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Driving Academic Performance through Effective Leadership: Empirical Evidence from Northwest University, Kano

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Abstract

There is a burgeoning concern regarding decreasing quality of teaching and research output associated with ineffective leadership. Thus, this editorial assessed the association between leadership and lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano, Nigeria. The research is quantitative in nature, and a cross-sectional survey design was employed. The population of the study comprises 714 academic personnel, out of whom 254 were chosen through a convenient sampling technique and 176 were ultimately retained for the final analysis. The data was collected via a questionnaire and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 32.0, using descriptive statistics, and simple linear regression evaluation. The outcomes of the assessment indicate that leadership lecturers' performance link was positive and significant. The result adds to leadership literature by offering empirical evidence from Nigeria State Tertiary Institution settings and accentuating the importance of effective leadership in improving academic performance.

Keywords: Leadership, Higher Education, Northwest University, Performance, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is a crucial tool for the development of individuals and society, and universities play a central role in the production of competent professionals and the advancement of knowledge (Aliyu et al., 2018; Abolarin & Felicia, 2025). Achieving the principal objectives of this important aspect of human capital development cannot be attained without strategic guidance and supervision through effective leadership, especially in a university system.

In the same vein, leadership has been acknowledged as a significant factor in organizational effectiveness, notably in educational institutions (Ado & Adamu, 2025; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019; Sarmento et al., 2024). Effective leadership promotes institutional culture, staff motivation, professional growth and organizational commitment and thereby enhances the performance of lecturers in teaching and research activities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Lloyd-Jones, 2012). However, weak leadership could result in low morale, decreased productivity, and poor institutional outcomes (Abid et al., 2025). Although the significance of leadership is well known, Nigerian universities are still struggling with challenges like poor funding, inadequate research facilities, inefficiency in management, and a high student-staff ratio, which are detrimental to the performance of lecturers (Iheanyichukwu et al., 2023; Onyeka-Udeh, 2024). Consequently, this study examined the effect of leadership on lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano.

Statement of the Problem

Lecturers constitute the backbone of university education through teaching, research, student supervision, and community service (Boyer, 1990). Thus, successful administration of universities is contingent upon effective leadership. However, there have been worries about the dwindling research productivity and the efficacy of teaching and assessment procedures among the academic staff in Nigerian universities (Igiri et al., 2021; Ladipo et al., 2022). These issues have been attributed to several causes such as poor leadership training and finance, high workload, poor infrastructure, limited access to research grants and inadequate professional development opportunities (Atakpo, 2025; Ayeni et al., 2025; Obadahun, 2025). Ineffective communication, lack of strategic direction and inadequate staff assistance are some of the poor leadership practices that further diminish lecturers' motivation and productivity (Northouse, 2019; Habeeb & Eyüpoğlu, 2024). Universities are citadels of research and learning and the underpinning for social transformation and national progress. However, Nigerian universities are characterised by inadequate leadership practices (Atakpo, 2025). Leadership has been widely researched, yet there is a lack of empirical evidence on its effect on the performance of lecturers at Northwest University, Kano (Agwu, 2026; Nnaji et al., 2024). Likewise, applying leadership measures that capture unique practices will provide fresh perspectives on how leadership effectiveness boosts the performance of academic staff at Northwest University, Kano. Therefore, the present study investigates the leadership-lecturer performance

link. Specifically, the study is set to achieve three specific objectives, 1) to investigate the effect of leadership on teaching effectiveness; 2) to examine the influence of leadership on research productivity; and 3) to assess the impact of leadership on lecturers' overall job performance.

Literature Review

Concept of Leadership

The term leadership has been widely acknowledged as a significant construct that enhance organizational performance and sustainability. Leadership refers to the ability to influence, guide, and motivate individuals toward the achievement of organizational objectives (Yukl, 2013). It is the process through which an individual inspires others to contribute toward pursuing organizational objectives while providing direction, support, and motivation (Northouse, 2019). Effective leadership has been linked to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement (Northouse, 2021). Leaders who provide support, recognize achievements, and encourage professional development positively influence lecturers' motivation and productivity (Leithwood et al., 2020). Therefore, leadership extends beyond the exercise of authority, it is the ability to enthuse others to work toward achieving a mission.

University leadership comprises creating institutional goals, managing resources, encouraging academic achievement, and fostering innovation (Bush, 2011). Tertiary education needs leadership, as universities are knowledge-demanding and have many stakeholders (Daramola, 2025). Furthermore, a study has indicated that leadership is situational and fluid. According to Dinh et al. (2014), a style's success depends on its suitability to the needs of the company, the available resources, the external environment, and the methods of leadership. Leadership directly affects job satisfaction, institutional efficiency, and employee engagement in Nigeria. Leadership in higher education should be a strategic and interpersonal function, as well as an administrative responsibility that enables organizations to reach their highest potential for employees, respond to changing circumstances, and attain greatness (Daramola, 2025). The Obadahun (2025) study found that effective leadership is still the key to academic performance. He also reported the effect of transformational and democratic leadership styles on instructional quality, research output, and institutional image. The empirical results strongly confirm that effective leadership is critical for the performance of lecturers and the success of the institutions by stimulating teamwork, commitment, and sharing of knowledge. This

influence is considerable, yet it varies from institution to institution and from environment to environment. These results suggest that leadership is critical in promoting academic excellence and the goals of universities.

Concept of Lecturers' Performance

Classroom efficacy, research output, community participation, and administrative duties comprise lecturers' performance (Boyer, 1990; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Teaching effectiveness boosts students' learning and critical thinking, and research output increases the institution's reputation and competitiveness in the world (Ramsden, 2003; Wang & Hamid, 2024). Staff performance is thus a manifestation of individual competence and the outcome of the organisational climate created by leadership (Daramola, 2025). Performance is a multi-dimensional concept while controlling the university. For instructors, it includes teaching quality, student mentorship, research productivity, and community services (Daramola, 2025). Hence, harmonization of academic and administrative roles toward attainment of institutional objectives is necessary. Research suggests that lecturers' performance is influenced by leadership, organizational culture, motivation, institutional support, and professional development opportunities (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Sunarti et al., 2025). On the contrary, Uwimana and Mudaheranwa (2026) reported an insignificant association between leadership and lecturers' performance. This accentuates the desire to investigate the nexus between leadership and performance in Nigerian universities.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Transformational leadership theory suggests that leaders can motivate followers to exceed their expectations through idealised influence, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). Such a leadership style promotes innovation, commitment and better performance of academic personnel (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Malik et al., 2022). Thus, this theory offers a solid foundation for comprehending how leadership practices can influence teaching effectiveness and research productivity in higher institutions. Consistent with this, the present study, leaders in Nigerian universities who demonstrate transformational behaviour such as enthusing lecturers, acknowledging their contributions and promoting creativity etc, are more likely to instructors' performance.

Instructional Leadership Theory emphasizes leaders' roles in improving teaching and learning processes by setting academic goals, monitoring instructional quality, and providing resources for academic success (Hallinger, 2003). Effective instructional leadership enhances teaching quality and research productivity. The application of this theory to Nigerian tertiary education implies that lecturers' performance is greatly influenced by their leadership styles. Thus, the motivation, job satisfaction and productivity of members of academia can be increased by effective leadership. On the other hand, ineffective leadership may make it more difficult for lectures to conduct their duties. Anchoring this editorial on these theories is imperative because it harmonizes leadership influence on performance (transformational theory) with enhancing teaching and learning (instructional theory). Consequently, the present research was grounded on the aforementioned theories, as they offer complementary perspectives for assessing the effectiveness of leadership at Northwest University, Kano.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study (figure 2.1) examines the relationship between leadership and lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano. Leadership is the independent variable and is considered a key factor influencing lecturers' attitudes, behaviours, motivation, productivity, and overall job performance. The dependent variable is lecturers' performance which include basic academic duties such as effective teaching, research productivity, publication output, student supervision and participation in academic and administrative activities. The framework argues that effective leadership of university administrators (vice-chancellors, deans and heads of departments) has a positive effect on the performance of lecturers and, consequently, contributes towards the realisation of institutional goals and the sustenance of quality higher education (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

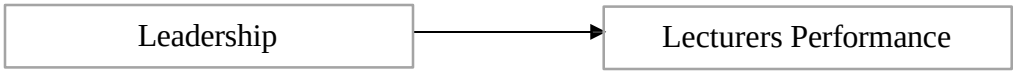


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Relationship between Leadership and Lecturers' Performance

Leadership as a concept has been extensively acknowledged as an indispensable factor that determines staff engagement, sustainability and institutional performance (Daramola, 2025). leadership practices in an organization affect it in a different way. A plethora of studies accentuates the essential role of leadership

practices in organizational performance. For instance, previous studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between leadership and lecturers' performance (Abdullahi et al., 2022; Byarugaba et al., 2025). Research has demonstrated that transformational leadership enhances teaching effectiveness, research productivity, motivation, and organisational commitment (Jamali et al., 2022; Malik et al., 2022).

Similarly, the study of Daramola (2025) demonstrates that democratic leadership is the most successful style for improving employees, while laissez-faire and autocratic leadership were found to harm the staff performance. Participative leadership also increases the academics' involvement as they are participating in the decision-making processes (Abonyi, 2024; Akwa & Akwa, 2026). Leadership support for the academic staff in the form of mentoring, training, and research funding considerably improves academic production (Owan et al., 2024; Mikhitsabu & Elizabeth, 2025). Thus, university leadership should be understood as a strategic and relational function that allows for the effective use of human resources, increases the institution's capacity to respond to the changing environment and supports the achievement of organisational excellence. Hence, grounded on transformational Leadership and Instructional Leadership Theories, the current research posits that academic staff performance is driven through effective leadership by enthusing commitment to institutional goals, creating an enabling environment for teaching, research, and community service, and supporting instructional excellence. The study therefore hypothesises that effective leadership significantly and positively drives academic staff performance.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design (Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 714 academic staff members at Northwest University, Kano. A sample size of 254 lecturers was selected using convenience sampling (Memon et al., 2025; Sarstedt et al., 2017) and the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, and 176 responses were kept for the main analysis. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The items for leadership style were adapted from Bass and Avolio (1995), Hallinger (2006), Spillane (2003), and Paais and Pattiruhu (2020), while the items for lecturers' performance were adopted from Daramola (2025). The questionnaire consisted of three sections; a demographic profile of the respondents, leadership and lecturers' performance. All items will be measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly

agree. Researchers commonly adopt Likert scales in social science research because they allow quantification of attitudes and perceptions, (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016). Reliability analysis produced Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.85 for leadership and 0.79 for lecturers' performance, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis through SPSS version 32.0.

Results and Discussions of the findings

The present study examines the effect of leadership on the performance of Northwest University, Kano lecturers. A total of 254 questionnaires were distributed, 176 valid responses were retained, resulting in a response rate of 69%, which is considered adequate for survey research (Saunders et al., 2019).

Respondents' Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic attributes of the respondents

	Gender distribution of the respondents	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
1	Male	114	65
	Female	62	35
2	**Age of the respondents**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	Less than 20 years	0	0
	20-29 years	26	14.8
	30-39 years	38	21.6
	40-49 years	49	27.8
	50-59 years	37	21
	60 years and above	26	14.8
3	**Qualification of the respondents**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	BSc	13	7.4
	Msc/MA	76	43.1
	PhD	87	49.4
4	**Academic Rank of the respondents**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	Graduate assistant	13	7.4
	Assistant Lecturer	21	11.9
	Lecturer II	29	16.5
	Lecturer I	31	17.6
	Senior Lecturer	42	23.9
	Associate Professor	23	13
	Professor	17	9.7
6	**Respondents' years of teaching experience**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

1–5 years	13	7.4
6–10 years	93	52.8
11–14 years	70	39.8
Total	**100**	**100**

According to the demographic profile in Table 1, the respondents were predominantly male, middle-aged, highly educated, experienced academics from Northwest University, Kano. These attributes imply that the participants acquired sufficient knowledge, experience, and professional competence to offer dependable information regarding the nexus between leadership and lecturers' performance.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Leadership	3.91	0.71
Lecturers' performance	3.87	0.63

According to Table 2, the highest mean score was found in leadership (M = 3.91, SD = 0.71). This suggests that the respondents generally evaluated the leadership practices in the university as effective. The comparatively low standard deviation indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding the extent to which positive leadership behaviours are prevalent.

Similarly, the performance of lecturers had a high mean (M = 3.87, SD = 0.63), which suggests that the respondents had positive perceptions about the performance of academic staff in critical duties like teaching, research, and other academic activities. The smaller standard deviation also shows that the respondents have a consistent view of lecturers' performance. Thus, both variables' high mean values indicate positive evaluations of leadership and lecturers' performance at the university. The results provide initial evidence of a potentially beneficial relationship between leadership and lecturer performance, which inferential statistical analysis further explored.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the Effect of Leadership on Lecturers' Performance

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
Regression	26.81	1	26.81	21.73	0.000
Residual	33.12	98	0.34		
Total	59.93	99			

The ANOVA results and regression coefficients presented in Table 3 and 4 indicate that leadership has a statistically significant effect on lecturers' performance. The ANOVA table shows that the regression model is significant (F = 21.73, p = 0.000), implying that the model as a whole is suitable for explaining the relationship between leadership and lecturers' performance. This result supported the study's objective of assessing leadership lecturers' performance nexus.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for the effect of leadership on Lecturers' Performance

Variable	B	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	1.32		3.71	0.001
Leadership	0.59	0.67	4.66	0.000

Furthermore, the coefficient findings reveal that leadership has a positive and significant effect on lecturers' performance (B = 0.59, β= 0.67, t = 4.66, p = 0.000). This demonstrates that a unit increase in effective leadership leads to a corresponding rise in lecturers' performance. The standardized coefficient (β = 0.67) also suggests that leadership practice is a strong predictor of lecturers' performance in Northwest University, Kano. Moreover, the constant value (β – 1.32, p = 0.001) illustrates that, even in the absence of leadership, lecturers' performance has a baseline level, though it is substantially improved by effective leadership.

Consistent with the study hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis was accepted because the p-value is less than 0.05. Similarly, the findings buttress the objective of the study by corroborating that leadership greatly influences lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano. It further points out the significance of embracing effective leadership practices in academic institutions to influence lecturers' productivity and performance. The result reinforces the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1995).

Therefore, regression analysis further confirmed the significant influence of leadership on lecturers' performance. Leadership accounted for 45% of the variation in the performance of the lecturers (R^2 = 0.45), which indicated a significant predictive potential. The regression coefficient indicated that leadership had a positive and significant influence on lecturers' performance (β = 0.67, p = 0.000). In addition, the full model was statistically significant (F=21.73, p=0.000). These findings support Transformational Leadership Theory and are consistent

with previous studies reporting positive effects of leadership on academic staff performance (Bass, 1985; Abolarin & Felicia, 2025; Akwa & Akwa, 2026).

Conclusion

The results of the present study show that leadership has a significant positive relationship with lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano. The findings highlight that transformational leadership practices such as motivation, intellectual stimulation etc., boost lecturers' performance. Moreover, the results of the current work are consistent with transformational leadership theory which opines that, leaders stimulate their subjects to attain a superior level of performance (Bass, 1985). The results are in line with prior empirical research that reported the positive effect of leadership on academic instructors' performance (Abolarin & Felicia, 2025; Akwa & Akwa, 2026). Additionally, the outcomes of the regression analysis posit that leadership clarifies a huge proportion of the changes in lecturers' performance. This editorial accentuates the significance of effective leadership in boosting facilitation efficacy, research productivity and academic engagement at Northwest University, Kano. The study concludes that leadership significantly enhances lecturers' performance at Northwest University, Kano. Effective leadership contributes positively to teaching effectiveness, research productivity, organizational commitment, and academic performance. leadership approaches used in the university were found to be particularly effective in motivating lecturers and improving institutional outcomes.

Recommendations

The study proposes that university leaders should adopt transformational leadership techniques, promote participatory governance, boost research activities, and engage in leadership development programs. Similarly, government institutions such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), Tertiary Education Trust Fund, and the Federal Ministry of Education should develop policies to enhance leadership capacity, better university administration, and proper funding of teaching and research operations.

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