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## Article

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Administrative Sciences

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*Suggested Citation:* Khan, Irfan Ullah; Gerald Goh Guan Gan; Khan, Mohammad Tariqul Islam; Saif, Naveed (2023) : Role of organizational justice in linking leadership styles and academics' performance in higher education, Administrative Sciences, ISSN 2076-3387, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 13, Iss. 4, pp. 1-17,  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13040101>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/275566>

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## Article

# Role of Organizational Justice in Linking Leadership Styles and Academics' Performance in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** Leadership is vital for all organizations, including higher education institutions (HEIs). Based on this, this study aimed to examine department heads' leadership styles concerning employee performance as well as nurturing the culture of justice. For this purpose, the leadership styles (transformational and transactional leadership) relationship is examined with employee performance through the mediating role of organizational justice. Data were collected from academicians working in the HEIs located in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan using a convenience sampling approach to obtain the targeted sample. Data were analyzed through a symmetric approach and after conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS, mediation models were assessed by following the Hayes process model procedure. The results indicate that organizational justice partially mediates the direct relationship between transformational and transactional leadership with employee performance in the HEIs sector of Pakistan. It is recommended that institutions need to take action to ensure that just and fair transformational leadership behavior is practiced to attain the desired employee performance in the HEIs.

**Keywords:** leadership styles; organizational justice; employees' performance; higher education institutions



**Citation:** Khan, Irfan Ullah, Gerald Goh Guan Gan, Mohammad Tariqul Islam Khan, and Naveed Saif. 2023. Role of Organizational Justice in Linking Leadership Styles and Academics' Performance in Higher Education. *Administrative Sciences* 13: 101. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13040101>

Received: 10 January 2023

Revised: 19 March 2023

Accepted: 24 March 2023

Published: 30 March 2023



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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, education at all levels has become a hallmark for well-groomed cultures and developed societies. Therefore, education is not a matter of qualification alone. Rather, it has developed into a core source of worthy living in obtaining a higher socio-academic profile in society (Ali and Rehman 2016). In this context, previous studies (e.g., Farooq et al. 2022; Saif et al. 2022; Tahira et al. 2019) indicate that socio-demographic attributes shape an individual's leadership approach in various situations, and it is supported by Bass' (2000) theoretical underpinning mechanism. Higher education institutions are dynamic actors in imparting quality education that ultimately provides leadership potential in the various spheres of life. The provision of quality education along with nurturing leadership capabilities is possible when academics deliver their utmost commitment and performance (Khan et al. 2020). In higher educational institutions, different functionaries work as academic units headed by leaders in the institutional hierarchy (Khan et al. 2021a). These leaders are responsible in their spheres for providing the directions towards desired objectives and evaluating the outcome through just, fair, and transparent procedures aimed at inspiring the workforce toward higher performance.

The concept of leadership varies across different disciplines as various kinds of leadership styles describe the importance of the word based on their relevant philosophies. For instance, Winston and Patterson (2006) described a leader as "one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted

*coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives"* (p. 9). Academic leadership is responsible for improving performance towards already set goals through different measures that are significant in determining the desired outcomes. Leadership in higher education has been considered for both academics and those who perform their functions with diverse capacities and dynamic roles (such as vice chancellors, deans, directors, and heads of departments) (Brown et al. 2002). The functions and roles, which are concerned with the academic and administrative affairs of their institutions, are further coupled with effective teaching and learning activities and outcomes (Ackerman and Mackenzie 2006). In this connection, each role is significant in its own domain. However, the head of the department's role remains more significant due to their role in shaping students' and teachers' behavior (Lyons 2008). The organizational context, along with leadership roles in different domains, is one of the several factors responsible for institutional success and failure. Likewise, brain drain, conflicts, globalization, nepotism, favoritism, inadequate resources, and institutional injustice are the most critical issues faced by institutions (Paracha et al. 2012) that need further consideration from the concerned leadership.

In leadership roles, the heads of departments are researched widely in the higher education context as these roles are assumed to be effective for guiding and leading academic and administrative roles effectively (Sakiru et al. 2014). Through their dynamic interactions, these leaders are effective towards academic performance and student outcomes. Most of the previous research studies link the dynamic relationship between transformational leadership and employees' performance in education (Lan et al. 2019), SMEs (Shah et al. 2022), and HEIs (Khan et al. 2021a; Khan et al. 2022). On the other hand, many researchers (Saif et al. 2018; Alrowwad et al. 2020; Azizaha et al. 2020) depict that transformational leadership cannot be understood effectively without assessing the role of the transactional approach, as these prominent styles of leadership are proposed by Bass et al. (1996). When leadership is fair, the chance for organizational justice may be greater than compared to when unfair and unwanted leadership is empowered (Bahar et al. 2015). Consequently, fair leadership, through diverse traits and styles, is vital for inspiring commitment and performance to ensure the desired outcomes leading to institutional ranking and success (Khan and Nawaz 2016). Leadership is dynamic for nurturing trust and confidence, thereby considering the norms and values of the concerned institution to attain the desired standards through effective measures is essential for institutional success (Holtz and Hu 2017). Leaders who can develop and demonstrate effective leadership styles and sustain a coherent dynamic correlation with contemporaries may be able to confer dynamism towards the development of the concerned institutions.

Academic leadership, through fair dynamic measures, remained constant and is thus phenomenal in attaining the desired outcomes. The entire phenomenon is bridged with fairness, trust, and confidence that emanates from the top echelons of the leadership, which are more often than not present at the bottom (followers) and results in leadership development in institutions (Grunberg et al. 2018).

The leadership (head of departments) is effective in managing efforts and the potential of followers (academics) overwhelmed at anticipated outcomes related to administrative will (determination) and academic outcomes (success) through dynamic culture (Khan et al. 2019). These are the leading and influential factors (leadership, justice, and performance), along with certain other influential factors (academic, economic, and political), which are vital for institutional performance (Khan et al. 2020). Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness and equity in the workplace. It involves evaluating how well an organization treats its employees, including distributive justice (fairness in the distribution of rewards), procedural justice (fairness in decision-making processes), and interactional justice (fairness in interpersonal treatment). The literature on transformational leadership and organizational justice suggests that transformational leaders are more likely to promote a sense of justice and fairness in the workplace (Purwanto et al. 2020). This is because transformational leaders are known to inspire and motivate their followers to go beyond their self-interests, and they often encourage a shared sense of purpose and

values (Alamir et al. 2019). In this connection, leadership through different styles has been widely researched toward performance through certain facilitative parameters, such as organizational justice with diverse outcomes (Khan et al. 2021a). Similarly, transactional leadership has also been found to be positively associated with organizational justice, and organizational justice has been found to mediate the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance (Khan et al. 2021b). This suggests that transactional leaders who provide clear expectations, feedback, and rewards are more likely to have employees who perceive their workplace as fair and perform better as a result. Moreover, some studies have found that organizational justice can also partially mediate the relationship between transformational (Thompson et al. 2021; Rokhman 2011) and transactional leadership and employee performance. This suggests that both transformational and transactional leadership may influence employee performance through the creation of a fair and just workplace. Therefore, this study is an “effort to examine the leadership” styles, organizational justice, and performance in the context of higher education institutions. The structure of the paper comprises five parts. Part one consists of introducing the concept of this current research study along with the research objective. Part two comprises a literature review to link the relationship between criterion and outcome variables as well as the mediating role of organizational justice. Part three comprises a detailed methodology along with instruments for data collection and statistical procedures as well as ethical standards for conducting this current study. Part four presents a detailed discussion of finding through the Hayes statistical models, while part five culminates in the presentation of the conclusion, contributions, and recommendations of this current study.

## 2. Research Objectives

To examine the association between predictors (transformational and transactional leadership styles), the mediator (organizational justice), and the criterion variable (academics’ performance) through correlation (in line with hypothesis # 1).

To examine the mediating role of organizational justice in connecting transformational style and academics’ performance through mediation (in line with hypothesis # 2)

To examine the organizational justice mediating role in linking the transactional style and academics’ performance through mediation (in line with hypothesis # 3)

## 3. Literature Review

Leadership is widely explored in different contexts in connection to different work outcomes, such as work ethic, work engagement, empowerment, commitment satisfaction, and performance, with diverse outcomes leading to the desired change (Blackmore and Sachs 2000). In this connection, the persistent environmental changes and there is an increase in the global demand for organizational leadership to find ways through diverse traits/styles to manage and control work groups (multicultural) fairly effectively and efficiently (Ackerman and Mackenzie 2006). In this regard, different styles are widely recommended. However, the transformational and transactional styles are widely researched concerning their significant attributes for inspiring workforces in different contexts (Bass and Bass 2008). However, the dynamism behind leadership effectiveness is the inspiration of these leaders toward followers (workforces) to attain the desired outcomes through effective performance via undaunted commitment (Paracha et al. 2012). The same is the case with higher education institutions, wherein leadership has been considered as an effective phenomenon towards academics’ performance leading to effective teaching and learning activities that ensure institutional success.

Leadership in higher education requires certain well-concerted efforts toward the inspiration of academics to attain the desired outcomes from teaching and learning activities. The provision of the required facilities, an adaptation of structural changes, and variation in technological advancement are the leading kinematics that demands leadership to inspire academics to upgrade their skills and knowledge as per leadership and institutional demands (Fairman and Mackenzie 2015). Thus, leadership is vital for augmenting the trust

and confidence of workforces through just and fair procedures to make them inspired and committed towards desired objectives in diverse situations (Holtz and Hu 2017). Leadership through different styles is effective towards work attitude and work performance (task and contextual), which are thus critical for the determination of desired objectives in a particular context (Wen et al. 2019). Leadership, be it transactional or transformational are widely researched towards performance in a different context, including higher education (Khan et al. 2021a), and this study is a further attempt to examine the leadership styles and academics' performance with organizational justice as a mediator in the context of higher education.

### 3.1. Leadership Styles

The literature on leadership provides insight into leadership traits and styles that establish actual dependence of leadership toward situations, values, standards, and attitudes of individuals involved in institutional activities, leading to attaining desired objectives. The main theme behind leaders' success is suitability regarding style selection, in a suitable situation and time (Bass 2000). Leadership through different styles aims to inspire the followers towards desired objectives to utilize their knowledge and skills towards pre-defined objectives (Bass and Bass 2008). Thus, the main kinematics behind the selection is the appropriate style based upon the situation that demands leadership to take suitable measures over cross-cultural competencies in response to various issues involved in the process of development (Paula and Tarique 2012). The literature revealed that through different phases, leadership has been gradually developed as the outcome of the various theories and models that recommended the leadership skills and traits necessary in particular situations (Khan and Nawaz 2016). Thus, it became apparent, as time passed, that leadership success is determined through situational factors, behavioral traits, and styles that leaders adapt in particular situations (Amin et al. 2018). However, at the moment, the most popular classification is the transformational and transactional extremes on the continuum of leadership that cover all leading attributes of leadership explained across the models in different situations (Khan et al. 2021b).

#### 3.1.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership enhances motivation and performance by developing morale and is effective in creating a culture of innovation and trust through its important attributes (Judge and Piccolo 2004). These leaders emphasize shaping the behavior towards goals and enhancing emotional strength and affection to produce maximum outcomes by utilizing their utmost efforts, skills, and potential (Bass and Bass 2008). The leader considers followers' needs and inspires them through effective attributes, such as intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation to encourage them towards higher efficiencies and greater productivity (Paracha et al. 2012). These charismatic leadership qualities assist the followers' behaviors and attributions toward particular objectives while keeping in view the vision and mission of the concerned institutions (Sharma and Singh 2017). These leaders thus encourage fairness, innovative approaches, and intellectual interests that inspire the workforce's commitment and performance (Khan et al. 2021a). These are the leading attributes that make transformational leaders more influential and effective compared to transactional leaders (Table 1).



**Table 1.** Existing Research.

Author/Year	Research Problem	Hypothesis	Sample	Findings
(Alamir et al. 2019)	Is there any connection existing between TL and OC through OJ?	Impact of transformational leadership (TL) on organizational commitment (OC) with the mediating role of organizational justice (OJ)	502 employees in higher education (HE) sector in Syria	Interactional justice (IJ) plays a role as a mediator for the direct and indirect effects of transformational leadership (TL) on organizational commitment (OC). Additionally, procedural justice (PJ) and IJ act as mediating variables for the relationship between TL and job satisfaction (JS). Distributive justice (DJ) mediates the relationship between transactional leadership (TrL) and JS. Furthermore, the impact of the three types of organizational justice (OJ) on OC occurs through JS.
(Purwanto et al. 2020)	Due to injustice perception employees' commitment and satisfaction is lower at work, effecting leadership efficiency	Justice and transformational leadership have significant relation with employees' job satisfaction	351 employees automotive industry in Tangerang Indonesia	Distributive and interactional injustice contributes to lower organisational commitment.
(Ha and Le 2021)	Do aspects of justice have a mediating role between TL and OCC?	Do justice types mediate the relation for transformational leadership and organization change capacity?	315 employees in 72 Vietnamese firms	Findings state that justice acts as partial mediator for transformational leadership and employees' innovation capacity.
(Khan et al. 2021a)	Is there any connection existing between leadership and employee performance through OJ?	Impact of transactional and transformational leadership (TRL) on organizational commitment (OCM) with the mediating role of organizational justice (OJC)	400 employees in higher education (HE) sector in Pakistan	Justice (OJ) mediates the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership and employee performance.

### 3.1.2. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders inspire workforces through rewards and punishment to follow the beeline towards objectives realization. Active and passive management by expectation plays a significant role in transactional leadership behavior (Bass et al. 2003). These leaders are focused on set goals (desired standards) and thus ensure effective measures from every possible dimension for workforce motivation and performance towards well-defined objectives (Hinkin and Schriesheim 2008). The leaders (head of departments), through positive and negative reinforcement, inspire workforces (academics) toward desired standards that further ensure contingent rewards and contingent punishment (Dai et al. 2013). The leaders through the system of rewards and punishment, punish workforces whose performances are below standards and reward those whose efforts are as per required standards (Silva and Mendis 2017). Therefore, transactional leadership is more focused on desired standards and thus uses different techniques to inspire the workforce towards desired performance standards to attain desired objectives (Khan et al. 2021a) and thus remain a significant leadership style in particular situations.

### 3.1.3. Organizational Justice

Organizational justice is a significant phenomenon in the organizational context that emphasized workforces' perception of fairness in organizational activities. In this perception, individuals judged the behavior of organizational leadership from different perspectives overwhelmed by augmented attitudinal responsiveness (Greenberg 1990). Fairness is a multi-dimensional concept (procedural, distributive, and interactional) wherein indi-

viduals (workforces) compare the leadership behavior in the allocation and distribution of institutional resources (Colquitt and Shaw 2005). Just and fair decisions on the part of leadership are significant in determining the workforce's attitude toward desired performances (Suliman and Al Kathairi 2012). Thus, organizational justice aids in reinforcing professionalism among workforces that brings their abilities to the surface towards the attainment of desired objectives (Khan et al. 2016). Organizational justice directs autonomy, authority, responsibility, motivation, and performance towards the desired consequences (Khan et al. 2021b). The literature on transformational leadership and organizational justice suggests that transformational leaders are more likely to promote a sense of justice and fairness in the workplace. This is because transformational leaders are known to inspire and motivate their followers to go beyond their self-interests, and they often encourage a shared sense of purpose and values (Lan et al. 2019; Khan et al. 2021b). Research has found that transformational leaders are more likely to engage in behaviors that promote distributive justice, such as providing employees with equitable rewards and recognition for their contributions (Khan et al. 2022). They are also more likely to engage in behaviors that promote procedural justice, such as involving employees in decision-making and ensuring that decisions are made fairly and transparently (Shah et al. 2022). Thus, leadership in higher institutions may be successful in achieving the desired performances when justice prevails between leadership and academics.

#### 3.1.4. Academics' Performance

Academics' performance has been measured as a multi-dimensional concept that ensures responsiveness, involvement, efficiency, and effectiveness towards the realization of certain objectives. In this regard, performance is dependent upon the effectiveness of the workforce and efficiencies of workforces (Armstrong and Baron 2005). On the part of leadership, professional behavior is critical for determining employee outcomes through the effectiveness of various attributes related to the leadership and workforce (Thomas and Feldman 2009). For instance, the study of (Haider et al. 2022) concludes that responsible leadership is the major style of leading behavior in shaping employee behavior through knowledge sharing in the HEIs sector. Similar results are quoted (Doh and Quigley 2014) that responsible leadership enhances employee performance. This performance denotes the abilities of individuals to perform different job-related activities (task and contextual) to chase the objectives and consequently contribute toward the desired development (Parmar et al. 2014). In this connection, virtuous performance, professionalism, commitment, and work ethics are leading parameters associated with the anticipated institutional consequences that ensure the desired success (Ahmed and Mostafa 2017). The leadership role through different styles and traits is significant in nurturing the workforce's behavior towards desired outcomes (Khan et al. 2021b). Therefore, performance is a vital success factor for employees and institutional development and success. Similarly, transactional leadership has also been found to be positively associated with organizational justice, and organizational justice has been found to mediate the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance (Khan et al. 2021b). This suggests that transactional leaders who provide clear expectations, feedback, and rewards are more likely to have employees who perceive their workplace as fair and perform better as a result.

Moreover, some studies (Lin et al. 2019; Thompson et al. 2021) have found that organizational justice can also partially mediate the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership and employee performance. This suggests that both transformational and transactional leadership may influence employee performance through the creation of a fair and just workplace. Overall, the literature suggests that organizational justice plays important mediating and moderating roles (Alneyadi et al. 2019) in the relationship between transformational/transactional leadership and employee performance and that creating a sense of fairness and equity in the workplace is crucial for improving employee outcomes.

Moreover, the dynamic relationship between transformational and transactional leadership with justice perception is based on social exchange theory (Blau 1964), while the relation between leadership styles and employee performance is based on Bass' transformational theory. The theoretical framework for this study that examines the relationships between these variables is presented in Figure 1.

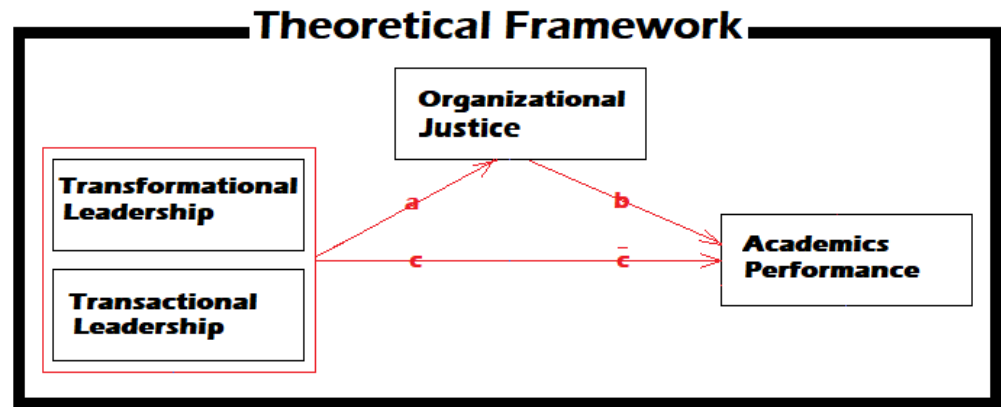


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

#### 4. Research Hypotheses

**Hypotheses 1 (H<sub>1</sub>).** *There are significant associations between predictors (leadership styles, i.e., transformational or transactional), mediator (organizational justice), and a criterion variable (academics' performance).*

**Hypotheses 2 (H<sub>2</sub>).** *Organizational justice mediates the link between the transformational style and academics' performance.*

**Hypotheses 3 (H<sub>3</sub>).** *Organizational justice mediates the link between the transactional style and academics' performance.*

#### 5. Materials and Methods

The research methodology denotes the methods and procedures supported by tools and techniques necessary for conducting the study and reaching a conclusion. This study received the Multimedia University Research Ethics Committee Ethical Approval (Reference No: EA0612022) for the study to be conducted. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents of the survey before the commencement of the data collection.

##### 5.1. Design and Approach

The design of this study is inferential, wherein testing hypotheses comprise exploratory parameters to explore possible and desired linkages among the research variables (Ridenour and Newman 2008). A representative sample is selected for the survey using standard procedures to determine sample size.

##### 5.2. Instruments

In social research, the existing data on the topic is first explored by the researcher with a view to extracting variables together with their inter-relationships to construct a theoretical framework (Bryman 2012). In the current study, adopted constructs were used to obtain appropriate results as shown in Figure 1. For this purpose, leadership styles (transformational and transactional) were investigated through employees rating their immediate boss in HEIs.

A Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (5X-short version) developed by Avolio and Bass (2002) and comprising twenty items was used, and the response is recorded on a five-point Likert scale where a rating of 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicates



‘strongly agree’. A sample item for transformational leadership is “*I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group*”, with the reliability of Alpha = 0.81. Similarly, transactional leadership was investigated by the same MLQ (5X-short version) developed by (Avolio and Bass 2002) consisting of 6 items, and the response is recorded on a five-point response scale where (from 1 = not at all to 5 = frequently). A sample item for transactional leadership is “*I make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved*”, with the reliability of Alpha = 0.78. Similarly, organizational justice is measured by the adopted construct (Khan et al. 2021a) comprising 12 items. A sample item for organizational justice is “*The output reflects what you have invested in the institution*”, with a reliability value of 0.76. Employee performance was investigated by examining the actual output of employees by their immediate boss in HEIs. Performance was measured by the adopted construct of (Khan et al. 2021a) comprising (16) items. The sample item for employee performance is “*Employees make all out efforts to adapt innovative methods*”, with a reliability value of 0.85. Table 2 depicts detailed information related to employee organizational justice measurement construct used in the current study. The reliability depicts that all the items are higher than the threshold level. Hence, it can be used for further analysis.

**Table 2.** Items for organizational justice.

S.N.	Item/s	Reliability
1	The output reflects what you have invested in the institution.	0.780
2	You receive appreciation, commensurate with services you render.	0.711
3	You have been promoted accordingly to what you have accomplished.	0.722
4	The competency and skill of employees takes them to higher status.	0.732
5	You are allowed to express your views during decision-making process.	0.802
6	You can influence the procedures and consequences.	0.811
7	The procedures are applied in the consistent manner in the institution.	0.803
8	The leaders are liable to explain the procedures they adopt.	0.807
9	The information is communicated in the specific time-period.	0.744
10	The leader transforms the information pertaining with an individual.	0.755
11	The leader promotes the interpersonal relationships in the institution.	0.766
12	The leader tries to create trust and commitment among employees.	0.745

### 5.3. Population and Sample

The population comprises all the elements which are necessary for conducting the study. Thus, the population of this study includes academicians (heads of departments and academics) from selected higher institutions (two universities (UOP and GU)) (994 total population) in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. From this population, a sample of 285 was selected through the sampling formula (Yamani 1967). A total of 285 questionnaires were distributed with a total of 266 usable responses collected or a 93% response rate from the respondents.

### 5.4. Data Analysis

In research, for answering research questions, data analysis is a systematic process that suggests different tools and techniques to arrange the information as per user requirements. Thus, several statistical procedures (correlation and regression) are used to reduce data into the practicable form and thus answer research questions (Zikmund et al. 2010). Similarly, mediation confirmed that among predicting and mediating variables, which one is bringing maximum variation in the dependent variable (Preacher and Hayes 2008). In one of the following formats, the answer to this question emerges: Full mediation is an indicator that is not a predictor rather mediator is critical. Partial mediation reflects that both are critical. No mediation shows that the predictor is critical.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (CA) was used to assess reliability because it is the standard method for measuring the internal consistency of the construct under study. Table 3 displays the CA results for all scales. The table reveals that all variable values ranged between (0.750–0.912), which is regarded to be ( $CA > 0.70$ ) (Hair et al. 2010), indicating that the research instrument has excellent internal consistency. The variance inflation factor was used in this study to test for multicollinearity (VIF). VIF quantifies how much the variance of the predicted regression coefficients is overstated due to collinearity (Sekaran and Bougie 2016). Table 3 shows that the VIF values ranged from (1.235–1.697), which is less than 2 and deemed to be within acceptable bounds.

**Table 3.** VIF Values.

Dimension	CA	Mean	SD	VIF
Transformational Leadership	0.750	4.197	0.767	1.697
Transactional Leadership	0.830	3.655	0.987	1.234
Organizational Justice	0.912	3.945	0.876	1.543
Academics' Performance	0.910	2.983	1.309	1.771

The association among research variables was hypothesized through the first hypothesis as analyzed through the correlation procedure (Table 4). The results show that the highest association was found between academics' performance and transformational leadership ( $R = 0.723$ ). Likewise, the other predictors, transactional leadership ( $R = 0.434$ ) and organizational justice ( $R = 0.555$ ), were correlated significantly with academics' performance. Results from correlation procedures revealed that transformational leadership is correlated highly with academics' performance as compared to the other predictor (transactional leadership). Hence, from the correlation outcomes,  $H_1$  (hypothesis # 1) is accepted. Therefore, the results of the study are supported by previous results on similar issues in similar as well as diverse contexts (Dai et al. 2013; Sharma and Singh 2017; Khan et al. 2021a) and, therefore, confirmed the results from existing studies.

**Table 4.** Association (Correlation).

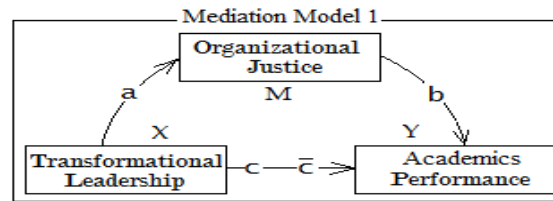
		Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Organizational Justice
Academics' Performance	P-Correlation	0.723 **	0.434 **	0.555 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	266	266	266

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

### 6.2. Mediation Model 1

The mediation model 1 as shown in Figure 2 was analysed and the mediation results provide the information (outcomes) through different paths (4 paths), which are thus considered significant conditions for mediation. The first mediation path (a) provides data about predictability of the mediator (organizational justice) through predictor (transformational leadership), wherein results confirmed 57.37% variance in organizational justice because of the transformational leadership with significant outcomes ( $\beta = 0.7041$  and  $p$ -value = 0.0000) and thus provide significant information about first mediation conditions (path-a) (see Tables 5 and 6). The mediation of the second and third conditions (path-b and c) in Table 7 revealed that 87.21% variance in academics' performance is due to organizational justice and transformational leadership with substantial outcomes; likewise, Table 8 shows the results obtained for organizational justice ( $\beta = 0.3562$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000) and transformational leadership ( $\beta = 0.8089$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000). Thus, the second and third mediation conditions also provide significant information.

X = Transformational Leadership  
M = Organizational Justice  
Y = Academics' Performance



**Figure 2.** Mediation Model 1.

**Table 5.** Model Summary (path-a).

R	R Square	F	MSE	df2	df1	p
0.6574	0.5737	430.6803	0.4153	320.0000	1.0000	0.0000

**Table 6.** Coefficients of Regression (path-a).

Model	Coefficient	t	se	p	ULCI	LLCI
Constant	0.5356	3.1241	0.1714	0.0019	0.8728	0.1983
Transformational Leadership	0.7041	20.7528	0.0339	0.0000	0.7708	0.6373

Dependent Variable: Organizational Justice, Independent Variable: Transformational Leadership.

**Table 7.** Model Summary (path-b and c).

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.7339	0.8721	0.1940	1087.5855	2.0000	319.0000	0.0000

**Table 8.** Coefficients of Regression (path-b and c).

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	−1.0559	0.1189	−8.8767	0.0000	−1.2899	−0.8218
Organizational Justice	0.3562	0.0382	9.3222	0.0000	0.2810	0.4314
Transformational Leadership	0.8089	0.0355	22.7750	0.0000	0.7390	0.8788

Independent Variable: Transformational Leadership and Organizational Justice. Dependent Variable: Academics' Performance.

Table 9 presents the results where the fourth condition (path-c) revealed that 83.73% of variance that occurred in academics' performance is due to transformational leadership ( $\beta = 1.1133$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000). Therefore, mediation of all paths provides significant information in reaching the decision, whether partial or full mediation. In Table 10, the organizational justice partially mediated the relationship between academics' performance and transformational leadership as a decrease in Beta (path-c), from (1.1133) to (.8089) in (path-b and c), while all paths remained significant in mediation. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted based on the mediation results. The results of the study are supported by previous studies results on similar issues in similar and diverse contexts (Carter et al. 2009; Rokhman and Hassan 2012; Tung and Tsai 2018; Khan et al. 2021b). Thus, significant support is provided from the existing research on similar issues.

**Table 9.** Model Summary (path-c).

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.7250	0.8373	0.2461	1646.3170	1.0000	320.0000	0.0000

**Table 10.** Coefficients of Regression (path-c).

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	−0.8651	0.1320	−6.5554	0.0000	−1.1247	−0.6055
Transformational Leadership	1.1133	0.0261	40.5748	0.0000	1.0083	1.1111

Independent Variable: Transformational Leadership, Dependent Variable: Academics' Performance.

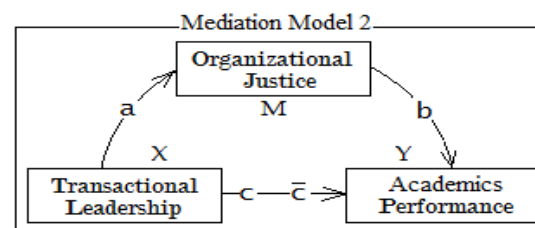
### 6.3. Mediation Model 2

The mediating role of organizational justice is hypothesized through H<sub>3</sub> which was tested using the Hayes process model and illustrated in Figure 3 as mediation model 2. The results provide significant information in deciding the mediation role over four conditional paths (a, b, c and  $\hat{c}$ ).

X = Transactional Leadership

M = Organizational Justice

Y = Academics' Performance

**Figure 3.** Mediation Model 2.

In Tables 11 and 12, the first path (a) confirmed the first condition wherein 61.20% alteration in organizational justice is due to transactional leadership with significant values ( $\beta = 0.8568$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000). The mediation second and third paths (b and  $\hat{c}$ ) in Tables 13 and 14 showed that 74.61% change in academics' performance is due to transactional leadership and organizational justice ( $\beta = 0.6271$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000) and ( $\beta = 0.5674$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000) respectively.

**Table 11.** Model Summary (path-a).

R	R Square	F	MSE	df2	df1	p
0.7823	0.6120	504.7136	0.3780	320.0000	1.0000	0.0000

**Table 12.** Coefficients of Regression (path-a).

Model	Coefficient	t	se	p	ULCI	LLCI
Constant	0.7751	5.2301	0.1482	0.0000	1.0666	0.4835
Transactional Leadership	0.8568	22.4658	0.0381	0.0000	0.9318	0.7817

Dependent Variable: Organizational Justice, Independent Variable: Transactional Leadership.

**Table 13.** The Model Summary (b and c).

R	R Square	F	MSE	df2	df1	p
0.8638	0.7461	468.6676	0.3852	319.0000	2.0000	0.0000

**Table 14.** The Coefficients of Regression (b and c).

Model	Coefficient	t	se	p	Upper Limit Confidence Interval	Lower Limit Confidence Interval
Constant	−0.2779	−1.7831	0.1559	0.0755	0.0287	−0.5846
Transactional leadership	0.6271	10.1467	0.0618	0.0000	0.7487	0.5055
Organizational Justice	0.5674	10.0553	0.0564	0.0000	0.6785	0.4564

Dependent Variable: Academics' Performance, Independent Variable: Transactional Leadership and Organizational Justice.

The fourth path (in Table 15) showed the direct relationship between predictor and criterion variables wherein 66.56% change is evident with significant values ( $\beta = 1.0597$  and  $p$ -values = 0.0000). Again, the mediation results presented in Table 16 confirmed the partial mediation role of organizational justice in linking transactional leadership and academics' performance wherein Beta in the direct relationship (1.0597) is reduced to (62.71) in the indirect relationship and thus, from results, hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) is accepted.

**Table 15.** Model Summary (c).

R	R Square	F	MSE	df2	df1	p
0.8158	0.6656	636.9581	0.5057	320.0000	1.0000	0.0000

**Table 16.** Coefficients of Regression (c).

Model	Coefficient	t	se	p	Upper Limit Confidence Interval	Lower Limit Confidence Interval
Constant	0.1619	0.9444	0.1714	0.3457	0.4991	−0.1753
Transactional Leadership	1.0597	25.2380	0.0441	0.0000	1.2000	1.0265

Dependent Variable: Academics' Performance, Independent Variable: Transactional Leadership.

The results of this study are supported by previous results on similar issues in similar as well as diverse contexts (Hassan and Hassan 2015; Reb et al. 2019; Khan et al. 2021b), and thus the study provides “significant support to results from the existing” research studies.

## 7. Conclusions

Since this research is an effort to answer specific research questions through the procedure of hypotheses testing thus provides significant information in concluding has been drawn about the relationships among research variables (predictors, criterion, and mediator) variables in higher education institutions (universities). The results provide significant information about the predicted role of leadership styles (transformational and tractional) of the head of departments towards academics' performance. In this connection, to summarize the outcomes of hypotheses testing, the following decisions are presented as a bird-eye-view of the complete story regarding hypotheses about leading questions of research hypotheses:

- H1. Before applying any further statistical procedures, the confirmation of the association between predictors and criterion variables is necessary. The results of the study verified highly significant associations between these variables. The first hypothesis tested through correlation analysis provides information about the dominant role of



transformational leadership in explaining the association towards the academics' performance. The results from the correlation procedure thus verify a higher correlation between transformational leadership and academics' performance (0.723) compared to transactional leadership and academic performance (0.434). Therefore, the decision is that transformational leadership is more effective for academics' performance in a higher education context. Similar results are evident in the study of (Alamir et al. 2019) in the education sector of Syria (Alrowwad et al. 2017) among Jordanian pharmaceutical companies (Lan et al. 2019) among cram schools in Taiwan.

- H2. The mediation of organizational justice as a supporter in the connection between leadership styles and academics' performance is verified through the data gathered. The mediation results confirmed partial mediation of organizational justice in linking transformational leadership and academics' performance (1.1133) to (0.8089). The decision is that organizational justice plays a significant role in explaining academics' performance in higher education institutions.
- H3. The testing of hypothesis about the mediation of the variable confirms that the mediator is significantly supporting the predictor in bringing variation in the criterion variable. Similarly, the second model of mediation analysis also gives figures representing the partial mediation role of organizational justice, thereby strengthening the relationship between predictor (transactional leadership) and criterion variables (academics' performance) from (1.0597) is (0.6271), thus confirming the partial mediation.

Consequently, it is concluded that predicting the role of the transformational leadership style of the head of the department is more powerful in determining academics' performance through facilitating the role of organizational justice in indirect relationships ( $\beta = 0.8089$ ) and as compared to the transactional leadership through the mediating role of the organizational justice- ( $\beta = 0.6271$ ). Thus, it is concluded from the results that transformational leadership is the most popular and effective leadership style in predicting academic performance in higher educational institutions in developing countries like Pakistan.

### 7.1. Theoretical Implications

The current study found a positive relationship between transformational and transactional leadership with employee performance with mediating role of organization justice. Hence it validates the assumptions of social exchange theory (Blau 1964), which proposes that employees replay positively to leaders or organizations in the form of work performance based on the level of justice perception. Transformational leaders, who are perceived by followers as supportive and respectful, as a result followers respond with positive behaviors at the workplace. On the other hand, the reward and punishment concept also aligns with employee's perception of justice, leading to affective exchange mechanism based on performance evaluation. Hence transactional leadership also portray as a significant contributor to shaping employee performance in the presence of an effective justice mechanism.

### 7.2. Managerial Implications

Based on the findings of the current study, it is recommended for academic leadership to foster the culture of effective mechanisms of justice in an organization that is based on performance-based evaluation instead of nepotism and personal biases. Top management of HEIs must also promote the culture of transformational leadership capabilities among senior management and faculty to inculcate innovation among young faculty members and infuse the feeling of motivation for achievements of rewards based on appropriate institutional codes.

### 7.3. Recommendations

There has been limited research regarding the role of the transactional and transformational leadership styles concerning academic performance in the background of the HEIs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. However, results from the current study confirm and

verify the impacts of leadership styles on academic performance. Furthermore, transformational leadership is emerging as the most preferred and dominant style across all research conducted on this issue in different contexts, including higher educational institutions.

Since democracy is gradually becoming adjusted to the political behavior of Pakistanis, therefore, the preference for transformational leadership is also increasing which is quite evident from every research in Pakistan for the assessment of transformational leadership style as the most leading, preferred, and executed widely in both public and private sector organizations.

Transformational leadership is effective in previous studies concerning performance as compared to transactional leadership, as confirmed also in the present study. Therefore, higher institutions are required to implement the transformational style of leadership in letters and spirit to attain the desired outcomes from the academics in higher educational institutions.

The present study established the mediating role of organizational justice through partial mediation in connecting transformational and transactional leadership. Though the role of transformational leadership is more effective (0.8089) than transactional leadership (0.6271), and thus institutions and leadership are required to ensure fairness in institutional processes and procedures.

The academic leaders are, therefore, required to inspire academics by using transformational styles in the institutions so that concerned teachers may show their efforts and potential to improve the teaching and learning activities overwhelmed at the institutional desired ranking and success in addition to ensure fairness in the distribution of the departmental resources.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, I.U.K., G.G.G.G. and M.T.I.K.; methodology, I.U.K., G.G.G.G. and N.S.; formal analysis, I.U.K. and N.S.; investigation, I.U.K.; writing—original draft, I.U.K.; writing—review and editing, I.U.K., G.G.G.G., M.T.I.K. and N.S.; supervision, G.G.G.G. and M.T.I.K.; resources, N.S.; project administration, G.G.G.G. and M.T.I.K.; funding acquisition, G.G.G.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** The APC was funded by Multimedia University.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Multimedia University (approval code EA0612022 and 6 September 2022) for studies involving humans.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not available.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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