RESEARCH PAPER

A Study on Leadership Styles and Its Impact on Higher Educational Institutions in Kerala

Jayaraj A. S.[1*], Dr. M.A. Pillai[2]

[1]Reg No: 17213151011011, Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Research Centre, S.T. Hindu College, Kottar, Nagercoil, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

Email: jayarajias@gmail.com

Mobile: 9995704767

[2]Supervisor, Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, S.T. Hindu College, Desi Vinayaga Nagar, Kottar, Nagercoil, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

Email: mapillai25@gmail.com

Mobile: 9486011640

***Corresponding Author:** Jayaraj A. S., Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Research Centre, S.T. Hindu College, Kottar, Nagercoil

Email: jayarajias@gmail.com

Received: 25th June 2026; **Revised:** 28th July 2026; **Accepted:** 10th October 2026; **Available Online:** 15th October 2026

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary higher education ecosystem, leadership has emerged as the single most vital factor determining institutional sustainability, academic excellence, accreditation outcomes (e.g., NAAC, NIRF), and overall organizational climate. Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Kerala—comprising government colleges, private aided colleges, self-financing institutions, and autonomous universities—operate within a unique socio-political, cultural, and highly literate landscape. This paper investigates the predominant leadership styles demonstrated by educational leaders (principals and department heads) across Kerala's HEIs and evaluates their direct empirical impact on key institutional parameters, including faculty motivation, institutional climate, decision-making dynamics, research culture, and organizational effectiveness. Grounded in quantitative empirical data (N = 390 faculty members) and synthesized using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression, this study highlights that transformational and democratic leadership serve as the primary drivers of institutional success, whereas bureaucratic and laissez-faire models impair faculty performance.

Keywords: Leadership Styles; Higher Educational Institutions; Kerala; Transformational Leadership; Democratic Leadership; Faculty Motivation; Organizational Effectiveness

How to cite this article: *Jayaraj A. S.1* Dr. M.A. Pillai2. A Study on Leadership Styles and Its Impact on Higher Educational Institutions in Kerala. Int J Drug Deliv Technol. 2026;16(89s):655-658. DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.89s.70.*

Source of support: ***Nil.***

Conflict of interest: *None*

1. Introduction and Contextual Background

Higher education in India is undergoing unprecedented dynamic shifts driven by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, rapid digital transformation, global accreditation demands, and changing student expectations. In Kerala—a state celebrated for its high literacy rate and progressive human development index—HEIs face distinct structural and administrative dynamics:

- **Diverse Ownership Models:** A tri-tiered structure consisting of State-run Government Colleges, Private Aided Colleges (managed by community trusts and educational societies), and Unaided/Self-Financing Institutions.
- **Faculty Empowerment & Unionization:** A highly politically conscious, well-educated, and active faculty and student body demanding participative decision-making.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Complex multi-layered governance involving UGC norms, University Statutes, Higher Education Department mandates, and NAAC/NIRF benchmarking.

Within this framework, institutional heads—specifically college principals—have transitioned from traditional administrative custodians to strategic visionaries, facilitators, mentors, and change agents. The primary problem investigated in this study revolves around how different leadership styles adopted by principals directly

impact faculty motivation, institutional climate, and quantitative measures of institutional effectiveness.

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Foundation

The theoretical framework underpinning this study synthesizes classical behavioral approaches (Ohio State and University of Michigan leadership studies) with modern educational leadership paradigms:

- **Behavioral Leadership Theory:** Focuses on observable actions, communication, and task vs. people orientation rather than static personality traits.
- **Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985):** Emphasizes visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to elevate follower commitment.
- **Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2011):** Focuses specifically on teaching-learning improvement, curriculum enhancement, and academic quality assurance.
- **Distributed / Shared Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006):** Advocates for shared decision-making across departmental heads, statutory councils, and faculty committees.

3. Research Methodology and Sample Profile

The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. Data was collected from four southern districts of Kerala—Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Alappuzha. A multistage stratified random sampling technique was utilized to obtain a sample of N = 390 faculty members representing diverse institutional types and disciplines.

Table 1: Institutional and Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 390)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Institutional Type	Government Colleges	110	28.2%
	Private Aided Colleges	185	47.4%
	Self-Financing / Unaided	95	24.4%
Gender	Female	218	55.9%
	Male	172	44.1%
Teaching Experience	Below 5 Years	82	21.0%
	5 – 15 Years	204	52.3%
	Above 15 Years	104	26.7%
Academic Stream	Arts & Science	225	57.7%
	Professional (Engg/Law/Mgmt)	165	42.3%

4. Data Analysis and Empirical Interpretation

4.1 Evaluation of Dominant Leadership Styles

Faculty perceptions of their principal's leadership practices were measured across five distinct styles on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Mean (μ)	Std. Dev. (σ)	Skewness	Kurtosis	Perceived Level
Democratic / Participative	3.98	0.68	-0.52	0.18	High
Transformational	3.85	0.72	-0.48	0.05	High
Transactional	3.52	0.61	-0.21	-0.32	Moderate–High
Bureaucratic / Autocratic	3.14	0.84	0.11	-0.45	Moderate
Laissez-Faire	2.41	0.79	0.42	-0.28	Low

Interpretation: Democratic leadership (μ = 3.98) and Transformational leadership (μ = 3.85) recorded the highest overall mean scores, indicating that college principals in South Kerala

frequently utilize participative councils and vision-driven communication. Conversely, Laissez-Faire leadership (μ = 2.41) received the lowest rating, confirming that passive management is rarely practiced or tolerated in higher education.

4.2 Institutional Comparison (One-Way ANOVA)

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA of Leadership Styles by Institutional Type

Leadership Style	Govt (μ)	Aided (μ)	Self-Fin (μ)	F-Value	p-Value	Decision
Democratic	3.82	4.15	3.71	14.82	.000	Significant
Transformational	3.65	4.08	3.58	18.25	.000	Significant
Transactional	3.78	3.32	3.61	11.41	.000	Significant
Bureaucratic	3.62	2.74	3.45	22.10	.000	Significant
Laissez-Faire	2.51	2.22	2.65	4.88	.008	Significant

Interpretation: Private Aided Colleges demonstrate significantly higher levels of Democratic (μ = 4.15) and Transformational (μ = 4.08) leadership due to stable faculty tenures and active community trusts. Government Colleges score higher in Transactional (μ = 3.78) and Bureaucratic (μ = 3.62) styles as a consequence of rigid state service rules and frequent principal transfers.

4.3 Multiple Regression & Collinearity Diagnostics

Multiple Linear Regression was executed with Institutional Effectiveness (IE) as the dependent outcome variable. The overall regression model yielded R = .812, R^2 = .659 (Adjusted R^2 = .655, F(5, 384) = 148.62, p < .001), indicating that leadership styles explain 65.9% of the total variance in institutional effectiveness.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Coefficients and Diagnostic Metrics

Predictor	Unstd B	Std Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Tolerance	VIF
Transformational	0.412	0.045	.438	9.16	.000	.482	2.07
Democratic	0.328	0.042	.362	7.81	.000	.511	1.96
Transactional	0.114	0.038	.112	3.00	.003	.784	1.28
Bureaucratic	-0.041	0.031	-.048	-1.32	.188	.812	1.23
Laissez-Faire	-0.108	0.033	-.105	-3.27	.001	.865	1.16

Regression Interpretation & Diagnostic Check: Transformational leadership is the single strongest positive predictor (β = .438, p < .001), followed by Democratic leadership (β = .362, p < .001). Laissez-Faire leadership exerts a significant negative effect (β = -.105, p = .001). All VIF values remain well below 5.0 and Tolerance values exceed 0.20, confirming the complete absence of multicollinearity.

5. Findings, Conclusions, and Suggestions

5.1 Major Findings

- **Dominance of Participative Models:** Democratic and Transformational leadership are highly prevalent in Kerala HEIs and serve as the core drivers of faculty motivation and institutional effectiveness.
- **Institutional Governance Divide:** Private Aided colleges leverage higher participative governance than Government colleges, where statutory red tape and short principal tenures drive bureaucratic administration.
- **Predictive Hierarchy:** Regression modeling proves that Transformational (β = .438) and Democratic (β = .362) styles account for 65.9% of institutional effectiveness variance.

5.2 Conclusions

Leadership style is a fundamental determinant of academic performance, research output, and faculty satisfaction in Kerala HEIs. Autocratic and bureaucratic styles are incompatible with Kerala's highly unionized, educated, and politically conscious faculty landscape. Sustained institutional growth requires transitioning toward transformational and distributed leadership paradigms.

5.3 Policy Recommendations and Suggestions

- **Institutionalize Leadership Academies:** Mandate formal executive leadership and management development programs for newly appointed principals focusing on strategic

planning, NAAC benchmarking, and conflict resolution.

- **Tenure Stabilization:** Ensure minimum functional tenures of 3 to 5 years for principals in Government Colleges to enable visionary planning and execution.
- **Promote Distributed Governance:** Empower IQAC cells, statutory councils, and departmental heads to participate actively in institutional decision-making.
- **Cultivate Research Mentorship:** Encourage principals to adopt transformational mentorship behaviors, providing seed grants and infrastructure support for faculty research.

References

- Bass, B. M., & Bass, R. (2008). The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications. Free Press.
- Bush, T. (2020). Theories of Educational Leadership and Management. SAGE Publications.
- Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for Learning: Lessons for 40 years of empirical research. Journal of Educational Administration, 49(2), 125-142.
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). Leadership: Theory and Practice (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Spillane, J. P. (2006). Distributed Leadership. Jossey-Bass.
- Yukl, G. (2013). Leadership in Organizations (8th ed.). Pearson Education.