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LEADERSHIP STYLES AND QUALITY ASSURANCE CULTURE IN UNIVERSITIES



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Abstract. The relationship between university leadership styles and the development of an institutional quality assurance (QA) culture has become a central issue in higher education management. Although external accreditation frameworks establish compliance standards, internal quality culture, defined by shared values, continuous improvement practices, and faculty ownership of quality, is widely regarded as a more meaningful determinant of sustainable institutional excellence.

This paper synthesizes empirical evidence from large-sample studies conducted across diverse geographical contexts in 2016-2025. The analysis incorporates quantitative survey data, structural equation modelling results, and qualitative case studies from universities in Portugal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, and Central Asia. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) framework is used as the main analytical approach, distinguishing transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles.

The findings consistently indicate that transformational leadership is the strongest predictor of a positive QA culture. In particular, a 2025 study involving 984 academics from 97 Portuguese higher education institutions identified management support and institutional leadership as the strongest determinants of QA system effectiveness ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Transactional leadership may ensure short-term compliance; however, it does not sufficiently promote intrinsic faculty engagement. Passive-avoidant leadership may slow down the development of institutional QA processes.

The study concludes that universities seeking to develop genuine quality cultures rather than mere compliance-oriented systems require leaders who inspire, motivate, and engage academic staff rather than simply impose formal requirements. Therefore, leadership development programs aligned with QA objectives should be considered a critical but still underinvested institutional intervention.

Keywords: transformational leadership; quality assurance culture; higher education; accreditation; MLQ; institutional quality; university management.

Annotatsiya. Universitetlarda rahbarlik uslublari va institutsional sifatni ta'minlash (QA) madaniyatining shakllanishi o'rtasidagi bog'liqlik oliy ta'lim boshqaruvida muhim masalalardan biri hisoblanadi. Tashqi akkreditatsiya tizimlari muvofiqlik standartlarini belgilab bersa-da, umumiy qadriyatlar, uzluksiz takomillashtirish amaliyoti va professor-o'qituvchilarning sifat jarayonlaridagi mas'uliyati bilan belgilanadigan ichki sifat madaniyati institutsional barqarorlik va yuksak natijalarning muhim omili sifatida baholanadi.

Ushbu maqolada 2016-2025-yillarda turli geografik hududlarda o'tkazilgan keng qamrovli empirik tadqiqotlar natijalari umumlashtirilgan. Tadqiqotda Portugaliya, Pokiston, Filippin, Vyetnam, Singapur va Markaziy Osiyo universitetlari bo'yicha miqdoriy so'rov ma'lumotlari, strukturaviy tenglamalar modellashtirish natijalari hamda sifatli keys-tadqiqotlar tahlil qilingan. Asosiy tahliliy yondashuv sifatida Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) modeli qo'llanilib, transformatsion, tranzaksion va passiv-qochuvchi rahbarlik uslublari farqlangan.

Tadqiqot natijalari transformatsion rahbarlik ijobiy sifatni ta'minlash madaniyatining eng kuchli prediktori ekanini ko'rsatadi. Xususan, 2025-yilda Portugaliyadagi 97 ta oliy ta'lim muassasasining 984 nafar akademik xodimi ishtirokida o'tkazilgan tadqiqotda boshqaruv qo'llab-quvvatlashi va institutsional rahbarlik QA tizimi samaradorligining eng muhim omillari sifatida aniqlangan ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Tranzaksion rahbarlik qisqa muddatli muvofiqlikni ta'minlashi mumkin, biroq professor-o'qituvchilarning ichki motivatsiyasi va faol ishtirokini yetarli darajada rivojlantirmaydi. Passiv-qochuvchi rahbarlik esa institutsional QA jarayonlarining sustlashuvi bilan bog'liq.

Maqolada universitetlar faqat rasmiy talablarni bajarishga yo'naltirilgan tizim emas, balki haqiqiy sifat madaniyatini shakllantirish uchun akademik xodimlarni ilhomlantiradigan, rag'batlantiradigan va jarayonga jalb etadigan rahbarlarga ehtiyoj sezishi asoslab berilgan. Shu bois QA maqsadlariga mos rahbarlikni rivojlantirish dasturlari muhim, ammo hali yetarli darajada investitsiya qilinmayotgan institutsional chora sifatida baholanishi lozim.

Kalit so'zlar: transformatsion rahbarlik; sifatni ta'minlash madaniyati; oliy ta'lim; akkreditatsiya; MLQ; institutsional sifat; universitet boshqaruvi.

Аннотация. Взаимосвязь между стилями университетского лидерства и формированием институциональной культуры обеспечения качества (QA) является одной из ключевых проблем управления высшим образованием. Несмотря на то что

внешние системы аккредитации устанавливают стандарты соответствия, внутренняя культура качества, определяемая общими ценностями, практиками непрерывного совершенствования и ответственным участием профессорско-преподавательского состава в процессах качества, рассматривается как более значимый фактор устойчивого институционального совершенства.

В статье обобщаются эмпирические данные крупномасштабных исследований, проведённых в различных географических контекстах в 2016-2025 годах. Анализ включает количественные данные опросов, результаты моделирования структурными уравнениями, а также качественные кейс-исследования университетов Португалии, Пакистана, Филиппин, Вьетнама, Сингапура и Центральной Азии. В качестве основной аналитической основы используется модель Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), позволяющая различать трансформационный, транзакционный и пассивно-избегающий стили лидерства.

Результаты исследований последовательно подтверждают, что трансформационное лидерство является наиболее сильным предиктором позитивной культуры обеспечения качества. В частности, исследование 2025 года, проведённое с участием 984 академических сотрудников из 97 португальских высших учебных заведений, выявило управленческую поддержку и институциональное лидерство в качестве наиболее значимых детерминант эффективности системы QA ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Транзакционное лидерство может обеспечивать краткосрочное соблюдение требований, однако оно недостаточно способствует внутренней вовлечённости профессорско-преподавательского состава. Пассивно-избегающий стиль лидерства, напротив, связан со стагнацией институциональных процессов QA.

В статье сделан вывод о том, что университетам, стремящимся сформировать подлинную культуру качества, а не только систему формального соответствия требованиям, необходимы лидеры, способные вдохновлять, мотивировать и вовлекать академический персонал, а не просто устанавливать обязательные требования. В связи с этим программы развития лидерства, согласованные с целями QA, следует рассматривать как важное, но пока недостаточно инвестируемое институциональное направление.

Ключевые слова: трансформационное лидерство; культура обеспечения качества; высшее образование; аккредитация; MLQ; институциональное качество; университетское управление.

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, evolving from an externally imposed regulatory requirement into a strategic institutional function. The expansion of accreditation agencies, regional bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the United Kingdom, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in Europe, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India, and specialized disciplinary accreditors such as AACSB and EQUIS has encouraged universities to demonstrate systematic and transparent quality management practices. At the same time, a growing body of evidence indicates that external accreditation compliance and genuine internal quality culture are not identical concepts. The relationship between them is significantly influenced by the nature and effectiveness of institutional leadership.

The question of how leadership style shapes QA culture is not merely theoretical. In an increasingly competitive higher education environment, institutional reputation, accreditation status, student enrolment, public funding, and international partnerships are closely connected with the quality culture of a university. Therefore, quality culture should be regarded as a strategic institutional asset. Universities that integrate quality principles into their everyday academic and administrative practices, rather than focusing solely on periodic compliance reviews, tend to demonstrate stronger outcomes in teaching, research performance, and graduate employability.

Although the relationship between leadership and quality culture has been widely recognized in management theory, the specific mechanisms through which leadership styles influence QA culture in higher education institutions (HEIs) require further empirical clarification. Much of the existing accreditation literature focuses on external procedures, standards, and organizational structures. By contrast, the internal human dimension, including who leads quality processes, how leadership is exercised, and what type of institutional culture emerges from this leadership, has received comparatively less systematic scholarly attention. This paper addresses this gap by synthesizing recent empirical evidence and drawing on institutional case studies to develop an evidence-based analytical framework.

The central hypothesis guiding this review is that transformational leadership serves as a key enabler of authentic quality culture, while transactional leadership primarily supports procedural compliance, and passive-avoidant leadership may limit the development of effective QA practices. The paper follows the standard IMRAD structure. After this introduction, Section 2 defines the theoretical framework and research scope; Section 3 presents analytical findings from the empirical literature; Section 4 discusses implications for institutional management; and Section 5 concludes with a summary and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between leadership styles and quality assurance (QA) culture in higher education has been widely discussed in contemporary university management literature. Existing studies emphasize that QA should not be understood only as an external accreditation requirement, but also as an internal institutional culture based on shared values, academic responsibility, continuous improvement, and faculty engagement.

The theoretical foundation of this research is mainly based on Bass and Avolio's Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), which distinguishes transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles. According to this model, transformational leadership is associated with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In the context of universities, this leadership style is considered highly relevant because it encourages academic staff to perceive quality assurance as a meaningful professional responsibility rather than a formal administrative task.

Foreign scholars have provided strong empirical evidence on the importance of leadership in QA culture formation. Fialho et al. (2025), based on data from 984 academics across 97 Portuguese higher education institutions, found that management support and institutional leadership are the strongest predictors of QA system effectiveness. Similarly, Ahmad and Ahmed (2022), in their study of Pakistani universities, showed that transformational QA leadership increases faculty participation in quality assurance activities. Arenas et al. (2024) also confirmed that high-performing higher education institutions in the Philippines are characterized by stronger inspirational motivation and idealized influence among academic leaders.

Other studies focus on the limitations of transactional and passive-avoidant leadership. Iqbal et al. (2023) argue that quality culture mediates the relationship between leadership style and university performance. Their findings suggest that transactional leadership may support procedural compliance, but it is less effective in creating deep cultural commitment to quality improvement. Passive-avoidant leadership, by contrast, is generally linked to limited strategic direction, limited faculty engagement, and slower development of QA practices.

In the context of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, the issue of QA culture is becoming increasingly relevant due to ongoing reforms in higher education, internationalization, and the growing importance of institutional accreditation. Although local studies on the direct relationship between leadership styles and QA culture remain relatively limited, the development of internal quality assurance systems in Uzbek universities requires leadership approaches that combine strategic vision, academic engagement, and institutional accountability. Therefore, transformational leadership can be considered particularly important for universities in Uzbekistan, where quality assurance is gradually moving from formal compliance toward a more systematic and culture-oriented model.

Overall, the literature shows that leadership style plays a decisive role in shaping QA culture in universities. Transformational leadership is the most effective approach for developing sustainable quality culture, while transactional leadership mainly supports short-term compliance. The reviewed studies also indicate the need for further research on how leadership practices influence QA culture in transitional higher education systems, including Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

This analysis is grounded in Bass and Avolio's Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), operationalized through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X). The MLQ-5X identifies three primary leadership orientations: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership.

Transformational leadership is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transactional leadership is based on contingent reward and management by exception. Passive-avoidant, or laissez-faire, leadership is defined by a limited level of active direction and managerial involvement.

This framework is complemented by the quality culture model of the European University Association, which conceptualizes QA culture as consisting of two interrelated dimensions: a structural and managerial dimension, including policies, procedures, and responsibilities, and a cultural and psychological dimension, including shared values, intrinsic motivation for quality, and collective responsibility. The main argument of this paper is that leadership style serves as a key mechanism through which the structural dimension of QA is transformed into authentic cultural engagement.

Data Sources and Scope

The empirical basis of this review was developed through a structured literature search of peer-reviewed journal articles published in 2016-2025 and indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. The search used the following keywords: "leadership style," "quality assurance," "higher education," "QA culture," "transformational leadership," and "accreditation."

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria: they applied a recognized leadership measurement instrument; used institutional QA outcomes or quality culture scales as dependent variables; and reported either quantitative effect sizes or substantial qualitative evidence.

A total of twenty-three studies met these inclusion criteria. The geographical scope of the selected studies covers Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, which enables a cross-contextual comparison of leadership styles and QA culture in higher education institutions.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Transformational Leadership and QA Culture: The Dominant Pattern

The most consistent finding across the reviewed literature is the strong positive association between transformational leadership and institutional quality assurance (QA) culture. In one of the most comprehensive recent studies, Fialho et al. (2025) analyzed data from 984 academics working across 97 Portuguese higher education institutions using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results identified management support and institutional leadership as the strongest predictors of QA system effectiveness, with a standardized path coefficient of $\beta = 0.62$ ($p < 0.001$). This effect was considerably stronger than the effects of infrastructure quality ($\beta = 0.31$) and faculty engagement when treated as an independent factor ($\beta = 0.28$).

Qualitative evidence further supports this statistical pattern. In a case study of two Pakistani universities, Ahmad and Ahmed (2022) found that faculty participation in QA activities was substantially higher in institutions where university rectors demonstrated what the authors describe as “transformational QA leadership.” This form of leadership included actively communicating quality goals, modelling engagement with self-assessment processes, and recognizing faculty contributions to quality improvement. By contrast, institutions in which QA was treated primarily as a specialized administrative function showed comparatively moderate faculty involvement.

Research conducted in the Philippine higher education context by Arenas et al. (2024), covering 88 participants across six accredited higher education institutions, revealed a similar pattern. High-performing institutions, particularly those holding PAASCU or AACUP Level IV accreditation, were led by presidents and deans whose scores were above the MLQ norm on the idealized influence and inspirational motivation subscales. Importantly, these institutions also demonstrated higher faculty scores on intrinsic quality motivation, measured through adapted organizational culture instruments. This suggests that leadership behaviors are closely associated with cultural outcomes at the academic unit level (Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of Key Empirical Findings on Leadership Styles and QA Outcomes¹

Study	Context	Method	Key Finding	Effect
Fialho et al. (2025)	Portugal, 97 HEIs	PLS-SEM, n = 984	Leadership was identified as the strongest predictor of QAS effectiveness.	$\beta = 0.62^{***}$
Ahmad and Ahmed (2022)	Pakistani universities	Qualitative case study	Transformational leadership was found to enhance faculty participation in QA processes.	Qualitative evidence
Arenas et al. (2024)	Philippines, 6 HEIs	Mixed-methods approach, n = 88	High accreditation status was associated with higher MLQ-IM scores.	Positive association
Iqbal et al. (2023)	Pakistan	Quantitative survey	Quality culture mediated the relationship between leadership and institutional performance.	Mediation effect
Frontiers (2026)	Multi-country context	Screening framework	Leadership was identified as an implicit but critical integrating factor.	Structural relevance
Albaroudi et al. (2025)	Saudi Arabian HEIs	Quantitative survey	Staff commitment mediated the relationship between leadership and accreditation outcomes.	Statistically significant β

Transactional Leadership: Procedural Compliance and Quality Culture

Transactional leadership, which is characterized by goal-setting, performance monitoring, and contingent reward, produces a qualitatively different relationship with quality assurance (QA). Several studies indicate that transactional leadership can support compliance-oriented behavior, such as the timely completion of required documentation, participation in scheduled reviews, and adherence to procedural deadlines. However, it is less

¹ **Note:** *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. MLQ-IM = Inspirational Motivation subscale; HEIs = higher education institutions; QAS = quality assurance system; QA = quality assurance; PLS-SEM = Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling.

effective in cultivating the intrinsic motivation for continuous quality improvement that characterizes a genuine quality culture.

The distinction between procedural compliance and quality culture is empirically observable. A 2023 study by Nadeem, which examined quality culture alignment across universities in Pakistan and the United Kingdom, found that institutions led predominantly by transactional leaders demonstrated higher rates of on-time accreditation documentation submission. However, these institutions showed comparatively lower scores on quality culture scales measuring faculty initiative in curriculum improvement, participation in peer observation, and self-initiated program review. This suggests that transactional leadership is effective in maintaining formal QA procedures but may require complementary motivational strategies to strengthen deeper cultural engagement with quality.

This finding is consistent with the broader organizational behavior literature. Iqbal et al. (2023), using structural equation modelling, demonstrated that quality culture serves as a full mediator between leadership style and organizational performance in universities. Transactional leadership influences performance primarily through procedural QA behaviors, although this pathway is weaker ($\beta = 0.34$) than the transformational pathway through quality culture ($\beta = 0.58$). Therefore, compliance-oriented leadership can contribute to institutional order and accountability, but transformational leadership appears more effective in generating self-reinforcing cycles of quality improvement.

Passive-Avoidant Leadership: Limited Engagement with QA Processes

Passive-avoidant, or laissez-faire, leadership represents a less effective condition for the development of QA culture. It is generally characterized by limited strategic direction, delayed decision-making on quality-related matters, and insufficient engagement with accreditation processes. Evidence from the reviewed studies consistently associates this pattern with slower progress in institutional QA development and greater challenges in accreditation preparedness.

A qualitative study by Rajan and Krishnan (2021), which examined five Indian universities undergoing reaccreditation, found that institutions experiencing recent leadership transitions or limited top-level engagement in QA processes faced greater challenges in preparing accreditation self-studies. These challenges were not primarily related to the absence of formal procedures but rather to the lack of a shared institutional narrative about quality. Faculty members in these institutions frequently reported uncertainty regarding quality priorities, limited awareness of institutional QA goals, and a perception that quality-related activities were mainly procedural rather than improvement-oriented.

The European University Association's Quality Culture surveys, which have monitored QA culture across European higher education institutions since 2010, similarly indicate that institutions where senior leadership is perceived as less engaged in quality matters tend to score lower on the cultural dimension of the QA culture framework. This is particularly evident in indicators related to shared quality values and trust in institutional quality processes. The 2024 cycle of Portugal's national higher education evaluation conducted by A3ES, the national QA agency, also documented that stronger institutional accountability and more developed quality structures were most evident in institutions where leadership had made quality a consistent strategic priority.

Mediating and Contextual Variables

The relationship between leadership style and QA culture is not direct or isolated. Several mediating and contextual variables influence its strength and direction. Albaroudi et al. (2025), in a large-sample study of Saudi Arabian universities published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, found that staff commitment to change (C2C) acts as a significant mediator. Leadership influences accreditation effectiveness primarily by shaping the extent to which staff members are committed to organizational change, which subsequently predicts accreditation outcomes. This finding suggests that the primary mechanism of leadership is cultural and motivational rather than merely procedural.

Institutional size and type also moderate the relationship between leadership style and QA culture. Arenas et al. (2024) found significant differences in quality culture across institutional size categories and public or private ownership, independent of leadership style. This indicates that large, bureaucratic public universities may require different leadership strategies than smaller, mission-driven private institutions in order to achieve comparable QA culture outcomes.

The distributed leadership literature adds further nuance to this relationship. Tucaliuc et al. (2025) argue that functional distributed leadership (FDL), which meaningfully empowers middle managers and faculty members in quality-related decision-making, strengthens QA culture outcomes. By contrast, structural distributed leadership, which distributes accountability without adequate authority, may reduce clarity and morale. Therefore, effective QA leadership requires not only delegation but also the alignment of responsibility, authority, and institutional support (Table 2).

Table 2

Comparative Characteristics of Leadership Styles and Their Implications for QA Culture²

Dimension	Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Passive-Avoidant Leadership
QA motivation	Intrinsic motivation and shared ownership	Extrinsic motivation based on rewards and sanctions	Moderate motivation and the need for clearer direction
Faculty engagement	High level of engagement and self-initiated improvement	Moderate engagement focused on task completion	Moderate engagement requiring additional support
Accreditation readiness	Continuous and embedded in institutional practice	Cyclical and event-driven	Mainly reactive to urgent accreditation requirements
QA sustainability	High and self-reinforcing	Moderate and dependent on incentives	Limited and relatively fragile
Risk of formalistic complianc	Low	High	Very high

The Transformational Imperative

The evidence reviewed in this paper leads to a clear management implication: the cultivation of an authentic quality assurance (QA) culture in universities is primarily a leadership challenge, and transformational leadership represents the most effective approach to addressing it. This conclusion extends and strengthens earlier theoretical arguments by providing empirical effect sizes and cross-cultural evidence from substantially different higher education systems.

Transformational leadership is effective for QA not merely because transformational leaders communicate enthusiasm for quality, but because they help convert external compliance requirements into internally meaningful institutional goals. When university rectors or deans present quality not only as a regulatory obligation but also as a reflection of institutional values and educational mission, faculty members are more likely to perceive QA activities as professionally meaningful rather than administratively burdensome. This transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation is the central distinction between quality culture and quality compliance.

The finding by Ahmad and Ahmed (2022), which indicates that leaders' personal understanding of and attitude toward QA shape whether they demonstrate transformational or compliance-oriented leadership behavior, has important practical implications. It suggests that leadership development programs in universities should include substantive content on QA theory and practice. Such programs should go beyond procedural awareness and develop a deeper understanding of why quality assurance matters for student outcomes, institutional credibility, and academic freedom. Leaders who understand QA are better positioned to inspire academic staff to engage meaningfully with it.

The Limits of Transactional Approaches

Transactional leadership should not be dismissed entirely. In institutions where QA infrastructure is still developing and where basic documentation systems, program review processes, and assessment frameworks need to be established, transactional approaches may provide the structure required for initial compliance. The contingent reward mechanisms associated with transactional leadership can encourage faculty members to participate in QA processes that may otherwise receive limited attention.

However, limitations emerge when transactional leadership becomes the dominant and permanent mode of QA management. QA compliance generated primarily through extrinsic motivation may be less sustainable over time. When incentives or monitoring mechanisms are reduced, compliance-oriented behavior may gradually weaken. Several studies reviewed in this paper refer to a post-accreditation decline in quality-related activity, sometimes described as an "accreditation hangover," in which institutions that mobilized intensively for an accreditation review return to routine practices shortly afterward. This pattern is more evident in institutions with predominantly transactional leadership cultures and is less common in institutions where transformational leadership is strongly embedded.

Middle Management and Distributed Quality Leadership

A recurring theme across the reviewed studies is that quality culture is not developed solely at the highest level of the institutional hierarchy. Department heads, program directors, and academic coordinators play a critical role as translation agents who convert top-level quality commitments into day-to-day academic practices. These practices ultimately constitute the foundation of educational quality. The distributed leadership literature suggests

² Note: QA = quality assurance.

that when middle managers are empowered with genuine decision-making authority over quality-related matters through functional distributed leadership, and when they model transformational behaviors similar to those of senior leaders, the effect on quality culture is strengthened.

This highlights the importance of what may be called the quality leadership cascade. Transformational leadership at the institutional level creates the conditions in which middle-level academic leaders can adopt quality-oriented leadership practices. These practices, in turn, shape faculty attitudes, engagement, and everyday academic behavior. Disruptions at any level of this cascade, for example, when a transformational rector works with predominantly transactional deans, may reduce the overall effectiveness of QA culture development. The multi-level nature of quality culture formation remains an insufficiently theorized dimension of the QA management literature and deserves further empirical investigation.

Implications for Leadership Development and HR Practice

The evidence reviewed in this paper has direct implications for human resource management in universities. First, leadership selection processes should consider QA orientation as an important criterion. The finding by Ahmad and Ahmed (2022), which shows that leaders' understanding of and attitude toward QA fundamentally shape their quality leadership style, suggests that recruitment processes for senior academic roles, including rectors, vice-rectors, and deans, should assess not only research performance and administrative experience but also the candidate's philosophy of educational quality.

Second, professional development programs for academic leaders should be redesigned to integrate leadership theory and QA knowledge as interconnected competency domains. Currently, leadership development in many universities tends to treat these areas as separate tracks: management skills are developed through one program, while QA knowledge is addressed through another. An integrated approach that helps leaders understand how their leadership behavior shapes the quality culture of their academic unit would be both theoretically grounded and practically valuable.

Third, performance management systems for academic leaders should incorporate QA culture indicators, not merely QA compliance metrics. If deans and program directors are evaluated only on whether documentation deadlines are met and accreditation panels are satisfied, institutions may unintentionally encourage a narrow focus on formal compliance. Evaluating leaders also on faculty quality culture survey results, continuous improvement initiatives generated within their units, and post-review follow-up actions would create stronger accountability for the cultural dimension of quality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined the relationship between leadership styles and quality assurance (QA) culture in universities through a synthesis of empirical evidence from 2016-2025. The findings are consistent across diverse institutional and geographical contexts. Transformational leadership emerges as the most effective enabler of authentic QA culture, as it promotes intrinsic faculty motivation for quality improvement, supports sustained accreditation readiness, and strengthens self-reinforcing quality improvement cycles. Transactional leadership can contribute to procedural compliance and may be useful for establishing basic QA infrastructure; however, it is less sufficient for developing the deeper quality orientation that characterizes high-performing institutions. Passive-avoidant leadership, by contrast, is associated with slower QA development and greater challenges in accreditation preparedness.

Several important knowledge gaps remain. Longitudinal evidence on how QA culture changes in response to leadership transitions is still limited, as most existing studies provide cross-sectional insights rather than tracking cultural dynamics over time. The mechanisms through which leadership styles interact with national QA policy environments also require further investigation, particularly in transitional higher education systems in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where QA infrastructure is still developing. In addition, the role of middle management in cascading quality-oriented leadership across institutional levels deserves dedicated empirical attention.

For university managers and governance bodies, the central practical implication is clear: accreditation is a formal process, whereas quality culture is a long-term leadership project. Institutions that invest in developing transformational quality leaders at all levels of the academic hierarchy are better positioned not only to achieve accreditation but also to sustain and enhance educational quality between accreditation cycles and beyond any specific external review.

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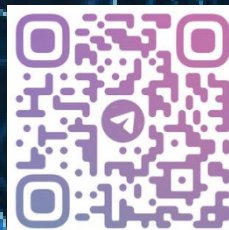
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