

**A Comparative Study on Quality of Education in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutes: The Case of Leadership Practice in Private and Public**

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**Abstract**

This research made a comparative study on the quality of education in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutes, specifically on leadership practice in private and public universities in six selected Higher Education Institutes. It looked into the styles and behaviour of leadership in these institutions. Relevant literature on the styles, behaviour and practice of leadership in HEIs was also reviewed. Different leadership theoretical assumptions were examined and used in studying the practice. Data were collected from six HEIs (three private and three public Universities) in Ethiopia. Data analysis was made by using both chi-square and t-test for quantitative data, and interpretational and reflective analysis for qualitative data. The findings showed that most of the leadership behaviour manifested in private HEIs is more of task-oriented that is primarily concerned with improving efficiency and process reliability. On the other hand, the leadership behaviour observed in public HEIs was mostly relations-oriented which is primarily concerned with strong commitment to the unit and its mission with improving human relations. Moreover, behaviours that are change - oriented like monitoring the external environment to identify threats and opportunities, initiating and leading change, encouraging innovative thinking, and facilitating collective learning were not given more attention in both institutions. Finally, it was concluded that the practice of effective leadership, and specifically the practice of transformational leadership in both HEIs was found to be weak and requires consideration from both the government and the HEIs.

**Key words: Leadership, task-oriented leader relations-oriented leader, change-oriented transformational-leadership**

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1 Background of the Study**

Currently education plays an essential and determinant role in all social, economic, political and technological life of our society. According to Awan (2014), education plays a pivotal role in the rise and fall of nations, especially in the 21st century. In this respect, education at higher level is expected to take the leading position.

The importance of education in higher education is realized everywhere and is now on top of the political agenda of most nations. This is happening due to the emergence of global competition in education and technology. For Example according to Mustard's (1998) investigation, universities for centuries have had a crucial role in educating the potential professionals, businessmen, and political leaders, religious and social scholars, who serve the society, to enrich its values and

develop its resources. This can be done through the quality of education at all levels in both public and private intuitions regardless of national, regional and cultural differences.

Quality teaching is the use of pedagogical techniques which involve several dimensions including the effective design of curriculum and course content, a variety of learning contexts, soliciting and using feedback, and effective assessment of learning outcomes. It also involves well-adapted learning environments and student support services (OECD,2012). Here, the role of school leaders is fundamental in creating conducive environment and supportive services. A sustainable quality teaching policies require long-term and non-linear efforts. This calls for a permanent institutional commitment from the top-leadership of the institution (OECD, 2012).

According to OECD, a good understanding and appreciation of the role of change agents across the institution, based on a mutual respect for the role each plays (from leadership on institutional policies to innovation in faculty teaching practice), is crucial for the success of reforms and building a quality culture. Therefore, institutional leadership and decision-making bodies at higher education, both in public and private institutions, have an essential role in shaping the institution's quality culture.

Hence, assigning qualified and committed institutional leaders, heads of departments, program leaders and directors is fundamental in supporting services and responsibilities for fostering quality teaching and learning. However, in practice most of the higher education institutions across different nations lack such type of leaders.

In Ethiopia, higher education institutions are suffering from quality and relevance of education. According to Reisberg&Rumbley (2011) in Ethiopia, there are quality challenges caused by the absence of enough qualified instructors, constrained infrastructure, and insufficient funding to address the needs of the institutional system. These constraints are the main concern of the top leadership. This has been supported by Ghelawdewos (2012), who says that Ethiopia needs serious consideration in the area of leadership due to the lack of visionary leadership and key role players.

These and other related leadership problems manifested in higher education have urged the writer of this paper to make a comparative study on quality of education in private and public higher education in the country with focus on the faculties of business and economics, and informatics.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of the study is to compare the quality of education both at public and private higher education institutes with respect to leadership styles.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- identify the leadership styles at public and private higher education institutes,

- assess the leadership behaviors manifested by leaders at public and private higher education institutes, and
- find out the challenges faced by leaders at public and private higher education institutes.

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The idea of scope of the study refers to the conditions that pose restrictions on the conclusion and application of a research endeavor. Research on the practice of leadership requires a wide scale study on different groups, levels and areas of the country. Nevertheless, in order for the study to be more manageable, its scope is delimited to five HIEs (two from private and three from public universities) within the country.

The study will not attempt to offer a single, one-fits-all, conclusive definitions of any practices of leadership, nor does it try to identify a set of characteristics of quality of education. The study will not take as one of its objectives the mission of establishing whether one group's understanding of practices is superior to another, or whether certain techniques are the only ones compatible with the quality of education. Instead, the study primarily will concern with identifying the degree to which the practices and behaviors of leadership match or mismatch with the principle of quality of education.

## **2. Research Design and Methods**

### **2.1 Research Method**

The methodological approach used in this research is a mixed method which focused on survey and descriptive study. This systematic approach is used to describe life experiences and gives them meaning.

### **2.2 Design of the Study**

Based on the nature of the study and the information needed to be collated, a comparative study between public and private higher education institutes in the selected universities, an analytic and descriptive design is adopted. Thus, connection between theory and practice in the implementation of leadership will be scanned through the use of survey method.

On the other hand, a qualitative approach will be done as an important method in collecting the necessary information for the purpose of supporting evidences obtained in quantitative method. Here, an in-depth investigation and empirical inquiry of events will be employed to explore causation in order to identify the underlying impacts within its real-life context.

### **2.3 Selection of Respondents**

In Ethiopia, there are thirty three public and four private universities. Out of these three universities from public and two from private were selected using stratified sampling techniques. The main criterion for the use of this technique was year of establishment. Therefore, among the three-generation public universities, one from each has been selected randomly. As to the selection of private universities, simple random sampling has been employed.

After selecting universities and issues that are related with leadership practice, data were gathered from the instructors and leaders at different levels. Selection of respondents from each department has been done using simple random sampling technique.

For qualitative data, selection was made purposefully. Here, in order to get the right information, discussions were made with different heads who have a good knowledge about the issue.

Hence, for the purpose of interview, purposive sampling technique has been used to the aforementioned respondents from each university relying on their long time experience of administrative work and teaching in the higher education. Therefore, from each department, there have been an appropriate number of respondents from both sex.

#### **2.4 Data Collection Instruments**

Precise and systematic data collection is basic to conducting scientific research. It allows us to collect information that we want to collect about our study objects. Depending on research type and methods of data collection, there are different instruments. Among many, documents review, observation, questioning and measuring are some of the most important instruments. Therefore, based on the type of the research and methods employed in this study, questioning which relies on questionnaires and interviews was taken as an appropriate instrument.

In order to obtain the necessary information on practices and behaviors of leadership, structured questionnaires have been employed with 60 public and 20 private instructors. For the formulation and disposition of the different questions in the first draft, a series of recommendations have been followed. These recommendations have been carried out by many scholars in order to check for order of difficulty, concreteness, ambiguity, use of simple and clear language and suitable vocabulary.

In the case of interview, semi structured interview has been conducted with 15 instructors from public universities and 9 instructors from the private ones. An interview guide has been constructed to tap the perceptions of all respondents. All the interviews were conducted in Amharic in order to make communication easier.

#### **2.5 Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In this study, in order to arrive at reliable information on practices of leadership both in public and private HEIs in enhancing quality education, both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data have been employed. Furthermore, chi and t-test were employed to examine the mean difference and level of significance among the respondents. This has been supported by the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer program.

In analyzing qualitative data both interpretational and reflective analysis were selected as the most important approach in order to create the necessary categories and to reflect the researcher's personal views on the bases of the collected information.

### **3. Data Analysis And Interpretation**

In order to comply with the evidences that could be considered in practice and behavior of leadership, this research paid attention to the internal conditions surrounding the institutes of higher education with a specific reference of public and private universities

In this research, factors that are related with leadership behaviors were explored. This was done to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One. In doing so, attempt has been made to investigate in, detail, the basic issues of leadership behaviors from the perspectives of leadership styles. Based on the information that has been obtained from the above mentioned respondents, the following careful analysis and interpolation of the data were made.

#### **Analysis and Interpretation on Task-oriented Behaviors**

The first question that guided this study was, “To what extent are there differences, if any, in task-oriented behaviors (i.e. planning and organizing work-unit activities, clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring work unit operations and resolving work related problems) of public and private HEIs.

In terms of planning and organizing work-unit activities, the public and private HEIs were found to be similar in responding to items on behaviors related to the specific criteria identified for the scheduling activities and assigning tasks presented in Table. Respondents in both groups, public (68.3%) and private (66.6%), felt that scheduling activities with priorities and assigning tasks with resources is not a significant problem. However, differences appeared when questioned about clarifying roles, monitoring work operations and resolving work related problems.

The first difference was with regards to clarifying roles. 78.3% public HEIs instructors disagreed, whereas 66.7% respondents from the private HEIs have agreed that leaders usually clarify roles and objectives with the necessary standards.

The second difference was related to how often the separate groups’ monitoring work operates. In this regard, 80.0% of respondent from the public HEIs disagreed with regular monitoring process of leaders. However, 73.3% of respondents from the private HEIs assured that leaders regularly follow and support teachers during instruction.

The third and last difference in frequency of responses to questions in resolving work related problems, specifically in how often leaders identify quickly the cause of the problem and provide firm and confident direction to their team to avoid them or minimize their adverse effects. Here, the level of disagreement on this issue was that of 70% of the public HEIs responders as compared to 30% private HEI responders. Public HEIs leaders indicated a significant number of agreements (70%) for these behaviors in the leadership role as shown in Table 1.

In the analysis of the planning and organizing work-unit activities, the difference between the means of the public and the private HEIs respondents was not found to be statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$  as shown in Table 1.

Although the mean of comparison of the planning and organizing work-unit activities was not found to be statistically significant, the two groups of respondents were found to differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ) when comparing the frequencies of items related to clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring work unit operations, and resolving work related problems. Here, the public and private HEIs instructors were found to differ significantly when reviewing the following three items: (1) clarifying roles, objectives and relevant performance standards ( $p < .05$ ); (2) observing activities regularly either face to face or using reports with feedback ( $p < .05$ ); and (3) identifying quickly the cause of the problem and providing firm and confident directions ( $p < .05$ ).

Moreover, similar responses were obtained from an in-depth interview made with leaders from the two groups of respondents in all of the above mentioned leadership behaviors. As the majority of respondents from the public HEIs replied, most leaders were not in a position of sharing the identified objective and roles more than the assignments and scheduling of tasks. Similarly, monitoring work unit operations and resolving work related problems seem to be weak in public HEIs as compared with the private ones.

**Table1: Task-oriented Behaviors**

Items	Respondent	Response in %				mean	P-value
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
scheduling activities and assigning tasks	public	8.3	23.3	53.3	15.0	3.75	0.789
	private	10.0	23.3	53.3	13.3	3.70	
	Total	8.9	23.3	53.3	14.4		
clarifying roles and objectives	public	26.7	51.7	18.3	3.3	2.98	0.000
	private	6.7	26.7	60.0	6.7	3.67	
	Total	20.0	43.3	32.2	4.4		
observing activities feedback	public	15.0	65.0	18.3	1.7	3.07	0.000
	private	6.7	20.0	50.0	23.3	3.90	
	Total	12.2	50.0	28.9	8.9		
identifying cause of the problem and providing direction	public	20.0	50.0	23.3	6.7	3.17	0.000
	private		30.0	56.7	13.3	3.83	
	Total	13.3	43.3	34.4	8.9		

**Analysis and Interpretation on Relation-oriented Behaviors**

The public and private leaders were found to be similar in only one behavior in the relation-oriented behaviors, namely, recognizing staffs. As indicated in Table 2, a significant number of respondents from the public (86.6%) and private (733%) groups reported that leaders were not as such proactive in looking for things that deserve recognition such as a pay increase or bonus.

In the analysis of the recognition of staffs, the difference between the mean of the public and the private HEIs instructors was not found to be statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), as shown in Table2.

The interview made with leaders at different levels has also shown the provision of recognition that is sincere, specific, and timely which can be taken as the bases for reward were found very

limited. The majority of respondents from the two groups said that leaders in HEIs were not as such active and efficient in promoting their staff to bring motivation.

In the rest relation- oriented behaviors, respondents from the public and private groups reported that they differed when comparing frequencies and means of support, training opportunities and empowerment. First, in response to support, 65.5% of the public group agreed on leaders' behaviors in listening to teachers carefully, providing support, and encouraging members when they are worried or upset. On the contrary, 86.7% of the private group respondents disagreed to the existence of such support.

Secondly, in the area of training opportunities as indicated in Table 2, 56.6% of the public and 16.7% of the private respondents reported that arrangement of practice sessions and provision of opportunities to apply new skills on the job is not a significant problem. On the other hand, 43.3% of respondents from the public HEIs and 83.3% of respondents from the private groups did not agree on such matters saying that arrangement of practice sessions and provision of opportunities is a serious problem within their institutions.

A third difference was found in the frequency of responses on empowering staff members. The frequency of agreement on this issue by public HEIs group is 65 % compared to the private HEIs group, 16.6%.

The analysis of the three questions included in this scale demonstrated statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the comparison of means for the rankings of the public and private respondents on the items of support, training opportunities and empowerment.

Similar opinions have also been obtained from the interview. On such matters, most of the interviewees from the public HEI leaders' partly agreed on the provision of support and encouragement when there is a difficult or stressful task. Moreover, additional training and empowerment in public HEIs were not seen as a serious problem. However, the majority of private HEIs interviewees stood against this idea saying that leaders were not in a position of giving a chance for additional training and empowering their staff members.

**Table 2: Relation-oriented Behaviors**

Items	Respondent	Response in %				mean	P-value
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
leaders listen carefully and provide support and encourage members	public	1.7%	33.3%	53.3%	11.7%	3.75	0.000
	private	46.7%	40.0%	13.3%		2.67	
	Total	16.7%	35.6%	40.0%	7.8%		
Arrange practice sessions and provide opportunities to apply new skills on the job	public	10.0%	33.3%	48.3%	8.3%	3.55	0.000
	private	30.0%	53.3%	16.7%		2.87	
	Total	16.7%	40.0%	37.8%	5.6%		
Proactive in looking for things that deserve recognition	public	23.3%	63.3%	13.3%	23.3%	2.90	0.091
	private	13.3%	60.0%	26.7%	13.3%	3.13	
	Total	20.0%	62.2%	17.8%	20.0%	3.75	
Ask other people for ideas and suggestions and consider them when making a decision	public	5.0%	30.0%	51.7%	13.3%	3.73	0.000
	private	30.0%	53.3%	13.3%	3.3%	2.90	
	Total	13.3%	37.8%	38.9%	10.0%		

**Analysis and Interpretation on Change-oriented Behaviors**

Regarding the change-oriented behaviors, the experience of both higher education institutes seems to be negative. As indicated in Table 3, 86.70% of the public and 80% of the private HEIs respondents assured that less emphasis has been given for advocating changes. The intention of leaders in influencing people to accept the need for change and propose a strategy for responding to a threat or opportunity seems to be weak.

Similarly, as indicated in Table 3, vision articulating and inspiring were not given more emphasis from the leaders side in the teaching learning process. Here, almost 76.60% and 86.70% of the respondents from the public and private HEIs, respectively, were not happy with articulation of clear and appealing vision of what the work unit or organization can attain.

In terms of innovation, the encouragement of leaders seems to be less both in public and private HEIs. As indicated in Table 3, the great majority ( 96.6%) respondents from public and 90% from private did not agree with the provision of opportunities and encouraging staffs to look at problems from different perspectives and to “think outside the box” when solving problems.

The other critical problem which was observed in this study was encouragement of collective learning. This is the fourth area in the change - oriented behavior which is not seen by leaders as an important means of instruction. As results in the study have shown, most leaders did not use this strategy as a means of intellectual stimulating opportunity in their teaching learning practice. As indicated in Table 3, almost 91% of the private HEIs respondents from the two groups stood against the use of practices that facilitate learning by an operations team.



In the analysis of the change-oriented behaviors, in all cases, the difference between the mean of the public and the private HEIs instructors group was not found to be statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ) as shown in Table3.

In this area similar responses were also obtained from an interview made with HEI leaders. Here, practice of leaders in encouraging, nurturing, and facilitating creative ideas and innovation in either a team or institution was found too low.

**Table 3: Change-oriented Behaviors**

Items	Respondent	Response in %				mean	P-value
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Influence staffs to accept the need for change and propose a strategy	public	26.7%	60.0%	10.0%	3.3%	.706	.839
	private	30.0%	50.0%	16.7%	3.3%	.785	
	Total	27.8%	56.7%	12.2%	3.3%		
Articulate a clear, appealing vision of what the work unit or organization can attain.	public	13.3%	63.3%	23.3%		.602	.045
	private	36.7%	50.0%	10.0%	3.3%	.761	
	Total	21.1%	58.9%	18.9%	1.1%		
Provide opportunities and encourage people to look at problems from different perspectives	public	38.3%	48.3%	13.3%		.680	.087
	private	53.3%	43.3%	3.3%		.572	
	Total	43.3%	46.7%	10.0%			
Support internal activities used to discover new knowledge	public	33.3%	56.7%	10.0%	33.3%	.621	.233
	private	46.7%	46.7%	6.7%	46.7%	.621	
	Total	37.8%	53.3%	8.9%	37.8%	.706	

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

This study focused on the styles of leadership at public and private higher education institutes in bringing quality education. The data was collected by survey with the help of questionnaire and interview. After coding in SPSS for statistical analysis and doing the demographic characteristic summary, factor analysis of t-score and p-score, on the basis of task-oriented, relation-oriented and change-oriented leadership behaviors of HEI leaders were tested. The item analysis indicates that all items function at the most favorable level. There is no need of modification/replacement of the items from the scale. And all the demographics of the respondents represent that our survey has covered all category of the respondents in public and private HEIs.

The analyses of the data compared the behaviors of public HEIs leaders with the private ones in relation to the behavior of leadership: task-oriented, relation-oriented and change-oriented behavior. In case of relation-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviors, there is a significant difference among public and private HEIs. Here, leadership behaviors at public HEIs is more of relation-oriented as opposed to private HEIs which mainly stressed on task-oriented. In short, it was found that private HEI leaders give more focus to clarifying roles and objectives to be performed,

monitoring work unit operations and resolving work related problems which are more of task-oriented than public HEIs .

On the other hand, the public HEI leaders give emphasis to support and empowering their staffs with the necessary training opportunities. However, with respect to recommendation for a tangible reward such as a pay increase or bonus, both private and public HEI leaders were found to be reluctant. Moreover, being proactive in looking for things that deserve recognition like providing of sincere, specific, and timely recognition seem to be weak in both HEIs.

In case of change - oriented behaviors, significant differences were not observed among the two groups. Both of them seem to be weak in advocating change and encouraging innovation. Provision of information showing how similar work units or competitors have better performance and influencing staff to accept the need for change were found very low. Use of practices that facilitate learning by an operations team and supporting internal activities used to discover new knowledge, such as research projects and small-scale experiments were not taken as important strategies.

Generally, the leadership behavior manifested in private HEIs is more of task-oriented: primarily concerned with improving efficiency and process reliability. However, the leadership behavior in public HEIs is mostly related with relations-oriented: primarily concerned with strong commitment to the unit and its mission with improving human relations. Moreover, behaviors that are change-oriented, such as monitoring the external environment to identify threats and opportunities, initiating and leading change, encouraging innovative thinking, and facilitating collective learning were not given more attention in both institutions.

#### **4.2. Recommendations**

The practice of effective leadership, specifically practice of transformational leadership, in both HEIs were found weak, thus requires consideration from both the government and the institutions. Therefore, on the basis of the feedback obtained from the respondents on the findings of this study, the following recommendation is forwarded:

Universities should build the key findings concerning the priority areas of focus in each higher education leadership behavior, along with the performance indicators and the capabilities identified as counting most for effective performance, into a revised and complementary set of leadership position descriptions, succession plans, selection procedures, development processes and performance management systems for each of the roles studied.

Institutions and government should continue to highlight the importance of learning and teaching in order to attract a new generation of leaders to this critical role as the current, older generation of leaders leaves the system; and that the moral and financial importance of effective leadership of learning and teaching in universities to the individuals, surrounding communities and the country should be emphasized.

Programs in the areas of leadership should be reviewed and aligned with the findings of the study concerning how and what academic leaders prefer to learn, and that the fact that this is identical to

the way in which higher education students wish to learn be made explicit. Where possible, programs should be underpinned by evidence-based insights into effective professional practice in the specific leadership behaviors involved. In doing this, it is recommended that universities investigate ways of setting up learning networks for people in the same role, in particular heads of institutions, academic deans and heads of programs.

Further research should be undertaken on: the profile of higher education academic leaders and the similarities and differences between the roles of learning and teaching leaders and those in other roles for example, leaders of research, university engagement and administrative services

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