

# Chapter 13

## Enhancing Student Success in Higher Education Using Leadership Strategies

**Kathirvel Ayyaswamy**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5347-9110>

*Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Tagore Engineering College, Chennai, India*

**Naren Kathirvel**

*Anand Institute of Higher Technology, India*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines the instrumental role effective leadership plays in enhancing student success in higher education. As colleges and universities face mounting pressures to demonstrate outcomes around retention, progression, attainment, career readiness and more, leadership has become mission critical to driving systemic reforms that enable these student achievement aims. The chapter provides higher education administrators, teams and policymakers research-backed principles to translate leadership vision, strategy and capabilities into tangible initiatives and cultural change that help all students thrive.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The role of leadership in higher education has never been more pivotal than it is today. As institutions face rising demands for accountability, the need for effective leaders who can navigate the complexities of these environments is paramount (Bryman, 2007). This chapter aims to explore the concept of effective leadership strategies that can lead to enhanced student success in higher education (Arday, J. 2018), providing valuable insights for administrators (Amanchukwu et al,2015).

Leadership is often considered a key determinant in the successful outcomes of any organization (Anderson, L. A., & Anderson, D., 2010). In higher education, this proves especially true as the effectiveness of leadership impacts not just the institution but also its stakeholders - most notably, its students (Choudhary, & Paharia, 2018). The landscape of higher education continues to evolve, with shifts in student demographics, advancements in technology, changes in societal expectations, and fluctuations in

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economic conditions all playing a part (Orr et al., 2020). Leaders are therefore required to be adaptable and innovative to manage these changes effectively (Artess et al, 2017).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have always been tasked with fostering intellectual growth and preparing students for future professional roles. However, these traditional objectives have expanded in recent years with HEIs now also expected to contribute to social mobility and economic development (McNair et al., 2011). This has injected a fresh urgency into discussions around effective leadership strategies for student success.

There are various definitions of 'student success' within higher education literature. Tinto's (1993) model is one of the most widely used frameworks, defining student success as both academic achievement (grades, course completion) and persistence (retention, graduation rates). A more recent definition by Kuh et al. (2006) suggests that student success is “satisfactory participation in valuable activities within and outside the classroom that result in knowledge acquisition, learning proficiency, and personal development essential for life after college (Bolden R et al, 2008).” Both definitions underline the critical role that leaders play in shaping an environment conducive to this broad view of student success.

Effective leadership strategies can create such an environment by promoting quality teaching and learning experiences, fostering inclusive communities, and enabling meaningful engagement opportunities (McCormick et al., 2013). Furthermore, they can influence policy development and implementation processes that directly impact student outcomes (Day et al., 2016).

Various studies have explored different models of leadership within higher education like transformative leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2007), servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002), distributed leadership (Bolden et al., 2008), and situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) among others. These models provide diverse perspectives on how leadership can be exercised effectively within HEIs. However, there is a gap in literature regarding how these different approaches can be practically applied by administrators to enhance student success (Kathirvel et al 2024a). This chapter bridges this gap by providing an overview of effective leadership strategies suited for enhancing student success and offering practical insights for administrators on how to implement these strategies.

This chapter begins by exploring different models of leadership prevalent within higher education. It then delves into how effective leadership impacts student success by supporting academic achievement, promoting student engagement, and enhancing retention and completion rates. Practical insights for administrators on implementing these strategies are then presented, followed by a discussion of case studies exemplifying their successful application. The chapter concludes by highlighting some current challenges and future directions for leadership in higher education.

In the context of an increasingly competitive and complicated higher education environment, a comprehensive understanding of effective leadership strategies is crucial for administrators aiming to enhance student success. This chapter hopes to provide a valuable resource in that regard.

## **Context and Importance of Student Success**

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, the imperative to prioritize student success has garnered unprecedented attention and urgency over the past decade (Calhoun, 1996; Matthews, 2018). This chapter delves into the multifaceted dimensions of this imperative, examining its roots, implications, and the driving forces behind its prominence in contemporary educational discourse.

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