



## The Relationship Between Instructor Leadership Styles and Student Motivation and Academic Performance in Public Universities of Amhara Regional State

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the relationship between instructors' leadership styles and students' academic performance and motivation in public universities in Ethiopia's Amhara Regional State, guided by Bass and Avolio's Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT). Despite the recognized importance of educational leadership, empirical research in this area is limited in Ethiopia. Using a correlational quantitative design, we surveyed 321 third-year undergraduate students from four public universities with a validated 44-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong, statistically significant associations between transformational leadership ( $r = .734, p < .01$ ) and transactional leadership ( $r = .717, p < .01$ ) with student motivation. Both leadership styles also exhibited moderate positive correlations with academic performance ( $r = .612$  for transformational and  $r = .589$  for transactional,  $p < .01$ ). A significant correlation ( $r = .678, p < .01$ ) between the two leadership styles indicates that instructors often blend these approaches. The findings suggest that both leadership styles independently enhance student motivation and academic performance, with transformational leadership having a marginally stronger effect. The study advocates for integrating both leadership approaches to meet diverse student needs and recommends including leadership training in faculty development programs to improve learning outcomes in resource-constrained environments.*

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Student Motivation, Higher Education, Ethiopia

## 1. Introduction

Educational leadership has a significant influence on student success and institutional effectiveness (Maduforo & Scott, 2024; Johnson & Smith, 2023). Instructors, as key leaders, play a crucial role in driving student motivation and academic performance. This is guided by Bass and Avolio's Full-Range Leadership Theory, which highlights transformational leadership focused on inspiring vision and growth and transactional leadership, which is structured and reward-based (Brown & Davis, 2023; Martinez et al., 2021). The effectiveness of these leadership styles varies across different cultural and institutional contexts, necessitating localized research (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2022).

Global studies, such as the GLOBE project (House & Javidan, 2004; Lee & Choi, 2023) and various meta-analyses (Judge et al., 2021; Perez & Wang, 2020), highlight the importance of context-specific research. However, studies in Ethiopia's Amhara Regional State remain limited (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). Transformational leadership has been shown to boost intrinsic motivation (Fenwick et al., 2019; Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2014), whereas transactional leadership enhances performance in structured settings (Nguni et

al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2021).

Given Ethiopia's resource-constrained educational context (Akessa & Dhufera, 2015; Zaidi, 2005; Yizengaw, 2003; Teferra, 2008), this study examines the impact of instructors' leadership styles on student motivation and academic performance in Amhara's public universities. Using a correlational design with third-year undergraduates (Kite & Whitley, 2018; Carter & Mills, 2022), the study aims to inform context-sensitive leadership practices to improve student outcomes.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

Instructor leadership significantly shapes student motivation and academic performance in higher education (Nguyen et al., 2022; Brown & Davis, 2023). As classroom leaders, instructors influence students' academic and emotional development through distinct leadership styles, notably transformational and transactional, as described in Bass and Avolio's Full-Range Leadership Theory (Martinez et al., 2021; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). Transformational leadership, characterized by visionary and inspirational approaches, fosters intrinsic motivation by encouraging students to surpass their expectations (Perez & Wang, 2020; Johnson & Smith, 2023). In contrast, transactional



leadership promotes extrinsic motivation through clear expectations and reward-based systems; however, its long-term effectiveness remains debated (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2022). These leadership styles play a critical role in creating engaging and productive learning environments.

Despite extensive global research on educational leadership, most studies focus on Western contexts, where cultural and institutional conditions differ significantly from Ethiopia's resource-constrained and collectivist environment (Judge et al., 2021; Lee & Choi, 2023). In Ethiopia, particularly in the Amhara Regional State, research on instructor leadership styles remains limited and fragmented (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). Existing studies often prioritize curriculum design or policy reform, overlooking the pedagogical impact of leadership on student motivation and academic performance (Hailegebreal & Temesgen, 2020). Furthermore, few studies have explored how leadership styles function in resource-constrained settings or addressed regional challenges, such as increasing student enrollment and socio-political instability (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023). This gap hinders the design of effective policies and interventions, such as targeted faculty development programs, that could address

local educational needs.

The absence of context-specific research risks significant negative consequences, including reduced graduate quality and employability, lower student satisfaction, and higher attrition rates, as unmotivated students may disengage or drop out in Ethiopia's challenging higher education landscape (Teferra, 2008; Yizengaw, 2003). This study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationship between instructors' transformational, transactional, and hybrid leadership styles and student motivation and academic performance in public universities in the Amhara Regional State. By examining these approaches, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights to inform context-sensitive leadership practices and faculty development programs, ultimately improving student outcomes in Ethiopia's higher education system (Ashira & Lodesso, 2024; Tadesse & Alemu, 2023).

### 1.3. Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the relationship between instructors' transformational leadership style and both student motivation and academic performance in public universities within the Amhara Regional



State.

2. To examine the relationship between instructors' transactional leadership style and both student motivation and academic performance in public universities within the Amhara Regional State.
3. To assess the effectiveness of a hybrid leadership approach, combining transformational and transactional styles, in enhancing student motivation and academic performance in public universities within the Amhara Regional State.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between instructors' transformational leadership style and student motivation and academic performance in public universities within the Amhara Regional State?
2. What is the relationship between instructors' transactional leadership style and student motivation and academic performance in public universities within the Amhara Regional State?
3. How effective is a hybrid leadership approach, combining transformational and transactional styles, in enhancing student motivation and academic performance in public universities within

the Amhara Regional State?

### 1.5. Literature Review

#### 1.5.1. Theoretical Foundations of Leadership in Education

This study is grounded in Bass and Avolio's (1994) Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), which integrates transformational and transactional leadership styles. FRLT posits that effective leaders inspire followers while providing structure and accountability, addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic needs. Recent research supports this model's applicability in educational settings, particularly for enhancing student outcomes in challenging contexts like Ethiopian universities, where instructors face limited resources and socio-political instability (Brown & Davis, 2023; Tadesse & Alemu, 2023; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). Transformational leadership, introduced by Burns (1978), emphasizes fostering intrinsic motivation through vision, encouragement, and individualized support. This approach has been linked to increased student engagement and persistence, even in resource-constrained environments such as Ethiopia (Johnson & Smith, 2023; Perez & Wang, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). By inspiring students to exceed expectations and fostering a sense of



purpose, transformational leadership creates dynamic learning environments that promote academic success.

In contrast, transactional leadership, rooted in Weber's (1947) bureaucratic theory, relies on clear expectations and reward systems to drive extrinsic motivation. While less emotionally engaging than transformational leadership, it is effective in structured settings, such as Ethiopian classrooms with large enrollments and limited resources, where discipline and accountability are critical (Martinez et al., 2021; Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2022; Tadesse & Alemu, 2023). Transactional leadership ensures consistent performance by setting defined goals and providing tangible incentives. Leadership effectiveness is context-dependent, shaped by cultural and institutional factors (Judge et al., 2021; Lee & Choi, 2023). In the Amhara Regional State, where collectivist values and hierarchical respect are prominent, a blended leadership approach combining transformational and transactional styles is particularly effective (Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). This adaptive approach, responsive to both student needs and local challenges, is increasingly recognized as essential for fostering motivation and academic

achievement in Ethiopian higher education (Brown & Davis, 2023).

### ***1.5.2. Motivation in Educational Leadership***

Motivation is fundamental to student engagement and academic success, driving learners' persistence and goal achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). It can be intrinsic, stemming from personal interest and enjoyment, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards or pressures (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Understanding these motivational types is critical for designing effective teaching strategies that foster sustained student effort and performance. Transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation by providing vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalized encouragement (Bass, 1985; Fenwick et al., 2019). This approach promotes creativity and autonomy, inspiring students to engage deeply with their learning.

In contrast, transactional leadership fosters extrinsic motivation through structured expectations and reward systems, which are effective for maintaining discipline but less impactful for long-term engagement (Nguni et al., 2006). In Ethiopia's higher education system, characterized by limited resources and socio-economic challenges, motivation plays a pivotal role in student



outcomes (Hailegebreal & Temesgen, 2020). Research highlights that instructors' leadership styles significantly influence student motivation and academic success (Ashira & Lodesso, 2024; Tadesse & Alemu, 2023). A hybrid approach, blending transformational inspiration with transactional structure, offers a balanced and effective strategy for enhancing motivation in this resource-constrained context (Brown & Davis, 2023).

### ***1.5.3. Leadership in Ethiopian Higher Education***

Leadership in Ethiopian higher education is shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors that often constrain instructors' ability to effectively motivate students. Traditional lecture-based teaching methods discourage active participation and critical thinking, while heavy administrative burdens divert faculty attention from pedagogical leadership (Teferra & Altbach, 2003; Yizengaw, 2006). Additionally, top-down policies frequently overlook local needs, limiting the adoption of transformational leadership approaches that could enhance student motivation (Teshome, 2017). Many instructors, lacking formal leadership training, rely on transactional methods, such as grading and rule

enforcement, which may not foster deep engagement.

Recent research highlights the importance of integrating global leadership theories with Ethiopia's cultural values, such as collectivism and respect for authority (Ashira & Lodesso, 2024). A context-sensitive approach that blends transformational and transactional leadership styles is recommended to align with student expectations and address local challenges (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023). Focused studies in public universities within the Amhara Regional State are essential to develop policies and training programs that empower instructors as motivational leaders, supporting Ethiopia's national goals for improving education quality and development.

### ***1.5.4. Instructor Leadership: A Blended Approach for Effective Teaching***

In education, leadership styles typically fall into two main categories: transformational and transactional (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring students, fostering innovation, and providing individual support through mentorship and encouragement (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013). Instructors who employ this style create an environment that promotes





critical thinking, independence, and a genuine love for learning (Harvey et al., 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Conversely, transactional leadership emphasizes clear expectations, performance monitoring, and the use of rewards or disciplinary actions to ensure tasks are completed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). While this approach can be effective for managing classrooms and ensuring compliance, it may not promote deep student engagement or long-term academic resilience (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Recent research indicates that neither leadership style is sufficient on its own in today's complex educational landscape. Instead, a blended approach combining elements of both transformational and transactional leadership is often more successful in addressing diverse student needs and contextual challenges (Nguni et al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2021). This hybrid model allows instructors to inspire and motivate students while also maintaining essential structure and accountability. Such a balanced approach is particularly relevant in challenging environments, such as Ethiopian public universities with limited resources.

#### ***1.5.5. The Correlation between Instructors' Leadership Styles and Motivation***

Leadership in education, particularly transformational and transactional styles, significantly impacts student motivation. Transformational leadership, as demonstrated by Metaferia, Baraki, and Mebratu (2023) and Khoudri and Zeriuoh (2023), fosters intrinsic motivation and promotes lasting engagement, aligning with Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). In contrast, transactional leadership, as found by Islam et al. (2012) and Nurlina, Hardianti, and Susianti (2024), effectively boosts extrinsic motivation and ensures discipline, especially in large or less engaged classrooms.

Ultimately, a blended approach highlighted by Petrescu and Bentasup (2023) and consistent with Northouse's (2018) theory of situational leadership is considered the most effective for diverse educational contexts, including Ethiopian public universities facing pedagogical challenges.

#### ***1.5.6. The correlation between Instructors' Leadership Styles and Academic Performance***

Research indicates that instructors' leadership styles, particularly transformational and transactional approaches, significantly impact academic performance. Transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation and student



engagement, fostering participation and critical thinking, which are crucial for academic success (Wangmo, 2025). In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on structure and clear expectations, effectively maintaining discipline and accountability, especially in larger classrooms (Islam et al., 2012; Angwaomaodoko, 2025).

Combining elements of both leadership styles can create a blended approach that meets diverse student needs. This hybrid model allows educators to inspire students while providing the necessary structure for academic achievement (Petrescu & Bantasup, 2023; Northouse, 2018). Investing in leadership development for instructors can foster environments that prioritize student engagement and emotional support, ultimately raising academic standards across various educational settings (Alemayehu & Shibeshi, 2021; Buric et al., 2021).

#### ***1.5.7. The Predictive Value of Leadership Styles on Motivation***

Recent studies in Ethiopian higher education show that instructors' leadership styles, specifically transformational and transactional, are strong predictors of student motivation. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring and individually supporting students, has been found to

strongly predict intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement. In contrast, transactional leadership, which relies on structure and rewards, is a strong predictor of extrinsic motivation and short-term academic behavior.

Research by Kebede & Kant (2022) found that transactional leadership positively influences motivation by establishing clear expectations. Similarly, studies by Teshome (2011) and Yonas Eshetu (2011) showed that transformational leadership predicts higher levels of emotional commitment, job satisfaction, and student motivation in university settings. While both leadership styles are valuable for predicting student motivation, transformational leadership appears to have a stronger and more lasting impact, making it particularly important for improving academic outcomes in Ethiopian higher education.

#### ***1.5.8. The Predictive Value of Leadership Styles on Academic Performance***

In Ethiopian higher education, the leadership styles of instructors have a significant influence on students' academic performance. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, fosters intrinsic motivation, leading to enhanced educational





outcomes. Studies show that it encourages critical thinking and fosters a long-term commitment to learning. Transactional leadership, which emphasizes structured tasks and reward systems, promotes extrinsic motivation, leading to consistent short-term academic achievements.

Research by Kebede & Kant (2022) highlights that transactional leadership ensures clear academic expectations, positively impacting performance in structured settings. Conversely, transformational leadership, as noted by Teshome (2011), cultivates emotional engagement and higher academic satisfaction, driving superior results. Yonas Eshetu (2011) further supports the notion that transformational leadership is correlated with improved grades and student persistence. While both styles contribute to academic success, transformational leadership's emphasis on inspiration and support has a more profound and sustained effect on performance. This makes it a critical factor in Ethiopian universities aiming to elevate academic standards.

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for Ethiopian higher education, particularly in the Amhara Regional State, where there is limited research on the impact of instructors' leadership styles on student motivation. By analyzing transformational, transactional, and hybrid leadership approaches, this research offers valuable insights for improving teaching effectiveness, faculty development, and student engagement.

The study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature, especially within resource-constrained and socio-politically complex contexts. It provides practical guidance for universities and policymakers. Furthermore, it contributes to leadership theory by promoting culturally responsive and adaptive models that are well-suited to Ethiopia's unique educational landscape.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopts a positivist research paradigm, emphasizing empirical observation and objective data analysis to investigate the relationship between instructors' leadership styles and student motivation and academic performance in public universities of the Amhara Regional State. Employing a correlational quantitative research design, it examines natural associations between transformational and transactional leadership styles and student outcomes without experimental manipulation, ensuring rigor, validity, and applicability within Ethiopia's higher education context (Kite & Whitley, 2018; Carter & Mills, 2022).

Data were collected using a culturally adapted 44-item Likert-scale questionnaire administered to a randomly selected sample of 321 third-year undergraduate students from four public universities in the Amhara



Regional State: University of Gondar, Wollo University, Debre Tabor University, and Debark University. Third-year students were selected due to their prolonged exposure to faculty leadership, enabling reliable insights into the effects of leadership styles on motivation and academic performance. The sampling ensured representation across diverse academic programs and institutional settings.

The questionnaire was validated by experts and demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.939 for transformational leadership (excellent), 0.725 for transactional leadership (good), 0.786 for student motivation (good), and improved reliability for academic performance following pilot testing. Data normality was verified through statistical tests (like Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov), supporting the use of parametric analyses. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and significance of relationships between leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and hybrid) and student motivation and academic performance, addressing the gap in localized research on instructor leadership in Ethiopia's resource-constrained higher education context (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023; Ashira & Lodesso,

2024).

## 2.2. Instrumentation

This study utilized a 44-item questionnaire, adapted from Churchill and Peter (1984), to measure students' perceptions of instructors' leadership styles, motivation, and academic performance. The instrument included 20 items on transformational leadership, 8 on transactional leadership, 11 on student motivation, and 5 on academic performance, with all items rated on a five-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was carefully pretested and refined with input from experts to ensure its validity and suitability for the Ethiopian higher education context. This process provided a reliable tool for identifying the predominant leadership styles in public universities within the Amhara Regional State.

## 2.3. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical protocols to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained by anonymizing responses and handling all data securely. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring their



participation was voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the study's purpose.

Furthermore, institutional permissions were secured prior to data collection, demonstrating compliance with university and national ethical standards for research involving human subjects. These measures collectively safeguarded participant privacy and upheld the integrity and ethical rigor of the entire research process.

## 2.4. Procedures

Data were collected from 321 third-year undergraduate students at four public universities in the Amhara Regional State: University of Gondar, Wollo University, Debre Tabor University, and Debark University. A simple random sampling method was used to ensure the sample's representativeness. A culturally adapted 44-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered in person by trained research assistants. The surveys were distributed and collected in classroom settings to ensure consistency and minimize bias.

The normality of the data was confirmed using Shapiro-Wilk tests and Q-Q plots, which justified the use of Pearson's correlation analysis. This analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between instructors' transformational, transactional, and combined leadership styles

and student motivation and academic performance. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards, and informed consent was secured from all participants. This procedure addresses the existing gap in localized research on instructor leadership within Ethiopia's resource-constrained higher education context (Tadesse & Alemu, 2023; Ashira & Lodesso, 2024).

## 2.5. Data Analysis Techniques of the Study

This section addresses the first two research questions of the study:

1. What is the relationship between instructors' transformational leadership style and student motivation in public universities within the Amhara Regional State?
2. What is the relationship between instructors' transactional leadership style and student motivation in public universities within the Amhara Regional State?

To explore these questions, data from 321 respondents were analyzed using Pearson correlation, which identifies the strength and direction of relationships between variables. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Pearson correlation between TFL, TSL, and Motivation**

Variables	Mean	SD		TFL	TSL	Motivation
TFL	3.60	.61	Pearson	1		
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)			
TSL	3.73	.60	Pearson	.678**	1	
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
Motivation	3.91	.56	R <sup>2</sup>	.460 (46.0%)		
			Pearson	.734**	.717**	1
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
			R <sup>2</sup>	.539 (53.9%)	.514 (51.4%)	

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N= 321

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

The data in Table 1 explores the relationships between Transformational Leadership (TFL), Transactional Leadership (TSL), and Motivation among a sample of 321 participants. The mean scores suggest that Motivation (M=3.91, SD=.56) was rated highest, followed by TSL (M=3.73, SD=.60) and TFL (M=3.60, SD=.61). This indicates that participants generally perceived themselves as more motivated and slightly more influenced by transactional leadership behaviors from their instructors. These descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of how these variables are

distributed across the sample.

The Pearson correlation coefficients reveal strong, statistically significant relationships among the variables. A positive correlation was found between TFL and TSL ( $r=.678$ ,  $p<.01$ ), which suggests that individuals who experience transformational leadership also tend to perceive transactional leadership behaviors. Most notably, both leadership styles are strongly and positively correlated with Motivation. The correlation for TFL ( $r=.734$ ,  $p<.01$ ) is slightly higher than for TSL ( $r=.717$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This implies that while both styles are highly influential, transformational leadership may have a slightly stronger impact on motivating individuals. The significance of all correlations at the 0.01 level reinforces the reliability of these associations.

### R-squared result of the Correlation between TFL & TSL with Motivation

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	R <sup>2</sup> (Variance Explained)	Interpretation
TFL & Motivation	.734**	< .001	.539 (53.9%)	Strong positive correlation
TSL & Motivation	.717**	< .001	.514 (51.4%)	Strong positive correlation

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

The findings indicate that both



transformational leadership (TFL) and transactional leadership (TSL) styles are strongly and positively related to student motivation. Transformational leadership showed a slightly stronger relationship ( $r=.734$ ,  $R^2=53.9\%$ ) than transactional leadership ( $r=.717$ ,  $R^2=51.4\%$ ). These results suggest that instructors who demonstrate either leadership style are likely to foster higher levels of student motivation.

Furthermore, the high correlation between TFL and TSL ( $r=.678$ ) implies that instructors often exhibit both styles simultaneously. This overlap supports the third research question, which investigates the potential of a hybrid leadership approach.

This section addresses the third research question:

How effective is a hybrid leadership approach, which integrates both transformational and transactional styles, in enhancing student motivation and academic performance in public universities of the Amhara Regional State? While student motivation is the primary dependent variable in this study, academic performance was also analyzed as a contextual dimension to enrich the interpretation of leadership style relationships. The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

#### Pearson correlation between TFL&

#### TSL with Academic performance

					Academic performance	
Variables	Mean	SD		TFL	TSL	e
TFL	3.60	.61	Pearson	1		
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)			
TSL	3.73	.60	Pearson	.678**	1	
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
Academic performance	3.89	.52	Pearson	.754**	.708**	1
			Correlation			
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N=321

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 321**

The data in the provided table highlights the relationship between two leadership styles, Transformational Leadership (TFL) and Transactional Leadership (TSL), and Academic Performance among 321 respondents. The mean scores suggest that Academic Performance ( $M=3.89$ ,  $SD=.52$ ) is rated slightly higher than both TFL ( $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=.61$ ) and TSL ( $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=.60$ ), indicating that students generally perceive themselves as performing well academically while experiencing moderate levels of both leadership styles.

The Pearson correlation coefficients reveal strong, statistically significant relationships between leadership styles and



academic performance. TFL shows a very strong positive correlation with academic performance ( $r=.754$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while TSL also demonstrates a strong correlation ( $r=.708$ ,  $p<.01$ ). These findings suggest that both leadership styles are positively associated with students' academic outcomes, but transformational leadership appears to have a slightly stronger influence. The significance level of  $p<.01$  for both correlations confirms that these relationships are not due to chance.

Additionally, the correlation between TFL and TSL ( $r=.678$ ,  $p<.01$ ) implies that these leadership styles often coexist. Students who perceive one style are likely to perceive the other as well. Overall, the data support the idea that effective leadership, especially transformational leadership, can play a crucial role in enhancing academic performance. This insight could be valuable for educators, administrators, and policymakers aiming to improve student outcomes through leadership development and training.

### R-squared result of the Correlation between TFL, TSL, and Academic performance

Variables	Pearson's r	P- value	R <sup>2</sup> (Variance Explained)	Interpretation
TFL & academic performance	.754**	< .001	0.57 (57%)	Strong positive correlation

TSL & Academic Performance	.708**	< .001	0.50 (50%)	Strong positive correlation
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The R<sup>2</sup> results from the correlation analysis between leadership styles and academic performance provide compelling insights into how Transformational Leadership (TFL) and Transactional Leadership (TSL) influence student outcomes. TFL demonstrated a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r=.754$ , which translates to an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.57. This indicates that 57% of the variance in academic performance can be explained by transformational leadership behaviors. This strong positive relationship suggests that when students perceive their instructors as inspiring, supportive, and visionary, their academic performance tends to improve significantly.

Similarly, TSL showed a correlation coefficient of  $r=.708$ , with an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.50, meaning transactional leadership accounts for 50% of the variance in academic performance. Although both styles are statistically significant and positively associated with academic success, transformational leadership appears to exert a slightly greater influence. These findings underscore the importance of leadership style in educational settings, highlighting that





fostering transformational qualities in academic leaders may be especially effective in enhancing student achievement.

## 2.6. Discussion

This study, based on data from 321 students in public universities across Ethiopia's Amhara Regional State, explored how instructors' leadership styles. Transformational (TFL) and Transactional (TSL) influence student motivation and academic performance. The results revealed robust, statistically significant correlations across all variables. TFL showed a strong positive relationship with student motivation ( $r = .734$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 53.9% of the variance, while TSL also demonstrated a significant correlation ( $r = .717$ ,  $p < .001$ ), accounting for 51.4%. Similarly, academic performance was strongly associated with both leadership styles: TFL ( $r = .754$ ,  $R^2 = 57\%$ ) and TSL ( $r = .708$ ,  $R^2 = 50\%$ ). These findings suggest that both intrinsic and extrinsic leadership approaches play a critical role in shaping students' psychological engagement and academic success.

The strength of these relationships aligns with foundational leadership theories. The impact of TFL on motivation and performance echoes Bass and Avolio's (1994) model of inspirational leadership and

Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) work on deep learning. It also resonates with Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the role of autonomy and competence in fostering intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, the positive influence of TSL supports classical organizational frameworks such as Weber's (1947) theory of structured authority and is reinforced by recent educational studies (e.g., Martinez et al., 2021; Nguni et al., 2006), which highlight the effectiveness of transactional strategies in promoting goal-oriented behavior and extrinsic motivation.

A notable insight from this study is the significant correlation between TFL and TSL ( $r = .678$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that instructors often employ a hybrid leadership style. This blended approach reflects Northouse's (2018) situational leadership theory, which advocates for adaptive leadership based on context. It also aligns with Judge and Piccolo's (2004) meta-analytic findings that transformational and transactional styles frequently co-occur. In the Ethiopian higher education context characterized by limited faculty development and outdated pedagogical practices (Teferra, 2008; Teshome, 2017), this hybrid model appears particularly relevant. Recent local studies (e.g., Ashira & Lodesso, 2024;



Metaferia et al., 2023) further support the effectiveness of adaptive leadership in enhancing both motivation and academic outcomes.

Taken together, these findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive leadership development programs in Ethiopian universities. Such initiatives should equip faculty with both transformational and transactional competencies, enabling them to implement a context-sensitive, blended leadership model. This approach not only aligns with global educational reform efforts (Perez & Wang, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022) but also offers a strategic pathway to improving student engagement, retention, and academic achievement across the region.

### 3. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that instructor leadership, particularly transformational and transactional styles, plays a pivotal role in shaping both student motivation and academic performance in Ethiopian public universities. Transformational leadership was found to significantly enhance intrinsic motivation and academic achievement, while transactional leadership contributed meaningfully through structure and external reinforcement. The strong correlations and

variance explained by both styles underscore their individual and combined impact. Notably, the frequent co-occurrence of TFL and TSL suggests that a blended leadership approach is not only common but also highly effective in addressing the diverse needs of students and the evolving challenges within Ethiopia's higher education landscape.

The study confirms that transformational leadership is a powerful driver of student engagement and academic success. Its emphasis on vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support aligns with global best practices and is especially relevant in contexts where intrinsic motivation is critical. Ethiopian universities should prioritize cultivating transformational competencies among faculty to foster deeper learning and sustained academic growth. Transactional leadership, while often viewed as more rigid, proves to be a valuable complement to transformational practices. Its role in setting clear expectations, rewarding performance, and maintaining accountability contributes significantly to student outcomes. Faculty development programs should not overlook transactional skills, as they provide the structural backbone necessary for consistent academic progress.

The evidence strongly supports the adoption of a hybrid leadership model, one



that integrates both transformational and transactional elements. This adaptive approach enables instructors to respond flexibly to the varying needs of students and institutional constraints. As Ethiopia's higher education system continues to expand, embedding blended leadership training into faculty development initiatives will be essential for creating responsive, student-centered learning environments. This study adds to the growing body of literature advocating for context-sensitive leadership strategies that can transform educational outcomes in Ethiopia and similar settings.

### 3.1. Implications for Higher Education Leadership

Instructor leadership, particularly in transformational and transactional styles, has a significant influence on student motivation, which is foundational to engagement and academic performance. Transformational leadership fosters inspiration and intellectual growth, while transactional leadership ensures structure and accountability. Their combined use creates a balanced and motivating learning environment.

Given the challenges in Ethiopian public universities, a hybrid leadership model is essential. Faculty trained in both styles can better respond to the diverse needs of students and institutional demands,

promoting inclusive and effective teaching practices. This approach aligns with global leadership theories and is well-suited to the local educational context.

To improve academic outcomes, universities should prioritize leadership development programs that integrate both styles. By cultivating adaptive leadership skills, institutions can enhance teaching quality, support student success, and build resilient, student-centered learning environments across the Amhara Regional State.

### 3.2. Recommendations

To effectively enhance student motivation and academic achievement in Ethiopian public universities, it is recommended that institutions adopt a transformational leadership style as the cornerstone of instructional practice. This leadership approach, characterized by inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, was identified as critically important in driving students' intrinsic motivation and academic success.

Universities should implement targeted leadership development programs for instructors that emphasize transformational competencies. These programs must equip faculty with the skills to inspire students through meaningful

academic goals and personal relevance, challenge students intellectually by fostering critical thinking and creativity, and provide individualized support that recognizes diverse student needs and aspirations. While transformational leadership should be prioritized, select transactional elements such as clear expectations and structured feedback can be integrated to reinforce academic discipline and accountability.

Furthermore, institutions should promote adaptive leadership practices, enabling instructors to adjust their approach based on students' motivational profiles and academic challenges. Regular evaluation, peer collaboration, and ongoing professional support should be embedded to ensure that leadership strategies are effectively applied in classroom settings. By institutionalizing this leadership model, Ethiopian universities can address persistent barriers to student motivation and achievement, ultimately fostering a more supportive and academically successful learning environment.

### **3.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

#### **3.3.1. Limitations**

The study is geographically limited to public universities within the Amhara region, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or private institutions in Ethiopia or beyond.

Additionally, the use of a cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, which limits the ability to examine causal relationships or changes in leadership's impact on student motivation over an extended period.

Future research employing longitudinal designs and broader geographic coverage could provide more comprehensive insights into the dynamics of leadership and motivation in higher education.

#### **3.3.2. Future Research Directions**

Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how instructors' leadership styles influence student motivation over time, allowing for a better understanding of causality and change dynamics.

There is also a critical need to design, implement, and rigorously evaluate faculty leadership development programs tailored specifically to the unique cultural and institutional context of Ethiopian higher education.

Expanding research beyond the Amhara region to include diverse universities across Ethiopia will improve the generalizability and applicability of findings. Moreover, future initiatives should emphasize promoting transformational leadership practices within faculty



development to maximize student motivation and academic success.

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#### **Credit authorship contribution statement**

**Sisay Fekadie:** Writing – original draft, Review & editing, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation.

**Professor Tesfaye Ketsela:** Review & editing, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

**Markos Tezera (Associate Professor):** Review & editing, original draft, Visualization, Formal analysis.

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#### **Data availability statement:**

The corresponding author will provide data upon reasonable request. **Sisay Fekadie (corresponding author).**

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#### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

We declare that the manuscript entitled "The Relationship Between Instructor Leadership Styles and Student Motivation and Academic Performance in Public Universities of Amhara Regional State: A Study of Students' Perceptions in the Context of Ethiopia" is our original work and has not been previously published elsewhere. The manuscript is not currently under consideration for publication by any other journal. The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper. Administrative support and travel assistance were provided by the University of Gondar.



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