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## Impact of Academic Leaders on the Teaching Quality in Malaysian Private Universities

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore academic leaders' role in improving teaching quality in Malaysian private universities. A two stage mixed methods sequential explanatory design was utilized where the results of the quantitative synthesis informed the qualitative synthesis. Quantitative data was used to analyse the current roles played by academic leaders to improve teaching quality in Malaysian private universities. The qualitative data provided information regarding what the academic leaders need to do to improve teaching quality. For the quantitative component of this research, four hundred and eight academicians from Malaysian private universities participated in an online survey. As for the qualitative component, twelve academicians participated in a semi-structured email interview. The findings provide insights into how academic leaders affect the teaching quality in private universities. Valuable suggestions have been drawn from respondents as to how guidance can be provided to help lecturers improve their style of delivery, provide a wholesome learning experience to students and ensure there is stable financial success for their universities. As the future of the country's economic growth is dependent on the quality of education offered by private universities, focus on teaching quality can improve the future of Malaysian students and can determine the extent to which private universities remain sustainable.

**Keywords:** teaching quality, teaching and learning experience, motivation of lecturers, role of academic leaders

#### Introduction

Private higher learning institutions in Malaysia have increased in number rapidly over the last ten years. Malaysia hosts 20 public universities, 41 private universities and about 500 private colleges (Education Malaysia, 2020). In 2020, over fifty percent of the students pursuing higher education were enrolled in private institutions (Wong, 2020). It has been projected that the percentage of students enrolled in private higher learning institutions will significantly outnumber those in public universities by 2025 (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2015-2025).

In order to remain relevant and be part of the global marketplace, Malaysia is continuously striving to evolve from a production-based economy to a knowledge-based one (Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014). The Ministry of Higher Education aspires to turn the country into a center for education excellence. Other than complementing public universities in catering to the increasing need for higher education among Malaysians, private higher learning institutions also contribute to the country's economic growth. The private education sector has proven to be a major source of revenue for the government. The gross output value of education services in Malaysia was RM17.6 billion in 2017 and from 2015 to 2017 the value increased by 7.7% per annum (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). The largest contributor to this was college and university education with the value of RM 10.4 billion (59%). The Malaysian higher education system has been gaining recognition and is moving forward with the aim of achieving its goal to be the global education destination by 2025; Malaysia is expected to capture a large percentage of the global market for higher education as the projection is to have an increase from 1.8 million in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025 (Yuk, 2019).

Private universities in Malaysia have undeniably become business oriented; eighty six percent of these institutions are 'for-profit' (Lim, & Williams, 2020). However, they have not been able to successfully steer themselves towards financial stability. Current researches portray worrying findings regarding their negative financial health which is rapidly becoming a crisis for the private education business sector. As reported by Hunter (2020), Malaysia's private higher education sector is facing a collapse that could close the doors of up to half of the country's private institutions permanently and only a few with strong financial backers will survive. A recent research conducted by former deputy vice chancellor of University Tun Razak, Professor Geoffrey Williams, showed that in 2018, sixty-four percent of Malaysian private higher education institutions were in debt distress as current and fixed assets were less than balance sheet debt. In the beginning of 2020, fifty-five percent were making trading losses.

There is an urgent need to address the challenges faced by private universities by planning for a major reform. The role played by academic leaders in determining the quality of education delivered in private universities cannot be undermined. Academic leaders shape the universities by setting goals, forming structures,



designing modes of instruction, allocating the number of students, offering subjects, distributing teaching loads and recommending pedagogy (Kawar, 2012). These are the main factors which affect the teaching and learning practices in institutions. Apart from academic qualifications, academic leaders need to have sound commercial expertise to bail affected institutions out from the current financial crisis. They need to be able to thrive in these times of financial turmoil. The financial success of organisations is determined by strong leaders who have the ability to achieve organisational goals by manipulating the attitudes of employees (Ali & Rehman, 2016). This factor plays an important role in increasing student intake and helping universities to be successful.

Numerous studies have been carried out to analyse major factors which influence the satisfaction level of students in private universities and the teaching quality in schools. However, there seems to be a gap in determining the motivation level of academic leaders to improve the quality of education. There has been very little research that examines the role of the academic leaders in improving the teaching quality in Malaysian universities. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the challenges faced by private universities and steps which need to be taken to improve the quality of education offered by private universities.

### **1. Challenges faced by Private Universities**

The main challenge faced by private universities is that the education business involves numerous stakeholders: students, parents, academicians, administrative staff, academic leaders, government, society and shareholders. All these stakeholders have differing expectations and demands which sometimes contradict one another. Friedman as cited in (Kothari, 2018) stresses that effective leaders need to function as shareholders' agents who conduct business according to shareholders' desires which is basically to maximize income while conforming to basic rules of the society, ethical customs and government laws. The private education sector needs to efficiently deal with continuous changes in modes of delivery, students' needs, employers' requirements and technological advancement. COPPA (2018) stresses that the main concern is to focus on providing learner centric education by creating a conducive learning environment which is designed based on current innovations in teaching, learning and assessment.

Dealing with these challenges has proven to be daunting for many universities as they lack sound financial infrastructure to survive in troubled times and are suffering due to economic downturns. Babulal and Solhi (2020) claim that the main factors for the current state of financial distress faced by private universities are incompetent top-level management, inexperienced vice chancellors and leaders who refuse to embrace change. The effects of these problems cut across a variety of disciplines and ultimately result in a change of how capitalism is perceived.

These factors have given rise to the need for a major reform in the management of private universities. The first strategy is to ensure the reputation of private universities is improved by analysing stakeholders' needs and requirements. The main financial goal for private universities should be to fulfill stakeholders needs by improving quality which then increases the student enrolment rate. Due to the nature of the education industry, which is becoming increasingly commercialised, the Stakeholder Theory is suitable to address the financial concerns faced by many private universities. Parmar, Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, De Colle, and Purnell (2010) advise that the Stakeholder Theory solves three interconnected business problems faced by private universities which are understanding how value is created and traded, connecting ethics and capitalism, and helping leaders think about management in order to manage the first two problems.

### **2. Teaching Quality in Private Universities**

Teaching quality is a crucial factor that determines the success and continuous growth of private universities. The main concern for students when choosing a university is teaching quality.

According to UNESCO in Sultana, Yousuf, Din, and Rehman( 2009), quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, activities, teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment The main factors which affect the quality of education in universities are the quality of faculty, curriculum designs, technological facilities, state-of-the-art infrastructure, opportunities for research, accreditation of programmes, administrative and finance policies, credible evaluation and ethical governance (Sultana, Yousuf, Din, & Rehman, 2009).

Out of these, the role played by faculty is the most crucial as they are the pulse behind any educational process. "Leadership, in whichever model it embraces, has as central goal to ensure and maintain the school improvement which has to do with the quality of teaching; the most influential factor of students' achievement" (Emmanouil, Osia, & Paraskevi-Ioanna, 2014, p.35). It is therefore necessary to explore the expectations of stakeholders in this area.



## **2.1 Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Requirements**

Understanding the requirements and expectations of the government is necessary for private universities to obtain accreditations for the programmes offered and to gain the confidence of stakeholders.

Private universities are required to strictly adhere to the code of practice issued by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) which was established to ensure there is quality in higher education (HE) in Malaysia. In order to assist higher education providers and enhance their academic performance and institutional effectiveness, MQA has developed standards and codes of practice. The Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) which was issued in 2008 is a general standard for stakeholders engaged in higher education. (COPPA, 2018).

### **2.1.1 Programme Delivery**

COPPA (2018) emphasises that learning, and teaching proves to be effective only when the curriculum content and the programme structure are designed after considering the current developments in each field of study. Programme information must be updated and made available to students. All stakeholders must be given an opportunity to provide feedback through continuous consultation to keep improving programmes offered.

COPPA requires education experts from various fields of study with extensive knowledge in effective learning-teaching methodologies to assist in the creation of a rich classroom environment. These experts need to contribute knowledge on dealing with challenges in delivering content. It is also a requirement for higher education providers to create a centralized educational technology division consisting of these experts.

### **2.1.2 Academic Staff**

Private universities which are facing financial distress have resorted to reducing the number of faculty members as a measure to reduce cost. This is against the requirements set by the government as cost reduction in this area has negatively affected the quality of teaching. For roles to be clearly defined and for tasks to be distributed fairly, the number of academic staff must be sufficient. COPPA (2018, p.18) stresses that “teaching, research, consultancy services and community engagement” are the main academic activities that lecturers should be involved in and “the quality of the academic staff is one of the most important components in assuring the quality of higher education”. Academic institutions are also required to hire candidates who are qualified to serve the programmes offered and select heads who will uphold the quality of teaching in their respective universities.

## **2.2 Teaching Excellence**

Many authors are confused about the value of key input and output measures for teaching excellence. Greatbatch and Holland (2016) claim that Quality Assurance systems in higher academic institutions around world are not designed to identify and promote teaching excellence but are in place to set thresholds for quality and improvement. It is a challenge to define excellence in teaching because it is dependent on numerous factors such as individual academicians, students, resources and facilities. The authors claim that students perceive lecturers to be excellent when they encourage students to develop their full potential by being enthusiastic, knowledgeable, empathetic, approachable, helpful, and patient

## **3. Role of Academic Leaders in Overcoming Challenges**

The challenges faced by private universities, especially in ensuring excellence in teaching quality is maintained, can be overcome if academic leaders place importance on this issue and take necessary steps with a sense of urgency.

There is an immense number of studies carried out on how leadership skills can be applied to improve the performance of employees in various business sectors as the behaviour of leaders produces an emotional response in their subordinates which in turn affects their performance (Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper, & Warland, 2015).

The main leadership positions in academic institutions which can make a difference are the roles of heads of department, deans, and vice chancellors. Heads of departments and deans are in charge of creating a culture that rewards and values good teaching whereas vice chancellors are in charge of establishing the university’s objectives and creating a positive environment that welcomes teaching innovation (Fahimirad, Idris, & Kotamjani, 2016). The majority of academic leaders are unaware of the complexity of their positions as they need to balance numerous undefined roles (Gigliotti, 2017). The main function of these leaders is to focus on improving students’ learning experience. Due to this, academic leaders are under pressure to ensure changes, such as personal enhancement and individual transformation, take place as higher education is facing complex managerial issues.



Research shows that there are seven key areas which academic leaders need to focus on in order to create subordinates who can effectively improve teaching quality and put their institutions on the path of long-term financial success.

According to Okoroji, Ukpere, & Anyanwu (2014), it is essential for leaders to have clear visions and the ability to help their subordinates understand how to achieve objectives by fostering an environment where risk-taking is encouraged. They claim that organisational goal realisation helps to draw the support and cooperation which is needed by the leaders. Locke's Goal-Setting Theory has proven to be extremely useful in predicting the satisfaction level of employees and how they affect their styles and attitudes at work (Locke, & Latham, 2016). Locke defines job satisfaction as a positive emotional situation which arises when there is an acceptance of one's job and experience

Many challenges are faced to remain competitive in the current demanding business environment. Both individual and organizational success depend on innovation (Imran, 2015). Kavar (2012) has stated that the most effective types of leadership for the educational sector are instructional leadership, transformational leadership and participative leadership. In addition to those styles, effective individuals in leadership positions need to also practice a collaborative style (Bryman in Fahimirad, Idris, & Kotamjani, 2016). When collaborative leadership is practiced, decisions are not made under the discretion of one leader. Academic leaders also need to communicate positively in order to create a communication climate that stimulates the interest of academicians to be more reflective when planning for lessons. In the Relational Leadership Theory, leadership is defined as a relationship among people who are working to achieve similar goals and have mutual wants and needs (Okoroji, Ukpere, & Anyanwu, 2014). This theory supports re-assessing the social influence of leadership roles (Hilaire in Akram, & Haider, 2017). This theory is relevant for the current study as maintaining a positive communication climate and improving communication efficacy in educational institutions can help lecturers to be more innovative.

Depth of knowledge in the subject matter and the skills to share this knowledge effectively, are two components which are essential in teacher preparation (National Council for Teacher Accreditation in Paolini, 2015). Understanding this will help develop leaders who are able to motivate lecturers to practice innovation when imparting knowledge to students. This is crucial as students' level of satisfaction increases with the improvement in teaching and assessment methods practised by lecturers.

Most employees see rewards as a sign of appreciation which motivates them to respect leaders, work harder and take ownership of the assigned tasks (Kelly, 2010). Performance based rewards and incentives need to be clearly articulated to encourage lecturers to develop their capacity (Hofmeyer et al., 2015). Vroom's Expectancy Theory emphasises that individuals make choices and are motivated to put in effort, with the expectation that performance will give desirable rewards (Purvis, Zagenczyk, & McCray 2015). Vroom posits that people prioritize personal gains and are motivated to perform only when they perceive that good performance leads to benefits which can come in either intrinsic or extrinsic rewards

Quality is a factor that cannot be compromised in institutions of higher learning. The main objective of an ideal education is to continue striving to achieve quality teaching to fulfill the country's needs for efficient human resources in the various sectors of development. For this vision to materialize, leaders need to design lecturers' job scopes according to their expertise, train them efficiently, and look into their career advancement (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2009).

Organising frequent class observations and peer review sessions, is a necessity in private universities. Experts claim that this practice can improve teaching quality; however, not many universities religiously follow this requirement which has been set by the government. Giving a free hand in the delivery of content can cause lecturers to develop a lax attitude when delivering lessons. Endrizzi in Greatbatch and Holland (2016) states that student perspectives are a beneficial way to understand teaching quality.

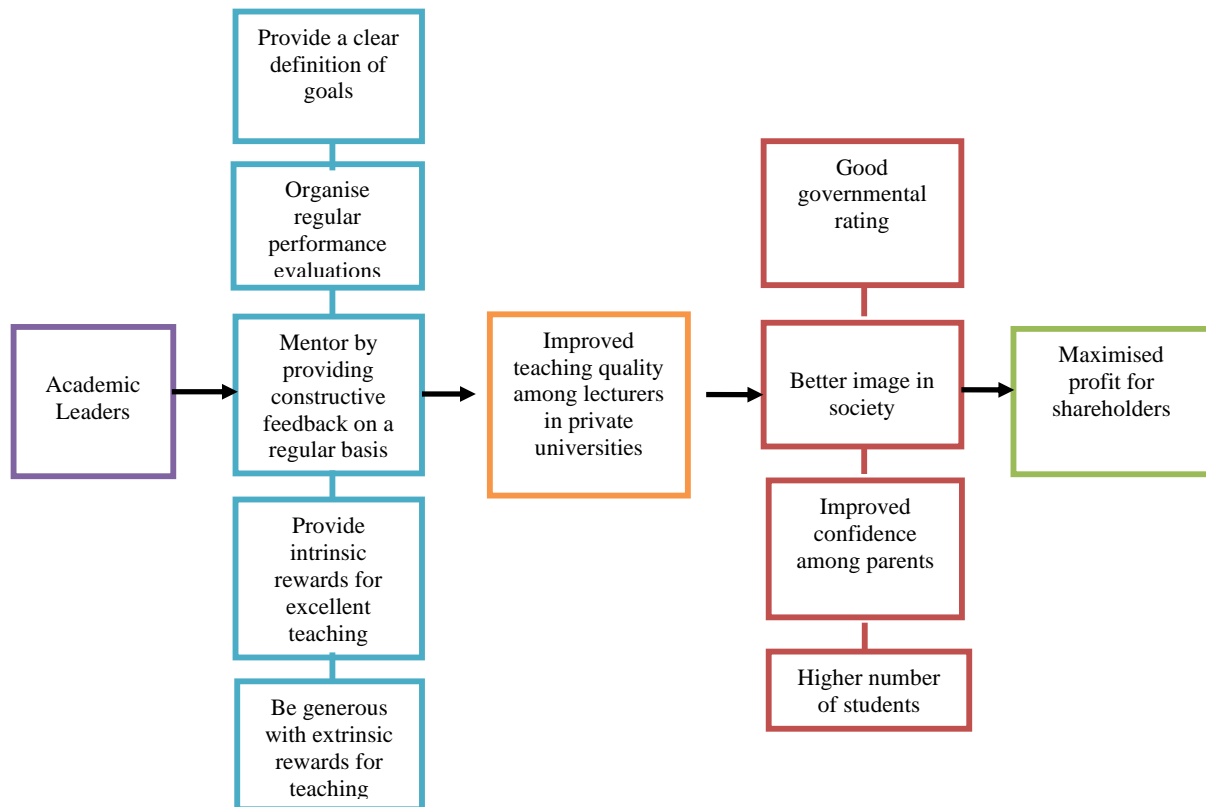
After each semester, students must be encouraged to provide both formative and summative feedback on the effectiveness of the course design and delivery (Paolini, 2015). However, careful consideration must be given to the reason for evaluation, the people who conduct the evaluation, when the evaluation is conducted in the learning process, how the questions are designed and how the results will be used. Prompt and constructive feedback needs to be provided by leaders to promote high quality output which contributes to the growth of intellectuality, culture and human capital. This feedback must be closely aligned to the data gathered from evaluations (Fahimirad, Idris, & Kotamjani, 2016).

Opting for tools which are active and interesting can reduce passive learning (Abdulbaki, Suhaimi, Alsaqqaf, & Jawad, 2018). Planning for effective teaching should be done with the students' needs and grasping power in mind. The lack of innovation causes the outcome of lessons to be far from satisfactory in private universities



#### 4. Conceptual Framework

Based on the information gathered from the literature review, this study proposes the following conceptual framework which is a formative construct.



In this framework, the academic leaders can improve teaching quality of lecturers by:

- 4.1 Providing a clear definition of goals
- 4.2 Organising regular performance evaluations
- 4.3 Mentoring by providing constructive feedback on a regular basis
- 4.4 Providing intrinsic rewards
- 4.5 Being generous with extrinsic rewards
- 4.6 Satisfying needs of stakeholders

#### 5. Hypotheses of the study

From the information gathered from the literature review, the following hypotheses have been constructed:

- 5.1 There is a positive relationship between setting a clear key performance index and teaching quality in private universities
- 5.2 There is a positive relationship between organising regular performance evaluations and teaching quality in private universities
- 5.3 There is a positive relationship between providing constructive feedback and teaching quality in private universities
- 5.4 There is a positive relationship between providing intrinsic rewards and teaching quality in private universities
- 5.5 There is a positive relationship between providing extrinsic rewards and teaching quality in private universities
- 5.6 There is a positive relationship between improving teaching quality in private universities and maximising monetary returns in private universities



**Purposes**

The purpose of this study is to explore academic leaders’ role in ensuring their institutions become students’ popular choice by providing an ideal learning experience which is strongly dependent on the quality of teaching. This study attempts to support the notion that the academic leaders in higher academic institutions play an important role in determining the quality of education delivered. More specifically the following research questions will be addressed:

- How do academic leaders affect the teaching quality in private universities?
- What can academic leaders do to improve the teaching quality in private universities?

**Research Methodology**

Based on the purpose of this study and the identified research questions, a mixed method approach was selected to analyze the impact that academic leaders have on the teaching quality in private universities. In addition to that, an in-depth understanding of the subject matter was obtained through literature reviews. In this way, triangulation increased the accuracy of the analysed aspects and capture different dimensions of the same occurrence.

A summary of the research design characteristics has been listed in the table below:

**Summary of Research Design Characteristics**

Purpose	Triangulation, Complementary, Development, Initiation, Expansion
Timing	Sequential-Dependent
Priority	Equal priority for quantitative and qualitative
Point of Integration	Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation
Mixing Type	Connecting and Integrating- Explanatory
Approach	Positivist
Sampling method	Non-probability convenience and snowball sampling (quantitative) Purposive judgmental sampling (qualitative)
Order of Results	Quantitative – Qualitative -Integration

Sequential mixed method design was chosen for this study. The survey (quantitative component) was completed before the email interview (qualitative component) was executed. The quantitative approach was used in the beginning of the research and survey data was gathered. A factor analysis was used to establish constructs. These constructs were used in the interviews to get more details. The main purpose of conducting the qualitative analysis was to triangulate and validate the quantitative results.

The qualitative component was dependent on the quantitative data in this study. Using the outcome of the quantitative component, the qualitative research’s design was reassessed and executed. The data obtained from the survey was analyzed and the main areas which required improvement on the part of academic leaders were shortlisted. The interview questions for the qualitative component were designed based on these areas. This was to increase the validity of the gathered data. Therefore, it can be summarized that the research was sequential-dependent.

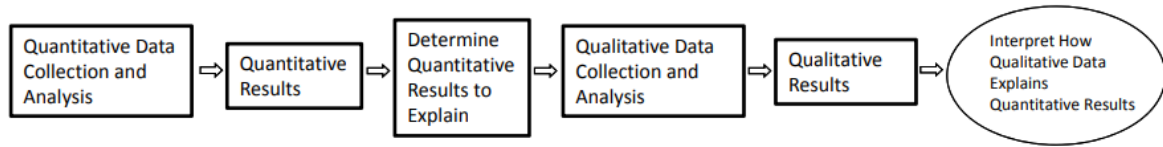
Equal weightage has been given for both the quantitative and qualitative components in this research as each component played a role in providing the information required to answer the research questions. The main purpose of using a sequential approach is to build one method to the other or to improve the design of a research tool through the implementation of one research component (Creswell, 1999).

Integration for this research took place in the experiential stage, data analysis stage and results stage. The quantitative component was first analysed and tabulated. The sampling size and questions for the interview were determined after analyzing the results of the questionnaire. The qualitative component was then implemented and the data obtained was analysed. Both the results were combined at the final phase of data analysis.

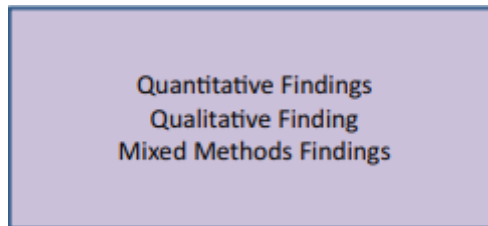
For this research, an explanatory design was used. Qualitative data obtained from email interviews was used to explain data obtained from quantitative data obtained from surveys. Data was presented separately through narrative.



→ Explanatory Sequential Design



Source: (Creswell, 1999)



Source: (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015)

A positivist approach was adopted for the quantitative component of this research to ensure that quantifiable responses were gathered. The positivist approach maintains that the origin of science is within the philosophy of science which is known as logical positivism (Lee, 1991).

The target population of respondents was defined by referring to the statistics published by Department of Higher Education (2019). The estimated number of lecturers in Malaysian private universities is approximately 11,087. To ensure that the respondent size was large enough to detect an association between variables, the sample size was determined to be 370 by using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Therefore, this respondent size was suitable to provide a ±10% accuracy for the population size of lecturers.

For the quantitative component of this research, questionnaires were administered by invitation; therefore the method falls under non-probability convenience and snowball sampling. While the sampling technique for the qualitative component was purposive judgmental sampling.

The quantitative findings are presented first, followed by the qualitative findings in an explanatory sequential design (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015). A large survey was conducted first and analyzed quantitatively, which was followed by a subset was interviewed qualitatively. First, the quantitative results were presented followed by the qualitative results. Both these categories were integrated and analysed together at the end.

**1. First Phase - Quantitative Research**

The quantitative research was carried out by completing an online survey. As for the respondents of this research, there were 408 lecturers from private universities in Malaysia. In the questionnaire for this research a six-point Likert Scale was utilised. The options provided were strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree and not applicable. The questionnaire was developed based on critical examination of the literature. The basic format has been adapted from Teacher Questionnaire (Educational Leadership and Management). Content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by three senior lecturers before a pilot study was conducted. A score sheet was provided to evaluate the validity of each question out of 10 according to the level of appropriateness, and wording.

Face validity of the amended questionnaire was assessed by distributing questionnaires to twenty respondents to check the comprehension of questions, the suitability of layout and the appropriateness of length.

Taber (2017) posits that a researcher needs to consider the relevance and the quality of an instrument when choosing or developing it for a study. The reliability of the questionnaire was proven by conducting a reliability test which yielded the following results:

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	50	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	50	100.0

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.976	42



The Cronbach's alpha is 0.976 which prove the reliabilities for the survey were excellent (Taber, 2017). A Cronbach's alpha of .70 and above considered to be good, while .80 and above is better, and .90 and above is best.

In addition to that, reliability was also ensured by having respondents complete the questionnaire within the same duration of time. There were 42 questions in the questionnaire and focus areas were:

- a) goals and ethical practices
- b) curricula matters and teaching innovation
- c) evaluation process
- d) curriculum review
- e) knowledge of effective teaching practices
- f) quality of assessments
- g) leadership styles
- h) research publications
- i) departmental goals
- j) technology in education

A quantitative data analysis was completed with the application of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics including frequency, and percentage, was utilized. Buchanan in Knapp (2009) concluded that percentage can be considered to be the most useful statistics ever invented. Salkind (2010) claims that there are numerous benefits in using frequency tables; raw data is presented in an organized, simple and easily understood manner.

## 2. Phase Two - Qualitative Research

In order to evaluate respondents' perception of the roles that leaders play in improving the quality of education in private universities, structured email interviews were carried out. Uncertainties which arise from the survey could be reduced by including interviews of respondents. Identified problematic areas were transferred to questions in the interview. Prior to carrying out the interviews, similar categories of issues were identified to form suitable questions. For the purpose of this research, respondents were lecturers and academic leaders from private universities in Malaysia. The survey consisted of twenty questions with ten focus areas. The interview was designed to include key issues which respondents highlighted as lacking in the current leadership. The respondents were selected using a purposive judgmental sampling method.

An introductory explanation was provided in the email and the participation of respondents was on a voluntary basis. These respondents were invited to participate by answering semi-structured interview questions. This approach is often used in exploratory research.

In order to reach data saturation, it has been recommended that a minimum sample size of 12 is required (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Therefore, 12 academic staff members were invited to participate in the interview upon completion of the quantitative data analysis. This helped in cross-checking whether the same problems identified by the survey respondents were also expressed by the interview respondents. In addition to that, data collected enabled a strong conclusion to be made that the identified problematic areas and categorization were valid.

Based on the analysis of data collected from questionnaires interview questions were further modified. Zyphur and Pierides in (Cortina, 2020) explain that a question is relevant if answers are sought to problems which affect the proper functioning of organizations, and the well-being of employees. A study that attempts to discover the effects of a given intervention on the success of an organization has a high relational validity as it provides inferences regarding real issues faced by organization.

The interview questions covered the following areas in order to obtain a more meaningful insight into the major areas for improvement identified in the pilot study:

- i) awareness regarding vision for teaching and learning practices
- ii) motivation to improve teaching practices
- iii) training programmes to improve teaching practices
- iv) teaching evaluation process
- v) assessment practices
- vi) challenges faced in teaching
- vii) rewards for good teaching performance

In the context of this research, answers to interview questions were classified, summarized and tabulated. Research questions were used as a guideline to analyse how well respondents' answers were aligned to objectives of research (Galletta, 2012). Content analysis and framework analysis methods were used to analyse data. method was also be utilised. A system of 'color-coding datum' was also used to code sources of data to identify similar





themes which emerge within the tabulated responses. The categories which significantly make up the typology were used to prepare the final report. The data for each interview was then re-coded as themes emerge within each of the broader categories. Bianco, Gasparini, and Schettini (2014) claim that effective visualisation provides information which enable researchers to gain a better understanding of the collected data as colour is pre-attentively observed and this characteristic made it effective in conveying qualitative information. In qualitative data analysis, numbers can be used to check frequency counts to make it easier to understand complex themes (Kawulich, 2004). Numbers assist in verifying findings, testing interpretations and coming up with conclusions.

In addition to that, NVivo, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package was utilised to analyse data. This software reduces manual tasks and allows the researcher to have more time to “discover tendencies, recognize themes and derive conclusions” (Hilal, & Alabri, 2013, p.182). Using NVivo will improve the quality of research as it will enable the analysis of qualitative data to be done in an easier and clearer manner. This will help to yield more professional results.

The description of the issues discovered in the first phase of the research was clearer and deeper in the second phase. This allowed attempts to be made at generalizations using valid findings.

## Results

The results are based on survey data collected from 408 academic staff who are employed in Malaysian private universities in various capacities. The findings were refined with data collected from semi-structured email interviews of 12 academic staff. The quantitative results will be presented first followed by qualitative results. Throughout these sections, the quantitative and qualitative results will be discussed in a manner which is consistent with the mixed methods data analysis methodology.

### 1. Quantitative Research

A total of 408 respondents participated in the survey. There were 98 respondents from the 26 to 35 age group, 158 from the 36 to 45 group, 131 from the 45 to 55 group and 21 from the over 55 group. 12% of the respondents were Bachelor’s degree holders, 53.2% of the respondents were Master’s degree holders and 34.8% of respondents were doctorate degree holders. 13.5% of the respondents had less than 2 years of experience, 38.2% had 3 to 5 years of experience, 30.4% had 6 to 10 years of experience and 17.9% respondents had more than 10 years of working experience in current university. Hence, more than 80% of respondents had significant and substantial experience in their respective universities.

Due to the large sample size, small differences in percentage can be detected as significant. Therefore, responses which have yielded above 60% support, have been listed under high, 59-50% under medium, 50-46% under low and 40-45% under very low. The areas which have fallen under the low and very low categories have been given more focus.

High (above 60%)		Medium (59-50%)		Low (49-46%)		Very low (40-45%)	
1.	have a clear vision for the university (60.3%)	1.	consult academicians about the needs and challenges of the university (53.2%)	1.	show concern for staff well-being (48%)	1.	promote teamwork (44.6%)
2.	create awareness regarding their beliefs and vision regarding teaching and learning (61.3%)	2.	knowledgeable about curricular issues (58.3%)	2.	promote ethical practices among lecturers (45.1%)	2.	monitor lecturers’ records of assessment (44.9%)
		3.	try to get lecturers to think about changing their teaching practices (55.1%)	3.	involve lecturers in the evaluation process (49%)	3.	provide guidance on writing research papers(45.3%)
		4.	inspire lecturers to accomplish teaching practices which are new (51.5%)	4.	monitor the effectiveness of curriculum(49.5%)		



High (above 60%)		Medium (59-50%)		Low (49-46%)		Very low (40-45%)	
		5.	ensure that lecturers plan in advance before teaching (55.1%)	5.	monitor the effectiveness of teaching methods (47.1%)		
		6.	leaders initiate changes that require people to re-examine their beliefs and values with regard to teaching (55.4%)	6.	make major changes in how teaching is done(49.5%)		
		7.	give lecturers effective feedback regarding teaching performance (52.7%)	7.	are the driving force behind major teaching innovations (49.8%)		
		8.	use the evaluation process to clearly indicate priority areas for improvement in classroom practices (52.5%)	8.	provide guidance regarding effective assessment practices(46.3%)		
		9.	encourage lecturers to stay informed of the current research and theory regarding effective teaching (53.9%)	9.	encourage lecturers to write research papers(49.3%)		
		10.	consult students to understand their learning preferences (55.1%)	10.	monitor the use of lecture method (49%)		
		11.	expose lecturers to current ideas about how to teach effectively (56.4%)	11.	monitor use of diverse teaching methods (46.3%)		
		12.	encourage lecturers to have discussions regarding effective classroom practices (51.5%)				
		13.	encourage lecturers to regularly read articles and books about effective teaching practices (55.4%)				
		14.	portray a positive attitude about lecturers' ability to accomplish important initiatives in teaching (52.5%)				
		15.	organise training programmes to expose lecturers to current teaching methods (53.2%)				
		16.	are very knowledgeable about effective classroom assessment practices (51%)				



High (above 60%)		Medium (59-50%)		Low (49-46%)		Very low (40-45%)	
		17	monitor the effectiveness of assessment practices (52.2%)				
		18	organise training programmes to expose lecturers to effective assessment methods (58.6%)				
		19	adapt leadership styles to the specific needs of a given situation (50.2%)				
		20	expose lecturers to current ideas about how to be effective researchers (50.2%)				
		21	determine how effective the department is in terms of enhancing student learning (56.1%)				
		22	determine how effective the department is in terms of publishing research papers (52.9%)				
		23	avoid reliance on quizzes and paper-based exams (50%)				
		24	increase lecturers' ability to gauge effectiveness of teaching and assessment practices (56.4%)				
		25	ensure that a centralized educational technology division is created to enhance teaching quality (54.7%)				
		26	ensure that the centralized educational technology division is functioning at its optimal level (56.4%)				

The data gathered from the quantitative analysis shows that more than 60% of the respondents believe that leaders have a clear vision for their respective universities and that they succeed in creating awareness regarding their beliefs regarding teaching and learning. For 26 questions, the responses were in the middle range; 59- 50% of the respondents provided positive feedback.

The analysis also showed that there are fourteen areas which gained less than 50% positive responses. These areas require more attention on the part of academic leaders. The quantitative data analysis gives an indication that the overall performance of academic leaders in Malaysian private universities is satisfactory but there needs to be more focus on certain aspects. Fourteen areas of concern were identified from the quantitative data.

## 2. Qualitative Research

A total of 12 respondents participated in the semi-structured email interview. There were 3 respondents from the over 55 group, 5 from the 45 to 55 group, 3 from the 36 to 45 group and 1 respondent from the 26 to 35 age group. 2 respondents were Bachelor's degree holders, 6 respondents were Master's degree holders and 4 respondents were doctorate degree holders. 2 respondents had less than 2 years of experience, 3 had 3 to 5 years



of experience, 1 had 6 to 10 years of experience and 6 respondents had more than 10 years of working experience in current university. 5 of the respondents were academic leaders and 7 were lecturers. Therefore, most of respondents had significant and substantial experience in their respective universities.

**Question 1**

**Do academic leaders involve their teams in forming the vision for teaching and learning? If so, how do they involve the team and/or create awareness? How often do they do so?**



academic	vision	teams	self	meeting	academ	even	level	like	may	mission	new	organiz		
					also	exampl	perform	seldom	student	subject	team	work		
		leadership	staff	report	attain	high	proces	acad	appo	area	ask	asse	attain	auth
teaching	leaders	involve	excellen	student	concer	ideas	rare	achis	auth	brain	brief	case	case	centr
		kpi	focus	time	depart	instituti	rarely	adm	begin	comp	court	curri	days	deac
learning	department	outcomes	intereste	univers	differen	instituti	regular	adop	belie	comp	cowe	dean	dep	desi
					etc	leader	respec	adop	beyo	comp	creat	dean	devel	dili
								amb	boils	comp	cultu	dem	dictat	

Out of twelve respondents, ten have stated that academic leaders do not involve lecturers in the formation of the vision for teaching and learning. These respondents claim that only Deans and Heads of Departments are involved in the process of forming an overall vision for the university.



Question 2

Do academic leaders motivate lecturers to improve their teaching practices? If yes, how do they provide motivation?



student	class	motivate	academic	allowance	just	new	professional	satisfaction	
			yes	generally	style	attend	development	growth	
leaders	teaching	staff			use	messages	advise	bit	cancellations
			comment	improve	field	reputation	conferences	discuss	emphasis
lecturers	encourage	concerned			happen	institutions			
					survey	checking	department	evaluation	fail

Seven out of twelve respondents claim that academic leaders do not motivate lecturers to improve their teaching practices. More emphasis is placed on punctuality, class cancellations and percentage of passes than what actually takes place in the classroom.



Question 3

Do academic leaders encourage lecturers to use innovative teaching methods? Do they actively want a diversity of approaches? If yes, how do they show this?



Seven out of twelve respondents claim that academic leaders encourage innovation in teaching. However, four out of seven respondents who claim so state that implementation is challenging due to numerous factors. Academic leaders encourage lecturers to be innovative as it is part of their teaching performance measurement and innovation is supposed to be a clearly visible factor. However, these respondents express that realistically innovation in teaching is difficult to be implemented in private universities due to the lack of a sound support system and budget constraints.



#### Question 4

Do academic leaders provide training programmes to improve teaching practices? If yes, how frequently are training programmes organised? How is the effectiveness of these programmes measured? Have they given the desired results?

training	effectiveness	initiated	budget	often	academic	assistance	changed	hardly
		lecturers	managemen	yes	student	feedback	financial	generally get
	depends		measured	teaching	practices	hrdf	many	program rational
programmes		apply			ascertain	improved	times	purpos result
	provided	approved	need	year	desired	leaders	usually	subject

Six out twelve respondents claim that training programmes are provided but ten out of twelve respondents have emphasized that this depends on the available budget.

#### Question 5

Do academic leaders encourage lecturers to prepare updated and comprehensive teaching plans? If yes, how is this done?



Eight out of twelve respondents state that it is a requirement for lecturers to prepare lesson plans for documentation purposes. Academic leaders do instruct lecturers to prepare teaching plans. Some departments form curriculum review committees which are in charge of such matters.



**Question 6**

**Do academic leaders participate in the teaching evaluation process? If yes, what role do they play and what is the process?**

lecturers	academic	process	reports	improve	surveys	teaching	actions	adminis
	evaluation		subject	information	assessme	assistant	class	collate
yes		based		just	comment	done	etc	form
student	leaders	feedback	discussion	may	conference	get	objective	observati
			qa	depends	department	hods	participate	perform

Eleven out of twelve respondents claim that academic leaders participate in the teaching evaluation process. However, all respondents state that leaders' participation is limited and insignificant.

**Question 7**

**Do academic leaders provide valuable feedback to lecturers after the teaching evaluation process? If yes, how effective is this feedback?**

feedback	end	academic	influence	cases	counselling	culture	yes	
	leader	discussion	change	needed	based	behaviour	departme	individual
lecturers		improve	just	consultation	like	show	achieve	actions
	bring			provide	part	advice	always	
effective	directly	time	appraisal	depends	report	process	aware	commen
							broad	commun

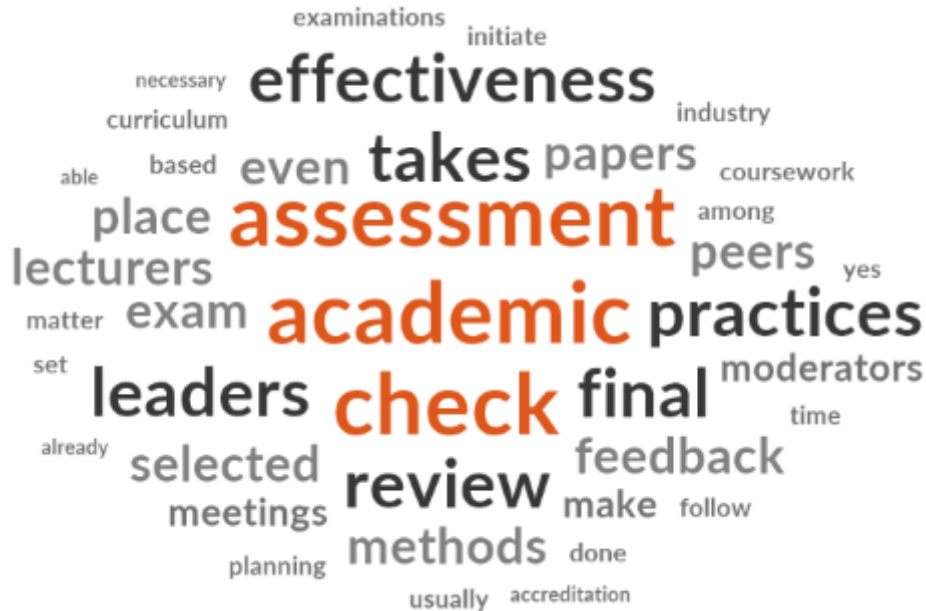
Ten out of twelve respondents claim that leaders do not provide feedback which can bring about major changes after completing the teaching evaluation process.





Question 8

**Do academic leaders regularly review assessment practices and evaluate their effectiveness? If yes, how?**



Eleven out twelve respondents claim that academic leaders do not review assessment practices. Moderators are selected among peers with similar subject expertise and they are required to provide feedback regarding the quality of the question papers.

Question 9

**Do academic leaders encourage the diversification of assessment practices? If yes, how?**



Eleven out of twelve respondents have stated that leaders do not encourage diversification of assessment practices. As explained in the previous section, leaders do not check or provide feedback regarding assessments.



Question 10

Do academic leaders provide support when lecturers face challenges in teaching? If yes, how?

leaders	academic	depends	also	job	practice	good	advice	based
			cases	often	channel	however	incident	individual
lecturers	training	give	challenges	students	complaint	late	offer	particular places
	yes	experience	involved	compassion	ear	may	time	whether written
support				help	mentored	understand	issues	leave

Seven out of twelve respondents claim that academic leaders do not provide sufficient support when lecturers face challenges in teaching.

Question 11

Do academic leaders encourage lecturers to publish research papers? Do they provide guidance in writing research papers?



Nine out of twelve respondents have stated that academic leaders encourage lecturers to publish. However, all ten respondents have stated that support and guidance are not provided.



Question 12

Do academic leaders give clear key performance index (KPI) to guide lectures? If yes, how much emphasis is placed on teaching quality?

quality	kpi	measure	human	60	achieved	completed	confused	crucial
		depend	lecturers	emphasis	marketing	resource	service	set
	student			institution	stated	plays	much	actually
teaching		academic	yes	kpis	exercise	also	cases	conducdegree
	department	clear	just	leaders	evaluation	attracti	compodeliver	details

Eight out of twelve respondents claim that academic leaders do not give a clear KPI. Most lecturers fill in details to fulfill the requirements of completing the exercise.

Question 13

Do the KPIs improve teaching quality? How can they be improved?



Six respondents have stated that KPIs do not improve teaching quality, two respondents are unsure and four respondents believe that KPIs can play an important role in improving teaching quality.



**Question 14**

Are intrinsic and extrinsic rewards provided for achieving desired teaching performance? If yes, please list the rewards provided.



Nine out of twelve respondents affirmed that there are no extrinsic rewards for good teaching performance. All ten respondents have asserted that intrinsic rewards are difficult to assess and something which is not common in private universities. Leaders have not created a culture where good teaching performance is praised in public.

**Question 15**

Do academic leaders encourage teamwork? If yes, do they arrange for peer support systems to improve teaching quality? How else is teamwork achieved?

support	work	staff	yes	events	peer	rare	share	students	
		system	meetings	information	universities	different	discussed	entering	exploring
	team		project	leaders	cat	need	assignment	give	putting
academic		teamwork			conduct		course	tag	play
	annual		game	oriented	day	teaching	department	perform	action
									actual

Eight out of twelve respondents have strongly stated that teamwork is not something academic leaders pay attention to. Meetings are conducted only to share information.



**Question 16**

**Do academic leaders take proactive action when an academic staff is facing challenges in the teaching process? If yes, please give a description of how this is done.**



Nine out of twelve respondents have stated that proactive action is not taken when lecturers face challenges in the teaching process. The reasons tie with the explanation given in Question 10 about the lack of support for lecturers who face challenges. Lecturers are accustomed to relying on themselves to solve issues which arise.

**Question 17**

**Do academic leaders validate and continuously review the effectiveness of curriculum thereafter?**

curriculum	original	academic	hardly	much	design	education	engineering	held
		approved	leaders	prefer	measure	regular	rely	student
review	continue	based	module	using	meetings	yes	instead	issues
		effectiveness	feedback	mqa	accreditation	process	follow	advisor

Ten out of twelve respondents have stated that academic leaders do not validate the effectiveness of curriculum, one respondent is not sure and one respondent asserts that curriculum is validated on a regular basis.



Question 18

What are the particular challenges to teaching quality in private universities?



The following challenges have been highlighted by the respondents.

- i) lecturers are not trained well enough to focus on teaching quality.
- ii) preparing documents for the accreditation process is taxing and time consuming
- iii) lecturers need to be skilled not only in designing programmes and teaching, but also in doing marketing to improve student intake
- iv) academic leaders treat students as consumers and work only on ensuring that they are pleased and that there are no complaints
- v) there are no rewards for teaching excellence
- vi) private universities have an ongoing enrolment period and keep extending the cut off for new students
- vii) lack of adequate facilities and heavy workload



**Question 19**

**What can academic leaders do to improve teaching quality in private universities?**



Valuable suggestions have been put forward by respondents on how teaching quality can be improved in private universities.

- i) train lecturers to use diversified teaching methods in order to maximize student participation
  - ii) conduct classroom observations and teaching evaluations regularly
  - iii) provide valuable feedback after conducting these sessions
  - iv) conduct regular meetings and involve lecturers in planning the curriculum
  - v) build a sense of ownership among lecturers
  - vi) give some form of appreciation for outstanding teaching quality
  - vii) give an opportunity to choose between two pathways: teaching or publishing
  - viii) allocate courses to lecturers according their qualifications and experience
- concentrate on their jobs without letting personal problems with subordinates get in the way



### Question 20

Does teaching quality influence the enrolment rate in private universities? If yes, how does it affect the enrolment rate?

students	quality	ranking	course	private	affect	also	based	important
yes	enroll	word	mouth	must	look	definitely	facilities	factors
teaching	lecturers	good	universities	school	academic	focus	parents	head
		requirements	marketing	term	attention	institution	qualified	achieve
					classroom	long	business	entry
							detail	play

All twelve respondents have stated that teaching quality influences the enrolment rate in private universities.

### Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

The quantitative data analysis gives an indication that the overall performance of academic leaders in Malaysian private universities is satisfactory but there needs to be more focus on certain aspects. Fourteen areas of concern were identified from the quantitative data. The data gathered from the qualitative research reinforces and provides depth regarding the areas which need more attention from the academic leaders.

### Discussion

This study attempts to reinforce the notion that the leadership styles practised in higher academic institutions play an important role in determining the quality of teaching, which is a major factor considered by stakeholders when enrolling in a private university. There is a necessity to study the reasons behind the working styles of lecturers in private universities as academicians in Malaysia have been encouraged to enhance their teaching skills and structure meaningful classroom activities in order to meet the current market demands. Leaders play an essential role in determining the success of academic institutions. Therefore, this study will give a clear indication of how academicians are influenced by their leaders to enhance the teaching quality in Malaysian private universities.

#### 1. Research Questions

The answers to the main research questions of this research have been formulated based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impact of leaders on the teaching quality in Malaysian universities.

##### 1.1 Research Question 1

#### How do academic leaders affect the teaching quality in Malaysian private universities?

The overall performance of academic leaders is satisfactory; however, there seems to be a lack of focus on certain critical areas which can affect the teaching quality negatively in Malaysian private universities. Academic leaders need to pay attention to how they:

- i) show concern for staff well-being
- ii) promote teamwork
- iii) promote ethical practices among lecturers
- iv) monitor the effectiveness of curriculum
- v) monitor the effectiveness of teaching methods
- vi) make changes in how teaching is done
- vii) act as the driving force behind major teaching innovations





- viii) reduce reliance on the lecture method
- ix) encourage the use of diverse teaching methods
- x) monitor effectiveness of assessment practices
- xi) provide guidance regarding effective assessment practices
- xii) involve lecturers in the evaluation process
- xiii) provide guidance in research activities

## 1.2 Research Question 2

### **What can academic leaders do to improve the teaching quality in private universities?**

Academic leaders need to show more concern for the well-being of staff and provide assistance as well as moral support when they face challenges in teaching. A supportive environment needs to be created to encourage lecturers to be interested in their work and for them to be motivated to bring out the best in themselves. Leaders have the power to exude hope and optimism; this power needs to be used wisely to instill a sense of loyalty towards the institution. Lecturers, who respect leaders and believe that their interests will be taken care of, will serve the students in the best possible manner. An increased commitment level among lecturers and increases their overall performance.

Teamwork should be encouraged to avoid lecturers from working in isolation. This will eventually lead to pressure due to dealing with challenges on their own through trial and error. Leaders need to thrive to create conducive environments for professional activities. Practicing a participative leadership style will enable priorities to be set for the benefit of all and ensure that lecturers are encouraged to work collaboratively. Supporting social interactions and building positive connections with peers will increase sense of belonging which is necessary for building team spirit. Academic leaders need to create avenues for effective communication to take place among lecturers as meeting regular to have discussions can improve teamwork.

Key Performance Index which are clear, achievable and supported by lecturers should be created to ensure ethical work practices are promoted. Clearly defined goals and tasks enable lecturers to find a sense of identity and have pride in their work. Due attention has to be paid to target setting as well as organising one to one sessions with employees regularly to identify areas for improvement. When lecturers' job scopes are designed after analysing their strengths and weaknesses, there will be observable positive changes in their working styles. Academic leaders need to be transparent and clear in task delegation to promote acceptance among lecturers; lack of knowledge regarding job roles leads to a high level of stress among lecturers.

Curriculum should be checked and updated regularly to ensure the content is suitable for the current market demands and learning styles of students. Academic leaders need to be part of the Curriculum Review Committee as effectiveness of curriculum will influence teaching quality positively. Regular updates must be initiated and leaders need to play an important role in making sure feedback is collected from stakeholders and external advisors in order to make meaningful changes.

Academic leaders should also observe the teaching methods used by lecturers and provide constructive feedback to motivate them to keep improving themselves. Leaders should be seen as role models who act as the driving force behind teaching innovations. The common choice of using the lecture method should be minimised in order to promote learner centric education. Getting lecturers to think about the way they teach is a major task which should not be neglected. Using diverse teaching methods should be encouraged by getting lecturers to design modules which are comprehensive and detailed. Leaders should check the modules not only for effectiveness of content but also for delivery methods. These modules should be useful, actively used and updated by department members.

Ethical practices in setting questions papers, and grading students' work should be maintained at all times to uphold the integrity of educational institutions. Close analysis will show that effective teaching methods are always aligned with efficient assessment systems. Leaders should put in effort to evaluate not only teaching practices but also assessment practices. All question papers set for a course should be moderated by peers who are content experts and the moderated papers should be endorsed by academic leaders. This moderation and endorsement practice should also not only be done for final exams but also for coursework. As for the scripts marked by lecturers, a suitable sample size should be checked by peers and leaders. The time sacrificed and attention paid will help lecturers understand the emphasis that academic leaders put on maintaining the quality of assessment practices.

Evaluation of teaching should be conducted on a regular basis. In order to gain an in depth understanding of lecturers' strengths and weaknesses, evaluation should be conducted by students, peers and academic leaders. The information gathered should be analysed to enable leaders to give valuable feedback and to understand subordinates' training needs. Academic leaders need to play an active role in conducting class observations, analysing data from student evaluations and compiling relevant details from peer evaluations.



Building a culture where lecturers are encouraged to conduct research, write papers and publish is crucial for the success of private universities as lecturers can only be effective if they are motivated to learn by conducting research. Academic leaders need to provide support to enable lecturers to have formal training on writing research papers and time should be allocated for them to focus on conducting research. There should be a written agreement between lecturers and management that the time allocated will be used solely for research and achievable targets should be set for publications.

Intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards should be awarded for good teaching quality. Expectations should be explained clearly in writing to enable lecturers to work on improving themselves. The momentum of business success can only be maintained if universities analyze how well their lecturers are performing and use this information to reward lecturers with outstanding performance. Rewarding teaching excellence will have a positive effect on raising the profile of teaching.

## **2. Hypotheses of Research**

The information gathered from the literature review helped in constructing the following hypotheses. All six hypotheses have been proven to be true from the data gathered through this research.

### **2.1 Hypothesis 1**

There is a positive relationship between setting a clear key performance index and teaching quality in private universities.

### **2.2 Hypothesis 2**

There is a positive relationship between organising regular performance evaluations and teaching quality in private universities

### **2.3 Hypothesis 3**

There is a positive relationship between providing constructive feedback and teaching quality in private universities

### **2.4 Hypothesis 4**

There is a positive relationship between providing intrinsic rewards and teaching quality in private universities

### **2.5 Hypothesis 5**

There is a positive relationship between providing extrinsic rewards and teaching quality in private universities

### **2.6 Hypothesis 6**

There is a positive relationship between improving teaching quality and maximising monetary returns in private universities.

## **Conclusions**

Private universities need effective leadership in order for required changes to be implemented and strategic approaches to be adopted. Challenges faced in ensuring excellent teaching quality is provided to students can only be overcome if academic leaders work towards making improvements. Steps should be taken with a sense of urgency by having strategic planning to ensure that excellent teaching quality is part of the university's mission. Leaders in private universities face complex challenges which may not be present in other administrative roles. Leading universities requires leaders to use strategies that may not be necessarily the same as when leading other corporate sectors. Academic leaders should pay attention to what research has proven with regard to effective leadership skills which are required to lead universities to success. Effective leaders always transform their visions into a language which is accepted by stakeholders. A wide range of leadership styles must be adopted in order to be change agents who offer programmes which fulfill the current market needs and ensure that the delivery style is in accordance to students' current learning styles.

This research contributes knowledge to educational administration and management. Education contributes to improvement in living conditions for human beings. As the main goal of educational management is to create an environment that promotes and sustains teaching practices which are effective, administrators in the education sector play a key role in improving the quality of education offered. This study contributes knowledge to the function of academic leaders. In addition to that, it provides solutions to dealing with challenges faced by academic leaders in focusing on and improving teaching quality in private universities.



## Recommendations

This study raises an opportunity for future researchers to conduct research on the challenges faced by academic leaders in improving the quality of teaching in private universities. The main respondents of the research should be leaders who will be able to provide an insight into the world of academic leadership. Information can be obtained regarding steps taken to improve teaching quality and how effective they have been in making changes.

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