

Perceptions of Academic Staffs towards Leadership Styles of their Leaders: The Case of Queens College

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Abstract: *In countries like Ethiopia, where higher education institutions are expected to address the multifaceted societal problems, it is increasingly important to study the leadership styles of the institutions, in general, and academic leadership in particular, are major determinants of success in achieving goals. Leaders in higher education institutions have to examine how to better lead their organizations, and must also find the most effective leadership approach (Kennedy, 1994; as cited in Befekadu, 2019). Bryman (2007) further proposes that leadership in higher education is expected to maintain autonomy, consultation and fostering a culture of collegiality. Collegiality refers to opportunities for members in the college to feel that they belong to a mutually respected community of scholars who value each other's contributions to the institution and feel concern for their colleagues' wellbeing.*

Keywords: Perceptions, Academic, Staffs, Leadership, Styles, and Leaders

Background of the Study

According to Northouse (2013), leadership style consists of the behavior pattern of a person who attempts to influence others. Befekadu (2019) examined the concept of organizational effectiveness in institutions of higher education. There are many factors which may affect the effectiveness of leadership. Among the factors leadership style is one. It is a pattern of behavior that leaders use when they are working with and through other people, as perceived by those people (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 1996; cited in Befekadu, 2019).

Previous studies and practical experience indicated that academic staff and leaders may perceive the concept of academic leadership and the related role differently (Scott et al., 2008; Spendlove, 2007; as cited in Dinh, 2020). In this light, uncovering the perception of college leaders and staff is crucial as this would provide the foundation for a design framework for a professional development (PD) program based on the results of need assessments or perceptions, understandings and skills. Academic leaders need to obtain an understanding of their unique roles and responsibilities surrounding academic leadership; skill sets imply an awareness of essential skills and competencies that comprise an effective academic leader (Wolverton et al., 2005; as cited in Dinh, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, head is used consistently academic departments / units where this study will be conducted. Researchers also confirmed that academic department heads play a crucial role in every aspect of department activities. Their actions can fulfill goals that are beyond individual goals (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999; Lindholm, 1999; in Mozaffari et al., 2015; as cited in Hundessa, 2019). Therefore, the study will attempt to explore the academic staffs' perceptions on leadership styles towards their leaders in Queens college.

1. Statement of the Problem

Queens college to play their role successfully, they need to have an effective academic leadership. This involves the higher, middle and lower level leaders. College leaders, especially department heads, have the potential to direct members of a particular culture toward change (Gemechis & Ayalew, 2012). In countries like Ethiopia, where higher education institutions are expected to address the multifaceted societal problems, it is increasingly important to study the leadership styles of the institutions, in general, and their department heads' and also perceptions of academic staffs about their department heads in particular, as these factors are major determinants of success in achieving goals.

Among various studies, Hundessa (2019), Befekadu (2019), and Kindie (2018) focused and examined the experiences and perceptions of department heads on academic leadership, tried to assess the link between leadership styles and leadership effectiveness, and the self-perception of academic Leaders (deans and department heads) about their own leadership styles in Ethiopian public Queens college, respectively.

Gemechis and Ayalew (2012) also investigated the self-perception of department heads about their own leadership styles at Jimma College. These and similar pieces focused on academic leadership with special emphasis on department heads. As far as my reading and observation is concerned, the perceptions of academic staff towards their leaders/department heads are not yet investigated in Ethiopia, in general, and Queens College in particular. However, this study will fill the gap by exploring academic staffs' perceptions on leadership styles towards their respective leaders/department heads at Queens College.

Moreover, all researches conducted in the above paragraphs were on academic leadership in teacher Queens College, the nature of these Queens College is more or less similar. However, Queens College might differ in its nature from other Queens college in the country since police organizations are law enforcement organizations and graduates are police officers in different disciplines like; police management, crime prevention, crime investigation, criminology and the likes. Students are admitted either from police members or from fresh graduates of different departments from different Queens college for its postgraduate programs in police science.

The researcher experience showed that there were some quarrels observed among academic staff members and department heads. In Queens College, there are two types of instructors i.e., teacher instructors and instructors from sworn/police members. This also triggers the area to be explored and studied in Queens's college context.

2. Research Questions

Attempts will be made to answers for the following basic questions:

1. What is the perception of academic staffs (both teacher and police)on the leadership styles of academic leaders (Department heads?)
2. How teacher academic staff perceptions differ from teacher academic staffs on the leadership style of their academic leaders (Department heads)?
3. What is the perception of academic leaders (department heads) about their own leadership styles?

4. Proposed Methodology

Research Approach

Qualitative research methodology will be used as a research approach. This methodology enables the researchers to collect data in natural settings with sensitivity to the people under study. It also provides for the voices of participants, a reflexivity of the researchers, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and appropriate to use to study a research problem when the problem needs to be explored; when a complex, detailed understanding is needed; when the researcher wants to write in a literary, flexible style; and when the researcher seeks to understand the context or settings of participants (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research allows researchers to deeply explore behaviors, different perspectives, and life experiences to discover the complexities of the situation through a holistic framework (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; as cited in Khan, 2014).

Phenomenology research design will be used. It is found to be appropriate for the study. Since, it describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals (Creswell, 2012).

Participants of the Study

Academic Staff Members and Department Heads will be participants of the study. Purposefully a total of 15 participants will be considered for the study. Ten participants will be from experienced lecturers who served more than two years in the college (Five teacher instructors and five sworn/police member instructors) and five participants will be from department heads (all are police) and the researcher believed that, these participants may have better understanding about the study to explore the perceptions of academic staffs towards leadership styles of their leaders. In using purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2007) also emphasized that even a sample of ten can represent a reasonable size, as the most important thing in a qualitative research is the quality not the quantity.

Accordingly, Queens college is considered as study area for the research mainly for the following reasons, the non-existence and/or limited empirical studies, seriousness of the problem, the researcher practical experiences/ acquaintances about the College, which is the located at Sendafa, 40km apart from Addis Ababa to the North.

Data Collection Instruments/Tools

Interviews

Data will be collected via semi-structured interviews, which Creswell (2012) described as interview can be performed in friendly settings that seem to be as natural as friendly conversation in a coffee shop for instance. To identify and explore the perceptions of academic staffs on leadership styles towards their leaders (department heads), the researcher will conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, the researcher will have a better chance to obtain from interviewees opinions, views, perceptions and experiences in detail. I will conduct individual interview for all 15 participants because the condition in Queens college will not allow me to conduct focus group discussion.

Observation

Observation will be conducted in order to collect firsthand information regarding the perceptions of academic staff on their leaders and the environment around them. Observation gives an opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, to study actual behavior, and to study individuals who have difficulty verbalizing their ideas (Creswell, 2012).

Documents

Documents like EPU's senate legislation, balanced score card (BSC) and minutes of staff disciplinary records will be examined. Using documents as sources of data have two main advantages: 1) the data is Non reactive, 2) document exist independently of the researcher's activity (Bogdan, 2003). The analyses of documents in social research give the researchers control to capture details of happenings in its real context (Marvasti, 2004; as cited in Lera, 2014).

Method of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze data collected through interview and observation. According to Creswell (2012), the thematic analysis is one of the ways to analyze qualitative data. Because the themes are similar codes aggregated together to form

a major idea in the database, they form a core element in qualitative data analysis. The recorded interviews transcribed and fieldnotes from observation will be thematically analyzed. After the transcription, the data will be checked against the audio data for accuracy; it will be thoroughly studied and reduced in several stages.

Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; as cited in Kiger M. & Lara Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis can be pretty useful for finding out about people's experiences, views, and opinions. Therefore, if your research aims and objectives involve understanding people's experience or view of something, thematic analysis can be a great choice.

Document analysis

I will also use document analysis for the documents like Queens college's senate legislation, balanced score card (BSC) performance evaluation and minutes of staff disciplinary records and other relevant related documents. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, which can be used to provide context, generate questions, supplement other types of research data, track change over time and corroborate other sources. In one commonly cited approach in social research, Bowen recommends first skimming the documents to get an overview, then reading to identify relevant categories of analysis for the overall set of documents and finally interpreting the body of documents (Bowen, 2009; as cited in Dalglish, S.L. Khalid,H. & McMahon, S.A., 2020).

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