

Research Paper

Academic Staffs' Motivation for Leadership Service in Higher Learning Institutions: the Case of Four Public Universities in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study was aimed at assessing the readiness of academic staffs to serve in their university leadership. To this end, a descriptive survey research design has been employed. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 386 academic staffs and top leaders of four public universities: Adama Science and Technology University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Debre Birehan University and Arsi University using questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and Key Informant Interview (KII). The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative data. The study reveals that, in spite of some irregularities, recruitment for middle and lower level leadership in public universities is carried out through open competition; however, academic staffs are less interested to serve in their university leadership mainly due to lack of willingness to sacrifice work-life balance, lack of transparency in the leadership selection process, and unnecessary government political interference. Minimizing political interference, introducing attractive incentive packages, ensuring transparency and decentralization of power in universities have been recommended to curb the existing problems.

Keywords: - *University leadership, academic freedom, ASTU.*

1. Background and Justification of the Study

Higher learning institutions are responsible for creating educated work force that can advance the future of the nation and conducting researches which address the socio-economic challenges of a country. This necessitates higher learning institutions to have the prerogative to plan and act autonomously and achieve their missions in a flexible manner (Mulatu Dea and Befikadu Zeleke, 2017). However, factors related to their organizational features and their relative autonomy from government intervention often make the leadership in higher learning institutions difficult (Clegg and Walsh, 2004; Kezar, 2001). Hence, the success in the leadership of these institutions demands committed staffs with good motivation to take part in their university leadership.

Staff motivation to assume a leadership role is often determined by existing governance system, institutional factors and personal factors (Njambi, 2014). According to a survey conducted by Nicole Torres (2014), asked about why they were not interested in managerial roles, more than half of the respondents (52 percent) reported they were satisfied in their current roles, a third (34 percent) responded they didn't want to sacrifice work-life balance. In similar studies, employees reported that they refrain from assuming managerial roles because they did not feel their company would give them the opportunity due to institution related factors (Kelli, 2010; Gous, 2003). Avolio and Bass, (2004) believe that followers' attitude and belief towards their leaders and the confidence they develop in their leadership largely determines their organizational commitment which includes

willingness to participate in the leadership their organization. In the context of academic institutions, factors such as transparency, academic freedom, superior-subordinate relationship, promotion opportunities, and the nature of job determine staff motivation for participation in leadership roles (Njambi, 2014).

Local studies in the area revealed that the governance system that the Federal Ministry of Education of Ethiopia implements in higher learning institutions restricts the autonomy of universities (Mulatu Dea and Befikadu Zeleke, 2017; Sisay Tamirat, 2015). Sisay Tamira (2015:9) argues that “erroneous political interference by governments” has eroded the academic freedom in higher learning institutions in Ethiopia. Teshome (2003) also stressed that higher learning institutions in Ethiopia are obliged to sacrifice their academic freedom owing to their financial dependence on the government. Similarly, rigidity of hierarchical structure, outdated human resource policies, absence of incentives, lack of transparency, lack of confidence among the leaders in giving strategic direction, and centralized governance system were found to be characteristics of governance in public universities in Ethiopia (Mulatu Dea and Befikadu Zeleke, 2017; Lerra, 2014; Behailu Aschalew, 2011). These challenges, in turn, may hinder academic staffs’ motivation to take part in the leadership of their universities. In an institution where workers show reluctance to take leadership position, it is difficult to ensure effective leadership which can properly gear the institution towards its ultimate goal. Hence, examining staff motivation for leadership helps to find out factors which hinder a given institution from achieving its mission.

Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted in the area so far at international and national levels to the best knowledge of the researchers of this study. The presence of such knowledge gap and our personal observation as lecturers, leaders, and researchers in public universities were what motivated us to carry out this scientific inquiry. In spite of the attempts made to make the leadership recruitment process open, the academic staffs seem to be reluctant to apply and compete for university leadership positions particularly the top and middle level management positions. Although there could be institution specific factors, the researchers feel that there

are problems which cut across similar higher learning institutions in the country.

Hence, the current study aimed at investigating the scenario in four public universities in Ethiopia. To be more specific, the study attempted to examine the readiness of academic staffs of public universities to take part in their university leadership; identify the major factors that hinder academic staffs from participating in their university leadership and examine differences among the target universities on academic staffs’ readiness to participate in their university leadership.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

In the current study, a Cross-sectional descriptive survey research design with mixed approach to data collection and analysis has been employed to collect data from four public universities of Ethiopia: Adama Science and Technology University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Arsi University and Debre Birehan University. The universities were chosen mainly due to their geographical proximity. By the time the data for the current study were collected, September 2017, there were 2052 local academic staffs on duty in the target universities and of these staffs 428 were selected as data sources using simple random sampling, quota sampling and purposive sampling.

2.2. Instruments

A survey questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended items was used to examine the readiness of academic staff to take part in their university leadership and factors which hinder them from such participation. The questionnaire was developed by the research team and validated before it had been used for the main study. The content validity of the survey questionnaire was checked by using the research team as panel of experts. *Cronbach’s* Alpha value of the questionnaire, $\alpha = .80$, was found to be in the acceptable range. Out of 400 survey questionnaires distributed in the four universities, 358 (89.5percent response rate) were filled and returned for analysis. In addition to this, 7 KII and 4 FGDs were conducted to obtain the qualitative data from higher level managers and selected academic staff, respectively.

2.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were entered into SPSS and analyzed by using both descriptive and inferential statistics. In the analysis of likert scale responses which range from 5= strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree were categorized into two as “agree” and ‘disagree’ just to obtain big picture about participants agreement or disagreement. The quantitative data have been transformed to perform comparison of mean scores. The qualitative data was transcribed, translated into English language and analyzed thematically.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Demographic Information

In the current study, 358 respondents (female 11.3 percent and Male 88.7 percent) filled and returned the survey questionnaire. Of these respondents, 115 (32.1 percent) were selected from Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU), 100 (28 percent) from Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU), 80 (22.4 percent) from Debre Birehan University (DBU), while the remaining 63 (17.6 percent) were selected from Arsi University (AU). The mean of the respondents’ service year is (M= 8.44, SD= 5.88). The majority of the respondents (77.1 percent) are lecturers, while 20.6 percent and 2.4 percent are assistant professors and associate professors, respectively.

3.2 Respondents’ Leadership Experience

More than half of the respondents, 201(56.9 percent), do not have leadership experience in their university; whereas 152 (43.1) percent reported that they have the experience. Of those respondents who had served in leadership positions, 37 (43.0 percent) left their position after they completed their term, 27 (31.4 percent) resigned before completing their office term, 8 (9.3 percent) has been sacked from position, while the remaining 14 (16.3 percent) has left their position due to other reasons. A considerable percentage of respondents who resigned and sacked from position may indicate lack of interest among academic staffs to serve in the leadership position.

As indicated in Figure 1, of those respondents who have served in leadership positions, 109 (74.7 percent) has reported that they have come to position through open competition, while 26 (17.8 percent) reported being assigned by higher officials. The remaining 11 (7.5 percent) confirmed being elected by their colleagues.

This may show that open competition has become common strategies used in the universities to bring staff to management position.

The respondents reported that they have applied for lower management positions such as department head 40 (29.4 percent), associate dean 29 (21.3 percent), and coordinator 27 (19.9 percent), middle level positions such as dean/director 31 (22.8 percent). Only 2 respondents reported to have applied for higher management positions. One can reasonably deduce

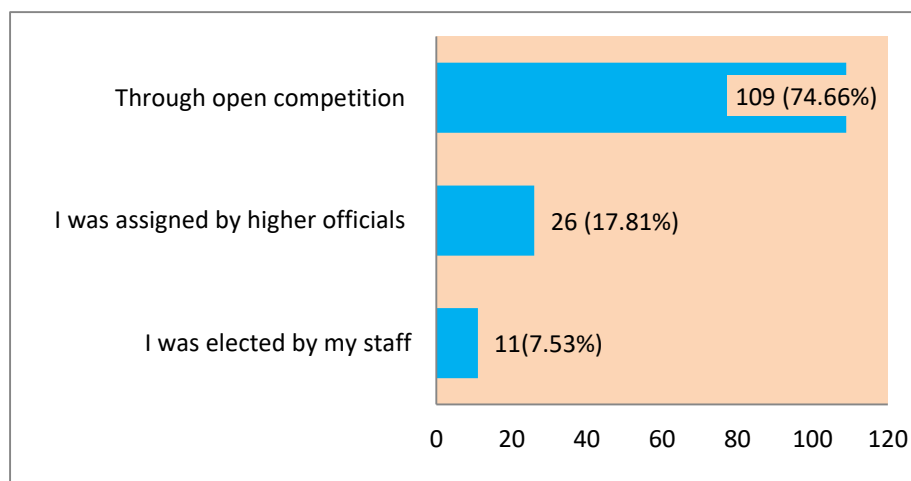


Figure. 1: Strategies respondents followed to come to position

from this data that open competition has become common strategies used in the universities to bring academic staffs to lower and middle level management positions. Other Participants of FGDs and KIIs also confirmed the presence of such practice though there are some irregularities.

At the same time, respondents' reluctance to apply for higher leadership position might indicate the absence of the chance due to procedure in the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 which gives the mandate of appointing the president and vice presidents of universities for Ministry or for the head of appropriate state organ and managing board of universities (Federal Negarit Gazeta No. 64, 17th September 2009). In such procedures, it is more likely that government or party affiliated individuals are given priority to hold higher positions in universities.

3.3 Academic Staffs' Readiness to Hold Leadership Position

Asked about their readiness to participate in their university leadership, 42 (13.5 percent) of the respondents reported that they are very much interested, 126 (40.5 percent) reported they are somehow interested, whereas 143 (46 percent) reported that they are not interested at all. FGD participants and key informants have also revealed that although their interest varies based on the type of positions they apply for, the academic staffs have generally less interest to hold leadership positions. According to these participants, it is quite common to see second round vacancies announced for the same positions due to lack of applicants. An FGD participant from AASTU said, "Mostly people from engineering are totally not interested to come to leadership position because they are paid per hour when they work outside..." A key informant from ASTU also added, "There is no interest to serve in management. I myself have been lobbied to come to position.... Last time, we announced vacancy for Director General Position, but nobody applied" (KII, ASTU). The respondents mentioned various factors that hinder academic staffs from applying for leadership positions.

3.4 Factors that Hinder Academic Staffs' Participation in Leadership

Participants were asked to rate 14 potential factors that are frequently mentioned in the literature as hindrances to employees' participation in leadership positions. The factors are related to personal interest, institutional working system, and general government policy.

3.4.1 Personal Factors

As can be seen in Table 1, 54.2 percent of the respondents agree/strongly agree that holding leadership position consumes much of their time, while 47.5 percent reported that their desire to give priority for their personal duties as major personal factors that hinder their participation in their university leadership. On the other hand, 56.9 percent reported that the challenges of leadership position have little impact in hindering their interest to participate in their university leadership.

Similarly, 51.1 per cent of the respondents reported that fear of additional burden of leadership roles has little impact on their participation in their university leadership although this figure somehow contradict with the qualitative data.

The data obtained from FGDs, KIIs and survey questions reveal that some academic staffs prefer to focus on their personal duties such as further study and researches. Others consider leadership roles as additional burden which has little significance for their professional development and personal freedom. An FGD participant from AU stated, "... I am engaged in routine activities although I am supposed to publish research articles..." A survey respondent from DBU added, "It [leadership service] seems good for nothing; it is routine work with no satisfactory output..." Some participants of FGDs also reported that academic staffs who provide leadership services often receive negative criticism at the end instead of rewards and appreciation which could enhance employees' job satisfaction and their motivation for work according to Kalimullah et al., (2010).

Table 1: Personal Factors that Hinder Staff Participation in Leadership

Items		Response percent				
		5	4	3	2	1
I feel leadership positions are full of challenges I am not interested to face	F	21	47	41	79	65
	%	8.3	18.6	16.2	31.2	25.7
I need to give priority to my personal duties	F	48	75	34	50	52
	%	18.5	29.0	13.1	19.3	20.1
Holding leadership position consumes much of my time	F	53	88	47	37	35
	%	20.4	33.8	18.1	14.2	13.5
I feel leadership job is simply additional burden to my life	F	26	50	49	71	60
	%	10.2	19.5	19.1	27.7	23.4

Response 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Undecided, 2= Disagree, 1=strongly Disagree

FGD participants also reported that academic staffs who serve in their university leadership often face isolation being considered as government cadres. Such feelings of the academic staffs may also reflect the magnitude of political interference in the management of higher learning institutions. Concerning the impact of personal factors, a Kruskal-Wallis test shows no statistically significant difference $H(3, N=247) = 1.94, p=0.585$ among the four universities.

In general, desires to give priority to personal duties, a tendency to consider leadership roles as additional burden which yield little benefit, and a tendency of considering leadership roles as the sole responsibility of cadres of the ruling party are found to be the major personal factors that hinder academic staffs' participation in their university leadership. In relation to this, Nicole Torres (2014) revealed that 34 percent of the survey participants in his study declined from assuming leadership of their institution because they did not want to scarify their work-life balance.

3.4.2 Institutional Factors

As shown in Table 2, 69.6 percent of the respondents reported that lack of time to apply for leadership post does not hinder academic staffs' participation in their university leadership. Similarly, 62.8 percent and 50 percent of the respondents reported that discrimination based on ethnicity and discrimination based on regional background respectively has little impact on academic

staffs' motivation to serve in their university leadership. In contrast to this, 42 percent agree/strongly agree and 20 percent remain undecided that lack of transparency and fairness in the competition procedure is the major institutional challenge that hinders academic staffs' participation in their university leadership. A considerable number of respondents, 34 per cent, also reported that they do not feel comfortable working with the existing management of their university. With regard to this, 20 percent of the respondents remain undecided.

Participants of FGDs also reported that though there is open competition for leadership posts, sometimes individuals who have closer affiliation with the top management are selected for leadership posts disregarding the results of the competition. They also mentioned lack of transparency in disclosing results of contestants for the public, and lack of power decentralization as major institutional factors that discourage academic staffs from applying for leadership positions. Most FGD participants have the feeling that middle and lower level managers have less power to exercise. For instance, an FGD participant from AASTU said, "Power with accountability should be given to Deans. They should not be there to do only what they are told to do"

As shown in Table 3, a Kruskal-Wallis test result shows that there is no statistically significant difference $H(3, N=241) = 1.79, p=0.616$ among the four

universities on the impact of institutional factors on academic staffs’ motivation to serve in their university leadership. This indicates the prevalence of the problems across the target universities. However, visual

observation of the mean rank shows that the impact of institutional factors is the highest in Arsi University (MR=131.99), but the lowest in ASTU (MR= 114.06).

Table 2: Institutional Factors That Hinder Staff Participation in Leadership

Items		Response percent				
		5	4	3	2	1
1. No sufficient time was given to apply	F	15	25	39	86	95
	%	5.8	9.6	15.0	33.1	36.5
2. Leadership position favors applicants who are typically from one region	F	41	44	41	56	70
	%	16.3	17.5	16.3	22.2	27.8
3. I do not feel the competition procedure in our university is transparent and fair	F	55	54	52	48	51
	%	21.2	20.8	20.0	18.5	19.6
4. I do not feel our university management would give me the opportunity because of my ethnic background	F	23	27	44	64	95
	%	9.1	10.7	17.4	25.3	37.5
5. I do not feel comfortable working with the existing management of my university	F	46	89	50	60	55
	%	18.4	15.6	20.0	24.0	22.0

Responses= 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Undecided, 2= Disagree, 1=strongly Disagree

Table 3: Comparison of Means on Impact of Institutional Factors (M=12.97)

Universities	N	MR	Test Statistics ^{a,b}		
			Df	H	p
ASTU	70	114.06	3	1.794	.616
AASTU	73	121.05			
DBU	54	120.97			
AU	44	131.99			

In general, lack of transparency and fairness in the recruitment procedure, lack of proper power decentralization, and lack of interest to work with the existing management have been reported to have stronger negative impact on academic staffs’ motivation to serve in their university leadership. Although Lai (2011) asserts that power decentralization can boost workers motivation and satisfaction through nurturing sense of responsibility and trust in their organization, results of previous studies in Ethiopia also revealed the absence of such practice in Ethiopian higher learning institutions. Behailu Aschalew (2011) affirms that in

Ethiopian Higher learning institutions “the over-centralization of authority in the hands of central executives heavily undermined the autonomy of academic units. Ashebir Bezabih (2016) and Lerra (2014) also assert that higher learning institution in Ethiopia is known for centralized decision-making structure.

With regard to transparency, previous studies show that when employees feel that there is lack of fairness in the competition, they become reluctant to apply for managerial roles in their company (Kelli, 2010; Gous, 2003). Mulatu Dea and Befikadu Zeleke (2017:96)

describe the leaders of public universities in Ethiopia as “neither accountable nor transparent.” Behailu Aschalew (2011) also claims that the current leadership appointment system by respective bureaucratic leaders in public universities in Ethiopia is susceptible to bias and unfairness which in turn discourages academic staffs from participating in their university leadership.

3.4.3 Government Policy Related Factors

As can be seen in Table 4, 53.3 percent of the respondents agree/strongly agree that the political

system is not inviting to apply for leadership position. Similarly, 47.2 percent reported that lack of academic freedom hinder academic staffs’ participation in their university leadership. Contrary to this, 64.4 percent of respondents disagree/strongly disagree that lack of additional benefit or incentive has impact on academic staff motivation for leadership position though this figure somehow contradicts with the qualitative data. Similarly, 53.2 percent do not consider the competition criteria as a major hindrance to their participation in their university leadership.

Table 4: Impact of Government Policy Related Factors on Staff Motivation for Leadership

Factors		Responses percent				
		5	4	3	2	1
Lack of academic freedom de-motivates me to apply for leadership positions	F	67	52	50	51	44
	%	26.6	20.6	19.8	20.2	13.0
The criteria do not go in consistence with my political belief/outlook	F	45	34	42	48	90
	%	17.4	13.1	16.2	18.5	34.7
Holding leadership position does not offer me any additional benefit or incentives	F	20	32	40	91	75
	%	7.8	12.4	15.5	35.3	29.1
The political system is not inviting to apply for leadership position	F	80	57	38	38	44
	%	31.1	22.2	14.8	14.8	17.1
The incentive package for management positions is not attractive	F	34	48	55	67	50
	%	13.4	18.9	21.7	26.4	19.7

Responses= 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Undecided, 2= Disagree, 1=strongly Disagree

FGD and key informant interview participants also mentioned lack of academic freedom or presence of political interference as major factor which discourages academic staffs from applying for leadership positions. The participants claim that excessive political interferences are observed especially in assigning university top management. In the procedure of appointing university president or vice presidents, the staff has almost no involvement as it has been clearly stipulated in the Proclamation of Higher Education No. 650/2009. This may have its own negative impact on the leadership behavior and accountability of these top leaders in their interaction with their subordinates.

The respondents also believe that due to lack of institutional autonomy, university managements often

fail to execute as per their plan. For example, FGD participants from AASTU reported that sometimes teachers are assigned to the university directly without asking the consent of the host departments. Lack of proper incentive package was also widely raised by many FGD participants. An FGD participant from ASTU said, “The work load and the incentive allocated for service in leadership position are not compatible... people serving in the leadership suffer for nothing...” A key informant from the same university added, “What do you get from it [leadership position] unless you want to continue in the leadership profession and go up the ladder?You don’t benefit financially because you cannot initiate or lead a research project....” (KII, ASTU). In general, participants of the current study

believe that serving in their university leadership has little financial and professional rewards compared the energy and time they exert. As a result, the staffs often prefer to engage in part-time jobs to supplement their salary.

Caparison of total mean of the four categories of hindering factors revealed that government policy related factors (M=14.22, SD=4.62) have the highest impact on academic staffs readiness to participate in their university leadership. However, no statistically

significant differences have been observed among the four universities on the impact of the three categories of hindering factors as shown in Table 5. This may indicate the prevalence of similar problems across public universities.

However, the visual comparison of the means of the target universities on the three factors reveal slight difference among the universities as depicted in Fig 2 below.

Table 5: Overall Impact of the Three Categories of Hindering Factors

Category of Factors	Descriptive Statistics					ANOVA		
	N	Min	Max	M	SD	df	F	Sig.
Institutional Factors	241	5.00	25.00	12.97	4.79	3	.446	.720
Personal Factors	247	4.00	20.00	11.54	3.88		.802	.494
Gov Policy Factors	238	5.00	25.00	14.22	4.62		2.252	.083

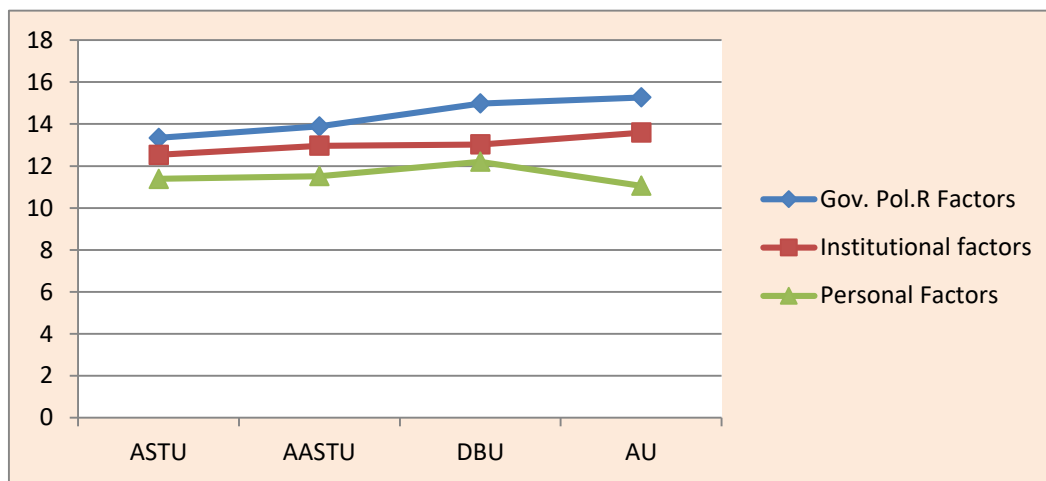


Figure 2: Comparison of Mean on Hindering Factors

As can be seen from Figure 2, the impact of institutional factors and government policy related factors seem to be the highest in Arsi University followed by Debrebirehan University. Similarly, the impact of personal factors is the highest in Debrebirehan University, but the lowest in Arsi University.

In general, the results of the quantitative and the qualitative data reveal that government policy related factors such as lack of academic freedom, uninviting political environment, and lack of appropriate incentive package have significant impact on academic staffs' readiness to serve in the leadership of their universities. The respondents are of the opinion that due to lack of

institutional autonomy, one can hardly execute as per his plan. Results of previous studies also strengthen the above findings. Njambi (2014) argues that academic freedom and the existing opportunities for promotion determine staff motivation for assuming leadership roles. Local studies also revealed that public universities in Ethiopia hardly exercising their academic freedom due to excessive interference of the government, which is the sole source of their budget (Mulatu Dea and Befikadu Zeleke, 2017; Sisay Tamirat, 2015; Behailu Aschalew, 2011). These scholars describe managers of public universities in Ethiopia as mere implementers of government orders rather than strategic thinkers. The

presence of such reality will, no doubt, discourage academic staffs' motivation to serve in their university leadership.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the results of the qualitative and quantitative data presented and discussed in the preceding sections, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Although there are some irregularities, recruitment for middle and lower level leadership in public universities seem to be carried out through open competition. However, academic staffs in the target universities appear to have less interest to serve in the leadership positions especially in the top level leadership of their university due to various personal, institutional and government policy related factors.
- Among the personal factors that hinder academic staffs' participation in their university leadership are the need to give priority for personal duties, tendency to consider leadership roles as additional burden with little benefit for professional development, and considering university leadership as the sole responsibility of cadres of the ruling party.
- Institutional factors such as lack of transparency and fairness in the leadership recruitment process, absence of power decentralization, and lack of interest to work with the existing management hinder academic staff participation in their university leadership.
- Lack of academic freedom due to unnecessary political interference, and absence of attractive incentive package are among the major government policy related factors that seem to have discouraged academic staffs from serving in their university leadership.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions made in the preceding section, the following recommendations have been forwarded:

1. The government, specifically the Federal Ministry of Education, need to take strategic actions to minimize unnecessary political interference and promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy of public universities in Ethiopia.
2. The government also needs to introduce attractive incentive packages for the service in university leadership. This may help the academic staff to fully engage in university business rather than hunting for part-time jobs outside their university.
3. Public universities in Ethiopia should introduce better systems which can ensure fairness and transparency in recruiting academic staffs for university leadership. This may include establishing independent bodies which can play the role of check and balance.
4. Universities also need to decentralize power to the middle and lower management structures to allow managers at these levels effectively implement their plans and encourage sense of ownership and responsibility.
5. Owing to time and budget limitation, the current study was delimited to participants of four universities. Hence, we feel that further studies with larger sample size and coverage could help in boosting the generalizability of the results of this study.

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