

Research Article

Academic Roles of Educational Leaders for Quality Learning Environment in the Public and Private Universities at Lahore

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Abstract |

Background: Quality learning environments are innovative, transformative and collaborative thus facilitating the educational processes. This study was designed to figure out the academic roles of higher educational leaders for quality learning environment in the public and private universities at Lahore. The objective was to identify the gaps in the academic roles being played and entrusted to the educational leaders.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted at Lahore, among the public and private sector universities. Stratified sampling technique was opted and universities having the faculties of natural sciences, arts & humanities, management sciences and social sciences were selected for study population. The educational leadership of the universities was categorized into senior and junior faculty and all the faculty members of sampled universities were invited for participation. The data was collected through the self-designed, validated and pilot tested five-point rating scale. The collected data was entered into the statistical package for social sciences. Chi square test was used to determine the association using p value < 0.05 as significant.

Results: Findings of the research revealed that there was a significant difference between the academic roles among the faculty of public and private universities.

Conclusions: The study concludes that higher educational leaders must identify and practice their roles to enhance the quality of the learning environment of universities.

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Introduction

Leadership establishes and promotes academic direction and quality of the higher educational institutes.¹ The higher educational leadership is the only capable human resource to create a balance of academic and regulation activities. These leaders provide activities of research and teaching throughout the institute and select competent human resource for academic developments of higher educational institutions. The academic developments and quality

may include innovations, collaboration, establishment of research centers and development of modular curriculum. Academic roles focus on four major domains including faculty and teaching, development of curriculum, learning and learners, and organizational promoters. Diverse studies concluded the abilities required for the higher educational leaders to provide good results at a larger scale.³ These abilities include the vision, direction, motivational capacity, technology, management skills, innovation for working in the quality learning

environments of universities and adaptability for the changing context.⁴ The support of the leadership for learning environment changes the teachers and systems. This transformation is a key role of the efforts for quality improvement. The leaders identify, cultivate and nurture the faculty to proceed for leadership in education. Researchers identify that leaders are having the capacity to develop a positive change by growing, engaging, helping and empowering the individuals. They address the challenges, engage different kind of individuals, develop linkages with other universities and create positive working relationship between administration and faculty.⁴ The availability of literature about the academic roles of leadership for quality of learning environment is limited at the level of universities and higher educational institutions.⁵ Quality is a multi-dimensional concept. It is different in different context. It is attached to the contextual factors including learning, teaching, intake of students and assessment methods. Researchers showed that perception of students about quality includes performance of teachers, learning and teaching. Perception of teachers about quality includes burden, discipline, technology, lack of mutual trust and constraints of teamwork. It is evident that the source of inspiration, support direction and guidance are the important academic roles of leaders.⁶

Some other roles of leaders include risk assessment, innovation support, enhance the reputation of the institute, competition and confidence provision in the governance of the institute.⁷ Now a days the learning environments of universities are very dynamic. It is mandatory to look for the excellence in the learning environment of the higher education. A research described that the expansion of information processing, project and task work environments, cognitive complexity, problem solving, knowledge application and generation of new knowledge are the landscape and nature of working in universities.⁸ It also includes greater autonomy, intensive interactions, extensive communication, risk taking, shared decision making, trust and adaptability, teamwork, independence and collaboration. Leaders are considered as the designers and producers of the structures and processes for whole of the learning environment. Different researchers concluded that the roles for academic development are related with academic

leadership and these roles must be articulated.^{9,10}

This study was designed to identify academic roles being played and entrusted to the educational leadership in their setups and find the elements of the leadership roles which are being reflected in the different capacities by different leaders including senior and junior faculty.

Methodology

This comparative cross-sectional study was conducted at Lahore, among the public and private sector universities recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Out of the total five public and 11 private universities, only general education related universities were included in the study. Stratified sampling technique was opted and universities having the faculties of natural sciences, arts & humanities, management sciences and social sciences were selected for study population. Based on the documents of HEC only three universities counting one public and two private universities met the inclusion criteria. The educational leadership of the universities was categorized into senior faculty (188 subjects) consisting of Deans/Directors/ HODs/ Professors and Associate Professors whereas second category comprised of Assistant Professors and Lectures (513 subjects).

All the 701 study subjects were personally contacted by the investigator, informed consent was obtained and they were invited to participate in the study. The data was collected through the specially designed five-point rating scale based on extensive literature review along with the face and content validation by the subject experts. These roles are for mandate, institutional vision, mission and objectives, assessment and evaluation system, research and staff or faculty. This rating scale was also pilot tested on 100 faculty members other than the study population for reliability establishment. The computed Cronbach alpha was $r = .873$ representing it as a reliable tool for data collection. The instrument was administered to all the study subjects. The investigator followed the data collection through e mails, telephone and at least three personal visits and received back completed responses from 349 study subjects. The data was organized, entered into the statistical package for social sciences and analyzed by the use of statistical

tools. Chi square test was used to determine the association of leadership roles with public or private universities using p value --- 0.05 as significant.

Results

Among the total 349 respondents, 205 (58.7%) were males and 144 (41.3 %) were females, 247 (70.8%) from the Public Universities and 102 (29.2%) from the Private Universities. Faculty wise respondents participated in the study from both public and private universities included 176(50.6%) from Faculty of science, 62(17.8%) from Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 56(16.1%) from Faculty of Economics and Management and 55(15.5%) from Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences. Rank wise distribution of the faculty was studied and found that 5 (1.4%) were Deans, 7 (2.0%) were Directors, 24 (6.9%) were Head of departments/ Chairmen, 26(7.4%) were Profe-

ssors, 47 (13.5%) were Associate professors and 240 (68.8%) were junior faculty members. The qualification of the respondents was studied and found that 18(5.2%) were MA/MSc, 160 (45.8%) were MS/M.Phil., 160(45.8%) were PhD and 8(2.3 %) were Post Doc. There were 193(55.6%) who had 1-5 years of experience in the current post, 100 (28.8%)

Table 2: Showing Results about the Roles of Educational Leaders in Public and Private Universities

Domain	Academic roles for educational leaders	*P-value
Assessment & Evaluation System	Briefly described evaluation system exist	0.008
	Procedure & tools for evaluation system are available	0.003
	Evaluation policy on program assessment, assessment of teachers & support staff exists	0.007
	Meetings are held to develop the improving plans	0.005
	Assessment tools are used for formative and summative assessment of each subject	0.920
Assessment Records	Portfolios of students for core courses are maintained	0.061
	Report on the general quality of the program is shared	0.234
	Report on recorded minutes of assessment analysis is shared	0.052
	Assessment methods are valid, objective and fair	0.005
	Students receive useful feedback from assessed work	0.057
Research Planning and Promotion	Research publication and dissemination policy of institution exist	0.001
	Research is conducted and supported on the priority issues	0.001
	Budget has been made available for the conduct, publish and dissemination of research each year	0.001
Record of the conduct and use of research	Classified list of completed research is available	0.001
	Completed researches are shared for implementation	0.001
	Joint research project has been designed by the institution	0.001
Staff / Faculty meeting file	Meeting notices and agenda of at least one year is kept in the file	0.797
	Minutes of the above meeting of the faculty and staff are kept in the file	0.014
	Report on the implementation of the decision made in the meeting is kept	0.102

*p-value < 0.05 is considered as significant.

Table 1: Showing Results about the Roles of Educational Leaders in Public and Private Universities

Domain	Academic roles	*P-value
Mandate	Mandate of the institution exists in black and white	0.665
	Mandate is endorsed by Academic Council	0.017
	Mandate is revisited after specified time	0.020
Institutional Vision	Vision is documented and catchy	0.248
	Vision is future oriented	0.025
	Mission is devised out of vision	0.012
	Vision is developed by decision makers	0.001
Institutional Mission	Mission is developed by Board of Governors and revisited after regular intervals	0.001
	Mission leads university decision making	0.001
	Mission is revisited to be more practical	0.001
Institutional Goals	Goals are broader	0.001
	Goals matches vision and mission	0.095
	Goals are driving and guiding force	0.018
Institutional objectives	Objectives are specific for each program	0.008
	Objectives match vision and mission	0.099
	Learning objectives are followed for teaching	0.001
	Objectives are consistent with the institutions mission	0.013

*p-value < 0.05 is considered as significant.

had 6-10 years, 33(9.5%) had 11-15 years and 21 (6.1%) had 16-20 years of experience in their current position. Table one and two shows that there is a significant difference between the opinion of the public and private universities indicating the leadership roles for quality learning environment.

Discussion

The objectives of this study were to overview the academic roles from the perspective of higher educational leaders which coincide with quality of learning environment. The researcher tried to provide a comprehensive look of these roles. Former researches highlight some or few aspects of these roles. Most of these roles are abundant in the literature. The first objective of the study was to identify current academic roles being played and entrusted to the educational leadership in their setup. This study identifies the dimension of higher educational leadership roles for educational services. At first, we discuss about the roles related to mandate, institutional vision, institutional mission, institutional goals, institutional objectives, assessment and evaluation, assessment records, research planning and promotion, record of conduct and use of research and staff/faculty meetings. It is evident from the results of study presented in table 1 and 2, that roles of public university leaders are better than private university leaders. Public university leaders are playing their roles for mandate that is endorsed by academic council. It is revisited after specified time, vision is future oriented and developed by the decision makers. Mission is developed by board of governors which leads decision making of the university. It is revisited to be more practical goals are broader and guiding force. Objectives are specific for each program, followed for teaching and consistent with mission. Further leaders are active in their roles for evaluation system's procedure and tools, policy and improvement plan for evaluation. They are also taking part for research planning and promotion, conduct and use of research, regular faculty meetings and implementing the decisions of these meetings. Higher education must continue to balance the above mentioned roles of leaders that are appropriate for stakeholders and retain the past learned experiences.¹¹ These roles are very important to manage the emotional and practical difficulties of the students and staff.¹² Another study describe vision, trust, positive self-regard and communication as the major leadership roles for the quality of universities.¹³ Similarly, the important leadership roles described by another study are shared vision, challenges to the process, empowering the team members to become

and act as role model for others.

Researches also prove that all these roles are interrelated and tied with each other. The higher educational leaders have to establish a vision because vision is a blueprint to move towards something.¹⁴ Leaders must develop a shared vision. Vision is closely related to mission of organization. Universities also find it difficult to develop a shared vision and mission. Other researchers also show that the leadership for the environment of learning encircles the establishment of vision for teaching and learning, communication of the direction and vision to all the stakeholders in a way which encourages and motivates them to use their resources in an alignment with the vision of the organization. It also includes the motivation and inspiration of the stakeholders to involve and engage with the vision.² Similarly, the roles are also enlisted as enable others to act, provide feedback, help to achieve goals and lead by example. Similarly, leaders foster professional development, sharing responsibility, combining ideas, collaborating and forming partnerships. Learning from others, sustaining interaction, encourage efforts, consulting, respecting autonomy and building shared goals are some other attributes. Other roles are finding common purpose, helping people solve problems, nurturing mutual trust, believing in others and giving them opportunities to perform as well as support them. Another study elaborate the academic leadership roles for the achievement of quality. The roles embrace motivation, delegation, empowerment and communication.¹⁵ Currently much of the focus of leadership development is generic, failing to attend to the particular domains of learning. A change in the culture is required promoting the recent values about the roles of leadership regarding the process of education and the quality of universities.¹⁰ Similarly, these leaders use relevant tools for assessment, develop a disciplined learning environment and promote a culture of dialogue and discussion about the learning activities. The second objective was to find the elements of the leadership roles which are being reflected in the different capacities by different leaders. This study reveals the elements of the educational leadership roles for educational services of different tiers such as deans, directors, HODs/ chairmen, professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers. Different researches highlight the role of presidents or vice chancellors, deans, HODs and professors separately. Such as one study was conducted at national level which highlighted the faculty roles for mission to enhance quality.¹⁶ An effective and efficient leadership at different levels of higher education institutes is

central to quality assurance and improved innovation. They create vision and circumstances to realize and achieve that vision.¹⁷ It is important to mention that an extra ordinary quality of these leaders is related with their communication skills. The academic leaders organize them self in a way to communicate what must be communicated. These leaders must have the capability not only to tell the truth but to listen to the truth from others as well. A study found that the effective leaders are motivators, celebrate the good results and reward people on good performance.¹⁸ They are the builders of relationship, called developers as they develop policies and innovators as well as they think, go beyond, encourage and plan to involve the stakeholders in the process of decision making. It is also a matter of concern that many staff members are reluctant to assume the academic leadership roles.¹⁹ Further some of the studies found the roles at institutional level and some researched the roles at departmental level.^{2,20}

Conclusion

The study concludes that higher educational leaders at different levels i.e. from Dean to lecturers must identify and communicate their roles especially for quality of learning environment in universities. Each faculty member must practice their roles so that universities can improve their quality. Study also concludes that leadership of public universities is more aware of their roles and their performance for quality is better than private universities at Lahore.

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