

Leadership and Academic Staff Performance in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Teacher Training Colleges hold a significant place among the various higher education institutions in the country. These are the oldest teacher education institutions in Sri Lanka. This study was conducted to identify the relationship between the leadership provided by Principals and Deputy Principals and the performance of academic staff (lecturers), and to determine the impact of leadership on staff performance across the eight existing teacher training colleges in Sri Lanka. Data were collected through the structured questionnaires from 18 leaders and 43 academic staff members across the eight teacher training colleges in Sri Lanka. The analysis was carried out using relevant statistical techniques. Accordingly, a correlation coefficient was utilized to identify the relationship between the performances of academic staff; however, this value was found to be statistically insignificant. The study revealed there was no relationship between leadership styles like work centered, employee centered and shared leadership and the overall performance of the academic staff. In addition, each leadership styles have not been correlated with the staff performance or its six determining factors: the nature of the work, employee knowledge and skills, achievement factors, intrinsic factors, professional factors, and ethical factors. Furthermore, leadership has not impact on the performances of the academic staff members (R square = 0.05). That means Work centered, employee centered (people oriented) and shared leadership have not contributed to the determination of performance.

Keywords: Leadership; work-centered leadership; Employee-centered leadership; Shared leadership; Staff performance

Introduction

The structural integrity of a national education system is fundamentally dependent upon the quality of its teaching force, which in turn relies on the efficacy of teacher training institutions. In the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, teacher education is delivered through a tiered system comprising Universities, National Colleges of Education (NCoEs), and Teachers' Colleges. Among these, Teachers' Colleges hold a unique historical position as the oldest institutional framework for professionalizing the nation's educators. Originally established to provide in-service training for teachers already active in the classroom, these institutions have faced significant administrative and pedagogical shifts over the last several decades. A primary concern for policymakers and academic researchers alike is the performance of the academic staff within these colleges and the extent to which the institutional leadership—represented by Principals and Deputy Principals influences their professional output. This exhaustive report investigates the relationship between various leadership styles and the performance of academic staff across all operational Teachers' Colleges in Sri Lanka, analyzing whether traditional leadership paradigms hold true in the specific context of the Sri Lankan Teacher Educators Service (SLTES).

Contextual Background of Teacher Education in Sri Lanka

The evolution of education in Sri Lanka spans over two millennia, rooted in Buddhist monastic traditions where teachers were revered as the primary bearers of culture and moral values. The modern institutionalization of teacher training, however, began during the colonial period with the establishment of vernacular and missionary training schools. The watershed moment for the current system occurred with the 1943 Kannangara Report, which proposed a free and equitable education system from kindergarten to university. Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara emphasized that the "future of the nation lies in the hands of the teachers," a sentiment that underscored the need for robust teacher training facilities (Kannangara, 1943). Following national independence in 1948 and the subsequent nationalization of schools in 1960, the government assumed direct control over teacher training colleges, standardizing the curriculum and establishing a centralized administrative structure under the Ministry of Education.

In the contemporary era, the teacher education sector is bifurcated into pre-service and in-service training. The National Colleges of Education (NCoEs), established in 1985, focus on pre-service training for G.C.E. Advanced Level graduates through a three-year residential program. In contrast, Teachers' Colleges primarily cater to the in-service professional development of teachers who entered the service without formal professional qualifications (Amarasuriya, 2025). These institutions offer a two-year course leading to the Trained Teacher's Certificate (TTC), which is essential for grade-level progression within the Sri Lanka Teachers' Service. Despite their critical role, Teachers' Colleges have been described as being in a state of stagnation, with the core curriculum remaining largely unchanged since 2007. This stagnation has prompted the current government to propose a massive 2026 National Education Reform Agenda, which seeks to transform these institutions into degree-awarding faculties capable of meeting 21st-century technological demands (Ministry of Education, 2026).

The Role of Leadership in Educational Institutions

Leadership is widely recognized as a critical determinant of institutional success, setting the tone for school culture, vision, and operational effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2024). In the context of academic staff performance, effective leadership is theorized to inspire lecturers to reach their full potential, improve instructional methodologies, and foster a collaborative learning environment (Shahin et al., 2024). Various leadership theories have been applied to educational management, ranging from traditional trait-based approaches to behavioral and contingency models (Bush, 2020). The behavioral theory of leadership, popularized by the Michigan and Ohio State studies, distinguishes between "task-oriented" and "people-oriented" behaviors. Task-oriented or job-centered leadership emphasizes technical efficiency, goal achievement, and the rigid adherence to administrative procedures (Velnampy, and Balaputhiran, 2013). Conversely, people-oriented or employee-centered leadership prioritizes the well-being, interpersonal relationships, and professional growth of staff members (Northouse, 2021).

A more recent paradigm gaining traction in higher education is "shared leadership". Shared leadership is a collaborative influence process where leadership responsibilities are distributed among team members based on expertise rather than formal hierarchy. This leadership is particularly relevant in Teachers' Colleges, where both the administrators (Principals) and the academic staff (Lecturers) often belong to the same elite professional service cadre, the Sri Lanka Teacher Educators Service (SLTES). In such an environment, the traditional top-down binary of leader and follower is frequently replaced by a more collegial and consultative administrative style.

Assessing the performance of academic staff in a state-funded institution requires a nuanced understanding of multiple professional and personal factors. (Kenny, 2018). Unlike commercial enterprises, the "output" of a teacher educator is measured through the quality of teacher trainees produced, the depth of curriculum delivery, and adherence to professional ethics. Thus, there is a compelling need to identify the leadership styles of principals and academic staff performance in teacher training colleges in Sri Lanka.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between employee-centered leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka?

2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between job-centered leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between shared leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka?
4. Do the leadership Styles impact the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka?

Objectives of the Study

Many institutional heads focus on traditional management and administrative roles rather than on instructional leadership, leading to a disconnect between administrative activities and academic outcomes (Lekamge, 2010; Kumari, 2016; Fernando, 2020). Despite the intuitive assumption that strong leadership drives better performance, existing literature in the Sri Lankan public sector context has shown conflicting results. The primary objective of this research is to identify the impact of Principals' leadership styles on the performance of lecturers in Sri Lankan Teachers' Colleges. Based on that, the study formulated the following objectives:

The following objectives are taken for this study.

1. To identify the relationship between employee-centered leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka.
2. To examine the relationship between job-centered leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka.
3. To find out the relationship between shared leadership style and the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka.
4. To explore the impact of leadership Styles on the performance of academic staff in Teacher Training Colleges in Sri Lanka.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a substantial gap in the literature; while many studies focus on school principals and university deans, there is a marked absence of research centred on the "middle tier" of Teachers' Colleges. Second, the findings provide a baseline for the Ministry of Education as it prepares for the 2026 reforms. If leadership is found to be ineffective in driving performance, structural changes in how Principals are trained and empowered may be necessary. Finally, the study offers a self-reflection for the Sri Lanka Teacher Educators Service (SLTES) to understand how the professional parity between leaders and staff affects institutional dynamics.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

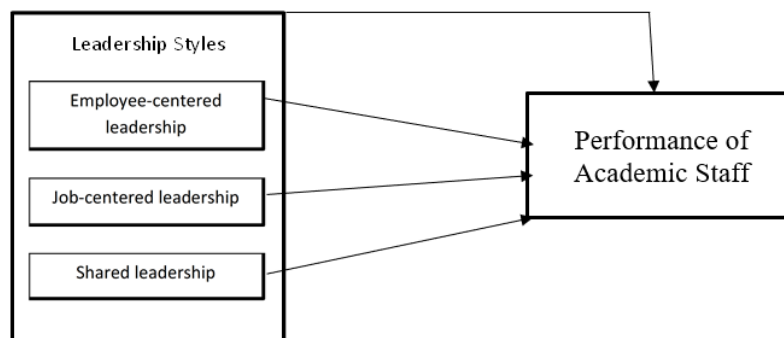


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study based on research questions.

H1: Employee-centered leadership has a positive relationship with academic staff performance.

H2: Job-centered leadership has a positive relationship with academic staff performance.

H3: Shared leadership has a positive relationship with academic staff performance.

H4: There is an impact of leadership styles on academic staff performance.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling

The primary data was collected through the structured questionnaire. It contained three parts. Part I is for collecting general information about the participants. Part II was used to collect information on leadership styles, and Part III was used to identify the type of performance by the academic staff. The researcher used a structured 35-question questionnaire to assess leadership style in Part II, which was developed by Pfeiffer and Jones, (1974). Parts I and III were prepared by the researcher. Part III was used to measure the performance of the academic staff of the Teachers' College.

For the purpose of this research, performance is conceptualized in terms of six primary determinants (Oguntimhin, 2001; Sareena Umma, Kengatharan, & Velnampy, 2021).

1. **Nature of the Job:** This includes the inherent characteristics of the workload, the diversity of tasks (teaching, administration, supervision), and the degree of autonomy afforded to the lecturer in the classroom.
2. **Staff Knowledge and Skills:** Professional performance is fundamentally tied to the lecturer's subject-matter expertise, pedagogical skills, and ability to use modern information technology.
3. **Achievement Factors:** This involves the lecturer's drive for professional excellence, willingness to innovate, and attainment of academic milestones.
4. **Content Factors:** Performance is also judged by how effectively the lecturer handles the curriculum, ensuring its relevance to current educational standards despite systemic limitations.
5. **Professional Factors:** Adherence to the standards of the teaching profession, participation in continuing professional development (CPD), and engagement in academic research are critical indicators.
6. **Disciplinary and Ethical Factors:** This includes moral conduct, time management (punctuality and attendance), and the ability to serve as a role model for teacher trainees.

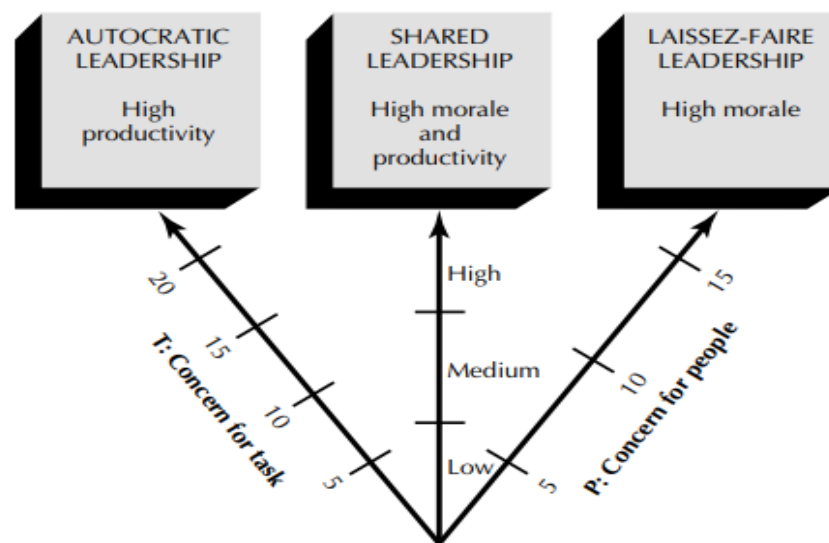
This study employs a quantitative research paradigm, with an explanatory, cross-sectional survey design. A census method was adopted, meaning the entire population of academic staff and leaders in the operational institutions was targeted to ensure exhaustive data collection. It contains 18 leaders and 43 academic staff members across the eight teacher training colleges. The decision to include the entire population across all eight colleges ensures that the findings are representative of the national state of Teachers' Colleges.

Data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed manually to all eight colleges. The leadership questionnaire was based on the T-P Leadership Questionnaire (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1974), which uses 35 specific behavioral items to map a leader's orientation toward tasks or people. The following instructions as they suggested were adopted to identify the leadership styles:

1. The item number for items 8, 12, 17, 18, 19, 30, 34, and 35 was circled.
2. Written the number 1 in front of a circled item number if responded S (seldom) or N (never) to that item.

3. Also written a number 1 in front of item numbers not circled if responded A (always) or F (frequently)
4. The number 1s that has written in front of the following items: 3, 5, 8, 10,15, 18, 19, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 35 was circled.
5. The circled numbers 1s was counted. This is the score for the level of concern for people.
6. The score was recorded in the blank following the letter P at the end of the questionnaire.
7. The un-circled number 1s was also counted. This is the score for concern for the task.
8. The score was recorded in the blank following the letter T at the end of the questionnaire.

The Leadership Style Profile Sheet as given below was drawn at the end of the exercise, and the different leadership styles were identified and then used in the study.



The staff performance questionnaire (section III) was developed based on a comprehensive literature review of performance determinants in the public sector, identifying 60 distinct performance indicators. It measures six different components such as the nature of the work, employee knowledge and skills, achievement factors, intrinsic factors, professional factors, and ethical factors. Both instruments utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always).

Data Analysis and Statistical Testing

The data analysis was conducted in SPSS across three stages: reliability testing, descriptive analysis, and hypothesis testing.

The following statistical tools are used to test the hypothesis

1. Correlation(r) – to identify the relationship between the leadership and the performance of the academic staff.
2. Regression (R^2) – to identify the impact of leadership on the performance of the academic staff.

Data Normality (Q-Q Plots and Skewness)

To ensure the data was suitable for parametric testing, normality was assessed. Quantile-Quantile (Q-Q) plots for both leadership and performance variables showed that observed values closely approximated the expected normal distribution line. Skewness and Kurtosis tests further confirmed this, with all values

falling between -3 and +3, satisfying the assumptions for correlation and regression analysis.

Validity and Reliability

To identify the different styles of leadership, the researcher used the questionnaire by Pfeiffer and Jones (1974). This is the model used by several other researchers as a pioneer. Similarly, the questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to measure the performance of the academic staff. The questionnaire items were identified from the literature. The researchers are satisfied with the content validity of the study. Cronbach's Alpha, reported in Table 1, was used to assess reliability.

Table 1: Reliability of the leadership and academic performance

Construct	Items	Alpha (α)
Leadership Styles (Pfeiffer & Jones)	35	0.829
Academic Staff Performance (Overall)	60	0.903
- Nature of the Job	9	0.904
- Staff Knowledge and Skills	13	0.901
- Achievement Factors	14	0.900
- Content Factors	10	0.899
- Professional Factors	5	0.900
- Disciplinary/Ethical Factors	9	0.902

The Alpha values for both leadership and performance scales exceeded 0.8, indicating high internal reliability and consistency of the survey instruments. It ensured the data was highly reliable.

Leadership Style Identification

Using the scoring matrix for the T-P Questionnaire, the 18 institutional leaders were categorized based on their orientation scores and are stated in Table 2.

Table 2: No of respondents by Leadership styles

Leadership Style	Count	Percentage (%)
Employee-Centered (High P, Low T)	02	11.1
Job-Centered (Low P, High T)	01	5.6
Shared Leadership (Balanced P & T)	15	83.3

The overwhelming prevalence of "Shared Leadership" (83.3%) is a defining characteristic of these institutions. In the Sri Lankan public sector, where trade unions are strong and service grades are standardized, institutional heads often prefer a collaborative, consultative approach to avoid administrative friction. Only one leader was identified as purely job-centered—a principal whose pursuit of a PhD coincided with a highly task-oriented administrative push.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics and Inferential statistics were used to test the characteristics of data and hypothesis respectively. Descriptive statistics was used to identify the characteristics of the variables. It provided in Table 3.

The mean scores for the six performance determinants provide an overview of the current professional status of the lecturers.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for performance

Performance components	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nature of the Job	4.03	1.597
Staff Knowledge and Skills	3.99	1.588
Achievement Factors	4.00	1.602
Content Factors	3.79	1.541
Professional Factors	4.01	1.621
Disciplinary/Ethical Factors	3.90	1.577

Lecturers rated their performance highest in the "Nature of the Job" (4.03) and "Professional Factors" (4.01). This suggests a strong sense of professional identity and dedication to the teaching tasks. The lowest mean was for "Content Factors" (3.79), which correlates with external critiques regarding the outdated nature of the current curriculum provided by the National Institute of Education.

Relationship between Leadership and Performance

Pearson Correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between leadership and academic performance (H) and the outcomes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation analysis for leadership and academic performance

Hypothesis	Variables	Pearson (r)	Sig. (p-value)
H1a	Employee-centered vs. Performance	0.193	0.444
H1b	Shared Leadership vs. Performance	0.228	0.363
H1c	Job-centered vs. Performance	0.086	0.735

The correlation values between leadership styles (employee centered, shared leadership and job centered) and academic performance are 0.193, 0.228, and 0.735 which are insignificant at 0.05 levels. It indicates that there are no any relationship between leadership styles and academic performance. Therefore hypothesis one is not supported.

Impact of Leadership on academic performance

The regression analysis was performed to identify the impact of the leadership on academic performance. Anyhow, pre-conditions need to be tested prior to the regression analysis, which is to test the autocorrelation and multicollinearity. For this purpose durbin Watson and tolerance and VIF were calculated which are shown in Table 5

Table 5: Test of autocorrelation and multicollinearity

Leadership Style;	Durbin Wattson	Multicollinearity	
		Tolerance	VIF
People Oriented	1.975	0.270	3.705
Task Oriented		0.208	4.803
Shared		0.408	2.449

Table 6: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin- Watson	F	Sig.
1	.224 ^a	.050	-.154	2.175633574789188	1.975	.246	.863 ^b

The table shows R² value of .050 is not significant at 0.05 level, therefore leadership styles have no impact on performance of the staff of training colleges in SriLanka. Hence, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Table 7: Co-efficient for leadership styles

Leadership styles	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance
(Constant)	3.069	2.746		1.118	.283	
People oriented	.039	.074	.267	.532	.603	.270
Task oriented	.015	.040	.155	.380	.710	.408
Shared leadership	.004	.024	.087	.152	.881	.208

According to Table 8, the t-values are not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that no leadership style contributes to staff performance.

Discussion

Analyzing the Disconnect

The finding that leadership does not impact performance in Teachers' Colleges contradicts many standard organizational behavior theories. However, a deep dive into the institutional structure of the Sri Lankan education system reveals several factors contributing to this disconnect.

Professional Parity and the "Colleague Culture"

One major reason for the lack of leadership impact is the professional structure of the SLTES. Institutional leaders (Principals) and their subordinates (Lecturers) often belong to the same professional service and frequently hold the same grade (Grade I or II). This parity creates a "colleague culture" where the Principal is viewed as a peer who handles administrative paperwork rather than a superior who directs academic work. Consequently, the hierarchical distance required for top-down leadership is absent.

Centralization and Lack of Incentives

Teachers' Colleges are highly centralized under the Ministry of Education. Local institutional leaders have virtually no autonomy regarding recruitment, disciplinary action, or financial rewards. In management theory, the ability to provide incentives (rewards) or penalties is a core lever of leadership influence. Without these tools, Principals become "administrative conduits" rather than leaders. Performance management is thus reduced to a ritualistic annual form-filling exercise rather than a genuine driver of improvement.

The Role of Unions and Conflict Avoidance

The prevalence of Shared Leadership (83.3%) is likely a survival strategy. The strong influence of trade unions in the Sri Lankan education sector means that any attempt to implement strict performance monitoring or increase task loads is often met with collective resistance. Institutional heads avoid job-centered (task-oriented) leadership to prevent conflict and strikes, resulting in a pervasive form of "laissez-faire" governance that is termed shared leadership but lacks a strategic focus.

Internal Professional Motivation

The descriptive statistics show high lecturer performance in "Staff Knowledge" and "Nature of the Job". This suggests that the academic staff is internally motivated and self-directing. As highly qualified professionals with years of experience, they perform their duties based on their own professional ethics and subject expertise rather than in response to leadership direction. In such a scenario, performance is an individual characteristic that institutional leadership is currently failing to harness or amplify.

Recommendations for Institutional Reform

Based on the findings that leadership is currently not a determining factor in performance, the following recommendations are proposed to bridge the gap between management and academic outcomes.

1. Professionalizing Institutional Leadership

The Ministry of Education should move away from appointing Principals based solely on seniority or service grade. There is an urgent need for a mandatory "Strategic Leadership and Educational Management" certification for all institutional heads. Training should focus on transformative leadership models that move beyond mere administrative management to instructional leadership.

2. Decentralization and Autonomy

To empower leadership, the administrative structure of Teachers' Colleges must be decentralized. Institutional heads should be granted autonomy over a portion of the institutional budget to reward innovation and support staff development programs. A decentralized model would allow leaders to respond to regional needs and leverage institutional strengths.

3. Curriculum and Infrastructure Modernization

The stagnation of the curriculum since 2007 must be addressed immediately. Modernizing "Content Factors" through digital integration and modular learning—as proposed in the 2026 reforms—will provide a new framework for leadership. Furthermore, investment in physical infrastructure (ICT labs and research centers) is necessary to provide the "Achievement Factors" that motivate highly qualified staff.

4. Implementing a Robust Performance Appraisal System

The current ritualistic performance evaluations must be replaced with a 360-degree appraisal system linked to institutional Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Leaders should be trained to use these appraisals not as a disciplinary tool, but as a mechanism for identifying professional development needs and recognizing excellence.

5. Strengthening Research Culture

To revitalize the "Professional Factors," lecturers should be incentivized to engage in educational research. Institutional leadership should be judged on its ability to foster an innovation-and-learning culture, moving the focus from "teaching-only" to a "research-and-instruction" model.

Scope for Future Research

This study, while comprehensive in its census approach, opens several avenues for further inquiry :

1. **Non-Academic Staff Performance:** A similar study should be conducted to investigate how leadership affects administrative and support staff, who are vital to institutional efficiency.
2. **Comparative Analysis with NCoEs:** Future research could compare leadership dynamics in pre-service institutions (NCoEs) with in-service institutions (Teachers' Colleges) to identify if the student-teacher environment alters leadership effectiveness.
3. **Qualitative Exploration of Performance Drivers:** Since leadership explained only 5% of performance variance, qualitative research is needed to identify the actual drivers of lecturer output, such as student engagement, peer collaboration, or personal career goals.
4. **Student Achievement Outcomes:** Investigating whether a change in institutional leadership style ultimately leads to better exam results or teaching skills in the teacher trainees would validate the indirect impact of leadership.

Conclusion

The Teachers' Colleges of Sri Lanka are at a critical juncture. This exhaustive analysis has demonstrated that despite the high qualifications and personal dedication of the academic staff, the current leadership paradigms of Principals and Vice-Principals have no statistically significant impact on staff performance. The lecturers function as autonomous, self-motivated professionals, while leadership has been relegated to an administrative role that lacks the autonomy and tools to drive excellence.

The prevalence of shared leadership in these colleges is more a symptom of service-grade parity and conflict avoidance than a strategic collaborative choice. For the 2026 National Education Reform Agenda to succeed, the government must move beyond curricular tweaks and address the fundamental administrative disconnection. By professionalizing leadership, granting institutional autonomy, and implementing robust performance-based systems, the "mother institutions" of teacher education can be transformed into centers of excellence that truly shape the future of Sri Lankan education.

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