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Leadership Behaviours and Academic Performance in Iraqi Public Universities: A Review

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Abstract: In line with the "National Strategy 2009-2013" launched by the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR), this study proposed to investigates the behaviour of university leaders (transformational leadership or transactional leadership behaviour) in enhancing academic performance of Iraqi public universities (including teaching, research, service, and staff satisfaction). A review of the literature suggests that there is positive relationship between leadership behaviour and academic performance in higher education; however, there is a dearth of studies investigating this relationship. The results are expected to show that leadership behaviour has positive relationship on academic performance in Iraqi HEIs. (98 words)

Keywords: *Leadership behavior, academic performance, public universities, academic leaders*

1. Introduction

There is a large body of literature pertaining to leadership and job performance of middle managers in business; however, similar studies of leadership behaviour and academic performance in (HEIs) are lacking especially in the Arab countries. The context of this study is Iraq, a developing country in the redeveloping stage. Iraq is situated in the Middle South- west of the Asia with a population of 30 million people. As reported in the Report of Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2011), Iraq institutionalized the first college of law in 1908, which was subsequently followed by an increased number of colleges and academies between the 1920s and 1950s in various Iraqi cities. The first university was, the University of Baghdad in 1957, the University of Al-Mustansiriyah, was institutionalized in 1963, the University of Basrah in 1964 and the University of Mosul in 1967. Therefore, HEIs have considered teaching, research, and service of society as part of their mission. In 1975, the Iraqi government and leaders of HEIs rendered adequate aid in this sector by supporting various facilities, such as teaching, research, service, curriculum, laboratories, scholarship, and training in order to develop knowledge among society. Therefore, Iraq had one of the soundest educational systems in the 1970-1980s among the Arab world universities (Janabi & Urban, 2011). Iraqi 1991 to 2003, following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1991, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) enacted economic sanctions that kept Iraq away from the rest of the world. This led to the mass destruction of information technology and reduced support for academic staff to enhancing teaching method, research, and service in Iraqi HEIs. As a result of the wars, Iraqi HEIs suffered the destruction of many of its universities, as well as arson and looting, such as in the University of Basrah and Mustansiriyah (Report the Minister of Higher Education, 2012). Further, Iraq's lack of security forced hundreds of scientific intellectuals from various specializations to leave their universities. Iraq has been facing significant deterioration in HEIs because of weak international contact (Janabi & Urban, 2011). Therefore, the situation in which Iraqi HEIs has been deteriorating since 1991 and has led to a decline in education levels of Iraqi HEIs (Janabi & Urban, 2011; UNESCO, 2003). This has destroyed education in Iraq, and Iraqi universities have not appeared among the top universities of the world since 1991.

Darwish and Yousef (2000) and Swanson and Johnson (1975) mentioned that leadership behavior influences performance. In the higher education setting, Niles (1997) and Nordin (2011) argue that leadership behavior in HEIs can be viewed as transformational and transactional leadership behavior. Although researchers differ somewhat in their definitions of transformational leadership and its associated behaviors, it has been found that transformational leadership behaviors induce positive employee behaviors and organizational outcomes (Emery & Barker, 2007; Stashevsky & Koslowsky, 2006). Both transactional and transformational leadership behaviors show positive relationships with enhancing performance (Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995; Nordin, 2011). Transformational leadership behavior provides motivation and influence performance of followers (Bono & Judge, 2004). In addition, transactional leadership behavior makes use of contingent reward, and leaders display positive strengths to execute goals (Eid, Johnsen, Bartone, & Nissestad, 2008). In this study, the researcher investigates leadership behavior by examining the behavior of the university leaders and associates them with a particular behavior; namely transformational leadership or

transactional leadership behavior in university setting (Niles, 1997; Nordin, 2011). These leadership behaviors provide motivation and support to enable the staff to develop their achievement (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2011). The achievements of performance in most organizations depend on leadership. There is a need for more adaptive, flexible leadership in today's rapidly changing organizational landscape (Bass, Avolio, Jung & Berson, 2003). It is important to find, develop, and keep effective leaders for organizational success (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000; Zehner & Holton, 2004). According to Kouzes (1999), when followers work with leaders who care for them and encourage them, the followers feels better about them and perform at significantly higher levels. These leadership behaviors are characteristics of the transformational leadership behavior and transactional leadership behavior. In the context of HEIs, there seems to be a lack of empirical studies that link leadership behavior of the university leaders to achieve performance (Niles, 1997; Nordin, 2011).

2. Literature Review

Academic Performance: Academic performance is defined as a quantity that measures some elements of an institution or its activity (Gaither, Nedwek, & Neal, 1994). Academic performance is measured using Academic Performance Indicator (API). Due to the pressing needs of accountability and assessment, there is a demand in the use API which is defined as "a concrete piece of information about the condition or result of public action that is regularly produced, publicly reported, and systematically used for planning, monitoring, or resource allocation at the state or system level such indicators are intended to be used together, not singly or out of context" (Ewell, 1994). Further, API has been fundamentally defined as a quantitative measure related to an event or activity (Sapp, 1993). Academic performance indicators have become tools for guiding governance and improvement of HEIs (Dooris & Teeter, 1994). Thus, in the context of HEIs, the measure of performance in public universities must take into account academic performance indicators (API) including teaching, research, service, and academic satisfaction (Agha, 2007; Hashim, 2009; Zwain et al., 2012). However, little empirical research has been conducted to investigate academic performance in Iraqi HEIs (Iraq-HEOC, 2007; Zwain et al., 2012). Therefore, in present study, academic performance is operationalized as quantitative measure linked to academic activities of teaching, research, service, and satisfaction of academic staff (Tang & Chamberlain, 1997; Boyer, 1990; Hashim, 2009; Johnes, 1996; Mert1er, 2001). Hence, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Iraq recently launched the "National Strategy 2009-2013" (Janabi & Urban, 2011, p. 97). The strategic plan 2009-2013 covers the following aspects with precise objectives and a proper implementation schedule:

- Providing support for higher education in various ways to develop university leaders.
- Providing support for the MOHESR strategic plan together with other fields of higher
- Education in Iraq.
- Enhancement of faculty and staff.
- Develop Information Technology current and future.
- Study scholarships.
- Revising the curricula.
- Encourage and increase research productivity.
- Dissemination of research results.
- Minimizing brain drain through providing a basis for encouraging faculty, staff, and
- Students to remain loyal to the country.
- International contact.
- Develop teaching method.
- Develop curriculum 10-20% per year.
- Develop knowledge creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge.
- Procedure justice.

Leadership Behaviour: For the purpose of the current study, leadership behaviour is defined as an interaction between two or more members of a group which often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. Thus, leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation and competencies of others in the group (Bass, 1990). According to Bass and Avolio (1994) and Bass (1985), transformational leadership is described by five factors;

- Idealized influence Behavior leaders behave in ways in which their actions are centred on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission. The leaders consider the needs of others over their own personal needs and share risks with followers.
- Idealized Influence Attributes: Respect, trust, and faith.

- Inspirational Motivation leaders motivate and inspire followers by providing meaning and challenge to work. These leaders engage followers in envisioning attractive future states and create communicated expectations that followers want to meet.
- Intellectual Stimulation leaders stimulate followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. New ideas and creative problem solutions are solicited from followers who are included in the process of addressing problems and finding solutions.
- Individualized Consideration leaders pay special attention to the needs of each individual follower for achievement and growth. Followers are developed to successively higher levels of potential.

According to Avolio and Bass (2004) and Bass (1999) transactional leadership occurs when mutual interactions exist between leader and their followers in which the leader can affect followers (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1999) through behaviors such as:

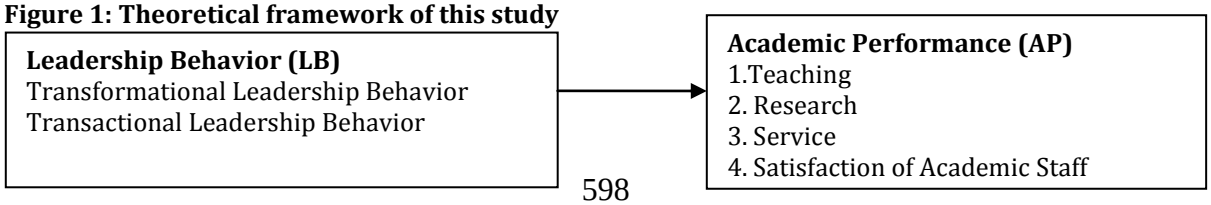
- Contingent Reward: Contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, recognizes accomplishments.
- Management-by-Exception (active): Watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, takes corrective action.
- Management-by-Exception (passive): Intervenes only if standards are not met.

Transactional leadership focuses on monitoring and controlling subordinates (Bass, 1985). It also involves contingent rewards based on the behaviors of subordinate. Transactional leadership encompasses positive exchange of expected performance and rewards between subordinates and leaders (Bono & Judge, 2004; Bass, 1985). Transactional and transformational are two competing leadership paradigms. Transactional leadership has shown to be effective in achieving short-term goals, but transformational leadership is more effective in achieving long-term goals (Hautala, 2005). Theorists and researchers believe transformational leadership is essential for organizations to improve performance. Bass (1990) believed transformational leadership allows organizations to increase worker interest and productivity of followers. Situational Leadership behavior is based on circumstances. A leader is flexible and moves from one style to another. For example, a coaching style is effective in an emergency while an autocratic style serve well in a deadline situation. Situational leaders use multi-directional communication to increase performance. The other leadership behavior which is identified for this present study is transactional leadership behavior. Bass (1985) referred to transactional leadership as an exchange relationship between leader and followers. Transactional leadership is grounded in the social exchange theories, which recognize the reciprocal nature of leadership (Deluga, 1990). The transactional leadership process builds upon exchange whereby the leader offers rewards (or threatens punishments) for the performance of desired behaviors and the completion of certain tasks (Bass and Avolio, 1997). The attraction of combinative aspects of leadership behavior lies in its simplicity and its apparent effectiveness in improving followers' satisfaction of the leader. However, much more research is needed to further explore this domain of leadership behavior. However, these leadership behaviors provide motivation and support to enable the staff to develop their achievement (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2011). In the context of HEIs, there seems to be a lack of empirical studies that link leadership behavior of the university leaders to achieve performance (Niles, 1997; Nordin, 2011).

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between leadership behavior and academic performance among academicians in Iraqi public universities. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this research is derived from academicians (academic leaders and academic staff) academic leaders involved deans, deputy deans and heads of department whereas academic staff involved professor and associate professor in Iraqi HEIs. The National Strategy (2009-2013) will only succeed with the active participation of the academicians (academic leaders and academic staff) from the various institutes of HEIs. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study is the academic leaders and academicians because they have more experience, leadership role in decision making, and they are entrusted to guide their institutions towards achieving world class status. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of this study.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of this study



This study proposed that leadership behavior in HEIs setting can be deemed as transformational and transactional leadership behavior (Niles, 1997). Both transactional and transformational leadership behavior show a positive relationship in enhancing performance (Dubinsky et al., 1995; Emery & Barker, 2007; Stashevsky & Koslowsky, 2006; Nordin, 2011). Transformational leaders influence motivation and performance of employees (Bono & Judge, 2004), thus increases performance (Geyer & Steyrer, 1998) among employees. In addition, transactional leadership behavior makes use of contingent reward, and leaders display positive strengthening to execute goal (Eid et al., 2008). Leadership in Iraqi HEIs is crucial in achieving excellence in academic performance (Taher & Amian, 2007). Whereas, there is a large body of existing knowledge pertaining to leadership and job performance of middle managers in business, while similar studies of leadership behavior and academic performance in higher education institutions (HEIs) are lacking especially in the context of this study (Taher & Amian, 2007). Therefore, the following hypotheses are postulated:

H1: There is positive relationship between leadership behavior and academic performance in Iraqi HEIs.
H1a: There is positive relationship between transformational leadership behavior and academic performance in Iraqi HEIs.
H1b: There is positive relationship between transactional leadership behavior and academic performance in Iraqi HEIs.

4. Expected Results

The findings of the present study will contribute to the body of literature in leadership and higher education. It is expected that there will be positive relationship between leadership behavior and academic performance in the Iraqi public universities. The findings of this study may also address the gaps identified in literature. From the practical standpoint, the expected results of this study suggests that the evaluation of academic performance among academic staff will provide some information for the academic leaders of Iraqi HEIs as well as the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in support of the objectives of the National Strategy 2009-2013.

5. Conclusion

This proposed study investigates the behavior of university leaders in enhancing academic performance of Iraqi public universities. A review of the literature suggests that there is positive relationship between leadership behaviour and academic performance in higher education.

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