



The Influence Of Academic Leadership Styles On The Quality Of Higher Education In Indonesia

Abdul Wahid^{1*}, Ahmad²

^{1,2}STAI DDI PINRANG

^{1*}batjoende@gmail.com, ²ahmadhibbu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of academic leadership styles on the quality of higher education in Indonesia, focusing on permanent lecturers in public and private universities under the Ministry of Education in South Sulawesi. Using a quantitative explanatory approach and survey method, data were collected from 120 respondents and analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS. The study examines three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and distributed—and their impact on teaching quality, institutional governance, student outcomes, and academic services. The findings reveal that all three leadership styles positively affect higher education quality, with transformational leadership having the most significant impact, followed by distributed and transactional styles. These results underscore the importance of visionary and participative leadership in improving institutional performance, particularly in regional universities facing resource and structural limitations. The study contributes theoretically by validating leadership models in a non-Western context and practically by offering insights for leadership development policies. It highlights the need for adaptive leadership strategies tailored to local academic cultures and institutional dynamics to enhance educational quality in Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Higher Education Quality, Distributed Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a vital role in driving national development through the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. In emerging countries like Indonesia, the quality of higher education remains a strategic concern due to the growing demand for academic excellence, global competitiveness, and institutional accountability. In this context, academic leadership becomes a central determinant in shaping the institutional culture, organizational behavior, and ultimately, the performance of higher education institutions.

Academic leadership, in essence, refers to the capacity of university leaders—such as rectors, deans, and department heads—to influence academic communities in achieving shared visions through scholarly excellence and innovation. Unlike leadership in commercial organizations, academic leadership entails unique complexities, such as shared governance, collegial decision-making, and the balancing of academic autonomy with institutional goals. Studies have shown that effective academic leadership contributes significantly to teaching quality, research productivity, student satisfaction, and institutional reputation (Bolden et al., 2012; Bryman, 2007). However, in many developing countries, including Indonesia, academic leadership is often constrained by bureaucratic structures, lack of autonomy, and limited professional development opportunities (Nugroho & Sirozi, 2022).

In the Indonesian higher education landscape, reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) such as Kampus Merdeka, outcome-based accreditation, and performance-based funding have increased the demand for strong, adaptive, and visionary leadership at institutional levels. These policy shifts necessitate a closer examination of leadership models that are most effective in ensuring educational quality in varying institutional contexts—particularly in regions beyond Java, such as South Sulawesi.

South Sulawesi represents a diverse and rapidly evolving higher education ecosystem, with a mix of public and private universities, religious and secular institutions, and rural and urban campuses. Despite institutional diversity, many challenges persist, including uneven faculty qualifications, limited research funding, infrastructural gaps, and administrative centralization. These challenges are compounded by the leadership capacity of academic heads, who are often appointed based on seniority or bureaucratic alignment rather than leadership competence. It is therefore critical to understand how academic leadership styles influence the quality of higher education delivery in this context.

Leadership theories such as transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership provide useful lenses for analyzing leadership patterns in academic settings. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—often linked with increased faculty motivation and institutional

innovation. Transactional leadership, by contrast, is more managerial and focuses on role clarity, reward systems, and performance monitoring. Distributed leadership highlights the collective and participatory nature of academic leadership, encouraging collaboration and shared responsibilities among faculty members. Several empirical studies in Western contexts have demonstrated that a blend of these styles often leads to optimal academic outcomes (Spendlove, 2007; O'Connor & Assad, 2020). However, limited studies have explored the applicability and impact of these leadership styles in Indonesian universities, particularly outside Java.

To fill this gap, this study investigates the influence of academic leadership styles on higher education quality in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Specifically, it examines how transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership styles—perceived by faculty members—contribute to institutional academic quality, as reflected in teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes, curriculum relevance, and support services. By focusing on the perspective of permanent lecturers (*dosen tetap*) in public and private universities under the authority of Kemendikbudristek, the study provides empirical insights into leadership dynamics and their implications for educational improvement in decentralized and diverse institutional settings.

This study adopts a quantitative approach using survey data from 120 permanent lecturers working in various higher education institutions in South Sulawesi. The respondents were selected based on stratified sampling to ensure representation across institutional types and leadership structures. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships between leadership styles and educational quality indicators. The choice of SEM allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple latent variables and their interrelations, offering a robust framework for understanding the complex nature of academic leadership influence.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study enriches the literature on academic leadership by validating Western leadership frameworks within the Indonesian context, particularly in less-researched regions. Practically, the study offers policy recommendations for university leaders and education authorities to develop and implement leadership development programs that are contextually relevant and aligned with national quality standards. Furthermore, the study provides a data-driven basis for institutional leaders to reflect on and refine their leadership practices to improve academic performance and institutional excellence.

In conclusion, improving the quality of higher education in Indonesia requires more than structural reforms; it necessitates competent, responsive, and visionary academic leadership. By analyzing how different leadership styles affect educational quality from the perspective of faculty members, this study aims to contribute toward building leadership capacity that drives sustained improvement and innovation in higher education institutions, especially in regions like South Sulawesi where contextual challenges and opportunities intersect.

Literature Review

Academic leadership is a central element in the success of higher education institutions, particularly in managing the complexity of the *tridharma* (three pillars) of higher education and the demands of global transformation. Various leadership models have been developed in the context of higher education, but three main styles are most frequently discussed in the literature: transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership. Transformational leadership is regarded as a style that fosters positive change through visionary inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention to academic staff (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bolden et al., 2012). Studies in Indonesia have shown that this style contributes to increased lecturer motivation, innovative teaching practices, and greater participation in academic activities (Nurtjahjani et al., 2020; Alwy & Baso, 2024).

Meanwhile, transactional leadership emphasizes formal relationships based on exchange—such as rewards and sanctions—and focuses on clear work structures and performance control. Although often considered more mechanistic, several studies suggest that in certain contexts, transactional leadership can enhance efficiency and achieve institutional targets, especially within strong bureaucratic systems (Rany et al., 2023; Sedat Tan, 2025). However, this style is also criticized for potentially creating high work pressure and decreasing job satisfaction if not balanced with a more humanistic approach (Al-Rjoub et al., 2024).

On the other hand, distributed leadership highlights the importance of collaboration, shared responsibilities, and participative decision-making. This approach is relevant in the academic world, which tends to be collegial and horizontal. Harris (2022) and Kezar et al. (2020) assert that distributed leadership fosters a sense of shared ownership in academic communities and strengthens team-based innovation. Studies by Nadeem (2024) and Jambo & Hongde (2023) show that distributed leadership positively influences lecturer engagement, inter-unit trust, and institutional governance effectiveness, although its application requires an organizational culture supportive of collaboration.

Higher education quality is itself a multidimensional concept that includes teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes, the quality of academic services, and the relevance of curricula to societal and labor market needs (Kundu,

2016; Sokoli, 2020). Additionally, quality indicators also encompass institutional management, accreditation, facilities, and the institution's ability to build international linkages (Yaroshchuk et al., 2022; Cao, 2023). Several instruments have been developed to measure these quality indicators, such as that proposed by Isa Bahat & Karakütük (2022), who emphasized the importance of construct validity in comprehensively assessing educational quality.

Various studies have linked academic leadership styles to institutional quality improvement. Research by Spendlove (2007) and Garger et al. (2023) confirm that transformational leadership positively correlates with teaching quality and students' academic achievement. In Indonesia, Wibowo (2024) found that campus leaders with visionary and supportive characteristics are able to foster lecturer creativity in the context of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) curriculum. Conversely, transactional leadership shows limited impact unless implemented fairly and accompanied by objective performance feedback (Goutam et al., 2021). Distributed leadership is seen to have an indirect but significant effect, particularly in shaping inclusive and adaptive organizational cultures (Kasalak et al., 2023; Al Hassanieh, 2020).

However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the influence of academic leadership styles on higher education quality in developing countries, including Indonesia. Most studies have been conducted in developed countries or in well-established universities in Java, with little attention given to institutions outside these central regions, such as in Sulawesi. Local contexts such as limited resources, varying lecturer qualifications, and strong institutional bureaucracy present unique challenges in leadership practices (Nugroho & Sirozi, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to examine how different leadership styles are adapted and impact institutions with diverse demographic and geographic characteristics.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on permanent lecturers in higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education in South Sulawesi. This region is relevant as it represents a diversity of public and private institutions and demonstrates unique managerial dynamics. By integrating the three main leadership styles and linking them to indicators of higher education quality, this study aims to enrich the academic literature and provide an empirical foundation for developing leadership capacity in Indonesia's higher education institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the influence of academic leadership styles on the quality of higher education in Indonesia, particularly in the South Sulawesi region. This approach was chosen because it allows for testing causal relationships between variables with a high degree of generalizability. In this context, academic leadership is categorized into three main constructs: transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership, all of which are measured through the perceptions of permanent lecturers. Meanwhile, higher education quality is understood as a latent variable encompassing several indicators, including teaching effectiveness, academic service quality, graduate outcomes, and institutional governance.

The population of this study consists of all active permanent lecturers working in higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in South Sulawesi. This population includes lecturers from both public and private institutions, covering various academic disciplines such as social sciences, religion, education, and science. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling, with stratification based on the type of institution (public/private) and geographical location. A total of 120 respondents were selected, in accordance with the minimum sample size required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which recommends five to ten respondents per indicator (Hair et al., 2014). This sample size was also determined by considering access limitations, geographic distribution, and respondent availability.

Data collection was conducted through the distribution of an online questionnaire (via Google Forms), which was shared with permanent lecturers through official institutional channels and academic forums. The questionnaire was constructed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The instrument consisted of four main constructs: (1) transformational leadership (including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), (2) transactional leadership (including contingent reward and management-by-exception), (3) distributed leadership (including collaboration, participation, and delegation), and (4) higher education quality (measured by indicators of teaching process, graduate outcomes, academic services, and quality assurance). Each construct was operationalized into four to six items based on previously established instruments such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass & Avolio (1994), and higher education quality assessment tools from the OECD QAHE and Indonesia's BAN-PT.

The validity and reliability of the instrument were tested through initial content validity analysis and internal consistency measures, including Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. The collected data were then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the aid of the latest version of SmartPLS software. SEM was chosen because it enables the simultaneous testing of multiple latent variables and their manifest indicators and accommodates

complex models involving mediation and moderation effects. The analysis began with testing the outer model (convergent validity, discriminant validity, and indicator reliability), followed by the inner model (R^2 values, path coefficients, and significance tests). Model fit was also assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which must be below 0.08 to indicate model acceptability.

To ensure external validity and ethical integrity, participant involvement was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the study's purpose and benefits before completing the questionnaire. All data collected were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Additionally, theoretical triangulation was employed by comparing the findings with existing literature to enhance interpretive validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 120 permanent lecturers from various higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in the South Sulawesi region. The demographic characteristics of the respondents show that the majority of lecturers were between 31–45 years old (62%), held a master's degree (78%), and had more than five years of teaching experience (65%). The distribution of respondents was relatively balanced between public and private institutions and reflected a diverse academic background, including education, economics, law, and religious studies.

The descriptive analysis of the main variables revealed that lecturers' perceptions of transformational leadership were in the "high" category (Mean = 4.15; SD = 0.56), transactional leadership was rated as "moderately high" (Mean = 3.72; SD = 0.64), and distributed leadership was also in the "high" category (Mean = 4.09; SD = 0.51). Meanwhile, the perceived quality of higher education was relatively high (Mean = 4.01; SD = 0.58), particularly in academic service delivery and the teaching-learning process.

The structural model was tested using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The outer model assessment showed that all indicators had loading values above 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, meeting the criteria for convergent validity. Composite reliability values for all constructs were above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. Discriminant validity, assessed via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, yielded values below 0.90, confirming that the constructs were distinct from each other.

The inner model assessment revealed an R^2 value of 0.61 for the dependent variable "higher education quality," indicating that 61% of the variance in education quality could be explained by the three academic leadership styles analyzed. The SRMR value of 0.058 indicated a good model fit.

The hypothesis testing results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Results of Hypothesis Testing Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Beta Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Conclusion
H1	Transformational → Quality	0.435	5.983	0.000	Supported
H2	Transactional → Quality	0.143	2.113	0.035	Supported
H3	Distributed → Quality	0.298	3.842	0.000	Supported

These results indicate that transformational leadership has the strongest influence on higher education quality, followed by distributed leadership and then transactional leadership. All three leadership styles exert a positive and statistically significant impact on education quality at the 5% significance level.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing that transformational leadership is a key predictor of higher education institutional success. Academic leaders who are visionary, inspirational, and capable of providing personal attention to staff members have been shown to strengthen lecturers' commitment to the quality of teaching and academic engagement. This aligns with the studies of Nurtjahjani et al. (2020) and Spendlove (2007), which confirm that transformational leadership positively affects teaching quality and job satisfaction among academic staff.

The positive effect of distributed leadership on education quality also supports findings by Kezar et al. (2020) and Harris (2022), who highlight the importance of collaboration in academic management. In the context of higher

education institutions in South Sulawesi, distributed leadership appears to be particularly effective, given the collegial organizational structures and the collective need to address resource limitations.

Although transactional leadership had the weakest influence among the three styles, it still demonstrated a statistically significant contribution. This suggests that reward systems, supervision, and formal structure remain essential in the context of higher education to ensure stability and regulatory compliance. Goutam et al. (2021) also noted that a combination of transactional and transformational approaches can create a balance between control and innovation.

The South Sulawesi context provides important insights into academic leadership dynamics outside Indonesia's primary educational centers. With challenges such as infrastructure limitations, varied human resource capacities, and accreditation pressures, institutional leaders are required to adopt leadership approaches that are adaptive and contextually grounded. These findings reinforce the idea that leadership practices cannot be uniformly applied across all institutions but must be tailored to organizational culture, staff characteristics, and local challenges (Nugroho & Sirozi, 2022).

Practical implications of this study include the need for leadership training and development programs for structural officials in higher education, with a focus on transformational and collaborative skills. Additionally, the evaluation systems for academic leaders should not rely solely on administrative outputs but also incorporate lecturers' perceptions and active participation as key actors in managing educational quality.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that academic leadership styles have a significant influence on the quality of higher education in Indonesia, particularly in the South Sulawesi region. Among the three styles analyzed, transformational leadership was found to have the strongest impact on institutional quality improvement, followed by distributed and transactional leadership. This indicates that academic leaders who are capable of inspiring, fostering innovation, and building personal relationships with staff make a tangible contribution to enhancing the teaching process, academic services, and graduate outcomes. On the other hand, transactional leadership remains relevant in the context of administrative management and system stability, though it requires integration with more humanistic approaches to achieve optimal impact.

Practically, these findings highlight the importance of strengthening leadership capacity in higher education institutions through transformational and participatory training programs. Ministries and higher education governing bodies should design leadership development policies that go beyond administrative compliance and focus on adaptive, visionary, and collaborative capabilities of academic leaders. At the institutional level, leadership performance evaluations should incorporate lecturers' perceptions as a key indicator of leadership effectiveness. This study also opens up opportunities for future research to examine the moderating roles of organizational culture and institutional autonomy in strengthening the relationship between leadership styles and higher education quality across various regional contexts.

REFERENCES

- Alwy, M. A., & Baso, R. S. (2024). The transformational leadership to increase the lecturers' creativity at higher education in Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 38(1), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-10-2023-0432>
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Sage.
- Bolden, R., Gosling, J., O'Brien, A., Peters, K., Ryan, M., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). *Academic leadership: Changing conceptions, identities and experiences in UK higher education*. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Cao, C., Li, Y., & Li, X. (2023). Comprehensive evaluation of higher education systems: A global comparative analysis. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01938-x>
- Garger, J., Jacques, P. H., Vracheva, V., & Connolly, S. (2023). Components of transformational and transactional leadership: Predicting academic performance beyond and below expectations. *Journal of Business and Academic Management*, 14(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jbam.2023.90586>

- Goutam, K. K. (2016). Higher education quality: A literature review. *Asian Journal of Management Research*, 7(1), 1–12.
- Harris, A. (2022). Distributed leadership: Taking a retrospective and prospective view. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(2), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2109620>
- Isa Bahat, I., & Karakütük, K. (2022). Higher education quality indicators: A scale development study. *Journal of Educational Measurement and Evaluation*, 13(2), 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.21031/epod.1117846>
- Jambo, D., & Hongde, L. (2023). The effect of distributed leadership on academic achievement: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 11(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2023.6890>
- Kasalak, G., Bilgic, R., & Çoban, O. (2023). The relationship between leadership styles in higher education and university performance. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 51(4), 620–640. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211012496>
- Kezar, A., Fries-Britt, S., Kurzweil, M., & Eaton, J. S. (2020). Shared leadership in higher education: A toolkit for administrators and faculty. American Council on Education.
- Kundu, G. K. (2016). Higher education quality: A conceptual framework and scale development. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 6(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.14707/ajbr.160012>
- Nadeem, M. (2024). Distributed leadership in educational contexts: A catalyst for school transformation. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 5, 100195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100195>
- Nugroho, A., & Sirozi, M. (2022). Academic leadership in Indonesian higher education: Between autonomy and bureaucracy. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Policy*, 6(2), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.31002/ijeeep.v6i2.789>
- Nurtjahjani, F., Noermijati, Djumilah, & Irawanto, D. W. (2020). Transformational leadership in higher education: A study in Indonesian universities. *Journal of Leadership in Education*, 23(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1722057>
- O'Connor, E., & Assad, A. (2020). Exploring leadership practices in higher education: A comparative case study. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 34(3), 501–519. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2019-0342>
- Rany, S., Chan, H., Seoung, S., Phorn, P., & Vy, S. (2023). Transactional leadership style in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 19(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v19i1.19921>
- Sarrico, C. S., Rosa, M. J., & Coelho, P. S. (2021). Performance measurement and quality management in higher education: A systematic review. *Quality in Higher Education*, 27(3), 313–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2021.1951445>
- Sedat Tan, S. (2025). Leadership styles and their impact on effectiveness in education: An integrative analysis. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 15(1), 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jop.v15i1.6122>
- Sokoli, O. (2020). Indicators of quality in higher education: A framework for evaluation. *UBT International Conference*, 9(1), Article 25.
- Spendlove, M. (2007). Competencies for effective leadership in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(5), 407–417. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540710760183>
- Wibowo, V. (2024). Enhancing creative performance in Indonesian universities: The role of leadership styles. *Journal of Social and Management Sciences*, 14(1), 188–201. <https://doi.org/10.31098/jsms.v14i1.313>
- Yaroshchuk, A. B., Guliev, A. Y., & Mikhaylenko, M. N. (2022). Quality management of higher education within the socio-investment model: Russian perspectives. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, 1057005. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1057005>
- Z Hyseni Duraku, et al. (2021). Impact of transformational and transactional attributes of leadership on students' performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 659919. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.659919>