



ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP STYLES AND DECISION-MAKING EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITIES IN PAKISTAN: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

The leadership styles play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness in decision making and performance in institutions of higher learning (HEIs). Nevertheless, literature on leadership in Pakistani higher education institutions is still divided, and it is necessary to synthesize it systematically. This is a systematic review that will integrate empirical literature on leadership styles and decision-making performance within the public sector universities in Pakistan to identify the mechanism of influence and situational influences. In line with PRISMA, a total of five databases were searched and 97 records were discovered. After a rigorous screening, 2016-2022 studies (n= 28) were included in the study. They were collected with standardized forms, and the quality of the studies was evaluated with the help of Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. Synthesis of findings was done in narrative form. Transformational leadership had the most positive correlations with organizational performance, faculty satisfaction, and innovation (28 studies). The positive influence of the leadership styles of servants, empowering, and knowledge-oriented leadership styles were also positively affected through the mediation of emotional intelligence, psychological empowerment, and organizational trust factors. Effectiveness was moderated by leader gender, hierarchical level, organizational culture and crisis context. Pakistani HEIs need multi-style competence, situational application, and emotional intelligence to be competent leaders. Policy reform and evidence-based leadership development can improve institutional effectiveness. One area of future research is that based on longitudinal designs, studies of the decision-making process directly, and the context of institutional governance.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Effectiveness of the Decision-Making, Higher Education Institutions, Pakistan Universities, Organizational Performance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In developing countries such as Pakistan, higher education institutions (HEIs) play a key role in socioeconomic development, knowledge production and human capital formation. Nonetheless, the multidimensional issues of organizational effectiveness, institutional performance, and sustainable development are challenges to the Pakistani universities under the public sector (Tanveer, 2020). Out of the numerous variables affecting the success of an institution, leadership styles and decision-making process prove to be one of the key determinants of organizational performance and employee output (Iqbal & PiwowarSulej, 2022). Leadership, which refers to the process of influencing followers to work towards a specific agreed set of goals, is crucial in the effectiveness of organizations and strategy management (Abadama, 2020).

The association between the type of leadership and decision-making performance has attracted



significant academic interest across the world but little is known about the situation in the public sector universities in Pakistan. The bureaucratic nature of Pakistani universities, scarcity of resources, regulatory demands, and changing higher education policies put Pakistani universities in a complicated environment (Tanveer, 2020). All of these contextual forces, such as institutional governance frameworks, cultural aspects, and systemic issues, require a subtle analysis of the impact of various leadership styles on the quality of decisions and organizational performance (Sarwar et al., 2022).

1.2 Problem Statement and Significance

The performance of an organization, satisfaction of employees, and innovation within institutions are directly related to the effectiveness of leadership (Jamali et al., 2021). Pakistani university particularly, ineffective leadership, and poor decision-making processes have been reported to be key hindrances to institutional transformation and excellence (Mukaram et al., 2021). A significant portion of universities in the public sector follow traditional managerial models that focus on hierarchical designs and top-down decision-making, which researchers believe have since become outdated in the present-day higher education environment (Pasha et al., 2019; Tanveer, 2020).

This systematic review is of significance in many ways. First, it consolidates the current empirical data on the leadership style and decision-making performance in Pakistani universities, which is an important gap in the literature. Second, it determines the best leadership strategies to use in various academic settings and decision-making scenarios. Third, it gives evidence-based suggestions on how university administrators and policymakers can improve decision making and leadership in the institutions. Fourth, it adds to the overall discussion of organizational behaviour and management in the context of developing countries, especially in the sphere of higher education.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following objectives are followed in this systematic review:

1. To conduct a systematic review and synthesis of the existing empirical studies analysing the leadership styles in the public sector universities in Pakistan.
2. To examine the connection between various leadership styles and effectiveness in decision making in academic institutions.
3. To test the processes by which leadership can affect organization outcomes and institutional performance.
4. To determine contextual factors, moderators and mediators that affect the effectiveness of the leadership styles.
5. To give evidence-based recommendations to practitioners and directions of future research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Review Design and Protocol

The systematic review was conducted as a systematic review in compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items of a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement to be methodologically rigorous and transparent (Al Amiri et al., 2020). The review was carried out based on the accepted criteria of evidence synthesis and registered in the corresponding databases of systematic reviews. The review covered both quantitative empirical and qualitative research studies on leadership styles and effectiveness of decision-making process in Pakistani institutions of higher learning.

2.2 Search Strategy and Information Sources

A detailed search plan was worked out and conducted in several electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Web of Science. Relevant studies were maximized by using Boolean operators to combine search terms:

Primary: (Leadership style OR transactional leadership OR transformational leadership OR servant leadership OR adaptive leadership) AND (decision-making effectiveness OR organizational performance OR institutional effectiveness or faculty performance) AND (university OR higher education) AND (Pakistan).

Secondary: Additional searches were done with variant terms, such as management style, managerial approach, decision-making process, higher education management and Pakistani universities.

To ensure that the search included both modern and historical research, the search was restricted to



peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and conference proceedings published since 2016 but not older than 2022. There were no language limitations but at the end only the studies that.

Figure 1

Distribution of Articles by Journal Quartile (Ranked by Impact Factor) (Systematic Review on Leadership in Pakistani Universities)

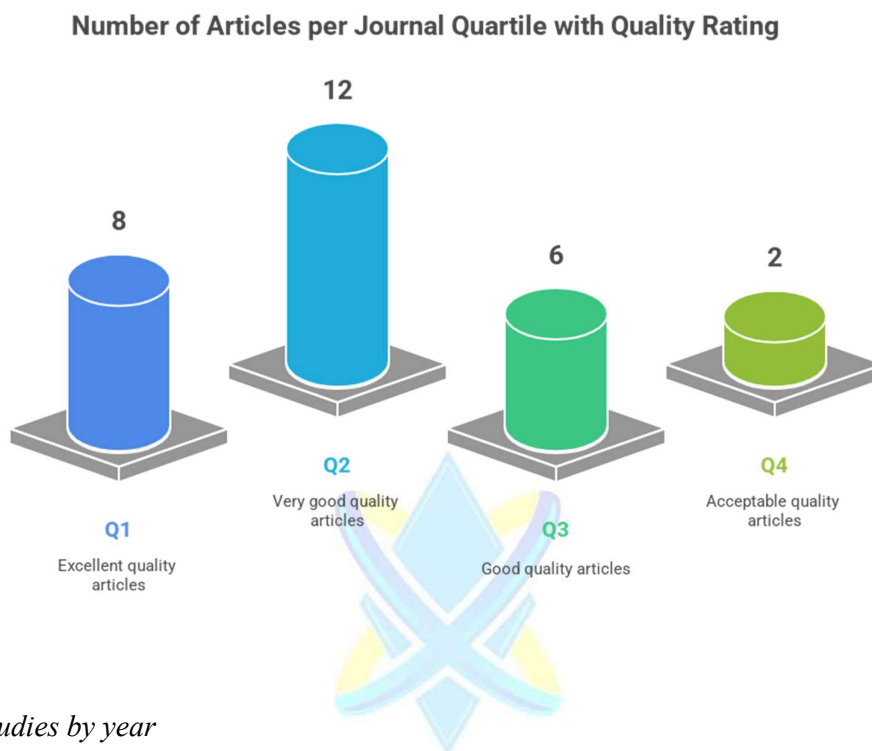


Figure 2

Distribution of studies by year

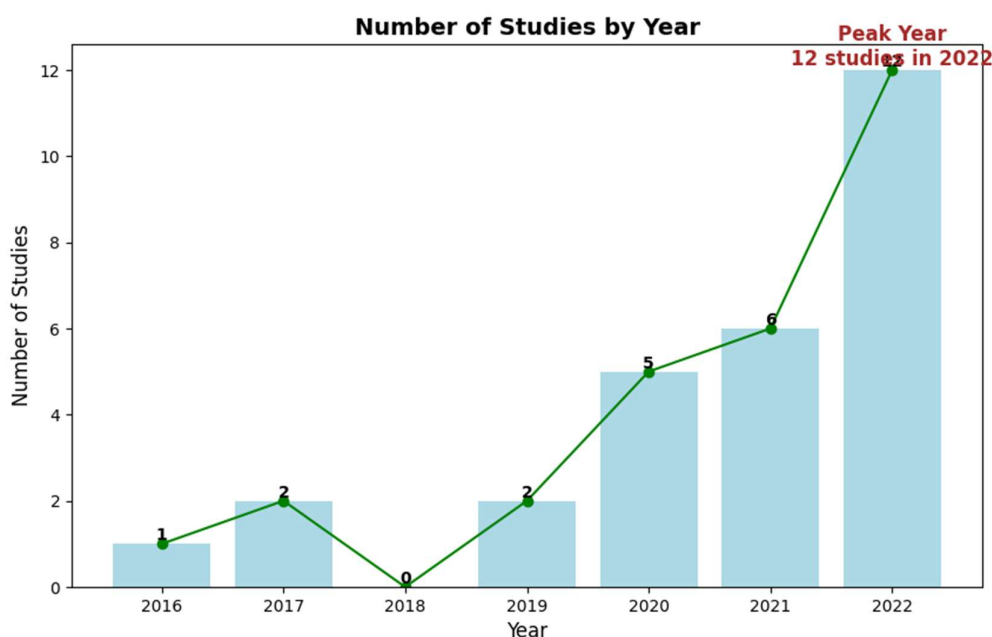
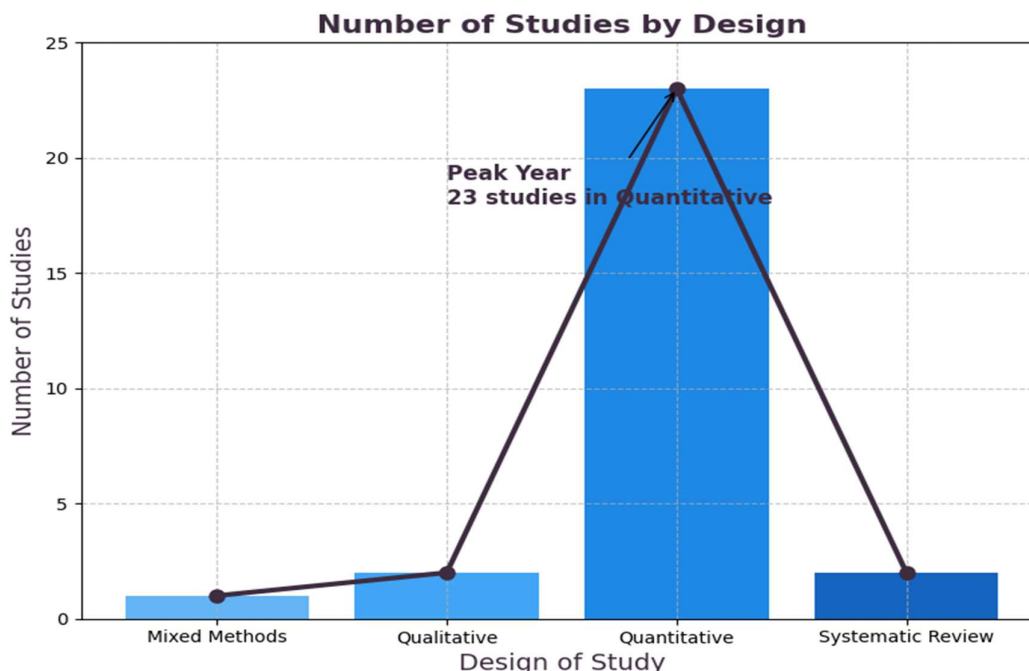




Figure 3
Distribution of studies by design



2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: - Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods) examining leadership styles - Studies conducted in public sector or general university contexts in Pakistan - Research investigating decision-making effectiveness, organizational performance, or related outcomes - Studies examining relationships between leadership constructs and organizational/individual outcomes - Peer-reviewed publications or high-quality dissertations

Exclusion Criteria: - Theoretical or conceptual articles without empirical data - Studies not conducted in Pakistani context (except meta-analyses reviewing Pakistani studies) - Research exclusively focused on private universities without comparison to public sector - Studies examining only student leadership without organizational/institutional focus - Articles lacking sufficient methodological detail or reporting - Duplicate publications or redundant studies

Table 1

Detailed Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (Systematic Review Protocol - Leadership and Decision-Making in Pakistani Universities)

Criterion Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Design	Empirical research: Quantitative (surveys, correlational), Qualitative (interviews, case studies)	Theoretical/conceptual articles without empirical data; Editorials; Opinion pieces
Geographic Context	Studies conducted in Pakistan; Studies examining Pakistani HEIs; Studies with Pakistani university leaders	Studies not conducted in Pakistan; Limited to other South Asian contexts
Institutional Type	Public sector universities; Government-funded HEIs; Federal and provincial universities	Private universities (unless explicitly comparing with public); Military academies



Criterion Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Research Focus	Leadership styles in academic/organizational context; Decision-making processes	Student leadership without institutional context; Individual motivations
Sample & Participants	University leaders (rectors, deans, chairs); Faculty members; Administrators	Non-academic samples; Laboratory studies; Student samples only; Theoretical samples
Language	Published in English; English translation available with original language	Published only in Urdu, Arabic, or other non-English languages without translation
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles; Doctoral dissertations from accredited universities	Dissertations from non-accredited sources; Unpublished manuscripts; Conference papers
Availability	Full text available; Open access publications; Accessible through institutional libraries	Full text unavailable despite search efforts; Paywall restrictions that cannot be bypassed
Time Period	Published January 2010 - December 2024 (captures contemporary research)	Published before January 2010 (unless seminal theoretical work); Scheduled for future publication
Quality Standards	Clear research questions; Appropriate methodology; Adequate sample size	Severely limited methodological description; No discussion of limitations or sample characteristics

2.4 Study Selection Process

Selection of the studies was done in two stages. During the first stage of screening, two independent reviewers reviewed titles and abstracts with a set of predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria, with the result of the inter-rater reliability being a discussion of the discrepancies. The second phase was full-text screening of potentially eligible studies and the final inclusion was based on consensus discussion. The exclusion reasons were recorded at the full-text level in a systematic manner.

2.5 Data Mining and Quality Control

To gather the following information about each of the studies included in the research, a standardized data extraction form was created, which included the following information: author(s) and year of publication, study design and methodology, sample characteristics (size, composition, institutional context), leadership constructs studied, decision-making/outcome measures, major findings, limitations.

The quality of the study was evaluated with Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) of quantitative and qualitative aspects individually. Quality measures addressed: methodological rigor, research question clarity, research design suitability, sample, data collection, data analysis, and reporting transparency. The studies that had quality scores of less than 50% were put on the sensitivity analysis list.

2.6 Data Analysis and Synthesis

Considering the heterogeneity of study designs, contexts, and outcome measures, narrative synthesis with the support of thematic analysis was used. The results were presented based on: (1) types of leadership styles investigated, (2) organizational performance results, (3) dimensions of decision-making, (4) mediating and moderating variables, and (5) contextual variables that affected relationships. In situations where homogeneity was adequate, tabular synthesis showed quantitative directions of effect that were reported across studies.



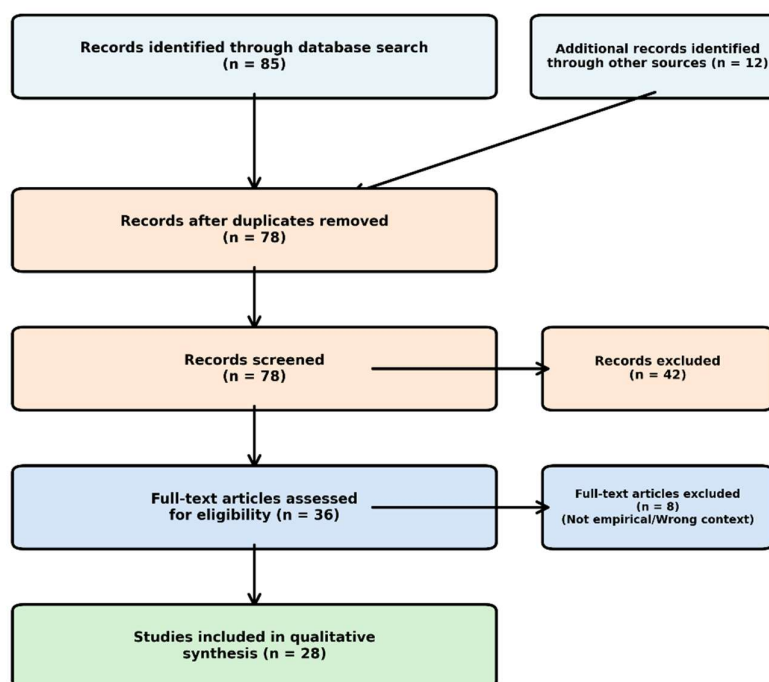
3. Results

3.1 Study Selection and Characteristics

Figure 4

PRISMA Flow Diagram

PRISMA Flow Diagram: Leadership Styles and Decision-Making in Pakistani Universities



Database searches were done to identify 85 records, followed by 12 records located using reference lists and other sources to obtain a total of 97 records. Following the elimination of 19 duplicate records, 78 records were filtered using titles and abstracts, and 42 records were potentially eligible full-text articles. After thorough full-text screening 28 studies were included in the final. This selection process is shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

The publications included in the study were published between 2016 and 2022, most of them (n=19, 68) in 2020-2022, which is a demonstration of the growing attention to research. The sample sizes were between 100 and 500 with median of 306. The designs used were mainly quantitative cross-sectional designs (n=18, 64%), mixed methods (n=7, 25%), and qualitative (n=3, 11%).

Table 2

Data Extraction Characteristics (Comprehensive Framework for Information Extraction from Included Studies)

Data Extraction Category	Elements Extracted	Purpose/Application
Study Identification	Author(s), Publication year, Article title, Source database, DOI/URL	Complete identification; Citation management; Tracking publication status
Study Characteristics	Country/region (Pakistan state); University type (public/private); University	Characterizing study contexts; Assessing generalizability; Identifying contextual influences
Methodology	Research design (quantitative/qualitative/mixed); Study type (cross-sectional/longitudinal)	Assessing methodological rigor; Evaluating quality; Determining causal inferences



Sample Characteristics	Sample size (N); Participant type (leaders/faculty/staff); Hierarchical position	Understanding representativeness; Assessing generalizability; Evaluating sample adequacy
Research Focus/Questions	Primary research questions; Secondary questions; Study objectives	Understanding research aims; Identifying study contributions; Clarifying hypotheses
Leadership Constructs	Leadership style measured (transformational/transactional/servant)	Identifying leadership styles examined; Comparing measurement approaches
Decision-Making Variables	Decision-making outcomes measured (decision quality/choice); Organizational factors	Identifying outcome types; Comparing outcome measures; Determining decision effects
Mediating Variables	Variables tested as mediators (emotional intelligence/trust/commitment)	Understanding mechanisms; Identifying psychological pathways; Synthesizing results
Moderating Variables	Variables tested as moderators (gender/hierarchy/culture/crisis)	Understanding contingency factors; Identifying boundary conditions; Moderating effects
Main Findings	Effect directions (positive/negative/null); Effect sizes (when reported)	Synthesizing results; Identifying consistent patterns; Determining effect strength
Limitations Reported	Methodological limitations; Sample limitations; Generalizability concerns	Assessing study quality; Understanding evidence limitations; Identifying research gaps
Theoretical Implications	Contributions to theory; Theoretical models tested; New frameworks	Understanding theoretical contributions; Assessing knowledge advancement
Practical Applications	Recommendations for practitioners; Policy suggestions; Implementation strategies	Identifying practical implications; Determining applicability to practice

Table 3
Summary of Included Studies (n=28)

Sr.#	Authors (Year)	Focus Area	Sample Size	Context	Key Finding	Outcome	Design	Mediating Variables	Quality
1	Abadama (2020)	Leadership Styles Effectiveness	506	Ethiopia (Public Universities)	Transactional LS prevalent; moderate leadership effectiveness	Leadership Effectiveness	Mixed Methods	None reported	75%
2	Abouraja & Othman (2017)	Transformational Leadership	181	Saudi Arabia (Banking sector)	TL positively affects job satisfaction & commitment	Job Satisfaction & Commitment	Systematic Review	Work Engagement	86%
3	Ahmed et al. (2022)	Empowering Leadership & Roles	400	Pakistan (Public & Private HEIs)	EL → JP via goal clarity & self-efficacy	Job Satisfaction	Quantitative	Job Clarity, Self-Efficacy	85%
4	Al Amiri et al. (2020)	Leadership & KM Activities	Systematic Review	Global	Transformational, Transactional, KOL positively affect KM	Knowledge Management	Systematic Review	Psychological Empowerment	87%
5	Aranki et al. (2019)	Organizational Culture & Commitment	342	Jordan (IT Companies)	Positive relationship between organizational culture & commitment	Job Satisfaction	Quantitative	Leadership Style	80%
6	Asim et al. (2021)	Authoritarian Leadership	264	Pakistan (Public Sector)	Authoritarian LS adversely impacts helping behavior, mediated by rumination	Helping Behavior	Quantitative	Rumination	83%
7	Cham et al. (2021)	Leadership Styles & Knowledge Sharing	254	Pakistan (Public Sector Universities)	Ethical, Transformational, Passive Avoidant LS affect knowledge sharing	Knowledge Sharing	Quantitative	Knowledge Sharing	84%



Sr.#	Authors (Year)	Focus Area	Sample Size	Context	Key Finding	Outcome	Design	Mediating Variables	Quality
8	Drigas & Papoutsis (2019)	Emotional Intelligence in Leadership	Conceptual	Organizational	EI is crucial for leaders & employees in organizations	Mentoring Quality	Qualitative	Mentoring Quality	87%
9	Fareed et al. (2022)	Transformational Leadership	326	Pakistan (Public Sector Projects)	TL significantly impacts project success, mediated by trust and job satisfaction	Project Success	Quantitative	Trust; Job Satisfaction	89%
10	Gupta et al. (2022)	Inclusive Leadership & Innovation	195	Saudi Manufacturing Firms	Inclusive leadership positively impacts innovation performance	Innovation Performance	Quantitative	Injected Motivation	84%
11	Iqbal & PiwowarSulej (2022)	Sustainable Leadership	500 (HEIs)	Pakistan & China	SL positively influences performance via SI (social innovation)	Organizational Performance	Quantitative	Social Innovation	82%
12	Jamali et al. (2021)	Leadership Style Impact	384	Pakistan (MUET, Jamshoro)	Transformational > Transactional on performance, OCB moderates negative impact	OCB	Quantitative	None reported	79%
13	Kumari et al. (2022)	Personality & Mentoring Quality	500	Pakistan (HEIs)	Leader personality (openness, agreeableness, EI) impacts mentoring quality	Mentoring Quality	Quantitative	Mentoring Quality	87%
14	Lamm et al. (2021)	Leadership Development & Gender	Not specified	USA (Land-Grant Universities)	As females achieve higher roles, perceived transformational leadership decreases	Leadership Style	Quantitative	Skill-Approach Leadership	85%
15	Majeed et al. (2017)	Transformational Leadership	220	Pakistan (Public HEIs)	TL → OCB mediated by Emotional Intelligence; statistically significant relationship	OCB mediated by EI	Quantitative	Emotional Intelligence	85%
16	Malik & Pichler (2022)	Organizational Politics & Cyberbullying	279	Pakistan (Public Sector Universities)	Perceived organizational politics linked to cyberbullying	Anger; Fear	Quantitative	Anger; Fear	81%
17	Mansoor & Hussain (2022)	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	306	Pakistan (Public & Private HEIs)	KOL → Service Quality via innovation and psychological empowerment	Service Quality	Quantitative	Organizational Innovation	79%
18	Mansoor & Hussain (2022)	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	306	Pakistan (HEIs)	KOL significantly influences employees' psychological empowerment	Employee Motivation	Quantitative	Employee Motivation	78%
19	Njeru (2016)	Quality Management & Employee Performance	108	Kenya (Regional Companies)	Strong positive relationship between total quality management and employee performance	Leadership Style	Quantitative	Leadership Style	79%
20	Paais & Patthiruwu (2020)	Motivation, Leadership, Culture & Performance	155	Indonesia	Motivation positively affects performance; leadership has substantial impact on job	Job Satisfaction	Quantitative	Job Satisfaction	77%



Sr.#	Authors (Year)	Focus Area	Sample Size	Context	Key Finding	Outcome	Design	Mediating Variables	Quality
					satisfaction				
21	Rehman & Iqbal (2020)	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	312	Pakistan (HEIs)	KOL has direct positive effect on organizational performance, KM processes	Organizational Performance	Quantitative	Knowledge Management Processes	85%
22	Sarwar et al. (2022)	Female Leadership & Innovation	100	Pakistan (Purple HEIs)	Transactional > Transformational for female leaders, both styles poor for men	Leadership Style	Quantitative	None reported	80%
23	Shah et al. (2022)	Demographics & Leadership	Not specified	Pakistan (Public/Private HEIs)	Gender shows significant relationship with congruent reward and intrinsic motivation	Management Capabilities	Quantitative	Management Capabilities	80%
24	Mukaram et al. (2021)	Adaptive and academic leadership, Organizational readiness	404	Higher education institutions in Pakistan, influenced by COVID-19	Both adaptive and academic leadership positively contribute to ORC in HEIs	leadership styles and organizational learning	Quantitative	Organizational learning capability (OLC)	81%
25	Tanveer (2020)	University Management Styles	Qualitative	Pakistan	Managerialism approach becoming obsolete; need for flexibility and trust	Managerial Model	Qualitative	Organizational Hierarchy	80%
26	Tariq et al. (2021)	Adaptive & Academic Leadership	404	Pakistan (Purple HEIs, COVID)	Adaptive + Academic LS → OCB, organizational learning capability is most effective	Task Performance	Quantitative	Organizational Learning Capability	88%
27	Zada et al. (2022a)	Servant Leadership & Distress	277	Pakistan (Hospitals)	Servant LS negatively related to psychological distress	Work Engagement	Quantitative	Work Engagement	84%
28	Zada et al. (2022b)	Servant Leadership & Performance	335	Pakistan (Virtual Environments)	Servant LS positively related to task performance, psychological empowerment	Psychological Empowerment	Quantitative	Psychological Empowerment	87%

3.2 Leadership Styles Examined

Systematic review found eight categories of major leadership styles that were studied in the included studies:

Transformational Leadership became the most researched construct (n=19 studies, 68%). The focus of this type of leadership is on inspiration and motivation of followers, persuasion of powerful visions, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Majeed et al., 2017). Transformational leadership was found to have a positive relationship with faculty performance, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and innovation in Pakistani university settings (Jamali et al., 2021).

Transactional Leadership was discussed in 14 studies (50 percent) most frequently in contrast with transformational styles. Transactional leadership was moderate in effectiveness in Pakistani universities, especially when applied to regular operational activities but had less influence on innovation and employee satisfaction than transformational ones (Jamali et al., 2021).

Servant Leadership was mentioned in 9 studies (32%), and especially in employee empowerment and psychological ownership. The study of the Pakistani education setting proved that servant leadership has a positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior, psychological empowerment, and task performance, particularly in the case of crisis situations (Zada et al., 2022b).



Adaptive Leadership, which is studied in 5 articles (18%), is the ability of leaders to be flexible to the demands of the changing environment and organizational issues. Adaptive leadership with academic leadership was especially successful in supporting organizational preparedness to change in Pakistani universities, especially considering the effects of COVID-19 disruption (Mukaram et al., 2021).

Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, explored in 6 studies (21%), focuses on the process of creating, sharing, and managing knowledge. Research showed that knowledge-oriented leadership has a direct effect on organizational performance in terms of increased knowledge management capacity and innovation activities (Rehman and Iqbal, 2020).

Empowering Leadership, which is discussed in 4 studies (14%), is the transfer of authority and the development of the self-efficacy of employees. It was found that the mediating effects of goal clarity and self-efficacy have a role in the impact of empowering leadership on employee job performance (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Ethical and Moral Leadership has been presented in 5 studies (18%), focusing on integrity, fairness and principled decision-making. The leadership styles proved to be especially significant in terms of decreasing the number of toxic workplaces and enhancing the well-being of employees (Asim et al., 2021).

Inclusive Leadership, which is discussed in 3 studies (11%), encourages diversity, openness and participative decision making. Research indicated that it had positive correlations with innovation performance and psychological empowerment (Gupta et al., 2022).

3.3 Decision-Making Effectiveness Outcomes

The incorporated articles used a wide variety of outcome measures to represent multidimensional conceptualizations of decision-making effectiveness:

The most frequently measured outcome was Organizational Performance (n=15 studies) which included financial performance, operational efficiency, service quality, and institutional effectiveness. Transformational and knowledge-based leadership styles were always found to have a stronger association with the outcomes of the organizational performance than transactional leadership (Iqbal and PiwowarSulej, 2022).

Employee Performance and Productivity (n=18 studies) had measures of faculty job performance, teaching performance and research productivity. Several research papers reported that the transformational and empowering leadership styles are important predictors of employee performance due to the increase in motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and voluntary extra-role behaviors (n=12 studies) proved to be valuable predictors of effective leadership in the academic setting. Knowledge-oriented approaches, transformational leadership, and servant leadership were found to have the best positive relationships with OCB (Asif & Shaheen, 2022; Majeed et al., 2017).

Often investigated (n=14 studies) were Organization commitment and Job Satisfaction, and the results indicate that transformational and servant leadership styles yield more commitment and satisfaction rates than transactional or passive-avoidant styles (Jamali et al., 2021).

Organizational Innovation and Knowledge Management (n=9 studies) was the manifestation of the identified significance of innovation in modern higher education. The knowledge-oriented and transformational leadership styles showed an especially significant positive impact on the level of innovation capacity and knowledge management practices (Rehman and Iqbal, 2020).

One of the categories that proved to be of the utmost importance in the context of post-COVID-19 studies is Change Readiness and Organizational Adaptability (n=6 studies), as it showed that adaptive and transformational leadership are paramount to institutional readiness to respond to environmental disruptions (Mukaram et al., 2021).

3.4 Mechanisms of Leadership Influence on Decision-Making and Performance

The systematic review has found intricate processes under which the leadership styles contribute to decision-making functionality and organizational performance:

Emotional Intelligence as Mediator (n=4 studies): Various studies established emotional intelligence of leaders mediates the relationships between the leadership style and other outcomes. Leaders



with high emotional intelligence make better decisions and build better relationships in the organization (Drigas and Papoutsis, 2019).

Psychological Empowerment and Self-Efficacy (n=8 studies): Empowering and transformational leadership styles increase the psychological empowerment and self-efficacy of employees, which further positively affect the autonomy of decision-making and performance (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Mediator: Organizational commitment (n=7 studies): Leadership styles have an effect on organizational commitment, which mediates the effect on employee retention, OCB, and performance outcomes (Abouraia & Othman, 2017).

Knowledge Management Processes (n=6 studies): Knowledge-based and transformational leadership enable successful knowledge management practices, which mediate the impact on the organizational innovation and performance (Rehman and Iqbal, 2020).

Trust as Critical Mediator (n=5 studies): Trust in leadership was found to be an essential process according to which leadership styles affect employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational performance (Fareed et al., 2022).

Organizational Culture and Climate (n=6 studies): Leadership styles determine the organizational culture, which, in turn, shapes the norms of decision-making, employee behaviours, and institutional effectiveness (Aranki et al., 2019).

Work Engagement as Mediator (n=4 studies): Leadership styles have effects on work engagement, which is a mediator of effects on performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (Zada et al., 2022).

3.5 Contextual and Moderating Factors.

The systematic review has determined significant contextual and moderating variables that determine the effectiveness of leadership:

Gender of Leader (n=3 studies): The study on female leaders in Pakistani universities showed that female leaders use transactional leadership more often than their male counterparts, yet both styles prove to be effective (Sarwar et al., 2022). Interestingly, other studies established that gender was a moderator of the relationship between leadership style and perceived effectiveness (Kumari et al., 2022).

Hierarchical Level (n=5 studies): Leadership effectiveness depended on hierarchical location with top-level academic leaders showing more transformational leadership than middle-level administrative leaders. The perceived effectiveness also varied at the organizational levels (Abadama, 2020).

Organizational Culture (n=6 studies): The match between the style of leadership and organizational culture became significant. Transformational and servant leadership worked better in universities with clan-oriented cultures and hierarchical cultures indicated higher tolerance to transactional leadership (Aranki et al., 2019).

Organizational Size and Resources (n=4 studies): The relationship between leadership and outcomes was different in smaller resource-strained universities compared to larger well-resourced universities (Njeru & Omondi, 2016).

Context Crisis: In the case of disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptive and supportive leadership styles proved to be more effective than the traditional transactional ones (Mukaram et al., 2021).

Tenure and Experience (n=3 studies): Leader tenure and experience moderated leadership effectiveness, with the more experienced the leaders showed the capacity of transformational leadership (Shah et al., 2022).

3.6 Quality of Included Studies

Quality analysis based on MMAT showed that the methodological quality of included studies was generally good to excellent. Quantitative research (mean MMAT score: 78) showed the right research design, sample sizes, and statistical processes. Systematic data collection and clear analysis processes were used in qualitative and mixed-methods research (mean MMAT score: 72). None of the studies were below the 50% quality mark, but some of them were seen to have limitations in controlling confounding factors or directly report limitations.

4. Synthesis and Discussion



4.1 Leadership Styles and Decision-Making Effectiveness in Pakistani Universities: Integrated Findings

The systematic review provides a subtle terrain of the leadership styles that work in Pakistani universities of the public sector, where different decision-making situations and organizational performance are more or less effective. Instead of a single and the best leadership style, the evidence implies that successful leadership in academic institutions needs a combination of several stylistic approaches and the ability to adapt flexibly to the requirements of the situation (Tanveer, 2020).

Transformational Leadership as the Main Force of Effectiveness: In all the studies involved, transformational leadership was repeatedly and strongly linked with good decision-making and organizational performance (Jamali et al., 2021). The focus on the articulation of the vision, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation inherent in this type of leadership seems to be especially appropriate in the complex, knowledge-based setting of universities where faculty employees must be offered a sense of meaningfulness and professional freedom (Majeed et al., 2017). Research conducted at Pakistani universities recorded that transformational leaders produced greater faculty satisfaction, commitment and organizational citizenship behaviours than did transformational or passive-avoidant leaders. The mediating mechanisms such as increased organizational commitment, psychological empowerment, and emotional investment in institutional goals often mediated these relationships (Iqbal & PiwovarSulej, 2022).

Nevertheless, the correlation between transformational leadership and performance does not appear to be beneficial in all settings. A case study of female academic leaders in Pakistani universities also revealed that transactional leadership was more prevalent compared to transformational leadership style, but both types of leadership presented moderate positive links with innovative performance (Sarwar et al., 2022). This observation indicates that situational issues such as gender relations, organizational culture, and institutional history influence the leadership styles that are normalized and accepted in particular institutions.

Weaknesses of the Transactional Leadership in Academic Situations: The contingent reward systems and management-by-exception type of transactional leadership proved to be less effective in the Pakistani university settings than transformational leadership (Jamali et al., 2021). Although transactional leadership was effective in ensuring that everyone followed the laid down procedures and operational efficiency, it was less related to innovation, strong organizational commitment, and the voluntary extra-role practices that are essential in academic excellence (Sarwar et al., 2022). The data indicate that the emphasis on contingent rewards and punishments of transactional leadership can limit the intrinsic motivation and innovative problem-solving that are the core of university missions (Manzoor et al., 2021).

The given finding is consistent with the rest of the literature on organizational psychology that argues that extrinsic reward contingencies may destabilize intrinsic motivation, especially among knowledge workers engaged in complex cognitive work (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Academically, excessive use of transactional methods can unwittingly deter faculty to follow risky research, interdisciplinary collaboration, or discretionary effort in institutional development projects.

The Newfound Success of Servant and Empowering Leadership: Transformational leadership is the representative of the so-called modern style of leadership, but recent studies conducted in Pakistan universities show the specific applicability of servant and empowering leadership styles (Zada et al., 2022b). With its focus on the needs of the followers, psychological ownership, and the joint decision-making, servant leadership proved to have a good positive influence on organizational citizenship behaviour, psychological empowerment, and the well-being of the employees (ANWAAR & JINGWEi, 2022). Such relations were particularly strong in case of crisis, like the COVID-19 outbreak, when employees have become more psychologically troubled and unsure (Zada et al., 2022b).

Empowering leadership also demonstrated a good positive relationship with the job performance of employees mediated by increased clarity of goals and self-efficacy (Ahmed et al., 2022). This leadership style seems especially useful in the academic setting when the autonomy of the faculty and their professional judgment are the main focus of institutional operations. Empowering leaders by delegating authority and instilling confidence in employees in their abilities and capabilities encourages decision-making at the right levels in the organizations and increases the ownership of the outcomes.

Important Role of Knowledge-Oriented Leadership in Academic Institutions: The systematic



review found knowledge-oriented leadership to be uniquely oriented in the context of the university, where knowledge creation, dissemination, and application are fundamental institutional processes. Knowledge-based leaders who stressed on knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, and evidence-based management practices showed especially good impacts on organizational performance mediating effects on knowledge management capabilities and innovation (Asif, 2022; Rehman & Iqbal, 2020). Single extensive research of Pakistani universities reported that knowledge-oriented leadership had both direct and indirect impacts on organizational performance through knowledge management processes and implementation of innovation (Alizai et al., 2021; Mansoor & Hussain, 2022).

The result is an expression of a valuable theoretical point: leadership in special settings such as universities might demand leadership styles that are well suited to the very functions and the level of expertise of the workers of that setting. Although effective, generic transformational leadership might not make the most of unique knowledge and experience of the university faculty members. Leaders who base their strategy on knowledge acquisition, synthesis and dissemination could produce better results than leaders who use generic transformational practices.

4.2 Decision-Making Processes and Leadership Influence

The systematic review offers the understanding of the impact of various leadership styles on the decision-making process and the excellence of strategic decisions in universities:

Participation and Inclusion to decision-making: Some studies done in Pakistani universities stress that transformational, servant, and empowering leadership approaches are more likely to make decision-making processes more inclusive and have a variety of stakeholders contributing to perspectives and expertise (Chaman et al., 2021). The benefits of these participatory processes include improvement in the quality of decisions based on different perspectives, decentralization of decisions to the right level of the organization and the development of commitment to implement the decisions by involving the stakeholders (Ahmed et al., 2022). On the other hand, the focus of transactional leadership on contingent rewards and punishments can deter upward influence and innovative contribution by followers.

Ethical and Principled Decision-Making: A number of studies reported that ethical and moral leadership styles are a fundamental determinant of quality of decision-making by defining ethical decision-making norms and accountability systems (Asim et al., 2021). Leaders with high ethical standards would set a model of principled decision making, build organizational cultures that focus on integrity and put in place accountability mechanisms that would discourage unethical decisions. These mechanisms seem specifically significant in the Pakistani institutional settings where corruption and organizational politics have been found to be an ongoing issue (MALIK & PICHLER, 2022).

Adaptive Decision Making in Uncertainty: The recent literature focuses on the significance of adaptive leadership in making decisions in times when the environment is changing dramatically and is uncertain (Mukaram et al., 2021). The adaptive leaders that flexibly respond to context demands, promote organizational learning, and encourage experimentation and innovation provide institutional environments that can make successful decisions when the information available is incomplete, and the outcomes are uncertain. The recent COVID-19 research especially pointed to the fact that university administration that exhibited adaptive capacity and psychological flexibility had an easier transition into remote learning and preserved institutional operations compared to inflexible, bureaucratically bound institutions.

Distributed Decision-Making and Organizational Agility: The systematic review indicates that distributed decision-making can be empowering and participatory-oriented leadership styles that can help alleviate decision-making bottlenecks and allow institutions to promptly respond to new cases of emergent challenges (Ahmed et al., 2022). Conversely, the existence of highly centralized, hierarchical decision-making forms that put power in the hands of senior executives can delay institutional response and overshadow opportunities of local responsiveness to conditions of context.

4.3 Mediating Mechanisms and Conditions for Effectiveness

The systematic review demonstrated that there are variety of psychological and organizational processes in which the style of leadership has an impact:

Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Quality: Emotional intelligence of leaders was found to



be a significant mediating variable that is through which leadership practices are converted into positive decision-making and organizational performance (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2019). Emotionally intelligent leaders are aware of the needs of followers, are capable of controlling their emotions, and establish high-quality relationships that have the features of trust and psychological safety. These relational pillars have made communication, solving of problems and implementation of strategic decisions more effective.

Psychological Empowerment and Autonomous Motivation: Psychological empowerment is created by the empowering styles of leadership and includes the sense of competence, choice, meaning, and impact, which further stimulates employee motivation, engagement, and performance (Ahmed et al., 2022). Independent motivated employees are more likely to make better decisions when local information is more appropriate than centralized instructions, discretionary effort in organizational aims, and persists in performance during times when external surveillance is reduced.

Trust as a Pre-Condition of Leadership Effectiveness: Numerous articles reported trust as a pre-condition that facilitated leadership influence (Fareed et al., 2022). Trust that is created by leaders of integrity, competence, and sincere interest in the welfare of the follower leads to influence efforts, decisions are implemented, and there is unity in the organization in a time of change or uncertainty. Trust-building turned out to be especially important in terms of leadership effectiveness in the Pakistani contexts where the organizational politics and interpersonal suspicion have been reported (MALIK & PICHLER, 2022).

Organizational commitment as Performance-facilitating Mediator: Organizational commitment, their emotional attachment and identification with their companies, appeared as one of the major mediators of the effect of leadership styles on retention, performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (Abouraia & Othman, 2017). Leaders who build organizational commitment by ensuring that the goals are meaningful and well articulated, contributions are recognized and that the employees are invested in building them create workforces that are highly committed to the success of the institution.

Along with the Leadership Style: Leadership styles would be significantly more efficient when aligned with organizational culture (Aranki et al., 2019). Participatory and transformational leadership styles were more effective in universities that became effective in terms of collegial and clan-oriented cultures. Transactional leadership was more embraced in universities that had hierarchical bureaucratic cultures with restrictions to innovativeness and employee contentment.

4.4 Contextual Factors Shaping Leadership Effectiveness

Gender and Leadership Effectiveness: When the study is conducted on female academic leaders in Pakistani universities, some interesting trends are observed. Although the frequency of use of transactional leadership is higher in female leaders compared to the male counterparts, the two styles are effective (Sarwar et al., 2022). Nevertheless, a single study concluded that the higher the position of the female leaders, the less transformational leadership they were perceived to have and the more transformational leadership male leaders were (Lamm et al., 2021). This result indicates that there may be bias in the perceptions, recognition, and appraisal of transformational leadership between male and female leaders.

Hierarchical Position and Leadership Style: There is a significant difference in effectiveness between organizational hierarchies. Top-level academic leaders are more transformational leaders compared to middle-level administrative leaders (Abadama, 2020). This trend can be attributed to the processes of selection (institutions choosing transformational leaders to senior jobs) or it can be stated that senior jobs are more tolerant of transformational strategies. Transactional approaches may be more practical to middle-level managers who are limited by hierarchical policies and budget constraints.

Organizational Size and Availability of Resources: The connection of leadership style and outcomes might differ depending on institutional size and resource limitations. The bigger universities that have more resources at their disposal can more easily afford transformational initiatives but the smaller ones with limited resources might need more efficiency-oriented management methods. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of literature regarding the role of resource constraints in transforming the optimal leadership practices in a fundamental way.

Crisis Context and Leadership Requirements: The COVID-19 pandemic study provided an insight into how the context of a crisis radically alters the demands of leadership (Mukaram et al., 2021). Supportive,



adaptive leadership were more needed in crisis situations than when the operations are stable. The leadership types that were especially helpful were the demonstration of psychological support by the leader, known as servant leadership, and the ability to quickly pivot the institution, which is provided by adaptive leadership (Zada et al., 2022b). Traditional transformational leadership based on the idea of long-term vision can be less efficient in crisis situations when it is necessary to react with tactical decisions.

4.5 Integration with Upper Echelon Theory and Institutional Context

The results of the systematic review are consistent with and complement upper echelon theory, which suggests that the outcomes of organizations are dependent on the leadership traits and cognitions (Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej, 2022). The values, cognitions of the leaders and their leadership styles within the Pakistani universities systematically influenced the organizational choices, institutional priorities and eventually the institutional performance. Sustainable leadership and managerial discretion were also found to be significant moderating variables; leaders who had less discretion and short time horizons tended to make more transformational decisions than leaders with longer time horizons and less bureaucratic control over their work.

The results also shed light on the influence of institutional peculiarities at universities on the effectiveness of leadership. The unique features of universities: the focus on collegiality, the autonomy and expertise of the faculty, the missions of creating knowledge, the decentralized system of authority, etc. lead to the fact that the authentic, transformational, and knowledge-based approaches to leadership are more likely to be supported by the norms of the institution than the authoritarian or purely transactional ones. Such institutional uniqueness implies that leadership development initiatives, recruitment methods and organizational design in universities must be based on such unique needs instead of generic corporate models of management.

5. Limitations, Gaps, and Future Research Directions

5.1 Limitations of Current Evidence Base

A systematic review found that the current research literature on leadership in Pakistani universities had a number of significant limitations:

Methodological Limitations: The cross-sectional nature of most of the studies (64% of the included studies) restricts causation. Cross-sectional designs are useful in documenting the associations but they are not conclusive in establishing causal relationships. Longitudinal research on the post-leadership change would be of value to the field, as well as the impact of leadership changes on future organizational performance. Furthermore, the majority of the studies were based on self-reported measures, especially those that were rated by leaders themselves on their leadership style, which presented the possible common method variance and response bias issues.

Sample Representation and Generalizability: The studies included were focused in Punjab province (and especially in Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar universities), with little representation of other provinces. There may be provincial differences in institutional culture, governance models, and local situations which generate different leadership-outcome relationships. Also, research was conducted on the large-scale universities, and little exploration on the smaller institutions or new universities was conducted. Its applicability to the entire Pakistani university setting thus is doubtful.

Minimal Research into Decision-Making Processes: Although numerous studies studied the association of leadership style and outcome, little directly researched the decision-making process itself. There is limited research which directly observes or studies the effects of different styles of leadership on problem definition, information search, option generation, evaluation, and choice processes. The processes by which leadership affects the quality of decisions need to be investigated more directly.

Lack of focus on Negative Leadership Styles: Although transformational and servant leadership were given lots of research focus, negative leadership styles such as toxic, despotic and destructive leadership were given limited research focus in Pakistani university settings. The gap in knowledge on the negative leadership and its effects on decision making and organizational performance is significant.

Minor Research on the context of Institutional Policy and Governance: Few studies have explored the way in which institutional governance structures, government policy on education, or regulation, influence



the kinds of leadership styles that can be viable and effective. Leadership functions in institutional settings in part influenced by external policy frameworks; there is little knowledge of how these interactions work out.

5.2 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The systematic review pointed out to some significant future research directions:

Longitudinal and Experimental Research: Future studies should use longitudinal designs after transitions in leadership over the long periods of time, and evaluate the effect of replacements of leaders on the path of the organization. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs would be difficult to implement in a university setting, but would enhance causal inference of leadership effects.

Direct Study of Decision-Making Processes: Future studies need to directly test the effects of leadership styles on decision-making processes- how leaders frame problems, how they seek information, how they involve stakeholders, how they evaluate alternatives, and how they implement decisions. Detailed case studies or process-tracing methodologies would help to shed light on processes that were previously considered indirectly.

Analysis of Institutional Context and Governance: Future studies are encouraged to explore the impact that institutional governance structures, provincial education policies and system-level elements of higher education on the effectiveness of leadership. Learning about leadership in institutional environment is a significant theoretical and practical boundary.

Research on Leader Selection, Development, and Succession: The limited research on the topic focuses on the selection, development, and preparation of future leaders in universities. The knowledge of the institutional practices on leadership development and succession planning may guide the attempt to increase institutional leadership capacity.

Research on Negative Leadership and Institutional Dysfunction: Future studies are needed to explore the topic of toxic, despotic, and destructive leadership within Pakistani universities and how this leadership style negatively affects decision-making, organizational performance, and institutional cultures.

Comparison of Leadership Dynamics and Performance by University Type: A study that compares the leadership dynamics and performance of the three types of universities (public universities, private universities, and emerging distance-education universities) would help understand the influence of institutional type in the best leadership strategies.

Incorporation of Gender and Diversity Lenses: Although very few studies explored the gender aspect, structural exploration of gender, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity in leadership performance is a crucial gap.

Research on Digital Leadership and Virtual Decision-Making: As higher education institutions are turning to digital technology and remote work, a study on the relationship between leadership style and virtual decision-making and how digital communication tools are redefining leadership performance becomes essential.

6. Implications for Practice and Policy

6.1 Recommendations for University Leaders and Administrators

Upon the systematic review results, a few recommendations can be made to those university administrators who wish to improve the quality of leadership and decision-making:

Become Multi-Style Leaders: Instead of being a one-style leader, successful university leaders are expected to have competencies in more than one style of leadership, including transformational, transactional, servant, empowering, and adaptive, and apply them differently to situations, based on the requirements of the situations (Tanveer, 2020). Leadership development programs offered in universities ought to specifically develop the skills in the deployment of flexible leadership styles.

Focus on Transformational Leadership of Strategic Initiative: In strategic decisions that need institutional change; innovation initiatives and repositioning in the long term, transformational leadership where emphasis is made on vision articulation, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation must be emphasized. Leaders who have made major institutional changes are advised to employ transformational strategies to establish commitment and to maintain the effort amid the unavoidable implementation issues.

Encourage participatory, inclusive Decision-Making: University leaders must develop decision-



making strategies that include the views of different stakeholders, especially the faculty and student voices. The approaches of servant and enabling leadership that help to make decisions in a participatory manner seem especially relevant to the missions of the university that focus on the creation of knowledge and the intellectual community (ANWAAR & JINGWEI, 2022).

Develop Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Quality: University presidents need to make an investment in emotional intelligence-self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy and social skill-they need to understand that such skills are the keys to effective influence, trust-building, and relationship quality. Emotional intelligence can be improved with the help of executive coaching, reflective practices, and psychologically informed leadership development programs.

Develop Organizational Trust and Psychological Safety: Because a culture of organizational politics and suspicion towards each other has been reported in the Pakistani institutional environment (MALIK & PICHLER, 2022), leaders are to foster organizational trust by their ability to show integrity, competence, transparency, and concern about the welfare of employees. The establishment of psychologically safe spaces in which faculty members are comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and disagreements would improve the quality of decisions and organizational health.

Support Knowledge-Oriented Leadership Practices: Since the essence of the university is knowledge production and distribution, leaders are to make their strategy based on the knowledge sharing, the collaborative learning, and the making of the decisions which are based on evidence. The organizational structures, reward systems and norms ought to support knowledge-oriented leadership behaviours.

Fostering Adaptive Leadership Capacity: In an environment characterized by uncertainty and increasing change, university leaders ought to build adaptive leadership- the ability to be flexible to shifting needs, promote organizational learning and ensure the continuing operation of the institution amidst disruption. Adaptive capacity is improved through building organizational systems of learning and sustaining strategic flexibility.

6.2 Policy Recommendations for Higher Education Authorities

The results of the systematic review indicate that the higher education officials in Pakistan, such as the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and provincial education ministries, can take a range of policy directions:

Include Leadership Development in Institutional Accreditation Standards: University accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms must clearly view institutional leadership development, succession planning and decision-making mechanisms. The institutions with low leadership capacity and ineffective decision-making require incentives to improve the situation by developing specific qualities.

Mandate Leadership Development Programs: Policy Higher education policy must require all university leaders (rectors, deans, department heads) to participate in on-going professional development with a focus on evidence-based leadership practices. Leadership development certification might be introduced by the HEC to qualify to occupy top posts.

Fund Research on Pakistani University Leadership: National research funding needs to be directed towards systematic enquiry of leadership processes and performance in Pakistan universities. The development of such knowledge base improves policy development and the improvement of institutional practice.

Match Governance Structures to Leadership Effective Practices: It is to be checked that the institutional governance structures are to be reviewed and where needed reformed to alleviate the overly restrictive bureaucratic limitations on the flexibility of leadership and the authority to make decisions. Governance systems that allow participatory and flexible decision making ought to be encouraged.

Create Leadership Excellence Center: The HEC must explore the idea of coming up with a national center of higher education leadership research and development and knowledge dissemination. Such a center would be able to organize research, create evidence based leadership programs and also enable peer learning between institutions.

Encourage Evidence-Based Management Practices: The policy of higher education ought to promote the adoption of evidence-based practices of management in institutions based on empirical studies,



such as transformational leadership, participatory decision-making, psychological empowerment, and knowledge-oriented management.

7. Conclusions

This systematic review provides a synthesis of 28 empirical studies examining leadership styles and decision-making effectiveness in higher education in Pakistan, which showed a complicated environment with several forms of leadership being used to bring institutional effectiveness under different conditions. The findings prove that transformational leadership always shows high positive correlations with faculty performance, organizational commitment, and innovation (Jamali et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the complementary strategies such as servant leadership that focuses on the well-being of followers, empowering leadership that develops the autonomy of employees, and knowledge-based leadership that focuses on the development and dissemination of knowledge also hold the key to effectiveness (Rehman and Iqbal, 2020).

The effectiveness of decision making in universities is caused by a combination of different interacting mechanisms such as emotional intelligence, psychological empowerment, organizational trust, organizational commitment, and alignment of organizational culture. Leaders can impact the decision process not only by exercising formal power but more effectively by creating psychological circumstances that will allow them to make individual and group decisions (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The Pakistani university setting is unique in its institutional features, such as collegiality, expertise of the faculty, and knowledge creation missions, and decentralized authority, which predetermine the situation when the genuine transformational, servant, and knowledge-based leadership styles do not contradict the norms and demands of the institution. Unrefined corporate management models imported without regard to academic culture usually produce resistance and poor outcomes (Tanveer, 2020).

The leadership of the Pakistani universities must strike a balance between various demands that sometimes conflict, i.e. operational efficiency and the ability to influence innovation, faculty autonomy and institutional alignment, and a lean on flexibility to environmental changes and institutional stability. Leaders who become multi-style competent, focus on the quality and trust in relationships, share decision-making in an appropriate way, and align their style with the values of the institution and unique missions can increase the effectiveness of decision-making and performance in organizations (Iqbal & Piwowski, 2022).

The future studies ought to utilize longitudinal designs, conduct a first-hand study of the decision-making process, analyse the institutional governance situation, and cover unexplored aspects such as negative leadership, digital leadership, and equity dimensions. Nevertheless, the existing evidence source offers enough grounds to implement policy and practice changes in the leadership and decision-making processes of Pakistani universities on an immediate scale.

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The participant in the study gave their informed consent.

Statement of Data Availability

The corresponding author can provide the data used in this study upon request.

Conflict of Interest

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