INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY FIELD
ISSN(O): 2455-0620 [Impact Factor: 9.47]
Monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal with IC Value : 86.87
Volume - 12, Issue - 1, January - 2026

DOIs:10.2015/IJIRMF/202601040 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

Assessment of critical leadership competencies among academics

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Abstract: *Leadership in academic field has a crucial role in enhancing institutional performance, research efficiency and the overall development of students. In the ever-changing scenario of higher education, academics must possess critical competencies that extend beyond conventional administrative functions. With a focus on identifying traits, abilities, behaviors and attributes that lead to effective leadership, this study tries to evaluate critical leadership competencies among academics in India. Drawing upon the recognized leadership frameworks, the study examines competencies like decision-making, collaboration, communication ethical governance etc. The findings emphasize competency gaps, differences across academic levels, and the influence of relative factors such as culture and policy frameworks. The study highlights the importance of targeted leadership initiatives in higher education, contributing practical insights for administrators, policymakers and faculty aspiring to leadership roles. By underlying the current state of leadership competencies, this research adds to academic field for enhancing the quality and sustainability of leadership in India's knowledge-driven economy.*

Key words: *Critical leadership competencies, Academics, Leadership, Decision making.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has long been recognized as a crucial factor in determining the performance of organization, engagement of employees and institutional growth (Bryman & Lilley, 2009; Obeidat, Al-Khrabsheh, & Masa'deh, 2024). In the framework of higher education, leadership competencies have a critical role due to leaders have dual responsibility of ensuring efficient administration of scholastic activities and nurturing intellectual excellence (Thompson & Harrison, 2023). Today, colleges and universities function in a dynamic and complex environment characterized by very fast technological change, growing academic demands, tough competition and different stakeholder expectations (Onorato & Giacalone, 2021). In such an academic setting, the leaders must possess a combination of different competencies including adaptability, innovation, vision and interpersonal skills to direct institutions towards sustainability and academic excellence. Critical leadership competencies include different skills, attributes and behaviors which a leader want to possess for influencing and inspiring others to achieve desired outcomes in dynamic environments (Amin, Vafadar, Namaziandost, Rezaei, & Nili, 2019). In present academic setting, critical leadership competencies also include adaptation of inclusive practices, encouraging research culture and balancing institutional accountability with academic autonomy (Bryman & Lilley, 2009). Differences will be there among academicians based on their disciplines, role in their institution and professional experiences (Dang, Tran, & Nguyen, 2019).

The success of an organization is often determined by the manager's ability to apply their skills in their day to day work, whether they are deans, department heads, academics or research coordinators in leadership roles (Obeidat et al., 2024). According to Baryman and lilly (2009), leadership competencies are the abilities, knowhow and character traits that allow people to effectively lead teams of people toward the accomplishment of common objectives. These skills in academic settings include things like academic vision, scholarly credibility, inclusivity, adaptability and the ability to maximize the potential of both students and academics (Dang, Tran& Nguyen, 2019).

This study aims to analyze critical leadership competencies among academicians from diverse backgrounds, with the objective of identifying strengths, developmental needs, and patterns across academic roles. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for enhancing leadership capacity in higher education, thereby contributing to improved institutional performance, innovation, and student success (Obeidat et al., 2024; Thompson & Harrison, 2023).

2. Review of Literature

Robescu and colleagues (2021) explores leadership competencies within the purview of a Romanian waste management company, highlighting the rising importance of leadership in overseeing crises such as COVID-19 and digital revolution. Drawing on a 360-degree feedback model implemented to 23 managers, the study examined 15 competencies grouped into personal, job-related and interpersonal domains. The study emphasizes the divergence between self-perceptions and stakeholder assessments, giving the importance of feedback for development of leadership. The paper finds the evolution of leadership competency model from Boyatzis's early models to recent multi-level approaches such as the LDC strataplex, noting the move towards behaviors, integrating traits and emotional intelligence. They found that context-specific leadership models are essential for supporting organizational performance, employee engagement and competitive advantage. The study suggests that leadership competency analysis not only identify development gaps but also direct the redesign of leadership models adapted to sector-wise challenges.

Shet et al. (2017) "***Framework for Methodical Review of Literature on Leadership Competencies*** "provide a systematic literature review on leadership competency, developing a multi-dimensional structure to classify and synthesize previous studies. Their review identifies diverse definitions and conceptualizations of leadership competency, finding origins to McClelland's (1973) challenge of traditional intelligence-based assessments. Five perspectives of competencies are assessing in this framework. They are Function-specific, geography-specific, job-specific, leadership levels and generic competency-specific. The study integrates models from Boyatzis's (1982) managerial competencies and Spencer & Spencer's (1993) iceberg model to recent frameworks explaining organizational arrangement, emotional competence, and human resource applications. This research highlights vagueness in definitions, conceptual variations and the absence of a uniform structure in existing literature. By contributing a structured framework, the authors intend to provide a foundation for future experiential research and practical implications in competency-based management. Their contributions will help in bridging fragmented competency researches and offering a roadmap for practitioners and scholars to advance this field.

Heinen and colleagues (2019) conducted an integrative review titled "***An Integrative Review of Leadership Competencies and Attributes in Advanced Nursing Practice***" to identify internationally approved leadership competencies for APNs (Advanced Practice Nurses) and CNLs (Clinical Nurse Leaders). The review combines fifteen studies and seven frameworks resulting in thirty important competencies within four domains: health care system, clinical, professional and health policy leadership. The authors argue that Advanced Practice Nurses and Clinical Nurse Leaders are exclusively positioned to drive healthcare reform because of their superior education, more clinical roles and capability for inter-professional alliance. They give emphasis on challenges in clearly defining and explaining leadership competencies in nursing which lead to gaps in curriculum and practice readiness. Situational and transformational leadership theories are highlighted as key perspectives where leadership competencies are observable results that integrate skills, knowledge and attributes. This research contributes to consolidate dispersed evidence into a consistent competence framework which will lead the development of evidence-based curriculum, policy reforms and leadership training focused at strengthening leadership among nurses in global health systems.

In a systematic review Sisu (2023) examines the evolving requirements for leaders in the digital era, emphasizing the need for new competencies. While traditional leadership qualities like vision, communication and innovation remain important, they are no longer adequate by themselves. Modern leaders must also develop digital literacy, emotional intelligence and the ability to manage virtual teams spread across different locations. The study highlights the increasing importance e-leadership, which involves using technology to influence both individual and organizational outcomes. In digital settings, Shared leadership has been found to encourage innovation and collective accountability, while the roles of transformational and transactional leadership change due to the lack of physical presence. Additionally, the result points out challenges such as building trust in virtual teams and addressing ethical issues related to new technologies like AI and robotics. Sisu concludes that to succeed in the complex and ever-changing digital landscape, leaders need ongoing development programs to enhance the skills necessary for organizational success.

In their study, Schiuma (2024) et.al explore leadership in the context of digital transformation by focusing on transformative leadership skills. They propose a human centered framework based on a review of existing literature and interviews with leaders from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The research highlights six essential competencies that set transformative leaders apart practical problem solving, decision making with focus on sustainability, promoting knowledge creation, inspiring communication, engaging people effectively and possessing informed digital literacy. This framework differs from traditional leadership models like transactional or transformational leadership by directly addressing the needs of organizations undergoing digital transformation. Leaders are required not only to embrace technology but also to cultivate organizational cultures that prioritize learning, collaboration and ethical responsibility, ensuring that digital change leads to lasting value. The study emphasizes that digital transformation goes beyond mere technological adoption: it is an organizational renewal process that demands resources orchestration, ongoing innovation and the empowerment of employees. By combining theoretical insights with field evidence the authors offer a practical model that positions transformative leadership as a guiding force for organizations facing digital disruption.

2.1 Research Gap

While leadership competencies have been extensively studied across various sectors, there is a noticeable gap in empirical research specifically targeting academics within the Indian higher education landscape. Reviews like those by Shet.et al.(2017) primarily present methodological frameworks for examining leadership competencies but lack insights tailored to academia. The works of Robescu and colleagues (2021) and Schiuma et al. (2024) explore leadership capabilities in general organizational contexts, yet these insights have not been customized to fit the distinct roles, governance structures and cultural expectations of Indian academic institutions. Similarly, Heinen et al. (2019) focus on leadership attributes in advanced nursing practice, and Sisu's (2023) systematic review emphasizes digital leadership competencies, but both are specific to their sectors and cannot be directly applied to academia without contextual adaptation. Furthermore, the existing literature does not address significant differences in competencies across academic ranks, disciplines or types of institutions in India, nor it does it offer psychometrically validated tools to evaluate these competencies among faculty. There is also scant evidence on how leadership competencies among academics correlate with outcoes such as research productivity, student development, institutional innovation or administrative efficiency. Consequently, there is a substantial research gap in identifying, contextualizing and evaluating leadership competencies among academics in India through a rigorous, culturally relevant and empirically based approach. This study aims to bridge that gap by developing and valifdating an understanding and measurement of leadership competencies specific to Indi's higher education sector.

2.2 The problem statement

Although there is an increasing focus on leadership excellence within higher education, a comprehensive empirically based understanding of the essential leadership skills needed by academics in India is lacking. Most research on leadership competencies has concentrated on the corporate, health care or digital sectors with little adaptation to the academic context. Indian higher education institutions are under pressure to improve quality, governance, curriculum, research output and global competitiveness. However, faculty members in academic and administrative leadership positions are seldom evaluated for the skills necessary to tackle these challenges. This issue is further complicated by differences in institutional type, academic rank, discipline, and regional cultures which affect both the nature and expression of leadership roles. Therefore, it is crucial to identify, assess and evaluate the leadership skills most vital for academics in India to succeed in their evolving academic, administrative and developmental roles. Without such evaluations, leadership development policies, training strategies and institutional planning remain misaligned with the actual competency needs of the academic workforce.

2.3 Significance of the study

This study holds great importance in higher education environment, where institutions are increasingly challenged by technological change, accreditation requirements, globalization and the rising demand for quality teaching and research. The leaders in academic field play a vital role in shaping institutional culture, driving innovation and fostering collaboration. And also they give emphasis on Identifying and analyzing the key leadership competencies necessary for academics will not only provides to improving the quality of teaching, research and governance but also helps to design

important training and professional development programs for their faculties. Moreover, the findings of this study can provide as a valuable structure for succession planning, ensuring that future leaders are outfitted with the skills necessary to develop institutional growth and competitiveness.

While leadership has been broadly studied in corporate and political contexts, this research fills a vital gap by giving attention on leadership competencies within academia, thereby elevating the existing body of knowledge. This study has more societal implications as it strengthens the leadership among faculties which contributes to producing talented graduates and thereby advancing national development.

3. Objectives and Hypothesis

3.1 Objectives

Present study has the following objectives:

1. To measure critical leadership competencies among academics
2. To analyze differences in critical leadership competencies with regard to demographic profile of academics.

3.2 Hypothesis Formulated and Tested (H1)

1. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on gender.
2. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on their age.
3. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among married and unmarried academics.
4. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on their educational qualifications.
5. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on monthly salary.
6. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on experience.
7. There is a significant difference in critical leadership competencies among academics based on working hours.

4. Research Methodology

This study examines critical leadership competencies among academics in India. Twelve important leadership competencies are identified and studied among academics who are participated in one month faculty Induction Program conducted by UGC MMTTC Central University of Kerala. This research adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design to study critical leadership competencies among academics from various states of India. Detailed understanding of variables is possible through descriptive approach. Quantitative methods enable statistical tools for hypothesis testing. The study depends on primary data collected from 55 academics who are participated in one month faculty Induction Program conducted by UGC MMTTC Central University of Kerala in the month of July 2025. A structured questionnaire was converted to a google form format and which is used by the researcher for collecting data. It includes questions for measuring demographic features as well as leadership competencies. The study employed purposive sampling to select faculty members from self-financing Arts and Science colleges in Malappuram District, Kerala. A total of 85 respondents participated in the study, forming the sample for analysis.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 5.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Particulars	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	20	36.4
	Female	35	63.6
Total		55	100.0
Age	25-35	25	45.5
	35-45	21	38.2
	Above 45	9	16.4

Total		55	100.0
Designation	Professor	5	9.1
	Assistant professor	47	85.5
	Associate professor	3	5.5
Total		55	100.0
Experience	Less than 5 years	25	45.5
	5-10 years	16	29.1
	10 - 15 years	7	12.7
	15-20 years	7	12.7
Total		55	100.0
Nature of Job	Government	14	25.5
	Aided	10	18.2
	Private	21	38.2
	Deemed university	4	7.3
	Central or state university	6	10.9
Total		55	100.0
	Commerce and Management	4	7.3
	Arts	15	27.3
	Science	29	52.7
	Education	7	12.7
Total		55	100.0

Source: Primary data

The demographic analysis of the respondents shows that the sample was mainly composed of females, who made up 63.6%, while males represented 36.4%. A significant portion of the participants fell within 25-35 age range (45.5%), followed by those aged 35 - 45(38.2%), suggesting relatively youthful workforce. The majority of respondents held the position of Assistant Professor (85.5%), with the Professors (9.1%) and Associate Professors (5.5%) being less represented, and nearly half had less than five years of experience (45.5%). Regarding the nature of employment the largest group worked in private institutions (38.2%), followed by those in government (25.5%) and aided sectors (18.2%). In terms of discipline, science faculty members were the most prevalent (52.7%), followed by those in Arts (27.3%), education (12.7%) and commerce and management (7.3%).

5.2 Table showing critical leadership competencies

Sl.No	Competency	Mean	SD
1	Leading for Learning (LL)	4.6049	.43953
2	Integrity and Accountability (IA)	4.5939	.47873
3	Communication (CMN)	4.4909	.52843
4	Collaboration (CLB)	4.4727	.50386
5	Critical Thinking (CT)	4.4303	.50785
6	Creativity and Innovation (CR)	4.4198	.50234
7	Decision Making (DM)	4.4606	.55367
8	Problem Solving (PS)	4.3879	.53581
9	Managing Change (CNG)	4.4000	.55333
10	Entrepreneurship (ED)	4.3697	.62418
11	Digital Literacy (DL)	4.3636	.59929
12	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	4.4848	.52438

Source: Primary data

This table shows that leadership competencies received high ratings with average score exceeding 4.3 indicating a robust overall leadership capability among the participants. The competencies of leading for learning and integrity and

accountability stood out as the most prominent, underscoring a strong focus on ethical behavior and promoting ongoing learning. Communication, emotional intelligence and collaboration also received favorable ratings, emphasizing the significance of interpersonal abilities. Comparatively lower scores in on the entrepreneurship and digital literacy.

5.3 Reliability statistics of the constructs

Factors	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Leading for Learning (LL)	3	0.554	Moderately reliable
Integrity and Accountability (IA)	3	0.812	Reliable
Communication (CMN)	3	0.836	Reliable
Collaboration (CLB)	3	0.790	Reliable
Critical Thinking (CT)	3	0.778	Reliable
Creativity and Innovation (CR)	3	0.769	Reliable
Decision Making (DM)	3	0.828	Reliable
Problem Solving (PS)	3	0.760	Reliable
Managing Change (CNG)	3	0.779	Reliable
Entrepreneurship (ED)	3	0.863	Reliable
Digital Literacy (DL)	3	0.864	Reliable
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	3	0.794	Reliable

Source: Primary data

The reliability analysis indicates that all leadership competency factors exhibit acceptable to high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.760 to 0.864, reflecting strong reliability for most constructs. Notably, competencies such as digital literacy (0.864), entrepreneurship (0.863), decision making (0.828) and communication (0.836) shows very high reliability, implying that their items are highly consistent in assessing the respective constructs. Similarly integrity and accountability, Collaboration, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, problem solving, managing change and emotional intelligence also demonstrate satisfactory reliability, well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. However leading for learning factor has a lower Cronbach's alpha of 0.554, indicating weak internal consistency.

Table 5.4 Independent sample t test of gender and Leadership Competencies

Particulars	Items	Mean	Standard deviation.	t value	sig
Gender	Male	4.7417	.23863	4.913	0.000*
	Female	4.2929	.43865		

*Value below 0.05 are considered significant, Source: Primary data

The result of the independent t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, as evidenced by the t-value of 4.913 and a corresponding significance level of p= 0.000. Since the p-value is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05, the hypothesis of no difference of the groups is rejected. This indicates that the observed difference in mean scores is unlikely to have occurred by chance and be considered meaningful. The magnitude of the t-value further suggests that the difference between the groups is substantial, Highlighting a clear disparity in the measured variable

Table No. 5.5 One-way Anova for different demographic features

Factors	Items	Mean	Std.dev.	F value	Sig
Age	25-35			0.512	0.602
	35-45				
	Above 45				
Marital status	Single	3.4737	0.5173	0.900	0.445
	Married	3.4410	0.4996		
	Widow	3.2456	0.3039		

Educational Qualification	PG	3.3918	0.5146	1.092	0.340
	M.Phil	3.5497	0.4098		
	Phd	3.579	0.5109		
Monthly salary	Below 15000	3.3062	.3735	.887	.451
	15000-25000	3.4154	.5387		
	25000-35000	3.5568	.4036		
	35000-45000	3.6447	.5642		
Experience	Below 5 years	3.3484	.5069	1.108	.350
	5-10 years	3.507	.4497		
	10-15 years	3.518	.5010		
	Above 15 years	3.719	.7146		
Working hours	Below 16 hours	3.4491	.5129	2.571	0.048*
	16-19 hours	3.4322	.4775		
	19-22 hours	3.8158	.4716		
	22-25 hours	2.8772	.4890		

* Value below 0.05 are considered significant, Source: Primary data

As a result of the one-way ANOVA analysis, most of the demographic variables considered in the study—namely, age ($F = 0.512$, $p = 0.602$), marital status ($F = 0.900$, $p = 0.445$), educational qualifications ($F = 1.092$, $p = 0.340$), monthly salary ($F = 0.887$, $p = 0.451$), and years of experience ($F = 1.108$, $p = 0.350$)—do not significantly affect the respondents' mean scores, as their significance values are greater than 0.05. Different categories of these variables have similar perceptions or responses, which indicates that the study is relatively uniform. A significant difference is observed regarding working hours ($F = 2.571$, $p = 0.048$), suggesting that the number of hours worked per day has a meaningful effect on respondents' mean scores. The mean score for people who work between 19 and 22 hours is 3.8158, while the mean score for people who work between 22 and 25 hours is 2.8772. This suggests that excessive work hours may have negative consequences. Overall, it can be concluded that most demographic factors do not contribute to variation in responses, but working hours do.

6. Conclusion

Upon reviewing the data, it is evident that the participants display a robust level of leadership skills with old major aspects receiving positive evaluations and most showing high internal consistency. The most prominent strengths among academics include leading for learning, integrity and accountability, communication, emotional intelligence and collaboration. Although Competencies like entrepreneurship and Digital literacy were rated lower, they still surpassed the average indicating potential areas for targeted development efforts. The demographic analysis showed a workforce that is predominantly young and female, mainly consisting of Assistant Professors with less than 5 years of experience, yet their leadership abilities are consistently strong across most areas. Further analysis confirmed that leadership skills do not vary significantly with age, marital status, qualifications, salary or experience suggesting a uniform perception of leadership across different groups. However, gender and working hours were found to be influential: males reported notably higher competency levels than females and long working hours seemed to adversely affect leadership effectiveness. Overall, the results point to a generally strong leadership foundation among academics, while highlighting the need for initiatives aimed at improving work life balance and improving female faculty to maintain leadership excellence.

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