ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: SCOPE AND CHALLENGES FOR LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SELECT COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

As a huge institution, a university is governed by complex hierarchy and management bodies, from the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Deans to academic councils, department directors, administrative boards, Head of the departments etc. *Due to this hierarchy, academic leadership pertains to varied management roles and titles, right from strategic management roles, administrative roles to transformational and visionary roles. HEIs in particular face various challenges such as dynamic global competition, institutional changes, recruitment, selection, training and retention of competent faculty, technological upgradation, intensified student expectations, increased accountability, government funding, economic and political pressures. Even in general times, coordinating all those decision-makers for a common goal, is very difficult. These challenges bring out the need for effective academic leadership with multiple competencies who not only work across boundaries at the top level but also contribute to the formation of emerging fields of knowledge, recognize, encourage and nurture faculty to pursue academic leadership and navigate the organizational growth and development and ensure institutional sustainability. *The current paper is a bibliometric analysis which discusses the various challenges and opportunities for leaders and leadership in higher education in different countries like India , UK, Germany and the USA as they have a good deal of Universities.

Keywords: *Academia, academic leadership, leadership development, higher education, university*

Introduction

Educational institutions play a prominent role in moulding the society at large by following their vision, the generation and transfer of knowledge. They are massive organisations with varied power and authority hierarchy, that aim to remain independent from their

environment. In current education arena, universities encounter several issues and challenges: International competition is increasing while resources are becoming very scarce. In order to raise funds for universities, there is a need for external collaborations, development programs etc. Moreover, the importance of accreditations raises more pressure to 'Publish – or – Perish' and poses another challenge for Universities, Colleges and Staff. The high competitiveness and complexity especially concern academic leaders who have a high responsibility to effectively lead towards organizational success. Leadership in Education has been characterized as substantially more complex than leadership in the corporate world. Leadership in academia has been characterized as substantially more complex than leadership in the corporate context (Lowman, 2010). Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff (2018; p. 318) have postulated that academic leadership is "a black box where we know the input and the intended outcomes, that is, flexible, path-breaking, high quality and everchanging universities."

Black Box

The term "black box" is often used metaphorically to describe a system or process that is opaque, complex, or difficult to understand from the outside. In the context of leadership, the black box refers to the internal dynamics and intricacies of leadership processes that are not readily visible or easily studied. Conger (2004) in his work on leadership capability in a black box explain the elements of it.

Elaborating on the context-specific scope and challenges to leadership, the black box signifies that leadership is influenced by various contextual factors that can significantly shape its scope and present unique challenges. These contextual factors can include organizational culture, industry norms, societal values, geographical location, and historical context.

1. Context-Specific Scope: The black box of leadership acknowledges that the scope and expectations of leadership can vary across different contexts. Leadership styles and practices that are effective in one setting may not be equally successful in another. For example, leadership in a hierarchical and traditional organization may require a different approach compared to a startup or a multicultural team. Understanding the specific context is essential for leaders to navigate the complexities and tailor their leadership strategies accordingly.

2. Challenges to Leadership: The black box perspective recognizes that leadership faces context-specific challenges that may not be immediately apparent. These challenges can stem from cultural differences, political dynamics, economic conditions, regulatory frameworks, or societal expectations. For instance, a leader operating in a rapidly changing industry may face the challenge of adapting to disruptive technologies and evolving customer demands. Similarly, leaders in diverse organizations may need

to navigate cultural nuances and foster inclusive environments. Recognizing and understanding these challenges is crucial for leaders to effectively address them and drive positive outcomes.

By acknowledging the black box of leadership, researchers, practitioners, and organizations can delve deeper into the complex interplay between leadership and its specific context. This understanding enables the development of more nuanced leadership theories, models, and practices that are responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities present in different environments. It emphasizes the need for leaders to continuously learn, adapt, and refine their approaches based on the specific context in which they operate.

Objectives of the study

- To shed light into the above-mentioned black box by elaborating on context specific scope and challenges to leadership.

- To identify the differences between academic, administrative and research leadership in different countries.

- To provide insights on the importance of the role of leadership development which is still mostly lacking in the current education system in different countries.

Status of Higher education

The status of higher education institutions across the world varies significantly depending on the country and region. However, there are a few general trends and characteristics that can be observed:

1. Accessibility: Higher education has become more accessible globally, with a significant increase in enrollment rates over the past few decades. Many countries have focused on expanding access to higher education, particularly through government initiatives, scholarships, and financial aid programs.

2. Diversity: Higher education institutions have become more diverse in terms of student populations. There is a growing emphasis on promoting inclusivity and diversity, including efforts to increase enrollment of underrepresented groups such as women, minority communities, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

3. Internationalization: Globalization has influenced higher education institutions, leading to increased internationalization. Many universities now offer exchange programs, joint degrees, and research collaborations with institutions from around the world. This has facilitated the mobility of students, faculty, and researchers across borders.

4. Technological Advancements: Higher education institutions have embraced technology to enhance teaching and learning. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital resources have become common, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Technology has also enabled the expansion of distance learning and lifelong learning opportunities.

5. Research and Innovation: Higher education institutions play a crucial role in research and innovation. Many universities are hubs of cutting-edge research, attracting talented researchers and facilitating collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Research outcomes contribute to advancements in various fields and drive economic and social development.

6. Challenges: Higher education institutions face numerous challenges, including funding constraints, affordability issues, quality assurance, and the need to adapt to rapidly changing societal and labor market demands. Additionally, there are ongoing discussions around the relevance and effectiveness of traditional teaching methods and curricula in preparing students for the future.

It is important to note that while these trends are observed globally, there are significant variations among countries in terms of funding models, governance structures, quality assurance systems, and educational philosophies. The status of higher education institutions continues to evolve as societies and economies change, and as new challenges and opportunities emerge.

In collaboration with UNESCO, the International Association of Univeristies (IAU), World Higher Education Database (WHED) Portal provides authoritative information on higher education systems, credentials in 196 countries and territories and over 20,000 officially accredited or recognized higher education institutions (HEIs). More Specifically, India has 508 public universities and 310 private universities. Germany has 238 public universities and 121 private universities, UK has 237 public universities and 9 private universities. The United States of America has 634 public universities and 1389 private universities.

Academic Leadership

Academic leadership refers to a distinct form of leadership that operates within educational institutions. It encompasses the roles, hierarchy, and responsibilities of top-level administrators, such as presidents, principals, chancellors, vice-chancellors, deans, and department heads, who are entrusted with decision-making authority at various levels (Bikmoradi, Brommels, Khorasani-Zavareh, Masiello, & Shoghli, 2010). Academic leadership involves the process through which these administrators establish and communicate the institution's mission, vision, and direction. They inspire, support, and guide their teams to work collaboratively

towards achieving common goals. Importantly, academic leadership is not limited to a single individual but is distributed across various levels within the university.

On a more specific level, academic leadership encompasses the actions taken by administrative leaders, faculty members, and professional support personnel to enhance student learning outcomes. It goes beyond the traditional responsibilities and functions of leadership, as defined by Bikmoradi et al. (2010). Academic leadership also encompasses the qualities and attributes exhibited by professionals in academia who are recognized as experts and leaders within their respective disciplines.

In summary, academic leadership involves both the formal roles and responsibilities of administrators as well as the broader attributes and actions demonstrated by professionals in academia. It encompasses the establishment of a shared vision, effective communication, and the cultivation of a supportive and stimulating environment to promote student learning and advance the institution's goals.

Higher education Institutions

Higher education in India is delivered through universities, including Central Universities funded by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, State Universities funded by state governments, and Private Universities. There are also Deemed to be universities, single-faculty institutions with academic privileges but without the authority to use the term "university." Institutions of National Importance receive central government funding. Many universities have affiliated colleges, and they are governed by statutory bodies. Public universities receive funding from state governments and the University Grants Commission, while professional institutions are coordinated by various bodies. The Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan was launched to improve the quality and accessibility of higher education in the country.

Higher Education in USA

Higher education in the United States encompasses a wide range of postsecondary institutions and programs that confer degrees upon completion. These degrees span from Associate and Bachelor's degrees to professional doctorates and research doctorates. The U.S. higher education system is comprehensive and not legally divided into separate university and non-university sub-systems. It is a diverse and independent community of publicly and privately supported institutions. While there is no official classification or typology, degrees granted by accredited institutions adhere to minimum standards regardless of the granting institution. Accessibility, diversity, and autonomy are defining characteristics of the U.S. higher education system, which is known for its size and quality. Recognition of educational institutions and programs falls under state authority, with public institutions operating under

state government oversight and private institutions operating under private corporations.

Higher education in Germany

In Germany, the majority of universities are publicly funded, making them the preferred choice for most students due to affordable tuition fees and the reputation for high-quality education. Over 90% of all students in the country enroll in public universities, while around 5% opt for private institutions. Unlike some countries, there is no specific legal requirement for specialized training for higher education teaching staff. Generally, a doctoral degree is the standard qualification for recruitment of higher education staff. Academic ranks in Germany include professor, junior professor, scientific and creative arts staff, and teaching staff for special tasks.

Higher education in UK

In the United Kingdom, higher education is offered by three main types of institutions: universities, colleges and institutions of higher education, and art and music colleges. The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 abolished the distinction between universities and polytechnics, granting polytechnics university status and the ability to award their own degrees. Universities are autonomous institutions with self-governing powers and are responsible for maintaining the quality of the degrees they confer. Previously, the authority to grant degrees was obtained through Royal Charter, via the Privy Council, or by an Act of Parliament. However, the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 transferred degree-awarding powers to the Office for Students, which now has the authority to grant and revoke these powers. Institutions that possess degree-awarding powers are referred to as Recognized Bodies, while there are also Listed Bodies approved to deliver full higher education programs on behalf of Recognized Bodies, but are not themselves authorized to confer degrees.

Administrative Leadership

Administrative leadership involves coordinating tasks and mobilizing individuals to develop and sustain an early childhood organization. Effective administrative leaders establish systems that safeguard and maintain essential operational functions to meet the needs of children and families. Two key aspects of administrative leadership are operational leadership and strategic leadership. Operational leadership encompasses activities such as staff hiring and support, budget oversight, and fostering a positive workplace environment. Strategic leadership involves guiding the direction of the organization with future-oriented thinking. Strategic leaders clarify purpose, inspire individuals to pursue a shared vision, and ensure the attainment of goals and outcomes (Talan, 2016).

In the academic context, administrative leaders refer to individuals holding managerial roles in universities, such as Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Deans, and Department Heads. The specific titles of these roles may vary across countries. Previous research on academic leadership has predominantly focused on this formal type of managerial leadership (Bensimon, 1989; Knight & Trowler, 2001; Smith, Adams, & Mount, 2007). These studies have revealed context-specific challenges, such as meeting diverse expectations while empowering organizational members to excel in research, teaching, and service. For instance, Bensimon (1989) interviewed Campus Presidents in the US (analogous to Chancellors in India) and highlighted the importance of collegial and symbolic qualities and values in effective leadership. Similarly, Birnbaum (1990) examined perceptions of effectiveness among College Presidents (analogous to Chancellors in India) and found that they relied more on implicit evidence rather than quantitative data and formal reports.

Numerous studies emphasize the significance of vision as a key success factor in higher education leadership (Breakwell & Tytherleigh, 2008; Powell & Clark, 2012). Vision, synonymous with strategic leadership, involves providing guidance for future endeavors. Other factors contributing to effective leadership include confidence, adaptability, academic credibility, financial awareness, communication skills, and a strong persona. Academic credibility is particularly important as scholars within higher education tend to trust and accept leaders with a proven academic track record who are familiar with the academic system.

While there is a substantial body of research in the academic context, most studies have focused on how academic institutions are managed rather than how academic work is managed. Given the complexity of the academic system and academic work, leadership within higher education can be viewed as a combination of vertical, horizontal, and emergent influences and directions, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" phenomenon.

Academic Leadership

In contrast to administrative leader roles in educational institutions, there are various stakeholders who serve as informal leaders, leading research in universities. These research leaders include senior academics such as professors and other academic staff responsible for managing research projects. The titles for professors differ significantly across countries, adding to the complexity. In some countries like India, the United States, the Netherlands, and Denmark, there is a distinction between Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors, each carrying different levels of seniority. In contrast, countries like the United Kingdom and Germany use the term "Professor" exclusively for a small group of tenured senior researchers at the advanced stage of their academic careers. The UK, for example, has multiple academic career stages, including Reader, Lecturer, and Senior Lecturer,

before reaching Full Professorship. The emphasis on teaching versus research also varies throughout an academic career, with early stages focusing more on teaching and later stages emphasizing research. In India and Germany, after completing a PhD, there is a post-doctoral research phase of several years before attaining a tenured Full Professorship. The primary criterion for advancing to professorship in these countries is the number of peer-reviewed publications, similar to research-oriented universities in the US. However, permanent positions as Full Professors are limited in India and Germany, making academic careers relatively uncertain and requiring flexibility in location. Some universities in Germany have started implementing "Tenure-Track Professorships" to provide more secure career prospects at earlier stages. Consequently, an academic career in Germany often begins with a strong focus on research and high competition, reflecting the privileged yet challenging nature of academia (Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011).

For over 200 years, professors have been responsible for research, teaching, administration, and student mentoring, reflecting the Humboldtian academic tradition that unifies research and teaching. However, research indicates that these tasks are often treated as competitive priorities for faculty members, with those who have higher research productivity investing less in teaching. The role of a researcher tends to overshadow the role of a teacher, as evident from faculty surveys (Fox, 1992; Miller et al., 2011). In recent decades, the number of tasks competing for academics' attention has increased, driven by new public management approaches and intensified competitive pressures. The proliferation of larger research teams further adds to the leadership demands placed on professors. To meet these demands, professors are increasingly required to assume managerial and leadership roles, influencing and motivating others, facilitating collective efforts, and accomplishing shared objectives (Yukl, 2010). Balancing their roles as excellent researchers, teachers, managers, and leaders has become crucial in today's higher education landscape. However, professors, particularly those newly appointed, are often unprepared for these leadership responsibilities, making it a novel challenge in their academic careers.

While reaching tenure is a significant milestone, it is not necessarily the final hurdle in an academic career. Despite the importance of informal leadership roles held by professors, there has been relatively limited research dedicated to understanding their leadership in academia. An exception is a survey conducted in UK universities, revealing that professors perceive leadership as embodying various roles such as role models, advocates, mentors, guardians, ambassadors, and acquisitors. Professors also express a discrepancy between their personal priorities and the expectations imposed by their universities, which can discourage potential leaders. Nonetheless, leadership remains a key factor for academic success. Professors, in their leadership roles, influence others as role models, guide subordinates in their career development, manage research groups, and develop strategic visions for their

departments. The effectiveness of transformational leadership in the academic context has been highlighted, as it enhances follower satisfaction and publication performance through inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and serving as academic role models (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative for universities worldwide to prepare academics for their leadership roles, develop existing leaders, and contribute to organizational success.

The Role of Leadership Development in Academia

Scholars have emphasized the critical importance of leadership development for preparing individuals for leadership roles and responsibilities. However, it is disheartening to note that higher education institutions have generally neglected the development of leadership skills, despite the evident need for effective leaders. Existing literature has highlighted the lack of systematic preparation for handling the complex leadership tasks in the education sector. Therefore, leadership development in higher education is scarce and requires a commitment to change, competence, adequate resources, and strategic planning. To design effective leadership development programs, it is essential to consider the specific characteristics of the academic system and hierarchy, the multiple roles of academics, and the intricate processes of adult development.

Evidence suggests various approaches for leader and leadership development at both the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, universities should aim to cultivate effective leaders by providing an understanding of the diverse roles they are expected to fulfill and imparting the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. It is recommended to combine theoretical input, practical training, and individual self-reflection. For example, leadership development programs should incorporate individual coaching sessions, allowing participants to brainstorm and reflect on their roles and goals in their day-to-day work. This approach helps tailor the development process to professors' unique motivations and identities, reducing the tendency to employ a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Identity reflection is particularly relevant, especially concerning gender, as previous studies have shown that education and leadership are strongly associated with masculine traits. These associations contribute to a perceived imbalance between female researchers and the ideal academic leader. This bias is a significant driver of the academic gender gap, influencing decision-makers in selection processes and impacting female researchers' career progression and motivation to assume leadership roles. In addition to individual training sessions, seeking feedback and engaging in self-reflection on daily challenges and personal values can enhance academics' personal development. Adopting a learning mindset can also inspire professors to step out of their comfort zones, take on new roles, and experiment with new behaviors.

At the organizational level, universities can implement three key measures concerning the recruitment and selection, development, and remuneration of academic leaders. Firstly, universities should strive for high diversity among academics to effectively address the diverse demands of today's academic world. Leadership capabilities and motivation to lead should be considered in recruitment and selection processes, moving away from standard appointment procedures that primarily focus on research output. Secondly, universities should establish an organizational unit or center responsible for leadership development. This unit should be strategically integrated and well-positioned within the institution. Examples include the establishment of the "Centre for Leadership and People Management" at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, Germany, and the provision of developmental courses and certifications for academic leaders by the Chairman of Research and Science Management at the Technical University Munich's School of Management.

As a third organizational measure, higher education institutions should offer various incentives to motivate professors to fulfill their diverse responsibilities. Universities should not only reward research and teaching but also recognize leadership qualities and effective leadership, thus strengthening the overall leadership capacity. Adopting a strength-focused approach holds promise for the success of universities, aligning with the institution's multifaceted needs and responsibilities. The diversity of strengths is particularly crucial in addressing the increasing demands of global competitiveness and the emergence of accreditations, both of which emphasize competition and quantitative evaluation criteria. Recognizing and rewarding professors for serving the university, acting as role models for faculty, and shaping society in an era where expert opinions are more crucial than ever is essential for overall success.

Conclusion

The importance of academic leadership in India, Germany, UK, and the USA has undeniably grown in recent times. Academic leadership in these countries is considerably more complex than in the corporate context due to the presence of both formal and informal leader roles, namely administrative leadership and research leadership. Additionally, the academic system lacks secure employment and is highly restrictive, placing leaders in the challenging position of managing autonomy and navigating uncertainty across various levels.

The increasing demands placed on professors and the inherent complexity of their profession raise crucial questions about how they can effectively balance and integrate their diverse roles and effectively respond to the numerous challenges they face. Despite these pressing concerns, there remains a lack of research on leadership development in higher education. This paper aims to address this gap by advocating for a systematic and holistic approach to leadership development at both the individual and organizational levels. Such an approach

not only benefits the effectiveness of academic leaders themselves but also contributes to the overall success of universities in these countries.

The academic landscape in these nations is undergoing significant changes and expanding with the globalized education system. Universities are confronted with an explosion of knowledge and technology across all fields. As a result, higher education institutions in India, UK, Germany, and the USA are increasingly required to compete and keep pace with the global education system while making their unique contributions to society. In such dynamic settings, the role of an academic leader becomes crucial. These leaders are expected to go beyond the confines of the classroom, fostering a sense of community among teachers, students, and staff, and driving improved educational practices and the pursuit of excellence.

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