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## Transformational leadership model and academic service quality: An investigation on higher education

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### Abstract

This research examines the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality in higher education. This research adopts a quantitative descriptive research method. There were 506 research samples consisting of the head of the study program, lecturers, staff, and students taken from six regional campuses of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, where they were enrolled in the study program for Primary Teacher Education. Primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Data analysis conducted in this research used the SPSS 24.00 application, which consists of descriptive data analysis, correlation analysis, ANOVA analysis, and regression evaluation. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between the nature of the transformational leadership model and the quality of academic services. This research finds further support for the relationship between transformational leadership models and the quality of academic services in higher education.

### Keywords

Academic service, academic service quality, higher education, transformational leadership, transformational leadership model

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## Introduction

Higher education as an institution can be defined in two ways: educational institutions with the mission to serve the community to improve quality of life, and academic institutions that must comply with the requirements for sustainability while at the same time having the primary purpose of providing a service (Ozdemir et al., 2020). In addition, higher education is a place for developing knowledge and technology, and for the students and staff who represent the campus community. Higher education develops human resources, contributing to society's economic stability and health. Higher education faces high competition between institutions (Darawong & Sanmaung, 2019; Erna & Mokot, 2020; Hazmira et al., 2021), which may drive up the quality of education. Quality can be defined as the perception or assessment that the 'customers' have about the overall service they receive (Muzakki & Tarigan, 2020). Thus, students' perception of the service they receive must be a priority for institutes of higher education.

Higher education as a service industry must start to assess the importance of customer service more thoroughly because there is a lack of awareness that customer satisfaction plays a vital role in the success of higher education as a business. Student satisfaction is an essential facet of higher education institutions; specifically, it is highly related to service quality (Stankovska et al., 2024). The service aspect of higher education is the main point of education administration in this sector. This service can be in the form of producer behavior - is higher education able to meet consumer needs and focus on achieving consumer satisfaction? Higher education must respond to increasingly intense competition by exploring and improving key aspects of its services. Improving service quality is seen as increasingly necessary to achieve student satisfaction. Therefore, the quality of service depends on the institution and its staff's ability to meet user expectations consistently (Djuanda et al., 2024).

Indeed, in response to growing competition, service quality has received focused attention from several researchers and is acknowledged as the key to maintaining profits and achieving customer satisfaction (Bawais et al., 2020). Service quality is essential in higher education for individual institutions to keep student numbers within an education-free market (Mulyono et al., 2020). Service quality is considered the most essential dimension in higher education for improving institutional competence and competitiveness (Hwang & Choi, 2019). Thus, good service is key to survival (Nguyen et al., 2020). Service quality is the key to the success of performance in an organization; with good service, community or student satisfaction can be maintained and improved (Saleh et al., 2024). In the modern environment of very competitive higher education, where higher education must meet student expectations, institutional image, student satisfaction, and loyalty are strategically important (Masserini et al., 2019). Therefore, qualified services can improve community satisfaction and trust; education service quality is a priority for all higher education institutions.

The intense competition between higher education institutions requires higher education institutions to pay attention to the quality of their educational and institutional services. Academic services represent a large portion of educational services in this 4.0 era. The main area of service of higher education institutions is academic (Rozikin et al., 2020). The integrity of academic services supports significant contributions to higher education, especially in terms of institutional competitiveness and generating a positive image to higher

education stakeholders (Ali et al., 2020). Academic services are closely related to students, so higher education must meet students' needs and perceptions by providing the best academic services. This is because academic services in higher education are directly related to students; in providing academic services, higher education must seek to understand and meet student needs and perceptions. To meet the needs and perceptions of students, dimensions are needed as measuring points or references to assess the quality of academic service. Academic service can be committed according to the ten dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding of customers, and physical appearance (Prima & Krismadinata, 2019). Nonetheless, higher education's academic service systems must be well-organized to do this. This includes planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring the academic service quality management and related processes. The extent to which the academic services provided align with customer expectations. Customers, in this case, students, will say that academic services are high quality if they match their expectations. The ability of an agency to maintain the quality of services provided to the community is one of the factors that determines the success of a government institution in remaining superior and trusted, and able to handle every complaint submitted by the community (Darwis & Haerul, 2024).

Quality academic services will provide satisfaction to students. Higher education focuses on how society values graduate skills and competencies and graduates' educational experience (Moslehpour et al., 2020). Therefore, improving the quality of academic services is necessary because they are seen as one of the indicators of improvement regarding higher education performance. However, it can be said that higher education in Indonesia has not been able to answer the challenges of the times and has not satisfied many employers who compete at the international level (Ali et al., 2020). It is a requirement for higher education to constantly improve the quality of its academic services because this will have implications for producing quality graduates. To provide high-quality academic services to students, higher education must fully understand student needs and identify the aspects of cognition and behavior that lead to student satisfaction and, in turn, the positive perceptions of students about service quality, resulting in a positive image for the higher education sector (Hwang & Choi, 2019).

However, several facets of academic service receive extensive complaints from students. Therefore, in a dynamic academic service system within higher education, it is necessary to have a leadership style that includes the ability to adapt to various situations. Realizing that qualified academic services are not easy, it is essential for the integrity, commitment, and cooperation of all parties, namely leaders, lecturers, employees, and students. Thus, these attributes are necessary for competent leadership. Leadership is a person's ability to attract, motivate, stimulate, and satisfy members and help them achieve common goals (Su et al., 2019). Leadership is dominant in increasing organizational members' work productivity and motivation. Effective leadership is a part of the governance necessary to direct the organization, in this case, higher education institutions, to adjust their goal of educational service quality. Leadership in a conducive organization will influence the employees and encourage them to carry out their duties.

Leaders and leadership cause the implementation of maximum academic management and services. The expected leadership has high credibility and integrity, strives to build

commitment, and can innovate toward improving academic services. Innovation in educational institutions is significant for the development of science and technology. Leaders with the authority to direct all available resources have a large part to play in realizing the quality of academic services. Leaders play an essential role in making improvements and changes in their organization. They must be able to serve as pioneers in improving the quality of academic services because making changes to enhance academic services is closely related to employee performance (Erna & Mokat, 2020). The demand for good service quality depends on the attitude of the leadership in academic management and the performance of lecturers and staff who directly deal with students through academic activities such as education, teaching, and student development.

Higher education continues to compete occasionally by offering various changes to its performance. The work situation that is built must be able to utilize technological advances and prioritize aspects of health. Thus, it is necessary to have a leader who can mobilize their subordinates to transform the current situation. Transformational leaders focus on the demands of their followers, motivate followers to help realize organizational goals, and encourage followers to pursue group interests and self-development (Su et al., 2019). Transformational leaders always try to meet their followers' significant needs and be fully committed (Antonopoulou et al., 2021), producing the desired performance (Jumiran et al., 2020). Such leaders pay attention to the needs of their followers, change followers' awareness of issues by helping them look at problems in new ways, and encourage and inspire followers to put in extra effort to achieve group goals. Service quality positively correlates with transformational and transactional leadership styles (Agarwala & Alwan, 2022).

Transformational leadership is one of the most studied leadership models in recent decades and positively correlates with individual and organizational outcomes (Anazia, 2021). In this process, the leaders encourage the followers to pursue personal development and adaptation skills. As a result, the leaders and followers raise each other to the highest level of motivation (Alessa, 2021). One of the most critical tasks of transformational leadership involves enhancing the participation between leaders and followers in terms of motivation and values while also enhancing the followers' awareness of existing problems and providing support, encouragement, and developmental experience (Wood, 2019). Leaders who can mobilize their subordinates to participate in optimizing the quality of academic services are represented by a transformational leadership model that encourages organizational development efforts through several strategies, such as building inter-institutional cooperation, establishing work culture, academic transparency and institutional management, building collaboration in institutional management, and creating and increasing competitiveness.

Although some previous studies on transformational leadership prove that the transformational leadership model has positive effects on organizing higher education (Al-Mamary, 2020; Antonopoulou et al., 2021; Waham et al., 2020), there are still only a few studies on the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality. A transformational leadership model that improves academic service quality will not only serve as a stable reference for improving academic service quality but will also be a general standard on how leaders should encourage their subordinates to be creative and innovative in completing their tasks. It is important to undertake this research since it is related to overall

policy, such that the positive effects can be seen directly in improving the overall quality of higher education. However, this improvement in academic service quality has not received attention. In that case, its influence on academic service quality will be less than maximum, and there will be less capability to meet student needs, which could lead to a negative impression of the process in higher education. Therefore, our research will help examine how much the transformational leadership model influences academic service quality in higher education.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Academic service quality***

Academic service quality is a comparison between the perceived academic service by customers or stakeholders and their expectations of academic service quality (Salbiyah et al., 2019). Service quality is defined as the customer assessment of the overall excellence of the given service (Sultan & Wong, 2019). Two main factors influence service quality: (1) customer perceptions of the service they receive (perceived service) and (2) the actual service they expect/desire (expected service) (Siwantara & Sumetri, 2019). Students encourage educational service quality, which creates difficulties for service provider institutions in understanding and applying the practices (Hwang & Choi, 2019). Parasuraman et al. (2005) described measurement instruments used to illustrate service quality, namely the Service Quality Scale, the most used instrument to obtain information about perception and expectation aspects of service quality. It has gone through a period of discovery, trial, and observation to be tested in various sectors (such as banking, manufacturing, and government). It has five foundations: tangible, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance (Hwang & Choi, 2019; Moslehpour et al., 2020; Sharma & Sinawi, 2021).

Ten dimensions are used to measure service quality: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding of customers, and physical appearance (Prima & Krismadinata, 2019). Furthermore, there is an overlap between these service quality dimensions. Thus, these ten dimensions are simplified into five main dimensions: (1) Reliability, related to willingness and ability to provide accurate services from the start without making mistakes and providing services in a timely fashion; (2) Responsiveness, related to the willingness and ability of employees to help customers and respond to their requests, as well as inform the service to be provided and then provide those services quickly; (3) Assurance, the ability of employees to create confidence and trust in the promises that have been made to consumers; (4) Empathy, meaning that employees can understand their customers' problems and act in their interests as well as give personal attention to customers in a timely fashion; (5) Tangible Evidence, related to the attractiveness of physical facilities, equipment, and materials used by the company, as well as the appearance of employees. Academic service is said to be of high quality if it is considered equal to or exceeds the expected service quality (Salbiyah et al., 2019).

The purpose of improving academic service quality is that it is expected to support the academic process so that it can easily achieve the vision and mission of an educational institution, which is basically to give birth to 'golden generations' to advance society. Students' satisfaction plays an important role in university success and can be an essential tool in

improving perceived service quality (Mulyono et al., 2020). Student-perceived service quality significantly influences student satisfaction, so the increase in student satisfaction will enhance the competitiveness of a university in higher education (Tan et al., 2021). This is because quality is a concept of customer satisfaction. Therefore, superior academic service quality provides an indicator of customer satisfaction and shows that service quality can influence customer satisfaction; if, over time, there is repeated satisfaction at service meetings, this results in a good perception of service quality.

### *Transformational leadership*

Transformational leadership is one of the most popular leadership models. It has obtained global interest and created significant organizational changes since it is strongly related to transformational leadership practices, which emphasize intrinsic motivation, follower trust, commitment, and loyalty (Farahnak et al., 2020; Widodo & Mawarto, 2020). Transformational leadership has received broad attention from scholars and practitioners (Bayraktar & Alferdo, 2020). Transformational leadership, which is often called the full-range leadership paradigm, has covered a series of transformational models from laissez-faire (the absence of leadership) to transactional (contingency appreciation) to transformational (inspirational leadership) (Mohamed et al., 2021). Followers of a transformational leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader and are motivated to do more than has previously been expected of them.

Transformational leadership is characterized by several key behaviors and practices that differentiate it from other leadership styles. These include: 1) visionary leadership, which helps employees understand their role in the company's future and fosters a shared sense of purpose, 2) inspirational motivation, which involves motivating and energizing employees by setting high expectations and demonstrating a commitment to achieving organizational goals, 3) individualized consideration, which involves motivating and energizing employees by setting high expectations and demonstrating a commitment to achieving organizational goals, 4) intellectual stimulation, which encourage innovation and problem-solving, providing employees with opportunities to contribute ideas and take ownership of their work (Kanungo, 2024). Moreover, four behavioral components determine the transformational ability of a leader in transformational leadership: (1) idealized influence (charisma), (2) intellectual stimulation, (3) individual consideration, and (4) inspirational motivation.

Suppose a transformational leader can apply the four interrelated components appropriately. In this case, the transformational leadership model can run effectively and will impact the progress of that leader's organization or institution. In addition, other main points strengthen the argument. One of the characteristics of an effective educational leader is a visionary. Visionary leaders possess unique characteristics and qualities that distinguish them in education management (Candrasari et al., 2023). They deeply understand the challenges and opportunities in the field and can envision their institution's desired outcomes and long-term goals (Bush, 2020). In addition, transformational leaders can also understand the cruciality of building a community, empowering teachers and developing leadership skills, leveraging data and resources, creating a collaborative and inclusive learning environment, anticipating future

challenges, being passionate about work, encouraging risk-taking, leading by example, and being lifelong learners.

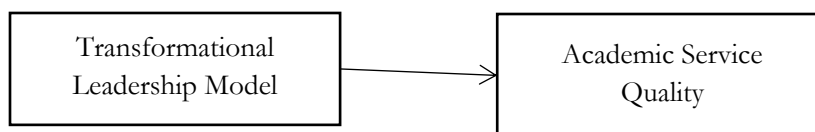
### *Academic service quality and transformational leadership*

This research investigates the impact of transformational leadership dimensions on the quality of academic services in higher education. In general, the dimensions of transformational leadership are adapted from literature and previous references by academics and experts in their fields of higher education. These dimensions include idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation. These four dimensions will be used to measure the extent of the impacts of transformational leadership on the quality of academic services. Previous research has stated that transformational leadership significantly influences the service quality of employees both individually and at the branch level (Su et al., 2019). The research showed increased employee performance, which improved service quality after implementing transformational leadership.

The quality of academic services in higher education plays a crucial role in that sector. Many higher education institutions are constantly trying to improve the quality of educational services. The performance provided by the educational service staff considerably influences the quality of educational services at universities. Thus, it takes the efforts of a leader in higher education to lead all the members toward providing the best performance. Quality of higher education leadership requires transformational leaders who, if adopted, are identified and associated with transformational leadership that has the ability, namely having an ideal future concept of effective higher education, which can satisfy all stakeholders. Transformational leadership is considered capable of mobilizing the commitment of all higher education citizens to realize ideal and practical images of higher education and satisfy customers, i.e., producing higher education that matches or exceeds the customers' requirements, needs, and expectations. The application of quality principles in education is inevitable and negotiable by the organizers or managers of higher education. Quality education in educational institutions is required for all levels of society, including students, parents, the government, and the business world. The researchers hypothesize that:

H1: Transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with academic service quality

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual model*



## Methodology

### *Research design, site, and participants*

This research used a quantitative descriptive approach. This helped the researcher to collect data at one point in time and to prove or disprove the formulated hypothesis (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). The research population was the entire academic community studying the Primary Teacher Education Program at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The sampling technique used was based on probability sampling with simple random sampling. There were 506 respondents, including the head of the study program, lecturers, academic staff, and students. An overview of the characteristics of research respondents can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1.** *Description of respondent characteristics*

Respondents	Gender		Sum	Educational background				Sum
	Male	Female		High school equivalent	Bachelor	Master	Doctoral	
Head of the study program	4	2	6	-	-	-	6	6
Lecturers	35	37	72	-	-	23	49	72
Academic staff	4	2	6	-	6	-	-	6
Students	181	241	422	422	-	-	-	422
Total			506		Total			506

### *Data collection and analysis*

Primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. All items on the questionnaire were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never “1” to always “5” on all transformational leadership variables. The academic service quality variable used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree “1” to strongly agree “5”. The questionnaire instruments used in this research included questionnaires on transformational leadership and academic service quality. The questionnaire instrument was created based on the dimensional indicators of each variable, which were then further developed into sub-indicators used as the question items in the research questionnaire. The data collected from respondents were then processed and analyzed using the SPSS 24.00 application, which consists of descriptive data analysis, correlation analysis, ANOVA analysis, and regression analysis.

## Findings

### *Descriptive statics*

The resulting variables' mean value and standard deviation describe the observed data (Table 2). The mean value summarizes the data, while the SD measures variability in the sample around the mean (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). The results of statistical descriptive analysis in this research are as follows.

**Table 2.** *Descriptive statistics for describing the observed data*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transformational leadership	506	1.71	5.00	3.9186	0.66047
Academic service quality	506	2.56	5.00	3.8910	0.50425
Valid N (listwise)	506				

The transformational leadership variable had a mean of 3.9186 and a standard deviation of 0.66047. The standard deviation is smaller than the mean, indicating that the data on the transformational leadership variable is less varied. The mean value of the transformational leadership variable (3.9186) is closer to the maximum; the mean value for transformational leadership in this sample is relatively high. This indicates that transformational leadership is quite good. Then, for the academic service quality variable, the mean is 3.8910, and the standard deviation is 0.50425 - the standard deviation is smaller than the mean. Therefore, the data on the academic service quality variable is less varied. The mean value of the educational service quality variable (3.8910) is closer to the maximum value, and therefore, the mean value of academic service quality in this sample is relatively high. This indicates that the quality of educational services is quite good. Based on the descriptive analysis, the transformational leadership and academic service quality variables show relatively high mean values and low standard deviations, indicating consistent perceptions among respondents. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine bivariate relationships based on the r value (correlation coefficient) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *Correlation analysis to determine bivariate relationships*

		Transformational leadership	Academic service quality
Transformational leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.408**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	506	506
Academic service quality	Pearson Correlation	.408**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	506	506

The relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the correlation coefficient,  $r$ , is 0.408, indicating a moderate, positive relationship. This means the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality is between 0.40–0.599. This suggests that better transformational leadership will lead to better quality educational services.

The researcher conducted multiple linear regression analyses to ascertain the predictive power of transformational leadership and academic service quality (Table 4).

**Table 4.** *Anova to ascertain the predictive power of transformational leadership and academic service quality*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.326	1	21.326	100.378	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	107.077	504	.212		
	Total	128.403	505			

Transformational leadership significantly affected academic service quality ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 5.** *Model summary for the regression analysis*

Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-squared	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.408 <sup>a</sup>	.166	.164	.46093

The R-squared value for the regression analysis was 0.166 (Table 5). Thus, the coefficient of determination as a percentage is 16.6%. This indicates that variation in transformational leadership explains 16.6% of the observed variation in academic service quality.

**Table 6.** *Coefficients to gain the conclusion of the relation between the transformational leadership model and academic service quality*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.672	.123		21.651	.000
	Transformational leadership	.311	.031	.408	10.019	.000

Based on the t-test results,  $p < 0.001$  indicates that transformational leadership significantly affected academic service quality (Table 6). Thus, it can be concluded from the statistical test results of multiple linear regression analysis that the transformational leadership model has a positive and significant relationship with academic service quality. In addition, the coefficient value of  $b = 0.311$  means that the transformational leadership model contributes 0.311 points towards improving the quality of educational services. The associated p-value of  $< 0.001$  indicates that this study's hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) can be accepted.

## Discussion

This research aimed to test the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality in higher education within the Primary Teacher Education Program at Universitas Pendidikan in Indonesia. Our research found that transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with academic service quality. This indicates that if the head of a study program can implement the transformational leadership model appropriately, this will significantly improve academic service quality. Leadership is closely related to aspects of the implementation of tasks and human relations within and outside the organization (Sunaengsih et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a necessity for qualified leaders who can direct, motivate, and inspire their members to generate the best performance in providing academic services (Sunaengsih et al., 2021). This transformational leadership model is effective because it has been shown to have a significant and positive relationship with the quality of academic services. Transformational leadership is one of the most critical factors in the effectiveness of campus culture (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021). As can be seen, academic service quality is always dynamic and has developed according to student needs.

As educational organizations, universities primarily focus on one main goal: to enhance the quality of human resources, particularly students, with various available resources (Putra et al., 2024). Transformational leaders must implement practical and ideal higher education in the future, using their abilities. Especially the ability to provide satisfaction to officeholders, mobilize commitment from all campus residents, and strive for institutional change for the better. The integration of transformational leadership within higher education needs to be performed tactfully to increase the overall efficiency of the input (Bhakuni et al., 2024). Transformational leadership includes recognizing the change, creating a vision, and effectively guiding and executing the changes (Fernandes & Ghorpade, 2023).

Herein lies the changing role of leaders in the era of globalization. More flexible, dynamic, and adaptable leaders must instill cultural diversity. Thus, the quality of academic services must also adapt to campus culture, and most importantly, they must provide satisfaction to students as the main customers at universities. The higher quality of academic services will lead to higher student satisfaction (Darawong & Sanmaung, 2019). This demand for good academic service quality depends on the attitude of leadership in academic management and the performance of lecturers and staff who directly deal with students through academic activities such as education, teaching, and student development. Transformational leaders can provide consistent encouragement and motivation for quality communication between leaders and their members for further development and can create self-confidence, commitment, loyalty, and trust. They can also develop a leadership spirit in others with an expectation to achieve or even exceed the organizational vision and mission (Cahyono & Fahlevi, 2020). Improving the quality of academic services is one of the visions and missions that must always be achieved by considering the importance of academic service quality in improving the quality of higher education.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between a transformational leadership model and academic service quality. Ever-improving academic service quality because of the effects of the implementation of a transformational leadership model by leaders in higher education can have implications for enhancing the quality of higher education, which in turn will increase the quality of graduates and improve the image and the numbers of students enrolled in higher education. However, the value of the correlation coefficient between transformational leadership and academic service quality in this research is only moderate. Further research might develop a transformational leadership model that improves the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality.

Future research should explore how transformational leadership models can be optimized within a single-institution context, such as the Primary Teacher Education Program at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Although this research demonstrated a moderate correlation, future studies could address potential barriers such as differences in roles among respondents (e.g., lecturers, staff, and students) and their varying perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Additionally, research could investigate how specific institutional dynamics and resource constraints influence the relationship between transformational leadership and academic service quality, providing more tailored strategies for improvement.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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