

Basic Concepts and Paradigms of Academic Leadership

Juli Rachmadani Hasibuan¹, Yeni Erlita², Masitowarni Siregar³, Fahri Hawani⁴,
Winda Setiasari⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

Email: julirachma@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Juli Rachmadani Hasibuan

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/lokakarya.v5i1.5343>

ABSTRAK

Academic leadership has emerged as a pivotal factor in the advancement and efficacy of higher education institutions. Universities function as knowledge-centric entities and necessitate leadership that integrates leadership competencies, academic expertise, and a strategic institutional vision. This study examines the essential concepts and evolving paradigms of academic leadership within higher education. The discourse centers on four key aspects: the essence of leadership, the distinction between leadership and management, paradigms of academic leadership within universities, and the function of scientific leadership in applied linguistics. This essay employs a conceptual and analytical framework to examine pertinent international literature on leadership and management within higher education. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a conceptual literature review, drawing on relevant international scholarly sources to analyze leadership practices in higher education. The results show that academic leadership goes beyond just being in charge of the office; it also includes intellectual impact, research guidance, and working together with other scholars. Modern universities are increasingly employing decentralized and collaborative management frameworks to address challenges such as globalization, digital transformation, and research competitiveness. In applied linguistics, for example, academic leadership is also very important for setting research objectives and encouraging new ideas in the field. Enhancing academic leadership necessitates that universities incorporate intellectual authority, collaborative governance, and strategic management techniques to foster the sustained advancement of institutions.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, Higher Education, Leadership Paradigm, Applied Linguistics, Scientific Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has become one of the most widely discussed topics in the study of higher education because universities operate in increasingly complex institutional environments. In addition to providing education, universities are responsible for generating research, developing innovation, and contributing to social and economic

development. These positions require adept leaders capable of directing academic groups and managing institutional development. As colleges and universities broaden their global networks and research initiatives, leadership is increasingly vital for establishing institutional objectives and shaping the academic atmosphere.

People frequently define leadership as the way one person gets others to work together to reach common goals "to reach common goals" (p. 6). While this definition is widely accepted in leadership studies, leadership in higher education possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from leadership in commercial organizations. Contexts involves unique characteristics that distinguish it from leadership in corporate organizations. Universities are often depicted as community organizations where power is dispersed among faculty, administrators, and academic departments. Because of this structure, university management cannot rely solely on formal authority to exert influence over colleagues. Bryman (2007) explains that in universities, management often acts based on persuasiveness and intellectual credibility rather than hierarchical power. He states, "University management is often determined by whether the individual can win the respect and trust of colleagues" (Bryman, 2007, p. 699).

Another crucial aspect of higher education administration is the concept of diffuse leadership. Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling (2009) say that university leadership is generally shared by more than one person instead of being in one person. Bolden et al. (2009) assert that dispersed leadership illustrates the collaborative nature of university operations and underscores the significance of faculty members in organizational decision-making. Recent studies highlight the growing importance of developing managerial skills in higher education institutions. Brownfield et al. (2020) point out that managerial development programs help university administrators manage complex organizations and prepare them to respond to rapid changes in the higher education system. In the same way, Bertrand (2018) shows that coaching programs for administrators can help deans improve their management skills by encouraging them to think about how they manage.

Bibliometric research shows that scientists have become much more interested in university management in the last few years. Mohamud et al. (2025) affirm that there has been a quick rise in scientific articles about managing higher education, which shows that more people are realizing how important management is for the success of an organization. Different fields have different ways of leading, and mentoring, research collaborations, and academic networks all have a role in shaping the leaders of the future (Komives & Sowcik, 2020).

Given these trends, analyzing the conceptual foundations of academic leadership is essential for understanding the impact of leadership practices on organizational management and academic development. This paper examines the nature of leadership, the distinction between leadership and management, shifts in the paradigms of academic leadership, and the role of academic leadership in applied linguistics.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a conceptual literature review. The data are derived from relevant scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books on leadership and higher education. The selection of sources prioritizes recent international publications as well as seminal works to provide theoretical grounding.

The analysis is conducted through thematic analysis, focusing on four main aspects: the nature of leadership, the distinction between leadership and management, academic leadership paradigms in higher education, and scientific leadership in applied linguistics. The selected literature is critically reviewed and synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of academic leadership.

This approach allows the study to provide a systematic and analytical overview of academic leadership concepts without relying on primary empirical data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Nature of Leadership

There is a universal consensus that leadership is a crucial component of an organization's effectiveness. In higher education, leadership entails managing the academic community, facilitating research and development, and promoting collaboration among researchers. Northouse (2022) emphasizes that leadership transcends mere titles; it constitutes a process involving influence, communication, and shared objectives. Leadership in academic institutions markedly diverges from the leadership tactics employed in commercial enterprises. University professors generally have substantial autonomy in their positions and are experts in their own fields. Therefore, academic leaders must rely on their intellectual integrity and scholarly reputation to wield influence. Briman (2007) contends that academic leadership frequently relies on professional respect rather than official power.

Research has revealed that leadership styles significantly impact the academic environment. Cumar et al. (2025) found that a participatory leadership style contributes to increased job satisfaction among academic staff. According to Cumar et al. (2025) assert that leadership strategies fostering collaboration and transparent communication enhance the development of a supportive company culture. Mahdinezhad et al. (2018) delineated various characteristics linked to good academic leadership, including mentoring junior researchers, facilitating research collaboration, and promoting strategic thinking. These activities foster an environment that promotes professional development and research productivity.

In the academic environment, leadership development is also linked to the creation of intellectual communities. Komives and Sowcik (2020) explain that in the academic environment, leadership skills are often developed through mentoring relationships, joint research projects, and scientific engagement. These practices foster the education of future academic leaders and strengthen the scientific community.

2. Leadership and Management

For a long time, organizational researchers have talked about the gap between leadership and management. Even though the two ideas are very similar, they do different things in an organization. Management is mostly about planning, organizing, and using resources, while leadership is more about having a vision, inspiring others, and getting people to work hard.

Northouse (2022) explains that while managers focus on maintaining the stability of the organization, leaders place greater emphasis on promoting change and innovation. In the academic environment, both leadership and management play an important role, as higher education institutions must support intellectual creativity while maintaining their administrative structure.

Research on higher education shows that the role of management increasingly includes managing organizational transformation. According to Gaikwad and Pandey

(2026), management in the university hierarchy requires not only the implementation of administrative policies, but also the ability to inspire colleagues and shape organizational culture.

As Söderhjelm et al. (2016) point out, academic leadership is based on collaborative relationships. According to their research, academic leaders often serve as facilitators, promoting teamwork and knowledge exchange between research groups. As Söderhjelm et al. (2016) note, "University management is required to promote collaborative relationships and create an environment where researchers can conduct innovative research" (p. 5).

Jones et al. (2024) also propose interpreting leadership in higher education through multiple paradigms, such as traditionalism, reformism, Changes in the structure and ethos of higher education have led to changes in how academic administration works

3. Academic Leadership Paradigms

Older schools that used hierarchical and bureaucratic tactics gave rise to administrative structures that were used in traditional management strategies. But more and more, colleges and institutions today are embracing management methods that are based on working together and giving people more freedom.

Management development programs are very important for training academic leaders who can do well in a climate that is always changing. Brownfield et al. (2020) say that managers need to go through training programs to learn the skills they need to run complicated academic institutions.

Executive leadership is also very important for changing an organization. Jinga and Hassen (2025) show that good executive leadership has a big effect on how well change management works in public universities. Their research underscores the significance of communication, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement in the implementation of organizational reform.

Another crucial part of being an academic leader is encouraging research productivity and new ideas. According to Mohamud et al. (2025), more and more study on leadership in higher education is looking at research performance, academic governance, and how well leaders do their jobs.

Pani (2017) stresses the importance of honesty and dedication to scholarship in academic leadership. Pani (2017) asserts that academic leaders are required to steer research communities while upholding elevated academic standards.

4. Scientific Leadership in Applied Linguistics

Academic leadership is when a researcher leads the way in making progress in their field of study. This is especially important in applied linguistics because this subject deals with complicated language problems including multilingualism, language education, and language policy.

Research on academic leadership emphasizes the influential role researchers play in developing research programs and building academic networks. Gholampour et al. (2023) show that academic leadership helps create worldwide research ecosystems and works together with others to create knowledge. Scholarly communication is also very important for shaping the academic environment.

Hyland (2019) elucidates how scholarly writing and discursive practices influence the creation and dissemination. Spolsky (2010) contends that language management frameworks enhance scholars' understanding of the regulation of linguistic activities in institutions and society. Through these efforts, academic experts

in applied linguistics advance interdisciplinary research and connect theoretical knowledge with practical application.

CONCLUSION

Academic leadership is a complicated and multi-dimensional thing that includes influence through collaboration, intellectual authority, and direction. Leadership in higher education is very different from leadership in business because it depends on academic authority and specialized knowledge. This paper discusses the paradigms of academic leadership, their conceptual foundations, and their roles in applied linguistics. It explains what leadership is, distinguishes management from leadership, the historical development of these paradigms, and the role of academic leadership in applied linguistics. The analysis suggests that for good academic leadership, intellectual management and organizational management must be balanced.

Academic leaders must foster research advancement, scholarly collaboration, and organizational development. Universities can develop future academic leaders and enhance research through leadership development programs, mentoring systems, and enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration are effective for universities seeking to cultivate future academic leaders and improve research efficiency. In applied linguistics, academic administrators can play a vital role in developing research programs, promoting international cooperation, and addressing global language challenges.

REFERENCES

- Bertrand, D. W. (2018). The practice of executive coaching to improve leadership capacity in academic deans at American higher education institutions. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2018.1545136>
- Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2009). Distributed leadership in higher education: Rhetoric and reality. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 37(2), 257–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143208100301>
- Brownfield, E., Cole, D. J., Segal, R. L., Pilcher, E., Shaw, D., Stuart, G., & Smith, G. (2020). Leadership development in academic health science centers: Towards a paradigm shift. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, 12, 135–142. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JHL.S263533>
- Bryman, A. (2007). Effective leadership in higher education: A literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), 693–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701685114>
- Cumar, M. A., Kidane, B. Z., Dawit, N. G., & Dinsa, F. (2025). Influence of leadership styles on job satisfaction in higher education institutions of Somaliland. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2480996. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2480996>
- Gaikwad, H., & Pandey, S. (2026). From management to leadership: A comparative analysis of leadership styles among women in academic hierarchies. *Cogent Business & Management*, 13(1), 2597708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2597708>
- Gholampour, S., et al. (2023). From mega-events hosting to scientific leadership: A seven-decade scientometric analysis. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 2210398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2210398>
- Hyland, K. (2019). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108635547>

- Jinga, A. A., & Hassen, J. O. (2025). Extent of leadership roles in change management process in public universities of Ethiopia. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2453284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2453284>
- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., & Ryland, K. (2024). Three perspectives on leadership in higher education. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01174-x>
- Komives, S. R., & Sowcik, M. (2020). How academic disciplines approach leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 165, 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20365>
- Mahdinezhad, M., et al. (2018). Effective academic leadership: Key aspects of leader behavior in higher education. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(9), 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i9/4646>
- Mohamud, Z. A., et al. (2025). Mapping the evolution of leadership in higher education: A bibliometric analysis. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2554957. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2554957>
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage.
- Pani, A. (2017). Academic leadership: Concept, attributes and practices. *University News*, 55(49), 17–25.
- Spolsky, B. (2010). *Language management*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620904>
- Söderhjelm, T., Björklund, C., Sandahl, C., & Bolander-Laksov, K. (2016). Academic leadership: Management of groups or leadership of teams? *Studies in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1160277>