



The role of cultural background in enhancing communication skills among academic leaders

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ABSTRACT

Academic leaders in the field of English language teaching (ELT) have come to recognise the vital role of culture in ELT. However, the influence of academic leaders' cultural backgrounds on their communicative competence has not been well-researched. This research aims to investigate the cultural factors affecting communicative competence among academic leaders. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with nine university leaders from different Iraqi universities, with the criteria being academic leaders who have been in service for more than three years. Four theories serve as its framework and direction: the theories of planned behavior, communicative competence, leadership competence, and communication competence. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, following key factors such as the impact of each academic leader's cultural background on his or her communicative competence. Effective communication skills have been identified as helpful in problem-solving and developing critical skills. The recommendation is to organise training for academic leaders to use English correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals.

Keywords: cultural background, communication, communicative competence, leadership, academic leader

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INTRODUCTION

Most universities today seek academic leaders willing to work with their subordinates to make a change, develop an inspiration-oriented vision, and implement the changes in line with the university's vision and mission. University leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the academic environment. Their communication skills directly impact their ability to inspire faculty and students, foster collaboration, resolve conflicts, and navigate the complexities of the educational landscape. Effective communication is not only a personal skill but also a leader's competence that is essential for ensuring the success and progress of academic institutions.

Communication skills are the cornerstone of successful academic leaders. In the field of leadership theory, communication plays a pivotal role in conveying vision, goals, and strategies to their academic team. Academic leaders with strong communication skills can inspire, motivate, and build confidence in their followers. Furthermore, in times of crisis or change, articulating a clear message and addressing concerns is essential. The urgency of honing these skills is underscored by today's world's fast-paced and interconnected nature. Leaders who excel at communication foster a positive work environment and adapt to their roles' evolving demands. Communication skills are the backbone that can transform good academic leaders into great leaders, making them effective influencers and facilitators of organisational success. Communication allows the leader and team members to follow through with progress towards

meeting organisational goals (Halim & Razak, 2014). Academics who face communication challenges and lack communicative competency affect the educational performance of universities in Iraq (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Mohammed et al., 2020). Henderson et al. (2016) emphasised some communication issues among academics, such as prejudice on the grounds of cultural diversity, stigmatising cultural behaviours, having a sense of unfamiliarity with cultural boundaries, and the challenges of understanding English. Some strategies to alleviate the challenges included seeking clarification and acquiring awareness about important issues.

Leadership is an important constituent of steering the university's teaching-learning process because it enhances motivation, morale, and performance among university instructors, thereby fostering student achievement outcomes (Jambo & Hongde, 2020). As university leaders, vice-chancellors, deans, heads of departments, coordinators, and instructors are responsible for initiating and implementing university changes. Leadership competency plays a significant role in university performance (Abdo & Edgar, 2019). More specifically, it is argued that leaders must develop a higher degree of communicative competence to be effective in their respective organisations (Askari et al., 2018; Mukhtar et al., 2020). Mayfield et al. (2015) found that the good communication skills of leaders can enhance organisational performance, foster organisational reputation, and increase external and internal staff satisfaction. Davis and Scaffidi-Clarke (2016) highlighted cultural miscommunication as a leadership challenge.

The importance of cultural factors in developing communicative competence is widely recognised (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). In an experimental study, Belousova & Bairamova (2020) indicated that 80% of students could show the quality of their knowledge, skills, and competence. In a qualitative study, Padua & Smith (2020) showed that cultural simulations enabled teachers to develop intercultural competency in knowledge, skills, and being. Setiyowati et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between communication skills, cultural competence, and counselling competence. Likewise, Álvarez (2020) reported the respondents' view of culture, intercultural stance, and understanding of intercultural communicative competence.

Ho & Ton (2020) revealed that teachers were reluctant to teach intercultural communicative competence due to students' low English language proficiency and the absence of intercultural communicative competence objectives in the teaching syllabi and assessments. Cultural background demonstrated that some misunderstandings resulting from cultural rather than linguistic issues have not been eliminated by the current educational system and language tools (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Some language teachers in Iraqi universities are becoming frustrated with the purely practical usage of language, particularly in leadership (Mohammed et al., 2020). Kuswari et al. (2022) stated that in verbal interaction ability, we need to consider the interactive nature of a normal conversation and ensure that reciprocity is considered in the test task in question. Taufiq & Herdi (2020) place the ethical dimension in the high category. Click to paraphrase, especially for novice practitioners with experience in supervised counselling practice. Unfortunately, there is a lack of empirical research on the impact of cultural influences on leaders' communicative competence and performance in the higher education context. Hence, the lack of such research in the literature review calls for research on leadership in Iraqi university settings. It has been opined that academic leaders in most Iraqi universities must develop communicative competence by improving their social-cultural communication skills, enabling them to lead their colleagues to make positive pedagogical changes.

The current study presents findings on the cultural factors affecting communicative competence among university academic leaders in Iraq. It seeks to answer mainly the following research question: How are cultural factors affecting communicative competence among academic leaders?

METHOD

The qualitative research will employ the interview protocol to collect respondent data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study is guided by the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the language learning experience. Qualitative research provides a unique opportunity to explore language acquisition's complicated and multi-layered nature. It allows us to explore the contextual

factors, personal perspectives, and nuanced behaviours that shape this process. Creswell's approach, renowned for its emphasis on understanding the research context, aligns well with our research goals. Additionally, validating the interview protocol by engaging experts, including a language learning specialist, adds an extra layer of credibility and reliability to our research. This ensures that the questions are both relevant and methodologically sound. This comprehensive approach will enable us to gather rich, participant-centred data necessary for a deeper understanding of the complexities of language learning (Hirose & Creswell, 2023).

The respondents in this research comprise nine academic leaders from different Iraqi universities who are either lecturers or administrators with at least three years of experience in their respective universities. In terms of their educational background, all of them hold PhDs. Five respondents are male, and four are female. Considering the academic roles, there are four professors and five associate professors. Finally, the administrative designation results include five department heads, two coordinators, a dean, and an assistant dean. All of them are from the English department. For the semi-structured interviews used in this study, they were selected using two sampling techniques: purposive and snowballing. Purposive sampling, or judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their judgment when choosing population members to participate in their study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The rationale for selecting university leaders in the language department or faculty is based on the condition that they are required to, or are supposed to, develop communicative competence to perform well at the faculty, in line with the university's mission and global standard. The demographic data of study participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research participants

| Code | Academic Qualification | Gender | Academic position | Department | Administrative Designation |
|------|------------------------|--------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| R1 | PhD | Male | Asst. Prof | English Department | Coordinator |
| R2 | PhD | Female | Asst. Prof. | English Department | Coordinator |
| R3 | PhD | Female | Prof. | English Department | Assistant Dean |
| R4 | PhD | Male | Prof | English Department | Head of Department |
| R5 | PhD | Female | Asst. Prof. | English Department | Head of Department |
| R6 | PhD | Male | Prof | English Department | Dean |
| R7 | PhD | Female | Prof. | English Department | Head of Department |
| R8 | PhD | Male | Asst. Prof. | English Department | Head of Department |
| R9 | PhD | Male | Asst. Prof. | English Department | Head of Department |

The data was collected through online interviews with nine respondents. The respondents selected through purposive sampling were academic leaders of language faculties from several universities in Iraq. The criterion stipulated was that the lecturers or administrators should have been in service for over three years. The rationale for selecting university leaders in the language department or faculty is based on the condition that they are required to, or are supposed to, develop communicative competence to perform well at the faculty, in line with the university's mission and vision to meet the global standard. The interview results were then transcribed and analysed using the analysis method adopted from Hatch (2002), which employs typological and thematic analysis. After identifying the typologies, the data was marked and coded to explore the patterns and their associations and to establish the relevant themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The basic objective of this qualitative phenomenology research is to employ in-depth interviews with nine selected university leaders in Iraq to investigate communicative competence development among Iraqi university leaders. The research method is characterised by its focus on rich descriptions and open-ended interviews to uncover the essence of this phenomenon within the specific cultural and institutional context of Iraqi higher education.

A theoretical model was formulated based on the communicative competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hyme, 1972), leadership competence (McClelland, 1973; Clark, 2016), communication competence (Pearson & Nelson, 2000) and the theory of planned behaviour. The model identified patterns that answer how cultural factors affect communicative competence among academic leaders.

Main factors and coding of themes

The following are the central themes and categories identified from the results of the data analysis. Table 2 presents the theme coding and findings under the main factors. In this section, the researcher discusses the effect of cultural factors on communicative competence.

Table 2. Main factors and key findings

| Theme/ Factor | Findings | Coding |
|------------------|---|---|
| Cultural factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unbiased treatment • Usage of body language • Express information • Efficient demonstration of oral, listening and writing skills • Adapt communications according to the audience's requirements • Fluent in the English language • Motivate young leaders • Promote others • Adaptation • Assimilation • Social organization • Ethnic and values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice • non-verbal • communication • Sharing ideas • Written and oral communication • Importance of the English language • Fluency • Communication and clear pronunciation • Renewal of modern ideas • listening to others' opinions • Adaptation skill • Cultural understanding • Fluency • perfection in the English language • Awareness of electronic communication • Inspire young leaders • Create space and opportunities for others • Respecting others • Individuality • Milt cultural backgrounds • Comprehension ability • Acquired new terms and a broader mind. • Progress communication with others from a different culture • Comprehension ability • Capable of maintaining social harmony • Confident communication with colleagues |

Cultural factors affect communicative competence

Based on the thematic analysis results performed on the interview data, twelve main categories influencing academic leaders in their communicative competence were identified. These factors include unbiased treatment, usage of body language, expressing information, efficient demonstration of oral, listening, and writing skills, fluency in the English language, motivation of young leaders, promotion of others, adaptation, assimilation, social organisation, and ethnic values.

Unbiased treatments, use of body language, and expressing information. In the context of academic leadership, the perspectives of R1 and R2 reveal two interconnected aspects that underscore the holistic nature of leadership competencies. Respondent R1 emphasises the crucial qualities of **unbiased treatment**, equality, and non-discrimination that academic leaders should embody when interacting with colleagues and students. This expectation reflects a broader

principle: the need for fair and equitable treatment for all academic community members, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics. As respondent R1 stated, *"She or he should also be fair and treat his colleagues and students equally without making a distinction between one and another."* (R1, transcript A, 18 March 2021, line 34). Building upon these principles, R1 extends the discussion to emphasise the significance of the **use of body language in communication**. They argue that academic leaders should be adept at using non-verbal cues such as nodding, gestures, raising eyebrows, and facial expressions. These non-verbal elements convey fairness, empathy, and openness in their interactions, aligning with the ideals of justice and equality. As respondent R1 stated, *"Moreover, she or he should be objective. To be competent, you have to be good at using body language: nodding, gestures, raising eyebrows, and facial expression."* (R1, transcript A, 18 March 2021, line 35).

Furthermore, respondent R2's perspective complements these ideas by underlining the importance of clear and appropriate communication skills for academic leaders. Clear communication is essential for expressing information and data transparently, aligning with the principles of fairness and equity. It ensures that information is accessible and comprehensible to everyone, further promoting non-discrimination. As respondent R2 stated, *"Clearly and appropriately, they express information and data and their desires and needs."* (R2, 17 March 2021, line 52). Overall, the competencies outlined by R1 and R2 are intricately related. Academic leaders are expected to embody principles of justice, equality, and non-discrimination while also demonstrating effective communication skills, including non-verbal cues and clear expression of information. These combined competencies create a leadership framework where fairness, equitable treatment, and effective communication work together to foster a conducive and inclusive academic environment.

Efficient demonstration of oral, listening, and writing skills. According to R2, to be communicatively competent, one should efficiently demonstrate academic skills, including oral, listening, and writing skills: *"Academic leaders should understand the importance of expression of information and demonstrate good oral, listening, and writing skills with colleagues and team members."* (R2, transcript B, 17/03/2021, line 3)

R5 highlighted the importance of having English language expertise: *"They should have grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology knowledge, and understanding. They need the skill of using utterances appropriately."* (R5, 19 May 2021, line 38)

R8 mentioned the importance of the four English language skills: when academic leaders speak a language fluently, they tend to have high-level skills. It indicates that academic leaders must have expertise in the skills: *"Academic leaders must have expertise in English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing."* (R8, 5 June 2021, line 38).

R9 mentioned that these needs are summarised in academic qualifications and the ability to communicate in English with correct and clear pronunciation, as well as in the renewal of modern ideas: *"The ability to communicate in English correctly and accurately."* (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 30)

Communication according to audience requirements. R2 mentioned the need to be careful about the nature of the audience, and the communication style needs to be diversified: *"adapts communications to audience requirements to optimise understanding and adapt to diverse communication styles from others."* (R2, transcript B, 17 March 2021, line 33)

R8 mentioned, based on his experience, that academic leaders need to focus on cultural understanding and English fluency when trying to be good academic leaders.

According to R8:

"They must be highly educated, aware of foreign cultural backgrounds and variations, and ready to cope with different situations. Academic leaders must interact with foreign visitors, guests, scholars, students, and others. They must be able to use English as fluently as possible whenever and wherever it is needed, owing to the importance of their scientific and social status as academic leaders." (R8, 5/6/2021, line 37)

R8 further added that it is pivotal that he behaves like a leader when dealing with others:

"This is a very decisive issue that adds to the respect of the person himself as a leader, on the one hand, and the whole institution he is leading on the other." (R8, transcript G, 5 June 2021, line 39)

R9 highlighted that communicative competence enhances adapting to communication according to the audience's requirements. R9 believed in having what he described as *"a culture of acceptance of others and listening to others' opinions."* (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 31)

Present information and ideas to all. R2 highlighted that academic leaders should act as role models and set an example for others through their behaviour, such as exchanging ideas: *"Academic leaders should actively present information and ideas to all appropriate levels and lead others to do the same, and actively listen to others' ideas and information."* (R2, transcript B, 17 March 2021, line 34)

Fluency in the English language. R3 emphasised English language fluency because it can make a real difference among leaders as a sign of communicative competence: *"When they communicate orally well."* (R3, transcript C, 17 March 2021, line 38). Similarly, R6 also indicated the importance of achieving perfection in English and that it can make a notable difference. Fluency in English and being familiar with using electronic communication are said to be important: *"Listening to native speakers is the fundamental element in developing communicative skills."* (R6, transcript F, 23 June 2021, line 35)

R8 also highlighted that fluency in English and familiarity with electronic communication are important: *academic leaders must be communicatively competent. They must be fluent English speakers because English is universally used and understood. It is the primary language of the internet, media, advertisements, and politics. Thus, academic leaders must be aware of it."* (R8, transcript I, 5 June 2021, line 37)

Presenting ideas. R3 added that his English communicative competence made it easier to present new information and ideas to all: *"It helps to be competent when we give ideas to others."* (R3, 17/03/2021, line 51). Also, R9 reported that he needed to give ideas to develop innovation, which could help him become competent in English: *"Renewal in modern ideas."* (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 40)

Motivating young leaders. According to R4, having a specialty in a field and upgrading it is essential to motivating young newcomers:

"The need for competence can be the experience and knowledge reflecting leaders' competence. Those who are specialised in the subject of educational leaders can make a conference or a committee responsible for developing the level of leaders by giving the leaders new information in this field, and they can arrange regular meetings with them to refresh their information and be ready for any task in the field of language learning and teaching." (R4, transcript D, 17 March 2021, line 48).

R7 expressed that academic leaders needed to use their English language ability to motivate their colleagues and students, helping them to be communicatively competent: *"Their ability to be in touch with their colleagues and students and to be ready to support and help them is the best criterion that shows their communicative competence."* (R7, transcript G, line 22)

Promoting others. According to R3, academic leaders are responsible for creating opportunities for others. That is what he meant about the need to be proficient in English: *"When they encourage and promote others."* (R3, transcript C, 17 March 2021, line 41)

Identification related to adaptation. Academic leader R5 mentioned that *"adopting other people's habits or customs"* was beneficial since these habits would improve his or her life. As for the habits and beliefs that *"do not appeal to me"*, R5 believed that individuality needed to be respected:

"I believe that adopting other people's habits or customs that are praiseworthy or beneficial is healthy and good since it is going to improve my life. As for the things that do not appeal to me, I try not to argue or refute, for I respect others' beliefs, individuality, and minds." (R5, 19 May 2021, line 41)

R8 mentioned academic leaders' adaptation according to their cultural background:

"I do respect my cultural background and try to understand my colleagues according to their cultural backgrounds. Adaptation to foreign cultural differences can best be achieved through openness and understanding of other cultures. This can be done while a particular person remains aware of his own culture and defends it or while trying simultaneously to be understood by foreigners." (R8, transcript H, 5 June 2021, line 43)

There is no difference in adapting to similar or different cultural backgrounds because of the exact language of communication: *"When communicating with my colleagues from the same or a different cultural background, my attitude from the adaptation side is compatible because the language of communication is the same." (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 32)*

Assimilation. R5 added that the assimilation of other cultures would further improve communication with others from a different culture, if there was no clash of culture and society: *"I usually adopt things that I believe would add to progress and improvement in this different culture as long as they do not clash with my culture and society." (R5, transcript E, 19 May 2021, line 43)*

R8 argued that one of the academic leaders' priorities is integration with colleagues and others. R8 stated: *"This thing may not happen, but I try my best not to offend others because of our cultural differences or backgrounds. Common respect is a very important factor for understanding." (R8, transcript H, 5 June 2021, line 45)*

Furthermore, academic leader R9 mentioned that assimilation varied according to one's linguistic and comprehension abilities, the acquisition of new terms, and the openness of one's mind. (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 33)

Social organisation. According to R5, communicative competence is required for communication with other social organisations, depending on the type of program. As R5 pointed out: *"It depends on the program these organisations work on." (R5, transcript E, 19 May 2021, line 45)*

Regarding social organisation, R8 argued that academic leaders must be skilled in maintaining social harmony: *"Of course, I should pay due attention to social organisation to give each person exactly what he deserves. Based on this issue, I must address each person based on his social position or rank, using (for example) formal or informal language to address others." (R8, transcript H, 5 June 2021, line 47).*

Academic leader R9 mentioned that the most critical thing was knowledge communication instead of social organisation, ethnicity, and values: *"I do not focus on them much because societies differ according to different cultures and religions. What interests me is knowledge communication." (R9, transcript I, 9 June 2021, line 24).*

Ethnicity and values. R5 explained that the academic leader is 'a model' for others:

"A teacher is a model to his students; they adopt their teachers' attitude and performance in their own lives and careers. Hence, I respect and admire those who are good examples of honesty, morality, faithfulness, and devotion to their job." (R5, transcript F, 19 May 2021, line 47)

R6 indicated that having the same cultural background gives one more confidence and lets one communicate easily with colleagues:

"When communicating with colleagues from the same cultural background, I do not find any obstacles or difficulties concerning adaptation, assimilation, social organisation, or ethnic values. When communicating with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, I usually think deeply before making any decision so as not to harm, disturb, or cause any bad effect on their feelings." (R6, transcript F, 23 June 2021, line 37).

Next, R7 showed a diplomatic way of avoiding mentioning ethical issues or comparing his life with others, be it from the same or different backgrounds and cultures: *"I have been a teacher in my college since 2007, and from that time, I dealt with diverse types of people and from different cultural backgrounds. I use a diplomatic way of dealing with them, never mentioning ethical issues or comparing my life with theirs." (R7, transcript G, 19 May 2021, line 24).*

R7 also believed that belonging to the same social class could allow for better communication:

"We used to sit together in one big hall and do several activities in the college, and we held several debates concerning our different majors. We were nearly from the same social class, the middle class, so we rarely had disputes or clashes. We meet and ask each other questions about matters concerning each other's major." (R7, transcript G, 19 May 2021, line 24)

R8 explained that ethnic values play a vital role in understanding cultural differences:

"Cultural differences must be understood and respected at the same time. The basic rule regarding different cultural backgrounds is common (or mutual) respect. At the same time, any person will fail to achieve communicative competence in the target language unless he is aware of these cultural or ethnic differences." (R8, transcript H, 5 June 2021, line 50).

Discussion

The above statements are the main findings of the analysis of the selected academic leaders regarding the cultural factors that influence the communicative competence of academic leaders. The findings show a need to focus on cultural understanding and audience type. As supported by previous research, communication styles and fluency in English are prerequisites for effective academic leadership. A diverse range of communication styles enables academic leaders to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, fostering better understanding and collaboration within a diverse academic community. The study conducted by Hidayat & Wulandari (2020), Meirawan et al. (2022) and Nurabadi et al. (2021) displays research results that the role of communication in academic leadership and emphasises the importance of adapting one's communication style to the context and audience, highlighting that leaders need to be versatile in their communication approaches. English language proficiency is particularly valuable in international and English-speaking academic settings (Barnett & Wood., 2021). Mastery of English facilitates clear communication of the leader's vision, goals, and policies to a diverse faculty and student body, ultimately increasing leadership effectiveness.

Furthermore, the concept that communicative competence promotes equality, equity, and non-discrimination aligns with the work of scholars such as Kiessling & Fabry (2021), who see effective communication as a fundamental element of a democratic society in which every individual is treated fairly and with respect. In academia, leaders with strong communication skills can create an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued, contributing to a sense of equality and justice among faculty, staff, and students. The role of body language in effective communication has been highlighted in numerous studies. A study by Alvarez (2022) underscores the importance of non-verbal communication in the classroom and demonstrates that gestures and facial expressions can contribute to better relationships between teachers and students, as well as to improved learning outcomes. The use of body language (nodding, gestures, raising eyebrows, and facial expressions) is also considered a cultural factor in effective communication and is essential in relationships with students and colleagues (Vishwakarma, 2023).

Likewise, Padua & Smith's (2020) study showed the significance of cultural simulations, which enabled teachers to develop intercultural competency in terms of knowledge, skill, and being. While the present study also showed that understanding the audience's or people's culture is crucial to ensuring cordial relationships among academic leaders, studies have also linked intercultural experience with communicative competence. Joan (2019) found that international students had positive intercultural communicative experiences and confidence to communicate with most people in their different communicative contexts in Canada. Similarly, the present study also showed that intercultural experience and cultural adaptation are needed to communicate according to audience requirements and to present information and ideas to all without hindrances, as communication styles need to be diversified in line with the audience's level of understanding. Hence, communicative competence allows for the command of justice and equality among academic leaders.

Additionally, past research by Ho & Ton (2020) showed the significance of English language proficiency for communicative competence. The study revealed that teachers were reluctant to teach intercultural communicative competence due to students' low English language proficiency, absence of intercultural communicative competence, insufficient intercultural knowledge, and intercultural communicative competence pedagogy. It is in line with the present study's findings, which showed the need for academic leaders to use the English language as fluently as possible whenever and wherever it is needed, owing to the importance of their scientific and social status as academic leaders. A low English language proficiency level can undermine communicative competency among academic leaders and affect their interactions with foreign visitors, guests, scholars, students, and the like (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). Hence, it can have a negative effect on the colleague's motivation and innovation. Most significantly, academic leaders are responsible for motivating their colleagues and students and assisting them in being communicative and competent. The present study found that there is a need for academic leaders to present information and ideas to all appropriate levels and lead others to do the same, as well as actively listen to others' ideas and information. Therefore, academic leaders require listening and non-verbal communication skills to lead and influence others. Listening to native speakers (especially English) is fundamental to developing communicative skills; this is crucial for an intercultural relationship, especially in multi-ethnic societies like Iraq. Listening to and relating to native speakers relates to sociolinguistic competence, while lack of exposure can affect the ability to comprehend native speakers (Enisa & Dililitaş, 2015). Compared to the previous study from Rabab'ah (2016), the present study showed the detailed non-verbal communication skills required for communicative competence. Body language such as nodding, gestures, raising eyebrows, and facial expressions are relevant for communicative competence; these are crucial to supporting communication and creating understanding.

Additionally, the qualitative analysis showed that cultural factors such as efficient demonstration of oral, listening, and writing skills are vital to communicative competence (Salikhova et al., 2023). Academic leaders must understand the importance of expressing information, demonstrate good oral, listening, and writing skills with colleagues and team members, and have grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, and understanding. Moreover, the cultural factor, such as communication according to the audience requirement, showed how it is essential for academic leaders to be diversified, primarily by ensuring communication is based on the audience's level of understanding concerning the audience culture (Alnasser et al., 2023). Hence, as revealed through the analysis, academic leaders must be highly educated, aware of foreign cultural backgrounds and variations, and ready to cope with different situations. Academic leaders should be able to interact with foreign visitors, guests, scholars, students, and the like. They must be able to use English as fluently as possible whenever and wherever it is needed, owing to the importance of their scientific and social status as academic leaders. The qualitative analysis also showed that communicative competence is required to create innovation, motivate young leaders, and promote others. Academic leaders should be able to motivate their colleagues and students and help them be communicative and competent. Their ability to be in touch with their colleagues and students and to be ready to support and help them is the best criterion that shows their communicative competence. On the other hand, in the essential role of academic leaders, an academic leader is a model for the team. Thus, cultural background is one of the factors that can affect communication.

CONCLUSION

In the context of academic leadership, culture plays an important role. It can be concluded that culture specifically impacts the communication competence of academic leaders in different universities in Iraq. Academic leaders who skillfully master the cultural nuances of their organisations foster an inclusive environment where diverse voices are recognised and celebrated. This contributes to a deep sense of equality and fairness among faculty, staff, and students. Furthermore, recognising nonverbal communication, including body language, as a necessary cultural element for effective communication highlights its importance in maintaining positive

relationships. Institutions and leaders should actively invest in cultural awareness and intercultural communication training to enhance effective academic leadership. This forward-looking approach enables university leaders to build stronger connections with staff and students, foster collaboration, and uphold the principles of fairness and respect in their leadership roles. Ultimately, acknowledging and accepting the impact of culture on communication competence is essential for cultivating successful academic leadership in Iraq's diverse educational landscape.

The recommendation to arrange training sessions for academic leaders aimed to improve their communicative fluency and competency to strengthen their leadership skills within their specific academic fields. Effective communication skills empower leaders to clearly express their ideas, promote productive teamwork, handle conflict professionally, and support diversity, especially in the context of diverse educational settings. Furthermore, these competencies empower academic leaders to skillfully adapt to the continuously evolving academic milieu and engage fruitfully with diverse stakeholders. The proposed training not only augments their current leadership roles but also constitutes an invaluable contribution to their enduring professional development.

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