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THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC LEADERS ON FACULTY MEMBERS' ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A STUDY OF NON-PROFIT PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN İSTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of academic leadership practices on faculty members' organizational identification. Intense competition, increasingly stringent performance criteria, and dynamic transformation processes are among the major challenges faced by higher education institutions, underscoring the influence of academic leadership on faculty members' institutional commitment and sense of belonging. Academic leaders can positively influence individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment by supporting faculty members' professional development processes, strengthening the cultural values and norms of higher education institutions, and playing an active role in institutional governance. Therefore, revealing the role of academic leadership in shaping faculty members' institutional commitment and sense of belonging is of great importance. The research was conducted using data collected from 350 faculty members working at non-profit private universities in Istanbul. A quantitative research method was employed, and data were collected through convenience sampling. The findings indicate that the three sub-dimensions of academic leadership—professional development, higher education culture, and higher education administration—have significant and positive effects on both the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of organizational identification and the perceived external prestige of the organization. The analysis reveals that professional development support, in particular, has the most pronounced effect on strengthening faculty members' commitment to their institutions. In addition, demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, professional experience, and administrative position were found to significantly influence organizational identification levels. The results emphasize the importance of academic leadership in strengthening faculty members' sense of belonging to higher education institutions.

Keywords: academic leadership, faculty members, Istanbul non-profit private universities, organizational identification, Türkiye

ÜNİVERSİTELERDEKİ AKADEMİK LİDERLERİN ÖĞRETİM ELEMANLARININ ÖRGÜTSEL ÖZDEŞLEŞME DÜZEYLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ: İSTANBUL İLİ VAKIF ÜNİVERSİTELERİNDE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, akademik liderlik uygulamalarının öğretim elemanlarının örgütsel özdeşleşme düzeyleri üzerindeki etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yoğun rekabet, yükselen performans kriterleri ve dinamik değişim süreçleri, yükseköğretim kurumlarının karşılaştığı temel zorluklar arasında yer almakta ve akademik liderliğin öğretim elemanlarının kurumsal bağlılık ve aidiyet düzeyleri üzerindeki etkisini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Akademik liderler, öğretim elemanlarının mesleki gelişim süreçlerini destekleyerek, yükseköğretim kurumlarının kültürel değerlerini ve normlarını güçlendirerek ve kurum yönetiminde etkin rol alarak, bireylerin bilişsel, duygusal ve davranışsal bağlılıklarını olumlu yönde etkileyebilir. Bu nedenle akademik liderliğin, öğretim elemanlarının kurumsal bağlılık ve aidiyet duygularını şekillendirmedeki rolünün ortaya konması büyük önem taşımaktadır. Araştırma, İstanbul ilindeki vakıf üniversitelerinde görev yapan 350 öğretim elemanından toplanan veriler üzerinden yürütülmüştür. Çalışmada nicel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmış ve veriler, kolayda örnekleme yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Bulgular, akademik liderliğin üç alt boyutunun profesyonel gelişim, yükseköğretim kültürü, yükseköğretim yönetimi-hem örgütsel özdeşleşmenin bilişsel, duygusal ve davranışsal bileşenleri hem de örgütün algılanan dış prestiji üzerinde anlamlı ve pozitif etkiler yarattığını göstermektedir. Analiz sonuçları, özellikle profesyonel gelişim desteğinin öğretim elemanlarının kuruma bağlılıklarını güçlendiren en belirgin etkiyi ortaya koyduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca, cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim düzeyi, mesleki deneyim ve idari görev gibi demografik değişkenlerin de örgütsel özdeşleşme düzeylerinde anlamlı farklılıklar oluşturduğu belirlenmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlar, akademik liderliğin öğretim elemanlarının yükseköğretim kurumlarına olan aidiyet duygusunu güçlendirmedeki etkisinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: akademik liderlik, İstanbul vakıf üniversiteleri, öğretim elemanları, örgütsel özdeşleşme, Türkiye

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions play a vital role in producing knowledge, advancing science, and training qualified personnel in modern societies. These institutions also facilitate knowledge transfer, conduct research, make social contributions, and enhance global competitiveness (Ruano-Borbalan, 2024, p. 4). The sustainability of these missions is directly linked to the quality of leadership within the institution and its structural organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2019, p.12). Academic leadership not only supports faculty members' professional growth but also shapes their sense of belonging and commitment to the institution. Therefore, academic leadership is crucial for fostering organizational identity, embedding institutional culture, and promoting collaboration within the scientific community (Yaseen et al., 2025, p. 20). It also helps develop qualified human resources by focusing on individuals' personal and professional growth. However, to effectively carry out these vital roles, the internal dynamics and organizational frameworks of higher education institutions should be prioritized. The success and efficiency of universities are closely tied to their organizational structure. Strong collaboration and organizational commitment among faculty, researchers, administrators, and other staff are essential for achieving these goals.

One key institutional implication of academic leadership practices is the level of organizational identification among faculty members. Organizational identification refers to employees' sense of belonging to the organization, their sense of harmony with the organization during both success and failure, the increasing alignment between individual and organizational goals, and the integration of individual and organizational identities (Cica & Karabulut, 2015, p.124). Thus, the practices of academic leaders that support faculty members' professional and personal development can strengthen their psychological bonds with the institution and enhance their organizational identification.

This study aims to examine the effects of academic leadership in higher education institutions on faculty members' organizational identification. The literature shows that the relationship between academic leadership and organizational identification has been largely examined using samples from public universities, while the unique employment structure, performance-oriented management approach, and institutional competition conditions of foundation universities have been addressed to a limited extent. This study analyzes the effects of these dimensions on organizational identification by examining professional development support, higher education culture, and higher education administration together in a sample of foundation universities in Istanbul. Thus, the study provides a contextual contribution that complements the literature, which is predominantly focused on public universities, and yields new findings about which dimensions of academic leadership most strongly influence faculty members' organizational identification.

In this context, the study examines the impact of academic leadership on faculty members' levels of organizational identification in higher education institutions. Conducted with a sample of non-profit private universities in Istanbul, the research investigates how professional development support, higher education culture, and aspects of higher education administration that influence academic leadership influence faculty members' sense of institutional identification and belonging. Therefore, the study seeks to provide a current perspective on the role of academic leadership in shaping institutional dynamics. In Türkiye, foundation universities are legally established as non-profit private universities. Therefore, the term "non-profit private universities" is used throughout this study.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Turkish academic system

Universities, which occupy the top of the education pyramid, are autonomous institutions established on scientific principles to systematically cultivate the necessary human resources and fulfill their duties in scientific publication, research, and consultancy. Furthermore, universities pursue accurate knowledge without seeking any benefit in their scientific activities (Kaymakzade, 2019, p.30).

The higher education system in Turkey is governed by structural regulations set by the Higher Education Council. In our country's higher education, the academic career ladder begins with doctoral and postdoctoral studies (Demirbilek & Çetin, 2022, p. 198). Teaching staff working in higher education institutions in Turkey include faculty members, instructors, and research assistants (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2019).

Faculty members form the core of the academic hierarchy and are responsible for scientific research, education and training, and academic governance activities. This group consists of three sub-titles: Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor. Assistant professors are individuals who have completed a doctoral degree or a specialist title in fields such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. The title of associate professor is awarded following a national evaluation conducted by the Inter-University Council. A professor is the highest rank in the academic hierarchy. Lecturers are academic staff members responsible for teaching, conducting, or supervising practical work at higher education institutions. According to the Higher Education Law No. 2547, teaching assistants are individuals who are recognized for their work and publications in their field of expertise and who may be assigned on a temporary basis or on an hourly basis to teach courses or conduct training and practical work for courses that require special knowledge and expertise, in accordance with this Law, in universities and their affiliated units where there are no faculty members appointed under this Law. (Kaymakzade, 2019, p.39). Research assistants are teaching assistants who assist in research, studies, and experiments conducted at higher education institutions and perform other related duties assigned by the competent authorities (YÖK, 2019).

2.2. Academic leadership

Higher education staff generally require a high degree of professional autonomy to perform their academic duties effectively. Contemporary organizational environments are characterized by increasing complexity, dynamism, and uncertainty. Because of these challenges, there is a greater need for leaders who can offer active guidance. Academic leadership is a key part of overall leadership, especially in academic circles and organizations (Durmaz, 2017, p.9).

Leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor in the effectiveness of educational institutions. The primary role of leaders is to guide and coordinate individuals toward organizational goals. This results in more efficient educational activities, helping to overcome challenges and obstacles more effectively. In higher education, leadership involves not just one authority figure but a more complex phenomenon that depends on the needs, expectations, and demands of the staff, as well as the person who takes on leadership (Akalin & Demirbaş, 2024, p.64-65).

Academic leadership plays a crucial role in organizing research and motivating academics to reach their goals. Introducing students to scientific studies and guiding them toward research activities, coordinating course content effectively, and enhancing communication and collaboration among faculty members are key responsibilities of academic leadership. Furthermore, fulfilling team management, guidance, and consulting roles; fostering discussions that include diverse perspectives; and developing institutional plans support an effective academic leadership approach (Baloglu & Öz, 2021, p.422).

Academic leadership involves fulfilling duties outlined in academic policies and strategies at various levels, including departments, faculties, and institutes. These duties include improving academic conditions, identifying key research areas, and streamlining academic processes. Academic leaders are professional individuals who support faculty, department members, and administrators on relevant issues while also contributing to students' qualitative growth and academic success. These individuals, who actively participate in decision-making processes related to curricular development, the evaluation of teaching methods, and student performance, and who provide guidance and direction, are defined as academic leaders (Yeşilyurt, 2007, p.78).

2.3. Dimensions of academic leadership

Academic leaders should first understand the unique roles and responsibilities of academic leadership; then, they must develop the skills

needed to achieve desired outcomes by working collaboratively with faculty, staff, students, other administrators, and external stakeholders. Finally, they should continuously improve their leadership practices by learning from past experiences (Gmelch, 2013, p.27).

Gmelch and Ramsden (2000) examined academic leadership through four main functional areas. The first is academic entrepreneurship, which refers to leaders' efforts to create a shared vision and foster ongoing commitment among colleagues by promoting innovative initiatives and supporting academic development. The second area, leadership within the academic community, emphasizes a transformational role in which leaders encourage intellectual stimulation, provide individualized support, and assist colleagues in achieving their academic goals. The third area, people management, encompasses responsibilities such as supervising team members, evaluating performance, providing feedback, and supporting professional development, thereby enabling individuals to set and achieve their objectives. Finally, managing academic activities involves administrative and managerial tasks, including curriculum and course design, effective financial resource management, implementation of quality assurance policies, coordination of mentoring processes, and performance monitoring. Together, these four functional areas conceptualize academic leadership as a comprehensive process that integrates vision creation with the effective management of its implementation.

While the taxonomy of academic leadership roles proposed by Gmelch and Ramsden (2000) provides a valuable framework for understanding managerial and academic responsibilities within universities, it is evident that these roles have undergone significant transformation in contemporary higher education systems. Since the early 2000s, the growing emphasis on governance, accountability, quality assurance mechanisms, and performance-based evaluation has expanded the scope of academic leadership beyond traditional collegial coordination. In this context, academic leaders are no longer limited to facilitating academic processes and collegial relationships; they are increasingly expected to engage in strategic planning, institutional performance monitoring, and quality management. Moreover, reforms associated with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area have further strengthened the role of academic leaders in curriculum development, learning outcomes assessment, and continuous quality improvement. Alongside these developments, digital transformation in higher education has introduced new expectations related to change management, data-informed decision-making, and digitally mediated leadership practices, thereby redefining academic leadership as a more dynamic, strategic, and distributed role.

2.4. The relationship between academic leadership and organizational identification

The link between academic leadership and organizational identification reinforces the functional and cultural integrity of higher education institutions. Through their visionary and inclusive approaches, academic leaders help faculty internalize institutional values, thereby enabling employees to develop a stronger connection to the organizational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.21).

Organizational identification is defined as the subjective bond individuals have with an organization and their integration of organizational goals and values with their personal identities. Academic leadership involves more than just carrying out administrative tasks; it also fosters scientific productivity, aligns academics with the institutional vision, and promotes social responsibility (Gmelch & Ramsden, 2000, p.33). Organizational identification is also described as the perception of belonging to or being one with an organization (Kachchhap & Ong'uti, 2015, p. 245). An academic leader needs a clear understanding of organizational values and the ability to adapt to changes within and outside the organization. The academic environment currently faces numerous challenges. Academic leaders must be knowledgeable and competent to effectively manage their teams (Siddique et al., 2011, p.734). Turgut, Tokmak, and Güçel (2012) observed that transformational leadership behavior increased organizational identification among academic staff and that perceptions of institutional reputation mediated this relationship.

Academic leadership plays a vital role in helping faculty members integrate into the organization and develop their identity within higher education institutions. Organizational identification reflects an individual's psychological connection to and sense of belonging to the organization, which significantly boosts employee motivation, commitment, and performance (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006, p. 573). By sharing their strategic vision and values, academic leaders support faculty members in aligning their personal goals with institutional objectives; this process is a key factor in fostering organizational identification (Siddique et al., 2011, p. 736).

3. Organizational identification

Organizational identification includes multiple components that reflect the level of psychological bond between an individual and an organization. This concept, which has garnered increasing attention in organizational behavior literature in recent years, is considered a key variable in understanding employee attitudes and behaviors. The three-dimensional model proposed by Meyer et al. (2012) is currently used as a basic framework for conceptualizing and studying organizational identification. The first dimension of the model, affective commitment, refers to an individual's emotional attachment to the organization and their sense of being part of it (Meyer et al., 2012, p.8-9). This dimension results from the alignment of an organization's values with those of its employees. The second dimension, normative commitment, describes an individual's sense of moral responsibility toward the organization. The final dimension, continual commitment, concerns an individual's focus on the costs of leaving the organization (Jaros, 2017, p.522).

When individuals do not internalize organizational identification, it refers to a psychological process through which employees perceive alignment between their personal values and the organization's goals. This phenomenon fosters a social and psychological connection between employees and the organization that persists even after individuals leave (Çetinceli, 2024, p.635). A key aspect of organizational identification is that it helps employees adopt the organization's goals and values, see themselves as part of this structure, and find their work meaningful. A lack of internalization of organizational goals and values may weaken employees' sense of belonging and psychological attachment to the organization. These individuals, who do not think in terms of a "we" mentality, distance themselves from the organization and feel they do not belong (Demir, 2020, p. 290). It was emphasized that organizational identification should be considered not only based on its cognitive aspects but also in its emotional and behavioral dimensions (Demir, 2009, p.663-665).

3.1. Factors affecting organizational identification

Recent studies have examined the factors influencing organizational identification more comprehensively. These factors can be grouped into four main categories. Generational differences are a significant individual factor (Twenge et al., 2010). It has been observed that the identification patterns of Generation Y and Z employees differ from those of earlier generations. Expectations for work-life balance (Allen et al., 2013, p.350-351) are another factor that has gained increasing importance in modern professional settings. The alignment between employees' personal values and organizational values can directly impact on their level of identification. Both domestic and international literature often emphasize that employees with a high degree of individual-organization fit tend to have higher levels of organizational identification (Acar, 2012, p.222-224). Analyzing organizational factors shows that perceptions of organizational support play a decisive role in fostering identification. Transformational leadership and mechanisms of employee voice are also key elements that strengthen organizational identification (Banks et al., 2016, p. 639-641).

Flexible job organization (Allen et al., 2013, p. 361-362) and the perception of meaningful work are notable among job design factors. Environmental elements include current topics such as organizational reputation management and the effects of digital transformation (Leonardi & Treem, 2020, p.885-886). Transformational leadership style and employee participation greatly enhance organizational

identification (Yücel, 2013, p.255-256). Furthermore, open, transparent, and two-way internal communication positively influences the level of identification (Karaköse, 2008, p.498-500).

3.2. Organizational identification among academic staff

Organizational identification in higher education institutions has become an increasingly researched topic (Claudel et al., 2021, p.493-495). The identification dynamics of academic staff differ significantly from those in other industries. The relationship between academic freedom and identification is a dynamic specific to higher education institutions. The balance of triple responsibility (education, research, and community service) is also a key factor influencing academic staff's identification. Among the current determinants, academic leadership styles (Bryman, 2015, p.13), performance evaluation systems, and the effects of digitalization (Watermeyer et al., 2021, p.653) stand out. Especially in the post-pandemic period, the impacts of remote work (Aristovnik et al., 2021, p.8438) and the commitment patterns of young academics have become increasingly examined topics.

Perceptions of academic freedom, administrative justice, merit-based promotion, and the internal communication culture are among the key factors shaping academic identification (Aydın & Yılmaz, 2012, p. 151-153). Therefore, understanding academic staff's organizational identification is essential for developing human resources policies in higher education institutions. The current study focuses on the impact of academic leadership practices on identification.

4. Methodology

4.1. The aim and significance of the study

This quantitative study aims to examine how faculty members' perceptions of academic leadership affect their levels of organizational identification in non-profit private universities in Istanbul. The study also identified the following sub-objectives:

1. The study of how three academic leadership sub-dimensions—professional development, higher education culture, and higher education administration—affect faculty members' levels of organizational identification.
2. To examine how academic leadership behaviors influence faculty members' perceptions of their organization's external prestige.
3. To assess whether demographic factors such as gender, age, academic titles, professional experience, education, and administrative duties significantly influence organizational identification levels.

This study, conducted at non-profit private universities in Istanbul, shows how leadership practices influence faculty members' commitment and sense of belonging to the institution in rapidly growing and diverse higher education settings. These leadership practices, which strengthen faculty members' emotional and cognitive connections with the institution, are essential for long-term institutional success and academic outcomes. Ethical committee approval for this study was discussed at the Istanbul Esenyurt University Ethics Committee Commission meeting on March 26, 2024, numbered 2024-03, and it was unanimously decided that it was ethically appropriate.

4.2. Population and sample

The research population consists of faculty members working at non-profit private universities in Istanbul. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample, and data were collected from 350 faculty members. Data collection took place between April and December 2024 through online and in-person surveys administered to faculty members at non-profit private universities in Istanbul. The study data were analyzed using Minitab 21.4.2.0 and Jamovi 2.6.2.

Convenience sampling was employed due to practical considerations related to accessibility, time constraints, and institutional permissions. Given the challenges of reaching academic staff across multiple universities, this sampling approach enabled the researcher to collect data from readily accessible participants who were willing to participate. Convenience sampling is commonly used in organizational and educational research, particularly when the target population is difficult to access and when exploratory or relational analyses are conducted.

Nevertheless, convenience sampling has certain limitations. Most notably, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all academic staff working in non-profit private universities in Türkiye. As the sample was not randomly selected, the results should be interpreted with caution and within the study's contextual boundaries. Despite these limitations, convenience sampling is considered appropriate for examining relationships between variables and generating empirical insights within a specific institutional and cultural context.

The term "academic leader" in the scale does not explicitly define a specific administrative position for participants (e.g., department chair, dean, rector). Participants are assumed to evaluate this term based on the academic administrator with whom they interact most frequently, based on their own experience.

In this study, a conceptual distinction has been made within the Turkish higher education system for the academic staff included in the sample. In the study, instructors are defined as academic staff responsible for teaching, conducting, or supervising practical work. Research assistants, on the other hand, are academic staff who assist with academic research, experiments, and investigations, and can take on supervisory roles in teaching activities. The broader category of faculty members includes academic staff with high titles such as professor, associate professor, and assistant professor; it also includes individuals with special titles determined by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in fields such as pharmacy, veterinary medicine, and certain arts (YÖK, 2019). All teaching staff holding the aforementioned titles were included in the study.

4.3. Data collection of instruments

The study data were collected using the Academic Leadership Scale (Karsantik & Çetin, 2021) and the Faculty Organizational Identification Scale (Eker, 2015). The Academic Leadership Scale was developed to evaluate faculty members' perceptions of academic leadership and includes three sub-dimensions. The first is Professional Development (10 items), the second is Higher Education Culture (5 items), and the third is Higher Education Administration (3 items). The Faculty Organizational Identification Scale assesses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral bonds that faculty members have with their institutions. The scale features two sub-dimensions: Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification (10 items) and Perceived External Prestige of the Organization (3 items). Participant demographics, including gender, age, education level, academic title, and seniority, were also included in the study.

4.4. Research hypotheses and models

H1: Academic leadership has a positive impact on the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional identification levels of faculty members.

H1a: Professional development positively influences cognitive, behavioral, and emotional identification levels.

H1b: Higher education culture positively influences cognitive, behavioral, and emotional identification levels.

H1c: Higher education administration positively influences cognitive, behavioral, and emotional identification levels.

H2: Academic leadership enhances faculty members' perception of the organization's external prestige.

H2a: Professional development has a positive impact on the organization's perceived external prestige.

H2b: Higher education culture has a positive impact on the perceived external prestige of the organization.

H2c: Higher education administration has a positive impact on the organization's perceived external prestige.

H3: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on gender.

H4: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on age.

H5: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on education level.

H6: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on academic title.

H7: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on seniority.

H8: There is a significant difference in the organizational identification levels of faculty members based on administrative position.

FIGURE 1 | The research model

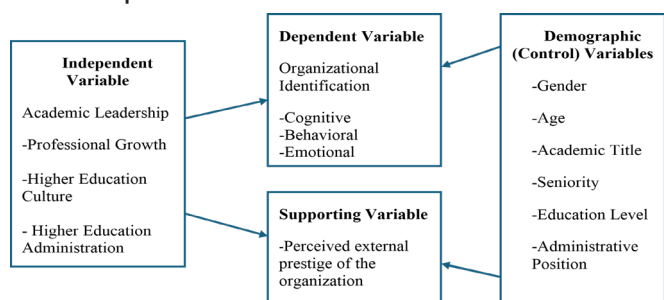


Figure 1 presents the research model, clearly distinguishing the independent, dependent, supporting, and control variables examined in the study. The model examines how three sub-dimensions of academic leadership—professional growth, higher education culture, and higher education administration—influence faculty members’ organizational identification and their perceptions of the organization’s external prestige. The professional growth sub-dimension relates to the leader’s mentoring, training, and offering opportunities for faculty members’ career development, academic skills, and personal growth. Higher education culture involves creating and sustaining a university-specific environment that fosters academic freedom, ethical values, effective communication, fair treatment, and shared norms. Higher education administration refers to the leader’s administrative and managerial skills, such as managing resources, recruiting personnel, monitoring performance, and overseeing processes to attain strategic goals (Karsantik & Çetin, 2021, p.678). Faculty organizational identification includes the Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification sub-dimension, which involves aligning the institution’s values with the employee’s personal values (cognitive), demonstrating the employee’s commitment to the institution (emotional), and expressing that commitment through behavior. The Perceived External Prestige of the Organization sub-dimension captures the employee’s personal perception of the organization’s reputation, prestige, and image in the eyes of society and other stakeholders (Eker, 2015, p.121-122). In the model, the sub-dimensions of academic leadership are treated as independent variables, whereas organizational identification (encompassing cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions) and the organization’s external prestige are treated as dependent variables. Additionally, demographic factors (gender, academic title, age, experience, and administrative duties) are included as control variables in the model.

5. Findings

TABLE 1 | Grouped descriptive statistics (N=350)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	210	60,0%
	Male	140	40,0%
Age	18-25	30	8,6%
	26-40	250	71,4%
	41-55	50	14,3%
	56 and above	20	5,7%
	Academic Position	Research Assistant	180
	Lecturer	100	28,6%
	Faculty Member	70	20,0%
Education Level	Undergraduate	10	2,9%
	Master's	200	57,1%
	PhD	140	40,0%
Seniority	1-5 years	200	57,1%
	6-10 years	80	22,9%
	11-15 years	40	11,4%
	16-20 years	15	4,3%
	21 years or higher	15	4,3%
Administrative Position	Yes	100	28,6%
	No	250	71,4%

The demographic and professional characteristics of the participating academics shown in Table 1 reveal that most of the participants were female (60%, n=210), while 40% (n=140) were male. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 26 and 40 (71.4%, n=250), followed by the 41-55 age group (14.3%, n=50), the 18-25 age group (8.6%, n=30), and those aged 56 and above (5.7%, n=20). Most participants were research assistants (51.4%, n=180), followed by lecturers (28.6%, n=100) and faculty members (20.0%, n=70). The majority held a master’s degree (57.1%, n=200), with doctors accounting for 40% (n=140) and those with undergraduate degrees accounting for 2.9% (n=10). Academics with 1- 5 years of experience (40%, n=200) formed the largest group, while those with 6-10 years (22.9%, n=80), 11-15 years (11.4%, n=40), 16-20 years (4.3%, n=15), and 21 or more years (4.3%, n=15) of experience were fewer. Most participants did not hold administrative positions (71.4%, n=250), while those with administrative duties accounted for 28.6% (n=100). As presented in Table 1, the majority of the participants were research assistants, followed by lecturers and faculty members holding other academic positions.

5.1. Descriptive statistics

TABLE 2 | Descriptive statistics on academic leadership and organizational identification variables (N=350)

Variable	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Professional Development	350	1.00	5.00	4.36	0.74
Higher Education Culture	350	1.00	5.00	4.41	0.71
Higher Education Administration	350	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.80
Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification	350	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.80
Perceived External Prestige of the Organization	350	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.99

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 2. The variables professional development ($\bar{x} = 4.36$, $SD = 0.74$) and higher education culture ($\bar{x} = 4.41$, $SD = 0.71$) had the highest means, indicating that participants prioritized professional self-development within the context of academic leadership and higher education culture. Although the mean of higher education administration sub-dimension was relatively low (4.00, $SD = 0.80$), its perception was still positive. The mean Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification variable was 3.08 ($SD = 0.80$), which was lower than the other variables and may suggest that participants did not fully identify with the organization. On the other hand, the mean perceived external prestige score was 3.49 ($SD = 0.99$), indicating a moderate level of perceived external prestige.

TABLE 3 | Normality tests

Sub-dimension	Shapiro-Wilk W	df	p
Professional Development	0.978	350	0.112
Higher Education Culture	0.981	350	0.145
Higher Education Administration	0.976	350	0.109
Cognitive Identification	0.907–0.913	350	< .001
Emotional Identification	0.867–0.884	350	< .001
Behavioral Identification	0.834–0.894	350	< .001
External Prestige of the Organization	0.876–0.901	350	< .001

Table 3 shows that the normality assumption was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The academic leadership subdimensions showed a normal distribution ($p > .05$), whereas the organizational identification and external prestige subdimensions did not meet the normality assumption ($p < .001$). However, given the large sample size ($n = 350$), parametric tests are considered robust to deviations from normality, and the analyses were continued using parametric methods.

TABLE 4 | Welch ANOVA results for scale sub-dimensions

Sub-Dimension	F	df1	df2	p
Professional Development	0.99 – 4.32	3	76.6 – 85.4	.403 – .007
Higher Education Culture	0.16 – 5.43	3	73.2 – 81.0	.922 – .002
Higher Education Administration	0.96 – 4.19	3	75.0 – 77.2	.415 – .008
Cognitive Identification	6.51 – 8.51	3	76.1 – 85.0	<.001
Emotional Identification	2.09 – 10.59	3	73.5 – 77.5	.109 – <.001
Behavioral Identification	3.93 – 8.42	3	74.6 – 79.1	.012 – <.001
External Prestige of the Organization	3.91 – 4.95	3	77.6 – 79.1	.012 – .003

Because the assumption of variance homogeneity was violated for some variables, as indicated by the Levene test, the Welch ANOVA was used for group comparisons. Table 4 shows the minimum and maximum ranges of the Welch F and p values obtained for the items constituting each subscale.

Although a limited number of outliers were identified in the boxplots, these values were not considered to be at a level that would distort the analysis results, and all observations were included.

5.2. Reliability analysis

Table 5 shows the reliability analyses for the Academic Leadership Scale and the Faculty Organizational Identification Scale. Cronbach's alpha was 0.948, indicating very high internal consistency.

TABLE 5 | Reliability analysis

Scale Sub-Dimension	Item count	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Academic Leadership Scale		
Professional Development	10	0,937
Higher Education Culture	5	0,812
Higher Education Administration	3	0,783
Faculty Organizational Identification Scale		
Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification	10	0,852
Perceived External Prestige of the Organization	3	0,791

Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficients were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the study scales. The Academic Leadership Scale comprises three sub-dimensions. Among these, α was 0.937 for the 10-item Professional Development dimension, indicating high internal consistency. α was 0.812 for the 5-item Higher Education Culture dimension, and 0.783 for the 3-item Higher Education Administration dimension. These results indicate that both sub-dimensions have acceptable reliability.

The Faculty Organizational Identification Scale has two subscales. Cronbach's alpha was 0.852 for the 10-item Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification subscale, showing high internal consistency. The Perceived External Prestige of the Organization subscale, which includes three items, had a reliability coefficient of 0.791, indicating acceptable reliability.

TABLE 6 | Academic leadership scale confirmatory factor analysis fit indices

Fit Measure	Model-Related Values	Perfect Fit	Acceptable Fit
χ^2	212.45		
sd	132		
p değeri	0.001	$0.05 \leq p \leq 1.00$	$0.01 \leq p \leq 0.05$
χ^2 / sd	1.61	$0 \leq \chi^2/sd \leq 2$	$2 \leq \chi^2/sd \leq 3$
RMSEA	0.055	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.08$
SRMR	0.043	$0 \leq SRMR \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR \leq 0.10$
NFI	0.93	$0.95 \leq NFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq NFI \leq 0.95$
NNFI (TLI)	0.95	$0.97 \leq NNFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq NNFI \leq 0.97$
CFI	0.96	$0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$
GFI	0.92	$0.95 \leq GFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq GFI \leq 0.95$

The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis presented in Table 6 indicate that the three-factor structure of the Academic Leadership Scale (Professional Development, Higher Education Culture, Higher Education Administration) is valid. All fit indices used in the analysis are acceptable or excellent. In particular, the χ^2/df ratio of 1.61, the RMSEA value of 0.055, and the CFI value of 0.96 support the model's good fit to the data. The SRMR value of 0.043 indicates that the model's error variance is low. The NFI value of 0.93, the NNFI (TLI) value of 0.95, and the GFI value of 0.92 also confirm the model's structural validity.

Since the data in the study were collected from the same source, the Harman One-Factor Test was applied to address the risk of common-method bias. The factor analysis, performed without rotation, yielded an eigenvalue of 13.046 for the first factor, accounting for 42.1% of the total variance. Since this ratio is below the 50% threshold accepted in the literature, it was concluded that common method bias did not pose a threat to the study.

TABLE 7 | Faculty organizational identification scale confirmatory factor analysis fit indices

Compatibility Measure	Model-Related Values	Perfect Fit	Acceptable Fit
χ^2 (sd)	189.752		
p değeri	< .001	$0.05 \leq p \leq 1.00$	$0.01 \leq p \leq 0.05$
χ^2 / sd	3.216	$0 \leq \chi^2/sd \leq 2$	$2 \leq \chi^2/sd \leq 3$
RMSEA	.065	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.08$
SRMR	.041	$0 \leq SRMR \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR \leq 0.10$
NFI	.937	$0.95 \leq NFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq NFI \leq 0.95$
NNFI (TLI)	.949	$0.97 \leq NNFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq NNFI \leq 0.97$
CFI	.958	$0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$
GFI	.932	$0.95 \leq GFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq GFI \leq 0.95$
χ^2 (sd)	189.752 (59)		

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis conducted to test the two-factor structure of the Faculty Organizational Identification Scale are presented in Table 7. According to the analysis results, the model's fit indices indicate a χ^2/df ratio of 3.216. In the literature, a χ^2/df ratio

of $\leq 3-5$ is considered an acceptable fit indicator (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The RMSEA value is 0.065, within the 0.05–0.08 range and indicating an acceptable level of fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024). Similarly, the SRMR value was .041, indicating a good level of fit, as it meets the $\leq .06$ threshold (Hooper et al., 2008; Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024). The correlational fit indices were calculated as NFI = .937, NNFI (TLI) = .949, CFI = .958, and GFI = .932. Values $\geq .90$ for CFI and TLI are considered to indicate good fit, while values $\geq .95$ indicate strong fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024). The $\geq .90$ threshold for GFI is also used as an acceptable fit indicator in many CFA studies (Hooper et al., 2008).

5.3. Correlation analysis

The findings in Table 8 indicate a strong, significant correlation between the two concepts. The overall correlation coefficient between Academic Leadership and Faculty Organizational Identification is $r = 0.72$ ($p < 0.001$), indicating a strong positive relationship. An increase in academic leadership behavior positively affects organizational identification.

TABLE 8 | Correlation between academic leadership and organizational identification sub-dimensions (N=350)

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5
1. Professional Development	1	—	—	0.68***	—
2. Higher Education Culture	—	1	—	0.61***	0.59***
3. Higher Education Administration	—	—	1	0.53***	—
4. Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional Identification	0.68***	0.61***	0.53***	1	—
5. Perceived External Prestige of the Organization	—	0.59***	—	—	1

Table 8 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between the dimensions of academic leadership and the sub-dimensions of organizational identification. The results show a positive and significant correlation between professional development and cognitive-effective-behavioral identification ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, a strong correlation was observed between higher education culture and cognitive-behavioral-emotional identification ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, a positive and significant correlation exists between higher education culture and the organization's perceived external prestige ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$).

A moderate correlation was observed between higher education administration and cognitive-behavioral-emotional identification ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$). However, no significant correlation was found between professional development and the organization's perceived external prestige, nor between higher education administration and the organization's perceived external prestige. These findings indicate that academic leadership dimensions are strongly related to cognitive-behavioral-emotional organizational identification, while their connection to perceived external prestige is limited.

5.4. One-way ANOVA analysis

Table 9 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA comparing differences across groups based on age, seniority, educational level, and academic title. The analysis shows that each independent variable exhibits a statistically significant difference.

TABLE 9 | Intergroup comparison of organizational identification levels based on demographic variables

Dependent Variable	Demographic Variable	Group	n	Mean	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc (Tukey)	η^2
Organizational Identification	Age Group	18–25	30	3,45	0,68	8,72	<0,001	26–40 > 18–25*; 41–55 > 18–25*	0,112
		26–40	250	3,98	0,52				
		41–55	50	3,82	0,61				
		56+	20	3,75	0,59				
	Seniority	1–5 years	200	3,65	0,71	6,15	<0,001	21+ years > 1–5 years*; 16–20 years > 6–10 years*	0,087
		6–10 years	80	3,72	0,63				
		11–15 years	40	3,91	0,55				
		16–20 years	15	4,12	0,48				
	Education Level	Undergraduate	10	3,28	0,75	12,43	<0,001	Master's > Undergraduate*; PhD > Master's*	0,154
		Master's	200	3,74	0,58				
		PhD	140	4,05	0,49				
		Research Asst.	50	3,46	0,72				
Academic Position	Lecturer	50	3,78	0,61	9,28	<0,001	Assist. Prof. > R.A.; Professor > R.A.; Assoc. Prof. > R.A.*	0,126	
	Assist. Prof.	180	3,96	0,53					
	Assoc. Prof.	40	3,84	0,58					
	Professor	30	4,02	0,49					

Table 9 displays the results of a one-way ANOVA examining differences in organizational identification levels across demographic groups. The analysis of age showed a statistically significant difference among the groups ($F(3,348) = 8.72$, $p < 0.001$). This difference, with a moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.112$), indicates that organizational identification scores were notably higher in the 26-40 and 41-55 age groups compared to the 18-25 group.

The analysis of the seniority variable also yielded significant results ($F(4, 348) = 6.15$, $p < 0.001$). With an effect size of $\eta^2 = 0.087$, it showed that employees with 21 or more years of seniority had significantly higher identification levels than those with 1-5 years of experience. Additionally, employees with 16-20 years of seniority had significantly higher identification levels than those with 6-10 years of seniority. These results suggest that organizational identification increases with seniority.

Education level was found to have a significant impact on organizational identification ($F(2, 347) = 12.43$, $p < 0.001$). The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.154$, indicating that education level is a strong predictor of identification. It was determined that individuals with a PhD scored significantly higher in organizational identification compared to those with a bachelor's or master's degree.

The academic title variable also yielded a statistically significant difference in organizational identification scores ($F(4,345) = 9.28$, $p < 0.001$). The effect size, $\eta^2 = 0.126$, indicates that academic title has a moderate effect on identification. It was found that assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors had significantly higher organizational identification scores compared to research assistants. This suggests that organizational identification varies significantly based on demographics. For effect sizes, age groups ($\eta^2 = 0.112$), professional experience ($\eta^2 = 0.087$), and academic title ($\eta^2 = 0.126$) have a moderate effect on organizational identification, whereas educational status has a relatively stronger effect ($\eta^2 = 0.154$). Organizational identification is particularly strongly related to the individual's education and title. Specifically, education level and academic title had a stronger influence on identification. Although age and seniority were also significant factors, their effect sizes were smaller than those of education and title. Therefore, hypotheses H4, H5, H6, and H7 were supported.

TABLE 10 | Two-sample t-test results for scores based on administrative position

Admin Position	N	Mean	SD	SE	Mean Diff.	95% CI Diff.	t	df	P	Cohen's d
Yes	169	3,828	0,581	0,045						
No	163	3,800	0,731	0,057	0,0285	0,1145 -0,1714	0,39	308	0,695	0,04

The results of a two-sample t-test conducted to examine the difference between the scores of faculty members with and without administrative duties are presented in Table 10. Descriptive statistics indicate that the mean score for faculty members with administrative responsibilities was 3.828 (SD = 0.581; SE = 0.045), while for those without administrative duties it was 3.800 (SD = 0.731; SE = 0.057). The mean difference between the groups was 0.0285, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.1145 to 0.1714. The t-test results show $t(308) = 0.39$ and $p = 0.695$. Because the p-value is greater than 0.05, there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of faculty members with and without administrative duties. The effect size is Cohen's $d = 0.04$, indicating a practically negligible difference. Therefore, hypothesis H8 is rejected.

TABLE 11 | Comparison of academic leadership scores based on administrative position

Admin Position	N	Mean	SD	SE	Mean Diff.	95% CI Diff.	t	df	P	Cohen's d
Yes	169	4,103	0,638	0,049						
No	163	3,985	0,675	0,053	0,118	-0,018; 0,254	1,709	330	0,088	0,19

Table 11 examines the relationship between administrative duties and the perception of academic leadership. According to the analysis results, the average academic leadership score for teaching staff with administrative duties was 4.103 (0.638), while that for those without administrative duties was 3.985 (0.675). The mean difference between the groups is 0.118, and the 95% confidence interval is between -0.118 and 0.254. The t-test results indicate that this difference is at the threshold of statistical significance: $t(330) = 1.709$, $p = 0.088$. The effect size is Cohen's $d = 0.19$, indicating a small effect. Because the p-value is slightly greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.088$), there is no statistically significant difference between the academic leadership scores of faculty members with and without administrative duties. However, the p-value being close to the .10 significance level and the average difference being positive suggests that faculty members with administrative duties may tend to evaluate academic leadership practices more positively.

TABLE 12 | Results of a two-sample t-test on scores by gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	Mean Diff.	95% CI Diff.	t	df	P	Cohen's d
Male	152	3,654	0,792	0,064						
Female	198	3,977	0,467	0,033	-0,3227	-0,4653- -0,1802	-4,46	229	0,000	0,590

Table 12 displays the difference in scores between male and female faculty members using a two-sample t-test. Descriptive statistics show that the mean score for male faculty was 3.654 (SD = 0.792; SE = 0.064), while for female faculty it was 3.977 (SD = 0.467; SE = 0.033). The mean difference was -0.3227, with a 95% confidence interval from -0.4653 to -0.1802. The t-test results are $t(229) = -4.46$ and $p < 0.001$. Since the p-value is below 0.05, there is a statistically significant difference between male and female faculty scores. The analysis indicates that female faculty members scored significantly higher than male faculty members. The effect size was calculated as Cohen's $d = 0.59$, indicating a moderate effect of gender on the scores. Therefore, hypothesis H3 was supported.

5.5. Regression analysis results

TABLE 13 | Hierarchical regression results for organizational identification

Variables	Model I B	t	Sig.	Model II B	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	1,05	3,75	0,001	0,88	3,12	0,002	
Gender	0,06	0,92	0,358	0,04	0,71	0,476	1,10
Age	0,31	3,45	<0,001	0,18	2,65	0,009	1,28
Education	0,34	4,10	<0,001	0,21	3,02	0,003	1,35
Academic Position	0,36	4,28	<0,001	0,20	2,98	0,003	1,42
Gender	0,22	2,85	0,005	0,13	1,98	0,049	1,20
Administrative Position	0,19	2,54	0,012	0,11	1,75	0,081	1,18
Professional Experience				0,30	5,00	<0,001	1,15
Professional Development				0,22	4,40	<0,001	1,10
Higher Education Culture				0,15	3,75	<0,001	1,08
Higher Education Administration							
F	11,84 (<0,001)	31,22 (<0,001)					
R ²	0,154	0,380					
ΔR ²		0,226					
F(ΔR ²)		28,91 (<0,001)					

Table 13 presents the results of hierarchical regression analysis, which revealed that the sub-dimensions of academic leadership—Professional Development, Higher Education Culture, and Higher Education Administration—had significant and positive effects on all sub-dimensions of organizational identification. The demographic variables included in the first-stage model explain 15.4% of the variance in organizational identification ($R^2 = 0.154$; $F = 11.84$; $p < 0.001$).

In the second stage, with the addition of the sub-dimensions of academic leadership to the model, the total variance explained increased to 38.0%. ($R^2 = 0.380$). Thus, there was a significant increase of 22.6% in the explanatory power of the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.226$; $F(\Delta R^2) = 28.91$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that academic leadership variables have a large effect size on organizational identification. When standardized beta coefficients are evaluated as an indicator of effect size, the effect of professional development on organizational identification is moderate ($\beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.001$), the effect of higher education culture is small to moderate ($\beta = 0.22$; $p < 0.001$), and higher education administration has a small but statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.15$; $p < 0.001$). Among the dimensions of academic leadership, professional development was found to be the variable that most strongly influenced organizational identification. Based on the results obtained, the H1 hypothesis and sub-hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H1c) were supported.

TABLE 14 | The impact of academic leadership on the organization's perceived external prestige

Variables	Model I B	t	Sig.	Model II B	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	0,90	2,81	0,005	0,52	2,10	0,036	
Gender	0,05	0,71	0,476	0,04	0,60	0,548	1,12
Age	0,38	3,80	<0,001	0,21	2,95	0,003	1,25
Education	0,28	3,50	<0,001	0,19	2,88	0,004	1,31
Academic Position	0,32	3,56	<0,001	0,18	2,64	0,009	1,40
Gender	0,20	2,50	0,013	0,12	1,98	0,049	1,22
Administrative Position	0,15	2,14	0,033	0,09	1,65	0,101	1,18
Professional Experience				0,18	2,57	0,011	1,15
Professional Development				0,25	4,17	<0,001	1,10
Higher Education Culture				0,12	2,40	0,017	1,08
Higher Education Administration							
F	10,22 (<0,001)			42,18 (<0,001)			
R ²	0,118			0,365			
ΔR ²	—			0,247			

Table 14. In the first stage of hierarchical regression analysis, gender, age, education level, academic title, administrative position status, and professional experience were included as control variables. Model I was found to be statistically significant ($F = 10.22$; $p < 0.001$) and explains 11.8% of the variance in the organization's perceived external prestige ($R^2 = 0.118$). At this stage, age, education level, academic title, and administrative position variables were found to have significant effects ($p < 0.05$).

The sub-dimensions of academic leadership, namely professional development, higher education culture, and higher education administration, were added to the model. The model's explanatory power has increased significantly ($\Delta R^2 = 0.247$; $F(\Delta R^2) = 16.28$; $p < 0.001$), and the total explained variance has risen to 36.5% ($R^2 = 0.365$). It shows that academic leadership has a significant effect on the organization's perceived external prestige, thereby supporting the H2 hypothesis.

When the Model II results are examined, it is determined that professional development has a positive and significant effect on the organization's perceived external prestige ($B = 0.18$; $t = 2.57$; $p = 0.011$). In line with this finding, hypothesis H2a is supported. Similarly, higher education culture has a significant and positive effect on perceived external prestige ($B = 0.25$; $t = 4.17$; $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that hypothesis H2b is supported. It was also determined that the higher education administration variable has a statistically significant effect on perceived external prestige. Accordingly, H2c, which proposes that higher education administration has a positive impact on the organization's perceived external prestige, is supported.

6. Conclusion and discussion

This study examined how faculty members' perceptions of academic leadership at non-profit private universities in Istanbul affect their organizational identification levels. The results showed that three main aspects of academic leadership—professional development, higher education culture, and higher education administration—significantly and positively influence faculty members' organizational identification. Additionally, demographic factors such as gender, age, education, seniority, academic title, and administrative role also affected identification. The analysis results show that the "Professional Development" sub-dimension of academic leadership has the greatest impact on organizational identification among the dimensions. This finding becomes more meaningful when evaluated not only in the context of the existing literature but also in the context of the unique organizational and employment dynamics of foundation universities in Türkiye. The fact that academic staff at foundation universities are largely employed on a contractual basis, have limited job security, and are subject to performance-based and competitive academic promotion processes can make faculty members' institutional commitment more fragile. Under these conditions, the primary determinant of faculty members' institutional commitment is the institution's capacity to support individual academic development.

Research opportunities provided by academic leaders, practices that encourage scientific production, professional development opportunities, and career guidance enable teaching staff to strengthen their academic capital, thereby facilitating alignment between the institution and individual career goals. Professional development support not only creates short-term performance gains but also helps faculty members perceive the institution as a strategic part of their long-term professional future. In this context, it can be said that development-oriented practices of academic leadership in foundation universities play an important role in strengthening organizational identification.

Specifically, based on the scale's sub-dimensions, it was observed that academic leadership's provision of professional development support significantly increased faculty members' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral identification levels. Academic leaders who offer professional development support help faculty members feel a sense of institutional belonging. This is consistent with Bryman's (2015) findings that academic leadership reinforces institutional belonging and promotes cultural integration in higher education. This finding also aligns with Gökhan and Öztürk's (2021) study, which examined the relationship between academic leadership and organizational citizenship

in Türkiye. Their results showed that academic leadership approaches strengthen faculty members' emotional and value-based connection to their organizations. Similarly, Mumcu (2022) reported that the positive effect of ethical leadership on organizational identification is significantly reinforced by moral identity. Therefore, it was observed that professional development efforts by academic leadership enhance faculty members' positive perceptions of institutional identity.

Yaseen (2025) reported that academic leadership positively affects faculty members' organizational commitment. The study showed that academic leadership increases faculty members' commitment levels, and job commitment mediates this relationship. Luo et al. (2025) examined how responsible leadership affects faculty members' organizational citizenship behaviors, specifically focusing on gratitude and organizational identification. The study found that responsible leadership does not directly influence organizational citizenship behavior but rather enhances it through mediators such as gratitude and organizational identification. The results highlighted the importance of mentoring and development-oriented roles of academic leaders in fostering organizational identification, especially given the significant effect of the professional development aspect. Liu et al. (2024) conducted research in Chinese colleges and emphasized that responsible leadership boosts organizational identification by fostering a sense of gratitude and belonging among faculty members. Additionally, Mostafa (2018) reported that organizational identification mediates the effect of ethical leadership on employees and that leadership behaviors influence employee commitment to the organization.

The study found that higher education culture and management factors also increased organizational identification. Similarly, a study by Vijayakumar and Padma (2014) showed that an innovative higher education culture boosts faculty members' organizational identification and commitment. These results support the idea that cultural and administrative practices in higher education institutions are crucial for shaping employees' levels of organizational commitment and identification.

Furthermore, demographic variables were found to influence organizational identification significantly. Female faculty members, assistant professors, and professors showed notably higher levels of identification compared to other groups. Faculty members with 21 or more years of seniority had higher identification scores than those with fewer years. Education level was also a key predictor: individuals with a PhD exhibited significantly higher organizational identification than those with bachelor's or master's degrees. The analysis of administrative roles indicated no significant difference between scores of faculty members with and without administrative responsibilities, consistent with previous findings in Türkiye. Kökden and Kazancı Tınmaz (2024) reported that gender and seniority significantly affect teachers' organizational identification.

The study also examined the relationship between administrative duties and perceptions of academic leadership. The analysis showed that academics with administrative duties had higher scores on academic leadership perception than those without, but the difference was within the limits of statistical significance. This finding indicates that faculty members in managerial positions may tend to evaluate academic leadership practices more positively.

The study findings showed that academic leadership practices in higher education significantly boost faculty members' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement with the organization. The most important result is that academic leadership's support for faculty members' professional growth has the strongest impact on their psychological connection to the organization. These findings indicate that leadership practices extending beyond traditional managerial roles are associated with stronger organizational identification among faculty members. As a unique contribution to literature, the study revealed that, across the different aspects of academic leadership, support for professional development is the most powerful factor influencing organizational identification. Redesigning university leadership to focus on mentoring and development, expanding professional development opportunities, and creating a managerial culture rooted in ethical values are key strategies to strengthen faculty members' sense of organizational belonging.

The limitations of the study include the use of convenience sampling and the study's focus on non-profit private universities in Istanbul. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, including faculty members from different cities and public colleges. While this study examined the direct relationship between academic leadership and identification, it is important to explore the psychological and social mechanisms behind this connection using mediating variables. Future studies are recommended to investigate the mediating roles of factors such as meaningfulness of work, alignment with organizational identity, psychological ownership, and group prestige, grounded in social identity theory. Insights into how these variables, along with academic leaders, enhance faculty members' cognitive and emotional bonds to their institution will enrich future theoretical discussions. One limitation of this research concerns the distribution of academic titles within the sample. A substantial proportion of participants (51%) are research assistants. As a result, the findings may primarily reflect the perceptions and experiences of early-career academics rather than the full spectrum of academic staff.

The use of convenience sampling in the study limits the likelihood that the sample represents the population and reduces the statistical generalizability of the findings. Selection of participants based on accessibility and voluntariness may increase the risk of sampling bias and lead to over- or under-representation of certain institutional characteristics in the sample. Therefore, the results obtained should not be generalized directly to all foundation universities or to the academic staff population; they should be evaluated within a contextual framework. One important limitation of this study is that the concept of "academic leader" in the scale's application was not confined to a specific managerial position. Participants may have evaluated this statement in terms of managers at different hierarchical levels (e.g., department chair, dean, assistant dean, vice chancellor). This situation may lead to perceptual differences in the measurements, limiting the comparability of the results and the validity of the measurements. In future research, it is recommended that the leadership position being evaluated be clearly defined.

Academic rank may influence organizational identification through differences in job security, career expectations, institutional power, and role responsibilities. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution when generalizing to senior academic positions such as associate professors and full professors. Future studies may benefit from employing more balanced sampling strategies across academic ranks to enable comparative analyses and enhance the generalizability of findings.

Additionally, exploring the mediating roles of emotional variables, such as gratitude, within the framework of social exchange theory may help clarify the psychological processes underlying the relationship between academic leadership and organizational identification.

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