

Research Article

An Evaluation of Heads of Departments Leadership Roles in Determining Academic Results in Selected Private Universities in Lusaka District

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Abstract

Heads of Departments (HODs) are involved in administrative and managerial functions and seems to have several difficulties in overseeing the lecturers since they lacked official in-service training in supervision that may lead to low student pass rates caused by ineffective teaching strategies and flawed assessment procedures. This article evaluates HODs leadership roles in determining academic results in selected private universities in Lusaka district. The survey indicated that HODS were not trained, no empirical evidence on the HODS impact on academic results, a vacuum leadership role by HODS, scanty knowledge and unclear relationship between the HODS leadership roles and academic results. The significance of the study was to examine the actual roles they implemented to enhance good academic results. A population was drawn from four selected private universities where a sample of 48 was picked. Structured questionnaires were used and data analysed using thematic process for interpretations, and conclusion. Findings were that most of HODS had no additional knowledge in management despite rating their leadership high. They performed some of their leadership roles well though totally failed to execute some of them. Nevertheless, the academic results were rated high. The teaching-learning environment was found to be favourable. Despite HODS being rated high in leadership, good academic pass rate, the relationship between the HODS' leadership roles practices and the academic performance was low. The low relationship between the leadership roles practices and the academic performance could have affected some of service delivery leading to low academic results. In this case the HODS could have used their past experiences; or imitating their role models; or used inherent leadership to influence others to work hard and produce good academic pass rate.

Keywords

Head of Department, Leadership Roles, Academic Results, Private University

1. Introduction

The achieving of academic excellence in higher education institutions depends mostly on departmental leadership where HODs are assigned with key roles that are supportive to both staff and students [5]. Oduro observed that a large number of HODs recruited was mostly based on academic

seniority and had no formal training [31]. In that regard, their leadership philosophies and methods varied, thus having an effect on their departments' academic performance. HODS are involved in administrative and managerial functions [33] and some may have several difficulties in overseeing the lecturers

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owing to lacked of official in-service training leading to low student pass rates [31]. According to [38], HODs were to oversee and to give instructions in order to guarantee high-quality education. However, differences in academic achievement between departments rose questions about the efficacy and consistency of departmental leadership roles in private university in Lusaka [5].

There was a stronger positive link between educational quality and leadership. It was suggested that in order to promote staff respect, obedience, and compliance, university administrators should employ less directive and commanding language and less authoritarian leadership styles. It also promoted leaders to increase communication through delegation, collaborative decision-making, and frequent interactions, as well as to include staff members in decision-making processes. The idea behind those practices was to improve staff motivation and communication that would lead to a sense of fulfillment and engagement and eventually help to deliver high-quality education [13].

According to [32], supervisors' instructions encouraged creativity by providing guidance on how to carry out their duties, but they did not precisely tell workers what they needed to do, they did not set key performance indicators, they did not schedule work appropriately, and their directive leadership style was insufficient to help workers persevere through difficult times, let alone fail to maintain a work-life balance. Little was done to fully operationalize the directive leadership style, despite the fact that it had shown to have a large and beneficial impact on staff members' willingness to put out effort and persist in their conduct.

Successful HOD leadership had a significant impact on a department's efficacy. However, the challenges they faced - such as scarce resources, holding many jobs, and navigating institutional politics - highlight the complexity of their responsibilities. Therefore, by emphasizing accountability, using performance measurements, and fostering an atmosphere of open communication, HODs could effectively lead their departments towards academic achievement. By providing opportunities for professional development, fostering environments that encourage collaborative leadership, and empowering HODs to confidently and competently manage their numerous leadership roles, universities could invest in improving their leadership skills [30].

According to [11], institutional leaders in Zambia conducted appraisals as part of their leadership roles. They claimed that while some people thought appraisals were not beneficial since they were disconnected from material benefits, others claimed that their performance had improved in areas like time management and teaching strategies. It was also noted that there were differences in the amount of input given, with some people receiving thorough comments while others did not. Poor performance may result from such disparities.

Private universities at the regional or African level, like in Uganda, employed a large number of inexperienced, middle-level faculty members who lacked qualifications. Ugandan

private universities, like those in Sub-Saharan Africa in general, appeared to rely on inexperienced middle-level administrators and academics who lacked the leadership skills necessary for such demanding roles. It was noted that the majority of Uganda's private universities did not follow the criteria and standards established by the National Council for Higher Education [2]. There was very little literature on the leadership roles of HODs in private university settings in Sub-Saharan Africa [19].

Department heads lacked official in-service training that could have led to low student pass rates [31]. He observed that a large number of HODs were recruited basing on academic seniority, leading to use of personal preferred methods that varied widely, hence effecting the departments' academic performance.

Many department heads lacked a distinct sense of their leadership identity and frequently faced difficulties as a result of inadequate leadership training [30]. Furthermore, there was a knowledge vacuum about the leadership roles and difficulties experienced by HODs in private universities because the majority of the research that was available concentrated on senior institutional leadership. [17] supported the assertion when he said that little empirical evidence existed about the impact of HODs on academic results, especially in the context of private universities in Lusaka, Zambia. The point was further agreed by [19] who stated that there was lot of study done on leadership in education, but very little of it had particularly looked at the functions of HODs in private university settings in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Zambia in particular.

The literature, therefore, indicated that HODS were mostly not trained, and there was no empirical evidence on the HODS influence on academic results, and that there were vacuum leadership roles for HODS. It entailed that knowledge on HODS leadership roles was scanty and unclear relationship between the HODS leadership roles and academic results. The study, therefore, evaluated the leadership roles executed by the HODs in determining academic results.

The significance of this article is to examine the actual leadership roles the department heads carried out on the private universities in Lusaka whose findings were to improve the implementation of leadership roles in private universities to enhance improved academic results.

2. Literature Review

At the regional (African) level, it was discovered that private institutions in Uganda hired a large number of inexperienced, middle-level faculty members. Generally speaking, private universities in Sub-Saharan Africa appear to rely on inexperienced middle-level administrators and academics who lacked the leadership skills necessary for such demanding roles. It was noted that the majority of Uganda's private universities did not follow the principles and requirements established by the National Council for Higher Education [2].

Etomes, S. E. et. al. [12] supported the assertion when he

said that little empirical evidence existed about the impact of HODs on academic results, especially in the context of private universities in Lusaka, Zambia. The point was further agreed by [19] who stated that there was lot of study done on leadership in education, but very little of it had particularly looked at the functions of HODs in private university settings in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Zambia in particular.

Concerning leadership, [13] found a greater positive association between educational quality and leadership styles. It was suggested that in order to promote staff respect, obedience, and compliance, university administrators should employ less commanding language and less authoritarian leadership styles. Instead, administrators should be encouraged to improve communication through delegation, collaborative decision-making, and frequent interactions. In the end, those techniques were seen to help deliver high-quality education by improving communication and inspiring employees, which in turn fostered happiness and a sense of involvement.

Commenting on leadership roles, [32] observed that supervisors' instructions allowed for creativity by providing guidance on how to carry out tasks, but they did not give feedback to workers on what they needed to do, they did not set key performance indicators, they did not schedule work appropriately, and their directive leadership style was insufficient to help workers persevere through difficult times, let alone fail to maintain a work-life balance. Little was done to fully operationalize the directive leadership style, despite the fact that it showed a large and beneficial impact on staff members' willingness to put out effort and persist in their conduct.

Unquestionably, HODs had a significant impact on how well universities performed academically and administratively. Successful HOD leadership, whether through transformational, transactional, or collaborative approaches, had a significant impact on a department's efficacy. Universities needed to make investments to improve HODs' leadership skills, providing opportunities for career advancement, establishing environments that encourage team-based leadership, and empowering HODs to competently and confidently manage their numerous responsibilities [30].

Commenting on appraisals, [11] noted that while some professors reported gains in their performance, such as in time management and teaching strategies, many others saw appraisals as useless because they were disconnected from material incentives. It was also noted that there were differences in the amount of input given, with some people receiving thorough comments while others did not.

Commenting on challenges, [16] stated that infrastructure was a crucial part of university learning environments. The other challenge was the reliance on learners tuition fees, a few private universities' financial standing had a detrimental effect on both the internal and exterior activities. Additionally, information regarding the roles of HODs in the district of Lusaka appeared to be inadequate.

In higher education, leadership was becoming more widely

acknowledged as a critical factor in determining both academic performance and institutional success. In higher education institutions, HODs played a crucial role as a link between the academic staff and higher administration. According to [4], their leadership skills were essential for fostering academic success, advancing high-quality instruction, and improving learners' performance.

According to [31], little empirical evidence existed about the impact of HODs on academic results, especially in the context of private universities in Zambia. Public higher education institutions was the only area where the majority of the data was available on educational leadership. As a result, not enough attention was paid to the unique dynamics and difficulties that HODs in private universities faced. Given that private universities were becoming more and more important in extending access to higher education in Zambia, the disparity was especially worrisome [22]. [7] observed that although the studies did not always single out HODs and quantify their insufficiency, they provide empirical sign that highlighted that there was a strong correlation between leadership styles and the creation of conducive teaching and learning environments that suggested that there was poor to moderate teaching and learning environments existing in the institutions.

The significance of assessing leadership in university departments was supported by findings from school-level research that demonstrated connections between learning environments and leadership styles. For example, teaching settings in Zambian university institutions were greatly impacted by leadership styles; hybrid approaches were proposed to balance effectiveness [7].

The evaluation of heads of departments leadership roles in determining academic results in selected private universities in Lusaka district required that the ideal and actual leadership roles were identified in and relate them to student academic performance.

2.1. Ideal Roles and Responsibilities

According to [38], the roles of HODs were to oversee and give instructions in order to guarantee the provision of high-quality education. Among the particular roles were the following:

Serving as an example to encourage, inspire, and intellectually stimulate instructors.

Oversee the creation and execution of the department's academic plan while putting students' academic and personal welfare first. It makes sure that student support and academic rigor were balanced.

Curriculum Development and Management. The department head was in charge of creating, developing, and implementing a demanding and creative curriculum that satisfies global standards and takes into account the many cultural backgrounds of our learners. The curriculum should also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, taking into account

new developments in education, the incorporation of technology, and the individual needs.

Additional responsibilities included conducting participatory evaluations and providing insightful comments related to research, professional support, mentoring, motivating, and facilitating educational advancement. Furthermore, it entailed conducting frequent performance reviews for teaching staff members, fostering their professional development with an emphasis on learners' safety, teaching methods, and academic quality [10].

Concerning institutional communication and governance, the HOD represented a department in governance structures. In order to guarantee a comprehensive approach to student development, HODS promoted efficient communication and teamwork among academic personnel. It also entailed making certain that academic policies and procedures were conveyed in a clear and uniform manner throughout the department, which supported a unified strategy for student welfare [9].

Additionally, [9] stated that it was impossible to overstate the significance of academic planning since it was a useful tool for guaranteeing quality and, consequently, the department's and institution's ongoing academic and financial success. A department would have a clear understanding of its direction and goals if it planned carefully and regularly evaluated its departmental goals. In order to conduct such an assessment, the department head provided guidance to the employees in their departments regarding the department's strengths and weaknesses, course viability, student enrollment trends, and departmental cost structures.

Going by [10], the department head had a major influence on how institutional policies were developed, making sure they followed best practices for both academic excellence and safety. In addition to planning, coordination involved working with other department heads and the institution's leadership teams to guarantee that uniform academic standards and safety procedures were followed throughout the entire organization. It included also creating, organizing, putting into practice, and scheduling student calendars.

Regarding resource management for institutions, [20] stated that certain private universities' financial capability affected both their internal and exterior activities. Thus, among the roles of the department head were:

Ensure that funds were distributed efficiently to meet the needs of students' education as well as the department's operating requirements by supervising the academic department's budget.

Make sure that instructional resources such as textbooks, digital tools, and learning materials were maintained and updated. Additionally, as administrators and leaders, department heads had a big influence on how well teaching and learning went in institutions because of their behavior and character, which affected every facet of the institution's operations [9].

In terms of student performance and evaluation, department heads kept an eye on and evaluate students' academic progress while making sure every student got the help they needed to

thrive in the classroom. That was achieved by making sure that academic policies and procedures were conveyed in a clear and uniform manner throughout the department that helped to foster a unified approach to learners' welfare [9].

2.2. Actual Roles and Responsibilities

Higher education institutions' (HEIs') production and transformative leadership were found to be positively and significantly correlated. The average value of intellectual stimulation for long-term productivity in private versus state-owned higher education institutions indicated that private HEIs used intellectual stimulation more frequently than state-owned HEIs to boost productivity [12].

Concerning the issue of hybrid leadership, [36] observed that the HEI's academic department heads' leadership philosophies differed. There was no discernible trend among the most common leadership philosophies. Employee job satisfaction and leadership styles seemed to have a non-linear relationship. The phenomena of job happiness were influenced by a variety of elements outside leadership styles. For instance, it was discovered that servant leadership was a potent style of leadership that could have a big impact on worker satisfaction through persuasion, stewardship, and trust-building. Organizations could boost employee engagement and retention, foster a healthy work environment, and eventually propel corporate success by implementing a servant leadership style.

According to [7], the development of favorable teaching and learning settings was strongly correlated with leadership styles. He proposed that, under the four leadership philosophies that were being examined, learning institutions had poor to moderate teaching and learning environments. A poor to moderate environment had detrimental effects on teaching and learning. Some were primarily employing instructional, laissez-faire, democratic, and autocratic leadership styles, which had an impact on how institutions were managed and how conducive learning and teaching environments were created. Therefore, from Zambia's point of view, the four leadership philosophies that were examined did not significantly aid in the development of favorable teaching and learning environments.

In addition to leadership styles, [39] found that organizational commitment and work climate were predictors of improved lecturers' job performance. For lecturer management to be successful, a conducive learning environment must be established. It entailed that supplying sufficient resources, making sure that the workload was manageable, and encouraging academic staff to collaborate. Internal quality assurance units were crucial for tracking and enhancing teaching and learning procedures, which supported learning environment [10].

When discussing instructional leadership techniques in higher education, it was emphasized how crucial department heads were to manage lecture planning, assessing lecturer performance, and encouraging staff growth. It was found that

staff development initiatives received less attention than supervision and assessment. It emphasized how important department heads were in influencing academic excellence through their leadership style [20].

It was discovered that department heads had several difficulties when it came to overseeing lecturers. Department heads did not get official in-service training in supervision. The department chiefs were likewise unmotivated. Department heads were under pressure to find alternative instructors to teach in their place because the majority of teachers consistently obtained approvals, failed to prepare lesson plans, and failed to fulfill deadlines [28].

In Zambia, many department heads lacked a distinct sense of their leadership identity and frequently faced difficulties as a result of inadequate leadership training [30]. Concerning such inadequacy, [10] said that performance reviews were essential instruments for evaluating and improving the work of academic employees, but just 25% of academic employees at private universities received thorough input from official performance reviews. It suggested that performance appraisal systems were not being used effectively.

According to [20], the benefits of continuing professional development (CPD) for improving academic staff competencies were becoming more widely acknowledged. However, due to time and budget limitations, private higher education institutions in Zambia sometimes struggled to offer CPD opportunities. Private institutions should, therefore, look for other financing sources to support staff development programs because CPD was crucial for fostering teaching and learning.

Time and money constraints were found to be major obstacles, even though professors were eager to participate in CPD in order to maintain their credentials. It emphasized how department leaders must push for institutional backing to enable CPD chances. University instructors were encouraged to participate in CPD in order to demonstrate their professional competence and to refresh their current credentials [27].

Alias, S. B. and Sellvaraju, J. A. (2024) found that academic outcomes were improved by integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning [1]. He identified a number of strategies to promote lecturers' use of ICTs, such as providing incentives, addressing barriers to ICT adoption, and sensitization programs. The strategies were intended to improve lecturers' attitudes toward ICT integration, which in turn improved the learning experience for learners.

Regarding mentorship, [21] proposed that there was a significant disparity between the views of department heads and recently qualified teachers on the roles of a leader in assisting newly qualified teachers in their profession.

According to [20], infrastructure played a crucial role in university learning settings. It depended on student tuition fees. Inadequate infrastructure, such as obsolete teaching facilities and a lack of office space, made it difficult for department heads to efficiently manage academics. Faculty and

learners were impacted by inadequate infrastructure. Resolving those infrastructural issues was essential to establishing a favorable environment for instruction and learning.

In private universities, department heads frequently struggled to retain knowledgeable and experienced instructors. Low compensation, few prospects for career progression, and a lack of institutional support were some of the factors that contribute to high turnover. Universities had adopted staff retention tactics, like performance-based compensation and chances for professional growth and additional education, to address those problems [26].

It was observed that Zambian institution executives faced a number of challenges, such as a lack of funding, insufficient chances for professional growth, and administrative restraints. Furthermore, learning institutions' leadership in Zambia involved a variety of leadership philosophies, each of which had an impact on academic results. Policymakers should encourage learning institutions' leadership to continuously improve by investing in comprehensive and ongoing professional development [40].

The management of university lecturers in private universities was extremely low. There were a number of factors like inadequate training, a lack of academic self-development, a lack of further education attainment, a lack of promotion, a lack of human resources, poor internal communications, a lack of support from top management, a lack of support for publication and research, a lack of support for participation in national conferences, seminars, and the presentation of academic articles, and poor working conditions [26].

Learning institutions' shortcomings included inadequate learners' support services, poor communication channels, poor training and professional development, issues with integrating ICT into the delivery of distance education, issues with assignments and tests, poor records management, a lack of a national policy on distance education in Zambia, and inadequacy with regard to interactive instructional materials and staffing [9].

The low economic incentives that were prevalent in the nation caused teachers to leave private universities. To that effect, it was advised that each time a lecturer resigned, the administration must accept responsibility and act right away to determine the cause of the departure. Besides that, factor, leadership development or career advancement were not done effectively. It was advised that leaders received the necessary orientation and training prior to starting their positions and their benefits be considered [26].

Institutions that provided learners with high-quality feedback in higher education adhered to established norms. Engaging learners with their feedback and advising them on how to use it for future learning, growth, and progress was one of the problems teachers faced. It was crucial to keep the emphasis on the significance of feedback as a feedback mechanism rather than a means of defending marks, even in the face of the growing marketization of higher education and the rise in

student challenges to grades and academic judgments. The difficulties of mass higher education and growing student populations put additional strain on academic personnel to provide timely and high-quality feedback [37].

According to [18], Lusaka's universities were in poor condition, which meant that the provision of high-quality services was jeopardized. In support of that, [25] cited Nambela (2019) and Nkhoma (2020), who stated that there were notable issues such as inconsistent application of quality standards, a lack of qualified teaching staff, a lack of science laboratories, libraries and computer laboratories with adequate resources, a lack of appreciation for corporate governance practices, and resistance to change within certain universities.

Additionally, in higher education, academic faculty played a critical role in teaching, learning, research, and public service. Zambia's standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education placed a strong emphasis on matching learning programs with Higher Education Authority (HEA) requirements, highlighting the importance of having a sufficient number of qualified academic staff [25]. In addition, [15] noted that low motivation, engagement, and self-regulation were among the major difficulties that teachers and students commonly face. Accordingly, [34] noted that relationships between lecturers and students helped students feel that their teachers cared about them, allow them to express themselves freely in class, and make both parties an essential part of the classroom as they actively participated. Poor lecturer-student interactions were nevertheless documented at educational institutions, even though professors and students were aware of the components of these partnerships.

According to [3], leadership was the process of deciding how to treat people when duties were assigned so that they were inspired to accomplish a result from the decisions made in action. Thus, the job was the capacity to inspire others to accomplish shared goals.

Leaders must recognize the importance and meaning of their roles in order to carry out the entire organization's operations in an adequate manner. The performance of diverse work, duties and obligations in a systematic and orderly fashion could be made possible by function [40].

Additionally, it was noted that social growth significantly depended on leadership. It required people who could successfully lead teams to achieve their objectives. However, studies showed that due to the skills and attributes required for leadership, effective leaders were hard to find. Some people were born leaders while others had received leadership training. According to several authors, those who had worked with groups for a long time as members were better in leadership roles. Accordingly, leadership was a skill that developed via participation [33].

Furthermore, according to [29], effective leadership affected not just the team, department, and overall organization, but also the individual followers.

The primary roles that leaders carry out to direct, sway, and assist individuals or groups in accomplishing organizational

or group goals were known as leadership functions. Achieving objectives, preserving group cohesiveness, and adjusting to change all depended on those processes. In both classical and contemporary theories of leadership, academics and researchers had delineated a number of leadership functions. Among the most important leadership roles are:

One of the most important aspects of leadership is effective communication. It entailed listening, outlining expectations, providing feedback, and maintaining open lines of communication. Some of the roles are:

To make sure objectives were reached, performance standards should be established, results should be assessed, and remedial action should be taken as needed.

Lead groups through changes, lessen opposition, and encourage flexibility in reaction to shifting conditions.

Making strategic choices and resolving issues while striking a balance between immediate solutions and long-term results.

A variety of leadership philosophies impacted organization's efficacy and performance, but transformational leadership was particularly noteworthy as a strong indicator of employee work satisfaction and general contentment. To successfully traverse complicated contexts, leaders were to embrace a flexible, context-driven strategy that incorporated a variety of leadership philosophies [29].

In summary, a combination of leadership styles rather than a single style may be able to address every issue in higher education institutions. According to an overview of department heads' leadership responsibilities, leadership is the process of deciding how to treat people when duties are assigned in order to inspire them to carry out the decisions they make. It entails being able to inspire people to accomplish shared goals. Therefore, the primary duties and obligations that leaders carry out to direct, sway, and assist people in accomplishing institutional goals are known as leadership roles. Direction, motivation, communication, decision-making, and dispute resolution are all part of it. Others include managing change, conducting performance reviews, fostering relationships, and training employees [14].

Numerous factors were found to contribute to students' poor academic performance, including a lack of adequate teaching and learning resources, improper infrastructure, high enrollment, low teacher morale, a shortage of qualified teachers, widespread absenteeism among teachers and students, a lack of funding, and low staffing levels [23].

Several variables negatively impacted the academic performance of learners enrolled in the University programs. Among some of them were: Lack of a supportive lecturer-student relationship; deteriorating classroom facilities, particularly the laboratories; an excessive amount of material in the curriculum, some of which was deemed unrelated to what was taught in schools; personal issues and obligations; a pace that was too quick for them; and low student attendance at lectures [8].

Chanda, C. T. et. al also found that learners who used social

media performed well. Social media was an excellent information source that gave learners access to news, resources, and instructional content that improved their learning and academic performance [6]. However, it was found to be a major distraction for learners by taking their focus away from homework, assignments, and other academic obligations. As a result, it was necessary to help learners learn time management skills.

2.3. Relationship Between Heads of Departments' Leadership Practices and Student Academic Performance

This article discovered that reviewing the actual academic results for private universities in Lusaka was not feasible because the results were not displayed on respective websites for various reasons like; academic examination results were considered confidential information for individual students and institutions; generating such results involved accessing private student data, which was protected and not publicly shared; each institution had its own grading and performance standards, and there was no universal standard for generating a combined set of results; and regulatory bodies (like HEA) focused more on accreditation, programme quality, infrastructure, minimum standards, not detailed performance metrics by institution.

Conceptually, it is concluded that there are three intervening variables that determine the results of the learners depending on how they were manipulated by the HODS. The intervening variables are lecturers, learners and environment.

3. Methodology

The study used a survey design where both structured and unstructured interview schedules that cover closed ended questions and open-ended questions. The study area involved four private universities in Lusaka District, Zambia that composed a population of Deans, Heads of departments, Lecturers, and Learners. The sample size, therefore, consisted of 48 respondents, drawn from four private universities in Lusaka district, comprised of four deans, four HODS, eight lecturers and thirty-two students. The sampling Technique included purposive and snowball sampling to select a sample that was relevant to the research in that HODS worked closely with deans, lecturers and students. Interview schedules was used as data collection method to collect primary data to evaluate the leadership roles that HODs played in determining academic results. The data collection instrument used was open ended and close ended questionnaires were used to collect qualitative data. The data analysis involved coding and group the data into themes. Ethically, the rights and dignity of all respondents in the evaluation of HODS' leadership roles in determining academic results were carefully protected, and informed consents were obtained from the respondents prior to participation, ensuring that they voluntarily agreed. Every respondent's anonymity

and confidentiality was protected by stringent procedures.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed and analysed through themes derived from the research specific objectives. The identified themes included; ideal roles, actual roles and relationship between Heads of Departments' leadership roles and student academic performance.

Table 1. Total sample.

		Frequency	Percent
Sample	target	48	100.0
Sample	Covered	46	95.6

Table 1 indicates 46 (95.6) respondents answered the questionnaires while 2 (4.4%) did not answer the questionnaire. The two could not submit their papers owing to unforeseen circumstances. The total number of respondents was 48.

IDEAL ROLES

Table 2. Do your university have institutional policies.

		Frequency	Percent
	YES	33	72.5
Valid	NO	13	27.5
	Total	46	100.0

The roles of HODS were guided by university policies in respective universities. It was found, according to the Table 2 that 72.5% of respondents agreed that they had university policies in place while 27.5% disagreed. In support of institutional policies to guide academics, [25] said that Zambia's standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education placed a strong emphasis on matching learning programs with HEA requirements. It also explained why [10] stated that department heads had a major influence on how institutional policies were developed, making sure they followed best practices for academic excellence. Furthermore, [40] said that leaders recognized the importance of their roles and participating in the creation of the laws and regulations that would be applied within their organizations in order to carry out the entire organization's operations in an adequate manner. It meant that most of universities had the policies to guide the HODS on the ideal roles of HODS hence most of the HODS were supposed to execute their roles appropriately.

Table 3. Did you see the document that contains roles of hods.

	Frequency	Percent
YES	19	41.9
Valid NO	27	58.1
Total	46	100.0

The question on whether respondents saw the documents that contained roles of HODS, Table 3 indicated that 58.1% did not see the documents that contained roles of HODS. The percentage of 41.9 agreed that they had seen. Almost half of the respondents saw the document and another half did not, a situation that could raise issues of poor accountability (e.g. lecturers might not have clear expectations of the HOD), unguided leadership, transparency might not be exercised, and delegation of duties might not be effective because the subordinates were not aware of the roles to do. The end result could be low performance.

ACTUAL ROLES

Table 4. How do you rate the leadership practices of your hod.

	Frequency	Percent
NOT SURE	2	4.3
POOR	1	2.1
Valid FAIR	12	26.0
GOOD	19	41.3
VERY GOOD	13	28.2

The rating of leadership of HODS was at 75% on average in view of the rates that were indicated for 50%, 75% and 100% according to the Table 4. Only 25% rated the leadership to be below 25%. Regarding leadership, [33] stated that some people were born leaders while others received leadership training but still observed that several authors said that those who had worked with groups for a long time as members were better in leadership roles as well.

According to [4], leadership skills were essential for fostering academic success, advancing high-quality instruction, and improving student performance. Additionally, [38] stated that HODs were to oversee and to give instructions in order to guarantee the provision of high-quality education. [7] observed that although most of the studies did not single out HODs and quantify their insufficiency, they provided empirical sign that highlighted strong correlation between leadership and the creation of conducive teaching and learning environments. It meant that most of the HODS leadership in private universities were good enough to influence the lecturers and

students, regardless of any problems the lecturers and students went through.

Table 5. How do you rate communication in your department.

	Frequency	Percent
25%	1	1.8
Valid 50%	39	84.8
75%	6	13.4
Total	46	100.0

Table 5 showed that 98.2% (84.8% for 50% and 13.4% for 75%) of respondents said that there was communication within the departments. Only 1.8% respondents rated communication to be at 25%. According to [1], communication was one of the aspects of leadership effectiveness because it entailed listening, outlining expectations and providing feedback. It meant that the HODS were able to communicate effectively to the lecturers and students. It seemed that there was effective horizontal communication that could have helped the lecturers to perform well in the presence of good leadership.

Table 6. Does the institution management communicate with parents/guardians.

	Frequency	Percent
YES	24	51.9
Valid NO	22	48.1
Total	46	100.0

Concerning communication to parents or guardians, Table 6 indicated that 51,9% of respondents agreed that institution management communicated with parents/guardians, while 48.1% respondents disagreed. It meant that the horizontal communication was given much attention than the vertical communication to parents. Communication is one of the roles of HODS. [24] said that there was limited parental participation in communication that had an impact on academic success. The HODS did not do much in communication with parents that could have affected some parent/guardians and subsequently some students.

Table 7. Do hods hold meetings with learners.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid YES	30	64.3

	Frequency	Percent
NO	16	35.7
Total	46	100.0

Table 7 indicated that 64.3% of respondents said that HODS held meetings with students while 35.7% said that HODS never held meetings with learners. The researcher might suppose that the HODS in that case could have utilized the meetings to communicate important matters to students and later on draw inputs from them for planning or other uses.

Table 8. Is the teaching learning environment favorable.

	Frequency	Percent
YES	37	79.4
Valid NO	9	20.6
Total	46	100.0

The learning environments were reported to be favourable owing to the high number of respondents (79.4%) who agreed to that fact, while 20.5% respondents disagreed that the learning environment was favourable. According to [7], the development of favorable teaching and learning environment was strongly correlated with leadership styles that promoted good performance. [39] also added that work climate was a predictor of improved lecturers' job performance. It was, thus, illustrated by [20] who said that infrastructure played a crucial role in university learning settings. The learning and teaching environment was conducive for both lecturers and students. It meant that the environment could have motivated the lecturers and learners to be effective in their works.

Table 9. How would you rate the academic performance of your university now.

	Frequency	Percent
25%	1	.3
50%	17	38.6
Valid 75%	21	46.5
100%	6	14.7
Total	46	100.0

Concerning academic performance, Table 9 indicated that 46.5% of respondents rated the academic performance at

75%, 38.6% of respondents rated the academic performance at 50%, 14.7% of respondents rated academic performance at 100% and only 1 respondent rated at 25%. It meant that more than 95% pass rate. However, [23] said that numerous factors contributed to students' poor academic performance. It was also found that students who used social media performed well. Social media was an excellent information source that gave learners access to news, resources, and instructional content that improved their learning and academic performance [6]. It meant that the good pass rate could be attributed to good leadership, favourable environment, and some leadership roles like good horizontal communication and meetings with students.

Table 10. Do the hods have further training in management.

	Frequency	Percent
YES	14	30.6
Valid NO	32	69.4
Total	46	100.0

Table 10 indicated that 69.4% of respondents said that HODS did not have further training in management while 30.6% said that they did the training. In view of the good rating of HODS' leadership, other factors could have been on play as asserted by [31] who said that some HODS were being recruited based more on academic seniority. Besides that, he observed that a large number of HODs were recruited without formal training. [30] added that many department heads lacked a distinct sense of their leadership identity and frequently faced difficulties as a result of inadequate leadership training. [28] stated that HODS found difficulties to oversee teachers because they had not done training in management. Training was one of the avenues HODS could acquire managerial skills to run their departments. The HODS, then, could have gotten some skills from their experience or used their initial bachelor programmes.

Table 11. Are the lecturers trained in teaching methodology.

	Frequency	Percent
YES	19	40.4
Valid NO	27	59.6
Total	46	100.0

Table 11 showed that 59.6% disagreed that lecturers were trained in teaching methodology while 40.4% agreed. The

training was another aspect that could shape lecturers in teaching as a CPD. It was a skill, so [35] commented that coaching and mentoring were a way of imparting skills. Despite [26] observation that leaders must undergo training prior to starting their positions, experience that went with coaching imparted skills as well. Some of the lecturers could have benefitted from that. It was one of the roles of HODS to encourage lecturers to do CPD in teaching methodology.

Table 12. Are lecturers observed by senior staff during the lecturing periods.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid YES	16	33.9
Valid NO	30	66.1
Total	46	100.0

Concerning the supervision of lecturers, Table 12 indicated that respondents (66.1%) said that lecturers were not observed during the lecture while some respondents (33.9%) said that lecturers were observed. Commenting on supervision, [28] observed that department heads did not get official in-service training in supervision, a case that agreed with the finding of the study. However, [32] said that supervision encouraged creativity by providing guidance on how to carry out their duties. Supervision was one of the HODS role that could improve the pattern of work [20]. The HODS were not conducting supervision and as such it could have affected the academic performance negatively in some other areas.

Table 13. Are lecturers involved in departmental planning.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid YES	12	26.0
Valid NO	34	74.0
Total	46	100.0

Table 13 indicated that 74.0% of respondents said that the lecturers were not involved in departmental planning. [9] stated that it was impossible to overstate the significance of academic planning since it was a useful tool for guaranteeing quality and, consequently, the department's and institution's ongoing academic success. It meant that most of the things in the universities were not run professionally. It was another drawback on the leadership roles on the part of HODS where they failed to involve others in planning in the departments.

Table 14. What challenges are faced in your department.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid POOR COMMUNICATION	25	56.0
Valid LOW INVOLVEMENT OF LEARNERS	11	24.2
Valid LECTURERS LACK INTEREST IN TEACHING	4	6.2
Valid LOW PERFORMANCE	6	13.6
Total	46	100.0

They were rated as follows, according to the table; poor communication (56%), low involvement of learners (24.2%), low performance of (13.6%), and lecturers lacking interest in teaching (6.2%). They can have a negative effect on learners' performance, even for the lecturer in terms of morale and delivery.

Table 15. Do you have enough lecturers.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid YES	31	65.6
Valid NO	15	34.4
Total	46	100.0

Availability of human resources was enough as indicated in Table 15 where 65.6% of respondents agreed that they had enough lecturers while 34.4% of respondents disagreed. The percentages were not impressive enough at 65.6% in that there could be issues of work overload on the part of lecturers in trying to cover all the courses. It would have meant that academic performance was going to be affected negatively.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

Table 16. Relationship between leadership practices and academic performance towards academic pass rate.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid LOW PERFORMANCE	34	74.6
Valid HIGH PERFORMANCE	12	25.4
Total	46	100.0

The relationship between leadership practices and academic performance was reported as not corresponding well because Table 16 indicated that 74.6% of respondents described the relationship between leadership practices and academic performance towards academic pass rate as low, while 25.4% described it as high. It entailed that the students could have been self-motivated or self-study; and the lecturers applied themselves effectively despite short comings in the HODS leadership roles. Environment of the university could have contributed also.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the departments had policies to guide HODS in executing their roles appropriately though a few staff did not see the policies. The art of influencing others by HODS was rated high and they did well in some of the roles. The teaching-learning environment played a role to promote conducive atmosphere for both the lecturers and learners as well.

However, it was found that HODS had no further training in management. Some HOS could have been using experience in view of the years they served; or imitated their role models they could have seen before; or used inherent leadership that made them to influence the learners and lecturers to work hard and produce good academic pass rate. The lack of training could have affected the leadership roles negatively on the part of HODS.

The failure by the HODS to carry out some of the leadership roles in some areas could have affected some service delivery in the private universities in Lusaka district that led to low rating of the relationship between the HODS' leadership roles and academic results.

Abbreviations

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
ZEIC	Zambia Education Information Centre

Author Contributions

Geoffrey Sandala: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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