills development among the business graduates. The study suggests guidelines for updating the course curriculum that will provide opportunities to students for developing their leadership skills, from which society will also benefit. The study was unable to include all universities in Bangladesh. Findings would be more significant if the respondents had been selected randomly. A cross-sectional study might provide more insight about the leadership skills development through course curriculum. The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Some future research directions have also been provided in this study.

Keywords: business course curriculum; business graduates; leadership skills; leadership skills development

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1. Introduction

1 The paper is a modified and improved version of the paper presented at the International Conference on Business Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Engineering 2013 (ICOBIEE2013) on 6-8th, December, 2013 at Bayview Beach Resort, Penang, Malaysia.
In today’s globalized world, business graduates are expected to have required leadership skills. Rapid changes in business, technology, political and social factors have required the development of effective leadership skills (Cacioppe, 1998). The traits or behaviours of a leader do not guarantee that leader’s success (Robbins, Judge & Sanghi, 2009). A leader’s success also depends on contextual factors (ibid.). Consequently, leaders need to develop their skills to be successful in today’s changing and competitive business environment. Moreover, a leader’s inherent potential is shaped by experiences enabling them to develop the capability to solve significant social problems (Erickson, 1959; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Lewis & Jacobs, 1992).

The business graduate programmes of universities and institutions have significant roles in building leadership skills and capabilities among business graduates. Universities perform their leadership skill development role through offering specific course curricula. Porter and McKibbin (1988) observed that “What universities do with - and to - students are in large measure a function of the curriculum.” However, Elmuti, Minnis and Abebe (2005) noted that the present leadership education curriculum in business schools is not adequate in many regards and that more work needs to be done in its development. Nirenberg (2003) claimed that, every year, 120,000 MBA graduates join the work force but 82% of organizations have difficulty finding qualified leaders. As a result, it is found that the existing leadership education system has major limitations (Elmuti et al., 2005). The current leadership curriculum focuses more on theoretical and conceptual training (ibid.).

In Bangladesh, almost all public and private universities except professional organization like medical and engineering institutions offer BBA and MBA programmes. However, there is still a lack of the required skills and qualifications in business graduates that would enable them to obtain better jobs (Chisty, Uddin & Ghosh, 2007). Moreover, in many organizations, at the top and middle levels of management, many foreign graduates find employment even though there is a huge number of MBA graduates becoming qualified each year in Bangladesh. In this present scenario, the question is arising as to whether the business course curriculum of public and private universities can develop the required leadership skills among business students. The authors have undertaken the present study to determine the answer to this question.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leadership Skills

Leadership success depends not only on various traits or forms of behaviour but, also, on specific abilities and skills relevant to the contemporary changing and dynamic business environment. Different theories of leadership have focused on different aspects of leadership. The trait theory of leadership identifies three categories that are helpful in determining leadership success: motivation,
personality and ability (Elmuti et al., 2005). An effective leader needs to combine cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and technical skills (Yukl, 1994; Gibson et al., 2003).

One of the behavioural theories of leadership, the transactional theory of leadership, places emphasis on the equitable transaction or exchange between leaders and followers by focusing on their mutual self-interest (Rosenbach, 2003). Such a form of leadership emphasizes rewarding subordinates for better performance, taking corrective actions, shaping strategies and helping to foster organizational performance (Bass, 1985; Waldman et al., 2001). Bass (1990) revealed that transactional leaders should have cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and technical skills that are all influential in determining leadership success. On the other hand, the transformational leader generally motivates followers to work for transcendental goals instead of short-term self-interest and for achievement and self-actualization instead of security (Bass, 1985; Gibson et al., 2003). Fiol, Harris and House (1999) stated that charismatic, visionary and transformational leaders focus on followers’ emotional attachment to the vision and values espoused by the leader, emotional and motivational arousal, heightened self-esteem, trust and confidence in the leader and heightened intrinsic motivation. According to Doh (2003), cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and conceptual skills are essential factors that are helpful in determining leadership success, according to the transformational theory.

In another study, Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) showed that, to be successful in business management, leaders need (i) cognitive skills, (ii) interpersonal skills, (iii) business skills, and (iv) strategic skills. Moreover Mumford et al. (2000) proposed a model of leader performance that is based on three key types of skills: (i) complex problem-solving skills, (ii) solution construction skills and (iii) social judgment skills. However, these problem solving skills and solution construction skills depend on the leaders’ cognitive skills, business skills, and strategic skills because, to guide decision-making, leaders need subjective knowledge (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Zaccaro, 2001) and also need to be able to guide others through a pre-determined vision and strategy (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Moreover, to take decisions and solve problems, a leader needs to know how to collect and utilize information in ways that ultimately indicate the extent of the leader’s cognitive skills (Lau & Pavett, 1980; Mintzberg, 1973; Zaccaro, 2001). A leader’s social judgment skills are important component parts of his or her interpersonal skills (Katz, 1974; Mumford et al., 2000).

In short, to face the challenges of globalization, technological changes, the challenges of the dynamic business environment and to be able to work at different levels of organizations, today’s business managers or leaders need cognitive skills, business skills, interpersonal skills and strategic skills.

2.2. Development of Leadership Skills
Many scholars suggested that due to continuous changes in the speed of the economy and technology, as well as the speed of change, managers and leaders who lead modern establishments need to be engaged in constant learning and education processes (Elmuti et al., 2005). Moreover, some researchers observed that becoming an effective leader is the result of both inherent traits and carefully developed skills (Connaughton, Lawrence & Ruben 2003; Rosenbach, 2003).

In today’s competitive and changing business environment, the success of managers or leaders is not only the function of leaders’ traits or forms of behaviour, rather the success of a manager or a leader depends on his or her capabilities or skills and whether they are capable of facing the challenges that exist. In recent times, many scholars have asserted that leadership can be framed not only in terms of specific forms of behaviour but, also, in terms of the capabilities, knowledge and skills that make effective leadership possible (Mumford et al., 2000). Moreover, they revealed that leadership is present in potential form in many individuals and that this potential can emerge once experience is obtained and manifests itself as the capability to learn and benefit from those experiences (ibid.).

Effective leadership capabilities can be fostered by offering specific leadership training, education and relevant exercises to students. Many scholars in this field agree that, although there are some natural talents beneficial to leadership effectiveness, other significant aspects of knowledge, skills and abilities that make up an effective leader can be taught (Doh, 2003; Connaughton et al., 2003; Rosenbach, 2003).

2.3. Leadership Skill Development through Business Course Curricula

The possession of knowledge and skills can help people develop capabilities that emerge over time as a function of their education and experience (Ackerman, 1992; Fleishman, 1992). The required skills and knowledge of business leaders can also be promoted through effective education, exercises and experiences. Elmuti et al. (2005) showed that academic units like the Harvard Business School Executive Education Program, which focuses on enhancing leadership capacities of executives, as well as the University of Michigan’s Michigan Leadership Program (MLP), are both well-known for developing the leadership skills of students through the special emphasis placed on critical leadership issues.

In their leadership skill development model, Elmuti et al. (2005) argued that leadership education should be multi-disciplinary and embrace a global perspective, while being integrated with education concerning business ethics. Moreover, they also showed the various stages of the leadership education model. In the first stage, leadership education focused on fundamental knowledge and skills, in the second stage conceptual and interpersonal skills and in the last stage on practical business skills (ibid.). One important implication of their model is that the business course curriculum should include some courses which cover pre-requisite courses, some co-requisite courses and others specialized courses. These courses will cover
present global, ethical and technological aspects. To develop interpersonal skills and conceptual skills, some classroom exercises such as presentations, role playing sessions and group discussions should be included in the overall business course curriculum. Moreover, to give practical knowledge and understanding, it is important to include practical involvement for students through internships, live projects and other activities. Mumford et al. (2000) also claimed that knowledge acquisition (e.g., intelligence and mastery motives) appear particularly important early in the skill acquisition process. Moreover, they observed that exercises and practical experiences promote the acquisition of leadership skills.

2.4 Business Education and Leadership Skill Development in Bangladesh

There are 37 public universities and 85 private universities under the University Grant Commission (UGC), which is a regulatory body of the Bangladesh government and which regulates tertiary (higher) levels of education in Bangladesh. Most universities, except those concentrating on engineering and medical science, offer business education at both graduate (MBA) and undergraduate (BBA) levels. The BBA and MBA courses are available in all universities offering business education. These courses are mostly the same at both levels. Some universities offer courses on leadership and leadership behaviour. However, there are no major courses offered that aim to develop the leadership skills of future business executives. Student evaluation systems are the same in all universities apart from some minor differences in the distribution of marks and grades based on different evaluation criteria. In most of the universities, examinations are taken centrally and administered by the controller of examinations. In some private universities, the concerned course teachers are given the right to evaluate students independently.

2.5. Hypothesis Development

2.5.1. Business Course Curricula and the Development of Cognitive Skills

Leaders need well-established cognitive abilities, including skills in written and oral expression (Bass, 1990; Fleishman & Friedman, 1990). Moreover, cognitive skills include learning (Mahoney, Jerdee & Carroll, 1965), active listening (Graham, 1983), active learning (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987) and critical thinking (Gillen & Carroll, 1985). The possession of good cognitive skills should enhance the abilities of leaders in terms of collecting, processing and disseminating information. Moreover, through active learning, leaders can more easily work with new information and grasp its implications. Using critical thinking, leaders can use logic to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to the work (Mumford et al., 2007). Consequently, it can be perceived that the cognitive skills of a leader can be developed through courses, classroom exercises and practical orientation sessions that are arranged according to the business course curriculum. As a result, the following hypotheses can be developed:
H1(a): There is a positive relationship between business courses and cognitive skills development.

H1(b): There is a positive relationship between classroom exercises and cognitive skills development.

H1(c): There is a positive relationship between practical orientation and cognitive skills development.

2.5.2. Business Course Curriculum and Development of Interpersonal Skills

The next category of important skills required for a leader is that of interpersonal skills, which includes social capacities (Zaccaro, 2001), social judgment (Mumford et al., 2000), social complexity and differentiation (Hooijberg, Hunt & Dodge, 1997) and human relationship skills (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Interpersonal skills also involve social perceptiveness (Graham, 1983; Mintzberg, 1973; Yukl, 1989), skills required for coordination of actions of oneself and others (Gillen & Carroll, 1985; Mumford et al., 2000), negotiation skills (Copeman, 1971; Mintzberg, 1973) and persuasion skills (Katz, 1974; Mintzberg, 1973; Yukl, 1989). Interpersonal skills assist managers and leaders to coordinate the activities of others and also persuade and motivate employees to achieve organizational goals. Since courses, exercises and experiences can assist the acquisition of leadership skills, then we can assume that business courses, classroom exercises and practical orientation sessions can develop the interpersonal skills of a leader. Consequently, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H2(a): There is a positive relationship between business courses and interpersonal skills development.

H2(b): There is a positive relationship between classroom exercises and interpersonal skills development.

H2(c): There is a positive relationship between practical orientation and interpersonal skills development.

2.5.3. Business Course Curriculum and the Development of Business Skills

In today’s competitive and very dynamic business environment, the success and failure of an organization can often be highly influenced by the presence of effective leaders with a broad business perspective (Elmuti et al., 2005). Business skill involves skills related to specific functional areas (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Zaccaro, 2001). More specifically, business skills involve the management of material resources (Katz, 1974), operations analysis (Hoffman & Hegarty, 1993),
management of personnel resources (Luthans, Welsh & Taylor, 1988) and the management of the financial resources (Copeman, 1971; Katz, 1974) of the organizational unit. Business skills enhance the ability of a leader to analyse business situations more effectively and take decisions effectively so as to achieve the organization’s mission and vision. Like other skills, business skills can be developed through business courses, classroom exercises, and practical orientation. Consequently, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H3(a): There is a positive relationship between courses of business and business skills development.

H3(b): There is a positive relationship between classroom exercises and business skills development.

H3(c): There is a positive relationship between practical orientation and business skills development.

2.5.4. Business Course Curricula and the Development of Strategic Skills

Strategic skills are highly conceptual skills needed to grasp systemic perspectives and to guide business activities towards overall organizational success. Strategic skills include skills of envisioning (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), systems perceptions (Connelly, Marks & Mumford, 1993; Mumford, Dansereau & Yammarino, 2000; Mumford et al., 2000), environmental scanning skills of identification of downstream consequences and identification of key causes (Cox & Cooper, 1988; Kanungo & Misra, 1992; Mumford et al., 2000), problem identification skills (Cox & Cooper, 1988; Yukl, 1989), solution appraisal and objective evaluation skills (Mumford et al., 2000). Strategic skills enhance the abilities of the leaders to understand the organization from a systems perspective. These skills also assist leaders in evaluating the causes and consequences of different scenarios for an organization. Using the capability to think conceptually, the leaders can establish the vision of the organization and guide organizational activities so as to try to achieve the long term goals. It can be seen that strategic skills can be developed by business courses, classroom exercises and practical orientations. Consequently, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H4(a): There is a positive relationship between business courses and strategic skills development.

H4(b): There is a positive relationship between classroom exercises and strategic skills development.

H4(c): There is a positive relationship between practical orientation and strategic skills development.

Based on the above discussion, the following theoretical framework has been developed:
3. Research Methods

3.1 Participants

The structured questionnaires were supplied to the final semester BBA students and MBA students after they had passed through the course curriculum. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore the development of students with respect to different leadership skills. From 300 distributed questionnaires, 226 were returned, of which 17 were rejected due to the lack of some answers and inconsistency. The response rate was, therefore, 75.3%. However, 69.7% of responses have been used for analysis. Among the respondents, 62.0% were public university students and the remainder was from private universities, 52.0% respondents were BBA final semester students and 48.0% were MBA students and 24.0% respondents were female in this study.

3.2 Survey Instruments

Leadership skills were measured by using instruments used by Mumford et al. (2007). According to that survey instrument, cognitive skill requirements were assessed using six items, including speaking, active listening, writing, reading comprehension, active learning and critical thinking. These items measured internal consistency reliability of 0.90. In this Bangladesh context, the comparable Cronbach’s alpha (α) was 0.68, which is rated as satisfactory (Zikmund & Babin, 2007:322).

Interpersonal skill requirements were assessed using four items, which were social perceptiveness, coordination, negotiation and persuasion. The internal consistency reliability was 0.84 and, in the Bangladesh context, the Cronbach’s alpha (α) was 0.64, which is rated as fair (ibid.).
Business skill requirements were measured using four items, which were operations analysis, management of personnel resources, management of financial resources and management of material resources. The initial internal consistency reliability was 0.75 and, in this study, Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) was 0.64, which is rated as fair (ibid.).

Strategic skill requirements were measured using six items, which were envisioning, systems perceptions, system evaluation, identification of downstream consequences, identification of key causes, problem identification and solution appraisal. It has an initial consistency reliability of 0.91 and, in this study, the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) was 0.81, which is considered to be very good (ibid.).

The status of the business course curriculum was measured by an instrument developed by the authors on the basis of suggestions given by Elmuti et al. (2005). The instrument was adopted for first use in the Bangladesh context. The status of courses were measured through eight items, which were specialized courses, pre-requisite courses, co-requisite courses, IT related courses, courses related to globalized business competition, doing business globally, ethics and ethical dilemmas. The Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) was 0.72, which is considered to be good (ibid.).

The status of classroom exercises was measured using seven items, including team-building exercises, simulations, exercise emphasis on building communication skills, negotiation skills, interpersonal skills, entrepreneurship development and IT related exercises. The internal consistency reliability score was found to be 0.87 or very good (ibid.).

Practical orientation was measured using three items, which were living projects, guest speakers and internship. The internal consistency reliability score was 0.69 or satisfactory (ibid.).

3.3. Data Collection

Survey instruments were delivered to respondents through personal visits. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect the responses from respondents. In collecting data, researchers personally attended the classrooms of different private and public universities situated in Chittagong and requested teachers to give 15 to 20 minutes so that students could complete the questionnaire on the spot.

3.4. Data Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were first conducted to examine the associations of different leadership skills (cognitive skills, business skills,
interpersonal skills and strategic skills) with the elements of course curriculum (courses, classroom exercises and practical orientation). Secondly, moderated regression analysis was conducted to examine the associations of cognitive skill and course curriculum, business skill and course curriculum, interpersonal skill and course curriculum and strategic skill and course curriculum. Analyses were conducted with the aid of SPSS 16.0 using the mixed model function to account for the nested data structure.

4. Findings

4.1 Correlation between Leadership Skills Development and Course Curriculum

From Table 1, it is found that there is a positive moderate correlation between courses and the development of cognitive skills, business skills, interpersonal skills and the strategic skills of leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business skills</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Skills</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Room Exercises</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Variables; source: Authors’ Own Research

It is also revealed that there is a positive moderate correlation between classroom exercises and cognitive skills, business skills, interpersonal skills and strategic skills ranging from 0.39 to 0.43. However, there is a poor positive correlation between practical orientation and cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, business skills and strategic skills ranging from 0.27 to 0.30. Although Table 1 showed a positive correlation between course curriculum and leadership skills, it cannot explain how much the development of leadership skills has been affected by business courses, classroom exercises and practical orientations. The following regression analysis will provide additional explanation about the impact of course curriculum on leadership skills development.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 indicates that courses, classroom exercises and practical orientations explain 23% of the variance of the cognitive skill development of leaders. The
influence of course curriculum on cognitive skill is significant (F = 20.64 and sig. = 0.000**).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Skill</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>3.460</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>20.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Room Exercises</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>3.127</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
<td>-1.284</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Regression Relationships between Cognitive Skills and Course Curriculum; source: Authors’ Own Research

Table 2 revealed that courses and classroom exercises make more significant contributions to cognitive skill development but that practical orientation has no significant impact.

In Table 3, below, it is found that course curriculum has a significant impact on business skills development (F = 18.53, sig. = 0.000**). The courses, classroom exercises and practical orientations can explain 21% of variance in business skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Skills</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>3.831</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>18.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Exercises</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.267</td>
<td>2.527</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
<td>-1.273</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Regression Relationships between Business Skills and Course Curriculum; source: Authors’ Own Research

From Table 3 above, it may also be observed that courses have significant impact on business skill development. However, practical orientations have no significant impact on business skill development.

The report of regression analysis in Table 4 revealed that the course curriculum has a significant impact on interpersonal skills development (F = 14.72, sig. = 0.000**). However, it is found that only classroom exercises have significant impact on interpersonal skills development of the leaders. Courses and practical orientations have no significant impact on the development of interpersonal skills of the leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Skills</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>2.319</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>14.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Exercises</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>2.734</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>-0.500</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Regression Relationships between Interpersonal Skills and Course Curriculum; source: Authors’ Own Research
Finally, from Table-5, it was found that there is a significant influence of the course curriculum on the strategic skills development of a leader ($F= 18.48$, sig. = $0.000^{**}$). It was also revealed that classroom exercises have a significant impact on strategic skills development, although courses and practical orientations do not have a significant impact on strategic skills development. The course curriculum can explain 21% of the variance in the strategic skills development of a leader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strategic Skills</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>2.400</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>18.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Exercises</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>3.787</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Orientation</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>-0.141</td>
<td>-1.464</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Regression Relationships between Strategic Skills and Course Curriculum; source: Authors’ Own Research

From the above findings and explanation, it is evident that practical orientations have no significant impact on cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, business skills and strategic skills development in this Bangladesh context. In Bangladesh, most of the business graduate programmes use only internships for involving students in practical experiments. It is found that business programmes are rarely using live projects or guest speakers from the corporate world to enhance the students’ understanding of business from a practical point of view.

5. Discussion

Whether leaders are born or made is a debate that has already been put to rest. Although some leaders are born with inherited traits of personality, these days leadership success depends not only on traits or the behaviour of leaders but also depends on the ability and capability of a leader to face the challenges of technological changes, socio-political changes, structural changes of organizations, globalization challenges and so on. Among the different skills required, four broad sets of skills are very important for leadership success, which are cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, business skills and strategic skills. These skill sets cover the abilities of leaders required to collect, process and disseminate information to interact with, negotiate with and persuade subordinates to act in particular ways, to manage business functional areas such as production, marketing, finance and human resources and to envision and guide the organization so as to achieve the long term goals.

These leadership skills are not inherited. The required skills of a leader are now subject to development through proper processes of skills acquisition. The acquisition of leadership skills is a function of knowledge acquisition, exercises and practical experiences. The success of business course curricula for development of leadership skills among business graduates depends on how much the curriculum can cover the knowledge acquisition, exercises and practical experiences required (Mumford et al., 2000).
In Bangladesh in this research study, mixed results were observed here. Although there was a positive relationship found between leadership skills development and the business course curriculum, mixed results were found when different elements of the course curriculum were considered separately. Business courses can have significant impact on the development of cognitive skills and business skills but cannot contribute much to the development of interpersonal skills and strategic skills. In most of the universities studied, business course curricula included courses covering functional areas of business but not including courses on desirable other areas related to environmental issues, ethical issues, social and human issues. That means, in our country, the business course curriculum is not fully multidisciplinary and that was one of the reasons for the failure of business education to develop necessary leadership skills (Elmuti et al., 2005).

It is also revealed that classroom exercises can have significant impacts on the development of cognitive skills, business skills and strategic skills. That means, in our country, all business programmes place more emphasis on using classroom exercises such as case study, group discussions and role play to ensure students’ involvement in developing their own leadership skills. The practical orientation has no significant impact on the development of effective leadership skills. Students have very limited opportunities to become involved in practical business activities. Inviting guest speakers from the corporate world is very limited in Bangladesh, according to this project. Moreover, students have limited opportunities to work in live projects sponsored by business organizations. However, students have no easy access to real organizational information to investigate real business cases or to solve real business cases. This is one of the important limitations that should be overcome to develop leadership skills as required. Relying only on theoretically- or conceptually-based course curricula will fail to inculcate effective leadership skills (Elmuti et al., 2005).

Above all, we found that there was a positive correlation between business course curricula and leadership skills development. By upgrading the course curriculum, the business course curriculum can ensure significant development in leadership skills among the business graduates. By including multi-disciplinary courses, ensuring effective classroom exercises and arranging programmes for practical experiments for the business graduates, progress towards achieving effective leadership skills for business graduates can be made.

5.1. Implications

There are some academic implications of this study. It is very important for business faculties to set up missions and goals in respect of leadership skill development. By only offering limited numbers of leadership courses will not be sufficient to build leadership skills; it is important to ensure sufficient classroom exercises and practical orientation sessions for students are provided through inviting guest speakers from the corporate world and enabling students to work in live projects. The business course curriculum should be updated regularly to cope
with changes in technology, organizational processes, methods of production and business trends broadly defined. The evaluation system has a great impact on the capability of the course curriculum to bring about the desired leadership skill development. There is a need for more classroom orientation and continuous evaluation. In this regard, more marks should be allocated to ensuring classroom involvement of the students rather than following the traditional bias towards midterm and final examinations. Business institutions should be careful about the student intake. In spite of enrolling all sorts of students, business institutions should give the opportunities to those who have the required leadership traits and personality.

There are some practical implications here for employers. The employers should give opportunities for business graduates to work on real business issue in preparing business cases. Both managers and employers should give time to various real life seminars and workshops organized by business institutions. It will be more effective if they share their experiences in the classroom on specific business issues. Different projects should be financed directly by business organizations so that students can work on actual business projects to enhance their business knowledge and capability to face future business trends and challenges.

5.2. Limitations

This study collected data from only one public university and four private universities in Chittagong city in Bangladesh. More effective results may be obtained if the number of universities could be increased. Only final semester BBA and MBA students were surveyed. This study did not compare between early career business graduates and MBA students to justify the changes in leadership quality to understand the role of course curriculum on leadership skills development. One of the most important limitations of this study is that the respondents were asked to judge their own leadership skills. A person himself or herself cannot always be entirely rational or fair and it is not possible to provide an independent estimation. The findings might be more significant if the respondents were selected randomly.

5.3. Directions for Future Research

An additional study might be conducted to examine the role of course curricula in the development of leadership skills by comparing the leadership skills of fresh business graduates and outgoing business students. Moreover, the researchers might try to reveal the impact of leadership roles of department heads or deans of business faculty in the development of students’ leadership skills through the implementation of course curricula. There is scope to create a study to uncover whether there are any gender effects on leadership skills development. A cross-cultural study might be conducted to determine whether there are any differences in business course curricula and their impact on leadership skills development around the world.
5.4. Conclusion

Business graduates are among the future business leaders who will manage businesses to try to achieve organizational goals in short and long terms. The success of business education depends on significant contributions to leadership skill development. It is apparent that the BBA and MBA graduates in Bangladesh surveyed here are not able to play their role positively and so lead to business and economic development in an effective manner. Since there are huge pressures from the globalized business world, changing technological environment, increased need for environmentalism and dynamic business environment, we need business graduates with the required leadership skills who can lead their organizations successfully. Business education programmes should focus on leadership skills development and re-arrange their business course curricula on the basis of current needs and challenges.

6. References


