**Strategic Leadership and The Effectiveness of Educational Institution Performance: The Palestinian Academic Departments as A Case Study**

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**Abstract**

Strategic leadership is a major integral aspect in terms of leadership and management practice, and its application in the educational context is a crucial issue. This study aims to identify the extent of strategic leadership practice among the heads of academic departments at the Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip. The study also aims to explore how this extent can affect the educational environment inside the academic departments of higher education institutions represented by their official academic heads. In the light of the findings, the study proposes a model to increase the effectiveness of the academic department head’s performance in the light of strategic leadership implementation. To achieve these objectives, the study uses a mixed method; implementing a questionnaire as well as conducting different interviews. The population of the study is made up of all the heads of academic departments in three different Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip (The Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University) during the first semester of the academic year (2019\2020). The study strengthens concerns that the increase of the effectiveness of strategic leadership has a positive effect on academic head performance in their departments. The study also finds out that the extent of strategic leadership practice in the academic departments in the Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip is of a high degree, but still below the required optimal limit according to the researcher. The study recommends using the proposed model to increase academic effectiveness within the academic department based on the principles of strategic leadership.

**Keywords:** *Strategic leadership; effectiveness; decision-making; higher education; strategic leadership model; academic heads.*

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**Introduction**

Modern practice of educational leadership is complex and demanding for nations. Current challenges include reestablishing novel national visions, formulating new objectives for educational institutions, restructuring education systems at different administrative levels, diversifying education and being proactive in facing up these contextual challenges using various leadership strategies. In this regard, strategic leadership is strongly linked to the institution’s vision. Strategic leadership is a major integral aspect in terms of leadership and administration practice, and its application in the educational context is a crucial issue. Leadership remains one of the most relevant aspects of the context of educational institutions, however, defining leadership is quite challenging. Different leadership approaches influence the vision and direction of growth and the potential success of the institution. Strategic leadership filters the applicable information; creating an environment where learning can take place to be shared and combining responsibility of the leader and the follower and the institution altogether. According to Beatty & Quinn (2010, p. 3), “The difficulty of arriving at a simple, cut-and-dried definition of strategic leadership is underscored in the literature on the subject”, therefore, defining leadership varies from one situation to another and from one context to another.

Strategic Leadership is the ability to influence others to make decisions that reinforce and enhance the prospects for the organization’s long-term success while maintaining short term financial stability. Respectively, to successfully deal with change, all executives need the skills and tools for both strategy formulation and implementation (May, 2013).[Managing change](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Managing_change) and ambiguity requires strategic leaders who can provide a sense of direction along with building ownership and alignment within their workgroups to implement the change (Fulmer, Stumpf & Bleak, 2009).In this regard, strategic leadership is defined by Barron (1995, p. 178) as “practicing existing abilities and skills and influencing others to train in new formats for new leadership models”. Specifically, to obtain successful educational management within the educational institution, academic head leaders should think and make their decision strategically. This means they need to think about what and where changes are needed to be implemented and why. They also need to grasp obstacles that hinder the implementation of strategic leadership from those who are change resistors. For instance, academic head leaders should be in possession of three fundamental skills: problem-solving, decision-making and creative, critical thinking. Also, educators, administrators, and other practitioners should be trained in educational management and continually activate this training in new leadership roles. As a result, the outcome of the educational environment will be influenced by the total quality leadership. Therefore, in Barron's (1995, p. 178) definition of strategic leadership, he concludes that ‘strategic leadership is demonstrated by individuals in all areas of the educational environment who possess skills to create and communicate vision and effect change through interactive leadership’.

**Conceptual framework and literature review**

There are lots of studies that highlighted strategic leadership in terms of implementation whether in organisations or within the education institutions. The focus of this research is upon strategic leadership in the educational institution’s context and precisely inside the academic departments of higher education institutions. With strategic leadership being such a broad topic, Rowe (2001) differentiated between strategic, visionary and managerial leaders. According to (Rowe, 2001, p.83):

Managerial leaders influence only the actions and decisions of those with whom they work. They are involved in situations and contexts characteristic of day-to-day activities and are concerned with and more comfortable in functional areas of responsibilities. In contrast, visionary leadership is future oriented and concerned with risk taking and visionary leaders are not dependent on their organizations for their sense of who they are.

In the educational context, the main objective of strategic leadershipis the strategic productivity. Another aim of strategic leadership is to develop an environment in which the academicians anticipate the educational institution’s needs in context of their own job tasks in their departments. Strategic head leaders encourage the staff in the institution to follow their own ideas. Consequently, they make greater use of rewards and incentives for encouraging productive staff to show much better-quality performance for their institution. In other regard, functional strategic leadership is about inventiveness, perception, and planning to assist staff in realising the objectives and goals of the academic institution. In different models, strategic leadership in education is characterised by different assumptions of the education environment, types of education reforms and movements, positioning of education institutions, nature of learning, conception of effectiveness, nature of competition and demands for sustainability. Correspondingly, key features of strategy, leadership role, and strategic concerns of leadership are completely different across these three models (Cheong & Cheng, 2010).

In higher education institutions, the heads of academic departmentscreate conditions that result in strategically reimagining the academic department’s vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century (Gholami et al., 2015; McBride, 2010; Williams, 2013; Taylor & deLourdes Machado-Taylor, 2010; Taylor & Machado, 2006). Understanding that the university ideally prepares its staff and students for the unseen but not altogether unpredictable future, the academic head leader creates a climate that challenges the university community to continually repurpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway strategy to reach it. Strategic leadership requires the potential to foresee and comprehend the academic environment. It requires objectivity and potential to look at the broader picture. Bryman (2007) reviewed the literature concerned with leadership effectiveness in higher education at departmental level from three countries: the UK, the USA and Australia. Surprisingly little systematic research had been conducted on the question of which forms of leadership are associated with departmental effectiveness. The analysis of the studies selected resulted in the identification of 13 forms of leader behaviour that are associated with departmental effectiveness. Palmer, Holt & Challis (2011) conducted a study of Australian teaching and learning centers in order to identify factors that contribute to the effective strategic leadership of these centers. In their study, focus groups at 10 Australian universities included 66 respondents, providing a diverse range of perspectives, from students to members of the university executives. Machado, Farhangmehr & Taylor (2004) highlighted the strategic structure and evaluation of academic programs, focusing on program content and structure. Furthermore, they highlighted the strategic analysis of the academic budget, focusing on the relationship between strategic planning and budgeting.

Chen (2008) examined school leadership in the context of Taiwanese educational reform since the mid-1990s. The goal of the inquiry was twofold: to explore the conflicts that school administrators have confronted in facilitating school reform and to analyse the strategic and innovative leadership practices that have facilitated improvements in school effectiveness in Taiwan. Furthermore, Deeboonmee & Ariratana (2014) used a set of five-rating scale questionnaires to examine the effect of strategic leadership on the effectiveness but in the school context. The results in their study indicated that the level of strategic leadership was ranked at a high level. When considering different functions, the mean scores showed from high to low level as: strategic implementation, monitoring and evaluation, organization culture, and the specification of strategy respectively. The level of school effectiveness also ranked at a high level with mean scores in each aspect from high to low as: students’ characteristics, satisfaction of teachers’ performance, school change and development, school climate and environment, and students’ achievement respectively. In a school context too, Eacott (2010), investigated whether the demographic variables of tenure and functional track have a moderating effect on the strategic leadership of school leaders. Despite few statistically significant differences in the data set, the study argued that there is evidence to suggest that the demographic variables of tenure and functional track have a moderating effect on the strategic leadership and management of public primary school principals.

Gappa, Austin & Trice (2007) profound challenges in higher education fiscal constraints, escalating competition, demands for greater accountability, growing enrollments, increasingly diverse faculty appointments, and the continuous expansion of new technologies are transforming the careers of faculty. They offer a vision of academic workplaces that will attract superb faculty committed to fulfilling the missions of the universities and colleges where they work. Blackmore & Blackwell (2006) further considered what expertise is required for the leadership in an academic development role, and how role holders and those aspiring to the role may best develop their professional capabilities. Their study argued for an integrated conception of academic development, and a correspondingly integrated view of the developer’s professional identity and role. It is suggested that this will put leaders in academic development into a position that is more congruent with faculty self‐perceptions; enabling them to support those in faculty roles more effectively. Neumann & Neumann (1999) examined university presidents’ strategic style and related it to the college bottom line. Eight different presidents’ profiles of strategic leadership style were discussed and analysed (integrator, net caster, focused visionary, focused performer, prioretizer, dreamer, implementer and maintainer). Three college outcomes are explored (enrollment growth, resource growth and quality improvement). The study indicated that the presidents’ strategic leadership style was associated with the college bottom line. The pattern is very distinct where maintainers were directly associated with declining institutions while integrators and net casters were associated with successful institutions. Normore (2004) focused on strategic leadership, the impact of external and internal factors on organizational leadership, and how effective educational leaders manage the competing demands of autonomy and accountability. The study dealt with the challenges of managing the boundaries between educational institutions and their external contexts, and reconciling environmental expectations and internal priorities.

Strategic leadership is based on long-term planning. It involves establishing and maintaining systems, allocating resources, and communicating vision. Academic head leaders need to maintain the focus clearly on the central vision for their university inside their departments. A lot of studies investigate the steps and the process of strategic leadership in different contexts including the educational context. These steps include environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy formulation and strategy evaluation. Neumann (1989) considered the thinking, or “strategy,” that underlies presidential behavior. The study findings suggested that, in recent years, presidential strategy has become more complex and that it focuses more on shaping institutional staff’s perceptions and attitudes. Changes in presidential strategy may result from changes in the environment or in the presidents themselves as they learn on the job. Gibney, Copeland & Murie (2009) addressed the changing leadership task associated with a new agenda about the leadership of place. Davies (2003) reviewed the nature of strategy and strategic leadership in schools. The study moved away from traditional frameworks associated with the strategic planning movement and reconceptualised the nature of strategy in schools. It considered how leaders can map the strategic architecture of the school and develop strategic capabilities for longer-term sustainability. For [Rabeea,](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814028614#!) [Almsafir](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814028614#!) (2014),strategic leadership capabilities are needed in the new competitive landscape expected for the 21st century. Human and social capital are a source of sustainable competitive advantage for organisations and, therefore, should be carefully nurtured and developed. Thus, Davies (2003) seeks to examine the role of strategic leadership capabilities in building sustainable competitive advantage in the academic environment. The targeted population for this study focused on all private universities. The statistical results found that there is a significant positive impact of strategic leadership capabilities on sustainable competitive advantage.

There are various strategic leadership styles ([Eacott](https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Scott%20Eacott), 2010; Fragueiro & Thomas, 2011; Fulmer, Stumpf & Bleak, 2009). Despite what style of leadership, these various styles can support one another to achieve the goals of the institution context. Strategic leadership can only be achieved when leaders are strategic in their approach to the matters of the institution. Cheong & Cheng (2010) argued that the diversity in contemporary conceptualisations of strategy and strategic leadership in education reflects the increasing complexity and uncertainty in the relationship between the changing context and leadership. Chen (2008) revealed four themes of strategic leadership in coping with the conflicts accompanying education reform in Taiwan: (1) educational values, (2) timeframe for change, (3) capacity building, and (4) community involvement. Three educational program initiatives were described and analysed in order to illustrate the dynamic relation between strategic leadership practices and school transformation’s goal. Furthermore, Davies (2003) questioned the hierarchical models of leadership and suggested a dual approach of extending and improving current performance. Davies (2003) also highlighted three characteristics of strategically oriented schools, suggested ways to improve the art of strategic conversations and how to build strategic intents. Nutt & Backoff (1993) explained how to transform public sector organizations using strategic management and strategic leadership. They summarised the theory and process of strategic management and strategic leadership and suggested propositions that can identify key questions in using these processes for the transformational change of public organizations.

Deeboonmee & Ariratana (2014) stated that strategic leadership is an ideal type of administrative personnel. The objectives of their study were to study: (1) the levels of strategic leadership, (2) the levels of effectiveness in the school and (3) the relationship between strategic leadership performance and school effectiveness. Cheong & Cheng (2010) proposed a typology of three-wave models for conceptualising and analysing the diversities in strategic leadership. Based on different models and their related paradigms in education and reforms, strategic leadership can be classified as internal strategic leadership, interface strategic leadership and future strategic leadership. For [AlTurki](https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Umar%20Al%E2%80%90Turki) & [Duffuaa](https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Salih%20Duffuaa) (2003), measuring the performance of academic departments received little attention compared to other industries due to their complex nature and difficulty in measuring their outputs. However, measures of performance are needed to assess whether they meet their set objectives and foster an environment of continuous improvement. The study developed a performance measurement system for educational institutions, outlined the properties of adequate performance measures and the steps for developing such measures in the educational environment. Three types of performance measures are proposed in the study including outcomes, inputs and process measures. Salama et al. (2018) aimed to identify the role of administrative procedures and systems in enhancing the performance of the educational institutions in the Islamic University in Gaza. The researchers used the analytical descriptive approach to collect information. The researchers used the questionnaire distributed to three categories of employees at the Islamic University (senior management, faculty members, their assistants and members of the administrative board). Tyagi, Yadav & Singh (2009) stated that the educational institutions have to adopt new strategies to make best use of the opportunities and counter the challenges. One of these challenges is how to assess the performance of academic programs based on multiple criteria. The study attempted to evaluate the performance efficiencies of 19 academic departments in India through data envelopment analysis (DEA) which is used to assess the performance of academic institutions in a number of countries like USA, UK, Australia. The study calculated technical, pure technical and scale efficiencies and identified the reference sets for inefficient departments. Input and output projections were also suggested for inefficient departments to reach the frontier.

Strategic understanding and involvement should be a central concern for all educational institution’s members and that, in order to be effective, strategic planning needs the commitment and ownership of all staff, not just senior managers. [Adopted from different previous studies such as (Radi, 2015; Braun et al., 2009; Coco, 2011; Dyer & Dyer, 2017; Glanz, 2010), the current study focuses on four stages of strategic management starting from *environmental scanning*](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) to a process of collecting, scrutinising and providing information for strategic purposes. It helps in analysing the internal and external factors influencing the institution. After executing the environmental analysis process, management should evaluate it on a continuous basis and strive to improve it. Salama et al. (2018) argue that there is a need to provide mechanisms for obtaining information about the surrounding external environment, and effective mechanisms to provide managers with the necessary information in a timely manner. The importance of providing channels of communication that enables staff to communicate information about any violations and breaches. The study also recommended the follow-up, review, procedures and administrative systems, and work to modify them in line with the mission of the university and the objectives that the university seeks to reach. [*Strategy Formulation*](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) is the process of deciding the best course of action for accomplishing organisational objectives and hence achieving organisational purpose. After conducting environmental scanning, managers formulate corporate, managerial and functional strategies. [*Strategy Implementatio*n](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm) implies making the strategy work as intended or putting the organisation’s chosen strategy into action. Strategy implementation includes designing the organisation’s structure, distributing resources, developing decision making processes and managing human resources. *Strategy evaluation* is the final step of the strategy management process. The key strategy evaluation activities are: appraising internal and external factors that are the root of present strategies, measuring performance, and taking remedial or corrective actions. Evaluation makes sure that the organisational strategy as well as its implementation meets the organisational objectives. These components are steps that are carried, in chronological order, when creating a new strategic management plan. Present management that has already created a strategic management plan will revert to these steps as per the situation’s requirement in order to make essential changes.

**Problem Statement**

Higher education in Palestine is a rich and challenging experience. It is rich because of the motivation and eagerness of the Palestinians to share their experience with others and learn from them. It is challenging because Palestine is not yet an independent state. Indeed, Palestinians consider higher education as the main wealth of Palestine in the absence of other natural resources, and it plays a vital role in developing the economic, political and social situation of the Palestinian people. Genuine strategic leadership requires high levels of trust, transparency and mutual respect. The importance of this study is to create an understanding of the extent of the effectiveness of strategic leadership and to formulate a model to increase the effectiveness of the performance of the academic department. Most of previous studies focused on strategic leadership in general or in terms of the extent of implementation whether in schools or academic institutions. This study targeted the academic department heads in three different universities in Gaza Strip in Palestine. Therefore, addressing this category as a study population is new in strategic leadership research and of great importance in its reflection on the current academic performance in the Palestinian universities and its developing role in a stimulating an effective manner for the academic staff under the umbrella of these departments and their reflection on the education quality.

In a strategic leadership inside the academic departments at universities, responsibilities for providing feedback and support to the academic staff are shared by the head of the academic department. This feedback may be given by a wide variety of the working educators of staff and can be used formatively for self-reflection, and for collaborative planning. Implementing strategic leadership at universities creates an opportunity for staff to ensure maintaining high quality feedback and improving their practice. Additionally, in strategic leadership, the heads of academic departments need to build a culture of trust, collegiality, and shared responsibility for all staff members upon a certain vision. They need to provide leadership opportunities for effective staff since this will be reflected upon university students. Strategic leadership will also reduce the heads’ evaluator workload and this puts their decision- making under evaluation whether it supports their strategic leadership or not since much of the work within colleges and universities gets done at the academic department level.

The effectiveness of the performance within the academic departments receives negative evaluation because of the lack of implementing appropriate leadership approaches and styles. This issue is reflected upon the faculty staff involvement as well at the quality management of the department as well as its students. Therefore, there is a tremendous need for the heads of the academic departments to find a relation between their decision- making and the leadership approach they adopt and, in this study, the choice is for strategic leadership. This issue has been rarely considered. Through working in the academic institutions, it is found that the academic heads often seek to adopt strategic leadership and try to apply it in their academic departments by taking effective decisions arising from the administrative requirements of their university. However, they face procedures and decisions issued by the university regulations that may prevent such leadership to achieve the desired change and to obtain the needed benefit. The current study claims the need to explore the extent of strategic leadership effectiveness in these universities, therefore, the study problem can be framed in the following main question: *What is the extent of the effectiveness of strategic leadership practice among the heads of academic departments in the Palestinian universities?*

The sub-questions that stem from the main question will be as follows:

*Question 1*: What is the extent of practicing the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities to strategic leadership from their point of view?

*Question 2*: Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance (*p* ≤ 0.05) between the average of the study sample estimates for the extent of practicing strategic leadership according to the variables of (gender, qualification, years of service, university)?

*Question 3:* What is the proposed model to increase the effectiveness of the academic department head’s performance in the light of strategic leadership factors?

**Method**

The study population in this study consisted of the heads of academic departments in three Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip within the framework of the study (Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University) in the first semester of the academic year (2019 \2020), according to official extracted data from the personnel departments at the aforementioned universities. The total population reached (n=117), (46) at the Islamic University and (36) at Al-Azhar University and (35) at Al-Aqsa University. In order to achieve the study objectives and to address its analytical aspects, preliminary data were collected quantitatively through implementing a questionnaire as a main study tool, designed specifically for this purpose. The questionnaire addressed the extent of strategic leadership themes. The questionnaire was distributed to the whole study population of all the heads of academic departments in the three universities in a comprehensive survey method where (n=117). The completed retrieved questionnaire reached (*n*=110), yielding a response rate of (49%).

Several questions and/or statements were formed for each theme of the questionnaires, to be scored on a 5-point Likert scale: 1¼ strongly disagree, 2¼ disagree, 3¼ neutral, 4¼ agree, 5¼ strongly agree. Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) calculating descriptive statistics for all items, including means (M), standard deviations (SD) and frequencies. Table (1) shows the distribution of the study sample according to the study three variables of (gender, academic qualification and university). The table indicates that (93.6%) of the study sample is of male academic heads, while (6.4%) is of female. It is noted that the percentage of working female in the position of the head of academic department in the three universities is relatively small compared to its counterpart percentage of male, and this evokes many questions regarding the reason for this depending on the nature of this position, or the existence of certain conditions or qualifications for the selection criteria of the heads of academic departments that might exclude females from taking charge. Table (1) also shows that (15.5%) of the study sample holds a qualification of a master degree, while (84.5%) holds a PhD. degree. It is somehow noted that the percentage of the academic heads who hold a master degree is less than its equivalent of a PhD. The study argues that in some universities, especially in Al-Azhar and the Islamic University of Gaza, the head of the academic department is selected according to special criteria, and hence, a PhD. degree is required for the entitlement of the associated experience. The study also indicates that Al-Aqsa University has a high percentage of master degree holders in this position and from the perspective of the researcher this may be attributed to the choice of Al-Aqsa university administration of opening the opportunity of practicing leadership for the new experienced master degree holders. Furthermore, table (1) indicates that (39.1%) of the study sample is employed by the Islamic University, (30.9%) is employed by Al-Azhar University, while (30.0%) is employed at Al- Aqsa University. The study attributes this to the reason that the Islamic university is one of the biggest universities in Gaza and it has many educational departments and different academic accredited programs more than the other universities included in the study.

Table 1 Distribution of the study sample by gender, qualification and university

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gender | No | % | Qualification | No | % | University | No | % |
| Male | 103 | 93.6 | Master | 17 | 15.5 | The Islamic University | 43 | 39.1 |
| Female | 7 | 6.4 | PhD. | 93 | 84.5 | Al-Azhar University | 34 | 30.9 |
| Total | 110 | 100.0 | Total | 110 | 100.0 | Al Aqsa University | 33 | 30.0 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Total | 110 | 100.0 |

The questionnaire covers (4) different themes with (32) questions and/or statements. The themes cover the following areas: The first theme: [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm), consisting of (8) items. The second theme: [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm), consisting of (8) items. The third theme: [Strategy Implementation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm), and consists of (8) items. The fourth theme: [Strategy Evaluation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-evaluation.htm), and consists of (8) items. The results of the structural validity of the questionnaire indicate that all correlation coefficients in all areas of the first questionnaire are statistically significant considering (*p* ≤ 0.05) as it is shown in table (2).

Table 2 Pearson Correlations Coefficients

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Themes | Pearson Correlations Coefficients | | (sig) |
| [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | | .775 | \*0.000 |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | | .851 | \*0.000 |
| [Strategy Implementation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm) | | .885 | \*0.000 |
| [Strategy Evaluation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-evaluation.htm) | | .776 | \*0.000 |

\* The correlation is statistically significant considering (*p* ≤ 0.05)

The reliability of the questionnaire was verified by two methods as follows: First, Cronbach's Alpha method was used to measure the stability and reliability of the questionnaire. The results shown in (Table 3) indicate that the value of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is high for each theme, ranging between (0.801, 0.904). The value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all the items was (0.942). This means that the coefficient stability is high and statistically significant.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Themes | No | Cronbach's Alpha |
| [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | 8 | 0.801 |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | 8 | 0.904 |
| [Strategy Implementation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm) | 8 | 0.881 |
| [Strategy Evaluation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-evaluation.htm) | 8 | 0.893 |
| Total | 32 | 0.942 |

The correlation coefficients then were divided into two parts (questions with odd numbers and questions with even numbers). The correlation coefficient was then calculated between the odd question scores and the even question scores. The coefficient of correlation was then corrected by the Spearman Brown equation. The new modified correlation coefficient is where (*r*) is the correlation between the scores of odd questions and the scores of even questions. It is clear from the results shown in (Table 4) that the modified correlation coefficient (Spearman Brown) is high and statistically significant

Table 4 Modified correlation coefficient (Spearman Brown)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Themes | Correlation coefficient | Modified correlation coefficient |
| [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | 0.782 | 0.878 |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | 0.867 | 0.929 |
| [Strategy Implementation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm) | 0.855 | 0.922 |
| [Strategy Evaluation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-evaluation.htm) | 0.843 | 0.915 |
| All fields | 0.917 | 0.957 |

**Results and Discussion**

In order to obtain the main objectives of the study, three main research questions were formulated to be tested as follows: *Question 1: What is the extent of practicing strategic leadership among the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities from their point of view?* To answer this question, the relative mean and relative weight and T-test were used.

Table 5 The relative average and the relative weight and order of each of the areas

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Themes | Mean | Relative weight | T-test | Sig | Order |
| [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | 4.09 | 81.90 | 23.30 | \*0.000 | 2 |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | 4.13 | 82.50 | 22.18 | \*0.000 | 1 |
| [Strategy Implementation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-implementation.htm) | 3.90 | 77.98 | 16.73 | \*0.000 | 4 |
| [Strategy Evaluation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-evaluation.htm) | 3.93 | 78.69 | 16.38 | \*0.000 | 3 |
| Total | 4.01 | 80.27 | 23.64 | \*0.000 |  |

\* The correlation is statistically significant at (*p* ≤ 0.05)

Table (5) shows that the arithmetic average of all the paragraphs of the questionnaire "The extent of practicing strategic leadership among the heads of the academic departments in Palestinian universities" is (4.01). Thus, the relative weight is (80.27%). The value of the T-test is (23.64) and the probability value is (0.000). This means that there is a high degree of approval of all the items of the questionnaire in general. The study indicates similarities with some other studies such as Deeboonmee & Ariratana (2014). The strategy formulation field received the first order since academic department heads showed the ability in strategy formulation from the questionnaire statements and questions. However, the strategy implementation received the final rank with a relative weight of (77.98%) and this illustrates the major gap between formulation and implementation in the leadership practice.

*Question 2: Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average of the study sample estimates for the extent of practicing strategic leadership among the heads of the academic departments according to the variables of (gender, qualification and university)?* To answer this question, the following three hypotheses were formulated and tested:

*Ho4*: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (*p*≤ 0.05) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department’s responses of the extent of practicing strategic leadership according to the variable of gender (male, female). To answer this hypothesis, T-test for two independent samples was used. The results shown in Table (11) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than (*p*≤ 0.05) level, so it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the heads of academic department estimates to the extent of practicing strategic leadership that attributed to the variable gender. This shows the awareness of the heads of the academic departments in the three universities of the importance of the developmental role of strategic leadership to lead the change for both males and females. The study attributed this to the need of the heads of academic departments to renew and exit from the prevailing traditional methods in most departments, and to start of renewal administrative leadership path where the academic department can represent a starting point.

The main hypotheses that generates from the main question are as the following: *Ho1: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department’s responses to the extent of practicing strategic leadership according to the variable of scientific qualification (Master, PhD.).* To answer this hypothesis, T-test was used for two independent samples. Results shown in (Table 6) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than (*p*≤ 0.05) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the academic department heads’ responses for the extent of practicing strategic leadership which are attributed to the variable of scientific qualification. Hence, it is clear to the heads of departments, regardless of their qualifications, the importance of strategic leadership implementation in their departments. The study attributes this to the tendency of the heads of the academic department to change the administrative routine and to adapt to new leadership styles in their faculties.

*Ho2: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department’s responses to the extent of practicing strategic leadership according to the variable of university (Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University).* To answer this hypothesis, “split-half" test was used. The results shown in (Table 11) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the "split-half" test is greater than (*p*≤ 0.05) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the heads of academic departments of the extent of practicing strategic leadership that are attributed to the variable of university. This result, according to the study, reflects a strong agreement to the administration of the Palestinian universities to adopt strategic leadership practices and implementation with their faculty staff to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their departments.

*Question 3:* What is the proposed model to increase the effectiveness of the academic department head’s performance in the light of strategic leadership factors? In order to increase the effectiveness of performance in the academic department, the researcher suggests that universities adopt the proposed model in the light of strategic leadership so that a vision, mission, and clear future goals for the academic department's programs can be defined to be able to meet the challenges and do their responsibility efficiently. The model depends on the theoretical framework background as well as the information gathered from the qualitative interview responses for nine heads of different academic departments. The interviews focused upon the weaknesses and the strengths of strategic leadership formulation and implementation to be included in the model according to their experience. Summary of the interview’s responses showed that there is a need for investing the available resources in the academic department to achieve quality and for involving globalization in evaluating the internal and external environment context within the universities with focusing on the implementation phase. This all should be done while integrating the faculty staff into work teams with the aim of strategic planning and formulating the department’s vision and mission in the light of their experience and knowledge. Furthermore, the academic head should be a great deal of concern to the training and developing of human resources skills within the department upon strategic planning and crisis management skills. In addition, the head department should work upon increasing the awareness of faculty staff in the strategic management in order to spread a culture that is supportive of change, development and creativity to advance the academic department towards competitiveness and excellence through workshops and training programs. Rebuilding the organizational structure to facilitate the process of implementing the strategy and evaluating the operations easily without conflict or duplication within the department are integral procedures in this regard. Adopting clear monitoring and evaluation criteria for each of the department's study programs as well as faculty staff and students are parts of the strategic leadership process to be implemented as well. In the light of the mentioned procedures above, the researcher recommends using the following model in (table 7) that contributes to the use of strategic leadership process in order to improve the effectiveness of the academic department's performance by relying on the five stages, which were adopted from previous studies presented in the conceptual framework in this study (Hanna, 2003; Hidayah et al., 2015; Holt, Palmer & Challis, 2011; Latham, 2013).

Table 6 The extent of strategic leadership practic

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Themes | Gender | | Number | | Average Mean | | Standard Deviation (SD) | | | | “T” Value | | Level of significance (P) |
| Results of T-test for two independent samples – gender | [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | Male | | 103 | | 4.09 | | 0.48 | | | | -0.364 | | 0.717 |
| Female | | 7 | | 4.16 | | 0.72 | | | |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | Male | | 103 | | 4.12 | | 0.53 | | | | -0.640 | | 0.524 |
| Female | | 7 | | 4.25 | | 0.60 | | | |
| Strategy Implementation | Male | | 103 | | 3.89 | | 0.56 | | | | -0.661 | | 0.510 |
| Female | | 7 | | 4.04 | | 0.59 | | | |
| Strategy Evaluation | Male | | 103 | | 3.96 | | 0.58 | | | | 1.657 | | 0.144 |
| Female | | 7 | | 3.50 | | 0.73 | | | |
| Total | Male | | 103 | | 4.02 | | 0.45 | | | | 0.164 | | 0.870 |
| Female | | 7 | | 3.99 | | 0.53 | | | |
|  | Themes | | Gender | | Number | | Average Mean | | Standard Deviation (SD) | | “T” Value | | Level of significance (P) | |
| Results of T-test for two independent samples – Qualification | [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | | Master | | 17 | | 4.19 | | 0.42 | | 0.875 | | 0.383 | |
| PhD | | 93 | | 4.08 | | 0.50 | |  | |  | |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | | Master | | 17 | | 4.25 | | 0.49 | | 1.053 | | 0.295 | |
| PhD | | 93 | | 4.10 | | 0.54 | |
| Strategy Implementation | | Master | | 17 | | 4.14 | | 0.48 | | 1.938 | | 0.055 | |
| PhD | | 93 | | 3.86 | | 0.57 | |
| Strategy Evaluation | | Master | | 17 | | 4.07 | | 0.61 | | 0.986 | | 0.326 | |
| PhD | | 93 | | 3.91 | | 0.60 | |
| Total | | Master | | 17 | | 4.16 | | 0.37 | | 1.485 | | 0.141 | |
| PhD | | 93 | | 3.99 | | 0.46 | |
|  | Themes | | Source of Variance (SV) | | Total Squares (SS) | | Degrees of Freedom (df) | | Average Squares | “F” Value | | | Level of significance | |
| Split-half test results – University | [Environmental Scanning](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/environmental-scanning.htm) | | Among | | 0.263 | | 2 | | 0.132 | 0.537 | | | 0.586 | |
| Within | | 26.217 | | 107 | | 0.245 |
| Total | | 26.480 | | 109 | |  |
| [Strategy Formulation](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategy-formulation-process.htm) | | Among | | 0.545 | | 2 | | 0.272 | 0.962 | | | 0.385 | |
| Within | | 30.309 | | 107 | | 0.283 |
| Total | | 30.854 | | 109 | |  |
| Strategy Implementation | | Among | | 0.569 | | 2 | | 0.284 | 0.893 | | | 0.412 | |
| Within | | 34.054 | | 107 | | 0.318 |
| Total | | 34.623 | | 109 | |  |
| Strategy evaluation | | Among | | 0.007 | | 2 | | 0.004 | 0.010 | | | 0.990 | |
| Within | | 39.020 | | 107 | | 0.365 |
| Total | | 39.028 | | 109 | |  |
| Total | | Among | | 0.133 | | 2 | | 0.067 | 0.326 | | | 0.723 | |
| Within | | 21.909 | | 107 | | 0.205 |
|  | Total | | 22.042 | | 109 | |  |

The proposed model for increasing the effectiveness of the academic department performance in higher education institutions is based upon five stages that represent the process of strategic leadership. These steps are adopted from different studies and modified upon the acquired results from the study results in the first questionnaire and from the interviews’ responses. The process consists of five different stages as following: (1) Initialisation and preparation, (2) Analysing the current situation, (3) The construction phase and the formulation, (4) Application and implementation, (5) Monitoring and evaluation stage (Taylor, de Lourdes Machado & Peterson, 2008; Preedy, Glatter, & Wise, 2003; Marshall, 2013; Marshall, 2007; Maringe, & Foskett, 2012; Morrill, 2013). The importance of applying the proposed model within the academic department in the Palestinian universities can be identified according to the researcher opinion in different categories. First, the changes in the administration of the academic departments take place very quickly due to the changing surrounding circumstances in the internal and external environment. The departments that practice strategic leadership properly ought to gain many benefits. Furthermore, Strategic leadership provides a clear department vision, goals and clear directions about the university’s future for all workers in the department’s administration. Next, the model contributes to preparing and preparing leaders in universities through participation in strategic leadership activities. It will also help decision makers to improve the quality of their decisions, as the strategic leadership is not applied. The model reduces the financial cost resulting from providing services and achieving strategic goals. It also exploits successful factors with the interlocking features of public administration such as the struggle of values ​​and ambiguity, resistance to change, environmental uncertainty, and lack of performance information clarity. The model directs the resources of the academic department in the right strategic direction and to use them effectively. Finally, it will help in building competitive advantages based on a deep understanding of the external environment and developing internal resources that enable the department to exploit opportunities in an effective way.

Table 7. Proposed model for effectiveness in the academic department

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A suggested model for increasing the effectiveness of managing the academic department in Palestinian universities**  **Gaza Strip in the light of strategic management** | | | |
| **Stage 1** | **Stage 2** | | **Stage 3** |
| **Initialisation and preparation stage** | **Analysing the current situation** | | **The construction phase and the formula** |
| 1. Senior management adopts and adheres the idea of strategic leadership.  2. Developing a framework for the strategic management process in the academic department under the university policy, vision and mission.  3. Forming a work team from the department’s administration to implement the strategic management procedures in the department under the supervision of the head of the department.  4. Analysing data and information on the previous and the current performance of the department by using methods and tools of strategic leadership. | 1. Analysing the department's external environment, which includes the department's budget, technological facilities, cultural aspects, and social capabilities, and legislation.  2. Analysing the internal environment of the department that includes the organisational structure in the department, the organisational culture including (beliefs, expectations and values that are shared by members of the department board within the university), resources, the university's assets, skills and human capabilities. | | 1. Determining the main aspects of the strategic leadership plan.  2. Determining the department’s vision, mission and goals.  3. Defining the standards and specifications of the educational programs within the department.  4. Effective participation of all beneficiaries in the planning process including faculty staff as well as students.  5. Determining the capacity building needs of the university and the department in the framework of preparing the strategy.  6. Planning to provide the proposed financing facilities for the implementation of the strategy.  7. Planning to find banners and systems that organise the academic and administrative process inside the department.  8. Planning to provide all sources and techniques of the educational process and administrative work.  9. Planning for an effective administrative academic department.  10. Determining how the documentation and publication processes will be completed  11. Defining the criteria for ensuring the quality of the outputs of the academic department's programs. |
| **A suggested model for increasing the effectiveness of managing the academic department in Palestinian universities**  **Gaza Strip in the light of strategic management** | | | |
| **Stage 4** | | **Stage 5** | |
| **Application and implementation** | | **Monitoring and evaluation** | |
| 1. Publishing and announcing the basic aspects of the strategic plan.  2. Announcing the department’s vision, mission and goals.  3. Formulating strategies that achieve building performance effectiveness specifications in the department.  4. Effective participation of all beneficiaries to implement the strategies including faculty staff as well as students of the department.  5. Implementing training and development programs in the department to build the teaching staff in the framework of preparing the strategy.  6. Establishing and implementing mechanisms and procedures for providing resources and techniques for the educational process and administrative work within the academic department.  7. Implementing plans to provide the proposed financing for the implementation of the strategy.  8. Following and implementing the regulations and systems that organise the academic and administrative process within the academic department.  9. Restructuring the administrative procedures within the academic department.  11. Publishing and implementing plans to implement department quality effectiveness standards. | | 1. Evaluating the main aspects of the strategic plan.  2. Evaluating the academic department’s vision, mission and goals  3. Evaluating the tutorial specifications strategies.  4. Effective participation of all beneficiaries to evaluate strategies.  5. Evaluating training and development programs within the framework of the planned standards.  6. Evaluating the mechanisms and plans for providing the necessary financing issues.  7. Evaluating the regulations and systems that govern the academic and administrative process.  8. Evaluating the mechanisms and procedures for providing sources and techniques for the educational process and administrative work within the academic department.  9. Evaluating the administrative procedures in the department.  10. Evaluating the documentation and publishing procedures.  11. Evaluating plans for implementing department quality assurance standards. | |

**Conclusion**

The leadership style that the department head exchanges with the faculty members represents a great deal of responsibility in the administration of the department. Within the academic departments at universities, leadership is most effective when it is based upon strategic leadership perception. The shared skills and experience among staff under their head supervision serve to sustain the academic department mission and improve the outcomes of their students. Strategic leadership practices can drive positive influence throughout the university departments. The results regarding the extent of strategic leadership practice showed that there is a very high level of approval of all the fields of the questionnaire in general. The study also concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments’ responses in the extent of strategic leadership practice that are attributable to the variables of gender, scientific qualification and university. Hence many decisions are born and made through the administrative tasks within the department but sometimes the leadership approach, which is adopted by the academic head, does not sustain these decisions and as a result the degree of their effectiveness decreases. Understanding this extent may contribute to the enhancement of the quality of the decision-making within the department and improve the implementation of different leadership approaches.

This study argues that strategic leadership models can be used to improve the effectiveness of the academic department performance. The results may help to integrate other leadership strategies in the academic context. It encourages further exploration of other leadership styles in relation to different administrative procedures to improve the quality of administrative functions inside the academic context. Strategic leadership can help to spread decision-making effectiveness throughout faculty, particularly to those on the front lines of the academic operation within the department. Encouraging initiative and collaboration allow those closest to the action to make the decisions that will most affect their success. For the heads of academic departments seeking improved department performance and better outcomes, the challenge is to create the conditions where professional knowledge and skills should be enhanced. When effective strategic leadership exists, at all levels, the entire academic department will be working interdependently in a collective pursuit of better learning outcomes inside the university campuses. Working inside the university context, especially in the academic departments, shows the need of the heads of academic departments for professional development in managing the affairs of their departments. The head of the department also needs to create opportunities for excellence and creativity for the faculty members by providing a suitable environment for participatory work. Therefore, there is a need to employ the modern leadership approaches for heads of departments in their work and perhaps, strategic leadership, which includes a great deal of mutual trust and support among the various faculty members and staff. The strategic leadership in the management of the academic departments depends on the effective implementation and evaluation in collaboration with the faculty members and the transition from the hierarchical meta-leadership to the horizontal group where the power is a strategic formulation under the condition of permanent accountability issues. Strategic leadership will help the academic heads to design and to create a variety of opportunities for their faculty members and academic staff to participate in important decision making and leadership roles.

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