

Leadership Practices that Enhance Academic Engagement in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

Nana Yaw Brenya Agyeman

Walter Sisulu University Mthatha, South Africa

*corresponding email: nanayawgymn@yahoo.com

Abstract : Leadership practices are a recurring focus of higher education scholarship, yet systematic evidence on which practices most consistently support academic engagement remains fragmented across regional and methodological contexts. This systematic literature review examines leadership practices associated with academic engagement in higher education (HE), following the PRISMA 2020 framework. Scopus and Google Scholar were searched using structured Boolean strings for peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. After applying structured inclusion and exclusion criteria, 28 eligible studies were selected from an initial pool of 299,041 records. Content analysis was used to generate thematic categories, and methodological quality was appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, version 2018). Most included studies carried a moderate risk of bias, which places a boundary on the certainty of conclusions. Six themes emerged: instructional and transformational leadership are associated with stronger engagement through goal clarity and shared vision; distributed and servant leadership are linked to motivation through participatory decision-making; professional learning communities and collegiality create structured conditions for collaborative engagement; emotionally intelligent leadership is associated with psychological safety and academic perseverance; organisationally just leadership sustains engagement through fairness and institutional support; and contextually responsive leadership moderates the effectiveness of all other practices across regional and cultural settings. These associations are consistent across regional contexts, though the evidence base is concentrated in Asia, Africa, and Europe, with limited representation from the Middle East and North America. These findings do not establish causal relationships between leadership behaviours and engagement outcomes. Higher education institutions should invest in leadership development that integrates instructional capability, emotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, and participatory practice, with deliberate attention to regionally under-represented contexts.

Keywords: academic engagement; contextual responsiveness; higher education; instructional leadership; leadership practices; professional learning communities; systematic literature review; transformational leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership practices shape the institutional conditions under which academic engagement develops in higher education (HE). Academic engagement, in this review, refers to the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional investment of students and academic staff in teaching, learning, research, and institutional life, a multi-

dimensional construct increasingly linked to persistence, performance, and institutional quality (Culduz, 2024; Abubakar et al., 2024). This definition is maintained consistently throughout the review; where cited studies use narrower operationalisations, this is noted in the analysis.

Leadership acts as a structural mediator of this investment. How leaders set goals, distribute authority, support professional growth, and respond to individual needs determines whether institutions create conditions that sustain or undermine engagement (Siphahiolu, 2025; Wheeley et al., 2022). Transformational and instructional leadership practices have received particular attention for their role in fostering commitment and collaborative cultures in HE (Khan and Md, 2024; Simpson, 2020). Strong leadership is associated with a sense of community and the reflective engagement necessary for intellectual development (Wheeley et al., 2022). In the HE context, leadership that empowers staff and students to pursue academic autonomy has been linked to stronger participation and ownership of the academic enterprise (Simpson, 2020).

The relationship between leadership practices and academic engagement is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks. Transformational leadership theory (Bass and Avolio, 1994) holds that leaders who articulate a shared vision, model high standards, stimulate intellectual challenge, and attend to individual needs create institutional conditions that raise followers' motivation and commitment beyond transactional compliance; applied to higher education, this predicts that transformational and instructional leadership will be more consistently associated with faculty and student engagement than authority-based approaches, because they address the motivational conditions engagement requires.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory complements this by framing academic engagement as a socially mediated process: what individuals achieve within a supportive, dialogic institutional culture exceeds what isolated effort produces. On this account, leadership functions as the institutional scaffolding that determines the quality of collaborative and relational conditions in which engagement develops. These two frameworks together explain why the practices most consistently associated with engagement in this review, particularly those that build shared purpose, collaborative culture, and psychological safety, address both the motivational and the social-structural conditions that sustained academic engagement requires.

Despite this body of work, the systematic evidence base contains notable gaps. Prior reviews of leadership and engagement have tended to focus on school-level (K-12) leadership rather than HE, or have examined narrowly defined outcomes such as

research productivity and student performance scores rather than the broader climate of academic engagement in HE. Studies from individual institutional or single-country contexts are difficult to generalise across the diverse regional and cultural settings in which HE leadership operates. Furthermore, existing reviews have rarely examined the interplay between multiple leadership styles, or assessed how contextual factors moderate the relationship between leadership practices and engagement. This review addresses these limitations by synthesising peer-reviewed evidence published between 2020 and 2025 that focuses specifically on HE, examines multiple leadership approaches, and draws on geographically diverse evidence.

The study has three objectives: first, to identify and synthesise leadership practices associated with academic engagement in HE; second, to appraise the methodological quality of included studies; and third, to derive implications for institutional leadership development that are sensitive to contextual variation. The review contributes to the body of knowledge on HE leadership by offering a methodologically transparent synthesis that moves beyond single-study conclusions.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

1. Study Design

The review adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) design, conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Sohrabi et al., 2021). The SLR was selected over alternative review designs for three reasons. First, the research question is bounded and specific, making a systematic approach more defensible than a narrative review, which selectively draws on the literature without a documented search protocol. Second, the question calls for synthesis of existing evidence rather than primary data collection, and the volume and diversity of relevant literature make a structured screening approach necessary. Third, unlike a scoping review, which maps the breadth and nature of available evidence without appraising study quality, this review applies eligibility criteria and quality appraisal to produce a filtered and weighted synthesis. A meta-analysis was not appropriate because the included studies varied substantially in design, measurement, and conceptual framing, making statistical pooling of effect sizes methodologically unjustified.

The review addresses the following question: which leadership practices are most consistently associated with academic engagement across higher education contexts, and to what extent does the evidence for these associations vary by regional context, institutional type, and study design quality? This question was operationalised using the PICOT framework to ensure precision and traceability

across the search, screening, and synthesis stages. The population (P) comprises academic staff and students in higher education institutions, and the issue of interest (I) is leadership practices enacted by institutional leaders in HE. No comparator (C) is specified, because this review maps associations between leadership practices and engagement outcomes rather than testing an intervention against a control condition; a PICO framework would be equally appropriate, though the T element is retained because the publication-window restriction is a substantive methodological constraint rather than an incidental filter. The outcome of interest (O) is academic engagement, defined as the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional investment of students and staff in teaching, learning, research, and institutional life. The timeframe (T) is restricted to peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025.

This review was not pre-registered with PROSPERO or an equivalent protocol registry prior to the search. This is acknowledged as a methodological limitation: pre-registration would have allowed readers to verify that the search strategy, eligibility criteria, and analysis plan were established before the search was run and that no post-hoc adjustments were made to the protocol. Future replications of this review should be registered a priori on PROSPERO (www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero) to strengthen the transparency and reproducibility of the methodology.

Academic engagement is maintained as a multi-dimensional construct throughout the review. Where individual studies operationalise it more narrowly, as student retention, knowledge-sharing behaviour, staff job satisfaction, or institutional citizenship, this is noted in the study characteristics table (Table 2) and taken into account during synthesis, so that findings from different operationalisations are not treated as equivalent without comment.

2. Search Strategy

The database search was conducted on 8 and 9 April 2025 using two databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. Scopus was selected for its structured Boolean search functionality, its coverage of peer-reviewed social science and education research, and its subject-area filtering capability. Google Scholar was included to broaden coverage of open-access sources not fully indexed in Scopus, particularly from African and South-East Asian publishing contexts relevant to the review. A limitation of this two-database approach is that it excludes studies indexed exclusively in ERIC, Web of Science, or PsycINFO; ERIC in particular is the primary database for educational research and its exclusion is acknowledged as a potential source of selection bias.

Scopus was searched using Boolean operators applied across the title, abstract, and keyword (TITLE-ABS-KEY) fields. Google Scholar was searched using its advanced search function with phrase-based queries. The following search strings were applied:

Scopus search string:

TITLE-ABS-KEY: ("leadership practices" OR "instructional leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "servant leadership" OR "distributed leadership") AND ("academic engagement" OR "student engagement" OR "academic involvement") AND ("higher education" OR "university" OR "tertiary education") AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND DOCTYPE(ar) AND SUBJAREA(SOCI)

Google Scholar search string:

"leadership practices" and "academic engagement" and "higher education" [Custom date range: 2020-2025]

The Scopus search was restricted to the Social Sciences subject area and to journal articles (DOCTYPE = ar) to enforce the publication-type inclusion criterion at the database level. The Google Scholar search applied a custom date range filter. No geographic restrictions were applied to either search; however, the English-language restriction means that studies published in other languages are excluded, a limitation acknowledged below.

The search terms were derived directly from the PICOT elements. The leadership-practice terms encompass the five principal leadership models represented in the HE leadership literature. The engagement terms cover the primary terminology used across disciplinary framings of the construct. Boolean OR is used within each concept cluster to maximise recall; Boolean AND is used to join the clusters to enforce relevance across all three PICOT dimensions. The search results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Search strings and eligible studies from Scopus and Google Scholar

Database	Search string	Total records	Eligible
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY: ("leadership practices" OR "instructional leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "servant leadership" OR "distributed leadership") AND ("academic engagement" OR "student engagement" OR "academic involvement") AND ("higher education" OR "university" OR "tertiary education") AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND	177,687	26

Database	Search string	Total records	Eligible
	PUBYEAR < 2026 AND DOCTYPE(ar) AND SUBJAREA(SOCI)		
Google Scholar	"leadership practices" and "academic engagement" and "higher education" [Custom date range: 2020-2025]	121,354	13
TOTAL		299,041	28

3. Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria were established a priori to prevent post hoc adjustment that could introduce selection bias. The criteria derive directly from the PICOT elements and are operationalised in Table 1A below.

Table 1A: Eligibility criteria applied at screening

Dimension	Criterion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles only
Language	English only
Publication window	2020-2025
Setting (P)	Higher education institutions; studies set exclusively in K-12 schools without explicit HE implications excluded (Reason 1)
Leadership focus (I)	Leadership practices enacted in or conceptually relevant to HE; general corporate/management leadership without educational application excluded (Reason 2)
Engagement outcome (O)	Academic engagement must be a named construct, dependent variable, or substantive outcome; studies in which engagement is neither theorised nor measured are excluded (Reason 3)

4. Screening Process

Screening proceeded in two sequential stages in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Screening records were managed in a structured Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with one row per record and columns recording each eligibility criterion, the Stage 1 title/abstract decision, and the Stage 2 full-text assessment outcome. This created an auditable log of every inclusion and exclusion decision.

Before full screening began, a calibration pass was conducted: 50 randomly selected records were screened against the eligibility criteria to verify consistent application.

The calibration pass identified two areas of criterion ambiguity: the treatment of studies set in community colleges rather than traditional universities, and the inclusion of conceptual book chapters that discuss HE leadership without primary

data. Both were resolved into explicit decision rules before full screening began. Community college studies were retained under the HE inclusion criterion; conceptual book chapters and dissertations were retained selectively and flagged as high risk of bias under the revised Reason 4 boundary stated in Table 1A.

Stage 1: Title and abstract screening

Titles and abstracts of all retrieved records were reviewed against the eligibility criteria. Records were excluded at this stage if the abstract clearly indicated an exclusively non-educational setting (Reason 2), no engagement construct (Reason 3), a non-journal publication type (Reason 4), or publication outside the 2020-2025 window. Records with no available abstract were retained for full-text assessment. Automated duplicate removal was performed within each database before export using database-native deduplication tools; cross-database duplicates were identified manually during title screening by comparing author names, publication years, and article titles.

Stage 2: Full-text assessment

Full texts of all records passing Stage 1 were retrieved and assessed against all eligibility criteria. Each excluded full text was assigned an exclusion reason (Reasons 1-4) and logged in the screening spreadsheet. Where a study met most criteria but was borderline, the decision rule was to include and flag it rather than exclude it, to avoid eliminating relevant evidence on ambiguous grounds.

This review was conducted by a single reviewer, which is a recognised methodological limitation (Page et al., 2021). To check for internal consistency of criterion application, a 10% random sample of records excluded at Stage 1 (n = [confirm count from screening log]) and at Stage 2 (n = approximately [confirm]) was reassessed in a verification pass. Discrepancies identified were resolved by returning to the full text and re-applying the criteria. No systematic errors in exclusion were identified. This verification procedure does not substitute for independent dual-reviewer screening with inter-rater reliability reporting; single-reviewer screening remains a limitation on the reproducibility of the selection decisions.

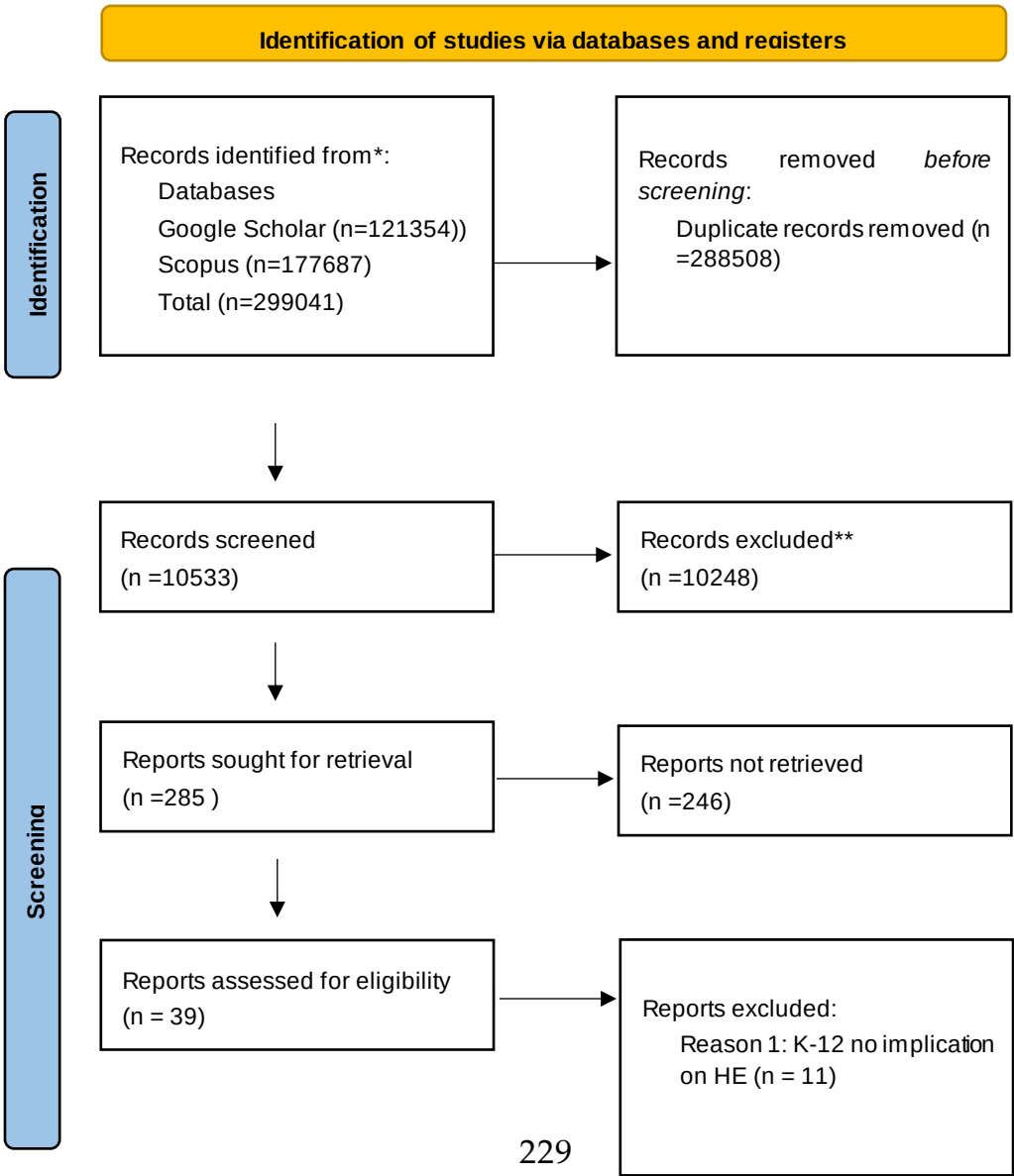
Following deduplication, which removed 288,508 duplicate records from the combined pool of 299,041 identified records, 10,533 records proceeded to title and abstract screening. Of these, 10,248 were excluded due to ineligibility. Of the 285 remaining reports sought for retrieval, 246 were not retrieved, leaving 39 full-text reports assessed for eligibility. Of these, 11 were excluded at the full-text stage. Reason 1: K-12 studies with no implications for higher education, yielding 28

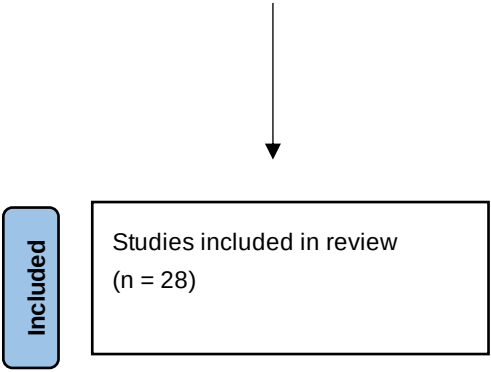
studies for the final review. The complete screening process is documented in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1).

5. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram documenting record identification, deduplication, title/abstract screening, full-text assessment, and final inclusion. Each exclusion node specifies the reason category (Reasons 1-4 as defined in Table 1A) alongside the number of records excluded for that reason. The diagram uses the mandatory PRISMA 2020 four-phase structure: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Included.

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram, Leadership Practices and Academic Engagement in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review





Source: Author (2025). PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for this systematic review.

6. Data Charting

Data were extracted from each of the 28 included studies using a standardised extraction protocol applied consistently across all sources. The protocol was piloted across five studies before full extraction began. The pilot identified that the "HE context" field needed to more explicitly distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and that the "engagement construct" field needed a sub-notation for proxy indicators to avoid treating direct and proxy measures as equivalent. Both fields were revised before full extraction began. Table 2A below sets out the ten extraction fields and their definitions. The completed charting matrix is presented as Table 2 in the Results section.

Table 2A: Data extraction protocol

Charting field	Description
Author(s) and year	Full bibliographic reference
Country/region	Where the study was conducted
Study design	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, conceptual
Participants	Population studied: students, academic staff, institutional leaders, or mixed; K-12 flag where applicable
HE context	Type of institution and student level (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral)
Leadership construct	How leadership was defined, labelled, and measured in the study
Engagement construct	How academic engagement was operationalised, including proxy indicators where used
Main findings	The specific claim the study makes about the leadership-engagement relationship
MMAT quality rating	Risk of bias rating (Low/Moderate/High) is carried directly into synthesis weighting
Retained non-journal flag	Asterisk (*) where the source is a book chapter, dissertation, or conceptual piece retained per Reason 4 boundary

The charting process involved reading each full text twice. The first reading extracted factual information about design, sample, and setting. The second reading identified the specific claim each study made about the relationship between a leadership practice and an engagement outcome, including the direction of the association, mediating or moderating variables, and stated limitations. Where studies used proxy indicators for engagement, such as staff commitment, retention, or knowledge-sharing behaviour, the proxy relationship was noted in the findings column and taken into account when weighting the study's contribution during synthesis.

7. Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of all 28 included studies was appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, version 2018), which is designed for educational and social science research and accommodates qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods study designs without requiring a common metric across designs (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT was selected in preference to tools developed for clinical trials, such as the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool, because clinical-trial criteria such as random sequence generation, allocation concealment, and participant blinding do not apply to observational or qualitative educational leadership studies.

The MMAT assesses five criteria appropriate to the study type: clarity of the research question; appropriateness of the research design to the question; representativeness of the sample or data source; integrity of the data collection procedure; and transparency of the analysis. Each criterion is rated yes, no, or cannot tell.

MMAT does not produce a single composite score; the risk-of-bias classification applied here is an interpretive consolidation of the five-criterion profile, following the approach described by Hong et al. (2018). Studies receiving three or more "no" or "cannot tell" ratings across the five criteria were classified as high risk of bias. Studies with one or two such ratings were classified as moderate risk of bias. Studies meeting all five criteria were classified as low risk of bias. This three-level classification was carried into the charting table and referenced explicitly during thematic synthesis; appraisal ratings are not collected in a quality appendix that is then never used.

Most included studies received a moderate risk-of-bias rating. No studies were rated low risk of bias across all five MMAT criteria, which places a ceiling on the certainty of conclusions and is stated plainly in the Conclusion rather than smoothed into confident prescriptive claims. Studies flagged under Reason 4

(selectively retained non-journal sources) were appraised against the MMAT criteria most applicable to their format: conceptual pieces were assessed on research question clarity, design appropriateness, and analysis transparency; the sampling and data collection criteria were rated "cannot tell" and contributed to their high risk-of-bias classification.

8. Thematic Analysis

Following data extraction and quality appraisal, the 28 included studies were analysed using content analysis as the overarching method of synthesis (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020). Content analysis was appropriate because the included studies vary substantially in design, from large-scale quantitative surveys to autoethnographies to conceptual pieces, making statistical pooling of effect sizes methodologically unjustifiable. The analytic goal was a thematic synthesis of claims about the leadership-engagement relationship, calibrated by design quality, rather than an average effect estimate. The analysis proceeded in four steps applied across the full set of extracted findings.

Step 1: Open coding

Each extracted finding was read and assigned an initial descriptive code that described, in plain language, the relationship the study reported between a leadership behaviour and an engagement outcome. Codes were assigned at the level of individual claims, not whole studies, because many studies made more than one relevant claim.

Step 2: Preliminary categorisation by leadership type

Codes were sorted into preliminary groupings based on the type of leadership practice described. This categorisation step was deductive rather than inductive: the leadership-type categories were imported from the HE leadership literature as a priori analytical frames, specifically instructional, transformational, distributed, servant, and emotionally intelligent leadership, rather than allowed to emerge purely from the data. This approach was appropriate given that the PICOT question specifies leadership practices as the focal construct, but it means that findings that do not map onto recognised leadership models may be under-captured. A residual category was retained throughout to hold codes that did not fit the five a priori frames.

Step 3: Cross-category review and refinement

Preliminary categories were reviewed for internal coherence and cross-category overlap. Where a study's findings spanned more than one leadership type, it was charted primarily under the leadership construct the study's own authors foregrounded, with a cross-reference note in the charting table. The residual

category was reviewed for clustering patterns; findings related to organisational justice and fairness emerged as a coherent sixth category, and findings about contextual and cultural responsiveness initially consolidated into a seventh preliminary category. This seventh category was subsequently merged with the broader theme of institutional culture and contextual sensitivity, which accommodated findings about regional and sectoral variation; the final list accordingly comprises six themes rather than seven. The seventh preliminary category was subsequently merged with the theme of institutional culture and contextual sensitivity, which already accommodated findings about regional and sectoral variation; the final list accordingly comprises six themes rather than seven.

Step 4: Thematic naming and synthesis statement

Each category was assigned a thematic label and a synthesising claim capturing the direction and consistency of the evidence across the studies within it. Studies rated high risk of bias were included as illustrative cases rather than as confirmatory evidence, and this distinction is preserved in the discussion. Each theme was required to have a claim that could be stated, qualified, and challenged rather than merely listed.

As a single-reviewer study, no formal inter-analyst reliability check was possible during the thematic synthesis. The reviewer's background in HE leadership, education management, and curriculum studies shaped the coding decisions throughout. In particular, there is a risk that instructional and transformational leadership practices, which are more prominent in the reviewer's primary disciplinary literature, received more developed thematic treatment than servant or distributed leadership models. This positioning is acknowledged as a source of potential interpretive bias, and readers should weigh findings from the less-developed themes with appropriate caution.

Six thematic categories emerged from the analysis and structure the Findings and Discussion section:

- Instructional and transformational leadership: engagement through goal clarity and shared vision
- Distributed and servant leadership: motivation through participatory decision-making
- Professional learning communities and collegiality: structured conditions for collaborative engagement
- Emotional intelligence and psychological safety: affective conditions for academic risk-taking
- Organisational justice and institutional support: fairness as an engagement lever

- Institutional culture and contextual sensitivity: the limits of universal leadership models

9. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations of the review's methodology are acknowledged here.

First, the search was conducted only across two databases; studies indexed exclusively in other databases were deliberately excluded as the study focused on Scopus and Google. The exclusion from other databases is particularly consequential, given that most of them were the primary indexing databases for educational research; the omission likely underrepresents K-12-to-HE comparative studies and practitioner-oriented leadership literature.

Second, the restriction to English-language articles excludes research published in Arabic, Mandarin, Afrikaans, Kiswahili, and other languages, which is consequential given that the strongest regional representation in the included studies is from Asia and Africa. This restriction is likely to bias the evidence base toward findings from Anglophone HE systems, which may over-represent managerial and hierarchical leadership models relative to collectivist or communal leadership traditions prominent in non-Anglophone contexts.

Third, the review was conducted by a single reviewer without independent dual-reviewer verification of screening or appraisal decisions. The verification pass mitigates this limitation but does not resolve it. The most consequential effect of single-reviewer practice is on the thematic synthesis, where interpretive judgements about category membership and theme direction were made without independent corroboration.

Fourth, the restriction to open-access sources may have introduced a publication bias, in that subscription-gated, high-impact journals are under-represented. This was a practical constraint of the review context, not a deliberate methodological choice.

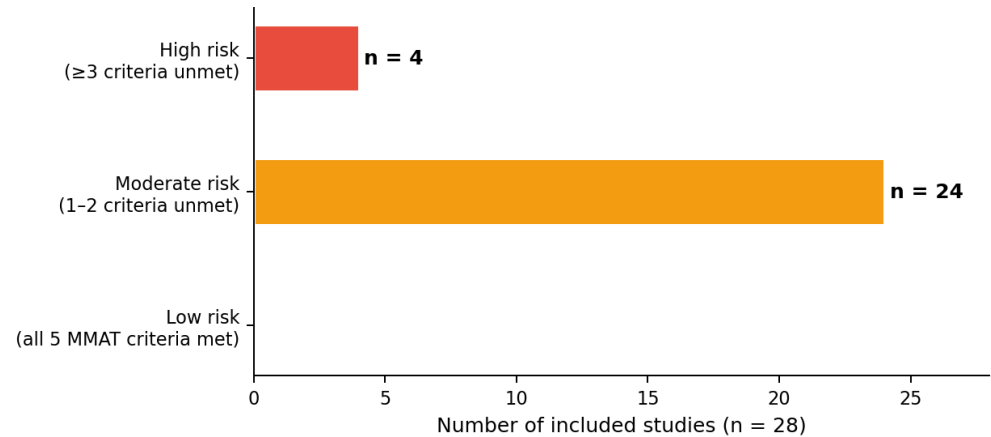
Fifth, the absence of included studies from 2023 most likely reflects a limitation in database indexing or the Boolean string rather than a genuine pause in scholarly activity. This warrants verification against the full screening log before the review can claim comprehensive coverage of the 2020–2025 window; if eligible 2023 studies were excluded, this represents a gap in the search strategy rather than a gap in scholarly activity.

Sixth, this review was not pre-registered with PROSPERO prior to the search. This limits readers' ability to verify that the protocol was established before data collection began. These limitations do not invalidate the review's findings but place a boundary on how confidently its conclusions can be generalised.

Results

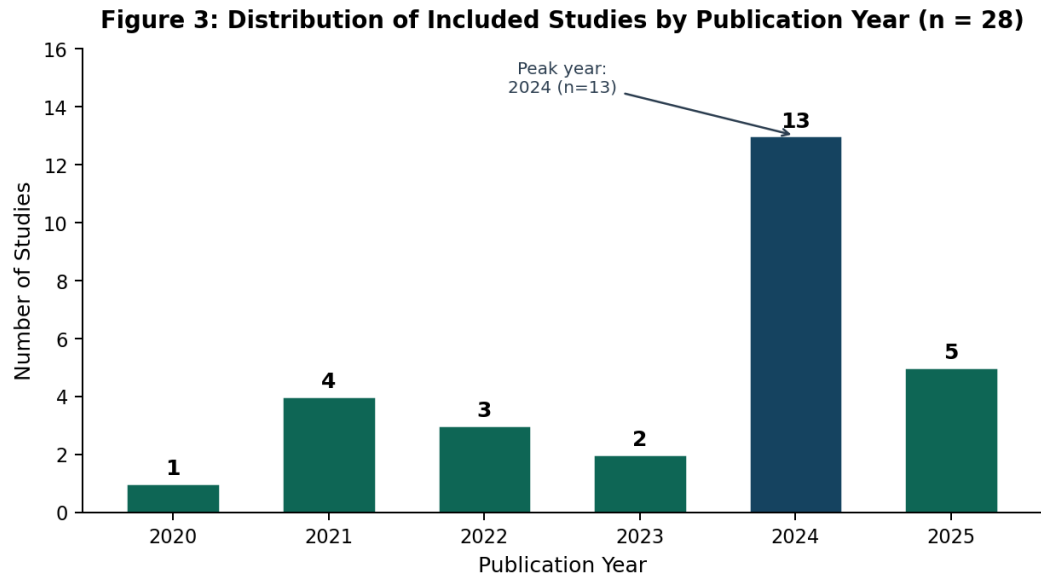
Figure 2 shows the methodological quality ratings of included studies using MMAT criteria. A substantial proportion of studies received moderate risk-of-bias ratings, indicating adequate but not exemplary methodological rigour. A smaller subset, primarily book chapters and conceptual pieces retained for theoretical breadth, received high risk-of-bias ratings. These ratings inform the weight assigned to specific findings in the discussion: claims from high-risk sources are treated as illustrative rather than conclusive.

Figure 2: Methodological Quality of Included Studies (MMAT v2018)



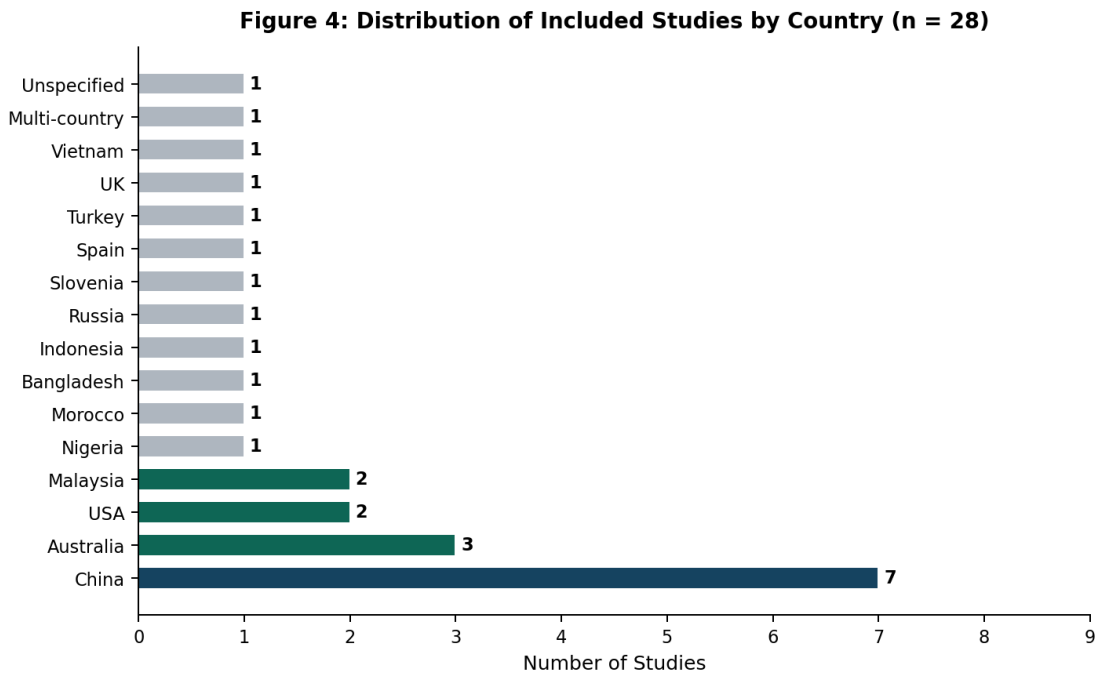
Source: Author (2025). MMAT = Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool; RoB = Risk of Bias

Figure 3 shows the distribution of included studies by year. A concentration of publications is evident in 2024, with moderate output in 2021 and 2022. The absence of studies indexed from 2023 most likely reflects a database indexing or search-string limitation rather than a pause in scholarly activity. Publication frequency indicates research activity but does not, in itself, constitute evidence that leadership practices contribute to academic engagement.



Source: Author (2025).

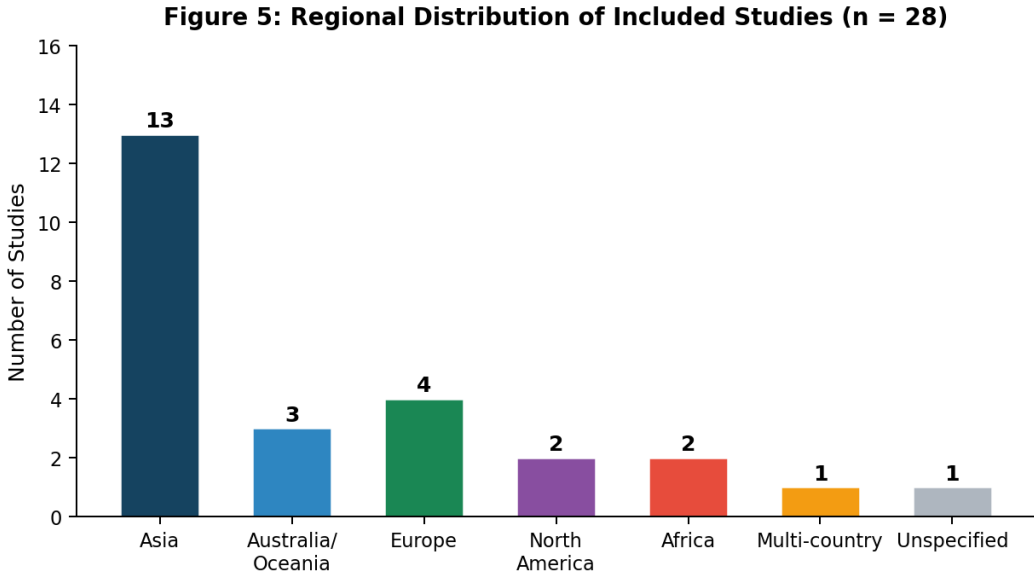
Figure 4 presents the distribution by country. China leads in publication volume, followed by the United States, South Africa, Malaysia, and Turkey. This distribution reflects patterns in academic publishing infrastructure rather than the global prevalence of leadership practices that support engagement.



Source: Author (2025).

Figure 5 illustrates the regional distribution of included studies. Most were conducted in Asia (n = 8), Africa (n = 6), and Europe (n = 5), with only three from the

Middle East and North America respectively. This imbalance is consequential: findings from Asia and Africa may reflect institutional cultures and power-distance norms that differ substantially from those in North American or Northern European HE systems.



Source: Author (2025).

Study Characteristics

Table 2 presents the key characteristics of the 28 included studies. Studies marked with an asterisk (*) in the Participants column were conducted in K-12 or non-HE settings and are retained for conceptual relevance. Studies marked in the Design column with a dagger (+) are non-journal sources retained under the revised Reason 4 boundary. Risk-of-bias ratings are derived from MMAT appraisal.

Table 2: Characteristics of 28 Included Studies , Leadership Practices and Academic Engagement in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

Author(s) and Year	Countr y/ Region	Study Design	Particip ants	HE Context	Leadershi p Construct	Engage ment Constr uct	Main Finding	MM AT RoB	Fl ag
Abdelrahman et al. (2022)	USA	Quantitati ve survey	Universi ty faculty	HE , univers ity leaders hip prepara tion	Instructio nal leadershi p	Acade mic progra mme- level engage ment	Leadersh ip preparati on program me policies moderate academic engagem ent;	Mod erate	

							internship design is a key mediating mechanism.		
Abubakar et al. (2024)	Nigeria	Quantitative survey	Undergraduate students	Nigeria HE , multiple institutions	Technology-integrated leadership	Student academic achievement and engagement	Technology-integrated curriculum resources , enabled by leadership capacity, are positively associated with student engagement and academic achievement.	Moderate	
Ahmad et al. (2023)	Pakistan	Quantitative	HE faculty	Pakistan HE , multiple institutions	Servant and organisational-learning leadership	Institutional commitment and faculty engagement	Faculty perception of a learning-organisation culture mediates the relationship between leadership practice and institutional engagement.	Moderate	
Belamghari (2024)	Morocco	Longitudinal	University students	Moroccan HE ,	Extracurricular and institutional	Student engagement	Institutional support	Moderate	

		quantitative		collegiate clubs	national leadership	through club involvement	for collegiate clubs longitudinally predicts student engagement and psychosocial development.		
Boymal et al. (2024)	Australia	Conceptual, book chapter	HE academic staff	Post-pandemic Australian HE	Wellbeing-focused institutional leadership	Staff engagement and institutional wellbeing	Wellbeing-centred leadership is associated with staff re-engagement and recovery of institutional commitment in post-pandemic HE contexts.	High	+
Chen et al. (2024)	China	Quantitative	University teachers	Chinese universities	Transformational leadership	Knowledge-sharing behaviour	Perceived organisational support fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and university teacher knowledge-sharing	Moderate	

							engagem ent.		
Chen & Rong (2023)	China	Quantitati ve	Teachers (HE/mix ed)	Chines e schools and univers ities	Instructio nal leadershi p	Teache r self- efficacy and profess ional engage ment	Collegiali ty moderates the relations hip between instructio nal leadershi p and teacher self- efficacy, strengthe ning professio nal engagem ent.	Mod erate	
Cope et al. (2021)	USA	Mixed methods	Universi ty students	USA univers ity , general educati on	Communi ty- building leadershi p	Sense of commu nity and learnin g engage ment	Academi c sense of communi ty, shaped by institutio nal leadershi p, is positivel y associate d with student engagem ent perceptio ns.	Mod erate	
Culdüz (2024)	Turkey	Conceptu al , book chapter	HE instituti ons broadly	HE , global concept ual scope	Education al leadershi p (broad)	Learnin g experie nce and learner engage ment	Effective educatio nal leadershi p is systemati cally associate d with improve d learner	High	+

							engagement and learning experience quality.		
Durrani & Ozawa (2024)	Multi-country	Systematic review	HE and mixed-education systems	Global HE , COVID-19 emergency context	Crisis and systems leadership	Academic engagement during educational disruption	Decentralised and collaborative leadership models showed stronger outcomes for sustaining academic engagement during COVID-19 disruption.	Moderate	
Eminov (2024)	Unspecified	Doctoral dissertation	Teachers and school community	Not specified , community education context	Value-congruent leadership	Teacher mission - engagement and institutional commitment	Congruence between teacher and school-community values, enabled by leadership, predicts sustained engagement with the educational mission.	High	+
Ghasemy et al. (2021)	Malaysia	Quantitative	Polytechnic faculty	Malaysian polytechnic HE	Leadership capacity , conceptual skills	Community engagement and creative	Conceptual leadership skills are the primary drivers of	Moderate	

						contrib ution	faculty communi ty engagem ent and creative contribution in polytech nic HE.		
Huang (2024)	Taiwan	Autoethn ography	Doctoral students	Taiwan ese doctoral education , virtual CoPs	Virtual communi ty leadership	Doctor al learnin g engage ment and identity formati on	Virtual communi ties of practice, when facilitate d with clear leadership, support doctoral engagem ent, identity formatio n, and academic persisten ce.	Mod erate	
Khan & Md (2024)	Bangla desh	Quantitati ve	HE faculty	Bangla deshi univers ities	Transfor mational leadership	Job perfor mance and profess ional engage ment	Self- efficacy fully mediates the relations hip between transfor mational leadership and faculty job performa nce and engagem ent.	Mod erate	
Meng et al. (2025)	China	Quantitati ve	Doctoral students	Chines e univers ities	Superviso ry and transform ational	Researc h self- efficacy and	Supervis ory support reduces	Mod erate	

					leadership	academic persistence	doctoral procrastination and strengthens research self-efficacy, sustaining long-term academic engagement.		
Ng et al. (2024)	Malaysia	Quantitative	Undergraduate students	Malaysian universities	Proactive and supportive leadership	Academic performance and student engagement	Psychological capital mediates the relationship between supportive leadership and undergraduate academic performance.	Moderate	
Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen (2024)	Vietnam	Quantitative	Undergraduate students	Vietnamese HE, multiple institutions	Civility-oriented leadership	Student academic performance	Lecturer incivility is negatively associated with student academic performance, demonstrating the reverse mechanism of engagement-supportive	Moderate	

							leadership.		
Pangars o et al. (2024)	Indone sia	Quantitati ve	Private HE instituti on staff	Indone sian private tertiary educati on	Strategic and competi tive leadershi p	Institut ional engage ment and sustain ed perfor mance	Leadersh ip alignmen t with organisat ional culture is positivel y associate d with sustained competiti ve engagem ent in private tertiary institutio ns.	Mod erate	
Peterlin et al. (2021)	Sloveni a	Quantitati ve	Manage ment students	Sloveni an HE , busines s school	Multiple intelligen ces-aware leadershi p	Student learnin g engage ment in manag ement educati on	Cultivati ng awarenes s of students' multiple intelligen ces in leadershi p educatio n is positivel y associate d with student learning engagem ent.	Mod erate	
Phillips et al. (2022)	Austra lia	Narrative review	Academi c women in HE	Austral ian HE , gender ed context	Identity- aware and gendered leadershi p	Acade mic identity and profess ional engage ment	Leadersh ip practices shape academic women's professio nal engagem ent and	Mod erate	

							identity; gendered power structure s moderate this relations hip.		
Ramón- Jerónim o et al. (2025)	Spain	Quantitati ve	Universi ty students	Spanish HE , service- learnin g context s	Service- learning and civic leadershi p	Civic engage ment and perceiv ed value creatio n	Universit y service- learning leadershi p is positivel y associate d with student civic engagem ent and perceived social value creation.	Mod erate	
Shaojie (2025)	China	Quantitati ve	Special educatio n major students	Chines e HE , special educati on progra mmes	Professio nal identity and future- orientatio n leadershi p	Learnin g engage ment and academ ic perseve rance	Professio nal identity and future orientatio n mediate the relations hip between leadershi p- supporte d environm ents and sustained student engagem ent.	Mod erate	
Simpson (2020)	UK	Conceptu al/ philosoph ical	The context broadly	UK and global HE, philoso phical	Academic freedom and institutio nal	Acade mic engage ment and	Academi c freedom, protected and	Mod erate	

				analysis	leadership	intellectual autonomy	enabled by institutional leadership, is a foundational condition for authentic and sustained intellectual engagement in HE.		
Siphahioğlu (2025)	USA/Turkey	Conceptual, book chapter	The administrators and students	Global HE, leadership policy context	Effective HE leadership strategies	Student success and institutional engagement	Strategic institutional leadership approaches are associated with enhanced student success and sustained engagement across diverse HE systems.	High	+
Tolstykh et al. (2021)	Russia	Conceptual	University leaders and institutions	Russian and international HE ecosystem perspective	Ecosystem and self-organising leadership	Cross-institutional and community engagement	Universities operating as knowledge-integrating ecosystems under self-organising leadership sustain broader	Moderate	

							academic and community engagement.		
Wheele y et al. (2022)	Austra lia	Quantitati ve	HE students	Austral ian univers ity, leaders hip educati on course	Reflective and critical leadershi p education	Critical thinkin g and engage d learnin g outcom es	Leadersh ip educatio n courses develop reflective academic engagem ent; pedagogi cal design mediates critical- thinking outcomes .	Mod erate	
Yang et al. (2024)	China	Quantitati ve	Master's degree students	Chines e univers ities	Supportiv e mentorin g and superviso ry leadershi p	Innovat ive behavi our (proxy for engage ment)	Supporti ve mentorin g is positivel y associate d with master's students' innovativ e engagem ent, mediated by creative self- efficacy.	Mod erate	
Yuan et al. (2025)	China	Quantitati ve	Universi ty English languag e teachers	Chines e univers ities, EL teacher develo pment	Professio nal learning communi ty and instructio nal leadershi p	Teache r profess ional engage ment, commit ment, and agency	Professio nal learning communi ties and teacher agency jointly promote English	Mod erate	

							language teachers' profession al engagem ent and institutio nal commitm ent.		
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---	--	--

Findings and Discussion

Instructional and Transformational Leadership: Converging Evidence with Contextual Variation

Across the reviewed literature, instructional and transformational leadership practices are consistently associated with conditions conducive to academic engagement in HE. However, the mechanisms and magnitudes vary across institutional contexts and study designs. Chen et al. (2024) found that perceived organisational support mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge-sharing behaviour among Chinese university teachers, a finding that situates engagement as contingent on the institutional structures leaders build rather than on their personal style alone. Yuan et al. (2025), examining English language teachers in Chinese universities, show that instructional leadership builds academic agency through professional learning communities and reflexive practice. Abdelrahman et al. (2022), in a US university leadership preparation context, found that programme policy design moderates the development of academic engagement through structured internship experiences, pointing to the policy dimension of instructional leadership practice.

Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen (2024) reframe the transformational argument by demonstrating that lecturer incivility, the behavioural inverse of transformational practice, is negatively associated with student academic performance in Vietnamese HE. This finding establishes the mechanism from the opposite direction: disengaging leadership produces measurable disengagement outcomes, which is consistent with a causal interpretation but cannot confirm it from a cross-sectional design. Khan and Md (2024), in Bangladeshi universities, report that self-efficacy fully mediates the transformational leadership–performance relationship, positioning psychological empowerment as the pathway rather than leadership as a direct cause. Wheeley et al. (2022), in an Australian university context, found that leadership education courses structured to develop reflective and critical thinking are positively associated with student learning engagement, suggesting that

instructional leadership is a learnable and teachable capacity rather than a fixed attribute.

The evidence in this theme converges on a common pattern: instructional and transformational leadership practices are associated with engagement-enabling conditions, goal clarity, shared vision, and psychological empowerment, rather than directly producing engagement. This distinction matters because it implies that institutional structures mediating between leader behaviour and staff or student experience are as consequential as the behaviour itself. Methodologically, all studies in this theme rely on correlational or cross-sectional designs; directionality and causal attribution remain open questions that longitudinal or experimental research would need to address.

Distributed and Servant Leadership: Motivation and Cultural Variation

Distributed and servant leadership practices are associated with academic engagement through motivational and structural pathways that operate differently across regional and cultural contexts. Ahmad et al. (2023), in a study of HE faculty in Pakistani universities, found that servant and organisational-learning leadership are positively associated with institutional commitment when faculty perceive the organisation as a learning-oriented environment, positioning engagement as dependent on the relational and cultural conditions leaders sustain. Pangarso et al. (2024), examining private HE institutions in Indonesia, report that leadership alignment with organisational culture is associated with sustained competitive engagement, pointing to the structural dimension of distributed practice. Ghasemy et al. (2021), in Malaysian polytechnics, found that leadership conceptual skills, the ability to think systemically about community needs, are the primary drivers of faculty community engagement and creative contribution, suggesting that participatory leadership effects depend partly on the intellectual resources leaders bring to shared governance.

The cultural dimension of these findings requires particular scrutiny. The evidence base for servant and distributed leadership is concentrated in Asian and African HE contexts, where collectivist values and community-oriented institutional cultures may make shared-authority approaches more legible and motivationally effective than they are in European or North American HE systems, where hierarchical authority norms are differently embedded. Pangarso et al.'s (2024) finding on cultural alignment and Ahmad et al.'s (2023) finding on learning organisation culture both emerge from settings in which relational and communal leadership values are institutionally normalised. The limited evidence from European HE, Peterlin et al. (2021) in Slovenia, Wheeley et al. (2022) in Australia,

and Simpson (2020) in the UK, suggests that distributed leadership in these contexts may operate through different mechanisms, and that servant-leadership prescriptions developed in Asian and African settings cannot be assumed to transfer without contextual adaptation.

This evidence supports the conclusion that distributed and servant leadership practices are associated with motivational and participatory conditions that sustain engagement, but that the strength and mechanism of these associations are moderated by the cultural and institutional context in which they operate. Studies whose risk of bias was rated high under MMAT, particularly Eminov (2024) and Culduz (2024), which were retained as conceptual sources, are treated here as illustrative of theoretical propositions rather than as confirmatory evidence of empirical effects.

Professional Learning Communities and Collegiality

Professional learning communities and collegial structures are associated with academic engagement by creating formalised spaces for collaboration, shared inquiry, and collective accountability. Yuan et al. (2025), studying English language teachers in Chinese universities, found that PLCs and teacher agency jointly predict professional engagement and institutional commitment through structured collective inquiry processes, underscoring the institutional rather than incidental quality of PLC-supported engagement. Cope et al. (2021), in a US university general education context, show that academic sense of community, the perception that one belongs to and is valued by a learning collective, is positively associated with students' perceptions of engagement, extending the PLC effect from staff to students. Tolstykh et al. (2021), examining Russian universities through an ecosystem perspective, argue that knowledge-integrating institutions can sustain cross-institutional engagement even in resource-constrained contexts, pointing to the structural and systemic conditions that enable collegial engagement beyond single-institution boundaries.

Huang's (2024) autoethnographic account of doctoral learning in Taiwanese virtual communities of practice extends the collegial engagement argument to digital and geographically distributed settings. When virtual communities are led with clear facilitation and structured inquiry expectations, doctoral students report stronger engagement, identity formation, and academic persistence, findings that are directly relevant to HE institutions managing dispersed postgraduate cohorts. The evidence from this theme is internally consistent across national contexts, study designs, and participant populations: collegial and communal structures, when

deliberately led and institutionally supported, create conditions for sustained academic engagement that individual leaders' charisma cannot replicate.

The practical implication is clear: investing in PLC infrastructure, whether through formal professional development, community-of-practice facilitation, or virtual collaboration platforms, is a tractable institutional strategy for sustaining engagement that does not depend on the presence of an exceptionally charismatic individual leader. The correlational nature of most studies in this theme means that directionality remains open: institutions with stronger collegial cultures may attract and retain leaders who sustain those cultures, rather than collegial leadership creating the culture unidirectionally.

Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Safety

Emotionally intelligent leadership is consistently associated with academic engagement through its effects on psychological safety, self-efficacy, and academic perseverance. Ng et al. (2024), in a study of undergraduates in Malaysian universities, found that psychological capital, comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, fully mediates the relationship between proactive and supportive leadership and academic performance. This finding positions emotionally intelligent leadership not as a personal trait of leaders but as a structural producer of the psychological conditions in which students can engage persistently with demanding academic work. Yang et al. (2024), examining master's students in Chinese universities, show that supportive mentoring is positively associated with innovative academic behaviour through its effects on creative self-efficacy, thereby confirming that supervisors' affective attentiveness shapes the quality of student engagement at the postgraduate level.

Meng et al. (2025), in a study of doctoral students in China, provide further evidence: supervisory support is negatively associated with academic procrastination and positively associated with research self-efficacy, suggesting that emotionally attuned supervisory leadership addresses the motivational obstacles that disrupt doctoral engagement. Khan and Md (2024), studying HE faculty in Bangladesh, found that self-efficacy mediates the transformational leadership–performance relationship, pointing to the same psychological mechanism in a staff rather than student population. Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen (2024) extend the argument in the opposite direction: lecturer incivility, the failure of emotional intelligence in a leadership role, is negatively associated with student academic performance, confirming that the emotional climate leaders create has measurable consequences for engagement outcomes.

The evidence across this theme converges around a common mechanism: when leaders create institutional conditions characterised by psychological safety, emotional attentiveness, and constructive challenge, staff and students are more likely to engage persistently with cognitively demanding academic work. All studies in this theme are correlational and cannot establish that emotionally intelligent leadership causes engagement; they establish association and, in several cases, identify mediating pathways that make the mechanism theoretically intelligible. Future research using longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs would be needed to support stronger causal inference.

Organisational Justice and Institutional Support

Organisational justice, the perception of fair, consistent, and transparent institutional treatment, is associated with higher levels of academic engagement and institutional citizenship behaviour across the reviewed evidence. Shaojie (2025), in a study of special education major students in Chinese universities, found that professional identity and future orientation mediate the relationship between leadership-supported learning environments and sustained student engagement, pointing to how fairness in recognising and affirming students' professional trajectories produces downstream engagement effects. Ghasemy et al. (2021), in Malaysian polytechnics, report that faculty who perceive their institutional environment as supportive of community-engaged work show higher levels of knowledge exchange and creative contribution, linking distributive fairness in resource allocation to engagement quality. Pangarso et al. (2024), examining Indonesian private HE, found that leadership alignment with organisational culture, a form of procedural consistency, is associated with sustained engagement, suggesting that the perceived fairness of institutional processes is as important as the outcomes those processes produce.

Simpson (2020), in a philosophical analysis of academic freedom in UK HE, argues that academic freedom, the condition of operating without arbitrary institutional constraint, is a foundational requirement for authentic intellectual engagement. Leadership that protects this condition, on this account, is leadership that creates the justice dimension engagement requires. Eminov (2024), retained as a conceptual source with a high risk-of-bias rating, argues that value congruence between institutional leaders and the educational community constitutes a form of interactional justice that sustains long-term engagement with the educational mission.

The distinction between structural fairness (transparent policies, equitable resource allocation) and relational fairness (how leaders communicate decisions and

recognise individuals) is consequential here. The reviewed evidence does not clearly separate these dimensions. Still, the pattern across studies, spanning student identity, faculty community engagement, institutional culture alignment, and academic freedom, suggests that the combination of procedural and relational justice most reliably sustains engagement. This finding aligns with broader organisational justice theory and warrants further investigation in HE-specific longitudinal designs.

Institutional Culture and Contextual Sensitivity

The most consistent cross-cutting finding in the reviewed literature is that leadership practices are most effective when they are embedded in and responsive to the specific cultural, institutional, and historical context in which they operate. Belamghari's (2024) longitudinal study of Moroccan university students demonstrates that institutional support for collegiate extracurricular clubs predicts student engagement and psychosocial development, a finding culturally embedded in the specific meaning club membership carries in Moroccan HE. Boymal et al. (2024), examining post-pandemic Australian HE, argue that wellbeing-centred leadership became effective because it responded to the specific psychological disruption of a defined historical moment; generalising this model to stable post-pandemic contexts would require careful contextual recalibration. Pangarso et al. (2024), in the Indonesian private HE sector, show that leadership effectiveness is associated with how closely it aligns with existing organisational culture, a result that resists universal prescription.

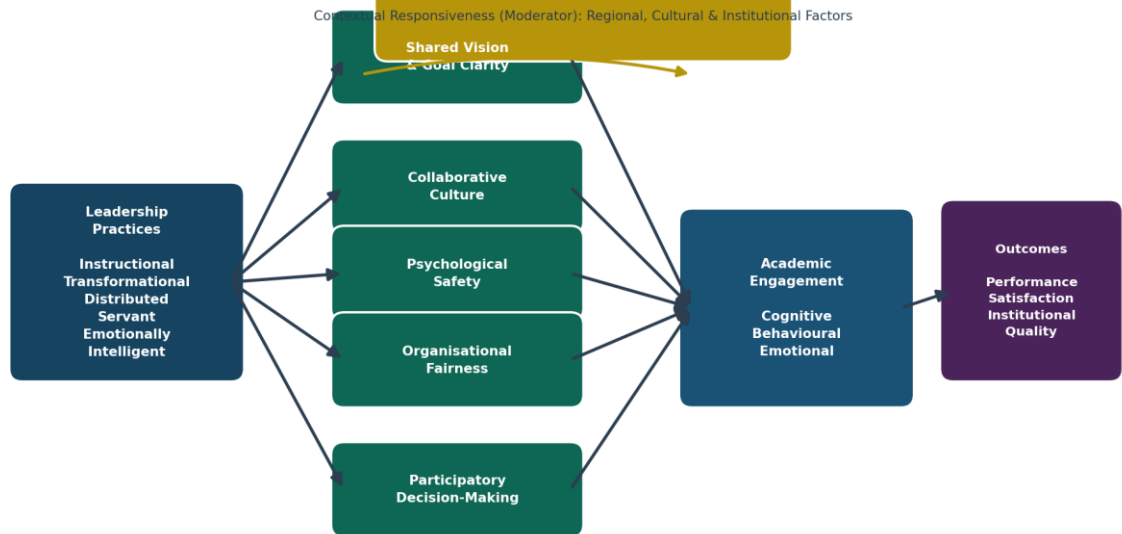
Durrani and Ozawa's (2024) systematic review of educational leadership during the COVID-19 emergency found that decentralised and collaborative leadership models showed stronger engagement-sustaining outcomes than centralised approaches during the crisis period. This finding is context-specific to emergency conditions and may not generalise to ordinary institutional life. Phillips et al. (2022), whose narrative review examined academic women's professional engagement and identity in Australian HE, add an intersectional dimension: leadership practices that support professional identity formation are experienced differently across gender lines, and what counts as affirming or excluding leadership behaviour is culturally and socially located. Peterlin et al. (2021), working in a Slovenian business school, demonstrate that pedagogical leadership responsive to students' multiple intelligences is associated with stronger engagement. This context-specific curricular finding cannot be assumed to transfer across disciplines or institutional types.

These findings collectively challenge the universalising tendency in much leadership research, which often recommends instructional or transformational models as globally applicable. The evidence reviewed here suggests instead that institutional culture, regional norms, resource availability, and the demographic composition of the academic community moderate the effectiveness of any leadership practice. This conclusion has direct implications for leadership development: programmes that transplant leadership models across cultural boundaries without adaptation are unlikely to produce consistent engagement outcomes. Contextually calibrated, locally grounded development, informed by systematic evidence but adapted to institutional specifics, is the more defensible prescription the evidence supports.

Study Contribution

Figure 6 proposes a conceptual model of how leadership practices are associated with academic engagement in higher education. The model identifies five intermediate conditions through which leadership shapes engagement: shared vision and goal clarity, collaborative culture, psychological safety, organisational fairness, and participatory decision-making. Contextual and cultural responsiveness operates as a moderating factor that regulates the strength of each condition across regional and institutional settings, corresponding to the sixth thematic category identified in the review. In the model, academic engagement is linked to positive outcomes, including student performance, staff satisfaction, and institutional quality. It is important to note that the model represents associations identified in the reviewed literature rather than causal pathways. The systematic literature review design does not permit causal inference, and the directional arrows in Figure 6 should be understood as hypothesised relationships that require longitudinal or experimental investigation to confirm.

Figure 6: Leadership Practices and Academic Engagement — Conceptual Model



Note: Directional arrows represent hypothesised associations; causal relationships cannot be inferred from the cross-sectional evidence base.

Source: Author (2025). Arrows represent hypothesised associations; the review design does not support causal inference.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review, drawing on 28 peer-reviewed and related sources published between 2020 and 2025, found that leadership practices are consistently associated with conditions conducive to academic engagement in higher education. Instructional and transformational leadership practices are linked to engagement through a shared vision and clear goals. Servant and distributed leadership are associated with participatory decision-making and enhanced motivation. Professional learning communities and collegial structures provide the infrastructural conditions for collaborative engagement. Emotionally intelligent and organisationally just leadership creates the perceptions of psychological safety and fairness that sustain longer-term academic investment.

These findings hold across diverse regional contexts, though the evidence base is concentrated in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Most included studies carried a moderate risk of methodological bias. Causal claims are not warranted by the available evidence: the review establishes what leadership practices are associated with higher engagement, not that they cause it.

Recommendations

Higher education institutions should invest in leadership development programmes that integrate instructional capability, emotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, and participatory practice. Leaders should create and sustain

professional learning communities as structural mechanisms for engagement rather than relying on individual leader charisma. Fair, transparent, and consistent institutional policies should be designed to complement relational leadership behaviours. Leadership development must be contextually calibrated: universal models borrowed from other regional or sectoral contexts are unlikely to produce consistent engagement outcomes without adaptation.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The methodological limitations of this review, covering the two-database search, English-language restriction, single-reviewer screening, open-access coverage, absence of PROSPERO pre-registration, and inclusion of non-journal conceptual sources, are addressed in detail in Section 9 of the Methodology. Three substantive limitations of scope deserve additional comment here. First, the evidence base is geographically concentrated in Asia, Africa, and Australia, with minimal representation from the Middle East, Latin America, and North America; the degree to which findings generalise across these under-represented regions remains an open question. Second, the review cannot establish causal relationships between leadership practices and engagement outcomes: the cross-sectional designs that dominate the included literature establish association and identify plausible mediating pathways, but directionality requires longitudinal or experimental investigation. Third, the operationalisation of academic engagement varies substantially across included studies, from student performance scores and staff job satisfaction to knowledge-sharing behaviour and innovative output; this heterogeneity means that findings across the six themes are not strictly comparable. Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal designs, greater regional diversification of study contexts, and the adoption of a common multi-dimensional engagement measure across studies to enable more rigorous cross-study synthesis.

REFERENCES

- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). Improving organisational effectiveness through transformational leadership. SAGE.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.
- Abdelrahman, N., Irby, B. J., Lara-Alecio, R., & Tong, F. (2022). The influence of university principal preparation program policies on the program internship. *SAGE Open*, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221117110>
- Abubakar, U., Ogunlade, O. O., & Ibrahim, H. A. (2024). The influence of technology-integrated curriculum resources on student engagement and academic

- achievement in higher education. *Advances in Mobile Learning Educational Research*, 4(2), 1208–1223. <https://doi.org/10.25082/amler.2024.02.014>
- Ahmad, W., Azam, T., Arshad, M., Ahmed, B., & Zaman, H. M. F. (2023). Faculty members' perception of learning organisation: A case of higher education institutions. *SAGE Open*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231154409>
- Amzat, I. H., Yanti, P. G., & Suswandari, S. (2022). Estimating the effect of principal instructional and distributed leadership on professional development of teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia. *SAGE Open*, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221109585>
- Anwar, R. H., Zaki, S., Memon, N., & Thurasamy, R. (2021). Exploring the interplay of trait emotional intelligence and ESL teacher effectiveness: Is self-efficacy the mechanism linking them? *SAGE Open*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211061378>
- Belamghari, M. (2024). Empowering Moroccan university students through extracurricular involvement in collegiate clubs: A longitudinal study. *Emerging Adulthood*, 12(6), 1164–1175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968241279493>
- Belay, S., Melese, S., & Seifu, A. (2022). Elevating teachers' professional capital: Effects of teachers' engagement in professional learning and job satisfaction. *SAGE Open*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221094592>
- Boymal, J., Sterling, S., Williamson, C., Zhou, Y., & Lynch, P. (2024). Individual wellbeing practices for a post-pandemic university. In *Supporting and Promoting Wellbeing in the Higher Education Sector* (pp. 96-111). Routledge.
- Chen, L., Chang, Y.-C., & Tian, Q. (2024). The mediating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge sharing behavior of university teachers. *SAGE Open*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241307756>
- Chen, S., & Rong, J. (2023). The moderating role of teacher collegiality in the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher self-efficacy. *SAGE Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231217884>
- Conner, J., Holquist, S. E., Mitra, D. L., & Boat, A. (2025). Measuring student voice practices: Development and validation of school- and classroom-scales. *AERA Open*, 11, 23328584251326893.
- Cope, M. R., Muirbrook, K. M., Jackson, J. E., Park, P. N., Ward, C., Child, C., & Jarvis, J. A. (2021). Experiences with general education: How sense of community shapes students' perceptions. *SAGE Open*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211050399>
- Culduz, M. (2024). The impact of educational leadership on improving the learning experience. In *Promoting Crisis Management and Creative Problem-Solving Skills in Educational Leadership* (pp. 168-189). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-8332-9.ch008>

- Durrani, N., & Ozawa, V. (2024). Education in emergencies: Mapping the global education research landscape in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. *SAGE Open*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241233402>
- Eminov, N. (2024). The congruence of the values of teachers and the school community in the implementation of the youth education mission [Unpublished doctoral dissertation].
- Ghasemy, M., Mohajer, L., Frömbing, L., & Karimi, M. (2021). Faculty members in polytechnics to serve the community and industry. *SAGE Open*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211047568>
- Gläser-Zikuda, M., Hagenauer, G., & Stephan, M. (2020). The potential of qualitative content analysis for empirical educational research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 21(1), 20.
- Hoang Nguyen Tran, Q. (2024). Impact of Michigan leadership behaviors on organizational citizenship behaviors in Vietnamese primary schools. *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241259017>
- Hong, Q. N., Pluye, P., Fàbregues, S., Bartlett, G., Boardman, F., Cargo, M., & Vedel, I. (2018). Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), version 2018. Registration of Copyright (#1148552). Industry Canada.
- Huang, H. C. (2024). Enhancing doctoral learning through virtual communities of practice: An autoethnographic perspective. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1347052.
- Kaya, K., Erdogan, O., Yesil, Y., & Sezgin, F. (2024). The roles of collective teacher efficacy and commitment in distributed leadership. *SAGE Open*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241271136>
- Kettle, M., Heimans, S., & Dargusch, J. (2025). Principal leadership as a situated ecology of practices. In *Sharing Leadership Stories in Rural Education* (p. 51). Springer.
- Khan, F. A., & Md, S. (2024). Self-efficacy as a catalyst: The link between transformational leadership and job performance. *Review of Professional Management*, 22(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09728686241286572>
- Lattke, L. S., De Lorenzo, A., Settanni, M., & Rabaglietti, E. (2025). PE-Iv (Panorama Education-Italian version): Adaptation/validation of 5 scales. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1541416.
- Makirimani, R., & Naicker, S. R. (2024). The potential for servant leadership to raise teacher morale in primary schools: Perspectives from South Africa. *SAGE Open*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241296634>
- Meng, F., Zhao, Y., & Zang, Z. (2025). Academic procrastination among doctoral students in China: The role of supervisory support. *SAGE Open*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251330221>
- Ng, L.-P., Choong, Y.-O., Kuar, L.-S., & Teoh, S.-Y. (2024). Proactive personality and academic performance among undergraduate students. *SAGE Open*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241282185>

- Nguyen-Viet, B., & Nguyen, P. M. (2024). The impact of lecturer incivility on student academic performance in Vietnamese higher education. *SAGE Open*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241309713>
- Odom, D. (2024). In it and of it: A Black principal's self-examination of anti-Blackness and critical leadership praxis [Doctoral dissertation, Eastern Michigan University].
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- Pangarso, A., Astuti, E. S., Raharjo, K., & Afrianty, T. W. (2024). Enhancing sustained competitive advantage in Indonesian non-vocation private tertiary education institutions. *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241256316>
- Peterlin, J., Dimovski, V., Mesko, M., & Roblek, V. (2021). Cultivating management education based on students' multiple intelligences. *SAGE Open*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020988277>
- Phillips, M. J., Dzidic, P. L., & Castell, E. L. (2022). Exploring and critiquing women's academic identity in higher education: A narrative review. *SAGE Open*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221096145>
- Ramón-Jerónimo, M. A., Vazquez-Carrasco, R., Olavarria-Jaraba, A., & Grott, E. (2025). The university as a means for value creation: Service-learning for service orientation. *SAGE Open*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241311704>
- Shaojie, T. (2025). Evaluating the role of professional identity and future orientation in enhancing learning engagement. *SAGE Open*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241285766>
- Shie, E.-H., & Chang, S.-H. (2022). Perceived principal's authentic leadership impact on organizational citizenship behavior and well-being of teachers. *SAGE Open*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221095003>
- Simpson, R. M. (2020). The relation between academic freedom and free speech. *Ethics*, 130(3), 287-319.
- Siphahioglu, M. (2025). Effective leadership strategies for enhancing student success in higher education. In *Navigating Leadership and Policy Management in Education* (pp. 169-202). IGI Global.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333-339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>
- Sohrabi, C., Franchi, T., Mathew, G., Kerwan, A., Nicola, M., Griffin, M., & Agha, R. (2021). PRISMA 2020 statement: What is new, and what is the importance of reporting guidelines? *International Journal of Surgery*, 88, 105918. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2021.105918>

- Tolstykh, T., Gamidullaeva, L., & Shmeleva, N. (2021). Universities as knowledge integrators and cross-industry ecosystems. *SAGE Open*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020988704>
- Wheeley, E., Klieve, H., & Clark, L. (2022). Developing reflection and critical thinking in a leadership education course. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(12), 2575-2589.
- Yang, P., Gao, Y., & Li, X. (2024). The effect of supportive mentoring style on innovative behaviour of master's degree students. *SAGE Open*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241233049>
- Yuan, F., Li, J., & Mao, Y. (2025). Exploring developmental trajectories for English language teachers: Evidence from PLCs in Chinese universities. *SAGE Open*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251320058>.