



Rectoral Leadership and Lecturer Performance in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership at the rectoral level plays a strategic role in shaping lecturer performance and institutional effectiveness in higher education. This study explores how rectoral leadership practices influence lecturer performance within a university context, drawing on perspectives of transformational, bureaucratic, and value-based leadership. Employing a qualitative case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving university leaders, academic staff, and institutional records. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns of leadership practices related to motivation, performance management, and institutional support. The findings indicate that rectoral leadership contributes to lecturer performance primarily through structured coordination mechanisms, value-driven motivational communication, and the delegation of performance-related programs across institutional units. Leadership practices emphasize alignment with core academic responsibilities, including teaching, research, community service, and the integration of institutional values. Although leadership implementation is largely hierarchical, it is perceived positively due to its clarity of vision, moral legitimacy, and consistency with organizational culture. The study contributes to higher education leadership literature by providing empirical insights into how rectoral leadership functions as a multidimensional process that combines strategic direction, bureaucratic coordination, and value-based engagement to support lecturer performance. However, the findings are limited by their single-case design and context specificity. Future research is recommended to adopt comparative or multi-site approaches and to incorporate mediating factors such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, and academic motivation to further explain leadership–performance dynamics in higher education.

Keywords: *rectoral leadership; lecturer performance; higher education leadership; value-based leadership; academic governance*



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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ushered in sweeping transformations within higher education institutions (HEIs), driven by accelerating globalization, technological disruption, policy reform, and rising public expectations. These dynamics have compelled universities worldwide to reconfigure their institutional paradigms from centers of knowledge dissemination to engines of innovation, socio-economic development, and global competitiveness (Dami et al., 2022). In this evolving landscape, institutional performance and academic excellence have become central imperatives, closely scrutinized through metrics such as international rankings, accreditation standards, and community impact.

At the heart of this transformation lies human capital, particularly academic staff whose roles have expanded well beyond traditional teaching to encompass research productivity, community engagement, curriculum development, and institutional governance. Consequently, optimizing faculty performance has emerged as a strategic priority, directly influencing educational quality, student outcomes, and institutional reputation (Saleem et al., 2020). Achieving this requires not only systemic support but also effective leadership at all organizational levels particularly at the apex of academic governance.

The role of university leadership especially that of rectors, presidents, and chancellors is critical in cultivating performance-enhancing environments. Contemporary leadership research consistently highlights that leadership style significantly influences faculty motivation, engagement, and performance outcomes (Ragaisis, 2018). Among the most effective leadership approaches in academic contexts is transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision articulation, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration qualities aligned with the autonomy and scholarly orientation of academic staff (Aboramadan et al., 2021).

Beyond transformational models, servant leadership has gained increasing prominence in higher education literature. This paradigm prioritizes ethical stewardship, empathy, and the empowerment of others traits conducive to fostering trust, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being among faculty members (Dami et al., 2022). Servant leaders create inclusive and participatory environments where lecturers feel valued and supported, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation and commitment to institutional goals.

In parallel, distributed leadership a model promoting collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility has also been advocated as a relevant framework for complex academic organizations. This approach helps dismantle rigid hierarchies and fosters a sense of collective ownership, especially critical in research-intensive and multidisciplinary environments (Gedifew & Bitew, 2017). Such leadership styles are particularly effective in navigating the increasing pressures of policy change, global competition, and academic burnout.

Despite theoretical advances, substantial challenges remain especially within HEIs in developing countries. Faculty members often grapple with systemic constraints such as insufficient remuneration, limited access to professional development, bureaucratic inertia, and inadequate recognition mechanisms. These barriers can severely dampen motivation and performance (Wahab, 2022). Notably, ineffective leadership exacerbates these issues, highlighting the urgent need for rectors to adopt inclusive and adaptive leadership strategies.



Recent empirical studies underscore the mediating effects of leadership on psychological well-being, digital competence, and engagement with the Tridharma of Indonesian higher education: teaching, research, and community service. The leadership exercised by university rectors does not merely influence administrative efficiency but plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional culture, aligning strategic objectives, and mobilizing human resources toward excellence.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the extent to which rectoral leadership conceptualized through transformational, transactional, and servant leadership lenses affects lecturer performance in HEIs. The research explores key mediators such as motivation, organizational culture, and institutional support mechanisms. By elucidating these relationships, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for HEI policymakers, leadership development practitioners, and academic administrators striving to foster performance-driven and ethically grounded institutions.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design situated within an interpretivist epistemological framework to examine the influence of university rectoral leadership on lecturer performance. The interpretivist paradigm is particularly suited for exploring socially constructed meanings and individual experiences within institutional contexts, enabling a deep understanding of complex human behaviors and leadership dynamics (Jenkins, 2021). Qualitative case studies allow researchers to capture the richness of phenomena within bounded systems and real-life settings, making this approach especially relevant for higher education leadership inquiries (Swanson, 2018).

The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi, selected through purposive sampling based on its visible rectoral initiatives aimed at enhancing academic staff performance. The institution served as a single embedded case, representing a bounded environment where leadership and faculty dynamics could be holistically studied across dimensions of teaching, research, and community service.

The researcher functioned as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation, embracing reflexivity as an essential element of qualitative inquiry. To ensure methodological rigor, researcher bias was mitigated through bracketing, reflective journaling, and peer debriefings (Cafley, 2015). This aligns with (Creswell & Poth, 2018) assertion that interpretive validity in qualitative research is contingent on the researcher's engagement with the context and critical reflexivity throughout the inquiry.

Data collection involved triangulated sources and techniques to enhance validity and depth. Primary data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of participants including vice rectors, deans, department heads, senior lecturers, and support staff. These interviews were designed to elicit participant narratives concerning rectoral leadership style, institutional culture, and their impact on academic performance. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for emergent themes to be captured effectively (Macdiarmid & McClunie-Trust, 2021).



Participant observation was used to capture interactional behaviors, symbolic gestures, and leadership rituals during faculty meetings, rectorial briefings, and university-wide events. This method provided contextual nuance and enriched the interview data. Complementing these, document analysis was carried out on strategic plans, internal reports, rectorial circulars, and lecturer evaluation records to trace alignment between policy articulation and ground-level implementation.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and iterative refinement. NVivo software was used to organize and manage the coding process. Triangulation was systematically applied during the analysis phase by comparing themes across interviews, field observations, and documentary evidence to identify convergences and anomalies (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement and member checking; transferability was facilitated by thick description of the institutional context; dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of coding and methodological decisions; and confirmability was ensured through peer audit and reflective memoing (Muzari & Shava, 2022). This integrated methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how rectoral leadership is interpreted, enacted, and experienced within a higher education institution, with implications for performance enhancement and strategic governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership Style of the Chancellor of Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi in Motivating Lecturers to Improve Performance

Lecturer motivation plays a pivotal role in determining academic performance in higher education institutions. Findings from this study reveal that the Rector of Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi adopts a transformational leadership approach characterized by a combination of explicit and implicit motivational strategies. These include direct verbal encouragement during meetings and personal interactions, as well as symbolic communication that reinforces the university's institutional vision and Muhammadiyah values. This aligns with the dimensions of *inspirational motivation* and *individualized consideration* within the framework of transformational leadership (Dorado et al., 2020).

The Rector's leadership approach fosters intrinsic engagement among lecturers in implementing the Tridharma and Catur Dharma of higher education, namely teaching, research, community service, and the integration of Islamic values. As Løvaas and Jungert (2020) assert, such engagement suggests that motivation derives not solely from external rewards, but also from the alignment of individual values with institutional goals (Løvaas & Jungert, 2020).

Symbolic engagements, such as public recognition, identity reinforcement in academic forums, and spiritually grounded communication, contribute to a mission-driven work climate. This supports the argument by Bolling-Cooper (2018), who emphasizes the importance of



structured motivational communication within value-based organizations. In the context of faith-based higher education, the integration of Islamic values as a motivational foundation proves effective in cultivating lecturer loyalty and commitment to strategic objectives (Bolling-Cooper, 2018).

The Rector also articulates institutional expectations through performance monitoring mechanisms, particularly in research output and community engagement. These practices provide clarity for academic staff regarding institutional benchmarks, ultimately boosting academic productivity and enhancing the university's reputation. Dahlvig (2018) notes that mission-oriented leadership, combined with performance accountability, strengthens organizational culture and fosters collaboration and innovation (Dahlvig, 2018).

Although the Rector's motivational approach is predominantly top-down, it is positively received by faculty members due to its moral integrity, visionary clarity, and recognition of individual contributions. This aligns with findings by Mwema et al. (2021), who reported that transformational leadership can enhance employee retention through non-material mechanisms such as symbolic recognition and value-based communication (Mwema et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the motivational structure deployed by the Rector is closely interlinked with the organizational culture and internal incentive systems. This supports the growing consensus that sustainable motivation is less about transactional rewards and more about creating meaningful engagement, value alignment, and psychological empowerment.

Overall, this case study highlights the importance of contextual and value-driven leadership in fostering sustained academic performance. The Rector's ability to embed motivational strategies within institutional rituals and performance systems serves as a model for leadership development in similar institutions. Future leadership training programs in higher education particularly within value-based organizations should therefore include components on motivational communication, ethical leadership, and strategic faculty development.

Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi Chancellor's Efforts to Improve Lecturer Performance

The leadership efforts of the Rector of Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi in enhancing lecturer performance are strategically framed and operationalized in alignment with national academic standards, particularly those set by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia. These efforts are grounded in the institutional implementation of the *Catur Dharma* of higher education teaching, research, community service, and the cultivation of Islamic and Muhammadiyah values. As the highest authority within the university structure, the Rector coordinates policies through a hierarchical framework involving vice rectors and unit heads, thereby ensuring a bureaucratic yet efficient mechanism for organizational functioning. This distributed form of leadership aligns with Sarwer et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of shared accountability and structural empowerment in institutional performance enhancement (Sarwer et al., 2025).

In the domain of teaching and learning, the Rector has launched a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening pedagogical competence and academic quality. These include the socialization of the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) framework, faculty training on



curriculum development, workshops on the design and implementation of semester learning plans (RPS), instructional development programs focusing on character education and applied learning strategies, and the renovation of classrooms to create a more conducive learning environment. Additionally, the university has invested in upgrading digital infrastructure and increasing lecturer compensation to boost morale and job satisfaction. According to Abid et al. (2025), such integrative leadership that couples professional development with environmental support plays a significant role in improving teaching outcomes in higher education (Abid et al., 2025).

Concerning research and community service, the Rector through the coordination of the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) has implemented a range of supportive programs. These include the allocation of institutional research funding, participation in national-level grant schemes under the auspices of *Diktilitbang PP Muhammadiyah*, expansion of research clusters, and an increase in proposal quotas. In addition, structured writing workshops and clinics have been held to assist lecturers in publishing their work in accredited national and international journals. Jusoh et al. (2025) note that consistent institutional support and access to funding significantly contribute to improved research productivity and engagement among faculty (Jusoh & Zainuddin, 2025).

In the religious and ideological realm, the University has taken proactive steps to embed Islamic and Muhammadiyah values into academic life through the Institute for Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (LPAIK). Initiatives under this domain include the organization of *Baitul Arqam* spiritual development programs, instructor training for Islamic education within the university environment, weekly religious studies, and seminars or book reviews on Muhammadiyah thought. These programs aim not only to strengthen moral character but also to align individual values with the university's faith-based identity. Suyatno et al. (2025) affirm that value-based leadership in Islamic higher education fosters deeper organizational commitment and unity among academic personnel (Suyatno & Fauzi, 2025).

The Rector's leadership style is characterized by a combination of top-down coordination and participatory responsiveness. While much of the implementation is delegated to vice rectors and unit heads, strategic control and accountability remain with the Rector. This model reflects a well-structured system of academic governance that ensures the integration of institutional vision with operational execution. Malini et al. (2025) argue that such alignment between hierarchical authority and distributed agency is crucial in translating leadership initiatives into tangible performance improvements. As observed in Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi, the Rector's leadership has fostered a culture of professionalism, religious identity, and academic excellence, driven by structured programs and institutional support systems across all four pillars of higher education engagement (Malini et al., 2025).

Leadership Style of the Chancellor of Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi in Evaluating Lecturer Performance

The leadership practices demonstrated by the Rector of Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi are strategically aligned with Indonesia's national higher education framework, particularly in adherence to academic performance standards issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This strategic alignment is operationalized through the



institutional implementation of the *Catur Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*—teaching, research, community service, and the inculcation of Islamic and Muhammadiyah values—thereby embedding the university's faith-based identity into its academic core.

Structurally, the Rector adopts a distributed leadership model while retaining strategic control at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Through coordinated efforts involving vice rectors, deans, and unit heads, the leadership fosters both vertical accountability and horizontal participation. This governance approach reflects the model of shared leadership and structural empowerment, which has been positively correlated with institutional performance in higher education contexts (Sarwer et al., 2025).

In the domain of teaching and learning, the Rector has initiated numerous academic development programs. These include the socialization of the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* policy, capacity-building workshops on curriculum design and *Rencana Pembelajaran Semester (RPS)*, as well as instructional innovation sessions focusing on character education and student-centered learning. Furthermore, substantial investments in digital infrastructure and lecturer remuneration have been implemented to enhance job satisfaction and teaching quality. These integrative practices demonstrate how leadership, when combined with professional development and environmental support, significantly contributes to instructional effectiveness (Abid et al., 2025).

In the realm of research and community engagement, the Rector—through the Research and Community Service Institute (*Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, LPPM*)—has expanded institutional support mechanisms. These include internal research grants, access to national funding programs coordinated by *Diktilitbang PP Muhammadiyah*, formation of interdisciplinary research clusters, and structured capacity-building through academic writing clinics. The creation of a conducive environment for scholarly publishing reflects an institutional commitment to research excellence. Empirical evidence supports this, indicating that research productivity is positively influenced by consistent institutional support and access to research resources (Jusoh & Zainuddin, 2025).

Religious and ideological reinforcement, a distinctive pillar of the university's mission, is cultivated through the Institute for *Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyah* (LPAIK). Programs such as *Baitul Arqam*, Islamic pedagogy training, weekly *kajian Islam*, and scholarly discussions on Muhammadiyah thought are integral to aligning personal values with institutional identity. These value-based leadership initiatives foster a cohesive academic culture, enhancing organizational commitment among faculty (Suyatno & Fauzi, 2025).

The Rector's leadership model, therefore, is characterized by a synergy between top-down strategic control and participatory implementation. While authority is centralized, execution is delegated, resulting in a governance model that is both directive and collaborative. This duality enables efficient institutional alignment, as emphasized by H. Malini and Putra (2025), who argue that integrating strategic leadership with operational management ensures consistent translation of institutional vision into measurable academic outcomes (Malini & Putra, 2025).

In sum, the leadership efforts at Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi exemplify a holistic and context-sensitive approach to institutional development. The Rector's initiatives span pedagogical innovation, research enhancement, ideological integration,



and structural governance—each reinforcing the others to produce a coherent academic culture. These findings underscore the necessity of strategic, value-driven, and evidence-based leadership in faith-based higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

The leadership style of the Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi Chancellor in providing motivation for improving lecturer performance is carried out bureaucratically. The methods used are direct motivation with spoken language on meeting agendas, university events, socialization, individual and general coordination with direct expressions (instructive) or with implied meanings (not instructive).

Related to the efforts that have been made by the Chancellor in improving lecturer performance through several work programs that have been mandated to the structural leaders who are in charge of the task by involving the leaders of each unit under their auspices. In practice, the efforts that have been made by the Chancellor are related to the performance of lecturers related to the four pillars of higher education, namely research, teaching, community service and Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyah. While the performance evaluation process for lecturers is carried out in coordination with leaders who have direct and indirect responsibilities and functions using performance assessment instruments.

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