Navigating Neoliberal Waters: Building Capacities and Skills for Effective Instructional Leadership in Higher Education

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Abstract

In the current era, leadership in higher education faces unprecedented challenges as a result of neoliberalism's influence. To effectively provide instructional leadership, higher education leaders and administrators need to acquire new skills and strategies. The issues of inadequate funding, increased workload, massification, and marketization in universities necessitate skillful navigation to uphold educational quality. This integrated literature review examines the impact of neoliberalism on teaching and learning and explores the specific skills and capacities required by university leaders to deliver effective instructional leadership. Through a comprehensive review, we shed light on the essential leadership skills necessary within the context of neoliberalism. By addressing these challenges head-on, leaders can navigate the neoliberal waters and build the capacities needed for successful instructional leadership in higher education.

Keywords: ethical leadership, ethics, higher education, doctoral supervision, well-being, Canadian universities.

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of post-secondary education, the appointment of leaders worldwide often overlooks the importance of their academic background and instead prioritizes other criteria (Kri et al., 2021). Consequently, this practice has resulted in the appointment of numerous inexperienced leaders who lack the qualifications necessary to effectively lead higher education institutions (HEIs) around the globe. However, it is essential to recognize that leadership is a skill that can be acquired (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Therefore, a research paper addressing the concept of instructional leadership and the requisite skills and capacities needed to provide exceptional leadership in the neoliberal era of education is both timely and relevant.

The 21st century presents an array of challenges for leaders in post-secondary institutions. These challenges encompass the complexities of striving to become a top-ranked university, grappling with political issues, navigating the influences of neoliberalism, managing issues related to massification, securing competitive funding, addressing student fees, attracting international students, handling labor concerns, maintaining financial autonomy, upholding instructional leadership, responding to pandemics, adapting to international, state, or regional movement restrictions, and embracing technological advancements (Elrehail et al., 2018; Genty, 2014; Kember et al., 2019; Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Marginson, 2013). These challenges are just a few of the multifaceted issues confronting leaders in higher education institutions worldwide.

This integrated literature review systematically explores various aspects of leadership, including instructional leadership, and examines the challenges posed by factors such as neoliberalism, massification, globalization, and labor issues. Furthermore, it elucidates the essential skills required by leaders to effectively navigate and mitigate the challenges associated with higher education leadership in the neoliberal era. By developing the capacities and skills

necessary to thrive amidst the intricacies of neoliberalism, leaders can successfully provide effective instructional leadership in the ever-evolving landscape of higher education. Consequently, the subsequent section delves into the concept of leadership.

Overview of Leadership

Effective leadership goes beyond holding a position or bearing a title. To be considered a true leader, one must have followers. A leader cannot operate in isolation; instead, they must cultivate strong relationships with people and possess the ability to organize individuals to accomplish tasks and achieve organizational goals. While classroom teaching is recognized as the primary factor influencing learner and school outcomes, leadership assumes a crucial role as the second most essential factor (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2007).

In the present context, the leadership challenges faced by higher education institutions call for a pragmatic leader who is well-informed about the prevailing conditions and adept at navigating the complexities of the neoliberalism era. Such a leader must possess the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively lead higher education institutions in this changing landscape.

It is important to note that a person in the position of leadership is not necessarily the wisest or the most knowledgeable, but they must know how to harness the potential in the team to achieve the general goal (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Ramsden, 2003). A leader is not just one that inherited leadership from ancestral roots or one appointed by the government to a political position. In the introductory section of Ramsden's *Learning to Lead in Higher Institutions*, he attempted to delineate a leader in the higher education systems, not just the vice-chancellors, deans, heads of department, directors, and others that retain a position of title, but also colleagues who support, manage, develop and inspire other colleagues to achieve institutional goals (Ramsden, 2003). Thus, leadership is not reserved only for those with formal positions with titles in higher education

although the bulk of the responsibilities are on them, but leadership trickles from the vice chancellor to the least casual worker (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Ramsden, 2003). Each person exercises leadership at various levels. Hence, leadership is how people relate with each other (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Ramsden, 2003).

The challenge of leadership is how leaders can get extraordinary things accomplished by mobilizing resources, especially people (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Ramsden, 2003). This is about the lifestyle and examples leaders show to their followers. Several scholars have written on the five exemplary leadership practices that enhance the performance of leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2022; Ramsden, 2003). These five exemplary leadership practices are not exclusive to leaders in higher education but incorporate leaders in every work of life (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The five exemplary leadership practices are as follows (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, 2019):

1. **Challenge the Process:** Until there is a change in the method of achieving a result, the outcome will remain the same all the time. Challenges stimulate innovation and opportunities. To make a positive difference, leaders must challenge the status quo, seek for opportunities, innovate, and mobilize resources to improve conditions.

2. **Model the Way:** Behavior is what earns leaders respect among their peers. Political associates, traditionally, positions of authority and titles can be granted but the life leaders live is what people venerate to follow or detest to jettison. Leaders model the attributes they anticipate from others. To effectively model the way, leaders are expected to have a guiding principle and have clear core values others can follow. A clear description of a leader's core values and principles will stimulate sharing them with others both vocally and in action. Thus, "exemplary leaders walk the talk" (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

3. **Inspire a Shared Vision:** Visionary leadership is required to effectively lead an institution to an enviable height. It is required for leaders to see a picture of the future they desire for their organization which helps them to work towards a goal and until they actualize it, they will not give up. Because leaders are not loners, they need to share this vision with their followers in a convincing way so that they will own the vision and work towards actualizing it like the leader. Communicating the vision in a clear manner to followers by the leader is essential to get everyone on board with the organization's goal and thus get inspired to work towards actualizing the shared vision.

4. **Enable Others to Act:** What leaders do to enable others to act involves building a team and allowing team members to bring in their expertise in achieving the organizational goal. Model leaders perform their functions as a team, and allow team members to express their ideas and imaginations to achieve the team's goal. To effectively achieve greater success by the team, the leader encourages collaboration among the team members instead of working alone or acting as a boss to suppress the ideas of others.

5. **Encourage the Heart:** Motivation, reward, and encouragement are what leaders do to encourage the heart of their workers. Appreciation, awards, and recognition for exceptional performance by team members encourage the heart to do more. Appreciating innovative and hardworking staff stimulates the desire to work harder. Encouraging the heart brings about healthy competition in the workplace to be more innovative in service delivery by workers.

The outlined practices of leaders (challenge the process, model the way, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) are the secrets to successful leadership in any organization and institution when they are effectively applied by leaders (Elrehail et al., 2018;

Kouzes & Posner, 2012, 2019; Ramsden, 2003). These practices help leaders to manage the people working under them and for followers not to see them as tyrants or destructive leaders. The contemporary challenges confronting the leadership of postsecondary institutions necessitate the application of these practices to form a formidable team to be innovative in troubleshooting and staying on top in instructional leadership.

One of the major goals of this integrative literature review is to explore how the field of leadership is impacted by the evolving challenges facing post-secondary institutions and the skills required by leaders to adapt to the challenges and stay afloat. Nowadays, the leadership field does not just pay attention to the individual leader but also devotes attention to supervisors, followers, work setting/context, peers, and culture, including all individuals in the organization which represents diversity (Avolio, 2007; Yukl, 2006). Different leaders utilize different leadership styles depending on the situation in leading organizations. Several leadership styles are documented in the literature (Avolio, 2007; Avolio et al., 2009; Barnes, 2015; Genty, 2014; Mohammed & Hankebo, 2019; Nathan et al., 2019; Northouse, 2022; Shaked, 2021). This integrated literature review concentrates on leadership skills required by leaders in the emerging challenges facing post-secondary education globally to provide effective instructional leadership.

The Concept of Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership can be defined as a leadership approach in educational institutions whereby school leaders exhibit ongoing and deep participation in curriculum and instruction issues, and get involved in several activities targeted at enhancing teaching and learning in schools (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Neumerski et al., 2018; Shaked, 2021). Instructional leadership is effective when leaders in educational institutions become intensely involved in improving teaching and learning (Mohammed & Hankebo, 2019; Shaked, 2021). Extensive research has found

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instructional leadership to be useful in primary and secondary school settings, however, there is insufficient studies on its effectiveness in post-secondary education (Mohammed & Hankebo, 2019; Shaked, 2021; Smith et al., 2017). Thus, the provision of a conducive environment for teaching and learning, as well as regular review of the curriculum to fit into the current social demands for graduates of post-secondary institutions is a major consideration for instructional leadership (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Neumerski et al., 2018; Shaked, 2021). Instructional leadership expects educational leaders to concentrate their energy on enhancing the academic performance of students more than other areas of management (Rigby, 2014; Shaked, 2021).

The concept of instructional leadership has been discussed in literature extensively with many of the definitions, research, and discussions centering on the secondary school system (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Brolund, 2016; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Rigby, 2014; Robinson, 2007; Shaked, 2021). This review synthesizes these discussions to situate the review of instructional leadership concepts in post-secondary institutions. Instructional leadership in the post-secondary institution is a type of educational leadership in which the leaders collaboratively work with instructors and administrators to provide guidance and support in instituting best instructional practices with the ultimate aim of improvement in teaching and learning (Brolund, 2016). An instructional leader in a post-secondary institution is expected to possess a high level of accountability to instructors, students, parents, and the institutional community (Brolund, 2016). The leader must communicate the clear goals related to teaching and learning in the institution to the followers to actualize them. A post-secondary institution leader who is modeling instructional leadership could utilize various leadership theories (Genty, 2014; Northouse, 2022; Smith et al., 2017) depending on the situation in the institution. It is well-recognized that an experienced leader will employ a variety of leadership styles that will utilize several models of leadership (Brolund,

2016; Northouse, 2022; Robinson et al., 2007). Instructional leadership is known to provide the platform for setting and communicating clear goals and vision for instructors and learners and assisting instructors through training, professional development, and mentoring (Brolund, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008; Shaked, 2021). It can result in positive outcomes in teaching and learning, but there are many challenges contending against effective instructional leadership in post-secondary institutions in recent times (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Brolund, 2016; Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Robinson et al., 2008; Scott, 2021; Scott & Scott, 2012).

Challenges to Instructional Leadership in Post-Secondary Institutions

Several challenges confronting instructional leaders in post-secondary institutions are discussed in this section. Starting with the neoliberalism of education, massification, marketization, internationalization and globalization, poor funding, tension/strikes, pandemic, technological challenges among others.

Neoliberalism

It is widely acknowledged that neoliberalism is a fairly topical economic and political scheme (Jeffrey, 2017). Harvey (2005) gives a precise description of neoliberalism as a political-economic practice ideology in which the well-being of humans is assumed to be best promoted by privatizing the public facilities owned by the government to individual capitalists. Neoliberalism promotes an institutionalized framework for entrepreneurial skills and freedom characterized by rights to own private properties, free market, and trade (Harvey, 2005; Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Zepke, 2017). The State performs the function of creating and preserving an institutionalized framework for such economic practices (Harvey, 2005). The State makes monetary policies that will provide assurance of maintaining the integrity and quality of money and set up security and legal structures to guarantee the security of property and rights (Harvey, 2005). The State also

provides a functional market but the state involvement in the market must be minimized because neoliberalism theory posits that the state does not possess sufficient information to predict prices because the entrepreneur and capitalist will target to invest to make maximum profit (Marginson, 2013). Neoliberalism theory aims to reduce government expenditure on public facilities of the State such as healthcare, water, education, social security, and environmental pollution among others (Harvey, 2005; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). The state only provides these services if a market does not exist for them (Harvey, 2005).

Today, neoliberalism is the prevailing economic policy in operation in many higher institutions in the world. This has greatly affected government funding of post-secondary institutions, thus transforming these institutions into capitalistic ventures (Gupta et al., 2016; Kapoor, 2005; Donskis et al., 2019; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Zepke, 2017). Education is no longer available to everybody, rather, only to those that can afford it. It is commonly said by those impacted by this economic policy in education that "if education is costly, try ignorance". Tuition fees have increased beyond the capacity of the common man in many countries. Facilities for teaching and learning are poorly funded by the governments, especially in developing countries and there is an increase in tuition and cost of housing in schools among other things affecting teaching and learning (Kapoor, 2005).

Massification

Possessing a qualification from an HEIs is regarded as a means to social mobility, that of, living a better life, developing skills, increasing the employability capacity, and developing better business ideas and networking (Gumport et al., 1997; Mok & Jiang, 2018; Noui, 2020; Selyutin et al., 2017). This has drastically increased the number of persons attending HEIs around the world. The government of different countries has made higher education available to everyone (although

this largely depends on whether or not they or their family can afford the education costs), and thus, there is a massive number of persons entering HEIs and a considerable proliferation of HEIs to meet the need of this demand (Gumport et al., 1997). Massification has consequences in that the workload of instructors has increased; instructors now have more people to teach, more scripts to mark, and more assessments to design, as well as more students to supervise for research, which could hamper the quality of education (Mok & Jiang, 2018; Noui, 2020; Selyutin et al., 2017). Instructional leaders must provide support to instructors and students through diverse means such as supervision, training and capacity building, and facilities to meet the demand of an increased number of students all with the aim of ensuring quality teaching and learning (Brolund, 2016; Shaked, 2021). To provide sufficient support, there is a need to fund training and resources for teaching and learning. However, funding is another big challenge confronting instructional leaders in providing excellent leadership in post-secondary institutions globally.

Poor Funding

Another dimension of the neoliberal economic policy has been the decline of funding of post-secondary institutions globally (Marginson, 2013; Donskis et al., 2019; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). To provide facilities for effective teaching and learning in post-secondary institutions which is the main goal of instructional leadership, funding is needed (Shaked, 2021). Conducting cutting-edge research which forms the basis of evidenced-based teaching and learning demands funding. The government of many countries have considerably reduced funding of post-secondary institutions which invariably affects the teaching and learning in higher education institutions (HEI). One example of such was a report in Canada where there is a drastic reduction in the government funding of the operating cost of universities from approximately 81% in 1985 to 50% in 2015 (Ross et al., 2020). Poor funding has produced many negative outcomes in HEI which

included: HEIs operating like profit oriented organisations (Drori, 2018; Marginson, 2013; Donskis et al., 2019), increased tuition fees for both local and international students, aggressive marketing and recruitment of international students to generate more revenues (Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Marginson, 2013; Scott, 2021), conflicts and strikes among HEI workers (Oyewunmi et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2020; Ukeje et al., 2015), more administrators with lower number of instructors, thus more responsibilities for tutors with lesser remuneration (Ross et al., 2020), the increase of the consumer mentality among students/learners, rise in class sizes and questionably diminishing instructive quality (massification), the increased expectation of academic to hunt for external research funding, intense upsurge in contract academic faculty (Jeffrey, 2017; Robinson et al., 2008; Donskis et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2020; Zepke, 2017). Instructional leaders, therefore, require the requisite skill of rebranding, marketing, and innovation to attract and generate funding for the HEIs effective teaching and learning.

Marketization

Neoliberal economic policies gave rise to HEIs around the world devising different methodologies to attract international students to their HEIs to generate funds for the running of the institutions as part of the privatizing of public institutions (Jeffrey, 2017; Gupta et al., 2016; Hurt, 2012; Donskis et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2020; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Zepke, 2017). This posed a challenge to the instructional leader who wants to satisfy the customer as well as maintain quality of education through standard curricula which is not at the detects of the consumer (student). Marketization gave rise to proliferation of private HEIs which are highly profitable capitalist organizations (Marginson, 2013; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016).

The core tenets of HEIs which promote critical inquiry and analysis has experienced a paradigm shifts to acting as a service industry that seeks to please the desires of the student

("customer") as a result of marketization (Hurt, 2012; Macheridis et al., 2020). Tutors are hired on a sessional basis with a meager salary and higher workload to conserve resources. These tutors are also expected to satisfy the "customers" to ensure they continue to patronize the business. The instructional leader needs the requisite skills to balance the pressure posed by the marketization of HEIs. These pressures result in tension and conflict among employees and employers.

Tension and Conflict in HEIs

Neoliberalism and poor funding of HEIs have resulted in labour conflicts and strikes in HEIs all over the world. A case study of Nigeria in 2020 resulted in a 9-months strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities which is an umbrella body of all lecturers in public Universities in Nigeria (Akinpelu, 2020). The strike action resulted from several unfulfilled government agreements, poor funding of universities, poor teaching and learning environment as a result of poor funding, and government interference with the university autonomy, among others. The strike paralyzed the academic activity of all public universities in Nigeria, keeping students at home; several of the students were engaged in various non-academic pursuits (Akinpelu, 2020; Ogugua, 2020). Prior to the strike, many of these students had completed the learning component of the courses for the semester, however, they were yet to write their final examination for the semester which invariably has the potential to affect students' performance in assessment and evaluation after a long period of being out of school. Different news reports/documentaries on different television and radio stations reported students who get involved in learning different crafts outside their academia. This case study of Nigeria is not isolated, although it might be the longest strike action in Nigeria, recently in Ghana, the news media also reported that lecturers embarked on strike as a result of poor funding and poor basic salary for lecturers (Darko, 2021).

Strikes in the University system in Nigeria did not affect private universities which were definitively capitalist in their economic policy with exorbitant tuition, not affordable for the average Nigerian (Adavbiele, 2015; Anonaba, 2015; Offem et al., 2018). The political class have their children in these private universities and/or sent their children abroad for studies, excluding them from the consequences of strikes which extended the period of study, longer than the normal period for students (Adavbiele, 2015; Anonaba, 2015; Offem et al., 2018; Ukeje et al., 2015). There is apathy therefore to effectively mitigate the root causes of strikes by the policy-makers, including the serving President, because their children were not in the public schools in Nigeria (Premium Times, 2016).

The impact of strikes in the HEIs included disruption to the academic calendar, rushed teaching which hampered the learning of students, delays in students' graduation, distraction from academic programming, and many others (Adavbiele, 2015; Anonaba, 2015; Darko, 2021; Offem et al., 2018). Tensions in HEIs affects the goal of effective instructional leadership (Brolund, 2016; Shaked, 2021). Therefore, the negotiation, mediation, and collaboration skills, as well as knowledge of effective collective bargaining are essential for an instructional leader to provide their direction related to teaching and learning in their institutions. The approach should have been to avoid the strike from occurring in the first place. Due to tension and persistent strikes in many countries, students travel from their home countries to other countries for a better educations while some attend online classes to obtain quality education.

Internationalization and Globalization

There is a global drive for international students to attend institutions. There was over 4.5 million international students in G-20 countries in 2012, and it is estimated to increase to 7 million by 2025 (Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). The majority of students travel from

the Global South to study in the North (Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). There is a 350% increase in the number of international students recruited in Canada from the year 2000 to 2014. This was the outcome of a national survey by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) which also identified that the majority (95%) of Canadian HEIs have included internationalization as a priority in their strategic plan. A federal target set by the Canadian government is to increase the number of international students at all levels of education to more than 450,000 by 2022 (Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016).

This increase in interational students, indicates that instructional leaders must recognize the diversity of students in their HEIs, and the challenges international students face, such as: education system differences; differences in culture and adjustment to unfamiliar cultural norms; discrimination and racism; values and customs; communication/language difficulties; financial hardships; lack of appropriate accommodation; isolation and loneliness; homesickness; and loss of established support and social networks. Globalization using technological advancement must be utilized in the face of pandemics, movement restrictions, and economic recession. International students pay significant tuition fees to study and spend more to access education outside their home countries.

Many HEIs globally have devised online learning platforms to ensure their international markets are not closed, but instructional leaders must know how to maintain quality of teaching and learning even when the only option is through online studies. Also, developing curricula for effective online learning is essential. The challenge posed by the pandemic has increased the demand for quality online education now more than ever.

Pandemic Challenges

In late 2019, a global pandemic that struck the world called coronavirus (COVID-19), greatly affected HEIs and schools at all levels. Many countries all over the world shut down their schools and visionary instructional leaders who had already prepared for such situation by creating online platforms for learning quickly adjusted their curriculum to match the demands of the time. There were a lot of HEIs that lost a whole session or several months of academic activity because of lack of preparedness for the pandemic (Egielewa et al., 2022; Schleicher, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The pandemic had a series of consequences on teaching and learning. A survey investigated 1,134 Nigerian students on their perception on the use of ICT on learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Egielewa et al., 2022). The study reported that students were unsatisfied with E-learning utilized by the several HEIs during lockdown owing to poor internet connectivity and electricity (Egielewa et al., 2022). The conclusion from the findings of the survey was that HEIs students preferred traditional classroom teaching and learning instead of the use of ICT (Egielewa et al., 2022). This is essential for instructional leaders because there is a greater demand to meet the infrastructural needs of using online learning. The pandemic innovated online conferences, workshops, seminars, teaching, and learning using several platforms. Zoom became more popular than ever during the pandemic. Instructional leaders have a herculean task of ensuring that online teaching and learning is appreciated as much as the traditional classroom. Also, methods used are sufficient to meet the purpose of assessment in awarding a degree (Schleicher, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Thus, the need to overcome the challenge of technological advancement in teaching and learning.

Technological Advancement in Teaching and Learning

The use of technology in teaching and learning has come to stay. Pre-COVID-19 era, there was online learning in many HEIs around the world. International students enroll in programs in other countries without necessarily travelling to the physical location of their institutions but study online. Postgraduate degrees are obtained by global students without leaving their home country. This is one of the ways HEIs generate fund in this neoliberalism era. COVID-19 pandemic massively increased the use of online platforms for learning (Bak & Kim, 2015; Schleicher, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Short courses, full undergraduate and postgraduate programs, workshops and conferences were held online in recent times. The instructional leader in the COVID-19 era must see the transition of the teaching and learning in most HEIs will be online. The instructional leader will have to provide training and capacity building to tutors for effective use of online platforms for teaching and learning. The online platforms are also subscription based which requires payment, thus the instructional leader has to make the resources available and accessible for the tutors and learners.

Universities with good websites and their academics are publishing in international journals gets good online presensence and that increases their webometric ranking. The university ranking system utilizes several criteria, but one of the basic one is the technological advancement of universities.

University Ranking

The university ranking system introduced the concept of "world-class" universities (Börjesson, 2017; Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021). The history of the global ranking of universities dates back to 2003 when the global ranking of universities was first developed (Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021). The foremost global ranking was then referred to as "the Shanghai ranking", while the

other two earlier ranking systems that followed were the Times Higher Education Supplement (THE) and Quacquaelli Symonds (QS) (Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021). There was dominance from universities in the United States followed by universities in the United Kingdom (Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021). The concept of these ranking systems emanated from the internationalization and marketization of HEIs around the world (Altbach, 2004; Börjesson, 2017; Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021; Cheng & Liu, 2008). Prospective international students assess the global ranking, as well as the national ranking of the universities they want to apply to, before submitting their application. Thus, the ranking of universities contribute to students' and their families' decision-making (Altbach, 2004; Börjesson, 2017; Cheng & Liu, 2008). Universities that are ranked top, attract the best students from around the world; thus, this affects their research output but does not necessarily truly or accurately reflect the quality of teaching in the class rooms (Altbach, 2004; Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021; Cheng & Liu, 2008). There is a massive quest for HEIs to have their institutions ranked among the best in the world. HEIs with high rankings utilize the opportunity to display a university's ranking in their website to attract attention and international students to their institutions, which is a strong marketing strategy.

Thus, the role of instructional leaders in this neoliberal era is more than just teaching and learning effectively, but participating in activities that will position their institution to be ranked among the best in their nation and then globally to attract attention and international students (Bak & Kim, 2015; Hurt, 2012). The presence of international students and research outputs are among the criteria utilized by these systems to rank HEIs around the world. Branding of the universities, provision of facilities for cutting-edge research, capacity building of graduate students and tutors on research, programs and activities that provides comfort for students, especially international students are among the strategies that the instructional leader must utilize to be ranked (Altbach,

2004; Barron, 2017; Börjesson, 2017; Börjesson & Lillo Cea, 2021; Cheng and Liu, 2008). The myriads of challenges discussed so far are not insurmountable. Several post-secondary institutions are matching the challenges through effective instructional leadership character traits and skills.

The Character Traits of Effective Instructional Leaders in the Neoliberalism Era

What do people look for in their leaders? This is a common question posed to 100,000 academics and workers from various spheres of the profession in different countries to assess the character traits of leadership that will attract willing followership not because of the position the leader occupied (Posner, 2018). The most valuable resources a leader can have to excel are individuals who speak truthfully and are committed to supporting the leader's visions and leadership goals (Avolio et al., 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2012, 2019; Northouse, 2022). A leader might possess all the technical skills but without the character to attract willing followership, they may struggle to find people to work with.In these contemporary times, there is a higher demand for collaboration in different areas of life: leadership, teaching and learning, research, and even at work. The common saying that the word "TEAM" means "Together Everyone Accomplishes More" is still true and valid in instructional leadership. Some "positional or title-based" leaders become lone rangers as soon as they leave their position because people were not actually following them because of their character traits but because of their position. There is a case study of a top university vice-chancellor whose teachers and students celebrated the completion of her tenure by designing a mock obituary poster and pasting them around the university campus due to several allegations of corruption, tribalism, and dishonesty in leadership (Adeyemi, 2021). This case went viral and became a news headline in daily newspapers. The leader may not have been pronounced guilty in any court, but the protest demonstrated the serious breakdown in their relationship with her followers.

The question in the study is still re-echoed, what do people look for in the leaders they will follow willingly without compulsion? Several characteristics listed received votes, reflecting the uniqueness of individuals and their preferences. However, some traits were more important to the respondents which receive more votes than others across the various industries and countries. It was only four of these traits received the majority of the votes scoring more than 60% across the globe (Posner, 2018). Hence, the consistency of these four characteristics across various disciplines, countries, genders, and educational levels indicates that what people seek in their leader is fundamental and enduring (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Posner, 2018). The four traits listed, which people look for when following someone willingly, are that they must believe the individual is honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-looking (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Posner, 2018).

"Honesty" – described as being truthful, integrity, trustworthy, character, and ethical received 84% votes, competent (capable, proficient, effective, gets the job done, professional) scored 66%; inspiring (uplifting, enthusiastic, energetic, humorous, cheerful, optimistic, positive about the future), received similar votes as "competent"; 66% and "forward-looking" (visionary, foresighted, concerned about the future, has a sense of direction) scored 62% of the votes (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Posner, 2018). All the other character traits scored less than 60% of the votes (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Posner, 2018). However, they are important. Such characteristics were collaboration, intelligence, innovation, and maturity among others (Kouzes & Posner, 2019; Posner, 2018).

The five practices of exemplary leadership and the characteristics of admired leaders discussed earlier in this article (challenge the process, model the way, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) are complementary to the character traits of a leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, 2019). When both the character traits and the five practices of a leader

are executed effectively, leaders will not only achieve excellent results but also fulfill the hopes of their followers. This underscores that instructional leadership entails establishing effective relationships with people and followers, not only fostering a positive working environment but also delivering outstanding results for students. Therefore, it is recognized that credibility, embedded in the five effective leadership practices such as modeling the way, forms the foundation of leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

The Instructional Leadership Skills in the Neoliberal Era

Skills refer to the knowledge and capacity that empowers an individual to perform a task well (Cobuild, 2021). Univeristy leaders around the world do not necessarily go through leadership training prior to their leadership position. Some leaders get to the position of leadership through election and/or political appointment. Thus, there are inexperienced leaders who are learning on the job. Some have been mentored by other leaders before, but most of them did not receive any formal leadership training for leading post-secondary institutions. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that leadership skills are more necessary now than ever. For an instructional leader to succeed in leadership, they must acquire these skills to effectively lead HEIs in this neoliberal era. This corroborated with findings on research among senior leaders in Chilean universities which reported that the senior leaders such as the directors never had any formal training or certification on leadership but rather were schooled in engineering, social sciences, or technology, hence underscoring their lack of preparedness for leadership (Kri et al., 2021). This is not an isolated case. In Nigeria, the vice-chancellors are elected by the senate members and ratified by the president through the minister of education while the vice-chancellors of state universities are appointed by the governor. Highlighting political influence on university leadership. There is no

recourse to formal leadership training but the popularity of a candidate and his/her political connections.

In this contemporary time, when excellent visionary leadership is essential for HEIs around the world, some of the basic skills required by a leader include teambuilding and team-working, networking, *strategic planning, understanding the institutional culture*, *attachment to institutional values*, ability to build trust, confident risk-taking, personal and interpersonal skills, *communication skills*, *self-organization, management* capacity, conflict management skills, *decision-making*, *visioning*, and *communication* skills (Contreras et al., 2018; Franken et al., 2015; Kri et al., 2021; Webber & Scott, 2008). It is highly recommended that HEIs leaders should be trained in university organization procedures, leading and managing staff, budgetary, conflict management, team working, leading change, effective communication, collaboration, entrepreneurship, time management, and networking (Contreras et al., 2018; Franken et al., 2015; Kri et al., 2021; Webber & Scott, 2008).

Leadership skills have been categorized by (Kri et al., 2021) into affective-related skills and cognitive capacities. Affective-related skills refer to those capacities or skills which impact emotions and organizational culture while cognitive capacities refer to those capacities and skills which need understanding, cognition, critical thinking, and/or identifying relationships and complexities (Kri et al., 2021). The affective-related skills outlined by (Kri et al., 2021) were key leadership skills and capacities in their review of literature on the expected capacities of leaders in Latin America and Non-Latin America. The Latin American countries include leadership studies from Chile, Argentina, Cuba, Columbia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Latin America (studies that drew upon all 20 countries). While the Non-Latin American countries – encompass Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United Kingdom, United States, South Africa, Sweden (and other

countries which were not considered part of the West, and are not part of Latin America – i.e., India, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia) (Kri et al., 2021). These skills and capacities are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The skills and capacities in Figure 1 and 2 are all applicable in the neoliberal era in the leadership of HEIs. Although it is difficult to possess all the skills in one individual, working as a team will harness these skills and capacities from team members in a leadership team that will effectively lead post-secondary institutions and provide instructional leadership in the neoliberal era.

Conclusion and Future Research

This literature review focuses on the leadership challenges encountered in instructional leadership during the era of neoliberalism. The dominance of neoliberal economic policies in education today exposes deficiencies in leadership, prompting aspiring leaders in post-secondary institutions to undergo leadership preparation prior to assuming leadership positions.

It is essential to examine the readiness of leaders in post-secondary institutions and the current obstacles they face, as well as how they address these challenges. An important research question is the level of preparedness among individuals aspiring to lead Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Faculty members also play a crucial role in investigating the background of leaders and identifying the essential skills they perceive as necessary for effective leadership in HEIs. A comprehensive exploration of these findings will enhance the abilities of HEIs leaders to acquire additional skills that enable them to navigate the demands of the neoliberal era.
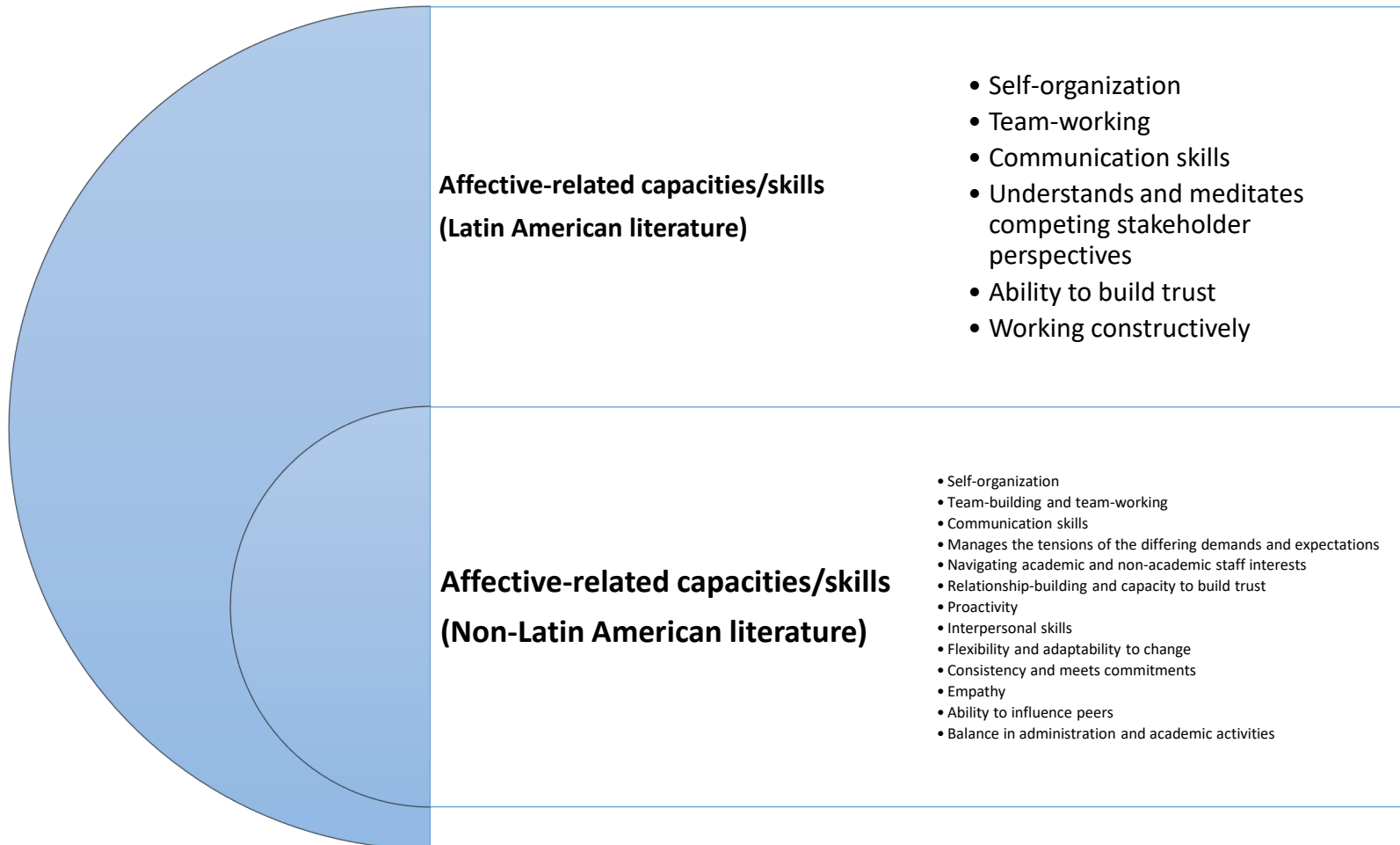
Figure 1:

Cognitive Leadership Skills and Capacities noted Latin American & Non-Latin American Literatures (Kri et al., 2021).

**Cognitive capacities/skills
(Latin American literature)**

1. Strategic planning and management
2. Make decisions
3. Networking
4. Understands the culture of the institution
5. Understand the global and local context
6. Lead the introduction of technologies
7. Taking responsibility for their decisions
8. Conflict management
9. Risk management
10. Visioning

**Cognitive capacities/skills
(Non-Latin American literature)**

1. Strategic planning and management
2. Make decisions and focus on critical activities
3. Diagnosis of needs and direction
4. Ability to set clear expectations
5. Understand the context
6. Difficult decisions and conflict management
7. Visioning
8. Marketing
9. Responsiveness

Figure 2:

Affective-Related Leadership Skills and Capacities noted Latin American & Non-Latin American Literatures (Kri et al., 2021).

**Affective-related capacities/skills
(Latin American literature)**

- Self-organization
- Team-working
- Communication skills
- Understands and meditates competing stakeholder perspectives
- Ability to build trust
- Working constructively

**Affective-related capacities/skills
(Non-Latin American literature)**

- Self-organization
- Team-building and team-working
- Communication skills
- Manages the tensions of the differing demands and expectations
- Navigating academic and non-academic staff interests
- Relationship-building and capacity to build trust
- Proactivity
- Interpersonal skills
- Flexibility and adaptability to change
- Consistency and meets commitments
- Empathy
- Ability to influence peers
- Balance in administration and academic activities

Conflict of Interest

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