The Nature of Academic Leadership at the Colleges of Royal University of Bhutan

Abstract

This qualitative case study research explored leaders’ and faculty members’ perspectives on the nature of academic leadership at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) Colleges. The study aimed to gain insights about non-Western academic leadership as practised in a Bhutanese context that is strongly influenced by Buddhist values. Data for the study was collected from leaders and faculty members of three of RUB Colleges through semi-structured interviews which were then analysed thematically. Following an interpretivist worldview and drawing insights from leadership theories enabled understanding of the academic leadership practices at the Colleges.

The study revealed that differences in the perspectives of leaders and faculty members on academic leadership at RUB Colleges are influenced by the leadership knowledge, experience and training of leaders. Further, the study illustrated that understanding of academic leadership is affected by the Bhutanese culture, which is strongly Buddhist in nature. Exploration of Bhutanese culture and Buddhist principles and values resulted in a construction of a Buddhist-influenced theoretical leadership model, thus contributing to the global cross- cultural understanding of leadership. The study also presented a recommended academic leadership model for RUB Colleges as no existing Western leadership model fits neatly into the Bhutanese cultural milieu.

The study recommends that RUB institute academic leadership development programme to enhance leadership knowledge and skill. It also identifies an urgent need to frame and implement RUB human resources policies and regulations for effective functioning of the Colleges. The study provides future research direction, such as the need for research into public and private colleges and Buddhist institutes of higher learning in Bhutan to gain more holistic understanding of academic leadership and to gain deeper insights into the practice of Buddhist leadership.

Keywords:

Academic leadership, higher education, leadership attributes, the Royal University of Bhutan, cross-cultural leadership, spiritual leadership, Buddhist-influenced leadership, cultural influence, interpretivist, case study