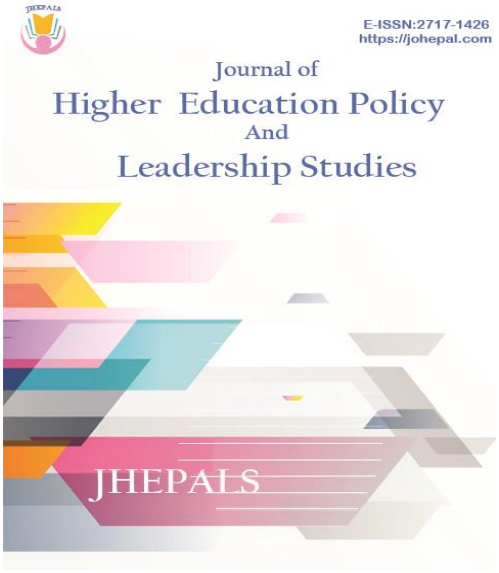
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Decision-Making and Its Correlation with Distributed Leadership of the Heads of Academic Departments: Palestinian Universities as a Case Study



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Abstract

Decision-making and distributed leadership are two integral aspects in terms of leadership and administration practice. This study aims to identify the correlation between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of distributed leadership practice among the heads of academic departments at the Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip. The study also aims to explore to which extent the correlation between both factors can affect the educational environment inside higher education institutions' departments. To achieve those objectives, the study adopts the quantitative method and implements two questionnaires. The population of the study comprises all the heads of academic departments in three Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip The study strengthens concerns that the increase in decision taking effectiveness has a positive effect on the extent of distributed leadership practice. The study recommends taking reasons for the success of decision-making in managing human resources within the academic departments in the context of higher education by relying on a system of incentives and encouragement. The study suggests conducting further studies on designing training programs for developing distributed leadership of the heads of academic departments. Furthermore, it recommends conducting analytical studies on the systems and regulations implemented by university leaders measuring their ability to support change.

Keywords: Decision-making; Distributed Leadership; Academic Department; Faculty; Correlation; Palestinian Universities; Gaza Strip

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Introduction

Decision-making and distributed leadership are two major integral aspects of leadership and administration practice. There is a great interest in education regarding the value of leadership and management because of their vital role in sustaining the educational process within the academic context. The leadership process at these academic institutions is a practical application and improvement of this interest since it oversees directing and leading the work to achieve the intended objectives.

The university is one of these significant academic institutions that serve as the hub of human intellect and a funding source. It is the foundation for human resources for development and a factory for the engaged citizens charged with advancing and protecting the country and tackling its difficulties (Deutsch & Strack, 2008). According to Jones et al. (2014), the expectations from students, the community, and the rising government are causing changes in higher education, which is why there is more emphasis on applying leadership models in institutions. Attempts to adapt higher education theory that underlies leadership in other sectors have been criticized for failing to understand its particular role in developing creative and inventive thinking necessary to grow and exchange information. The administrative process is not just a commercial issue or an abstract management practice; it is, first and foremost, a leadership process. Administrative leadership alone may compel the personnel of any institution to work. Still, it does not provide the necessary inspiration and motivation nor inspire their passion, motivation, creativity, and craftsmanship. It combines both fundamental ethics and essential values. Administrative leadership demonstrates the capacity to influence people and steers them to accomplish the desired outcomes based on the magnitude of the power entrusted to the holder of the leadership position and the nature of the task itself. Everyone may practice leadership by dealing with people of different cultures. However, this requires distinctive skills in moving from one type of leadership to another.

Decision-making, in this regard, is a rational process. It starts from a decision-making strategy toward effective implementation and evaluation of the results. Therefore, it is one of the basic processes which are necessary for individuals and communities. Decision-making processes appear in all institutions regardless of their type and nature (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2016). As a result, decision-making is considered one of the most critical components of the administrative process. Failure in decision-making results from poor performance and will impede the attainment of the specified goals. Furthermore, decision-making is a steady and ongoing action that uses all available information about the surroundings and categorizes them as opportunities or impediments. As a result, the leader must make the necessary decisions based on predefined criteria to attain and obtain the desired results. Furthermore, decision-making heavily influences other administrative operations like planning, organizing, leading, training, and monitoring.

In the case of educational administration, as represented in educational institutions, leaders make decisions that impact the educational process in all dimensions due to the nature of their positions. However, a difference should be made between these decisions and their significance since some are connected to developing curricula and educational programs and the extent to which these programs would lead to the desired outcomes. Other selections will most likely center on enhancing educational management to devote

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time and effort (Cameron et al., 2014). According to Milkman et al. (2009), the time has come to devote some attention to the search for solutions that would enhance constrained judgment since decision-making mistakes are costly. One of the most essential reasons for success in educational institutions is to build a decision-making procedure before making a choice. This can be accomplished by gathering the necessary information, studying the decision-making conditions, participating in the relevant authorities, reviewing previous decisions, unifying the decision-making body so that there is no conflict aroused between them, and finally, determining the types of decisions in terms of strategy, whether tactical or executive.

Decision-making in higher education institutions and academic departments should reflect the leadership style. As a result, Wolverton et al. (2005) investigated the first step taken at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (U.S.A.) to address midlevel academic leadership preparedness issues. The first stage was determining what departments 'chairmen lack to be influential leaders. The sort of leadership used by the leader can also impact decision-making. Jones et al. (2014) suggest that a new leadership strategy is required that goes beyond individual control and managerial bureaucracy to embrace more sharing and cooperation. Distributed leadership is one such option; nevertheless, existing research on distributed leadership in higher education has been critiqued for being normative and less democratic than its theorization suggests. Leadership was adopted in literature as a collective notion that involves interaction between academics and the expanding number of professional personnel engaged in their institutions (Jones et al., 2014; Whitchurch, 2008). Respectively, we need to investigate distribution leadership as a concept and put it into practice in the academic context inside higher education institutions.

Decision-making and Distributed Leadership in the Academic Departments

The perception that hierarchical leadership approaches are not well adapted to the global character of complex change is reinforced by the concept of distributed leadership, which was developed in response to new difficulties posed to higher education institutions. According to Jones (2014), the government, students, and community expectations are causing changes in higher education, leading to colleges putting more emphasis on leadership. Hempsall (2014, p. 383) broadly acknowledged that "leaders in the twenty-first century are required to navigate an increasingly complex landscape and that the types of challenges individuals and organizations face in the knowledge era require the capacity to adapt and respond to continual fluctuations and change".

This study reviewed literature that highlights the concept of distributed leadership in educational institutions whether in schools (Sales et al., 2017; Park et al., 2009; Singh, 2012; Botha, 2014) or in the academic departments inside higher education universities (Cronje & Bitzer, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Gosling et al., 2009; Floyd et al., 2018; Jones, 2014; Jones et al., 2012; Bolden et al., 2009; Youngs 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Bento, 2011; Hempsall, 2014; Sewerin & Holmberg, 2017; Ramahi, 2015; Busse et al., 2014). According to Jones et al. (2017), the higher education industry is under stress due to the increasingly complex global environment where it works. As a result, the operational environment and institutional leadership have significantly changed. As a result, top leaders and academics are now more likely to resist, foreshadowing the need for a more involved and

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comprehensive approach to leadership. According to Bento (2011), the requirement for leadership has been underlined as strategically crucial in the academic environment of growing demand to offer high-quality teaching and research. However, the structure of higher education institutions does not allow top-down leadership. Similarly, Jones et al. (2012, p. 67) clarified that "while multiple theories of leadership exist, the higher education sector requires a less hierarchical approach that takes account of its specialized and professional context".

The distributed leadership function at higher education institutions is explored by Gosling et al. (2009), drawing attention to the numerous actors engaged in leadership and the significance of organizational processes in determining their involvement. Bolden et al. (2008) identifies five primary constituent elements of leadership practice in higher education (personal, social, structural, contextual, and developmental), building on theories of distributed leadership in schools and demonstrating how they can influence perceptions and experiences of leadership. Respectively, Bolden et al. (2009, p. 257) identify two principal approaches to the distribution of leadership: "*devolved"*, associated with top-down influence, and "*emergent"*, associated with bottom-up and horizontal influence. According to Youngs (2017), approaches influenced by New Public Management are ingrained in higher education institutions. Two staff groups, professional and academic, now exist due to the restructuring of institutional management structures. Burke (2010) focused on the possibilities for new frameworks for thinking about leadership through connections between the concept of shared governance in higher education and the emerging idea of distributed leadership. According to Sewerin and Holmberg's (2017) analysis of development program documentation and interviews with ten faculty members, leadership strategies were linked to various institutional logics that were prevalent in four fundamental activities at university: formal organization, boundary-spanning cross-scientific environments, and education. A recent problem in scientific study is the relationship between decision-making and distribution leadership regarding efficacy. In this prospect, Park et al. (2009, p. 477) investigated leadership methods in school systems utilizing distribution leadership theory and data-driven decision-making. According to their study, "the emphasis on data-driven decision-making practices to bring about improved student outcomes is relatively a new feature of the education reform landscape and thus requires educators to learn and develop new competences". It could be argued, according to Busse et al. (2014), that the bureaucratic nature of universities, with their disparities in power, authority, and resources, combined with recognition and career paths that frequently favor individual success over group achievement, are primarily at odds with the tenets and premises of distributed leadership.

On a conceptual level, distributed leadership is conceptually consistent with collegiality and professional autonomy, which have historically higher education leadership. Distributed leadership also recognizes the broader institutional need for successfully managing the changes that turbulent environments impose on higher education institutions. In response, Singh (2012) suggested that as schools move toward a more diverse leadership structure, awareness levels must be increased, fresh perspectives and resources must be created, and more research must be done. But what about the academic divisions? Aspiring head leaders must be familiar with this new method of operation and ready to assume new responsibilities. Sharing real-world experiences with individuals who teach leaders can help

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them develop the attitudes, information, and abilities necessary for using this leadership style. Leadership development programs must be reevaluated and adjusted to ensure that academic leaders are prepared and ready to share leadership and power and serve as the aligning factor. Mesfin (2018) defines leadership as a method of delegating work to teachers and school communities. The lack of a feeling of community, accountability, self-assurance, trust, a culture of support, and harmonious relationships among staff members has prevented its implementation. As a result, it is essential to create a welcoming educational environment and help staff members anticipate the feeling of ownership, accountability, and confidence. Distributed leadership is primarily concerned with leadership practice instead of focusing on leadership positions or tasks. It is comparable to shared, group, and extended leadership practice that increases the potential for change and development. Studies, according to Sesky (2014), show how their administrators gave students the freedom to make judgments and gave them the authority to help them manage the educational institution. Ramahi (2015) asserted that higher education in Palestine is a rich and demanding experience in the setting of the Palestinian university. It is rich because of the Palestinians' drive and readiness to teach others from their experiences and share knowledge. Because Palestine is not yet an independent state; the Palestinians view higher education as their country's greatest asset, and it is essential to improving the economic, political, and social conditions. High degrees of mutual regard, honesty, and trust are necessary for effective distribution leadership.

The central claim is that the best way to understand leadership in university departments is as a distribution activity that spans both the social and situational settings of higher education. The head of the academic department shares responsibility for advising and assisting the academic staff under a distributed leadership model used in universities. This feedback may be provided by a wide range of the academic staff working and utilized formatively for introspection and group planning.

Distributed leadership at universities gives staff members a chance to retain high-quality feedback and advances their profession. The heads of academic departments also need to create a climate of trust and shared accountability for all staff members regarding leadership distribution. They must provide capable staff members with the opportunity to lead. Additionally, distribution leadership will lighten the workload of the head evaluators, making it more important to assess whether their decisions align with distributed leadership or not. The academic department heads of three separate institutions in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, were the focus of this study. Considering this, addressing this group as a study population is a novel issue in distributed leadership research and crucial for reflecting on the state of academic performance in Palestinian universities, as well as for developing a role that is both motivating and effective for the academic staff members.

Problem Statement

Decision-making and its practices can be effective in higher education institutions if an adequate leadership style is supported. Much of the work within colleges and universities gets done at the academic department level. Nevertheless, most institutions of higher learning pay little attention to either the preparation of academic department leaders or their succession into the position (Wolverton et al., 2005). Because proper leadership

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techniques and styles are not used, academic departments' decision-making processes are negatively evaluated. This problem is evident in the department's quality control, teacher and staff participation, and the s performance. As a result, there is a critical requirement for the heads of academic departments to establish a link between their decision-making and the leadership style they adopt. In this study, distribution leadership was chosen. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of studies that highlight the extent of distributed leadership in the context of higher education in Palestine, where most of the studies examined distributed leadership within the context of school leadership such as (Taha, 2019; Saymah, 2017; Assaf, 2011; Elhour, 2017) or in correlation with teachers' satisfaction (Assaf, 2011) but not in correlation with decision-making. The current study asserts the necessity to investigate and examine the connection between distribution leadership adoption at these colleges and decision-making efficacy. Therefore, the primary issue of the study might be expressed as follows:

- What relationship exists between the degree of distributed leadership practice across academic department heads at Palestinian institutions and the efficacy of decision-making?

Research Methodology

To answer the study questions, the authors adopt the quantitative method approach. The population in this study is adopted from (Abusamra, 2022) and consisted of the heads of academic departments in three Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip within the framework of the study (Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University) in the second semester of the academic year (2020-2021), according to official extracted data from the personnel departments at the aforementioned universities. The total population reached (N=117), (46) at the Islamic University and (36) at Al-Azhar University, and (35) at Al-Aqsa University. To achieve the study objectives and to address its analytical aspects, preliminary data were collected quantitatively by implementing two questionnaires as the primary study tools, designed specifically for this purpose. The first questionnaire addressed the effectiveness of decision-making themes adopted from (Abusamra, 2014), while the second addressed distributed leadership. The study of the correlation will be conducted by applying the applicable analysis using the SPSS program.

The two questionnaires were distributed to the whole study population of all the heads of academic departments in the three universities in a comprehensive survey method (N=117). The completed retrieved questionnaires reached (*n*=110), yielding a response rate of (49%). Several questions and/or statements were formed for each theme of the questionnaires, to be scored on a 5-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL), calculating descriptive statistics for all items, including means (M), standard deviations (SD), and frequencies.

Table (1) shows the distribution of the study sample according to the study's three variables of gender, academic qualification, and university. The table indicates that (93.6%) of the study sample comprises male academic heads, while (6.4%) is female. It is noted that the percentage of working females in the position of the head of the academic department in the three universities is relatively small compared to its counterpart percentage of males,

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and this evokes many questions regarding the reason for this depending on the nature of this position, or the existence of certain conditions or qualifications for the selection criteria of the heads of academic departments that might exclude females from taking charge. Table (1) also shows that (15.5%) of the study sample holds a master's degree while (84.5 %) holds Ph.D. It is somehow noted that the percentage of academic heads who hold a master's degree is less than its equivalent of a Ph.D. The study argues that in some universities, especially in Al-Azhar and the Islamic University of Gaza, the head of the academic department is selected according to particular criteria, and hence, a Ph.D. degree is required for the entitlement of the associated experience. The study also indicates that Al-Aqsa University has a high percentage of master's degree holders in this position. From the researcher's perspective, this may be attributed to the choice of Al-Aqsa University administration to open the opportunity of practicing leadership for the new master's degree holders.

Furthermore, Table (1) indicates that (39.1%) of the study sample is employed by the Islamic University, (30.9%) is employed by Al-Azhar University, while (30.0%) is employed at Al- Aqsa University. The study interprets this since the Islamic university is one of the most prominent universities in Gaza and it has many educational departments and different academic accredited programs more than the other universities included in the study.

Table 1.
Distribution of the study sample by gender, qualification and university

Gender	No	%	Qualification	No	%	University	No	%
Male	103	93.6	Master	17	15.5	The Islamic University	43	39.1
Female	7	6.4	PhD.	93	84.5	Al-Azhar University	34	30.9
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0	Al Aqsa University	33	30.0
						Total	110	100.0

The first questionnaire in this study measures the effectiveness of decision-making, and it consisted of the following four themes with (32) questions and/or statements. The first theme: the preparation of decision-making, consists of (8) items. The second theme: participation in decision-making, consists of (8) items. The third theme: is drafting and declaration of decision-making and consists of (8) items. The fourth theme: monitoring the implementation of decision-making and consists of (8) items. The results of the structural validity of the questionnaire indicate that all correlation coefficients in all themes of the first questionnaire are statistically significant considering ($p \leq 0.05$) as in (Table 2).

Table 2.
Pearson Correlations Coefficients

Themes	Pearson Correlations Coefficients	(sig)
Preparation of decision-making	.791	*0.000
Participation in decision-making	.842	*0.000
Drafting and declaration of decision- making	.883	*0.000
Monitoring the implementation of decision-making	.889	*0.000

* The correlation is statistically significant considering ($p \leq 0.05$)

The reliability of the questionnaire was verified by two methods: First, Cronbach was used to measure the stability of the questionnaire. The results shown in (Table 3) indicate

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that the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is high for each field ranging between (0.788, 0.901). The total value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all the themes of the decision-making questionnaire was (0.943). This means that the coefficient stability is high and therefore is statistically significant.

Table 3.
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

Themes	No	Cronbach's Alpha
Preparation of decision-making	8	0.839
Participation in decision-making	8	0.788
Drafting and declaration of decision-making	8	0.845
Monitoring the implementation of decision-making	8	0.901
All	32	0.943

Second, the Split-Half method was used to measure the reliability of the first questionnaire. The correlation coefficients were divided into two parts (questions with odd numbers and questions with even numbers). The correlation coefficients were then calculated between the odd and even question scores. The coefficient of correlation was then corrected by the Spearman-Brown equation. The new modified correlation coefficient is where (r) is the correlation between the scores of odd questions and the scores of even questions. It is clear from the results shown in (Table 4) that the modified correlation coefficient (Spearman-Brown) is high and statistically significant.

Table 4.
Modified Correlation Coefficient (Spearman-Brown)

Themes	**Correlation coefficient**	**Modified correlation coefficient**
Preparation of decision-making	0.780	0.876
Participation in decision-making	0.787	0.881
Drafting and declaration of decision-making	0.816	0.898
Monitoring the implementation of decision-making	0.820	0.901
All	0.930	0.963

The second questionnaire covers (4) different themes with (32) questions and statements. The themes adopted by Taha (2019) cover the following areas which are vision, mission, and goals, shared responsibility, Staff empowerment, and distributed leadership practices as shown in Table (5).

Table 5.
Pearson Correlations Coefficients

Themes	Pearson Correlations Coefficients	(sig)
Vision, mission, and goals	.775	*0.000
Shared responsibility	.851	*0.000
Staff empowerment	.885	*0.000
Distributed leadership practices	.776	*0.000

*The correlation is statistically significant considering ($p \leq 0.05$)

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The reliability of the questionnaire was verified by two methods: First, Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the stability and reliability of the questionnaire. The results shown in (Table 6) indicate that the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is high for each theme, ranging between (0.801, 0.904). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value for all the items was (0.942). This means that the coefficient stability is high and statistically significant.

Table 6.
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

Themes	No	Cronbach's Alpha
Vision, mission, and goals	8	0.801
Shared responsibility	8	0.904
Staff empowerment	8	0.881
Distributed leadership practices	8	0.893
Total	32	0.942

The correlation coefficients were then divided into two parts (questions with odd numbers and questions with even numbers). The correlation coefficient was then calculated between the odd and even question scores. The coefficient of correlation was then corrected by the Spearman-Brown equation. The new modified correlation coefficient is where (r) is the relation between the scores of odd questions and the scores of even questions. It is clear from the results shown in (Table 7) that the modified correlation (Spearman-Brown) is high and statistically significant.

Table 7.
Modified Correlation Coefficient (Spearman-Brown)

Spearman-Brown	Correlation coefficient	Modified correlation coefficient
Vision, mission, and goals	0.782	0.878
Shared responsibility	0.867	0.929
Staff empowerment	0.855	0.922
Distributed Leadership practices	0.843	0.915
All fields	0.917	0.957

Results

To obtain the main objectives of the study, five main research questions were formulated to be tested as follows*.

- Question 1: What is the extent of effectiveness of decision-making among the heads of academic departments in the Palestinian universities from their point of view?

To answer this question, the relative arithmetic mean, relative weight analysis, and T-test were used.

Table (8) illustrates that the arithmetic means for all themes of the questionnaire "The effectiveness of decision-making among the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities" equals (4.24). Thus, the relative weight is (84.82%). The value of the T-test is (34.01) and the probability value is (0.000), This means that there is a very high level of

* Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 are available as online supplementary file.

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approval of the fields of the questionnaire in general. This indicates the interest of the heads of the academic departments in the three universities to make effective decisions, which is attributed to the nature of the work of the academic departments that requires effective decision-making, in addition to the new quality assessment procedures and practices.

- Question 2: Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering ($p \leq 0.05$) between the means of the study sample responses to the extent of effectiveness of decision-making according to the variables of (gender, academic qualification, and the university)?

To answer this question, the following three hypotheses were tested:

H_{01}: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering ($p \leq 0.05$) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses to the extent of effectiveness of decision-making according to the variable of gender (male and female). To answer this hypothesis, T-test was used for two independent samples. The results in (Table 9) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than ($p \leq 0.05$) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments' responses in the effectiveness of decision-making that are attributable to gender.

H_{o2}: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering ($p \leq 0.05$) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses to the extent of effectiveness of decision-making according to the variable of scientific qualification (Master, PhD.). Table (9) illustrates that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than the ($p \leq 0.05$) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments in decision-making that are attributable to the variable scientific qualification.

H_{o3}: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering ($p \leq 0.05$) between the average estimates of the heads of academic department's responses to the extent of effectiveness of decision-making according to the variable of university (Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University). To answer this hypothesis, the "split-half" test was used. The results shown in (Table 9) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to "split-half'' test is greater than ($p \leq 0.05$) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses attributed to the university variable.

- Question 3: What is the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities from their point of view?

To answer this question, the relative mean and relative weight, and T-test were used. Table (10) shows that the arithmetic average of all the paragraphs of the questionnaire "The extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments in Palestinian universities" is (4.01). Thus, the relative weight is (80.27%). The T-test value is (23.64) and the probability value is (0.000). This means that there is a high degree of approval of all the questionnaire items in general.

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- Question 4: Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average of the study sample estimates for the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments according to the variables of (gender, qualification, and university)?

To answer this question, the following three hypotheses were formulated and tested:

H_{o4}: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses to the extent of practicing distributed leadership according to the variable of gender (male, female). To answer this hypothesis, a T-test for two independent samples was used. The results shown in Table (11) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than (p≤ 0.05) level, so it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the heads of academic department estimates to the extent of practicing distributed leadership that attributed to the variable gender.

H_{o5}: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance considering (p≤ 0.05) between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses to the extent of practicing distributed leadership according to the variable of scientific qualification (Master, Ph.D.). To answer this hypothesis, the T-test was used for two independent samples. Results shown in (Table11) show that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the T-test for two independent samples is greater than (p≤ 0.05) level. Thus, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the academic department heads' responses for the extent of practicing distributed leadership which are attributed to the variable of scientific qualification. Hence, it is clear to the heads of departments, regardless of their qualifications, the importance of distributed leadership implementation in their departments. The study attributes this to the tendency of the heads of the academic department to change the administrative routine and to adapt to new leadership styles in their faculties.

H_{o6}: There are no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level of significance between the average estimates of academic department heads' responses to the extent of practicing distributed leadership based on the university (Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University). The "split-half" test was employed to answer this hypothesis. Table 11 shows that the probability value (Sig) corresponding to the "split-half" test is larger than the (p≤ 0.05) threshold. As a result, no statistically significant variations in the level of dispersed leadership practiced by academic department heads can be ascribed to the university variable of the institution.

- Question 5: Is there a statistically significant correlation at the significance level (p≤ 0.05) between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of distributed leadership practice among the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities?

To answer this question, the following hypothesis was tested:

H_{o7}: There is no statistically significant correlation at the significance level considering (p ≤0.05) between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of distributed leadership practice among the heads of academic departments in Palestinian universities. Table (12) shows that the ultimate correlation coefficient is (7.25), and the probability value

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(Sig) is 0.000, which is less than ($p \leq 0.05$) level. This indicates that there is a moderately significant correlation between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments in the Palestinian universities at the level of statistical significance considering ($p = 0.05$).

This indicates that the effectiveness of decision-making is strongly linked to distributed leadership; the more influential the decision-making, the greater the distributed leadership involvement and implementation of the heads of academic departments, and hence the study links them and makes recommendations in this regard.

Discussion

In response to the research's first question, the findings of the first questionnaire illustrated a very high level of approval of decision-making effectiveness fields. This indicates the interest of the heads of the academic departments in the selected universities in making effective decisions. This can be attributed to the nature of tasks and duties in the academic departments conducted in collaboration with the assistance of academic staff, other academic departments, and academic affairs.

Regarding the extent of effectiveness of decision-making according to the study variable of gender, the study found that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments' responses. The study attributed this to the requirements of the position of the academic head, which requires the diligence of both male and female department heads to reach high levels of performance in their departments. It should be noted that the difference in the number of females compared to males in this position is relatively straightforward in the three universities. This leads to many questions regarding the requirements of this position and the lack of availability of these requirements in females or other conditions that may require future research.

In addition, the study found that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments in decision-making attributable to the scientific qualification variable. The majority of the academic heads in the three universities, especially in the Islamic University and Al-Azhar University, are Ph.D. holders, and some of them hold master's degrees at Al-Aqsa University and are on their way to completing their postgraduate studies. The study refers to the role of the qualification that is required for the post of the head of academic departments, which is mainly associated with experience.

The study further concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of the academic department's responses according to the university variable. The study attributed this to the fact that the decision-making in the department councils is subjected to specific mechanisms and evaluations by the academic affairs in each of the mentioned universities. This requires tracking these decision-making mechanisms and activating them as required according to the department's needs. This further stipulates the need for reinforcing effective decision-making by applying new quality assessment procedures and practices. The study, in this sense, asserts the finding of Supovitz and Tognatta (2013), who illustrated that more

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information may contribute to decision-making along with diverse perspectives to inform deliberation, reaching greater implementation efficiency.

In response to the study's third question, the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments in Palestinian universities reached (4.01) with a relative weight of (80.27%) and a probability value of (0.000). This indicates that there is a high degree of approval of all the questionnaire items in general. This signifies that adopting leadership approaches and reinforcing decision-making practices within these departments becomes vital. Distributed leadership is one of these leaderships that can facilitate the administrative practices for the academic heads. Therefore, these heads are aware that sharing and distributing tasks among the academic staff in their departments can lead to achieving the desired goals. The study in this result aligns with (Taha, 2019; Saymah, 2017; Assaf, 2011; Elhour, 2017).

According to the study, distribution leadership may be used to manage academic department procedures and promote meaningful change as in (Jones et al., 2017). Applying several leadership philosophies may therefore put the conventional normative framework of higher education under scrutiny. The distribution idea has many characteristics with the conventional collegial leadership style in higher education, according to Bento (2011) and Youngs (2017). However, this idea still appears to have limitations due to its neglect of the internal dynamics of power interactions. Burke (2010) contends that leadership theory provides much for education if understood within the structure of shared governance, which is helpful in furthering distributed leadership. This is further matched to the development of management practices over the claimed academic collegial practice. Furthermore, Holt et al. (2014) concluded that the foundation for distribution leadership must be laid at the highest levels of the organization by deliberate formal leadership commitment and action. Gosling et al. (2009) highlighted two inconsistencies in the experience of academics who take on administrative jobs or exert leadership of some kind, despite this survey indicating a high level of distributed leadership practice. In addition to helping to resolve conflicts in the identity work of being an academic and a manager, it may also assist in making sense of a mismatch between their experience of leadership and their perception of what it ought to be.

The study found that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the heads of academic department estimates to the extent of practicing distributed leadership that was attributed to the variable gender. This reinforces the awareness of the heads of the academic departments in the three universities of the importance of the developmental role of distributed leadership to lead the change for both males and females. The study attributed this to the need of the heads of academic departments to renew the prevailing traditional methods in most departments and to start a renewal administrative leadership path where the academic department can represent a starting point. This result aligns with (Taha, 2019; Saymah 2017; Assaf, 2011). The study also denoted that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the academic department heads' responses for the extent of practicing distributed leadership which are attributed to the variable of scientific qualification. Hence, it is clear to the heads of departments, regardless of their qualifications, the importance of distributed leadership implementation in their departments. The study attributed this to the tendency of the heads of the academic department to change the administrative routines and to adapt to new

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leadership styles in their faculties. The study also agrees with (Saymah, 2017; Assaf, 2011). However, it contradicts Taha (2019) hence her study indicated differences due to the variable of scientific qualification. The results also showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the heads of academic department responses to the extent of practicing distributed leadership attributed to the university variable. According to the researcher, this result reflects a firm agreement with the administration of the Palestinian universities to adopt leadership practices with their faculty staff to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their departments.

In response to the study's fourth and main question, the ultimate correlation coefficient reached (7.25), and the probability value (Sig) is 0.000, which is less than ($p \leq 0.05$) level. This indicates that there is a moderately significant correlation between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments in the Palestinian universities at the level of statistical significance considering ($p = 0.05$). This indicates that the effectiveness of decision-making is strongly linked to distributed leadership; the more effective the decision-making, the greater the distributed leadership involvement and implementation within the academic departments; hence the study correlates between them, making future recommendations in this regard. The researcher attributed this to the need for the heads of academic departments to make stronghold effective decision-making mechanisms that can be strongly associated with distribution leadership practices. Respectively, this correlation should be sustained and improved to achieve outstanding academic performance.

An encouraging collaboration initiative allows those closest to the action to make the decisions that will most affect their success. For the heads of academic departments seeking improved department performance and better outcomes, the challenge is to create better conditions to enhance professional knowledge and skills. When effective distributed leadership exists at all levels, the entire department will work interdependently in a collective pursuit of better learner outcomes. Working inside the university context, especially in the academic departments, shows the need for the heads of academic departments for professional development in managing the affairs of their departments.

The head of the department also needs to create opportunities for excellence and creativity for the faculty members by providing a suitable environment for participatory work. Therefore, there is a need to employ modern leadership approaches for heads of departments in their work and distributed leadership, which includes a great deal of mutual trust and support among the various faculty members and staff. The distributed leadership in the management of the academic departments depends on the participation of the head of the department with the leadership of the faculty members and the transition from the hierarchical meta-leadership to the horizontal group where the powers are distributed under the condition of permanent accountability issues.

Distributed leadership will help the academic heads design and create various opportunities for their faculty members and academic staff to participate in critical decision-making and leadership roles. The study reinforces other studies such as Supovitz and Tognatta (2013), which reports on the first experimental study of distributed leadership. They examined the impact of a distributed leadership intervention and associated individual and team characteristics on collaborative team decision-making. The study denoted that the intervention caused more collaborative decision-making and that individuals' perceived

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influence over school decision-making, use of data, and trust within the team is also associated with higher levels of collaborative decision-making. Furthermore, Park et al. (2009, p. 477) indicated that leaders at all levels co-constructed the vision and implementation of productive data-driven decision-making by creating an ethos of learning and continuous improvement rather than one of blame. According to their study, "giving data relevance, leaders also distributed decision-making authority in a manner that empowered different staff members to utilize their expertise".

The study confirms Cronje & Bitzer's (2019, p. 5) findings by reinforcing that academic managers in higher education contexts need to spend considerable effort on strategizing their campus programs to empower academic leaders through distributed leadership and with the agency to lead their teams. Asserting the positive correlation alongside the current study, Kezar & Holcombe (2017) emphasize that "Shared leadership is also associated with adaptable and flexible decision structures, rather than the fixed structures common to shared governance such as faculty senates. Instead, shared leadership structures tend to look more like task forces or cross-functional teams set up to address issues in real-time as they emerge".

This study highlighted a positive correlation between decision-making and distributed leadership. For Menon (2005), the respondents in her study believed that their involvement in the management of their institution was very limited. This according to Menon (2005, p. 167) "applied to both high and low levels of decision making, even though respondents recognized that their input was greater in less important decisions". Furthermore, Jones et al. (2017) demonstrated that distributed leadership, while it may increase the participation of academics in decision-making, is not synonymous with democratic decision-making. The current study also contradicts Jones's (2014) claim that existing research into distributed leadership in higher education has been criticized for being normative and less democratic than is suggested in its theorization.

Implications of the Study

The study sets up different implications based on the results and discussion. They are divided into implications related to decision-making and distributed leadership as follows:

Implications for Effective Decision-making

1. Working on the reasons for successful decision-making in managing human resources within the academic departments through adopting a system of incentives and encouragement.
2. Giving particular importance to the heads of academic departments in terms of professional continuous training and selection criteria; assigning the position of the heads of the academic departments according to competence, merit, creativity, personal qualities, human relations, effective communication, and working performance.
3. Giving the councils of the academic departments more authority, especially in decision-making in the educational aspects, to expand the involvement of the boards of academic departments' participation in significant aspects such as regulations and

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budget matters and to provide a wider area of decentralization and to provide a system of accountability based on clarity, justice, and professionalism.

Implications for Distributed Leadership Practices

1. Utilizing the experiences of international universities as expert institutions to provide advice and consultation to the educational institutions regarding their experience in the field of distributed leadership and their suggested practices in Arab universities to make a qualitative leap towards creativity, innovation, excellence, and quality.
2. Building effective communication channels between the academic departments and academic affairs with the private sector and the community stakeholders to contribute to the success of distributed leadership in the educational process.
3. Creating a shared vision in the light of which the department's mission will be developed, maintaining the alignment between the objectives of the faculty members and the department's goals, and setting and defining the strategic objectives of the work within the department.

Conclusion

The department head's leadership style with his or her faculty members represents a great deal of responsibility in the administration practices. Leadership is most effective within university academic departments when distributed among the academic faculty. The shared skills and experience among staff under their head's supervision serve to sustain the academic department mission and improve its outcomes. Distributed leadership practices can drive positive change throughout the university departments. Previous studies and the reviewed literature dealt with decision-making or distributed leadership separately without studying and analyzing the correlation between them.

The results regarding the effectiveness of decision-making showed that there is a very high level of approval for all the fields of the questionnaire in general. The study also concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments' responses in the effectiveness of decision-making that are attributed to the variables of gender, scientific qualification, and university. Furthermore, the results from analyzing data regarding the extent of distributed leadership practice showed that there is a very high level of approval of all the fields of the questionnaire in general. The study also concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the heads of academic departments' responses in distribution leadership that are attributed to the variables of gender, scientific qualification, and university.

After testing the correlation, the study finds out that there is a moderately significant correlation between the effectiveness of decision-making and the extent of practicing distributed leadership among the heads of the academic departments in the Palestinian universities at the level of statistical significance considering (p = 0.05). This indicates that the effectiveness of decision-making is linked to distributed leadership, the more effective the decision-making, the greater the distributed leadership involvement and implementation. This is significant because it evokes and encourages linking between decision-making and other leadership approaches to enhance the effectiveness and

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efficiency within the department. This correlation supports the collaboration between the head's responsibilities and faculty staff involvement. Hence, many decisions are born and made through the department's administrative tasks, but sometimes the leadership approach, which is adopted by the academic head, does not sustain these decisions. As a result, the degree of their decisions' effectiveness decreases. Understanding this correlation may enhance the quality of decision-making within the department and improve the implementation of different leadership approaches. The resulting correlation may further help to integrate other leadership strategies in the academic context. It encourages further exploration of other leadership styles in relation to different administrative procedures that can improve the quality of administrative functions inside the academic context. Distributed leadership can help to spread decision-making effectiveness throughout faculty, particularly, to those on the front lines of the academic operation within the department. The study calls for future studies on the effectiveness of decision-making practices, linking them to other leadership approaches in the higher education context.

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Human Participants

All necessary permissions are obtained, and so all ethical guidelines are observed. All persons who participated in this study did so voluntarily and were made aware of minimal risks. All participants will remain anonymous.

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