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**A STUDY OF THE ENHANCEMENT OF LEADERSHIP GROWTH IN UNIVERSITIES
AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES (ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY,
DISTRICT 2)**

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ABSTRACT

Enhancing leadership growth includes development, education and training of the leader as well as increasing leadership capacities in the dimensions of insight, empowerment, performance assessment and leadership acquisition. The aim of the present study has been to study the enhancement of leadership growth in universities and higher education institutes. Statistical population of the study included 1600 faculty members out of which 450 persons, as the sample size, answered the promotion of leadership growth questionnaire (with Cronbach's alpha of 0.91). In order to analyse the obtained data, descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics of one-sample t-test was adopted through SPSS software to determine the current status of variables. Results obtained for leadership growth and its other variables indicated that there is a significant difference between the mean for sample size and the expected mean. The calculated mean for the components of insight, empowerment, performance assessment and leadership acquisition have been lower than the expected mean and the results suggested that the status of the components have been undesirable.

Keywords: growth, leadership growth, growth of university leaders

INTRODUCTION

By investment in education and training of workforce, core competencies of the members of the organization can be raised. The workforce is among the important resources of the organization and its importance increasingly becomes greater and more critical in more advanced theories of human resources management. It is in such a way that human resources experts consider it to be one of the critical resources in organizations [1].

Continuous improvement of quality is considered to be among the necessities of sustainability and enhancement of capabilities in higher education institutes and universities. Solving the problems and issues related to higher education requires paying attention to infrastructures and training experts, specialists, managers and leaders who are able to identify strengths and weaknesses, analyse the system, prepare and devise university development plans, comparing experiences of higher education systems and advanced universities, assessing the performances and researching into expectations and results [2].

A few numbers of organizations have the true willingness towards the full development of potential capability of leadership in their structure. It is because sometimes it is unimportant or not much important to the

organizations that imagine that leadership is not a big deal, or the gap can be bridge by training the management through the traditional method [3].

Growth and improvement of university leaders like the improvement of faculty members as teachers is so much important and critical that it cannot be considered a specific activity imparted by the central division to some of the deans of faculties, or apart from the routine activity of the university and/or merely by focusing on the knowledge based on the current internal procedure. Since it is required to focus on the future needs, growth and development of university leadership for the university heads should be considered a normal expectation for all the presidencies [4].

Activities related to education (growth) in the organization normally includes employees' educational programs, managers' training (growth) and assisting employees in order to improve professional activity. Assisting employees in pursuing their goals of particular career path will cause them to enjoy exciting and rich job activities [5].

Education in the list of development goals has always had an important place. But it can be almost said that 'higher education' has never been addressed. Organizations such as World

Bank, have traditionally given lower priority to higher education, believing that firstly, higher education is considered by the elites of the society, and secondly, return of investment in higher education is considered to be lower than primary and secondary education [6].

In short, leaders require to assume four university leadership responsibilities for growth and development, which are as follows: insight, empowerment, performance assessment and leadership acquisition [4].

One important aspect of being creative and forward-looking is insight. Insight is a vision of the future you want to build. Insight is an ideal vision, an image of perfection, a prominent model which differentiates the training group or educational program or research team [7].

Literal meaning of empowerment is to enable people to do something. But in a technical definition, empowerment is the process of promoting sense of self-efficacy. This is accomplished by identifying situations causing individuals to feel powerless and eliminating them as well as providing individuals' required information making them self-efficacious by using formal organizational methods and informal techniques [8].

Empowering human resources in academic and educational environments has been considered in recent decades by experts and researchers of higher education centers. In fact, the main purpose of implementing empowerment plans is to empower these individuals to perform their assigned duties [9].

Process of learning leadership encompasses both universities and university leaders who work in those universities. They both can learn and create an environment where the leadership capabilities can grow. Growth and improvement of university leaders like the improvement of faculty members as teachers is so much important and critical that it cannot be considered a specific activity imparted by the central division to some of the deans of faculties, or apart from the routine activity of the university and/or merely by focusing on the knowledge based on the current internal procedure. Since it is required to focus on the future needs, growth and development of university leadership for the university heads should be considered a normal expectation for all the presidencies [7].

Performance management is the continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning them with the

strategic goals of the organization. Therefore, performance management requires setting goals, observing mentoring performance and presenting continuous feedback, so that the performance of the individuals would be in line with organizational goals .[10].

Performance assessment specifies that in which areas the individual has strengths and in which areas he/she has weaknesses. Aspects in which the individual has weakness should be minimized by teaching required knowledge and skills, thus performance management results in individual development and growth [11].

As a topic for study, research and investment in leadership have been considerably developed exponentially over the last 70 years and over time with the beginning of advancement of industry or universal features and leadership theories style in a situation-based manner [12].

From among the countries pioneering in development and improvement of educational leadership, China's performance can be mentioned in recent years which has shown great interest in leadership development. Besides, Australia has established institutions for this purpose by allocating resources for developing professional leaders. International interests in evolving educational systems continues, for example, UK's National

College and leadership development programs in the USA and Britain.[13].

Spendlove[14] conducted a study titled "Competencies for Effective Leadership in Higher Education". The purpose of this research was to set out to investigate the competencies (attitudes, knowledge and behavior) that are needed for effective leadership in higher education.

Ladegard et al. [15] conducted a study titled "Leadership Coaching, Leader Role-Efficacy, and Trust in Subordinates: A Mixed Methods Study Assessing Leadership Coaching as a Leadership Development Tool". The research results indicated that coaching represents a promising leadership development tool. Furthermore, the results regarding trust in subordinates represent contributions to the development of a relational perspective on leadership development.

Saatchi [16] conducted a study "Designing a Model for Effective University Leadership". In this study, based on the current theories in the area of guidance and leadership, different models for effective leadership and effective university leadership was studied and investigated, and the conceptual model for effective university leadership for universities and higher education institutes based on the eight indices accepted by university leadership experts was designed. Based on the

leadership experts, eight criteria for effective leadership are prioritized in order of importance in the form of creating attraction, team building, group empowerment, ongoing performance improvement, having a vision, self-assessment, inspiration and coaching.

Nourshahi[17] conducted a study titled “a Study of the Relationship between Cognitive Style and Leadership Style among the University and Higher Education Institutes Heads”. The results indicated the necessity of reinforcing dimensions of individual consideration and mental stimulation as well as reinforcing intuitive and holistic cognitive style among the university heads under study.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive-survey in terms of type of data and data collection. Statistical population of the study included faculty members of Islamic Azad University (IAU) in district 2 amounting to 1600 persons out of which 450 persons were selected as the sample size through stratified random sampling. In order to collect data, the researcher-made leadership growth questionnaire with four dimensions of insight, empowerment, performance assessment and leadership training containing 20 items in 5-points Likert scale ranging from too much to too low was adopted. Validity of the questionnaire was approved of by the experts.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been 0.91 after the questionnaire was administered among 30 respondents. In order to analyse the data, inferential statistics (one-sample t-test for determining the current status of variables) were used through SPSS software.

FINDINGS

In order to investigate the current status of leadership growth in universities as per the identified dimensions and components, firstly, descriptive indices of each dimension and its components were presented, and then the significance of the extracted components in terms of the obtained mean and by using one-sample t-test was examined. In this method, the observed mean for each component and the expected mean (average score of the scale, i.e. 3) were compared.

Since the research questionnaire has been prepared in 5-point Likert scale and its average score is 3, the expected mean is considered to be 3.

As it is shown in the **Table 1**, the mean difference for ‘leadership growth’ and its components with expected mean is significant (because $P < 0.05$); in such a way that their observed mean is lower than the expected mean (the mean difference is negative), thus according to the respondents' opinions, the current status of these components is undesirable and is below average.

Table 1: Results of one-sample t-test for leadership growth and its components

Expected mean= 3						
Significance level	Degree of freedom	t statistics	Mean difference	Standard deviation	Mean	Variables
0.000	449	-3.83	-0.17	0.93	2.83	Insight
0.001	449	-3.5	-0.15	0.88	2.85	Empowerment
0.000	449	-6.37	-0.21	0.69	2.79	Performance assessment
0.000	449	-4.78	-0.22	0.98	2.78	Leadership acquisition
0.000	449	-5.18	-0.19	0.76	2.81	Leadership growth (total)

CONCLUSION

In regard to the status of leadership growth, given the results obtained from data analysis, it can be said that the obtained mean for the dimension of insight has been 2.83 which is lower than the average mean; regarding the leadership insight, it can be said that insight is described as to be able and to clearly and rapidly see by means of mental activities which are not clear and definite, and one of the important aspects of being creative and forward-looking is insight. Insight is about change and change is among the prominent features of any educational institute. According to the points mentioned earlier and the results of evaluation, it can be said that faculty members have evaluated these characteristics to be undesirable. In relation to the importance of this component, studies conducted by Spenlove can be pointed out in regard to the importance of insight in growth and development of universities.

In relation to the leadership growth's component of empowerment with the mean of 2.85, it can be said that its status is not also

desirable; in interpretation of this, it can be said that empowerment means promoting sense of self-efficacy, and it is accomplished by identifying the situations in which individuals identify their weaknesses and try to eliminate them through formal ways or organizational processes, which eventually, result in individual's effectiveness. Thus in case of this component, faculty members' view is that this characteristic is also ignored by leaders and the current status has been reported undesirable. The results related to this component can be seen in other studies on leadership empowerment for organizational and university development namely Nourshahi in which the importance of this component for individual and organizational development is stressed.

Performance assessment helps the educational and academic system to enable the individual to recognize his/her weaknesses and strengths and to become cognizant of the opportunities and threats in an ongoing process. And this can result in better planning, better resource allocation and eventually qualitative and

quantitative improvement of the individual and organization; thus given the evaluations carried out from the viewpoint of faculty members as well as the obtained results and the mean of 2.79 for this component, it can be said that the cases pointed out are not much considered and from the viewpoint of the faculty members, the status of individual and organizational performance assessment is below average. The results related to this component and the importance of performance assessment in the development of leadership is seen in the studies of Saatchi in which the importance of performance assessment is considered to be one of the components of development and growth of effective leaders.

The last component of leadership growth is leadership acquisition with the mean of 2.78 which is below the average mean from the viewpoint of faculty members and is not desirable. Thus it can be concluded that the importance of learning principles and processes of leadership and learning it by university leader is in an undesirable status from the viewpoint of faculty members. Since leaders should emphasize on planning for future, growth and development of university heads requires lifetime learning in the organization for their growth and improvement for future changes. As it was

stated, the results of evaluation have been undesirable and indicate the unimportance of the process of up-to-date learning of leadership knowledge for resolving university system running procedures. Importance of leadership acquisition can be seen in the studies of Ladegard in which the importance of leadership learning for the growth and development of the organizations including universities is pointed out. Altogether, it can be concluded that growth and development of leadership insight, leadership empowerment, self-performance assessment and leadership acquisition are important as the factors for enhancing the evolutionary leaders' growth, and as it can be understood from the data analysis, the mentioned components have a direct effect on enhancing leadership growth and achieving its components, and these dimensions need to be redeveloped in university leaders.

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