EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMICS AS LEADERS FOR LEARNING IN A PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Academics play an imperative role in developing and producing high quality human capital and at the same time as a significant role model and students exposure for learning. However, the role of academics as role model for learning is still limited and scarce. This explanatory mixed methods paradigm is aimed to investigate whether academics have significant influence to students in their learning processes while studying at higher learning institutions. The main objective of this study is to identify the leadership characteristics among the academics that being emulated by students as their role model. A total of 288 undergraduate students from various faculties were selected to give their reflections on the suitable leadership characteristics that are in addition, three undergraduate students were also interviewed in exploring their preferences on the academics leadership qualities that they admired during the learning process. Findings revealed that academics who frequently motivated their students were most preferred. In addition, they also assumed that these academics were also chosen as their role model. Moreover, as an academician cum educator, it is important for academician to have high capacities on personal and cognitive, interpersonal skills and knowledge when dealing with students because academicians considered as students’ role model.

Keywords: academics, leadership for learning, role model.

Introduction

In general, institution of higher learning has major capacity in developing and producing human capital equipped with skills and knowledge for the meant as workforce for the nation’s growth and development. The role of universities admittedly is beyond the process of learning and teaching, but have wider scope as learning and research institutions (Richards, 2011). Therefore, as academics, they are considered as leaders within the expertise and also have to ensure that the process of learning occurs as scheduled. Therefore, a major role as an academician is to guide the process of learning. Thus, from the viewpoint of students, academics were beheld as leaders within their area of research and also as academic leaders who played a significant role model for their students (Marshall et al., 2007). Thus, academics play a major role as leaders who are practicing leadership within the process of learning for students. As leaders in academic setting, they have to ensure that students are exposed to the scholarship of academic work and also provide assistance for students to achieve their deep passion with support and advice in achieving the academic goals (Scott et al, 2008; Marshall et al., 2001).

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In the context of leadership, the conceptual framework of leadership for learning has been of much interest within this past decade. Hallinger (2010) and Stoll (2009) pointed out that much is required and needed in leadership approach within the academic capacity which is able to give the fullest potential in promoting learning of people within educational institutions. Within the school-based context, the concept of leadership for learning was described by Fullan (2006) as strategy or action that is able to increase the collaboration among academics to improve students’ learning through providing students with new knowledge, resource and motivation for seeking higher level of academic capacity. Even though previous leadership scholars believed that leadership of learning has much potential and capacity in improving students’ exposure to the higher capacity of learning, research on the mainstream of higher educational content has overlooked the concept of leadership practiced by academics within the process of teaching and learning in universities and higher learning institutions (Quinlan, 2014). As such, the concept of placing the academics as leaders for learning for students merely an approach that recognizes the professoriate as academic leaders which emphasised by most previous researcher within the same approach (Macfarlane, 2011; Rayner, Fuller, McEwen, & Roberts, 2010) when academics are engaged with the concept of learning and teaching during their learning experiences for students (Simon & Pleschová, 2013).

Even though previous studies proved that leadership for learning have high potential within the higher educational context, Bryman (2007) argued that the relevant concept is considered as underdeveloped and also overlooked (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008) and there is a wider gap that need much studies in exploring the academic roles as instructional leaders which comparatively is much emphasised in the school-based context where headteachers and teacher leaders were fortified with wider knowledge of learning and teaching in helping students to succeed in academic excellence. Admittedly, studies related to leaders in university’s teaching and learning inclined to focus on two main leadership characters which is vice-chancellor or department heads who were responsible in designing vision of universities in order to ensure more effective teaching methods and create better learning environment (Bargh et al., 2000). Thus, the concept of leadership of learning in the higher educational context is drawn based on the role of academics in fulfilling the role as leaders for teaching and learning in the process of student learning (Quinlan, 2014). According to Bolden et al. (2008), as academics. They are also leaders who must possess positive characters in order to be role models for their followers. This can result in the followers having the same character as their leaders. However, leadership courses are not included in most higher education institutions’ curriculum and the educators do not realize that academic play an essential role as an example for students to emulate.
Academic leaders are burdened with many roles in development of students potential. Previous researchers (Walker, 2006; Barnett, 2007) stressed that academics should emphasize on the moral and social aims in tandem with the instrumental objectives which is merely accentuated in current higher educational context as part of holistic and integrated approach in developing students’ potentials (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore, as learning leaders, academics should re-look into their learning experiences with students and start to embark with traditional values which entails self-identity, holistic approach and their level of self-reliant which are also significant for preparation for job placement (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010) and essential attributes for building an ethos of an academic community. Being leaders in the academic setting, academics have much influence on the students’ academic achievements since academics display academic substances that can gain much passion among students as the students’ role model. In this sense, Smircich and Morgan (1982) argued that academic leaders should create reality, frame students’ academic paths and also guide students’ directions and focus. Later, Richards (2011) through her study, critically believed that students will be willing to accept their lecturers or teachers as leaders on learning if their academics have much academic positive traits within their learning and teaching. From the students’ lenses and standpoints, these academic positive traits include putting in much effort in order to provide students with easier understanding of the content, being flexible, being accessible, integrating technology into teaching and possessing highest degree of pedagogical relationship. On the other hand, she added that taking part in reviewing and assessing program’s curriculum, winning the teaching award, engrossed with research and energetic in publications were some of their least preferred traits as leaders in learning and teaching. In this sense, Scott, Coates, and Anderson (2008) critically stressed that the role of academicians as leaders is currently based on their relationship on a prescribed basis rather than instructional since most higher learning treats their students as client to be guided and modeled.

In this study, we examine the role of academician as role model leaders for learning since it was previously questioned by Richards (2011) on the limited number of studies which typically explore academician role as leaders for learning engagement. In other words, this study is a replication of scholarship work produced by Richards (2011) on students’ viewpoints of the role of academician who should support, encourage and even motivate their students in knowledge seeking processes as academic leaders. Using students’ standpoints as foundation for empirical analysis, this study attempts to fill the gap that were left out by most of the previous scholars in higher educational setting where they merely used the academics as the essential elements in understanding the higher educational studies (Marshall et al., 2007) and students’ perspectives are often neglected.
Literature Review

Theory of leadership that support learning

Theoretically, Hallinger (2003) and Hallinger and Heck (2010) noted that leadership for learning is a new approach that support the learning within learning institutions and it is a blending outcome between the instructional and transformation leadership practices in answering the relevant call for effective leadership which advocates learning process. In this papers Hallinger also stressed that leadership that cater for learning should not just focus on highlighting the students’ excellency in academic achievement but should also emphasised on teachers and educators as significant individuals that should be engage with learning and in fact, crafting the scholarship environment. Later, Malakolunthu et al (2014) believed that when an educational leader applies the five principles that give implication to learning, it subsequently implies the existence of learning within any organisational context. They later emphasised that significant support provided by leaders such as : i) focus on learning, ii) create conducive learning environment, iii) empower, iv) share responsibility and v) communicate for learning to improve teaching and learning process in an education institutions has resulted their students to engage with learning as part of their continuous professional development approaches. Within the same idea, Hallinger (2010) also pointed that the new concept of leadership for learning is a reawakening of instructional leadership when leaders have much influence of the learning and teaching process which later have much significant effect on the overall knowledge dissemination within organisational boundaries. In the broadest sense, both scholars, MacBeath and Swaffield (2011) and Stoll (2009) called on the impact on leadership that support learning, the learning and disseminating process will extremely grow and people within the organisational context is allowed to learn, experiment and practice this learning or knowledge within their new context and situation in achieving their goals and objectives. Later, previous researchers (Dinham and Crowther, 2011; Fullan, 2006) also believed that through leadership that support learning which is now gaining much interest, the process of sharing and dissemination of knowledge will be much easier since it involves the conducive elements of learning such as collaborative, encouragement and even enthusiasm as a collaborative effort among staffs which give much implication on students’ achievement.

At this point, leadership within higher educational institutions and universities should think of the new landscapes that constructing the learning environment which emphasised on the quality teaching and research within the university (Lokman et al., 2014). Citing the transformational leadership model proposed by Kouzes and Posner, academic leaders should therefore encourage academics with relevant questions and also support them to think and finding the relevant alternatives in solving problems associated with higher learning teaching and
research (Lokman et al., 2014). As leaders in higher educational context, they also should place themselves as role model for an innovative approach in generating and improving the present situations that need changes and progressive constituent. Even, academic leaders should prepare prospects for their academic to grow which can later benefit the whole university’s organisation. Later, Ramsden (1998) proposed and developed a four scale leadership that consists: (a) transformational leadership considered as dynamical approach which enhances the learning organisation within the organisational community and the changing pace of the university. Based on the suitable leadership approach, academics were inspired, being modeled, collaborate and the existence of trust in bonding between members of the community. Secondly is the clear goals and rewards which is seen as an exchange for loyalty and positive efforts. The open climates creation which particularly emphasised on teacher involvement for platform for sharing ideas and learning needs were the third and fourth elements.

As learning entities, universities and higher learning institutions should play major role in the process of enhancement of learning within their operational system (Hanney & Kogan, 1999). Therefore, as leader in universities, they should support the current practice that enhance instruction as the main mediator which is seen as important in creating a learning and academic capacity in universities. As leaders in higher educational context that support instruction, Bruggencate et al., (2012) called for leaders learning institutions have much responsibilities in advocating the learning process in selecting and appointing the suitable and effective teachers that manage to execute the learning activities as a strategic approach in promoting institutional stability. In addition, Urbano and Guerrero (2013) also stressed that university leadership should define universities as an ‘incubator’ that initiate the new thinking approach to engage the academics with knowledgeable, commercialisation and conjoined elements that provision wisdom and the growth of knowledge. In this regard, academics in universities should be encouraged to share their knowledge despite the academic boundary that block the dissemination process within the university and between universities (Woods, 2009). In this sense, previous scholars (Urbano & Guerrero, 2013; Van Vught, 1999) in higher educational settings believed that universities through their effective teaching, should heighten the elements of practicality instead of focusing too much on the theoretical aspects which does not give much implication to the society as a whole learning process (Porter, 2007). As such, academician should train students’ professional capabilities as a profound effect in navigating students’ future which lies on the quality teaching and research in higher educational context (Garvis & Dwyer, 2012). Similar with this subject, Devlin (2013) later accentuated that the academics have major role of the university’s teaching and learning successful features since their quality teaching and learning marked the students’ achievement and experiences.
Academics as leaders for learning

Admittedly, teachers or in higher learning institutions, the academics is an essential individual that inspires the learning processes through their knowledge, behaviours and experiences (Bolkan, Alan and Griffin, 2011). Thus, they also produce orientations that are able to effectuate the quality academic results based on interactions and provoking approach for critical thinking skills (Soweyba, 2014). Mascal (2013) cited from Sewoyeba (2014) preaches that teachers is a leaders within their learning practice and also the determining factor of students’ success. Therefore, based on the above rationalisations, we assumed that academics provided major role as leaders in enhancing students learning even renowned as students’ role model in the process of learning and teaching in university setting. Even though much have debates related to the role of academician capacity in helping students to learn or even as their role model, the report from Standing Committee for the Social Sciences at the European Science Foundation (2012) revealed that academics continue to their own experiences when teaching which does not stimulate the high quality learning experiences for students. In addition, academics also practiced the long traditional learning experiences which focus too much on lecturing and focus on the narrow subject knowledge.

As educators in higher learning, academics are much responsible in developing human capital through the process of teaching and learning plays plentiful responsibilities in giving advices and supports to students in helping them achieve their academic goals. Effective leadership skill can lead to successful teaching and learning (Hopkins, 2001) processes which later implicates on students’ academic achievements (Marshall et al., 2001). The role of academics of being leaders in learning as pointed by Bligh, McNay and Harold (1999) cited from Sewoyeba (2014) can be classified into three main roles; Firstly, as academician, they should influence student’s arrogances, values and truthfulness and even their individual skills. Secondly, academician also has high responsibility in emerging students’ cognitive capabilities and also in training students’ professional capabilities as a profound effect in navigating students’ future which lies and quality teaching and research in higher educational context (Garvis, 2012).

Empirically, studies of leadership for learning has been classified or ‘cried’ as a new approach of leadership which ignites the conducive environment and later have immense effects on learning in higher education or universities. On the other hand, previous study that investigates and examines the leadership role within the higher educational context is considered as limited and scarce. The breakthrough within this limited study is mostly from Australian academics perspectives and it is hard to find any related study within the Asian students’ perspectives. However, a few studies which were previously conducted mainly from the perspectives of the academics and also limited preferences were given that ‘listening’ to students’ reflections and feedbacks. For instance, in Ghana, result of the study conducted by
Malakolunthu et al. (2014) shown that there were positive changes across the institution after leader of institution adopted these five principles. Then, students in higher education institutions valued learning environment impact their academic performance and in their skills development process. Positive learning environment such as lecturer providing guidance and standardization in evaluation are able to improve students’ achievement. Using a qualitative approach, Sewoyeba (2014) studied the role of leaders in enhancing student learning process in a Finnish university. The major intent of the study was to obtain better illustration of the leadership roles that paints the students learning processes. Samples were drawn from faculty and departmental leaders of teaching staffs. Based on the findings, the leadership roles among the academics have crafted pathways that enrich students’ learning development. In Australia, Richards (2011) also conducted the same approach of study that measures the leadership roles which believed to have high impact on student’s learning progress. From Richards’s study (2011), it was found that students achieve better when they emulate their lecturers as a role model. Academics who are knowledgeable, always available in helping students and with high morale in teaching are usually accepted as role model by students. In addition, the students agreed that academic which practice motivation and positive elements such as empathy, high self-discipline, adapt various teaching techniques and use technology in teaching is an effective leader and students accept their lecturers or academics as significant role model for learning engagement process.

Earlier, Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell and Martin (2007) conducted a study that investigates the university teachers’ experiences of academic leadership, and also their perceptions related to a specific academic context and teaching approaches. A total of 439 Australian academicians were selected to give their reflections on the elements studied. Based on the findings, it was vibrantly explained that academics’ experience of teaching and collaborative efforts between academics were identified to have a strong link with academics’ experiences of contexts and approaches in teaching. Indeed, the importance of academics as students’ role model has been wide spread within the context of higher education and student’s learning experiences. However, it is considered as topics to be ventured and discussed in order to promote better teaching and research skills and experience for for novice academics. Therefore, questions about does students in universities or higher educational setting consent or recognise do students in universities academics as their leaders which can be models remain unanswered. Even, most studies in the higher educational context used academician responses and perspectives and neglected students’ feedbacks and opinion, hence, we assume that quality teaching and research produced by academicians is seen as achievements which are highly valued by students. In addition, it is unclear which type of academicians that student preferred as their scholarship role model and are able to motivate them to achieve in academic setting. Therefore, this study is a repetition
of a study conducted by Richards (2011) study which conducted in Australian higher learning institutions which entail the preferred leadership role model among academicians.

**Material and Methods**

**Research objectives**

This research aims to identify leadership for learning in a higher education institution based on students’ perspective. There are three objectives addressed in this study: (a) to identify the leadership characteristics of the academician which are preferred by students as their role model. (b) To identify academician’s capabilities while instructing and teaching which consist of personal, interpersonal, knowledge and cognitive skills. (c) to explore whether students accept their academics as their role model in leaders for learning.

**Design**

Methodologically, this study utilised a pragmatic concurrent mixed-methods approach in adopting the research objectives. The rationale of choosing the mixed methods is typically based on the strong justification that the other methods, in this context is the qualitative, is able to enrich the data for more augmentation and interpretation (Greene, 2007; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2012). As for mixed-methods context, numerical data were first collected followed by the naturalistic approach as simultaneous process of the data collection. In this study, a questionnaire was used as the tools for obtaining quantitative data while interviews with students were chosen for the medium for qualitative data collection.

**Sample**

The sample was made up of 288 students from an elite research public technological-based university and studying across 10 fields of study. However, for the quantitative data analysis purpose, students were clustered into three major categories which were the social sciences, the natural sciences and engineering students through cluster random sampling approach. A total population of 10,348 students were grouped into three major clusters which were the social sciences comprised of students from the Educational, Islamic Civilization, Management and Build Environment faculties while the natural sciences were students from the Science, Bio-Medical, Environmental Studies, Chemical faculties. Lastly, the engineering students comprised of students from the Mechanical, Electrical, Computer Sciences, Civil and Geo-informatics faculties were convened as engineering group. Through the cluster random sampling approach, a total of 389 students were selected and asked to give their reflections on the role of academics as leaders for learning. From 389 students, only 288 reflections were obtained and analysed for quantitative data analysis. From 288 students, 100 students were males and 188 were female
students. In measuring their age groups, 60 per cent belongs to the age category of 21 to 25 years followed by 105 students ranging from 26 to 30 years old and only nine students were aged more than 30 years old. Based on their field of studies, 98 students were from the social science area, 94 students from the natural sciences and 96 student were engineering students.

**Measures**

Data were collected through distribution of questionnaires which were self-administered to students. The instrument contained items with a likert five-point scale response from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items that were covered represented the following domains: the student’s demographics and leadership characteristics represented Richards (2011) and Scott et al (2008) to measure academic leadership preferred as students’ role model. A total of 15 items was used to measure academics’ leadership and another 28 items was used to investigate the academics capabilities while teaching and supervising their students consisting of personal, interpersonal, knowledge and cognitive skills.

**Analysis**

As initial process of data analysis, all quantitative data were manually scanned and all missing values were removed before testing the data normality. Normality of the data was tested using Kolgomorov-Smirnov’s test. In measuring students’ feedbacks, data was obtained from questionnaires regarding their perceptions on the academician leadership characteristics and capabilities while teaching, supervising and interacting with students. Firstly, data was analysed using descriptive statistics before proceeding with the inferential statistics which were the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe’s post hoc tests in determining students differences based on their field of study.

Further, after analyzing the quantitative data, a few students were selected to be interviewed and after obtaining the quantitative data. Three students were interviewed separately in an informal manner to provide a comfortable environment. The interviews lasted for one and a half hours each. Before proceeding with the interview, students were informed regarding their anonymity where their identity will be kept secret and all data will be viewed for academic purpose only. In analysing the interview data, patterns that emerged from the transcripts were extracted in understanding the meaning mentioned by students. For protecting the trustworthiness of the study, students were re-called to give their verdict on the accuracy of the interviews data in searching for high validity qualitative data. In addition, inter-rater reliability approach is being used through the Cohen Kappa table in determining the significant values of students’ assessment on the interviews’ data. A value of 0.86 were calculated and proven to be high reliability for qualitative data based on Cohen’s Kappa table indicators.
Results

Quantitative

Item’s validity and reliability

In this study, the items were extracted from Richards (2011) and Scott et al (2008) and translated into Malay in order to give a clearer understanding on the items. In determining the validity and reliability of the Malay version, a few statistical analyses were conducted. Firstly, through the Cronbach Alpha value, the reliability was identified in measuring the internal consistency which were 0.88 which consist of 0.80 for the academics leadership measurement and 0.97 for academician capabilities while supervising, teaching and interacting. Secondly, exploratory factor analysis was also used in determining the internal consistencies of the items. Before proceeding with the exploratory analysis, Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Test (KMO) and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity were employed to inspect the sample adequacy. A value of 0.95 with significant value was measured through the KMO and Bartlett’s tests. Next, the exploratory factor analysis revealed that the Malay version obtained 60.1 per cent of total variance which indicated as acceptable value based on suggestion by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (2010).

Leadership characteristic of the academics

Using descriptive statistics, leadership capabilities of the academics were assessed by students from three clusters of area of study which were from the social sciences, the sciences and the engineering students.

Figure 1 illustrates the leadership characteristics being reflected by students from engineering, natural sciences and social sciences. Based on the table, it shows that all three categories of students perceived that their lecturers or the academics were their role models for all three categories of students. Comparatively, social science students were more likely to accept academicians as their leaders for learning during their learning and acquiring process while studying at the university compared to other two clusters which Accordingly, Figure 1 explained the findings whether students considered their lecturers as leaders who enhance their learning experiences students replied with a high mean score for all categories of students which is above 3.9 value. For instance, students from the natural science cluster having the highest mean score of 4.10 value compared to the social sciences (mean = 4.09) and engineering students (mean = 3.92). Therefore, we assume that students mostly believed with the helps and assistance provided by their academician, it certainly improved their passion in learning and seeking of knowledge. In the questionnaire, we also ask whether students accept their lecturers as leaders in learning; based on the data, it also showed that mainly students accept their lecturers as leaders in learning or leaders that emphasised the importance of learning with
the social sciences indicating the highest mean score (mean = 3.92) followed by the natural science (mean = 3.84) and lastly the engineering students (mean = 3.8).

![Figure 1: Mean score for leadership characteristics among the academics](image)

Based on the items, we also asked students whether academician provided them with motivation and support during their learning process, students revealed with high mean score; social sciences (mean = 4.48); natural science (mean = 4.43) and the engineering students (4.28). Typically, it suggests that academician have played their major role as leaders in students’ learning process. Lastly, students also replied that academicians have always provided them with caring and empathy while teaching and disseminating knowledge to their students within all three types of students. Furthermore, we also assessed students’ acceptance towards the role of academicians as students’ leaders in learning through analysis of variance test which conducted between three categories of students. The findings of the analysis of variance and Post-hoc tests are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1 revealed that there was a significant mean difference between three types of students in evaluating their academicians as leaders for learning. Next, Table 2 which represents the Post Hoc test indicates that the significant difference between three groups of students were between social sciences with the engineering students. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between the social sciences with the natural sciences students.

**Academician’s capabilities**

The next research question related to measurement of academics capabilities consist of four elements which are personal, interpersonal, cognitive, knowledge and skills.
TABLE 1: ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCES FOR STUDENTS’ ASSESSMENT ON LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders for learning</td>
<td>3.575</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.787</td>
<td>3.357</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3.575</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.787</td>
<td>3.357</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>151.755</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155.330</td>
<td>287</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p <0.05; N= 288

TABLE 2: SCHEFFE’S POST HOC TEST LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Category</th>
<th>(J) Categories</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>0.20994</td>
<td>0.10535</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>0.25383</td>
<td>0.10479</td>
<td>0.042*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p <0.05; N= 288

In analysing the findings, we used descriptive statistics in order to draw the conclusion of the academics from three major clusters in a public research university.

Academics were assessed by students based on four major elements mentioned above. In terms of personal capabilities, the natural sciences academics were being evaluated with the highest mean scores (mean = 4.11), followed by the social sciences (4.10) and lastly the engineering academics (4.06). The findings were also repeated based on the students’ evaluation on the academics capabilities in interpersonal capabilities acquired by all three categories fields of study. The natural sciences scored the highest mean score (4.17) and overshadowing the social sciences academics (mean = 4.07) into second and the engineering academics (mean = 3.93) into last place. Therefore, students believed that the natural sciences academics had much better capabilities in terms of the personal compared to the other two major clusters.

Table 3 also displayed the findings based on students’ assessment on the other two categories which are the cognitive capabilities and academics knowledge and skills in teaching. Based on the findings, social sciences academics achieved the highest mean scores for both categories which were cognitive capabilities (mean = 4.08) and knowledge and skills in teaching (mean = 4.02). Within both categories, the natural sciences academics were second place for knowledge and skills in teaching (mean = 4.03) and cognitive capabilities (mean = 4.09); the last place were academics from the engineering cluster with cognitive capabilities (mean = 4.04) and knowledge and skills for teaching (mean = 3.95). Lastly, descriptive analysis also measured the highest mean scores based on the students’ evaluation based on each academics capability. For students from social science, they perceived academics from their category have high emphasis on the quality of the product (mean = 4.26) while students from the natural science indicated that their academics practiced wisely in accepting opinions from various perspectives in the interpersonal capabilities. For respondents from science and engineering, students gave
reflections that their academics frequently used their experiences while teaching and disseminating knowledge (mean = 4.28) to students in their respective fields of study in the cognitive capabilities.

**TABLE 3: MEAN SCORES OF ACADEMICIAN CAPABILITIES BASED ON STUDENTS’ EVALUATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>Social sciences</th>
<th>Natural sciences</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High passion</td>
<td>4.235</td>
<td>4.213</td>
<td>4.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on the quality</td>
<td>4.255</td>
<td>4.170</td>
<td>4.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never surrender</td>
<td>4.163</td>
<td>4.202</td>
<td>4.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a wise decision</td>
<td>4.092</td>
<td>4.170</td>
<td>4.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admit their mistakes</td>
<td>3.684</td>
<td>3.894</td>
<td>3.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold to a strong value</td>
<td>4.153</td>
<td>4.021</td>
<td>3.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.097</td>
<td>4.111</td>
<td>4.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept opinion</td>
<td>4.235</td>
<td>4.160</td>
<td>4.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently give motivation</td>
<td>4.265</td>
<td>4.255</td>
<td>4.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing students’ behaviours</td>
<td>4.041</td>
<td>4.032</td>
<td>3.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build a good relationship</td>
<td>4.174</td>
<td>4.160</td>
<td>4.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being truthful</td>
<td>4.041</td>
<td>4.043</td>
<td>3.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have strong empathy</td>
<td>3.857</td>
<td>4.021</td>
<td>3.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept decision from various opinions</td>
<td>3.908</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>3.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.074</td>
<td>4.167</td>
<td>3.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure high sense of creativity</td>
<td>4.071</td>
<td>3.990</td>
<td>4.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past experiences to solve problems</td>
<td>4.153</td>
<td>4.202</td>
<td>4.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to analysis the current problems</td>
<td>3.980</td>
<td>4.096</td>
<td>3.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing the exact resources</td>
<td>4.020</td>
<td>4.011</td>
<td>3.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to solve problems</td>
<td>4.031</td>
<td>4.106</td>
<td>3.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply past experiences in teaching</td>
<td>4.204</td>
<td>4.170</td>
<td>4.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.076</td>
<td>4.095</td>
<td>4.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge and skills in teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having current knowledge to be shared</td>
<td>4.204</td>
<td>4.117</td>
<td>4.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use effective teaching methods</td>
<td>4.112</td>
<td>4.085</td>
<td>3.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having high skills in ICT</td>
<td>3.929</td>
<td>4.011</td>
<td>3.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to deliver knowledge to various categories of student</td>
<td>4.092</td>
<td>3.957</td>
<td>3.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert in classroom management</td>
<td>4.020</td>
<td>4.011</td>
<td>3.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.071</td>
<td>4.036</td>
<td>3.953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 288

**Qualitative findings**

The next phase of this mixed method study is the process of interview data collection process. At this naturalistic stage, we selected three students from each cluster of study which were the social sciences, the natural sciences and lastly engineering.
In protecting their identities, students were labeled as R1, R2 and R3. The main focus of this phase is the process of exploration whether students were able to accept their academics as their role model in leadership for learning. During the interviews, we typically asked questions such as: (a) do students accept their academics as role model of leadership for learning? (b) What are the capabilities needed by the academics to be selected as leaders for learning.

**Academics as role model for learning**

In answering the last question, we interviewed three students separately in order to obtain better explanation on their selection of role model among the academics. From the interviews, students certainly accept their academics as their role model for learning since most of them believed that their academics were able to guide them and also enhance their knowledge within the field of study. Result from the interview showed that all respondents accepted their lecturers as role model. For example, R2 explained that:

"Lecturer is a great role model for all students because students meet their lecturers every day. I believed that they are capable person to guide us in understanding the theoretical and fundamental concepts on our subject" (R2)

In addition, another student who was interviewed also agreed with the statement based on his rationale of accepting academics as their leaders. From the interview, students mentioned that the accepting elements are basically based based on some role model characteristics that they perceived during classes with some of the academics. Based on their evaluations, mostly they believed that academics within the public research university have practiced the role model of being leaders within their field of expertise. Thus, it was easy for the students to accept academics as their leaders for learning. One of students which are R1 expounded;

"My lecturer gives us advice besides teaching in class, sharing experiences, helping my colleagues when they face problems especially in the academics.” (R1)

During the interview, another two students who was interviewed also agreed on the sense that their academics have practiced their role as leaders and role model which can be shadowed by students to succeed in their journey of seeking knowledge in the university. From the interviews, both of them mentioned that their academics were cooperative, helpful and even practiced equity and fairness in order to see their students’ progressing in their academic achievement. Quoting the comments from both students;

"...My lecturer answer questions from students in simplest way to make sure students understand, he also ensure students good in academic and be morale.” (R2)

R3 who is also an undergraduate student from a research university supported the positive feedback from R2. She commented on the good practices which can be role model for each student as leaders for learning. She later clarified;
“... I like my lecturer because he is quite a reasonable person and always give students opportunity to make correction when there are errors in the assignment submitted.” (R3)

Based on the comments from all students who were interviewed, it can be concluded that students within the research public university accept their lecturers/academician as a role model because most of their lecturers. Positive and supportive behaviours such as providing motivation, knowledgeable, practice equity during classes and frequently give their constructive and truthful comments towards students achievement within their field of expertise are some of the preferred influencing behaviours of leaders in learning. Thus, academics were trusted as their significant example in in quest for knowledge while studying at the university.

**The academics capabilities**

The second interview question was related to the academics capabilities that were needed to be selected as leaders for learning from students’ viewpoints. In exploring the criteria for leaders that are capable to enhance the learning process among students, we again asked this question during the interview period. Based on students’ comments and suggestions, we concluded on a few themes that emerged from the interviews which are: good communication, build a good relationship with students; ICT proficiencies with effective teaching technique.

*Good communication skills:* during the interview, students mentioned that communication skill is much needed by academics to attract students’ attention towards their teaching. At the same time, students also mentioned that academics should provide them with support and encouragement to maintain good relationship with students. Data from interview revealed that student require much encouragement as part of motivation for them to succeed in their academic journeys. R1, who is a student in a public research university where the study is located, highlighted the required motivational words from their academic in order to succeed in their academic voyage. R1 raised the issue;

“I certainly need encouragement. My lecturer always gives encouragement to us in making a project to be done… exchange opinion with us… sharer ideas and information with us… uses few teaching methods in the classroom.” (R1).

Another student interviewed also emphasized on the good communication skills required to helps student with lesson or knowledge that are being delivered during the lecturing session. He declared that some of the lecturers do not pay much attention on their communication skills to deliver the concept which results in the students finding it difficult to understand the concepts explained in classroom. Therefore, it is quite difficult for students to excel in their academics due to the difficulties in understanding academics’ teaching. R2 later explained;

“I think good communication skill is required to lecturers in attracting students because students pay less attention in class in afternoon class… repeat and repeat on same topic until we understand… give motivation to students in the master project.” (R2)
In supporting to the R2 comment, R3 also advocates that as an academics or lecturer, they should also learn and know how to obtained students’ attention.

“… The way he approached students is essential to attract students’ learning process. Some academics, they tried to makes students give attention to what he says… for example, one of my lecturers always called student when the student came to class late or absent from class.” (R3)

**Build good relationship:** From interviews, students also mentioned on the importance of academics to have good interpersonal skills to be respected as leader. With that sense, students highlighted that academics should be able to maintain a good relationship with students as part of helping students’ performance. Comments that were obtained from students revealed that they preferred academics who are able to build a good relationship with their students. With a good relationship between them, they will be able to share their problems and provide many opportunities to students to ask their lecturers when they find any difficulties in understanding the concepts. Thus, R1 and R2 described their good relationship with lecturers;

“… My relationship with lecturers is good; therefore, I can share my problems with my lecturer and he shows his willingness to listen… I am ok sharing my problems with him. (R1)

“… Lecturer should always maintain a good relationship with students in classroom but also be friend with students…good relationship between students and lecturer is essentially important in building students’ confidence. (R2)

**Possess good knowledge in teaching and ICT:** from the interview, it also found that it is very imperative for lecturers/academics to have wide knowledge on teaching and how to use the ICT as part of academics learning process as an educators in higher learning institutions. Admittedly, students revealed that as academics, knowledge in the usage of ICT is essential. Teaching in the higher learning entity within the new millennium, students believed that academics should learn and use ICT as part of their efforts in producing effective teaching to their students. Based on data from the interview, students stressed that academics also should learn to teach using ICT as part of new approaches in teaching to attract students’ attention. For students, they believed that academics will be able to be recognised as leaders for learning if he possesses a good knowledge using ICT while teaching. From the data, student R1 and R2 mentioned the importance for academics in using ICT. Later, R1 explained;

“… I prefer lecturers who know how to use ICT because ICT is important nowadays.” (R1)

“… Skills to use ICT more important for me to understand what taught by lecturer… if lecturer good in using ICT is a bonus for me to accept my lecturer as role model.” (R2)

On the other hand, R3 against the statement that link knowledge in ICT with respected element as leaders in learning. As for R3, she against the idea;
“… not affect because only lecturer from IT field will be expert in using ICT, lecturer only need able to use power point in class.” (R3)

Acquire good teaching approach: When interviewed, students mostly agreed their lecturers practice a good teaching and learning techniques while teaching because students believed that academics is trying very hard to adopt few teaching techniques within the classroom. The initiatives provided by the academics revealed that academics are putting their many efforts in providing understanding on the concepts and materials that were delivered to their students. In addition, academics also believed that experimenting new approach in teaching will improve the students’ academic quality. From the interview, R3 draw the situation on her lecturer who using few teaching techniques to provide understanding to students;

“… good lecturer uses many teaching techniques such as organized program outside class, role play in class and group discussion so students not boring in class.” (R3)

In supporting this comment, R2 also believed that academics have practiced much initiatives since academics believe that adopting or experimenting new teaching approach might to able to gain students’ attention and provide much understanding on the difficult topics. R2 explained that his lecturers is testing a few teaching approach to ensure that students have much understanding and have high passion on the knowledge. R2 explaining;

“Based on my observation, I know that my lecturer is trying very hard and he is trialing a few methods …during the semester most of my lecturers go to class on time…” (R2).

Discussion

The concept of leadership of learning has much been debated by researchers as firsthand concept in leadership within the educational leadership paradigm. It is believed believed that this new approach have substantial goals to enhance students’ academic achievement in educational entities whether in school-based or high learning context. In replying to the appeal, we conducted a study in a research public university with the intent to explore whether students perceived their academics as leaders who are able to enhance their learning or conducting their role as leaders for learning. Thus, 288 students were selected which represents three major fields of study consisting of the social sciences, the natural sciences and engineering. In addition, we also interviewed three students from each cluster of study in concluding our effort to paint in-depth the practices of the academics in playing their role as leaders for learning.

Quantitatively, majority of the students felt and agreed that academics in the public research university that were studied have played their major role as leaders for learning. Descriptively, students from three major clusters of study have chosen their academics that played their roles as leaders in learning. The assumption was made based on students’ perceptions that most of the academics can be classified
as role model within their learning process. From the quantitative data, students replied that academics frequently provided them with support and helping efforts which implicates to their improvement in learning and on the process of seeking knowledge. Moreover, students also provided feedbacks that their academicians displayed caring and empathic behaviours as part of motivating efforts to help students achieve the highest academic achievement. In addition, students also accepted their academics as their role model for learning since most of the academics have practiced the supporting behaviours such as cooperative, helpful and even practiced equity to students. Therefore, students were able to accept their academics as owning positive role model in their pathways towards academic excellence. This finding is aligned with Richards (2011), who believed that when academics were accepted by students as their role model, it certainly will benefit both parties as mutual collaboration. Lastly, it will benefit the whole academic system as a whole. Based on the findings, it also connotes that academics that are mostly are favored by their students possess positive leadership characteristic such as caring, being fair and giving motivation to students are factors and criteria of accepting academics as their role model for learning. In that sense, Coates et al. (2012) stated that students will emulate leaders’ styles more effectively when they have high acceptance in terms of emotional and psychological engagement with the academics. Indirectly, students will also develop their soft skills within the duration of their study period based on their emotional attachment with their academics as their motivator and facilitator.

In addition, we also measure the academician’s capabilities consist of personal, interpersonal, knowledge and skills in teaching and lastly the cognitive capabilities. A total 288 students were asked to give their verdict on the elements of capabilities most acquired by academicians. Comparatively, academics were ranked high in terms of personal capabilities compared to other three elements of capabilities assessed by current student which are the cognitive, knowledge and skills in teaching and interpersonal capabilities in a public research university. Based on their assessment, students from the social sciences perceived their academics higher than other clusters. However, on the personal criteria, academics from the natural sciences ranked as the most among the other two clusters of academics. Thus, we typically assumed that natural sciences academics have been practicing their positive role as role model for students when engaged with knowledge. Even though through students’ assessment, they perceived differently towards their academicians performance in classroom, most students select their academics as individuals who has performed their job as leaders for learning with all four elements were ranked high mean scores. From the interview, we were also able to designate that, student pays high emphasise on academics performance in classroom especially related to academics’ good communication skills when dealing with students. Students mentioned that academics should acquire themselves with good communications
in providing understanding towards the concepts that are being explained. From students’ explanations, if academics have strong communication skills, it is much easier for students to share their problems and found little any difficulties in understanding the information that were delivered.

Empirically, students also pointed that some of academics do not have high communication skills in classroom and yet it is quite difficult to understand the teaching material due to the poor communication skills. According to Davis (2012), good communication skill is important for a leader because leader has to deal with followers who come from various background and characteristics. Thus, students suggested that academics should also learn how attract students’ attention when teaching. In this research, students’ opinion were aligned with Scott et al.’s (2008) study that three most important abilities that should be acquired by a lecturer is adopting the past experience in teaching, accepts opinion from students and motivates students to achieve their academic goals. Moreover, the result showed within academics’ cognitive capabilities element, academics have high intention to adopt their past experience into their teaching skills. In addition, academics also have high inclination to experiment new techniques and skills in the process of their teaching and learning skills. The result of this study is consistent with Hunt (1970) that indicated an educator that understands his students can identify the best teaching technique for individual student based on his understanding. Findings also show that academics’ past experience will lead to their understanding on students’ needs and academics and will certainly try to blend their experience and integrate into their teaching techniques in order to provide better students’ understanding towards the taught concepts.

Qualitatively, students perceived that academics were trialing their ICT skills within their concept such as using video and audio as part to catch students’ attention on the knowledge and concepts that were delivered during classes. For students, they also believed that their academics are fulfilling their best efforts to ensure that students understand the theoretical elements of the relevant knowledge which were delivered during classes, tutorials and labs experiments. Literately, this finding is stressed by Robinson et al. (2011) who indicate that student-centered leaders will always focus on adopting, making assessment towards their teaching techniques, and design a supportive learning experiences and use resources wisely for promoting students’ academic and skills development. Thus, as leaders in learning, academics were found to put high expectations and many efforts in order to improve students’ academic, soft skills and personal qualities.

**Implication and recommendations**

Based on the discussion, it is noted that academics leadership meant for learning were well accepted by students as their role model in knowledge seeking. According to Folkman (2010), an effective leader will always motive and inspire his followers,
be honest and set good example, build good relationship with followers, develop other individual’s abilities, give cooperation and achieve goals together with their followers. In addition, personal ability, interpersonal ability, cognitive ability and knowledge and skills with lecturers are imperative in leading students to their academics’ excellence. According to Davis (2012), communication skill is an essential requirement to any leader who has to face any individuals from various backgrounds. Therefore, as an academic and students are learners from various demographics, there is urgency for academics to possess good communication skills in dealing with students who are typically numerous in terms of their personalities and background. In this sense, Townsend and Bassoppo-Moyo (1996) stressed that when a leader build and maintain good relationship with his followers, it is much easier for leader to inspire their followers and reduce conflicts which occurred between leader and followers. Thus, a positive relationship between academics and students is certainly important to gain students’ level of trust on their academics as their leaders that support their learning processes. Hence, the higher level of trust to academics, it is most likely for students to accept their academics as their role model for learning. As the result, the Ministry of Education should offer more courses to academics with the purpose to improve academics’ leadership capabilities, knowledge in teaching, relational relationship, in order to produce academics which were be accepted by students as their learning role model or leaders.

Furthermore, the academic capabilities in adopting various effective teaching techniques are also required accorded to students’ feedbacks and replies. Therefore, as a consequence, academics should be supported by their academic administrators or their head of department in universities to adopt new teaching techniques to help students in developing their soft skills. In addition, the latest approach in higher education learning such as the student-centered teaching and collaborative teaching considered as relevant teaching approach that improve the cognitive learning (McCabe, 2014; De Hei et al., 2014) process. In addition, collaborative teaching technique also allows students to work in group, learning together with and from classmates and so on. As a result, students are able to build their confidence. Empirically, students in higher education institutions also believe that learning environment has impact on their academic achievement and in developing their skills in their knowledge seeking processes. Theoretically, positive learning environment such as guidance given by academics will certainly improve students’ achievement (Lizzio, 2012) in academics and their extra-curriculum activities. The ideas was supported by Malakolunthu et al. (2014) who believed that students’ achievement can be improved when they are pleased with the learning environment in education institutions. Therefore, researcher suggested that academics should precedence the importance of having positive learning environment in order to improve their students’ achievement.
Recommendation has been made by researchers typically based on the limitation of the study. Firstly, larger sample size is needed which involved students not only from a public university but also from private higher education institutions in order to make a wider comparison with private university academics. Secondly, widening students sampling which involve all students from listed public universities is also required to draw a bigger picture of academics’ role as leaders in learning within the local context of higher learning. Moreover, this study involved limited students’ opinions regarding the academics’ major role as leaders in learning, therefore, further study should be improved by involving academics’ feedbacks in making their own assessment towards their leadership role in learning in the process of developing high quality human capital for the nation’s growth and development.

As a conclusion, this study has identified characteristics of leadership should with academics to accept as a role model by students in higher education institutions, to identified abilities of lecturers in teaching and learning process and instructional leadership practiced by lecturers from the perspective of students in higher education institutions. The finding of this research improve the reliability level of this study by involving respondents from a public university related to leadership for learning in higher education institutions.

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