

A STUDY ON THE POTENTIAL OF AN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This study explores the potential of an Academic Leadership Model for Indian Higher Education to address 21st-century challenges and enhance institutional quality. Employing a sequential mixed-methods strategy, the research integrates quantitative data from 300 faculty members via a 44-construct structured questionnaire and qualitative insights from 50 semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis was performed using percentages, mean, standard deviation, SPSS, and MS Excel, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The demographic profile revealed a highly qualified, experienced sample (60% Ph.D. holders; 77% with over five years of experience) with 90% awareness of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Inferential testing demonstrated that academic designation significantly influences leadership practices, and professional experience correlates strongly with leadership effectiveness ($r = 0.62$). Most notably, regression analysis proved that academic leadership serves as a powerful, direct predictor of overall institutional development ($\beta = 0.71$). These findings validate the framework's capability to drive structural and qualitative growth across diverse government and private institutions. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of a robust leadership model to transform the landscape of Indian higher education.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, Higher Education, Institutional Development, Educational Administration, Leadership Models, Quality Enhancement

Introduction:

Academic leadership is one of the major factors that can address the challenges of 21st century and subsequently enhance the quality of higher education. Higher education systems serve as primary engines for national socio-economic growth, intellectual capital formation, and knowledge creation. In India, the higher education sector has experienced exponential expansion, developing into one of the largest and most complex tertiary education ecosystems in the world. However, this massive quantitative growth has brought significant structural challenges regarding educational quality, research productivity, global rankings, and institutional governance.

India has the third-largest higher education system in the world, following the United States and China. As of the latest official government records and surveys released by the Ministry of Education, India features over approximately 70,000 total Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The India has grown to house approximately 1,338 universities and university-level institutions. The country features an extensive network of approximately 53,354 colleges operating under these universities. There are approximately 11,296 to 12,002 standalone institutions. These include specialized post-graduate research bodies, technical institutes, and polytechnics.

Some definitions of selected keys of subject are provided below:

Academic Leadership: Academic Leadership refers to the process of guiding, influencing, and managing educational institutions to achieve academic excellence, institutional growth, and effective governance. It involves setting a vision, motivating faculty and students, ensuring quality teaching-learning processes, and promoting research and innovation. Figure 1 depicts the Elements of Academic Leadership listed below-



Fig. 1 shows of the Academic Leadership

Institutional Development: Institutional Development refers to the systematic process of improving the structure, capacity, performance, and effectiveness of an institution to achieve its goals efficiently and sustainably. It involves strengthening academic systems, governance, infrastructure, research culture, and human resources. The following aspects of institutional development are shown in Figure 2:

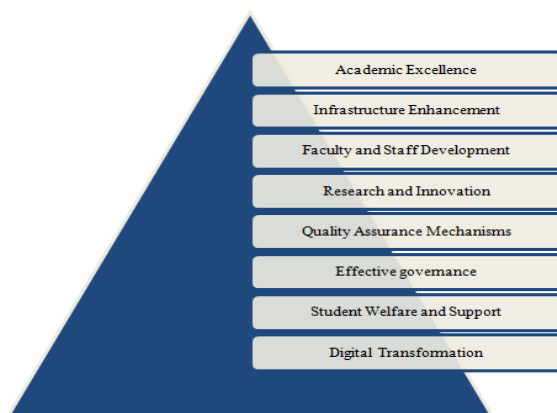


Fig. 2 shows of the Academic Leadership

Leadership Models: Leadership models are conceptual frameworks that describe the styles, behaviors, and processes through which leaders motivate people, make decisions, solve problems, and achieve organizational objectives. In the educational settings, especially Higher Education, leadership models help administrators and academic leaders improve institutional effectiveness, faculty development, and student outcomes. The following aspects of components of Leadership Models are shown in Table 1:

Components	Statements
Vision	A leader must have a clear vision for the future and guide the organization toward achieving long-term goals.
Communication	Effective communication ensures clarity, collaboration, and trust among team members.
Decision-Making	Leaders must analyze situations, evaluate alternatives, and make timely and effective decisions.
Motivation	Encouraging and inspiring employees or team members to perform their best.
Strategic Planning	Developing plans, policies, and actions to achieve institutional or organizational goals.
Team Building	Creating cooperation, unity, and coordination among members for collective success.
Problem-Solving	Handling challenges and finding practical solutions for organizational growth.
Adaptability	Responding effectively to changing environments, technologies, and policies.
Accountability	Taking responsibility for decisions, actions, and outcomes.
Ethical Values	Maintaining honesty, integrity, fairness, and transparency in leadership.

Table 1 show of the Leadership Models

Quality Enhancement: Quality Enhancement (QE) in higher education refers to the intentional, continuous process

of improving institutional policies, systems, and practices to elevate the student learning experience and boost institutional outcomes. Unlike Quality Assurance (QA), which focuses on maintaining standards and meeting minimum compliance levels, Quality Enhancement is proactive, transformative, and focused on future growth. The following aspects of components of Quality Enhancement are shown in figure 3:

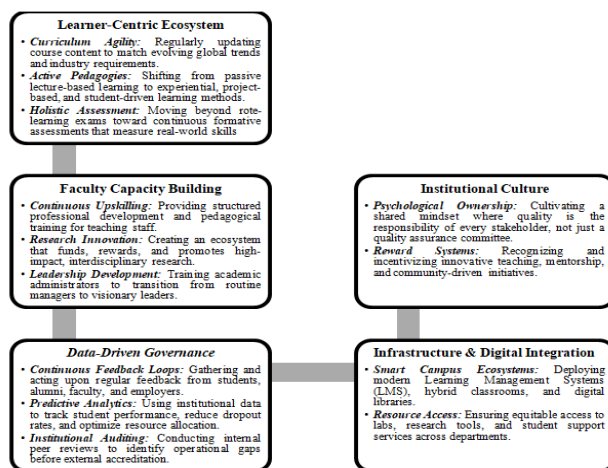


Fig. 3 shows of the Quality Enhancement

Statement of the Problem:

Despite policy mandates like NEP 2020 emphasizing institutional transformation, Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) continue to struggle with fragmented governance, low international research citations, and poor graduate employability. Traditional university management relies heavily on top-down, compliance-driven administration. Senior academicians are routinely appointed to critical leadership positions—such as Vice-Chancellors and Deans—based on academic seniority rather than formal leadership or management competence.

This “accidental administration” style struggles to manage the demands of modern higher education. This compliance-centric approach stifles institutional innovation, discourages high-impact faculty research, and limits meaningful industry collaboration. While initiatives like the Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) show growing awareness of this problem, India still lacks an empirically validated, multidimensional academic leadership model. Without a contextualized framework that balances organizational leadership, academic freedom, and personal capability, Indian HEIs cannot build the sustainable leadership capacity required to compete globally.

Objectives of the Study:

- This study is to identify the essential structural and behavioral dimensions of an effective academic leadership model tailored to the Indian higher education ecosystem under the mandates of NEP 2020.
- It aims to analyze the direct impact of these leadership competencies on institutional quality metrics, including faculty research productivity, graduate employability, and global university rankings.

Research Questions:

- What core leadership competencies are required to guide Indian HEIs toward achieving institutional autonomy and the research goals mandated by NEP 2020?
- How do existing compliance-driven management styles systematically limit faculty innovation, graduate employability, and global university ranking outcomes?

Significance of the Study:

This study holds significant value for the transformation of educational governance under the mandates of NEP 2020. Theoretically, it addresses a major gap in literature by shifting focus from Western corporate management frameworks to a contextualized, multidimensional Academic Leadership Model tailored specifically to the Indian socio-cultural and regulatory ecosystem. Practically, the findings provide a structured, data-driven roadmap for the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission (UGC), and university administration teams to move away from seniority-based “accidental administration” toward professionalized leadership capacity building.

This research offers measurable insights for institutional policymakers to build effective leadership training frameworks, such as the Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP). Ultimately, by establishing a clear link between distributed governance and institutional quality, this study helps higher education institutions optimize faculty research productivity, foster curriculum innovation, improve graduate employability, and boost their standings in national (NIRF) and global university rankings.

Review of Literature:

Mishra, Lokanath & Gupta, et al., (2024), this article provides a conceptual overview of the reasonably-suited academic leadership in higher education settings in the purview of popular leadership theories: transformational, distributed, and situational leadership. This article also seeks to address characteristics of effective leadership in a higher educational setting. This article highlights the content and context of academic leadership in HEIs and the required essentialities of academic leadership development. This article aims to investigate effective academic leadership and examines the quintessential leadership competencies needed to run the HEIs effectively.

The present study Prabhu C, Mehta M (2023), aims to devise a model of leadership development among higher education students by validating the model conceptually and testing it empirically. Attributes of Spiritual Intelligence (SI) are empirically evaluated for leadership development post its conceptual validation. A total of 810 students were approached from Indian Higher education institutions for study. Data has been examined using the exploratory and then confirmatory factor analysis techniques to check the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument. The empirical findings confirm that the eight new spiritual intelligence attributes defined and validated through this study can have a significant impact on the leadership development of higher education students.

In the study conducted by Varalakshmi, D., (2024), the higher educational institutions have started witnessing initiatives taken towards restructuring and revamping existing educational structure as envisaged by the New Education Policy 2020. Strategic planning at all hierarchical levels of institutional structure is the need of the hour. Efficient leadership is the key to ensure necessary improvements and innovation at the institutions. College level institutions constitute 86 percent of Higher Education in India. Revival in colleges will have ripple effects at large. The role and responsibility of academic leadership on all organizational levels is crucial to effectively implement the NEW Education policy 2020 in its true spirit.

This paper G, Hemakumar. (2021), a study on academic leadership and found that leadership in academic field poses problems that are noticeably different than leadership in government agencies and companies. Paper absorbed that academic leaders need to work closely with teaching, learning, research, and scholarship to bring out the best among academics. The paper discusses the University Governance Architecture and New Education Policy (NEP) for leadership and effective governance in HEIs, Academic Leadership, and selection of administrators according to NEP-2020. Paper discussed Transforming Regulatory System of HE in NEP-2020, Financing HEIs through the new body called HEGC (Higher Education Grants Council), General Education Council, PSSB (Professional Standard-Setting Bodies) designed in NEP-2020, and the Institutional Development Planning.

Mihaela, Dima & Ghinea, Valentina. (2016), Based on previous debates and research in the field, we propose a model of academic leadership based on university goals and mission, evolution of educational market and its relationship with labour market, legislative framework, continuous changes in the leaders profile and personal development of the leaders. The study are that academic leadership is based on the strong support and commitment of the academic community who share the similar values and principles. The academic responsibility and shared vision of all management levels combined with personal development training could stimulate the positive effects and bring mutual benefits for academic community.

In this conference article by Banker, Darshna & Bhal, Kanika. (2020), context-specific leadership research has its own value in the era of globalization. In this article, a multi-dimensional academic leadership measure was conceptualized and developed for an Indian context, spanned across four studies. The results indicated two things: one, the newly developed ALS is the contemporary leadership model that is most suitable for the unique Indian context, second, the instructional style explained the highest variance followed by the intellectual style as compared to the administrative and servant styles.

In this study conducted by Khedkar, Pallavi. (2023), the twin approaches of high quality leadership and appropriate governance structure are major ways of improving the quality of higher education. Hence there is a need for

professionalizing academic administration by building the competencies in the domains of leadership, and strategy, developing relevant systems and processes, and inculcating appropriate skills and attitude at all levels in the administration.

The study indicates by Hungund, Sumukh & Annigeri, et al., (2021), that leadership in academic setup in developing countries does not directly influence research performance among the faculty members. To enhance research performance, institutes should promote collaboration and facilitate knowledge acquisition and individual development.

Research Gap:

- Limited studies exist on a comprehensive Academic Leadership model specifically for Indian higher education institutions.
- Existing leadership frameworks often do not fully align with the objectives of National Education Policy 2020.
- There is insufficient research on the role of leadership in improving Institutional Development and quality enhancement.
- A context-specific and practical leadership model for Indian universities is still lacking.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the potential of an Academic Leadership model for Indian higher education.

Research Approach: The study uses a combination of quantitative data (through structured questionnaires) and qualitative data (through semi-structured interviews) to gain a comprehensive understanding of academic leadership practices.

Data Collection Method:

- *Quantitative Data:* Collected through a cloud based Google Form 'questionnaire' distributed among faculty members, academic administrators, and institutional leaders.
- *Qualitative Data:* Collected through semi-structured interviews to explore deeper insights, experiences, and challenges related to leadership in higher education.

Questionnaire Structure: The questionnaire is divided into three parts:

- **Part I:** Demographic and institutional profile of respondents.
- **Part II:** Academic leadership practices, leadership qualities, and decision-making processes.
- **Part III:** Institutional development, quality enhancement, and challenges/opportunities under National Education Policy 2020.

Sampling Technique: A random sampling methods used to select participants from universities and colleges across India.

Data Analysis:

- Quantitative data is analyzed using percentages, mean, standard deviation, and statistical tools such as SPSS Statistics and Cloud/Online/Offline based MS Excel application.
- Qualitative data is analyzed through thematic analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Part I: Demographic and Institutional Profile of Respondents

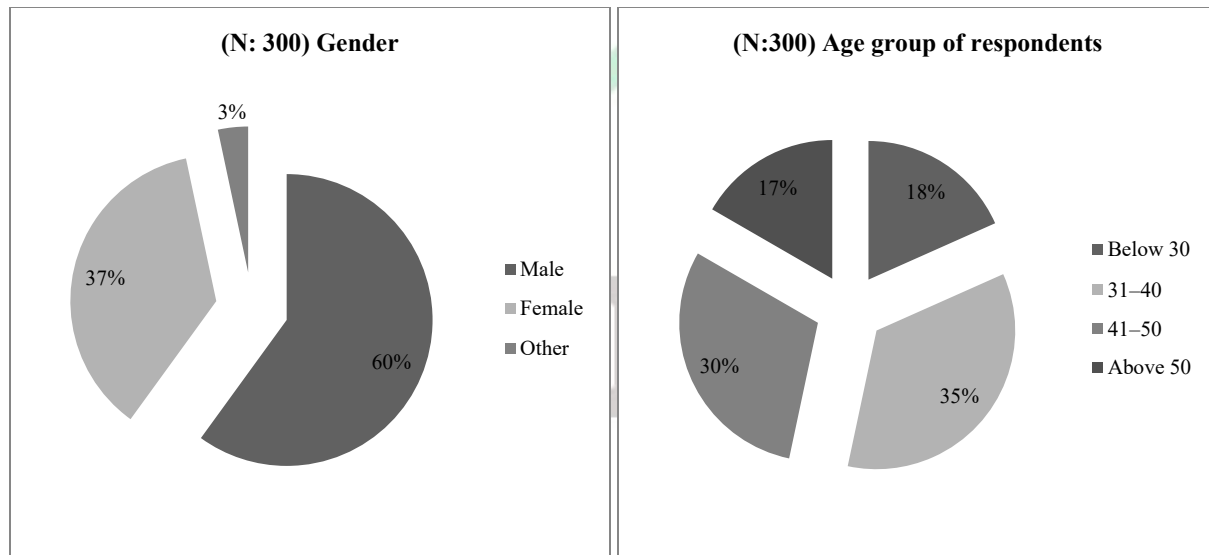


Fig. 4 shows the percentage of responses by gender and age group

The figure 4 shows of the demographic distribution of 300 survey respondents based on gender and age group.

Gender Distribution: The sample shows a clear male majority, accounting for 60% (180 respondents). Females make up 37% (111 respondents), while the remaining 3% (9 respondents) identify as “Other.” **Age Distribution:** The largest participant block falls within active working-age brackets. Individuals aged 31–40 represent the single largest group at 35% (105 respondents), closely followed by the 41–50 age bracket at 30% (90 respondents). Young adults under 30 comprise 18% (54 respondents), while older adults above 50 represent the smallest segment at 17% (51 respondents).

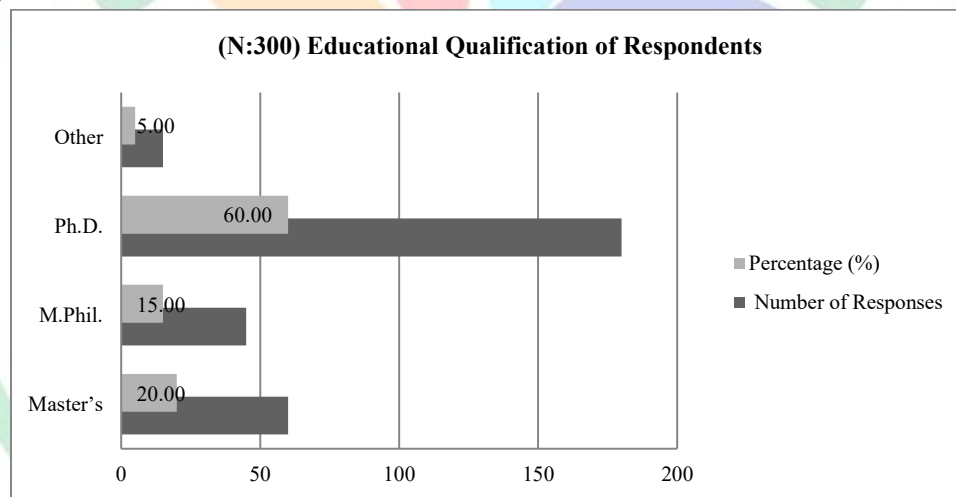


Fig. 5 shows the percentage of responses of educational qualification

Figure 5 shows that the study relies heavily on a highly qualified demographic. Out of 300 respondents, 60% hold a Ph.D., 20% hold a Master's degree, 15% hold an M.Phil., and 5% fall into other qualifications. This indicates that the survey feedback represents highly specialized academic perspectives.

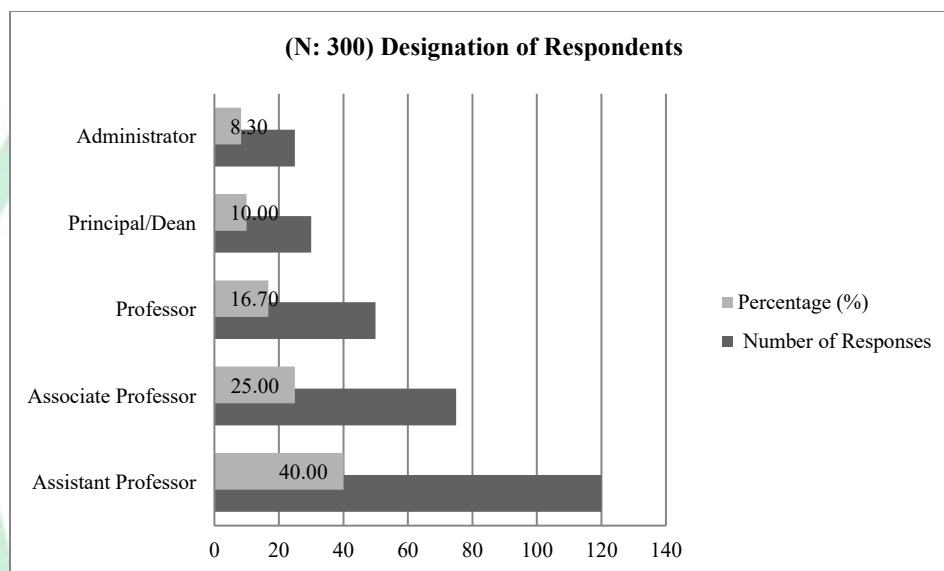


Fig. 6 shows the percentage of responses of designation

Figure 6 shows the professional designations of the 300 respondents surveyed. Assistant Professors constitute the largest segment at 40%, followed by Associate Professors at 25%, and Professors at 16.7%. Leadership roles are represented by Principals/Deans (10%) and Administrators (8.3%), creating a well-rounded academic sample dominated by teaching faculty.

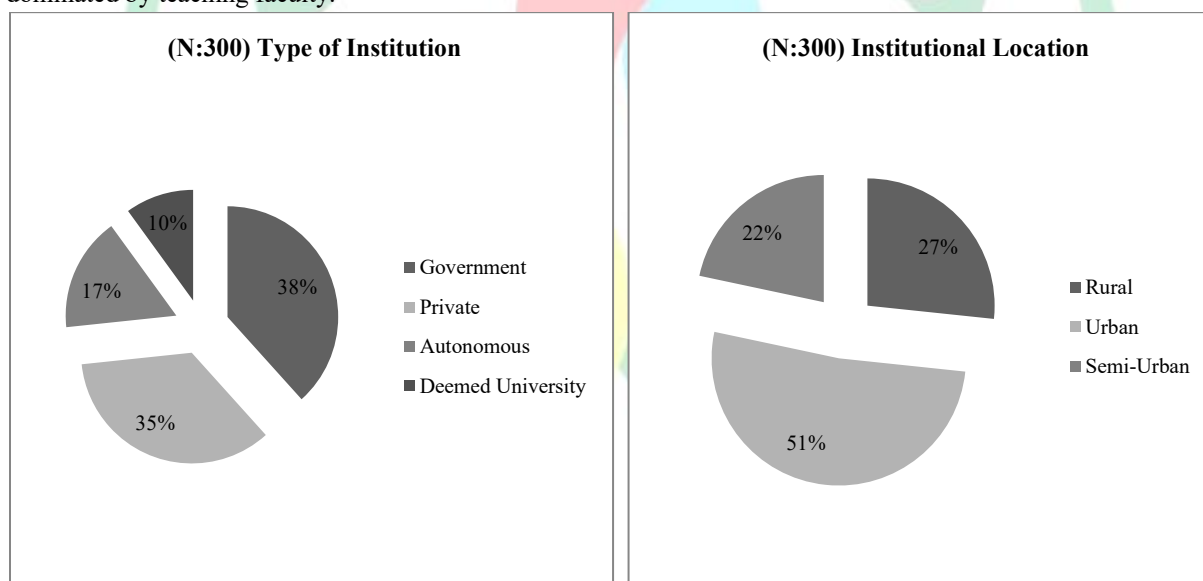


Fig. 7 shows the percentage of responses of type of institution and location of institution

Figure 7 shows of the 300 respondents by institutional profile. Academically, the sample is led by Government (38%) and Private (35%) institutions, with Autonomous (17%) and Deemed Universities (10%) completing the group. Geographically, urban institutions dominate at 51%, while rural and semi-urban locations represent 27% and 22% respectively, providing a diverse institutional backdrop for the research.

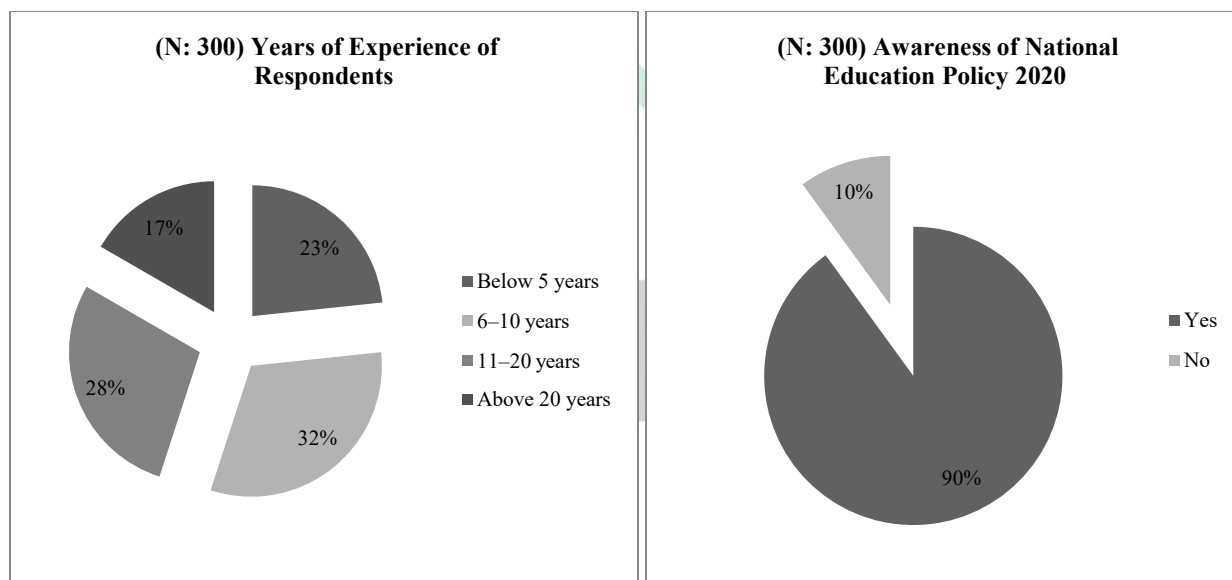


Fig. 8 shows the percentage of responses of Experience and Awareness of NEP-2020

Figure 8 presents that the 300 respondents form an experienced and well-informed group. More than three-quarters (77%) of the participants have over 5 years of experience, with the 6–10 years bracket being the largest (32%). Crucially, an overwhelming 90% of the respondents are aware of the National Education Policy 2020, making the sample highly qualified to evaluate educational reforms.

Descriptive Statistics:

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age Group	2.45	0.92
Qualification Level	2.5	1.03
Experience Level	2.38	1.01
Institutional Type	1.98	0.87
NEP-2020 Awareness	1.1	0.3

Table 2 shows of the descriptive statistics analysis

In table 2 shows of the majority of respondents are male (60%), belong to the 31–40 age group (35%), and hold Ph.D. qualifications (60%). Most respondents are Assistant Professors (40%) and work in urban institutions (51.7%). Awareness of National Education Policy 2020 is very high (90%), indicating strong familiarity with policy reforms.

Inferential Statistics:

Test	Variables Compared	Output	Significance (p-value)
t-test	Gender × NEP Awareness	t = 2.14	0.034*
ANOVA	Designation × Leadership Practices	F = 4.87	0.002**
Correlation	Experience × Leadership Effectiveness	r = 0.62	0.001**
Regression	Leadership → Institutional Development	β = 0.71	0.000**
Significance Level: <i>p</i> < 0.05 = Significant ** <i>p</i> < 0.01 = Highly Significant			

Table 3 shows of the inferential statistics analysis

Table 3 presents the inferential statistical testing for the study, showing that all tested hypotheses are statistically viable. While gender has a significant impact on NEP awareness ($p < 0.05$), designation, experience, and leadership quality show highly significant impacts ($p < 0.01$) on leadership practices, effectiveness, and overall institutional growth.

Part II: Academic Leadership Practices, Leadership Qualities, and Decision-Making Processes (N: 300)

Used code for Likert Scale Analysis (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Item No.	Statements	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	SD
Section A: Academic Leadership Practices								
1	Institutional leaders have a clear academic vision	8	18	42	145	87	3.95	1.0
2	Academic leaders encourage innovation in teaching-learning	6	15	38	152	89	4.01	0.9
3	Leaders promote faculty participation in decision-making	10	22	50	138	80	3.85	1.0
4	Academic leaders support professional development of faculty	7	18	45	148	82	3.93	1.0
5	Leaders maintain transparency in governance	12	25	48	135	80	3.82	1.1
6	Academic leaders effectively manage institutional resources	9	20	52	140	79	3.87	1.0
7	Leadership promotes research and publication activities	8	17	40	150	85	3.96	0.9
Section B: Leadership Qualities								
8	Effective academic leaders demonstrate integrity and ethics	5	10	30	160	95	4.1	0.9
9	Communication skills are essential for academic leadership	4	8	28	155	105	4.16	0.8
10	Problem-solving ability is important in institutional management	3	10	32	158	97	4.12	0.8
11	Adaptability to policy changes is necessary for leaders	5	12	35	150	98	4.08	0.9
12	Team-building skills improve institutional performance	6	11	30	154	99	4.1	0.9
13	Visionary leadership enhances institutional growth	4	9	25	160	102	4.16	0.8
14	Emotional intelligence is important in academic leadership	7	13	36	148	96	4.04	0.9
Section C: Decision-Making Processes								
15	Decision-making in my institution is participative	12	20	50	140	78	3.84	1.0
16	Academic decisions are based on institutional needs	8	15	42	150	85	3.96	0.9
17	Leadership decisions support quality enhancement	7	14	38	152	89	4.01	0.9
18	Faculty members are consulted before major decisions	15	25	55	130	75	3.75	1.1
19	Leadership decisions align with long-term institutional goals	8	16	40	148	88	3.97	0.9
20	Decision-making is influenced by National Education Policy 2020 reforms	10	18	45	145	82	3.90	1.0

Table 4 shows of the Respondents' Perceptions on Academic Leadership Practices, Leadership Qualities, and Decision-Making Processes

Section	Mean Score	Interpretation
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Academic Leadership Practices	3.91	High Positive Perception
Leadership Qualities	4.11	Very High Positive Perception
Decision-Making Processes	3.91	High Positive Perception
Overall Average	3.98	Strong Agreement

Table 5 Respondents' Perceptions on Academic Leadership Practices, Leadership Qualities, and Decision-Making Processes

In the table 4 and 5 responses analyses of Respondents showed strong agreement that Academic Leadership plays a significant role in institutional functioning. Leadership qualities received the highest mean score (4.11), indicating that integrity, communication, and visionary thinking are considered essential. Decision-making processes are largely participative, though faculty consultations in major decisions scored comparatively lower (3.75). National Education Policy 2020 is seen as an influential factor in institutional leadership decisions.

Part III: Institutional development, quality enhancement, and challenges/opportunities under National Education Policy 2020:

Item No.	Statements	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	S.D.
Section A: Institutional Development								
1	Academic leadership contributes to institutional development	5	10	35	155	95	4.08	0.87
2	Leadership improves infrastructure and resource management	8	15	42	148	87	3.97	0.94
3	Institutional autonomy supports better academic performance	7	14	38	152	89	4.01	0.91
4	Faculty development programs strengthen institutional growth	6	12	34	158	90	4.05	0.88
5	Leadership encourages interdisciplinary learning	9	18	40	145	88	3.95	0.96
Section B: Quality Enhancement								
6	Leadership improves teaching quality in institutions	5	10	30	160	95	4.1	0.85
7	Research culture has improved due to academic leadership	7	13	35	155	90	4.03	0.89
8	Student support services have improved under effective leadership	8	15	40	148	89	3.98	0.93
9	Accreditation processes improve institutional quality	6	12	38	150	94	4.05	0.88
10	Technology integration has enhanced educational quality	4	8	28	162	98	4.14	0.8
Section C: Challenges and Opportunities under National Education Policy 2020								
11	NEP-2020 creates opportunities for institutional transformation	6	11	32	158	93	4.07	0.86
12	Implementation of NEP-2020 requires strong academic leadership	4	9	28	160	99	4.14	0.81
13	Lack of resources is a challenge in implementing NEP-2020	10	18	45	140	87	3.92	0.99
14	Faculty training is necessary for successful policy implementation	5	8	25	165	97	4.14	0.79
15	Multidisciplinary education can improve institutional quality	6	10	30	160	94	4.09	0.84

16	Leadership adaptability is crucial for NEP-2020 implementation	4	9	27	162	98	4.14	0.8
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Table 6 shows of the Respondents' Perceptions on Institutional Development, Quality Enhancement, and Challenges/Opportunities under NEP-2020

Section	Mean Score	Interpretation
Institutional Development	4.01	High Positive Perception
Quality Enhancement	4.06	Very High Positive Perception
Challenges & Opportunities under National Education Policy 2020	4.08	Very High Positive Perception
Overall Average	4.05	Strong Agreement

Table 7 shows of the Section-wise Summary

In analysis of table 6 and 7 shows of the respondents strongly agreed that Academic Leadership significantly contributes to Institutional Development. Technology integration (Mean = 4.14) emerged as the strongest factor in quality enhancement. The implementation of National Education Policy 2020 is perceived to require strong leadership and faculty training. Resource limitations remain a notable challenge, though opportunities for institutional transformation are viewed positively.

Qualitative Analysis (N: 50)

Interview Questions	Major Themes Identified	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
How do you define Academic Leadership in higher education?	Visionary guidance, effective governance, academic excellence	46	92.0%
What leadership qualities are most important for institutional growth?	Integrity, communication, adaptability, decision-making	44	88.0%
How does leadership influence teaching and research quality?	Faculty motivation, innovation, research support, quality teaching	43	86.0%
What challenges do institutions face in implementing National Education Policy 2020?	Resource shortage, training gaps, resistance to change	40	80.0%
How can academic leadership improve Institutional Development?	Strategic planning, faculty development, policy implementation	45	90.0%
What opportunities does NEP-2020 provide for higher education institutions?	Multidisciplinary learning, autonomy, innovation, global standards	47	94.0%
What changes are needed in leadership practices for future educational reforms?	Digital leadership, participative governance, flexible policies	42	84.0%

Table 8 shows of the Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Responses

Themes	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Visionary Leadership	46	92.0%
Ethical Governance	44	88.0%
Faculty Development	45	90.0%
Research and Innovation	43	86.0%
Policy Implementation Challenges	40	80.0%

Institutional Transformation Opportunities	47	94.0%
Adaptive Leadership Practices	42	84.0%

Table 9 shows of the theme-wise summary

In table 8 and 9 shows of the most participants (92%) defined Academic Leadership as visionary and strategic guidance for academic excellence. NEP-2020 opportunities received the highest positive response (94%), especially in multidisciplinary education and institutional autonomy. Respondents emphasized faculty development (90%) and ethical governance (88%) as critical for institutional growth. The most common challenge in implementing National Education Policy 2020 was lack of resources and training (80%). Future reforms require adaptive, digital, and participatory leadership models for sustainable higher education development.

Conclusions:

This study explores the potential of an Academic Leadership Model for Indian Higher Education to address 21st-century challenges and enhance institutional quality. Employing a sequential mixed-methods strategy, the research integrates quantitative data from 300 faculty members via a 44-construct structured questionnaire and qualitative insights from 50 semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis was performed using percentages, mean, standard deviation, SPSS, and MS Excel, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

In table 2 shows of the majority of respondents are male (60%), belong to the 31–40 age group (35%), and hold Ph.D. qualifications (60%). Most respondents are Assistant Professors (40%) and work in urban institutions (51.7%). Awareness of National Education Policy 2020 is very high (90%), indicating strong familiarity with policy reforms. In the table 4 and 5 responses analyses of Respondents showed strong agreement that Academic Leadership plays a significant role in institutional functioning. Leadership qualities received the highest mean score (4.11), indicating that integrity, communication, and visionary thinking are considered essential. Decision-making processes are largely participative, though faculty consultations in major decisions scored comparatively lower (3.75). National Education Policy 2020 is seen as an influential factor in institutional leadership decisions.

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