

Description of the Leadership Experiences of Alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo in the Workplace

Marc Salama Asobee¹, Tariku Fufa Gemechu²

¹Ethics and Leadership Development Department, Christian Bilingual University of Congo, Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo

²School of Leadership and Governance, International Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya

Email: jeanmarcasobee@gmail.com, tarikuf@kenya.ilu.edu

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Abstract

This study investigated the leadership experiences of alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo (UCBC) in the workplace, using a holistic leadership approach as a context, with the aim to learn the nature and challenges of their leadership practices and identify areas of need for leadership development in order to enhance their leadership effectiveness in a challenging work environment. Leadership experiences in the workplace represent both a daily challenge and a developmental opportunity that many leaders face and fail to handle in the current Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous global context. Inaptitude in leadership has been almost always associated with Africa's current miserable and underdevelopment state. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, poor leadership and mismanagement have been paralyzing the whole nation in the last several decades since independence in 1960. This alarming situation has been translated through ineffective political leadership, lack of economic development, social crisis and chronic instability, corruption, injustice, greed, selfishness, duplicity, pride and many more vices that continue to describe leadership practices at all levels. A qualitative study using phenomenological research design described lived leadership experiences of 13 purposefully selected UCBC alumni in the workplace. Data were collected through one to two hours of in-depth interviews and analyzed through qualitative content analysis procedures. Findings revealed nine major themes that emerged through first-cycle and second-cycle coding processes. The themes were discussed along with literature reviews and recommendations made for contemporary practitioners and future research.

Keywords

Holistic Leadership, Leadership Development, Leadership Experiences,

1. Introduction

Leadership experiences in the workplace, as presented by Kouzes and Posner (2017), represent both a daily challenge and a developmental opportunity that many a leader struggle to handle effectively in the current business context. Globally, the current business environment has been identified as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). Taggart (2011) asserted that individuals, organizations, and countries have been experiencing massive and rapid changes that not only stimulate the need for a new breed of leaders but also require a holistic perspective of leadership. These global changes are related to the economic, environmental, cultural, technological, professional, and even ethical or spiritual situations; just to name a few. The rapidly changing, competitive, and globalized context, more importantly, places new pressures not only on the way leadership is conceptualized, applied, and evaluated, but also on how leaders are developed to be effective in such a complex work environment.

In Africa, the situation is so alarming that Adeyemo (2009) asked, "Is Africa cursed?" (p. 9). Van der Walt (2019) identifies failed leadership as the root cause of Africa's deplorable condition. Poor leadership has been almost always associated with the underdevelopment state of the continent (Poncian & Mgaya, 2015; Yimer, 2015). This has been part of the most pressing challenges on the continent (Kiruhi, 2017).

The same is true even in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where leadership crisis has been the norm since the country gained independence in 1960 (Yahaya & Bello, 2020). Research has widely recognized (Njie, 2016; Muyingi, 2017; Yigzaw, 2019) that failure in leadership is probably the main cause of the state's failure in DRC. This national failure due to failed leadership is translated through ineffective political leadership, lack of economic development, social crisis, and chronic instability. Corruption, injustice, selfishness, duplicity, pride and leader-centric mentality continue to characterize the leadership practice at all levels and across sectors. Tshiyoyo (2015) asserted that poor leadership and mismanagement have been mutually mentioned as the present DRC's predicament and that effective leaders need to be developed in order to overcome the crisis and bring about stability and prosperity in the country.

It is in this context that the current study sought to describe the leadership experiences of the alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo (UCBC) who have been holistically trained as agents of change in response to the devastating situation in DRC and for the transformation of their families, communities, organizations, and the entire nation. The aim of this qualitative research was to learn the nature and challenges of the UCBC graduates' leadership and identify their areas of need for development in order to enhance their

leadership effectiveness in a challenging workplace. This empirical study contributes to the knowledge base by answering the main research question– *What does the leadership experiences of UCBC alumni look like in the workplace when described from a holistic leadership approach?* Holistic leadership theory was used as a context to describe the lived leadership experiences of UCBC alumni. Phenomenological research design was applied, in-depth interview was used as data collection method and qualitative content analysis procedures were employed to analyze data.

2. Profile of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo

As an organization, UCBC is among a few institutions of higher education in DRC which are committed to offer an environment and implement a curriculum which aims at training future leaders holistically. According to the *CI-UCBC Strategic Plan (2012)*, UCBC is a Christian university created in 2007 in Beni town in the Eastern Congo, chartered by the DRC government in 2010. This Christian higher education institution is owned by the organization that created it: Congo Initiative (CI). CI is a non-profit organization of Christ-centered Congolese leaders and global partners, cognizant of the multidimensional crisis affecting the Congolese society, motivated to uphold holistic leadership development and committed to provide transformational education to individuals for a thriving DRC. *Nzikako and Warue (2018)* argued that UCBC desires to foster integrated development through “academic excellence, specialization, interdisciplinary competency, bilingual education, character formation, service-learning and community engagement” (p. 99). This is the meaning of being transformed to transform (UCBC motto). Currently, UCBC organizes five faculties at undergraduate level including Theology, Economic Sciences, Communication Sciences, Applied Sciences and the last-born faculty of Law which aims to train Christian lawyers whose mission is to positively impact the judiciary system in DRC.

The vision of the university originates from its founding organization. It therefore exists “to train and develop strong, indigenous Christian leaders to transform their communities and their nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo” (*CI-UCBC, 2012: p. 4*). The mission of UCBC is to “model, nurture and shape an authentic, redemptive community of Christ’s followers whose calling is to transform the society in the Democratic Republic of Congo” (*CI-UCBC, 2012: p. 5*). This mission was revisited in 2009 and translated into students’ outcomes and graduates’ capability upon graduation from the university (*Nzikako & Warue, 2018*). Upon completion of studies, UCBC graduates are expected to demonstrate the following competences: 1) Problem-solving through the identification of problems and formulation of relevant solutions to the identified issues in the society as they link knowledge to practice, 2) Communication and interactive learning in addition to expertise in their fields of study, 3) Integration of “mind, emotion, and body in theology, politics, and business for individuals and com-

munities and exhibit servant, Christ-like character as agents of transformation,” and 4) Transformation leadership through modeling, nurturing, and shaping authentic Christian community and take transformational actions in their places of influence (Bunduki & Higgs, 2017: p. 18).

To achieve its mission and vision, UCBC has developed four guiding values including community life (create opportunities for sharing experience and spiritual practices by promoting a learning process based on spiritual principles of mentoring and discipleship through various programs and activities); service-oriented training (create an environment and to develop a Christ-like servant character in men and women who will become agents of transformation); reflection (to allow and promote dialogue and interactive learning in groups, so as to conciliate knowledge and practice and to formulate solutions that are relevant to the context of DRC) and integration (to develop a holistic ministry associating the mind, emotion and action in theology, politics and business for both individuals and communities).

The training curriculum that UCBC offers its students is triadic involving Academics, Work and Service components. The Academic aspect addresses mainly the cognitive dimension by developing students’ critical thinking and academic inquiry to relate education to real life experience. Through the Work component which addresses the physical dimension, students develop practical skills, time management, and teamwork. They also develop work ethics and identify with the community in all sorts of work. The Service part addresses the affective dimension by developing Christ-like servant character in learners as they link acquired knowledge from classroom to practice in the community as agents of transformation (Figure 1).

3. Statement of the Problem

In DRC, inaptitude in leadership has been paralyzing the whole nation in the last several decades (Yahaya & Bello, 2020). Various actors, especially higher education institutions, are struggling to develop leaders of integrity who can ethically use their heads, hearts and hands in leadership to achieve positive organizational and societal change (Bunduki & Higgs, 2017). Etshim (2017) posit that, in DRC, higher learning institutions have increased in number from 764 in 2014 to 901 in 2015, but “results revealed that the current curriculum and policies have inherent inefficiencies that do not provide new graduates with sufficient skills to easily move into and be productive in the labor market” (p.1). UCBC emerged from this context to provide an alternative educational approach in response to the aforementioned challenges.

Since its inception in 2007, UCBC has been committed to develop and implement a holistic approach to education by training strong, indigenous Christian leaders whose mission is to lead change and bring about transformation in their spheres of influence. Almost a decade later, in his doctoral dissertation, Dr. Honoré Kwany Bunduki (current UCBC Rector) conducted a study that sought

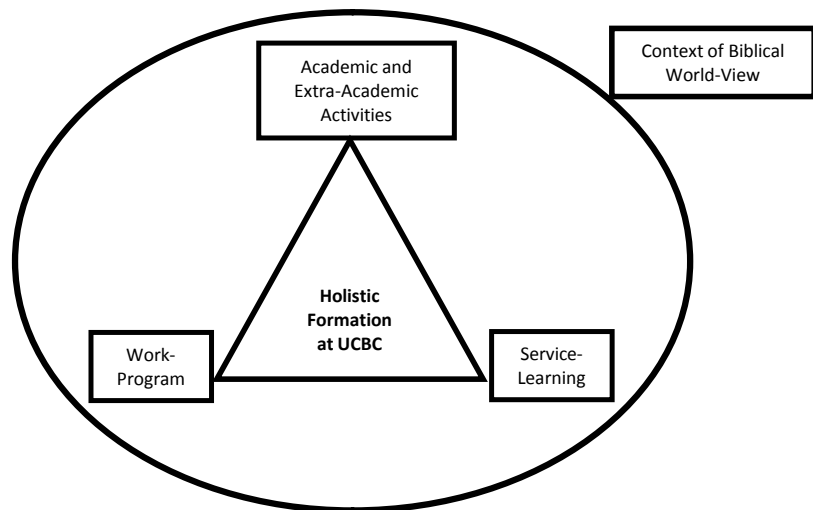


Figure 1. Triadic curriculum at UCBC.

to examine the various perspectives of alumni from UCBC on the topic of integrated learning. Research findings indicated five themes describing what UCBC alumni understood about integrated learning based on their learning experience at UCBC and service in the community in general. They described integrated learning as an education process which: is holistic, is complete, combines theory and practice, prepares students to be people of significance in their nation, and is learner centered.

This valuable work contributed to clarify the understanding and application of the integrated learning approach at UCBC as described by UCBC alumni. However, it failed to focus on the leadership experiences of UCBC graduates who are in leadership positions in their workplace after training. In fact, in the section on suggestions for future research in his doctoral dissertation, Bunduki (2016) stated, “it would be important that a study be carried out to clarify the nature of leadership (inclusive and/or servant/spiritual) that students develop after experiencing education for social responsibility” (p. 295). This study was conducted to fill this gap.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Nature of Leadership

Leadership is a multifaceted concept and its nature has been described through a variety of theories (Khan & Nawaz, 2016). Literature reveals that theories have evolved from simple to more complex and yet complementary and relevant depending on the context (Ahmed, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016). According to Best (2011), in the evolution of leadership theories, each new perspective was enlarging the previous one. The limitations of each theory were key factors that enhanced the development of new theories as researchers were continually struggling to fill the gap with new variables that were missing in the previous approaches. Silva (2015) argued that the three major variables that characterize

leadership and have been emphasized by multiple theories and experiences include the leader, the followers, and the context. These components operate not in isolation but in a dynamic and complex process (Yukl, 2012) of interdependence as would be summarized in the leadership triangle below (Figure 2).

The progressive development of leadership theories has eventually changed researchers' perceptions and focus from leader-centered, contingency-oriented to values-based approaches.

Earlier studies of leadership tried to explain leadership by focusing on the leader's traits, skills, and behaviors. D'souza (1994) posited that "earlier studies of leadership tried to explain leadership by pointing out leaders' superior qualities of personality and character which separated them from their followers" (p. 21). It was believed that understanding leaders were essential to understand the whole leadership phenomenon. This leader-centric conception caused the emergence of leadership approaches such as Trait theory, Skills theory, and Behavioral/Style theory (Northouse, 2019). Although these three approaches failed to provide a comprehensive description of the nature of leadership and to consistently predict leadership outcomes, they helped researchers realize that leadership was a much more complex and integrated process (Winston & Patterson, 2006) and that there was a need to consider the followers and context in addition to the leader (Best, 2011). Therefore, contingency leadership approaches were developed to address these two variables that were overlooked in leader-centered perspectives.

Among the prominent theories that researchers developed according to the contingency viewpoint of leadership are Fielder's Contingency theory and Hersey-Blanchard Situational leadership model (Uslu, 2019). As contingency theories were becoming too complex by linking personality characteristics and styles to the situation of followers and the general organizational context as a method to explain and predict which leadership behaviors would be best in a variety of situations, the leader's moral values and character in addition to his capacity to motivate subordinates to perform to their maximum potential emerged as central themes (Best, 2011). So, contingency theories began to give way to values-based approaches to leadership.

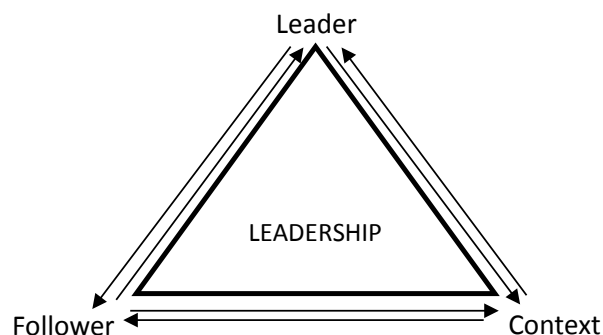


Figure 2. Leadership triangle.

In recent years, a strong attention has been paid by scholars and even practitioners to the role and implication of values in leadership. [Corte et al. \(2017\)](#) defined values-based leadership as an interaction aiming to set goals, solve problems, create a language, and develop values based on organizational standards of morality. They posited that this leadership approach focuses on the role of values in reaching expected goals. [Scott et al. \(2020\)](#) suggested that several values such as integrity, transparency, ethical considerations are the foundation of values-based leadership. This set of values and ethical behaviors, in addition to many others, is most closely associated with several leadership theories that are considered as values-based theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, charismatic leadership, exemplary leadership, ethical leadership, holistic leadership, etc. ([Bass, 1999](#); [Cote, 2017](#); [Corte et al., 2017](#); [Eva et al., 2019](#); [Kouzes & Posner, 2017](#); [Larsson & Eid, 2012](#); [Northouse, 2019](#); [Orlov, 2003](#); [Scott et al., 2020](#)).

4.2. Holistic Leadership Dimensions

The holistic leadership theory, in particular, has emerged as the new paradigm for contemporary leaders to be able to handle changing, complex, virtual and multidimensional realities of the present time ([Dhiman, 2017](#)). The concept of holistic leadership can be approached from different angles. It can be viewed as the ability of a leader to integrate the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in the leadership practice ([Orlov, 2003](#)); multidimensional care for the followers ([Taliaferro, 2014](#)); an integrated perspective taking into account the situation of the leader, the leader-follower dynamics, and the context ([Silva, 2015](#)), or an education method which impacts the head, heart, hand, and soul of the learner ([Bunduki, 2016](#)). All of these are legitimate and important uses of the term. However, for the purpose of this research, the holistic concept focused specifically on the leader's ability to lead from the mind, the heart, and the soul and the developmental needs that come with the multidimensional challenges they encounter in the workplace. Holistic leadership was used as a theoretical context to describe various dimensions of the leadership experiences of UCBC graduates including the cognitive (mind or head), affective (heart), and spiritual (soul) dimensions ([Best, 2011](#); [Orlov, 2003](#)) ([Figure 3](#)).

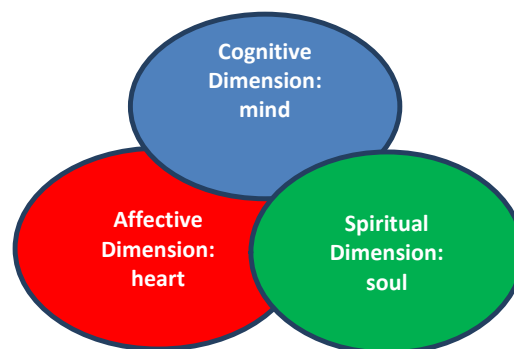


Figure 3. Theoretical framework.

4.3. Challenges to Leadership Effectiveness in the Workplace

VUCA is the word used by researchers to describe the current situation of *volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity* that characterize the global context (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). In this VUCA world, leaders experience challenges in many respects which affect leadership effectiveness (Hassan et al., 2018). A major leadership study was recently conducted by Global Leadership Forecast (2018) and identified top challenges that organizational leaders experience in the current context characterized by ongoing global crises including the latest Covid-19 pandemic. Research findings from this expansive leadership research project revealed four top challenges that affect leadership process in this new era driven by crises: 1) developing the next generation of leaders, 2) global recession/slowing economic growth, 3) attracting/retaining top talent, and 4) driving new product innovation. On the other hand, Islam et al. (2019) described other challenges that could affect the effectiveness of leaders across sectors such as task ambiguity, role conflict, leadership and management illiteracy, insufficient teamwork and collaboration, lack of reward system, financial constraints, changes in economic, political, social or technological contexts. In addition, Hassan et al. (2018) argued that other difficult factors affecting leadership effectiveness include conflict management, organizational culture, organizational setting, quality of decision-making, follower commitment, follower satisfaction among others. All these challenges require the development of competitive, specialized, and holistic leadership skills that will meet leaders' needs and enhance their leadership effectiveness in a challenging workplace.

4.4. Leadership Development Needs and Methods

Van Velsor et al. (1998) as cited by Sessoms (2004) defined leadership development as "The expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes" (p. 1). Omotesho et al. (2019) affirmed that the need for leadership development has been presented in many studies, although specific areas of need remain unclear. Through their study, three most critical areas of leadership development need were identified including group resources mobilization, monitoring and control. However, other areas of need were also identified with regard to how to develop a connection between subordinates and other stakeholders in the sector, assign the work to people, ensure performance, provide feedback for accomplished work, ensure accountability, to keep record appropriately, motivate members, ensure their satisfaction and productivity, make and reinforce organizational policies, rules, and regulations, and ensure effective communication among team members. Moreover, competences such as soft, cognitive, and technical skills; in addition to the development of resilience, specialized competences, ethics and accountability in leadership will be needed for leaders to be able to deal with complex and challenging situations (Mamabolo, 2017). Further development needs will include strategic thinking and planning, human relations, networking, team building, motivation, mentoring (Ng & Szeto, 2016). These skills may be developed through various leadership development methods

either through corporate-based programs or formal education in higher learning institutions.

In their study, Kjellström et al. (2020) developed a *Dialogue Map of Leader and Leadership Development Methods*. This map describes five broad categories which can serve as a new pedagogical framework and gives an overview of leadership development methods: 1) developmental relationships, 2) developmental assignments, 3) feedback processes, 4) formal programs, and 5) self-development activities. Authors observed that, although most of these developmental experiences are created at the place of work, but learning can also come from unexpected or even negative situations is viewed as framework. In fact, Krosigk (2007) found that leadership development was a complex, long-term and holistic learning experience.

5. Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived leadership experiences of alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo in the context of holistic leadership approach with the aim to learn the nature and challenges of their leadership practices and identify their areas of need for leadership development in order to enhance their leadership effectiveness in a challenging work environment. The goal of a phenomenological study is to describe “what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994: p. 19). In this phenomenological inquiry, a basic research type was conducted to make a theoretical and practical contribution by responding to the main research question: *What does the leadership experiences of alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo look like when described from a holistic leadership perspective?*

This main research question was divided into three research sub-questions to capture major aspects of the phenomenon under study:

- 1) How do UCBC alumni describe their day-to-day leadership practices in the workplace?
- 2) What are the major challenges that UCBC alumni encounter in their leadership experiences in the workplace?
- 3) What are the areas of need for development that UCBC alumni identify in order to enhance their leadership effectiveness in the workplace?

5.1. Participants Sampling

Participants in a phenomenological study are individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon and are able to describe it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Scholars suggest different sample sizes for a phenomenological study including five to 25 participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019: p. 233), six to 10 respondents (Padgett, 2017: p. 70), 3 - 10 people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018: p. 186). However, they all agreed that the numbers of participants in a study may get larger or smaller depending on available resources and other influential factors. In this phenomenological study, 13 UCBC alumni were selected and interviewed.

Participants were selected utilizing purposive sampling method. Qualitative investigators employ purposive sampling because they want to select participants who are able to share needed content (Padgett, 2017). Three criteria were defined to select experienced participants: 1) having graduated at UCBC, 2) be working in any public, private, or nonprofit organization at the time of study, 3) holding a leadership position in that institution at the time of study. The participants in this study represent a variety of leadership experiences in the church, education institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations, bank, business, etc. Out of the 13 participants, five were female and eight were male as presented in **Table 1**.

5.2. Data Collection

In qualitative study, investigators gather information by interviewing participants, observing the phenomenon, fieldwork, and reviewing documentations (Patton, 2015). However, according to Moustakas (1994), in-depth method is preferable for primary data collection intervention in a typical phenomenological investigation. Moreover, Leedy and Ormrod (2019) asserted that phenomenological studies rely on long interviews that may require one to two hours. In addition to secondary data which were collected through literature review, the researcher used face-to-face in-depth interview method (one to two hours) to collect primary data with the chosen participants until saturation was reached. All the interviews were first of all audio-recorded and then transcribed prior to analysis. Participation in the study was voluntary and a consent form was duly signed by all participants prior to respond to the interview questions.

Table 1. Demographic of participants to the study.

ID Code	Gender	Education Level	Organization	Years of Experience	Leadership Position
Exp.1	Male	Bachelor	Bank	3	Sales Advisor and SME Manager
Exp.2	Male	Bachelor	NGO	2	Program Support Assistant
Exp.3	Male	Bachelor	Radio Station	2	Acting Director
Exp.4	Female	Bachelor	NGO	3	Project Manager
Exp.5	Male	Bachelor	Tech Startup	2	CEO
Exp.6	Male	Bachelor	Higher Education	3	Assistant Chaplain for Campus Ministry
Exp.7	Male	Bachelor	High School	3	Senior Chaplain
Exp.8	Female	Master	Higher Education	3	Advanced Studies and International Partnership Program Officer
Exp.9	Male	Bachelor	Church	10	Senior Pastor
Exp.10	Female	Bachelor	Higher Education	3	IT Manager
Exp.11	Female	Bachelor	NGO	6	Chief Finance Officer
Exp.12	Male	Master	Higher Education	3	Work-Program Coordinator
Exp.13	Female	Bachelor	Business	2	Marketing and Communication Officer

5.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis method was used to analyze data. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), “The objective in qualitative content analysis is to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of key results” (p. 94). In short, this is what Creswell & Creswell (2018) referred to as the coding process which moves from massive and disorganized data to a more organized set of key themes that emerge from first-cycle and second-cycle coding.

Saldana (2016) suggested that first-cycle coding is used on the raw data and is the initial form of coding. In this study, first-cycle coding was done manually. After first-cycle codes for the answers to all the nine interview questions were generated and themes derived, then second-cycle coding was applied as per Saldana’s (2016) guidelines. Second-cycle coding uses the coding from the first cycle and tends to be more analytical (Saldana, 2016). In the second-cycle coding, Creswell & Creswell (2018) suggested that coded portions can be the same meaning units, large passages of text, and analytic memos about the data. In this stage, codes that have been developed in the first cycle coding may also be refined. Saldana (2016) argued that second coding is a helpful process through which the researcher avoids the research bias. The second-cycle codes are categorized and presented as final coding processes from which answers to the research question will be derived.

6. Findings

This phenomenological research was undertaken with the purpose to provide a thick description of the leadership experiences of the UCBC alumni in the context of holistic leadership approach with the aim to learn the nature and challenges of their leadership practices, identify their areas of need for leadership development in order to enhance leadership effectiveness in a challenging workplace. The main research question that guided this study was formulated as follows: What does the leadership experiences of alumni of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo look like when described from a holistic leadership perspective? In order to cover the entire intended scope of the study, three research sub-questions were derived from the main research question to serve as leading threads in the investigation. Here below is a summation of nine major themes derived from first-cycle coding and then refined through second-cycle coding processes. These themes are presented according to their categories and along with their frequency in relation to each research sub-question (Table 2).

7. Discussions

In pursuing the goal of this study, thirteen verbatim transcripts reporting on lived leadership experiences of the UCBC alumni were analyzed following qualitative content analysis procedures (Saldana, 2016). In this section, major findings are discussed with regard to the main research question as well as each sub-research questions. Moreover, implications, limitations of the study, and suggested avenues

Table 2. Summary of themes derived from first and second cycle coding processes.

Categories	Themes	Frequencies
<i>Research Question #1: How do UCBC alumni describe their day-to-day leadership practices in the workplace from a holistic leadership approach?</i>		
Meaning of leadership	Responsibility to influence people through supportive relationship, sacrificial service, communication, and role modeling that enable them to unleash their maximum potential to achieve collective vision	147
Leadership role	People-oriented activities such as communicating with, developing, supporting, and serving teams; management tasks including planning, strategizing, project management, monitoring and evaluations and reporting, and organizational growth actions such as vision casting, partnerships development and fundraising	180
Self-control	In a context of multidimensional challenges, discerning quietly and responding wisely while seeking counsel from advisors and depending on God's assistance is critical in maintaining self-control as a leader	233
Teamwork	Despite the challenges due to team diversity, it takes complementarity, mutual support, and collective efforts to effectively perform individual tasks and achieve common goal in response to changes and new challenges in the workplace	148
Ethical values	Personal standards and boundaries, spiritual disciplines, organizational values and procedures are essential for a leader to uphold ethical values and morally handle ethical dilemmas, internal tendencies, external stimuli towards unethical practices	174
Managing emotions	Stepping back for a while to calm down, identifying and verbalizing emotions and seeking reconciliation through honest dialogue and forgiveness to manage personal, interpersonal, and organizational effects of a variety of emotions	241
Spirituality	Spirituality enables a leader to be connected and accountable to a higher power, work with a sense of life purpose/calling, strong conviction, high moral standards, self-control, and inner motivation to deal with unusual challenges in the workplace	189
<i>Research Question #2: What are the major challenges that UCBC alumni encounter in their leadership experiences in the workplace?</i>		
Major challenges in leadership	Lack of continuous training, imbalance between workload and reward system, work-family conflict, and scarcity of funds	95
<i>Research Question #3: What are the areas of development that UCBC alumni identify in order to enhance their leadership development and effectiveness in the workplace?</i>		
Areas of development	Resources mobilization and project cycle management, organizational development, personal leadership development, communication and teamwork	135

for future research are also provided.

7.1. Main Research Question

This study sought to answer the main research question: What does the leadership experiences of UCBC alumni look like in the workplace when described from a holistic leadership perspective? Research findings provide evidence that the leadership experiences of UCBC alumni in the workplace reflect the val-

ues-based holistic leadership approach. Some characteristics of values-based leadership approaches include vision, self-sacrifice, integrity, performance, etc. (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2017) argued that values-based leadership approaches can support and promote ethical attitudes and behaviors of workers because the leader is a role model who teaches by good example.

The above findings clearly suggest that the kind of holistic approach to education that UCBC applies in developing a new breed of leaders for the transformation of Congo is having a huge impact on the graduates in the workplace. This impact is demonstrated, partly, through a paradigm shift with regard to the meaning of leadership as experienced and described by UCBC alumni. This paradigm shift is a major step in the process of transformation that can move families, organizations, communities, and even the whole country from poor leadership and mismanagement that have been identified as the current DRC' predicament (Tshiyoyo, 2015). This can also lead to an effective realization of the vision of a peaceful and prosperous nation based on values of sacrificial service, integrity and equity (N'Gambwa, 2011). Unlike some traditional leadership perspectives (commonly observed in the context where this study was conducted) that explain leadership by focusing on the leader's personality, position, power, prosperity (D'souza, 1994), UCBC alumni's conception of leadership exhibits values-based holistic approach to leadership, that many scholars advocate for (González & Martín, 2017; Silva, 2015) even in the African context (Kiruhi, 2017). This conception or paradigm shift is actually demonstrated through UCBC alumni's daily leadership practices in the workplace.

7.2. Sub-Research Question One

How do UCBC alumni describe their day-to-day leadership practices in the workplace from a holistic leadership approach?

In relation to their daily leadership practices as described from the holistic leadership theory, findings uncovered seven major aspects. Research participants described their: 1) meaning of leadership, 2) activities they engage in as part of their leadership role; experiences in 3) maintaining self-control, 4) promoting teamwork, 5) upholding ethical values, 6) managing emotions, and 7) integrating spirituality and work. These aspects are described and discussed in details here below.

7.2.1. Meaning of Leadership

Findings revealed that leadership means the responsibility to influence people through supportive relationship, sacrificial service, communication, and role modeling that enable them to unleash their maximum potential to achieve the vision. The theme which had high respondents' frequency to describe the meaning of leadership in the workplace was intentional support through sacrificial service to unleash people's maximum potentials. This finding is consistent with Kouzes and Posner's (2017) and Burns' (1978) transformational leadership concept which suggests a supportive relationship whereby leaders and followers in-

tentionally engage in raising one another to a higher motivation and morality levels leading to an effective achievement of organizational vision as opposed to self-interests (Alqatawenah, 2018). Furthermore, Taggart (2011) asserted that a common thread for most holistic leaders is the desire to communicate with other people and a tendency to consider the common good before selfish interests. Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (2017) pointed self-sacrifice as one of the characteristics of values-based leaders.

7.2.2. Activities They Engage in as Part of their Leadership Role

The leadership role of UCBC's alumni in the workplace include activities such as communicating with, developing, supporting, and serving teams; planning, strategizing, project management, monitoring and evaluations and reporting; vision casting, partnerships development and fundraising. The themes that had high frequency of respondents describing leadership activities performed in the workplace were supporting, serving, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting in collaboration with stakeholders. These activities clearly describe the concept of leader-manager in the workplace and are consistent with several studies in the literature. While some studies focus more on the distinctions or similarities between these concepts, the rapid changes and current challenges in the workplace tend to require a combination of the two skills to achieve higher effectiveness and efficiency. In fact, Nguyen and Hansen (2016) stated, "Companies today require that leaders know how to manage and managers know how to lead" (p. 4). However, a leader-manager needs adaptability and flexibility so that he can shift from one function to the other according to the situation. Being flexible as a leader-manager requires a sense of self-control as these two functions may bring an individual to face some unpleasant situations at work.

7.2.3. Experiences in Maintaining Self-Control

Finding in this category indicated that in a context of multidimensional challenges, discerning quietly and responding wisely while seeking counsel from advisors and depending on God's assistance is critical for a leader to maintain self-control. The theme that had top frequency of describing the experiences in maintaining self-control as a leader in the workplace was multidimensional challenges related to heavy and complex workload, people characteristics, counterproductive behaviors, stressful environment, and work-family conflict. Furthermore, participants recognized that self-control is a challenging but required quality in leadership. Berkman et al. (2017) asserted that, usually, self-control is viewed as an inner battle when a person is supposed to make a choice between two competing urges. They proposed that self-control is basically a form of value-based decision making or self-initiated regulation of competing urges in favor of enduring values and long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2016). However, their study lacked what many of the participants in this study described as "seeking counsel from advisors and depending on God's assistance" as a way to maintain self-control. Holistic leaders are aware that their own efforts are not

enough to be self-controlled and face unusual challenges in the workplace leadership. They need support through meaningful relationships and connections with others and ultimately with God (Oh & Wang, 2020). The aspect of relationships and mutual support in maintaining self-control in the workplace evokes the notion of teamwork on which current organizational leaders rely more to achieve greater effectiveness.

7.2.4. Experiences in Promoting Teamwork

Research participants mentioned that despite the challenges due to team diversity, it takes complementarity, mutual support, and collective efforts to effectively perform individual tasks and achieve common goal in response to changes and new challenges in the workplace. The themes with high frequency that described the experiences of teamwork in the workplace were complementarity, mutual support, and collective effort to enhance team effectiveness and achieve common goal. The current context of globalization characterized by interaction, integration, and competition at global level has led many organizations to establish team-based work as a strategy in response to these challenges and to achieve greater organizational effectiveness (Strubler & York, 2007). Carter et al. (2019) argued that, currently, teams have received a wide consideration as essential building blocks of organizations as they contribute to increase individual performance, improve the quality, decrease absenteeism, enhance employee engagement, diminish employee turnover, etc. A part from the benefits of teamwork at personal, group, and organizational levels, participants also underlined diversity or individual differences as a major challenge or disadvantage of team-based work. This diversity includes aspects such as background, culture, skill, personality traits, etc. In fact, Ogbonnaya (2019) asserted that there are times when team-based work is good for employees and when it is not. In addition to clearly defining, explaining, and assigning tasks and maintaining accountability among team members; managing team diversity requires recognizing and valuing differences, promoting inclusion and combating discrimination (Farnsworth et al., 2019).

7.2.5. Experiences in Upholding Ethical Values

Findings indicated that personal standards and boundaries, spiritual disciplines, organizational values and procedures are essential for a leader to uphold ethical values and morally handle ethical dilemmas, internal tendencies, external stimuli towards unethical practices. The top-rated theme that described experiences in upholding ethical values in the workplace was self-commitment in setting up personal standards, boundaries, and discipline in line with personal identity. This finding is consistent with Kouzes and Posner's (2017) description of an exemplary leader as a role model. They argued that the kind of ethical standards and disciplined life that a leader requires from others, he should be the first to embody them through their thoughts, words, and deeds. In short, they should walk the talk or walk the ethical way before showing the way to others. Thus,

upholding ethical values in the workplace is primarily a personal discipline before it becomes an organizational matter and even when organizational regulations are not clearly articulated about certain undesired or prohibited behaviors. However, there is an aspect that the literature seems to overlook. Several participants mentioned the fact that some spiritual disciplines or religious practices helped them in upholding ethical values even in times of crisis or in the face of ethical dilemma. These practices include prayer, Bible study, fear of God, etc. As mentioned previously, spirituality has emerged as a critical leadership factor that has a positive effect on leaders' performance and character in the workplace. In addition to ethical values, leadership also involves emotions which may create a connection or interpersonal conflict between the leader and followers.

7.2.6. Experiences in Managing Emotions

Findings revealed that stepping back for a while to calm down, identifying and verbalizing emotions and seeking reconciliation through honest dialogue and forgiveness are critical steps in managing personal, interpersonal, and organizational effects of a variety of emotions. The theme that had high frequency of respondents describing experiences in managing emotions was calm down, express emotions, collaborate to seek reconciliation through honest dialogue and forgiveness. This agrees with [Mfikwe and Pelser's \(2017\)](#) assertion on Emotional Intelligence (EI). They asserted that EI is the ability to manage personal emotions in order to express them appropriately and effectively. Moreover, it is about sensing the feelings of others and deal with interpersonal relationships successfully. Although the affective aspect of leadership has, originally, not been the focus of corporate leadership development or university-based programs, but human emotion is a real phenomenon and can be leveraged as a source of energy and shape influence on employees' behavior. This domain includes skills such as persuasive communication, empathic understanding, and self-monitoring. Holistic leaders achieve effectiveness by maintaining their emotional intelligence. The maintenance occurs as the leader deals with the emotional needs and responses of their followers as well as their own ([Quatro et al., 2007](#)). Leadership role does not only involve leader-member exchange, but it also includes faith-work reality.

7.2.7. Experiences in Integrating Spirituality and Work

Findings indicated that spirituality enables a leader to be connected and accountable to a higher power/God, work with a sense of life purpose/calling, strong conviction, high moral standards, self-control, and inner motivation to deal with unusual challenges in the workplace. This theme has emerged as a key pillar in the participants' leadership experiences in the workplace. The above findings are consistent with [Fry's \(2003\)](#) spiritual leadership theory. [Fry \(2003\)](#) defined spiritual leadership in terms of values, attitudes, and behaviors that produce intrinsic motivation in the leader and followers and enhance a sense of calling or destiny and membership or fellowship. Moreover, [Pargament and Mahoney \(2011\)](#)

as cited by Nullens (2019) argued that spirituality is also defined as the process through which a leader seeks guidance from God or simply a holy and higher power. It evokes the notion of religious beliefs that Fry identified as an aspect of spiritual leadership (Oh & Wang, 2020).

Following the above discussions, it is important to note that, although the spiritual dimension of leadership has been unheeded or slightly tackled in early leadership studies conducted mainly in the Western context; current research, especially in the African context supports that spirituality is an essential building block that most leaders consider as the hidden cause of their strength and success in leadership (Kiruhi, 2017). Moreover, it is important to mention that findings pertaining to the nature of day-to-day leadership practices of UCBC alumni in their workplace support Bunduki's (2016) results on the impact of integrated learning on students as a contributor to personal and community transformation. Through their paradigm shift and role modeling, UCBC alumni are influencing change of mentality and inspiring a new way about the being and doing of leadership in their organizations and the larger community. The nature of the daily leadership practices of UCBC alumni in their workplace seems easy to describe but difficult to accomplish. They represent a daily challenge. UCBC graduates have actually mentioned major challenges that they encounter in leadership and that need to be addressed in order to enhance their effectiveness.

7.3. Sub-Research Question Two

What are the major challenges that UCBC alumni encounter in their leadership experiences in the workplace?

Research findings revealed that UCBC alumni face several major challenges in their leadership in the workplace. These challenges are identified as major because even their daily leadership practices as discussed under sub-research question one are already challenging. The major challenges that UCBC alumni encounter in their workplace and hinder leadership effectiveness have been described as lack of continuous training, imbalance between workload and reward system, work-family conflict, and scarcity of funds. The theme that had high frequency was lack of continuous training in leadership and other areas of improvement. The finding is consistent with Frew et al.'s (2020) descriptions of major factors that affect leadership effectiveness in the workplace. Among many other challenges, Frew et al. (2020) mentioned professional capacity and leadership literacy. Poor performance or incompetence in leadership and any other professional domain is known to be a major cause of failure and underdevelopment at personal, organizational, and even national level (Tshiyoyo, 2015). This failure represents the inability of individuals to perform well and deliver expected results. A leader will never perform beyond his capacity. Therefore, capacity building stands out as strategic and regular process through which individual leaders are equipped to enhance their leadership effectiveness in their workplace. The above major challenges that UCBC alumni encounter in their leadership in the workplace suggest that there are areas of need for improve-

ment.

7.4. Sub-Research Question Three

What are the areas of development that UCBC alumni identify in order to enhance their leadership development and effectiveness in the workplace?

In relation to the areas of need for personal development in order to enhance leadership effectiveness in a VUCA work context, research findings revealed several areas including resources mobilization and project cycle management, organizational development, personal leadership development, communication and teamwork. The theme that had top frequency was resources mobilization and project cycle management. The finding confirms Omotesho et al.'s (2019) assertion on areas of need for training to enhance effectiveness of leaders in the workplace. In terms of severity, the three most critical areas of need for development included group resources mobilization, monitoring and control. Financial constraints, changes in economic situation (Islam et al., 2019) and global recession/slowing economic growth (Global Leadership Forecast, 2018) have caused many organizations to require leaders across levels to demonstrate skills in areas such as resources mobilization, monitoring, evaluation and project management so that they can adapt to the new realities and remain competitive in the business. Moreover, the concept of project management is closely related to the idea of teamwork as most tasks in a project are accomplished by teams. Also the precarity of life in Africa has resulted in an opportunity for organizations to write projects with specific development goals, apply for grants and receive funds from a Foundation or Grantmaker to execute these projects that will contribute to improve the lives of many as governments are struggling to respond to people's needs and expectations. Following the above discussion, it is clear that the current global context is putting more and heavy expectations on organizational leaders than in the past (World Economic Forum, 2019). Therefore, leaders are expected to update and upgrade their skills for the survival and sustainability of their organizations in the industry.

8. Research Implications

The findings of this study have significant relevance to the practitioners as well as scholars. Practitioners would do well to increase understanding of leadership as a holistic concept and leadership development as an integrated long-term learning process which should affect the hand, heart, head, and spirit of a person. Higher learning institutions such as UCBC as well as corporate-based learning programs should develop leadership development programs based on the needs and challenges in the current business environment, which are multi-dimensional in nature. They should provide opportunities for continuous capacity building of the graduates/workers in an intentional way. Leaders such as UCBC alumni should also develop lifelong learning mentality through self-development activities.

On the other hand, an empirical study on holistic leadership is now available to inform scholars from different parts of the world, especially the West, about contemporary African leadership practices and development experiences as described by a young generation of Congolese leaders. Moreover, this study will help scholars find refreshing insights about the concepts of holistic leadership and holistic leadership development from an African point of view that will trigger more empirical investigations on holistic leadership and development in the continent and beyond to learn from a variety of contexts and gain more perspectives.

9. Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership experiences of UCBC alumni in their workplace from the holistic leadership approach. The participants in this research came from a higher learning institution with Christian values and applying integrated or holistic education model in training learners. This means that results cannot be generalized and extrapolated to other groups of people or organizations. However, other universities, organizations, and even corporate-based programs may find value in the results of this study as they reflect on leadership and leadership development process in their own contexts. Participants in this study were all former UCBC students who held a formal leadership position in the period of inquiry, so perspectives of their subordinates, peers, and supervisors were not accounted for in the investigation.

10. Recommendations for Future Research

As opportunities for future research, we suggest that a study would be undertaken to determine the perception of followers regarding the nature of leadership practice of alumni in their workplace. A similar study would also be conducted from the perspective of peers, and supervisors to investigate the impact of UCBC alumni's leadership in their workplace. Perceptions of organizations that employ alumni or people who work with them can also be examined to have a much more complete understanding of the impact of alumni's leadership experiences in their workplace. Further study could be done using various research methods to assess the impact of UCBC's holistic approach and its relevance in the marketplace. Another recommendation for future research would be to duplicate this same study in other higher learning institutions whose purpose is to develop leaders in the country or other countries in the continent and beyond as grounds for a comparative study to identify the role of holistic leadership and holistic leadership development in enhancing leadership effectiveness in the workplace for individual, team, and organizational benefits. Future researchers could also investigate differences between male and female leadership experiences in the workplace across sectors. Lastly, a study that specifically identifies the role of spirituality in leadership for non-Christian group of leaders can also be valuable.

Given the fact that there are not just Christian leaders in the marketplace, there is a need to examine if those spiritual values are similar across different religions and what this would mean for leadership development in Africa.

11. Conclusion

At the end of his doctoral dissertation on integrated education at a Christian University for community transformation in DRC, Bunduki's (2016) suggestions for future research included a study that would clarify the nature of leadership that UCBC graduates develop in their workplace after experiencing an integrated education at the university. Therefore, this phenomenological study was conducted with the purpose of describing the leadership experiences of the UCBC alumni in the context of a holistic leadership approach in order to learn the nature and challenges of their leadership practices, identify their areas of need for leadership development in order to enhance leadership effectiveness in a challenging workplace. The central question that guided this investigation was: What does the leadership experiences of UCBC alumni look like in the workplace when described from a holistic leadership perspective?

Data collected through in-depth interviews with 13 purposively sampled participants and analyzed through content or thematic analysis procedures (Saldana, 2016), helped to address all sub-research questions and achieve study objectives. The nature of day-to-day leadership practices of UCBC alumni in their work reflects a value-based holistic leadership approach. Major challenges among others that UCBC alumni experience in their workplace and that hinder leadership effectiveness included a lack of continuous capacity building in leadership and other areas of improvement. Areas of need for further development in order to enhance leadership effectiveness at work included mainly resource mobilization and project cycle management skills. Discussion of the findings along with literature reviews has been done and research implications for scholars and practitioners were elaborated. Moreover, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research were provided.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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