

An institutional leadership framework on university academics' decision to become institutional leaders: A Malaysian perspective




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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the factors that influence academics' decisions to accept or decline leadership roles in Malaysian universities. A questionnaire survey was distributed to a total of 1,771 academics from public and private institutions in Malaysia. The study shows that the majority of academics in universities, regardless of whether they are public or private, are reluctant to take on administrative roles. In particular, female academics in public universities have no ambition for administrative roles, while female academics in private universities show a strong enthusiasm for taking up administrative positions. In terms of age, academics of all age groups made comparable choices, but those under 30 years old have a greater propensity to aspire to administrative positions. Associate professors at private universities also opt for administrative roles. The factors influencing academics' decisions to accept or decline administrative positions are categorized into five groups: career development, skills and experience, preferences, perceptions, and organizational factors. The findings suggest that the increasing number of academics not seeking institutional leadership positions is a concern, as universities need a sufficient pool of potential successors to effectively fulfill their mission and vision. This study recommends implementing awareness and training initiatives to inspire academics, especially young academics, to assume leadership roles within their institutions.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is the first large-scale investigation into the factors influencing academics' acceptance of leadership roles in Malaysian universities, encompassing participants from all public and private institutions nationwide.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic institutions are struggling to maintain a competitive edge in several critical areas, such as research, financial sustainability, new technologies, teaching and learning, and the differing expectations of various generations [1, 2]. This relates to both governance and leadership, both of which are prevalent in today's global environment. The obstacles currently encountered are the hybrid teaching and learning process, which requires both students and faculty to master and have access to reliable technology and internet connectivity, declining student numbers, and decreasing funding and grants each year [3]. Universities are required to review and evaluate their strategies to

determine if the approaches are effective and appropriate for addressing the challenges [4]. A critical mechanism for addressing these challenges is educational leadership that can manage the intricacies of higher education with competence and efficiency. Individual variable characteristics, development strategies, the roles of academic and institutional development, successful practices, and leadership within the institution all contribute to a unified vision of leadership in the context of a university. Therefore, the importance of academics in the university environment is paramount, and developing leadership competence among academics is a major concern in addressing today's challenges.

Inspiring strong leadership is one approach to surmounting these obstacles. An institution's distinctive leadership environment results from a confluence of factors, including effective leadership practices, individual variable characteristics, development strategies, and academic and institutional development Parker and Welch [5]. Given the circumstances, academicians occupy a critical position within universities, and fostering institutional leadership is imperative if we are to confront the complexities of the twenty-first century. However, academics in leadership positions at universities, according to studies such as Parrish [6] and Caliskan and Zhu [7], lack both competence and institutional leadership abilities. Prior studies have also indicated that university scholars frequently operate within a supervisory framework, characterized by limited prospects for career progression Smith and Wolverton [8]. Conversely, Garwe [9] discovered that a considerable number of academics occupying leadership positions within institutions possess inadequate practical and managerial expertise. Additionally, it is argued that academicians lack enthusiasm for assuming leadership roles within a university. However, the existing body of literature on leadership in Malaysia yields insufficient evidence pertaining to the subject.

This study investigates the determinants that influence the acceptance or rejection of leadership positions by academics in Malaysian universities. The results of this study will serve as a valuable repository of data regarding the factors affecting the election of academicians as leaders of their respective institutions. The subsequent sections of this paper are organized as follows: Section 2 contains the relevant literature review for the present investigation. The research design is outlined in Section 3, while the results and discussion are presented in Section 4. Section 5 concludes this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations that desire greater levels of flexibility, change, choice, and diversity are placing increasing emphasis on the accountability of leadership Ghani and Mohamed Jais [10]; Mohamed Jais et al. [11] and Islam et al. [12]. Burns [13], who proposed the definition of a genuine leader as an individual capable of inspiring followers to behave in alignment with the leaders' and followers' own motivations, is regarded as the progenitor of what is arguably the earliest notion of leadership. Burns further emphasized that the participation of both leaders and adherents is vital to a shared enterprise, as the enterprise would be devoid of purpose without them. Since Burns' study, leadership has been the subject of considerable discourse because of its significance within an organization and its reputation as a critical determinant. Bechtel [14] proposed that organizations should be restructured to empower individual employees. The future of the organization and its employees should not be based on advancement to higher management levels but rather on the personal growth and development of each employee as a leader [15, 16].

The leadership literature comprises scholarly investigations that examine leadership from various vantage points and approaches. These studies have explored a range of subjects, including the evolution of frameworks and contexts for leadership [13], the definition of leadership in terms of behaviors, situations, and skills, and the concept of transformational capabilities [17]. Additional studies have been conducted on leadership competencies subsequent to the evolution of different contexts [11]. On the contrary, these investigations have predominantly concentrated on leadership as a collective concept, implying that a leader is an individual who possesses the necessary skills and abilities to inspire, motivate, and direct subordinates toward the successful attainment of the organization's objectives,

regardless of the nature of the organization [18]. However, scholarly studies indicate that leadership in academic institutions is distinct from that of other types of organizations due to the unique challenges and objectives [19].

In view of this, academic researchers have devoted considerable attention to the subject of leadership in education, considering the importance of ensuring universities function efficiently and effectively [10]. For example, a study conducted by Ghasemy et al. [20] regarding educational leadership among academic leaders from 25 Malaysian universities provides insights into various aspects, including management, work values, change and leadership, and fundamental academic activities. Leadership studies within the Malaysian context have also been conducted. Karia and Abu Hassan Asaari [21] investigated the impact of leadership traits that emerge in higher education institutions on employees' attitudes toward their jobs. Most studies examining leadership in higher education have focused on individuals occupying formal management positions at senior levels, including deans, vice chancellors, and deputy vice chancellors. Frequently, academic institutions appoint administrators, scholars, and researchers to faculty positions because they have significantly contributed to the institution's growth and operation [22, 23].

The expectation that leaders in the education sector operate as sustainable leaders for their education system, senior management teams, professors, and researchers, as well as alter and redirect policies, is one of the greatest challenges they face [24]. There is a prevailing perception among individuals that universities are making concerted efforts to cultivate the development of prospective leaders who will subsequently occupy significant roles within these establishments of higher learning [25]. An additional expectation of stakeholders is that universities cultivate the growth of prospective future leaders who will subsequently occupy significant positions within their respective institutions [26]. However, the question remains as to how we can discern academicians who possess the capacity to emerge as leaders and evaluate their preparedness to assume leadership positions within their respective institutions, such as dean, deputy vice-chancellor, or vice-chancellor. Throughout the centuries, scholars and practitioners alike have endeavored to comprehend the concept of leadership. Despite being one of the most frequently observed phenomena, little is known about the dynamic processes that underpin it [10, 11].

Leadership in the field of education is distinct from that of other organizations because of the specific environment in which academic institutions operate an environment where potential leaders with significant influence over decision-making are faculty members [8]. Consequently, academic institutions significantly depend on the personal aptitudes of their administrators to guide their staff members toward attaining organizational objectives [13]. According to Smith and Wolverton [8], faculty members operate in an environment characterized by minimal supervision, despite having significant influence over critical institutional decisions. Leaders are responsible for reconciling the often divergent concerns of these faculty members with those of other stakeholders, including students, trustees, donors, government officials, and community members. Leaders must balance these interests, which frequently conflict. From this perspective, an effective leader must find a balance between the concerns of the faculty and department and those of other stakeholders, including the government and students [27].

A large body of leadership literature has adopted a more general approach to leadership, concluding that regardless of the type of organization under consideration, effective leadership necessitates a competent leader who can inspire and direct followers to behave in a manner consistent with the organization's objectives [28]. While numerous leadership studies have endeavored to establish universally acknowledged definitions of educational leadership, none have been successful to date. Distinguishing between these dimensions of the field, the various definitions of educational leadership that are presently the subject of debate incorporate aspects of administration, leadership, and management [29]. According to Filan and Seagren [30], educational leadership is a dynamic, multifaceted, and complex subject that presents ample opportunities for additional research owing to its ongoing evolution, adjustments, and turbulent context throughout the last ten years. Taylor [31] reached the conclusion that effective leadership is directly related to successful practice and leadership in institutions. The interaction of numerous

individual traits, academic development initiatives, institutional context, and development strategies shapes leadership within an academic setting.

Several studies have determined that educational leadership can be categorized into two distinct subfields: academic leadership and institutional leadership. Scholars who actively effect substantial change and are acknowledged as authorities in their respective disciplines are referred to as academic leaders [32]. Academic leadership is characterized by the utmost regard for public intellectuals who actively disseminate knowledge within their respective domains of expertise. In the realm of guiding significant societal involvement or implementing groundbreaking pedagogical or methodological approaches, academic leaders must consistently demonstrate unwavering integrity to be recognized as authorities in their respective disciplines. In contrast, institutional leadership pertains to scholars who exhibit their aptitude for administration through qualities such as flexibility, adaptability, strategic acumen, and, above all, efficacy. Such individuals are in charge of institutions. Due to their proficiency in carrying out administrative and managerial responsibilities in pursuit of the university's objectives and goals, they are frequently designated as senior and middle managers [25].

In addition, appointments to leadership positions at the university are typically of a temporary nature. It is imperative that individuals exhibit proficient management and leadership capabilities throughout their entire term of appointment. This includes the formulation of short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies that align with institutional objectives. Academic leadership and institutional leadership should be balanced at universities for the benefit of all stakeholders, including faculty, departments, students, and others [24]. Educational leadership is a composite of diverse personal attributes, academic development responsibilities, and institutional conditions of an individual. Historically, positions of institutional leadership, including the Dean, Associate Vice-Chancellor, and Vice-Chancellor, have been perceived as transitory appointments with a predetermined duration. Although there is widespread recognition that academics have the potential to ascend to leadership positions within their institutions, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies investigating the factors influencing why academics decide to accept or decline to become institutional leaders.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. The Participants

The participants in this study comprise academics from both public and private universities in Malaysia. The Ministry of Higher Education [33] reported that the number of academicians enrolled in public institutions stood at 31,568 as of December 31, 2021, while private universities had 28,570. The sample for this study consisted of professors, associate professors, and lecturers; thus, the total number of academics affiliated with public universities amounts to 29,496 individuals, while that of academics affiliated with private universities stands at 25,498. This study utilized the sample size table from Krejcie and Morgan [34] to determine the sample size. The academics were subsequently classified into two distinct groups: those from public universities and those from private universities. There were 1,053 academics from public universities and 873 from private universities, totaling 1,928 academics as the sample size for this study.

3.2. Research Instrument

As a research instrument, this study utilizes two approaches: a quantitative approach and a qualitative approach. In terms of the quantitative approach, a questionnaire survey was used in this investigation. A thorough review of the pertinent literature influenced the development of the questionnaire. There are two sections in the questionnaire. Section A comprises a series of demographic profile questions, including details such as the respondent's gender, highest academic attainment, work experience, and current administrative position. After completing the initial section of the questionnaire, participants were categorized into two groups based on their prior selection before

responding to the two sections addressing the research questions. Regardless of whether the academics currently hold an administrative position, previously held an administrative position but no longer do, or have never held an administrative position, one group indicated interest in an administrative position, while the other group expressed disinterest. Additionally, this study employs a qualitative approach by asking participants to provide other factors influencing their decision to accept or decline an administrative position through open-ended statements. The data obtained from this section was also analyzed using Atlas.ti.

3.3. Data Collection

Email served as the primary means of correspondence with the academics. The researchers coordinated a symposium with a group of professors from a public university before beginning the data collection process. The objective of this workshop was to utilize the professors' expertise and understanding to evaluate the questionnaire design and explore methods to improve its quality while still achieving its intended goals. A total of thirteen academics from various departments participated in evaluating the preliminary questionnaire. After revising and improving the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with three academics from public and private institutions. The purpose of this assessment was to determine whether the participants could understand and complete the survey easily. In total, 1,771 questionnaires were collected. The number of responses was below the expected sample size specified in this study. However, the total responses are considered adequate because the difference ($1,928 - 1,771 = 157$) is not statistically significant.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the participants were categorized into two groups based on their responses before addressing the two sections that posed the research questions. Regardless of their current or past administrative positions, academics who identified with one group expressed interest in an administrative role, while the other group stated they were not interested, did not hold an administrative position at present, or had never held one. The responses of the two categories to the question of whether they would be interested in an administrative position are presented in Table 1. The findings indicate that 57% of the participants (1016 individuals) are not interested in administrative positions, whereas 43%, or 755 individuals, are interested. Only 39% of participants in public universities express interest in pursuing an administrative role, while 61% do not. In private universities, 52% of participants are not interested in administrative positions, whereas 48% are interested.

Table 1. Academics' interest in accepting administrative positions.

Interest	Public universities		Private universities		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	417	39	338	48	755	43
No	655	61	361	52	1,016	57

This study investigates whether there are differences between academics in public universities and those in private universities regarding the proportion of participants who currently accept or aspire to accept administrative positions, as well as age, gender, and position grade. Concerning gender, male participants (56%) show a greater inclination toward pursuing administrative roles compared to their female counterparts (29%) in public universities. A majority of female participants (71%) express no interest in pursuing administrative roles. The results of participants' interest in administrative positions by gender are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Public university academics' interest in accepting administrative positions by gender.

Interest	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	219	56	198	29
No	172	44	483	71

According to the study's findings, participants between the ages of 31 and 40 (41%), participants over the age of 50 (48%), and participants under the age of 30 (56%) all aspire to accept an administrative position. Table 3 reveals that 59% of participants between the ages of 31 and 40 and 52% of participants aged 50 and older have no interest in holding an administrative position, in contrast to 61% of participants between the ages of 41 and 50. It is somewhat unexpected that participants between the ages of 41 and 50 have no interest in administrative positions, given that the lack of interest among those over the age of 50 can be attributed to their impending retirement.

Table 3. Public university academics' interest in accepting administrative positions by age.

Interest	Below 30		30 to 40		40 to 50		Above 50	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	8	50	116	38	151	34	142	46
No	8	50	187	62	293	66	167	54

The findings regarding the presence of percentage differences between participants who aspire to an administrative position and those who do not aspire to an administrative position concerning the academic position in public universities are presented in Table 4. The findings indicate that a majority of the professor participants (56%) hold aspirations for an administrative role, in contrast to the 28% of lecturers. It is presumed that lecturers prefer to develop their academic leadership skills before pursuing institutional leadership. However, it is worth noting that professors and associate professors might be more inclined to assume institutional leadership positions due to their potential attainment of a specific level of academic leadership.

Table 4. Public university academics' interest in accepting administrative positions by position grade.

Interest	Lecturer		Associate professor		Professor	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	168	28	193	50	56	60
No	425	72	193	50	37	40

This study investigates whether there are any differences in terms of gender, age, or academic classification at private universities between participants who aspire to administrative positions and those who do not. Regarding gender, the proportion of female participants (51%) who are inclined to pursue administrative positions is higher than that of male participants (46%). In contrast, among public university participants, the difference is not as significant. The results of participants' interest in administrative positions by gender are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Private university academics' interest in accepting administrative positions by gender.

Interest	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	156	46	182	51
No	183	54	178	49

Regarding age, the findings of this research indicate that slightly more than half of the participants under 30 years old (60 percent) aspire to an administrative role. Participants aged 50 and older follow at 52 percent, and those between 31 and 40 years old at 48 percent. Conversely, 53 percent of participants aged 41 to 50 do not aspire to an

administrative position. The percentages for those over 50 and between 31 and 40 are 48 percent and 52 percent, respectively. These results are comparable to those obtained from public university participants. The data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Private university academics' interest to accept administrative position by age.

Interest	Below 30		30 to 40		40 to 50		Above 50	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	12	60	76	48	137	47	113	52
No	8	40	82	52	157	53	104	48

According to the data in Table 7, associate professors (58%) and lecturers (39%) are the two groups with the highest aspirations for administrative positions (86%). Instructors, similar to the public university participants, are presumed to prioritize academic leadership over institutional leadership, according to their responses. Conversely, individuals holding the ranks of professors and associate professors may have attained a specific level of academic leadership and are prepared to assume positions of institutional leadership.

Table 7. Private university academics' interest in accepting administrative positions by grade.

Interest	Lecturer		Associate professor		Professor	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	149	39	165	58	24	86
No	237	61	120	42	4	14

Table 8 presents the results of descriptive statistics on possible factors influencing participants' decisions to accept institutional leadership through administrative positions. The results show that out of 31 statements, participants agree that 22 are potential factors for their decisions. The top three statements with the highest mean scores are: "I believe being a university administrator provides me with a broader perspective on higher education" with a mean score of 5.0120; "I am confident in holding any academic administrative post" with a mean score of 5.0000; and "I believe leadership is necessary to improve the university's ranking" with a mean score of 4.8450. Conversely, two statements indicating strong disagreement are: "I hold an administrative position because I do not like to do research," with a mean score of 2.3285, and "Holding an administrative position is an excuse for me not to conduct research," with a mean score of 2.1762.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of possible factors influencing acceptance of administrative positions.

No	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I am confident in holding any academic administrative position.	5.00	0.89
2	I prefer to become a university leader.	4.57	1.05
3	I prefer academic posts over research.	3.97	1.44
4	I can have less time for teaching if I hold an administrative position.	3.72	1.40
5	I hold an administrative position because I do not like conducting research.	2.32	1.37
6	Holding an administrative position is not an excuse for me not to conduct research.	2.17	1.29
7	I like to manage people.	3.90	1.21
8	I have the organizational skills required for an academic administrative position.	4.55	1.05
9	I think lecturers should focus on institutional leadership for their career advancement.	4.08	1.28
10	I like to attend meetings that academic administrators usually have to attend.	3.61	1.24
11	I am able to do paperwork that usually academic administrators have to handle.	4.41	1.09
12	I believe institutional leadership is my focus rather than academic leadership.	3.70	1.20
13	I am good as a policymaker.	4.14	1.11
14	I can handle work as an administrative position.	4.67	0.95
15	I feel more appreciated when holding an administrative position.	4.11	1.23
16	I feel more respected when holding an administrative position.	4.11	1.28

No	Statement	Mean	SD
17	I received good support when holding an administrative position.	4.52	1.02
18	I have no problem following my superior's instructions even if they go against my principles.	3.94	1.14
19	I can handle the office politics that academic administrators usually face.	4.31	0.97
20	I believe leadership is necessary to improve the university's ranking.	4.84	0.97
21	Holding an academic administrator post does not hinder lecturers from carrying out their actual responsibilities, such as teaching and research.	4.70	1.15
22	I believe being a university administrator provides me with a broader perspective on higher education.	5.10	0.99
23	I am being inspired by experienced institutional leaders to hold an administrative position.	4.57	1.26
24	I believe the reward system as an academic position motivates me to hold the position.	4.03	1.28
25	I believe holding an administrative position provides the opportunity to grow my leadership network.	4.75	0.99
26	I believe the current selection of leaders encourages me to pursue an administrative position.	4.28	1.24
27	I prefer to be on campus during office hours.	4.47	1.26
28	I have good experience during my term as an academic administrator.	4.74	1.15
29	I believe an academic is meant to be part of the management team.	4.73	1.09
30	I see the need to become an administrator.	4.56	1.06
31	I believe becoming an administrator is not a barrier to my academic leadership.	4.72	1.12

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of possible factors influencing the decision to decline an administrative position.

No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I am not confident in holding any academic administrative position.	2.91	1.59
2	I prefer to become a subject-matter expert.	5.14	1.04
3	I prefer research over an academic administrator post.	4.57	1.32
4	I have more time for teaching if I do not hold an administrative position.	5.27	0.92
5	I am a shy person.	2.79	1.57
6	I do not like managing people.	4.14	1.63
7	I do not like taking orders from others.	3.37	1.51
8	I am not ready to hold an academic administrative post.	3.46	1.69
9	I lack the organizational skills for an academic administrative position.	3.22	1.69
10	I think the lecturer should focus on teaching and research.	4.69	1.41
11	I believe being a university administrator is a waste of time.	3.29	1.52
12	I do not like attending meetings that academic administrators usually have to attend.	4.21	1.47
13	I do not like doing paperwork, which academic administrators usually have to handle.	4.23	1.52
14	I cannot work with superiors who talk but take no action.	4.89	1.29
15	I believe academic leadership is my focus rather than institutional leadership.	4.47	1.22
16	I believe in action rather than talking about policies, etc.	5.07	0.95
17	I have experienced former bosses/Leaders who are ignored after their terms ended.	4.22	1.51
18	I am concerned about my health if I hold an administrative position.	4.97	1.28
19	I believe there is too much work if I hold an administrative position.	5.08	1.16
20	I feel that there is no appreciation if I hold an administrative position.	4.21	1.56
21	I experienced insufficient support from my superior during my term as an academic administrator.	3.57	1.47
22	I find it difficult to follow my superior's instructions if they go against my principles.	4.08	1.41
23	I do not like office politics that academic administrators usually face.	5.22	0.99
24	I believe lecturers should focus on academic leadership if we want to improve the university's ranking.	4.69	1.27
25	A lecturer should not hold the position of academic administrator for too long.	5.24	0.95
26	Holding the academic administrator post hinders lecturers from carrying out their actual responsibilities, such as teaching and research.	5.04	1.01
27	Holding an administrative academic position reduces the time spent with family.	4.98	1.13
28	I have had a bad experience during my term as an academic administrator.	3.73	1.47
29	I believe an academic is not meant to be part of the management team.	3.62	1.52
30	I do not see the need to become an academic administrator.	3.94	1.5
31	I feel becoming an administrator is a barrier to my academic leadership.	3.96	1.38

Table 9 presents the results of descriptive statistics on possible factors influencing participants' decisions to decline an administrative position. The results show that out of 31 statements, participants agree that 22 are potential factors for their decisions to avoid holding an administrative role. Five statements received a mean score above 5, indicating strong agreement. These statements are: *'I have more time for teaching if I do not hold an administrative position'* with a mean score of 5.27; *'A lecturer should not hold the position of academic administrator for too long'* with a mean score of 5.24; *'I do not like office politics that academic administrators usually face'* with a mean score of 5.22; *'I prefer to become a subject-matter expert'* with a mean score of 5.14; and *'Holding the academic administrator post hinders lecturers in carrying out their actual responsibilities, such as teaching and research'* with a mean score of 5.04. Conversely, two statements received strong disagreement: *'I am not confident enough to hold any academic administrative post'* with a mean score of 2.91, and *'I am a shy person'* with a mean score of 2.79.

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, this study shows that of the 31 items representing possible factors influencing participants' decisions to accept an administrative position, 23 are considered reliable since the responses for these items are 4 and above. Similarly, regarding the 31 items representing possible factors influencing participants' decisions to decline an administrative position, this study indicates that 20 items are considered reliable as the participants provided a scale of 4 and above.

Table 10. Qualitative Factors for the Decision to Accept or Decline an Administrative Position.

Factors	Component
Behavioural and attitude	Skills and experience
Career development	Career development
Commitment and synergy within the organization.	Organisational
Developing career development and profiling	Preference
Individual passion and achievement	Preference
Organisational rewards and appreciation	Organisational
Skill development	Skills and Experience
Time consumption and quality	Perception
University strategic planning	Organisational
Communication platform for organisation	Organisational
Health and psychological	Preference
Organisational management system	Organisational
Organizational politics in the workplace	Organisational
Strategic direction from government	Organisational
Work overload and duties	Perception

In this study, to ensure that all possible factors are considered, an open statement section was also provided in the questionnaire. The purpose of the open statement section is to request that participants identify their reasons for accepting or declining an administrative position. A total of 165 statements were collected, analyzed, and subsequently thematized, as shown in Table 10. Based on Table 10, this study reveals that five components emerged from the analysis. The five themes are career development, skills and experience, preferences, perceptions, and organizational. The first four components career development, skills and experience, preferences, and perceptions—also emerged in the quantitative analysis, while the last component, organizational, emerged from the qualitative analysis. To date, there is no common institutional leadership framework that explains why academics in public and private universities decide to accept or decline an academic position. This study conducted a descriptive analysis of the 31 items developed to identify the factors influencing academics' decisions to accept or decline administrative positions. Items with a mean score above 4 were considered for further analysis. To ensure the reliability of these items, a Cronbach's alpha analysis was performed. Table 11 shows that for the 23 items from the responses of participants who are keen to accept an administrative position, the Cronbach's alpha is 0.943, whereas for the 20 items from the responses of participant who declines an administrative position, the Cronbach's alpha is 0.879, as shown in Table 12. Therefore, these items are reliable.

Table 11. Reliability of items for academics' interest in accepting administrative positions.

Cronbach's alpha	N	Mean
0.943	23	Above 4.0

Table 12. Reliability of items for academics' interest in accepting administrative positions.

Cronbach's alpha	N	Mean
0.879	20	Above 4.0

This study conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Items representing quantitative components were included in their respective categories. Items that were not similar were grouped into new categories. The study then finalized the items for the academic decision to accept or decline an administrative position. Items considered for further analysis were thematized based on the researchers' understanding and judgment regarding their appropriateness in this study.

Table 13. Operational Definition of Components.

Component	Definition
Career development	Statements that specifically mention career progression or terms related to career advancement, stability, etc.
Skills and experience	Statements that specifically mention an individual's competency and indicate feelings suggesting that the individual has had experience as an academic administrator.
Preferences	Statements that specifically mention an individual's option of choosing one over the other.
Perceptions	Statements that specifically mention a judgment of an individual that can be contested.
Organisation	Statements that relate to organizational factors.

Table 14. Final list of possible factors to accept an administrative position.

No	Statement	Mean	SD
Career development			
1	I think lecturer should focus on institutional leadership for their career advancement.	4.08	1.28
2	I believe the reward system as an academic position motivates me to hold the position.	4.03	1.28
3	I believe holding an administrative position provides the opportunity to grow my leadership network.	4.75	0.99
4	I feel becoming an administrator is not a barrier to my academic leadership.	4.72	1.12
Skill and experience			
5	I am confident in holding any academic administrative position.	5.00	0.89
6	I have the organisational skills required for an academic administrative position.	4.55	1.05
7	I am able to do paperwork, which usually academic administrators have to handle.	4.41	1.09
8	I am good as a policymaker.	4.14	1.11
9	I can handle work as an administrative position.	4.67	0.95
10	I received good support when holding an administrative position.	4.52	1.02
11	I can handle the office politics that academic administrators usually face.	4.31	0.97
13	I have good experience during my term as an academic administrator.	4.74	1.15
Preferences			
14	I prefer to become a university leader.	4.57	1.05
15	I believe being a university administrator provides me with a broader perspective on higher education.	5.10	0.99
16	I am being inspired by experienced institutional leaders to hold an administrative position.	4.57	1.26
17	I believe the current selection of leaders encourages me to hold an administrative position.	4.28	1.24
18	I prefer to be on campus during office hours.	4.47	1.26
Perceptions			
12	I believe leadership is necessary to improve the university's ranking.	4.84	0.97
19	I feel more appreciated when holding an administrative position.	4.11	1.23
20	I feel more respected when holding an administrative position.	4.11	1.28
21	Holding an academic administrator post does not hinder lecturers from carrying out their actual responsibilities, such as teaching and research.	4.70	1.15
22	I believe an academic is meant to be part of the management team.	4.73	1.09
23	I see the need to become an administrator.	4.56	1.06

Table 15. Descriptive statistics of possible factors influencing the decline of administrative positions.

No.	Statement	Mean	SD
Career development			
1	I have more time for teaching if I do not hold an administrative position.	5.27	0.92
3	I believe academic leadership is my focus rather than institutional leadership.	4.47	1.22
4	I believe lecturers should focus on academic leadership if we want to improve the university ranking.	4.69	1.27
5	Holding the academic administrator post hinders lecturers from carrying out their actual responsibilities, such as teaching and research.	5.04	1.01
10	I prefer to become a subject-matter expert.	5.14	1.04
11	I prefer research over academic administrator post.	4.57	1.32
Skill and experience			
6	I cannot work with superiors who talk but take no action.	4.89	1.29
7	I have experienced former bosses and leaders who are ignored after their terms ended.	4.22	1.51
8	I find it difficult to follow my superior's instruction if it goes against my stands.	4.08	1.41
9	I do not like office politics that academic administrators usually face.	5.22	0.99
Preferences			
12	I do not like to manage people.	4.14	1.63
13	I do not like to attend meetings that academic administrators usually have to attend.	4.21	1.47
14	I do not like doing paperwork, which academic administrators usually have to handle.	4.23	1.52
15	I believe in action rather than talking about policies etc.	5.07	0.95
16	I am concerned about my health if I hold an administrative position.	4.97	1.28
Perceptions			
2	I think lecturer should focus on teaching and research.	4.69	1.41
17	I believe there is too much work if I hold an administrative position.	5.08	1.16
18	I feel that there is no appreciation if I hold an administrative position.	4.21	1.56
19	A lecturer should not hold the position of academic administrator for too long.	5.24	0.95
20	Holding an administrative academic position reduces the time spent with family.	4.98	1.13

The final list of potential factors influencing academics' decisions to accept or decline an administrative position is categorized into five main components: career development, skills and experience, preferences, perceptions, and organizational factors. The operational definitions of each component are provided in [Table 13](#).

From the quantitative analysis, this study shows that the final items from the responses of participants who are keen to accept an administrative position and those who are not keen to accept an administrative position can be categorized into four main components: career development, skills and experience, preferences, and perceptions. [Table 14](#) presents the final list of possible factors influencing participants' decisions to accept an administrative position. As shown in [Table 14](#), the career development component includes four items, the skills and experience component includes eight items, the preferences component includes five items, and the perceptions component includes six items. Conversely, the final list of possible factors influencing participants' decisions to decline an administrative position is shown in [Table 15](#). As shown in [Table 15](#), the career development component includes six items, the skills and experience component includes four items, the preferences component includes five items, and the perceptions component includes five items.

From the qualitative analysis, this study shows that, apart from the four components identified in the quantitative analysis, a new component emerged, namely, organizational. [Table 16](#) provides a summary of the final qualitative findings. For participants who responded that they are willing to accept an administrative position, the results show that four items represent the organizational component, whereas for participants who responded that they are not willing to accept an administrative position, three items appear to represent the organizational component.

Table 16. Qualitative findings on organisational.

Organisational	Hold	Not to Hold
Strategic direction from government	√	
Organisational management system	√	
University strategic planning	√	
Communication platform for organizations	√	
Organisation politics		√
Commitment and synergy		√
Rewards and appreciation		√

This study's analyses show that the final items identified through the quantitative approach include 23 items from responses of participants willing to accept an administrative position and 20 items from responses of participants unwilling to accept such a position. Additionally, from the qualitative analysis, one component emerged. Regarding participants' decisions to accept an administrative position, four items represent organizational factors, while three items represent organizational factors for those declining the position. In total, there are 27 items representing factors influencing academics to accept an administrative position and 23 items representing factors influencing academics to decline such a position.

After considering the above findings, this study proposes a framework that depicts institutional leadership in universities, illustrating the factors influencing academics in both public and private universities when deciding to accept or decline an administrative position. The framework identifies five main components that determine the decision-making process for accepting or declining such positions. These factors should be considered when evaluating or selecting the most suitable candidate for an institutional leadership role. The decision-making process is categorized into two types: decisions to accept and decisions to decline. Each category comprises five key components: career development, skills and experience, preferences, perceptions, and organizational factors. Each component includes specific items related to the factors influencing academics' decisions regarding administrative positions.



Figure 1. Proposed institutional leadership decision framework.

Figure 1 presents the institutional leadership decision framework for understanding the factors influencing whether academics decide to accept or decline an administrative position. When all these factors are considered, it is believed that the selection of potential institutional leaders can be conducted effectively. Understandably, not all academics are eager to become institutional leaders. Therefore, it is important for universities to understand the characteristics of academics to strategize on identifying those who can become institutional leaders and those who should focus on academic leadership. By doing so, universities can foster a culture that nurtures leadership and teaching excellence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides findings on academics' decisions to accept or decline institutional roles in universities, both in public and private universities in Malaysia. These academics, in general, are positive about the university's institutional practices. The study showed that more than half of the academics in both public and private universities do not want to accept administrative positions due to various factors. Such findings are concerning, as universities need a pool of future institutional leaders to achieve their mission and vision and to sustain organizational excellence. The study identified 27 items influencing academics' decisions to accept administrative positions, and 23 items influencing their decisions to decline. These items are categorized into five components: career development, skills and experience, preferences, perceptions, and organizational factors.

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, the intended sample size was 1,928 academics; however, only 1,771 questionnaires were collected. Future research could increase the number of respondents to improve generalizability. Secondly, this study employed simple random sampling, so the findings may only reflect the perceptions of academics as a whole.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that universities need a sufficient pool of potential successors to effectively fulfill the purpose and vision of the institution. To increase the interest of academics in holding institutional positions, this study recommends implementing awareness and training initiatives to inspire academics, especially young academics, to assume leadership roles within the institutions.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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