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Research Article

Role of Management Accounting Education in Developing Leadership Skills among Management Accounting Graduates of A Catholic Higher Education Institution

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Abstract - *Leadership in an organization has a critical role in an organization's outcome and effectiveness. It is recognized as one of the key factors influencing job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction. In this study, the role of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting (BSMA) program was explored in developing leadership skills among its graduates. While existing literature affirms the importance of leadership competencies in management accounting, there remains a limited body of research specifically examining how academic programs within Catholic higher education institutions contribute to leadership development among management accounting graduates. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing purposive sampling to select thirteen (13) BSMA graduates from batch 2018 to 2024 who held managerial positions or operated their own businesses for at least one year. Data were gathered through an online written interview using open-ended questions and analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed five major themes, highlighting that the BSMA program provided a transformative and holistic learning experience that developed both technical and leadership competencies. Graduates identified experiential learning, collaborative activities, values formation, co-curricular engagements, and academic rigor as significant contributors to their leadership readiness, confidence, and professional adaptability. Thus, management accounting education plays a substantial role in cultivating foundational leadership competencies among graduates, while affirming that leadership development is a continuous, lifelong process that extends beyond formal academic instruction.*

Keywords - *Higher Education Institution, Leadership Development, Management Accounting Education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership in an organization has a critical role in an organization's outcome and effectiveness. It is recognized as one of the key factors influencing job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction. Organizations that have powerful leaders create strategic development along with innovation to gain successful business outcomes (Kılıç, 2022). The current competitive market demands leaders to combine hard and soft skills by implementing strategic planning and making ethical decisions while mastering interpersonal communication skills. The success of a small or medium-sized enterprise is often best understood and evaluated by examining the qualities and actions of its leader whether the founder, manager, or owner.

Enterprises led by managers or owners who exhibit clear leadership traits are more likely to achieve higher levels of success and expand their presence within the market (Kocherbaeva et al., 2019). Managers are integral to the execution of organizational operations and are significant contributors to the development of the organization. Their ability to respond to challenges and their commitment to achieving strategic objectives are essential for the efficient attainment of organizational goals (Lu, 2024). Management accounting evolved before the 1900s, alongside the formation of industry and markets (Petrović & Tanasic, 2020). Management accounting is one of the specializations of accounting which provides financial and non-financial information about business that is essential for business management (Huynh, 2022). In the swift-changing business landscape of today, the management accountant has become a business consultant who takes an active part in leadership, strategic management, business alignment and does not hesitate to show initiative to be reliable.

They are now expected to work closely with managers at all levels of the organization, providing the valuable information necessary for effective decision-making (Zainuddin & Sulaiman, 2016). Milačić and Žarković (2025) state that leadership is essential for the management accountant because their job has been transformed from reporting to being strategic "expert advisors" and team leaders that connect various departments. They believe that effective leadership is essential to creating an innovative culture and supporting teams in the challenging transition towards digital solutions such as AI and ERP. Leadership is considered one of the most important competencies in the recently expanded IMA Competency Framework, which is based on more than 100 years of accounting and finance knowledge and expertise, informed by trends and data, and designed for the evolution of essential accounting and finance professional skills (IMA, 2023).

Lawson (2019) stated that no other competency domain has been the same over all time iterations of this framework, and this makes it the most important competency in the profession. In addition, Broccardo et al. (2025) has shown that the management accountants who can successfully combine the knowledge, methodological, and interpersonal skills, such as leadership, in relation to knowledge management and decision-making are more likely to contribute to organizational success and co-create strategic value. To sum up, gaining leadership skills in early career management accountants is economically and socially beneficial, because individual initiative is a catalyst in increasing organizational loyalty among young adults (Alonderienė & Šimkevičiūtė, 2018), and helps to empower young workers to autonomously adapt to the fast pace of the changing workplace resulting from digital disruption (Thaller et al., 2024).

Given the expanding professional responsibilities of management accountants, understanding how leadership competencies are developed through academic programs has become an important area of inquiry. In this context, examining how academic programs contribute to the development of leadership skills among management accounting graduates is valuable in highlighting the role of higher education in preparing students for professional practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting program at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao in the development of leadership skills among its graduates.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Research Design

The study utilized qualitative research design.

B. Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao.

C. Informants of the Study

The study included 13 graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting program from the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao, specifically from the batch of 2018 to 2024. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: they held a managerial position or operated their own business for at least one year, regardless of whether they currently held that position. This specific selection process ensured that informants possessed the necessary professional experience to provide substantive insights into leadership practices and decision-making relevant to the study's objectives.

D. Data Gathering Instrument

The study utilized an online written interview as its data gathering tool. The interview guide, consisting of open-ended questions, was developed based on the study's objective of exploring how the BS Management Accounting program contributed to the development of leadership competencies among its graduates. Informants were explicitly encouraged to verbalize and expound on their answers to provide rich, qualitative depth to their responses. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the interview guide underwent expert validation by the research adviser and the course instructor to ensure the questions effectively captured the required qualitative data.

E. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers sought permission from the University Research and Innovation Office Director to conduct the study. Once approval was granted, Ethics Clearance was obtained from the USL-Research Ethics Board. After securing the clearance, the researchers conducted an online written interview. Informants were selected through purposive sampling from the population of graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting program at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao from the batches of 2018 to 2024.

These participants have held a managerial position or operated their own business for at least one year, regardless of whether they currently hold that position. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews through a Google Form, and only informants who submitted the completed consent form proceeded to the interview questions. The researchers also confirmed that the timing of the online written interview did not interfere with the informants' schedules. The form began with a brief overview of the study, and informants were given an opportunity to ask questions via the provided contact information. The results were shared once the data had been analyzed.

F. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data that was gathered from the interviews. This method was the most suitable as it helped identify common themes in the interview data. The analysis followed the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up.

G. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and respect of all informants. Informants were invited because they were graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting program at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao from the batches of 2018 to 2024. The study included thirteen (13) participants purposely selected based on having held a managerial position or operated their own business for a minimum of one year, ensuring they possessed relevant professional experience. Recruitment was done through direct invitation. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews through a Google Form, and only informants who submitted the completed consent form proceeded to the online interview questions.

The study's purpose, objectives, and procedures were explicitly detailed for the informants on the landing page of the Google Form, emphasizing that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time or skip any question without facing negative consequences. Those who did not wish to participate or who intended to withdraw at any time did so by simply declining the consent or exiting the Google Form before submission; this ensured that no data was recorded or stored by the researchers.

This research study was conducted over a period of five (5) months from January to May 2026, and participation involved an online written interview conducted through a Google Form consisting of open-ended questions lasting approximately 45-60 minutes with no follow-up sessions required. Informants were prompted within the form to expound on their experiences and provide detailed descriptions. The study posed minimal risks, as it only involved completing an online written interview, with the potential inconvenience of time that was addressed by ensuring the interview was conducted during the informant's free time. The confidentiality and anonymity of informants were prioritized throughout the research. No identifying information was collected, and all responses were anonymized to prevent the tracing of data back to individual informants.

Collected data was securely stored, accessible only to the researchers, and destroyed after the completion of the study to maintain privacy. Results were reported in aggregate form to ensure that no individual responses could be identified. Although there was no monetary compensation for participation, the information shared might provide insights that could help improve management accounting education and leadership development at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao, benefiting current and future students, educators, and the institution's curriculum development. The researchers also declared that there was no conflict of interest in this study, as the research was personally funded and did not receive any external funding. To ensure ethical compliance, the research was submitted for review and approval by the University of Saint Louis Research Ethics Board (USL-REB) before any data collection began. These ethical measures ensured the integrity and transparency of the study while protecting the rights and well-being of the informants.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the gathered narratives generated eight major themes that explain the role of management accounting education in developing leadership skills among graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Management Accounting (BSMA) program at the University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao. The themes collectively reflect how the program contributed to the graduates' technical competence, leadership formation, interpersonal development, ethical grounding, confidence, and workplace readiness.

Theme 1. Transformative and Holistic Learning Journey in Management Accounting Education

The theme reflects how the graduates perceived the entire process of learning during their studies as Management Accounting students in the University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao. The informants have always been saying that the process of learning was demanding, difficult, transformative, and holistic. Although the process of learning was challenging for them because of the pressures from their academics, they also felt that the challenges enabled them to develop various skills as well as values.

The Following were Some of the Verbalizations:

> **Informant 1**: "*It was a 'survival of the fittest' kind of experience, but in the best way possible... It felt like we were being forged in fire to ensure that once we stepped out, we were ready for the corporate world*."
>
> **Informant 3**: "*My overall learning experience as a Management Accounting student... has been both challenging and transformative... Beyond academics, my experience at USLT also helped me grow personally and professionally*."
>
> **Informant 6**: "*My overall experience as a BSMA student at USLT was well-rounded—it was a balance of rigorous academic training and character building... making the experience truly holistic and not just academically focused*."

The findings reveal that graduates viewed their educational experience as going beyond traditional education into an approach that is transformative and multidimensional. The participants have consistently linked the program to tough coursework, high academic standards, and a difficult learning environment. Instead of viewing such an environment as negative, the graduates have come up with ways of using the environment to build themselves up through resilience, discipline, adaptability, and readiness for the real world of professionals. Describing their experiences as 'survival of the fittest' and 'challenging yet rewarding,' the graduates mean that their learning experience helped them develop skills and psychological readiness for the real world of professionals.

In addition, it should be noted that the graduates have learned not only the technical aspects of accounting but also the issues related to the building of their values and ethics. Therefore, this kind of experience helped the graduates become ready not only to be accountants but also professionals who will be able to handle organizational complexities. The integration of challenging coursework with experiential and values-based learning appears essential in producing graduates who are adaptable and professionally resilient.

The current research findings correlate well with modern literature focusing on transformative learning environments and experiential learning approaches. Current literature indicates that in higher education institutions there is more focus on the development of holistic competence, which is not limited to just the academic aspect, but also includes the emotional, ethical, and professional aspects as well. As per David A. Kolb's model for experiential learning, significant learning occurs through the interplay between experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application, thus improving practical competency and professional development. In addition to this, humanistic and non-technical skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional selfregulation are essential complementary competencies that are needed along with technical skills for modern-day graduates to function effectively in corporate environments (Robles, 2022).

Moreover, modern research has shown that the challenging learning environment improves the resilience and adaptability abilities of university students (Ayala & Manzano, 2021). The recent study by Jackson (2021) further highlights that workplace preparedness was strongly related to experiential learning embedded in higher education curricula. Likewise, the research by Alshammari et al. (2020) indicated that the educational environments focused on personal development and the formation of values have strong effects on leadership and professional readiness of graduates.

Theme 2. Formation of Technical Expertise and Transferable Professional Competencies

The theme brings out the different competencies developed by the Management Accounting students during their academic pursuits within the BSMA program. Participants mentioned competence and knowledge in the key aspects of accounting, including analytical skills, financial analysis, accounting principles, and digital competency, as well as soft skills like communication, teamwork, leadership, decision making, and adaptability.

Apart from competence in the technical areas, participants noted that the BSMA program had also provided them with competencies applicable in different professional environments. Such competencies not only improved employability but also helped students carry out leadership roles and interact with others in professional environments. This theme confirms that Management Accounting education is crucial in the development of relevant competencies for successful careers.

A. Experiential and Collaborative Learning as Incubators of Leadership Competencies

This theme is concerned with the impact of collaboration activities in terms of group learning experiences, group projects, research, organizational involvement, presentation, and leadership activities in fostering leadership-related skills among BSMA graduates. The informants considered these experiential activities as crucial in the development of communication skills, initiative, teamwork, accountability, and decision-making abilities.

The Informants Revealed the Following:

> **Informant 1**: "*The most defining experience was spearheading the Book Donation Drive as VP for Non-Academics. This was a collaboration where USL alumni donated accounting books to students who couldn't afford them… it taught me that true leadership is about creating a lasting, positive impact*."
>
> **Informant 3**: "*Working on our research or capstone project was one of the most impactful experiences. It required planning, delegation, and consistent monitoring of progress. I had to communicate with group members, consolidate data, and ensure that our study met academic standards*."
>
> **Informant 7**: "*During my time as a BSMA student, the experiences that helped me develop leadership-related competencies were mostly group projects, case studies, research activities, and our thesis. These activities required teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and proper coordination among group members*."

The findings show that leadership skills of the BSMA alumni were largely cultivated through hands-on and collaborative learning experiences incorporated into the curriculum and co-curricular activities offered by the program. As stressed by informants, group tasks, case analysis, thesis work, organizational involvement, and leadership positions in student activities were the means of learning how to work in teams, delegate tasks, handle conflicts, communicate well, and make decisions. Such experiences enabled graduates to develop interpersonal competence and collaborative leadership behaviors that later became transferable to workplace settings. Interesting, however, was the discovery that leadership was not only confined to the formal leader role but that it also could be demonstrated via initiative-taking, responsibility, socializing among peers, and participation in task groups.

This suggests that leadership development within the BSMA program was deeply experiential and socially constructed through authentic interactions and collaborative engagements. Moreover, it can be deduced from the research results that management accounting courses will be extremely helpful for preparing leaders for the future, provided that the programs include interactive processes in the same manner as those in practice.

These results are consistent with those that emphasize collaborative and experiential learning in accounting education. For example, Dallimore et al. (2019) observed that the use of collaborative learning techniques for management accounting courses led to improvements in critical thinking skills, teamwork, communications, and students' level of involvement. Furthermore, as stated by Ugrin et al. (2021), participation in simulations helped build student confidence in their managerial accounting skills and their work in groups. According to Vysotskaya & Prokofieva (2024), practical and technological experience should be added to contemporary management accounting studies.

Moreover, Hanny et al. (2023) highlighted that leadership competencies are effectively strengthened through immersive educational experiences and leadership-oriented activities. Additionally, these results align well with the social constructivist view of learning described by Imjai et al. (2025), which holds that leadership skills can only be developed in a collaborative setting where there is encouragement of analytical thinking and problem-solving.

B. Development of Analytical, Technical, and Strategic Management Competencies

This theme highlights the role that the BSMA program played in providing graduates with skills in technical accounting, analysis, decision-making, and technology that helped them become better leaders. The informants noted that their accounting skills, data analysis capabilities, ability to interpret financial information, and familiarity with software applications provided them with confidence to make sound decisions in organizations.

Some of the Informants' Verbalizations were as Follows:

Informant 1: "*Apart from the technical mastery of Cost Accounting and Financial Management, the most useful skill I gained was analytical thinking. In USL, we weren't just taught to memorize formulas; we were taught to interpret what the numbers were saying about a business*."

Informant 2: "*Not only yung accounting principles but also yung included subjects na related sa accounting and/or data analytics system software (SAP and Power BI)… naging edge ko siya especially when applying for work*."

Informant 6: "*The program equipped me with management advisory services concepts such as budgeting, cost management, and financial analysis, which I now apply directly in running my small business*."

The results show that the BSMA program made significant contributions to graduates' skills development that formed the basis of their effectiveness as leaders in professional practice. In particular, participants repeatedly noted the significance of learning financial analysis, budgeting, cost control, decision making, and using accounting software in the workplace.

However, apart from knowledge about the procedures in accounting, graduates stressed that the program helped them acquire skills in analyzing and interpreting financial information critically and making data-based decisions. As for the use of data visualization and other technologies, such skills have become an important advantage for them in a technologically advanced environment. Having gained such competencies, graduates are now capable of leading teams, providing valuable insights, managing business processes, and participating in organizational planning activities.

Thus, management accounting education needs to place more emphasis on analytical skills, strategic thinking, and IT skills in order to train effective leaders in management accounting and related areas. The importance of analyzing data and translating numerical data into organizational decisions can be seen as critical to being an effective leader.

The present findings are justified by modern literature, which highlights the growing relevance of analytical skills and the application of technology in teaching management accounting. Imjai et al. (2025) said that analytical skills were one important factor that contributed to the leadership potential of accounting students and were one important mediator in forming sustainable and adaptive leadership. Similarly, according to the study, Vysotskaya & Prokofieva (2024), the adoption of data analytics as a technique in management accounting education helped the learners accept the technology, the analysis skills and the readiness for employment of the learners.

In regard to the research done by Santos et al. (2025) on competencies for management accountants, technical expertise, communication, negotiation, and systemic vision were identified as competencies that future management accountants should possess. Furthermore, Bartholome et al. (2024) emphasized the role of using accounting management concepts for decision-making and efficiency in the accounting education literature.

C. Confidence Building, Adaptability, and Leadership Readiness Through Academic Challenges

This theme shows how the BSMA course helped the graduating students become more confident, adaptable, resilient, and ready to take on managerial responsibilities. Informants explained how they became self-confident by dealing with academic stress, presenting in class, meeting deadlines, and studying difficult courses.

The Following were Some of the Verbalizations:

> **Informant 1**: "*The program is a total confidence builder because if you can survive the qualifying exams or the deptals, you feel like you can survive anything… Being an MA student at USL gives you a certain 'tough skin*."
>
> **Informant 6**: "*The program really tests your limits… It made me feel like, 'If I could survive this program, I can handle the challenges of running a business too.' It turned my 'I think I can' into 'I know I can*."
>
> **Informant 10**: "*My time in the BSMA program helped build my confidence gradually. Since we often had to analyze cases, present ideas, and work in teams, I became more comfortable sharing insights and taking responsibility*."

The findings reveal that the BSMA program substantially contributed to graduates' confidence building, adaptability, and readiness to undertake leadership responsibilities. Informants associated the demanding academic requirements, extensive presentations, research tasks, case analyses, and pressure-filled activities with the gradual development of self-confidence and professional readiness. The demanding nature of the program seemed to serve as a training ground that provided students with real-life challenges that required accountability, toughness, and individual ability to solve problems.

Graduates became more adept at making decisions, becoming leaders, presenting ideas, and coping with the pressure associated with a career after being constantly exposed to challenging but positive situations. From the results presented above, it can be concluded that confidence and preparedness to act as leaders did not occur instantly but gradually developed through constant exposure to difficulties that had to be overcome. The research results confirm those obtained from similar studies investigating the connection between challenging educational experiences and leadership readiness of accounting students. Ugrin et al. (2021) discovered that simulation exercises positively influenced the level of confidence in management accounting skills and made students better prepared for a future career.

As observed by Imjai et al. (2025), the analytical skills and adaptability competencies of the accounting students are vital in making them future leaders. As stated by Hanny et al. (2023), the education of leadership will enable accounting students to be resilient and adaptive in facing organizational problems in the current context. Moreover, researchers found that emotional intelligence and adaptability are two important traits to have in effective leadership and team management. According to Ćwiąkała et al. (2025), emotional intelligence is an important aspect from which leadership efficiency cannot be neglected. Moreover, in current educational literature, one can see an emphasis on the idea that active learning, reflective experience, and engaging environment positively impact the development of leadership abilities among students.

D. Values Formation and Ethical Leadership Orientation

This theme explains how the BSMA curriculum and the organizational culture of USLT enabled the development of ethical leadership qualities, a sense of responsibility, integrity, service orientation, and professionalism in the graduates. It was revealed that apart from receiving technical education, the informants learned their leadership skills in a values-based atmosphere provided by the university.

The Informants Revealed the Following:

Informant 1: "*The instructors didn't just teach us how to compute; they taught us the value of Missio et Excellentia*."

Informant 3: "*The school environment encouraged discipline, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility values that are crucial in the accounting profession*."

Informant 5: "*My advice to current BSMA students is to seek leadership not for power or position, but to serve others, inspire your team, and create a positive impact on the people you lead*."

The results show that ethical orientation and values integration emerged as important aspects of leadership training for BSMA alumni. There was a clear indication that participants viewed leadership as an embodiment of integrity, accountability, discipline, and service rather than as positional power or authority. This shows clearly that the educational environment helped foster servant leader orientation and ethics in professional practice, which eventually impacted how alumni related to their colleagues, organizational duties, and decision-making process in their work environments.

It is notable here that the ethical component becomes important in management accounting because transparency, accountability, and proper financial stewardship become critical. In addition, there were implications that the development of leaders in institutions of higher learning becomes more meaningful through the incorporation of value education in learning processes.

The results of the study are in line with the literature focusing on the significance of the teaching of ethics and values in accounting and leadership programs. In particular, Ariail et al. (2021) noted that developing ethical leadership is essential for fostering professional responsibility among students. Similarly, according to Matei and Bertino (2023), ethics and systems thinking are crucial skills in modern professional education. Moreover, responsibility, professionalism, and ethics were listed as important soft skills by García-Chitiva and Correa (2023). Finally, current research in the field of leadership suggests that servant and ethical leadership have a positive impact on collaboration and organizational trust and engagement of employees.

E. Communication and Interpersonal Competence as Essential Leadership Skills

This theme highlights the development of Communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skill-building, which were identified as significant outcomes among BSMA graduates through academic assignments, group presentations, and organizational engagements.

Some of the Informants' Verbalizations were as Follows:

Informant 4: "*More than that, the confidence and communication skills I gained by actively participating in Extra Curricular Activities*."

Informant 10: "*Through group work and case studies, I also developed communication and teamwork skills*."

Informant 11: "*Even simple reporting helped me gain confidence in expressing ideas, and over time, those small experiences improved my teamwork and communication skills*."

The findings revealed that communication and interpersonal competence were the key areas identified by informants in relation to the importance of these skills in the context of leadership qualities acquired in BSMA studies. Students were able to learn how to communicate ideas in an efficient manner, how to work together, manage different personalities, and be part of team activities through their reporting exercises, group presentations, and organizational involvement.

The informants were aware of the relevance of communication and collaboration capabilities in the management of accounting as an important element in the development of key qualities associated with leadership. It should also be pointed out that classroom and extracurricular programs served as practical grounds for improving graduates' communication skills.

In this case, the present research is consistent with other findings related to the significance of communication and interpersonal skills in the context of accounting and leadership roles. Specifically, García-Chitiva and Correa (2023) argue that communication and collaboration are the two major employability skills that are developed at institutions of higher learning. The same idea is elaborated by Sandi & Cindrakasih (2025), who state that the concept of interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in leadership by helping build confidence and loyalty in teams and organizations. Furthermore, Santos et al. (2025) emphasize the need for developing communication and negotiation skills by management accountants in order to ensure effective organizational decision-making. In the same way, Awotwe et al. (2020) state that modern accountants must possess communication and interpersonal skills in order to cope in the field successfully.

F. Leadership Development Through Organizational and Co-Curricular Engagements

This theme refers to how student organizations, extracurricular activities, service-learning programs, and leadership positions contributed to the enhancement of graduates' leadership abilities and social responsibility.

The following were some of the verbalizations:

> **Informant 1**: "*My stint as VP for Non-Academics at JPAMA-USL was my ultimate training ground; it taught me how to manage people and logistics for large-scale events while maintaining academic excellence*."
> **Informant 8**: "*The leadership experience and service learning programs are vital in the formation of an Accounting Student*."
> **Informant 9**: "*Being part of the SABH council during my 4th year… helped me on how to lead a person such as my assistant, proper communication, delegating work, and to correct them when mistakes are made*."

From these findings, it can be observed that the competencies in leadership of BSMA graduates were greatly enhanced due to their organizational and co-curricular activities. The various student leadership positions, service learning courses, outreach programs, and organizational activities allowed them to experience first-hand the importance of delegation, coordination, project management, and leadership of people. What the informants highlighted was the fact that these activities gave them exposure to leadership issues outside the classroom and allowed them to build initiative, confidence, and social responsibility. Making, which later became transferable to workplace and managerial settings. The findings imply that co-curricular experiences serve as important complementary platforms for leadership development in management accounting education.

Supporting evidence can be found in existing literature in leadership education on the significance of experiential learning and organizational learning. Specifically, Hanny et al. (2023) pointed out that leadership-based initiatives and learning experiences make important contributions to the leadership preparedness of the learners. Likewise, based on the concept of experiential learning, participation in organizational tasks would increase learners' self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and leadership development. Watts and Burian (2024) also found that students who assume various leadership positions in universities' student associations have skills and competencies highly valued by the industry, such as independence and responsibility.

In addition, Dewanti et al. (2025) found that students participating in organizations exhibit significant positive impacts on their leadership and interpersonal skills, particularly their communication, teamwork abilities, and decision-making skills. Furthermore, the study conducted by Imjai et al. (2024) revealed that participation in extra-curricular activities has a positive relationship with the emotional intelligence and social skills of accounting students, supporting the idea that extra-curricular activities help cultivate the skills and characteristics needed for effective leadership. Recent studies on educational issues also highlight the positive contribution of involvement in student organizations and service-learning initiatives on employability, communication skills, and leadership skills of graduates.

Theme 3. Academic Preparation as a Foundation for Professional Leadership Responsibilities

The above theme illustrates that the educational background possessed by the BSMA graduates became one of the important foundations for being able to take up leadership positions at work. According to informants, the BSMA curriculum provided graduates with vital knowledge, analytical, and decision-making skills, as well as practical experiences that could be easily transferred to work-related leadership activities. Aside from technical skills and knowledge, respondents also believed that academic background allowed them to develop necessary qualities of confidence, accountability, organization, as well as the ability to perform work-related tasks of supervision and coordination. From the above results, it can be inferred that an education in management accounting provides students with the background to become leaders at work.

The Informants Revealed the Following:

> **Informant 1**: "*Currently, I lead the month-end reconciliation for our fleet and warehouse operations… My stint as VP for Non-Academics at JPAMA-USL was my ultimate training ground… it taught me how to manage people and logistics for large-scale events while maintaining academic excellence*."
>
> **Informant 2**: "*My current role is the Budget Officer… These responsibilities involve taking initiative, guiding colleagues when needed, and ensuring that tasks related to budgeting, reporting, and financial monitoring are completed accurately and on time… My academic background at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao played a significant role in preparing me for these responsibilities*."
>
> **Informant 6**: "*I currently work at BPI as a Project Manager handling projects related to procurement systems and loans… My Management Accounting background helped me become more organized, analytical, and comfortable working under pressure*."

The findings show that graduates of Management Accounting take on varied leadership roles in different organizations, such as those related to finance, auditing, project management, entrepreneurship, budgeting, and supervision. These students always cited their academic background as having helped them prepare for these leadership-oriented tasks. Graduates indicated that the BSMA curriculum equipped them with foundational competencies that reduced uncertainty and facilitated workplace adaptation.

Participants pointed out that their past experience with accounting principles, budgeting, financial analysis, systems expertise, and collaboration in academics made them feel more ready and able to accept the leadership role without feeling underprepared. Moreover, the aspect of leadership preparedness was not restricted to leadership roles but also included preparing one's self to lead others, coordinate tasks, make decisions, and be responsible for results.

It is shown that leadership preparation in the context of Management Accounting involves both technical preparedness and experience with initiative-taking and decision-making in the process of collaboration with peers. Therefore, educational experiences combining theoretical and practical aspects may positively influence the future ability of graduates to become leaders.

The findings support previous research stating that leadership education is becoming more embedded in holistic learning approaches that combine domain knowledge and practical application. The importance of formal education to prepare graduates to take leadership roles in the workplace is evident. For instance, Jackson (2021) found that higher education processes that incorporate realistic work have significantly improved the employability and preparation of graduates to assume roles within organizations, especially those that involve work-based learning.

Likewise, experiential education activities that foster problem solving, group work, and initiative have been found to be related to leadership preparedness in graduates (Tomlinson, 2020). Clarke's (2018) research also highlighted the importance of the integration of disciplinary knowledge and transferable competencies to adjust to the workplace, as part of the employability and leadership capability. Two of the most essential components of a manager's learning and development and confidence in his/her professional role include active learning experiences like project, case analysis and simulation in management and business education (Caza et al., 2018).

In addition, Priest and Middleton (2019) have conducted research suggesting that students' leadership identity formation occurs when they are given repeated chances to take on leadership responsibilities and engage in real-life leadership experiences. Collectively, these studies support the present findings that leadership preparation among BSMA graduates was shaped through a combination of technical instruction and practical experiences that facilitated effective leadership transition in professional environments.

Theme 4. Emerging Leadership Competency Gaps in Actual Managerial Practice

This particular theme captures the skills associated with leadership, which were seen by graduates to be developing or needing improvement following their assumption of managerial or entrepreneurship duties. While graduates admitted that the BSMA program was very effective in preparing them for management work, some informants hinted that it was from workplace experience that their leadership skills gained maturity.

From the results, there seems to have been development of certain competencies associated with managing other people, resolving conflicts, emotional intelligence, making decisions under varying circumstances, among others, through workplace experience. This shows that leadership development is a progressive process where academic preparation comes first before workplace experience.

Some of the Informants' Verbalizations were as Follows:

> **Informant 1**: "*I can say that it helped, but not totally, because maybe it is just like common sense or a sense of initiative/responsibility that kicks in when you are actually handling a team…*"
> **Informant 6**: "*Not at the maximum but for sure above average*."
> **Informant 10**: "*While most leadership skills were further strengthened through actual work experience, my time at USL definitely helped me build the basics…*"

The findings indicate that although graduates recognized the substantial contribution of Management Accounting education to leadership preparation, they also perceived leadership development as a process that extends beyond formal academic instruction. Some of the participants suggested that the skill sets of a leader are still not fully acquired at the undergraduate level and are further shaped by experience in the work environment. The competencies needed to lead real teams, make organizational decisions, deal with pressures in the workplace and manage interpersonal dynamics, informants said, could only be understood through practice and experience.

Skills related to emotional intelligence, conflict management, people handling, adaptability and situational judgment appeared to have been further developed after assuming professional responsibilities. Such findings suggest a leadership preparation that is not necessarily limited to academic contexts, as leadership is situational and relational and is formed through repetition and demands of everyday life. Educational institutions can offer the theoretical components and simulated experiences, but authentic workplace experiences are still crucial environments for leadership development. The results thus point to leadership as a developmental process and a lifelong, complementary interplay between educational preparation and work experience.

The findings support current perspectives that assert that abilities in leadership grow progressively based on practice. According to leadership scholars, education is able to offer the necessary information for effective leadership; nevertheless, true leadership skills tend to improve through practice and human interaction at work environments. Leadership development, as Day et al. (2021) point out, should be understood as an ongoing process, not a one-off educational outcome. It is important to note that the practical experience has a significant impact on leadership competence.

Research by Komives et al. (2019) similarly pointed out that leadership identity and capacity continues to evolve through repeated involvement in leadership situations. Seemiller and Murray (2019) also found that although higher education can introduce leadership competencies, workplace experiences reinforce these competencies through authentic application. Moreover, Caza and Rosch (2020) pointed out that leadership learning is now often happening in situations that are challenging and in practice, which in turn involves adaptation and self-awareness.

In more recent years, there has been research done to indicate that emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills can be more efficiently developed within an experiential learning environment rather than within just a classroom setting (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). The studies together support the present findings that the leadership competence of Management Accounting graduates has been further developing after graduation through direct professional experiences and engagement in leadership activities in the real world.

Theme 5. Graduates' Insights and Developmental Recommendations for Aspiring Future Leaders

This theme contains the thoughts, observations, and suggestions of the graduates of Management Accounting for the current BSMA students who want to hold leadership positions in the future. Informants shared that they learned to balance academic responsibilities with opportunities that helped develop their leadership skills. They also highlighted the importance of improving communication and interpersonal skills, taking on challenges, and practicing values such as humility, responsibility, and service.

The informants stated balancing academic excellence and opportunities for leadership development, improving interpersonal and communication skills, accepting challenges, and developing values of humility, responsibility, and service. Crucially, many did not view leadership as something requiring the holding of a formal position rather, they saw it as something that was built through daily decisions, initiatives taken on one's own, and introspection. The results emphasize that leadership development is an intentional and incremental process, which includes technical preparation and participation in experiences that promote professional and personal growth.

The Following were Some of the Verbalizations:

> **Informant 1**: "*Don't just be a student who studies; be a student who serves. Join JPAMA or other organizations because the technical skills will get you the job, but your leadership skills will get you promoted*."
>
> **Informant 3**: "*It is obvious that we need to focus on academics… However, my advice is that you should also give importance to activities that will boost your confidence, communication skills, and social interaction*."
>
> **Informant 5**: "*Leadership does not demand a title, and it does not know hierarchy… being a student, regular or irregular, student leader or just student, you are a leader*."

The findings show that graduates think leadership development is about more than doing well in school and having technical skills. Leadership development is also about having experiences that involve helping others, getting involved, making yourself better, and growing as a person. The people we spoke to mentioned that students should take advantage of the time by joining groups, participating in activities outside of class, collaborating on projects, and engaging in other activities that will help them communicate and become more confident. The people we talked to also said that being humble, taking the initiative, being responsible, and thinking about how to help others are parts of being a leader.

But what's fascinating is that graduates don't believe that leadership is limited to those who hold titles or positions. Instead, graduates think that leadership is about how you behave, and that means being responsible, taking the initiative, and having an effect on others, no matter what your role is. The people we talked to also said that it is important to see both the things that happen and the bad things as chances to learn and grow, and that this helps you become more mature as a person and in your career.

These findings mean that students who are studying Management Accounting need to make an effort to have experiences that help them develop both the technical skills and the personal skills they need to be leaders. Educational institutions, therefore, are important in promoting environments that encourage experiential learning opportunities and student involvement that foster leadership identity and readiness. The findings are consistent with recent leadership literature, which views leadership as a developmental process shaped through social interaction and experience. Existing studies indicate that leadership competencies are often developed through participation in co-curricular activities and other experiential opportunities outside the classroom.

Komives et al. (2019) noted that leadership identity develops over time as individuals become involved in different activities, learn from their experiences, and interact with others, instead of depending only on formal leadership roles. Similarly, Seemiller and Murray (2019) noted that students are better equipped for leadership when given experiential learning opportunities and active involvement in student organizations. Dugan (2020) conducted a study to demonstrate how very beneficial it is for students to be involved in activities and leadership programs to assist them with their communication skills, confidence, and civic responsibility. Priest and Middleton (2019) confirmed this. They said that leadership skills are often developed when students have to take the initiative, be accountable, and work together with others in situations, which helps with leadership development, and this is something that happens over time, with repeated experiences that require leadership skills, collaboration, and accountability.

Furthermore, Day et al. (2021) noted the importance of developmental experiences that promote personal development and interpersonal skills in effective leadership training. Collectively, these studies support the present findings, suggesting that leadership among Management Accounting graduates is not seen solely in terms of professional roles, but also as something that continues to develop through involvement, service, and learning gained from experience.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Management Accounting program at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao helped graduates develop both technical knowledge and leadership skills. In addition, experiential learning, challenging academic activities, and values formation contributed to their preparedness for the workplace and their ability to adapt to professional demands. However, leadership development does not end in school, since actual work experiences continue to shape skills such as emotional intelligence, people management, and decision-making.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publishing of this paper.

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