

## Instructors' Perception of the Leadership Styles of their Department Heads at Jimma University

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate instructors' perception of the leadership styles of department heads at Jimma University. The study employed descriptive survey method and used quantitative approach. Instructors were source of data. A total of 192 sample instructors were selected using proportionate stratified sampling technique. LEAD-Others instrument and Demographic Variables Survey questionnaires were employed to collect the data. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Finally, it was examined using relevant literature. The results of this study showed that instructors perceived 'selling' as department heads' predominant and 'participating' as their secondary leadership style. The study further revealed that the perception of instructors did not significantly vary across demographic variables such as work experience and disciplinary background except level of education. Finally, the researchers recommended that department heads, as leaders; need to vary their leadership style in order to fit into the situations. Moreover, the university is advised to arrange continuous and relevant training for department heads to make them move able to varying their leadership styles. In addition, since leadership styles can vary across situations and time, further research should be conducted to see if there may be any differences in the leadership styles of department heads longitudinally.

**Keywords:** perception, leadership style, department heads

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## Introduction

Education in general and higher education in particular is corner stone of a nation's development as it is crucial in producing skilled labor force that accelerates the pace of a nation's social and economic advancement (UNESCO, 2005; TGE, 1994; Psacharopoulos 1985; Meulemester and Rochat, 1995). Principally, for developing countries where growth is essential, education is particularly important. Thus, in this changing and challenging world, knowledge based economy is craving for more intellectual property higher education plays paramount role in this regard.

The significance of higher education for the development of any nation, developed and developing, has clearly been spelt out in the large body of literature. According to Teshome (2005), higher education is crucial for the production of vital human resources, such as teachers, healthcare professionals, lawyers, engineers, managers, businessmen and researchers which are critical for socio-economic development of a nation. Moreover, Teshome described higher education as a center for knowledge and skills creation, adaptation and dissemination. Likewise, Santiago *et al* (2008) stated that there are at least four broad ways in which tertiary education contributes to the use of knowledge in both economic and social life: the building of knowledge bases (primarily through research); the creation of capabilities (through teaching and research training); the diffusion of knowledge (through interactions with knowledge users); and the maintenance of knowledge (inter-generational storage and transmission of knowledge through codification, libraries, databases, *etc*). Higher education, therefore, plays multiple roles especially in the transition toward knowledge based economy by providing the human resources required for leadership, management, business and professional positions that are important for the development of the country.

With this understanding therefore, most nations today are investing much on expanding higher education (Bloom, Canning and Chan, 2006). To take the advantage of higher education, Ethiopia has embarked on higher education

expansion and reform program of impressive dimensions following the adoption of the Education and Training Policy (TGE 1994). With rapid expansion, the policy raised the country's insignificant tertiary enrollment ratio to a more respectable level (Teshome, 2006). At the present time, the country has twenty-three universities, many of which were opened from scratch four or five years ago.

Universities are complex organizations. They have goals, and hierarchical systems and structures. They have officials that carry out specified duties and responsibilities. The officials that offer leadership and perform routine bureaucratic administration needed for handling day-to-day work (Cohen and March, 1974). To achieve their missions and goals, it is imperative for universities to have effective leadership that functions at different levels. Leadership is one of the major factors affecting a university's performance. With regard to this, Bitzer and Koen (2010) note that effective academic leadership can be viewed as the biggest advantage a university can have in a resource-hungry competitive higher education environment. Similarly, Al-Omari et al (2008) revealed that leaders are one of the crucial factors that determine the success or failure of an organization. In addition, leaders lead subordinates to perform in order to achieve organizational goals.

The establishment of land grant universities (Bennett, 1983) brought with itself job for department heads. The position of the academic department head in higher education is one that requires leadership, administrative skills, and scholarship (Gabbidon, 2005; Lucas, 2000). It bridges the gap between faculty and administration. A group of researchers noted that, "It is at the departmental level that the real institutional business gets conducted" (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993).

The academic department is the basic unit of universities and colleges. It provides a useful structure for the day-to-day activities that shape faculty members' attitudes, behaviors and performances. In line with this, Lucas (2000a) stated that within institutions of higher education, change efforts that directly impact students' educational experiences occur at the department

level. The same author also stated that changes in disciplinary focus, curriculum, research emphases, and teaching quality and student- faculty relationships are among the changes that occur as a result of efforts led by department chair persons'. Department chair persons make approximately 80% of all decisions on college campuses and are primarily responsible for both the budgeting and planning activities of the academic enterprise (Dyer and Miller, 1999; Knight and Holen, 1985). Therefore, the academic department chair person's position is one of the most important positions in the operation of higher education institutions.

A diversified body of literature witnesses that there are various leadership styles such as Democratic, Autocratic, Participative and Laissez-faire that managers can exercise in different situations so as to influence their employee with the ultimate aim of maximizing organizational performance. According to Dull (1981), since leadership is a dynamic process, leaders should always be astute enough to use the right style of leadership. In order to do so, they have to examine the nature of the task, their own limits and capabilities and the nature of individuals and the group they lead. This shows that there is no single leadership style that is effective in all situations. A leadership style effective in one situation may be ineffective in other situation. With regard to this, the Tri-dimensional Leader Effectiveness Model of Hersey and Blanchard (1982), comprises Relationship Behavior Axis, a Task Behavior Axis, and the Effectiveness Dimension Axis. According to these authors, these axes or grids form four quadrants of leadership styles: telling, selling, participating and delegating.

**Telling style (S<sub>1</sub>):** is characterized by high task and low relationship behavior and is best suited for followers of low maturity. The leader who employs this style habitually makes his/her own decisions and announces them to his/her subordinates expecting them to carry them out without question.

**Selling style (S<sub>2</sub>):** is characterized by high task and high relationship behavior and is best suited for followers of low to moderate maturity. The leader who uses this approach also makes his/her own decisions but, rather than simply announcing them to his subordinates, he/she tries to persuade his/her subordinates to accept them. The leader accepts the possibility that the followers may resist the decision; therefore, he/she persuades the followers to accept his/her decision.

**Participating Style (S<sub>3</sub>):** is characterized by high relationship and low task behavior and is best suited for followers of moderate to high maturity. The leader who uses this style does not make a decision until the problem is presented to members of his group and their advice and suggestions are received. The decision is made by the leader but it is not taken until the staff is consulted.

**Delegating Style (S<sub>4</sub>):** is characterized by low relationship and low task behavior and is best suited for followers of high maturity. This approach to leadership involves delegating to the subordinates the right to make decisions. The leader's function is to define the problem and indicate limits within which the decision must be made. The selection of an appropriate leadership style is determined by the maturity of the followers, which ranges from immature to mature.

Department heads, as leaders should therefore be aware of the specific situation in which they give direction so that they can employ leadership style that fits into the context. With this back ground, this study was designed to assess the leadership styles of department heads at Jimma University.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In today's world of knowledge based economy, universities are recognized as major actors in economic development and growth. In order to play their role successfully, they need to have an effective academic leadership. This

involves the higher, middle and lower level leaders. University leaders, especially department heads, have the potential to direct members of a particular culture towards change. In countries like Ethiopia, where higher education institutions are expected to address the multifaceted societal problems, it is increasingly important to study the leadership styles of the institutions, in general, and their department heads' in particular, as these factors are major determinants in achieving goals.

The large body of literature that exists on leadership is mainly the experience of Western countries. Comparatively, limited or no researches on leadership have been undertaken in the context of higher education institutions in developing countries like Ethiopia. Supporting this, Gmelch (2002a) indicated that even though department chairs have a significant impact on higher education's current and future state, they may be the least studied and most misunderstood management position anywhere in the world. Hence, there is lack of knowledge on the leadership styles of academic leaders in the university, in general, and that of department heads, in particular. Despite the universal acceptance of the fact that the success of university rests partly on academic leadership of the university at different levels, there is- to the best of the researchers' knowledge-no empirically designed systematic study on leadership styles of department heads of universities in Ethiopia, in general, and in Jimma University, in particular. In view of the facts stated above, the present study therefore, attempted to assess the perception of instructors' about the leadership styles of their department heads at Jimma University in their leadership functioning. "Perception" in this study is understood as the view of the instructors regarding the dominant leadership style used by the department heads as measured by LEAD (Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description). This study attempted to answer the following basic questions:

1. What is the perception of instructors about the leadership styles of their department heads?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference between any of the demographic variables (qualification, discipline and experience) and the leadership styles of department heads?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study was to assess the leadership styles of department heads in Jimma University. To this end, the study was aimed at:

- identifying the leadership styles of department heads;
- determining whether or not there is a difference in leadership styles of department heads based on their level of education/qualification, experience and discipline

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was aimed at assessing the leadership styles practiced by department heads in Jimma University. It was, thus, hoped that it would:

- provide valuable information to the concerned bodies about the leadership styles of department heads of the university under consideration;
- serve as a stepping stone for others who that may be interested in improving the function of leadership in higher education institutions in Ethiopia;
- serve as a spring board for researchers who are interested in studying further aspects of leadership styles in higher education institutions in the country; and
- also assist higher education academic leaders to acquire awareness of their own leadership styles as a step towards becoming effective academic professional leaders.

**Definition of Terms**

**Department Head:** The officially designated leader of an academic department in a college or university. According to Leaming (1998), department chairpersons serve as chief administrators for the department and represent the interests of the department to upper administration, to the dean, and to their faculty and students.

**Leadership Style:** The behavior pattern a person exhibits when they attempt to influence the activities of others (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 1996).

**Predominant Style:** The behavior pattern used most often to influence the activities of others. In other words, most leaders tend to have a favorite leadership style (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982).

**Relationship Behavior:** The extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication by providing socio-emotional support, "psychological strokes," and facilitating behaviors (Hersey and Blanchard, 1976).

**Readiness:** Readiness in Situational Leadership is defined as the extent to which a follower demonstrates the ability and willingness to accomplish a specific task (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996).

**Secondary Style:** The leadership style that a person tends to use on occasions (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982).

**Task Behavior:** The extent to which a leader engages in one-way communication by explaining what each follower is to do as well as when, where and how tasks are to be accomplished (Hersey and Blanchard, 1976)



## **Research Design**

This is a quantitative study, the purpose of the study is to assess leadership styles of department heads at Jimma University based on the perception of subordinates or instructors. In addition, the study aimed at describing the leadership styles of the department heads in relation to demographic variables (experience, qualification and discipline). In order to identify the current leadership styles of department heads, a descriptive survey method was employed.

## **Data Sources**

Sources of data for this study were instructors in the university under consideration. Accordingly, instructors in six colleges and one institute participated in this study.

## **Sampling Technique**

The university has six colleges and one institute. These are: College of Public Health and Medical Sciences; Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine; Business and Economics; Social Science and Law; Natural Sciences, Technology and Engineering and Institute of Education and Professional Development Studies. These Colleges and the Institute have 255, 158, 55, 231, 123, 178 and 15 instructors respectively. Accordingly, with the exception of instructors in the College of Business and Economics, all instructors in the other five colleges and one institute were included in the study. The College of Business and Economics, which had only four departments and 55 instructors, was excluded because it was used for pilot testing the instruments.

Stratified sampling technique was used to select representatives from each College and Department. Gay (1987) argues that the sample size of at least 10% should be taken for population of 1000. However, to increase the validity of the findings 20% of the instructors were included from each

college. Accordingly, 52 instructors from the colleges of Public Health and Medical Sciences (32), Agricultural and Veterinary Medicine (46), from Social Science and Law 25 from Natural Sciences (36), from Engineering and Technology (36), and 3 instructors from the Institute of Education and Professional Development Studies were included in the study. Altogether, 191 instructors were involved in the study.

### **Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

Data was collected using the Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description LEAD- Others instrument developed by the Center for Leadership Studies to assess the leadership styles proposed by Heresy and Blanchard. This instrument was, used in this study to assess leadership styles displayed by department heads as they are perceived by the instructors.

In addition to the LEAD-Others instrument, a Demographic Survey Instrument called the Personal Information Data Sheet was also included in the survey packet to determine appropriate factors relating to the subject's years of work experience, qualification, discipline and any other data relevant to the study.

The LEAD- Instrument consists of 12 management situations and four possible leadership style responses for each: 1) a high task–low relationship behavior; 2) a high task–high relationship behavior; 3) a high relationship–low task behavior; and 4) a low relationship–low task behavior. The respondents were expected to select the answer that most closely matches how they think their department heads would typically respond in a given situation.

Scores in four quadrants of the situational leadership model indicate style: quadrant 1 ( $S_1$ ), high task and low relationship behavior; quadrant 2 ( $S_2$ ), high task and high relationship behavior; quadrant 3 ( $S_3$ ), high relationship and low task behavior; and quadrant 4 ( $S_4$ ), low relationship and low task

behavior. The predominant leadership style of a respondent defines the quadrant with the most responses on the LEAD-instrument. A respondent's secondary/supporting style (or styles) defines a style they might apply on occasion.

The reliability of the instrument was maintained in such a way that it was pilot tested on one college before it was employed for the actual data collection. Out of 55 instructors in the college, 11 (20%) were included in the pilot test. Accordingly, the coefficients of reliability of items measuring all variables were found to be Cronbach's alpha,  $\alpha = 0.70$ . According to Gay (1980), if reliability coefficient is  $\alpha \geq 0.50$ , then, it can be accepted as reliable instrument. The items were, therefore, found to have good ground to be used in gathering the relevant data for the study.

Regarding the validity, the instruments were adapted from standardized questionnaire developed by the Center for Leadership Studies to assess the leadership styles proposed by Heresy and Blanchard. Moreover, the researchers tried to check it with relevant documents so as to adapt the items for the specific survey. The questionnaires were administered to 192 sample instructors and 188 (97.9%) were completed, returned and employed for the purpose of the study

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained through LEAD-questionnaire was analyzed using statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 16.0. It involved the application of both the descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive tests such as simple frequency and cross tabulation were used to investigate the predominantly perceived leadership style of department heads. Moreover, mean rank and other non parametric tests such as Chi-square and Kruskal-Wallis tests were computed to test whether or not there is a statistically significant difference among the perception of instructors about the leadership styles of department heads across various disciplines, experience and level of education in the university under consideration.

Moreover, to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the data, the disciplines were categorized using Biglan's classification. As cited in Gorsky et al (2010), Biglan (1973) classified academic disciplines into four categories: pure hard, pure soft, applied hard and applied soft. To each category, he associated disciplines and described the nature of their subject-matter as follows:

**Pure Hard** (Exact and natural sciences) characterized by Cumulative, atomistic (crystalline/treelike), concerned with universals, quantities, simplification, resulting in discovery/explanation.

**Pure Soft** (Humanities and social sciences) characterized by Reiterative, holistic, organic, concerned with particulars, qualities, complication, resulting in understanding/ interpretation.

**Applied Hard** (Science based professions) characterized by Pragmatic (know-how via hard knowledge), concerned with mastery of physical environment, resulting in products/techniques.

**Applied Soft** (Social science based professions) characterized by Functional, utilitarian (know-how via soft knowledge), concerned with enhancement of professional practice, resulting in protocols/procedures.

Accordingly, to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the data the researchers classified the disciplines in the university under consideration as summarized in table 1 below.

**Table 1: Classification of Disciplines in the University Based on Biglan's Category of Disciplines**

<b>Classifications</b>	<b>Discipline groups</b>
<b>Pure Hard</b>	Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Statistics
<b>Pure Soft</b>	Governance, Psychology, Sociology, History, Geography, English, Amharic, Afan Oromo and Oromo Folklore
<b>Applied Hard</b>	Internal Medicine, Ophthalmology, Pediatrics, Radiology, Anesthesia Gynecology and Obstetrics ; Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Medical Laboratory, Horticulture, Animal Science, Engineering, and Technology Disciplines
<b>Applied Soft</b>	Educational Planning and Management, Health and Physical Education, Nursing, Environmental Health, Health Education, Population and Family Health and Epidemiology, Agricultural Economics, Law, Post Harvest Management, Natural Resource Management

Furthermore, before starting the analysis, the quantitative data were codified. This facilitated the organization, retrieval and interpretation of the data.

## Results

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic data covers sex, instructors' work experience in the university, current educational level and their disciplinary areas. The majority of the instructors [169(89.9%)] were male. This is not surprising as there is an intolerable gender gap in the university. As far as work experience is concerned, majority of the respondents [114(60.6%)] had less than 6 years of work experience. Some instructors [34(18.1%)] had work experience of 11 years and above in the university. The presence only a limited number of academic staff with long years work experience seems to be due to high staff turnover in the university and the newness of some of the colleges. With regard to level of education, majority of the respondents, [122(64.9%)] hold

masters (MA/MSc/ DVM, MD with Specialty Certificate) whereas a limited number [8(4.3%)] of the instructors had their terminal degree.

Moreover, majority of the instructors [76(40.4%)] studied applied hard disciplines in their tertiary education. This means that most of them had the background of science based professions such as engineering, agriculture and medical sciences.

**Table 2: Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of their Department Heads**

	Percentage of Respondents' Perception per Quadrant				Total
	S1	S2	S3	S4	
Frequency (N)	30	90	46	22	188
Percent	16.0	47.9	24.5	11.7	100.0

*Note: S1= Telling, S2 = Selling, S3 = Participating and S4 = Delegating*

As can be seen from table 2, subordinates or instructors in this study perceived the predominant and secondary leadership styles of their department heads to be selling [90(47.9%)] and participating [46(24.5%)] respectively. The department heads were perceived by their subordinates as occasionally using leadership styles of participating (S3). Moreover, 30(16.0%) of the department heads were perceived by their subordinates as rarely using telling leadership style whereas 22(11.7%) were reported as rarely using delegating. This implies that department heads in the university under consideration, did not employ the delegating (S4) leadership style.

**Table 3: Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of their Department Heads according to their Work Experience**

Work experience in years	N	Percentage of Responses per Quadrant			
		S1	S2	S3	S4
0 -5	114	(23)20.2	(53)46.5	(25)21.9	(13)11.4
6- 10	40	(6)15.0	(24)60.0	(6)15.0	(4)10.0
11-16	13	(0).0	(6)46.2	(5)38.5	(2)15.4
17-20	4	(0).0	(2)50.0	(2)50.0	(0).0
21-25	12	(1)8.3	(2)16.7	(6)50.0	(3)25.0
26-30	4	(0).0	(3)75.0	(1)25.0	(0).0
Above 30	1	(0).0	(0).0	(1)100.0	(0).0
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>(30)16.0</b>	<b>(90)47.9</b>	<b>(46)24.5</b>	<b>(22)11.7</b>

Table 3 discloses that the predominantly perceived leadership style of department heads were selling [53(46.5%)] and participating [25(21.9%)] for instructors who had work experience of 5 years and below. Selling style of leadership was perceived by instructors who had 6-10, 11-16 and 26-30 years work experience. However, the predominantly perceived leadership styles of department heads among instructors who had 17-20 years of work experience were both selling [2(50%)] and participating [2(50%)]. No pattern of change in perception of leadership style of department heads was observed among instructors as the length of experience increases. Selling leadership styles followed by participative leadership styles were predominantly perceived across different length of work experience.

**Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis Test on Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of their Department Heads according to their Work Experience**

Work experience in years	N	Mean	X <sup>2</sup>	df	P
0-5	114	89.94	11.610	6	.071
6-10	40	86.90			
11-16	13	117.35			
17-20	4	109.50			
21-25	12	130.00			
26-30	4	92.50			
Above 30	1	143.50			
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>				

Table 4 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference ( $X^2 = 11.6$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) between instructors based on difference due to length of work experience regarding their perception about leadership style of their department heads. This means that regardless of their work experience, instructors perceived that the predominant leadership style of their department heads was selling.

**Table 5: Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of their Department Heads according to their Level of Education**

Qualification	N	Percentage of Responses per Quadrant			
		S1	S2	S3	S4
Bachelor	58	(16)27.6	(28)48.3	(12)20.7	(2)3.4
Masters	122	(14)11.5	(58)47.5	(30)24.6	(20)16.4
Doctoral	8	(0)0	(4)50.0	(4)50.0	(0)0
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>(30)16.0</b>	<b>(90)47.9</b>	<b>(46)24.5</b>	<b>(22)11.7</b>

Table 5 discloses that 28(48.3%) instructors who had a bachelors degree qualification perceived selling as a predominant leadership style of their department heads whereas telling was secondary [16(27%)]. Moreover, the



table shows that 58(47.5%) instructors with Masters' Degree qualification perceived selling as a predominant leadership style of their department heads whereas [30(24%)] of them perceived that to be participative as the leadership style of their department head. As far as instructors having Doctoral Degree qualification is concerned...4 (50%) perceived their department heads. Leadership styles as setting and 4 (50%) perceived it as participative [4(50%)] perceived selling and [4(50%)] participative as the predominant leadership style of their department heads. The table further shows that the perception of instructors about the predominant leadership style of their department heads was not changed following their level of education. For instance, for instructors with a bachelor degree, the perceived secondary leadership style of their department heads was telling whereas it is participative for Masters Degree holders.

**Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis Test on Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of Department Heads according to their Level of Education**

Qualification	N	Mean	$X^2$	df	P
Bachelor	58	76.53	10.67	2	.005
Masters	122	102.06			
Doctoral	8	109.50			
Total	188				

Table 6 shows that there is statistically significant difference ( $X^2 = 10.67$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) between instructors of different levels of education regarding their perception about their department heads leadership style. This means that the level of education has an effect on the instructors' perception of the leadership styles of department heads.

**Table 7: Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of their Department Heads according to their Discipline**

Category of Disciplines	N	Percentage of Responses per Quadrant			
		S1	S2	S3	S4
Pure Hard	28	(4)14.3	(12)42.9	(10)35.7	(2)7.1
Pure Soft	41	(8)19.5	(15)36.6	(12)29.3	(6)14.6
Applied Hard	76	(13)17.1	(40)52.6	(14)18.4	(9)11.8
Applied Soft	43	(5)11.6	(23)53.5	(10)23.3	(5)11.6
Total	188	(30)16.0	(90)47.9	(46)24.5	(22)11.7

Table 7 reveals that instructors in pure hard discipline category, predominantly perceived their department heads leadership style as selling [12(42.9%)] followed by participating [10(35.7%)]. In the same manner, instructors from pure soft discipline perceived that the predominant and secondary leadership styles of their department heads were selling [15(36.6%)] and participating [12(29.3%)] respectively. As far as instructors with applied hard discipline background are concerned, [40 (52.6%)] of them perceived selling as the leadership style of their department head and [14 (18.4%)] of them perceived participating to be the leadership style of their department head. Instructors in applied soft discipline also perceived that selling [23(53.5%)] and participating [10(23.3%)] leadership styles of their department heads were predominant and secondary respectively. The table, in sum, shows that instructors from various disciplines in the university under consideration perceived selling and participating to be the leader style of their department heads. On top of that, no change in perception of instructors was observed across different disciplines.

**Table 8: Kruskal-Wallis Test on Self-Perception and Instructors' Perception of Leadership Styles of Department Heads according to their Discipline**

Disciplines	N	Mean	X <sup>2</sup>	df	P
Pure Hard	28	98.50	1.13	3	.77
Pure Soft	41	98.62			
Applied Hard	76	89.84			
Applied Soft	43	96.20			
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>				

Table 8 shows that there is no statistically significant difference ( $X^2=1.13$ ,  $P>0.05$ ) between instructors from different disciplines regarding their perception of their department heads leadership style. They, thought that the leadership style of their department heads was predominantly selling.

## Discussion

According to the finding of this study, instructors perceived that the predominant leadership style of department heads was selling. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Al-omari et al (2008) who investigated the leadership style of department heads and deans and found that the predominantly perceived leadership style was selling. Furthermore, this finding also agrees with the finding of Al-Omari (2007) who explored that the predominant leadership style of department heads and deans in Jordan universities was selling. This leadership style is differentiated by above average amounts of both tasks and relationship behavior. The task behavior is suitable because people are still considered unable but, because they are trying, it is important to be supportive of their motivation and commitment. The leader sets up and maintains atwo- way communication and provides sufficient support and re-enforcement so that followers would psychologically accept the leader's decision (Hersey et al., 1996). When the follower can do the job, at least to some extent and perhaps is over-confident about their ability in this, then 'telling' them what to do may demotivate them or lead to resistance. The leader, thus, needs to 'sell' another way of working,

explaining and clarifying decisions. The leader also needs to spend time in listening and advising and, where appropriate, helping the follower to gain necessary skills through coaching.

The finding of this study also revealed that participative leadership style is the secondary leadership style of department heads. This means that department heads occasionally exercise participative leadership style in addition to the predominant one, i.e. selling. This finding is in line with Al-omari et al (2008) and Al-Omari (2007) who asserted that the secondary leadership style of most academic deans were participative. This leadership style is a style that involves all members of a team in identifying essential goals and developing procedures or strategies for reaching those goals. From this perspective, participative leadership can be seen as a leadership style that relies heavily on the leader functioning as a facilitator rather than simply issuing orders or giving assignments. This leadership style is characterized by above average amounts of relation behavior and below-average amounts of task behavior. The decision making procedure is shared by both the leader and follower. The leader maintains the role of confidence in the aptitude of his followers (Hersey et al. 1996). Participative leadership involves consulting with subordinates and the evaluation of their opinions and suggestions before making decision (Mullins, 2005). Participative leadership is associated with consensus, consultation, delegation and involvement (Bass 1981). Results revealed that employees who perceive their managers as adopting consultative or participative leadership behavior were more committed to their organizations, more satisfied with their jobs and are higher in their performance (Yousef, 2000). Because of the consultative nature of participative leadership, it has the potential to enhance the dissemination of organizational and managerial values to employees. Employees who work for a participative leader tend to exhibit greater involvement, commitment and loyalty than employees who work under a directive leader (Bass, 1981). Consequently, employees who are allowed to participate in the decision-making process are likely to be more committed to those decisions. Therefore, management needs to allow employees to participate in the decision-making process. Participative leader's ability to

raise the commitment, involvement and loyalty among employees should be attractive to a manager who written to promulgate his or her commitment to service quality to employees.

The result also shows that delegative leadership style was rarely perceived by instructors. This style is described by below-average amount of both relationship and task behavior. The followers are allowed to take charge and decide for themselves what, how, when and where to do various tasks. The leader shows complete confidence in his followers' aptitudes and decisions (Hersey and Blanchard, 1996). In higher education institutions, where majority of the teaching staff the highly skilled, it seems appropriate to put into effect such kind of leadership style.

The finding of this study also showed that demographic variables such as work experience and disciplinary background do not seem to affect instructors' perception about leadership style of the department heads but the level of education appears to have effect on their perception.

The result of this study, thus, showed that instructors' perception regarding the leadership style of their department heads did not vary across their years of experience. This result seems to be in disagreement with some of the findings of the previous studies. For instance, Katz (1982) argued that the longer an executive is at an organization, the more pronounced his or her leadership style becomes. Allen and Cohen (1969) also found that background and work experiences in an organization shape the ways that people process information and eventually their leadership style. Katz (1982) further explained that leaders are likely to depend increasingly on their past experiences and routine information sources rather than on new information with growing organizational experience. Viljoen's (1987) also argued that people with an increased amount of working experience usually fall in the older age group bracket. From this study, it could be deduced that people within this category were from the old school of thought where autocracy was dominant. However, there is no evidence in this research that shows work experience affects leadership style.

According to Kathawala (2001) (cited in Govindsamy, 2006), the banking sector in New York City was the first to make real commitment to MBA recruiting with the assumption that the most successful leaders were those who completed post graduate programs. The result of some studies also showed that level of education is an important factor that may affect an executive leadership. Swinyard and Bond (1980) conducted a study of executives and found that subjects with a master's of business administration (MBA) degree got their executive positions at a younger age (44 years old) than those without MBAs (47). New executives, through this period, increasingly relied more heavily on human capital as evidenced by increasing educational levels and greater reliance on a specialized graduate degree. This implies that leaders' level of education may affect their leadership style (Keiser, 2004). In connection with level of education, the finding of this study revealed that there was statistically significant difference in instructors' perception about their department heads leadership style. This has the implication that level of education affects the perception of instructors about the leadership styles of department heads.

Because deans and department heads were typically drawn directly from faculty ranks in each academic discipline, their behaviors in the new administrative roles vary according to the expected norms of their respective fields (Smart and Elton, 1976). Moreover, Neuman and Borris (1978) found that leadership styles of department chairs have been found to be varying by their discipline. Furthermore, Wolverton et al (2001) argued that academic discipline has a potential influence on the leadership style of academic deans and department heads. In contrast to these, the finding of this study showed that disciplinary background did not have any effect on instructors' perception about the department heads leadership style.

Many leadership practitioners and scholars like Bass (1985) and Kreiner (1999) have proposed that followers need leadership to inspire them and enable them to enact revolutionary change in today's organizations. Situational Leadership Style is intuitively appealing and popular with practicing managers in such areas as business, research and development,

communications, project management, health care and education (Yukl, 1989).

### **Conclusion**

This study was aimed at assessing leadership styles of department heads at Jimma University. The study employed descriptive survey method and used quantitative approach. Instructors were source of data. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the predominant and secondary leadership styles of department heads were selling and participating respectively. This means that the department heads spend time listening and advising and, where appropriate, helping the followers to gain necessary skills through coaching methods in the first, while in the record case, they occasionally involve subordinates in consulting and evaluating their opinions and suggestions before making the decisions.

Perception of instructors does not significantly vary across demographic variables such as work experience and disciplinary background. This means that these demographic variables gave the impression that they do not affect leadership styles of department heads. But their perception about the leadership styles of department heads vary across different levels of education. This means that level of education has an effect on the perception of instructors about the leadership styles of department heads.

### **Recommendations**

As shown in the results and discussion parts, the predominant and secondary leadership styles of department heads at Jimma University are selling and participating. Situational Leadership Theory states that there is no single leadership style that fits all situations. Hence, department heads, as leaders, need to vary their leadership style in order to fit into the situations. Specially in higher education institutions, where the majority of the

teaching staff hold post graduate degree and where department heads spend most of their time in routine activities such as administrative, interpersonal and resource development, delegative leadership style seems to be appropriate and department heads, therefore, need to exercise such kind of leadership style.

Varying leadership style to fit into situations is not an easy task. It needs critically looking into the nature of the work and employees' behavior. Department heads as leaders, therefore, have to acquire important leadership skills and update themselves with the situations in which they are leading. Moreover, in order to equip department heads with such analysis skill, the university is advised to arrange continuous and relevant training for department heads in various areas of leadership.

This study was a one shot study. It was not carried out over a period of time and the findings showed leadership style of department heads in a particular time. Since the leadership style could vary across situations and time, further research needs to be conducted to see if the predominant leadership style of department heads could remain the same over a period of time. A study is also needed to establish if there are differences in the leadership style of department heads across universities in the country.



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