International Journal of Strategic Leadership, Education and Social Sciences (IJSLESS)
Volume-2/Issue-2/April-June, 2026.
Print ISSN: 3115-4417; E-ISSN: 3115-4409.

Original Research Article

THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ROLES OF HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS

Michael Ekpenyong ASUQUO, Samuel Okpon EKAETTE, Iniabasi Udofia ETETIM
Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, College of Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria
mikeasuquo2015@gmail.com, sammylucky2009@yahoo.com, iniabasi8122@gmail.com

Ekpenyong Ekpenyong OKON
Admission Unit, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria
ekpenyongokon66@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study investigated the relationship between the strategic leadership roles of Heads of Departments' and sustainable growth of university departments. The study adopted both descriptive survey and correlational research designs. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to describe existing phenomena as they occur within the study population, while the correlational design facilitated the examination of the nature and extent of the relationship between the variables without manipulation. The population comprised 139 Heads of Departments in the University of Calabar, from which a sample of 80 HODs was selected. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Strategic Leadership Roles of Heads of Departments and Sustainable Growth of University Departments Questionnaire (SLRHDSGUDQ)". SLRHDSGUDQ was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established through a pilot study involving 20 academic staff members outside the study sample, yielding a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .891, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis at the .05 level of significance using SPSS version 29. The study's findings revealed that strategic leadership practices of Heads of Departments significantly influence the sustainable development of university departments. The study concluded that effective strategic leadership is essential for the promotion of sustainable departmental growth. The study recommended that Heads of Departments in the university system should improve upon their strategic leadership practices so as to facilitate sustainable development in their respective Departments in the university system, and the university management should give leverage and encourage every departmental heads to always work strategically for the benefit of individual department in particular and the university system in general.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership Practices, Heads of Departments, Sustainable Development, Departmental Growth, University System, Higher Education.

Reference to this paper should be referenced as follows:

Asuquo, M. E., Ekaette, S. O., Etetim, I. U., & Okon, E. E. (2026). The strategic leadership roles of Heads of Departments' and sustainable growth of university departments. *International Journal of Strategic Leadership, Education and Social Sciences, 2*(2), 145-154. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20701219.

Copyright © 2026 IJSLESS

INTRODUCTION

In the university system, departments serve as operational levels where teaching, learning and research in various disciplines are implemented in a bid to actualize the objectives of the

university. These objectives include; developing intellectual capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving skills, provision of students with in-depth knowledge and expertise in specific disciplines or their respective chosen fields of study, promotion of research and innovation, equipping graduates with relevant skills, competencies, and attitudes required by the lobour market as well as ability to create jobs and be self-reliance through entrepreneurial initiatives (FGN, 2008). As such, the university system in the dynamic society needs to remain relevant, proactive, creative innovative and responsiveness to the needs of the society. This informs the need for the role performance of HODs to go beyond mere routine administrative responsibilities in such areas as academic planning and coordination, policy implementation, staff management, staff management, students' administration, resources management, policy implementation, organization of meeting and reporting, examination and quality assurance responsibilities, record keeping and information dissemination to strategic leadership practices that stresses on long term development and sustainability of the university system.

Strategic Leadership is the ability to influence others to make decisions that reinforce and enhance the prospects for the organization's long-term success while maintaining short term financial stability (Abusamra & Abusamra, 2022). Strategic leadership is directed toward achieving a particular purpose or to gain future advantage. To lead strategically means planning to accomplish specific future target(s) or purpose (Bassey & Asuquo, 2025). It also entails leading with a vision and mission for the future while managing the present effectively and efficiently for goal attainment and sustainable development in the respective departments in the university system. Abusamra & Abusamra further stressed that, implementation of strategic leadership by HODs in the university system creates an opportunity for staff to maintain high quality feedback and improve their practice and that strategic leadership practices helps HODs a culture of trust, collegiality, and shared responsibility for all staff members upon a certain vision. Strategic leadership practice is the leadership practice that is specifically directed to guide a department in a university system toward goals actualization by making informed decisions, aligning resources and promoting culture that supports growth, innovation and departmental sustainability.

In the university system, HODs do not only direct and guide academic and administrative processes but also inspire staff members to be committed, encourage collaboration, and cultivate a culture of continuous improvement (Hill, 2019; Malik & Amin, 2023). Strategic leadership is manifested in the ability of leaders to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, utilize resources optimally and empower others to create strategic change that ensures organizational success over the long term (Nahak et al., 2022; Suharto, 2023; Khalilov et al., 2025). The significant of strategic leadership practice in emerging economies is crucial due its increasing global influence in organizations (Kebede et al., 2024). Similarly, Channuwong et al. (2024) stressed that strategic management practices have become crucial for the organization as it serves as a guideline for executives to set the direction of organization, analyze both external and internal environments, and determine suitable strategies for the organization. In this connection, scholars have stressed that, to thrive in emerging economy, strategic leaders need to balance immediate pressures with long-term organizational vision, focusing on innovation, ethical practices, and robust stakeholder engagement (Kebede et al., 2024).

The need for strategic leadership in the university system is to actualize needs and requirements of institutions in relation to future aspirations and strategic leaders have the responsibility of accomplishing excellence in a competitive environment. It has also been argued that, strategic leaders are responsible for the strategic thinking that takes place at every unit as

well as in an institution as a whole. Strategic leaders are always proactive in orientation with ability to set flexible future vision as well as ability to provide support and motivation to others to bring about the required and necessary strategic changes in the institution (Atoum, 2024). By implication, strategic leaders define institutional direction and objectives through short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans as well as ensuring that plans are effectively executed, monitored, correct deviation where necessary.

Strategic leaders document the vision of the organization, organization's mission, and operational strategies that serves as a roadmap for organizational activities objectives accomplishment. Iqbal & Ali (2024) noted that, strategic leaders need to emotionally intelligent, analytical thinkers, flexible, and willing to take calculated risks. Khalilov et al., (2025) noted that, strategic planning is a fundamental process that ensures the long-term success and sustainability of organizations and that leadership skills play a crucial role in effectively formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategic plans. Effective leaders provide vision, inspire teams and promote innovation. Khalilov et al also averred that organizations that integrate strong leadership achieve higher efficiency, competitive advantage, and resilience in a rapidly evolving system. Generally, leadership entails influencing the followers by leading and controlling them as well as managing and administering the school system effectively and efficiently to achieve specific stated goals. Effective leadership in every educational organization is inevitable if educational organizational goals and objectives are to be accomplished, within available human, material and financial resources (Ekpoh & Asuquo, 2025).

In an empirical study, it was found that increase of the effectiveness of strategic leadership has a positive effect on academic head performance in their respective departments and that the extent of strategic leadership practice in the academic departments in the Palestinian universities in Gaza Strip is of a high degree (Abusamra & Abusamra, 2022). In healthcare system, researchers have found a significant positive effect of strategic leadership practices on sustainability of healthcare (Suriyankietkaew & Kungwanpongpun, 2022). Similarly, has been found to have been positively impacted on sustainable competitive advantages and sustainable competitive advantage was positively affected by the dimensions of strategic leadership in terms of human capital and social capital in Palestinian pharmaceutical companies (Abdeen et al., 2025). In another study by Kising'u (2017), it was found that strategic leadership practices played significant role in promoting organizational innovation for sustainable competitive advantage in Kenyan public and private universities.

The result of another empirical that measured the extent of the influence and relationship between strategic leadership and development indicated positive and significant relationship strategic leadership and sustainable development in health institution (Alagele et al., 2025). In Jordanian higher education institutions, a study that was on the impact of strategic leadership in enhancing strategic performance carried out by Atoum et al. (2024), found that, all dimensions of strategic leadership (strategic vision, core competencies and ethical practices) affected strategic performance. Another finding indicated that the implementation of strategic leadership had a significant positive impact on the organization's success in achieving long-term goals and that leaders who apply a strategic approach, with a deep understanding of the vision and mission, analysis of the business environment, and the ability to formulate innovative strategies, play a key role in guiding the team and creating clear direction (Suharto, 2023).

Similarly, the results of another study by Alayoubi et ai.(2020) indicated a strong and statistically significant relationship between strategic leadership practices in terms of strategic orientation, investment of strategic capabilities and talents, development of human capital,

strengthening organizational culture, emphasis on ethical practices, implementation of balanced regulatory control and improvement of quality of educational service in Palestinian universities. Again, other scholars found that, effective strategic leadership significantly enhance corporate sustainability by aligning an organization's mission and vision with sustainable development (Onwuzulike et al., 2024). Although previous researchers have conducted studies in strategic leadership, the need for this study still become apt because studies addressing HODs' strategic leadership practices and sustainable development of Departments in the University System seems to be scarce.

Sustainable development is often associated with the concept of sustainability and as such both terms are used as synonyms, even in the academic and scientific fields, as observed in the literature (Olawumi & Chan, 2018; Sartori et al., 2014 as cited in Ruggerio, 2021). Sustainability as a global concept has received much attention in educational system (Ekpoh & Asuquo, 2017; Edet & Asuquo, 2019). In educational system, sustainability entails indefinite maintenance of and continuity with the stipulated standards for the benefit of the students in particular and the society at large (Edet & Asuquo, 2019). Sustainable development of departments in the university system manifests in such areas as academic sustainability in effective teaching, learning and research as well as consistent in students' enrolment; human resource sustainability like maintaining effective staff mix in terms of right proportion of personnel (number, qualifications, experience, skills, and roles) in the department and sustainable development in the area of social responsibility by ensuring that departments in the university system maintain, encourage and promote research that addresses societal challenges both at the local and global levels.

Statement of the Problem

University is the highest level of education and as such is it expected to serve as centers of excellence in teaching, research, and community development. In the university system, various departments are regarded as operational units through which facilitate the national growth and development through teaching and learning. Sustainable development in each of the department in the university system may not be unconnected with the HODs' strategic leadership practices. The is no doubt that, HODs are responsible for academic sustainability, human resource sustainability, planning and decision-making in their respective departments.

Nevertheless, there have been concern in recent years with respect of some department to maintain academic standard in such areas as teaching, learning and in the conduct of academic research. Concern has also been expressed in the area of human resource sustainability in relation to appropriate staff mix, and involvement of qualified and experienced staff members in both academic and administrative activities. These seem to be linked in part, to HODs' deficiency strategic leadership practices. This study therefore seeks to examine HODs strategic leadership practices and sustainable development of Departments in the University System.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategic leadership roles of Heads of Departments' and sustainable growth of university departments. The specific objectives of the study are to find out:

- The extent of strategic leadership practices by the HODs in the university system
- Whether strategic leadership practices significantly predict significantly predict sustainable development of Departments in the University System

Research Question

- To what extent is of strategic leadership practiced by the HODs in the university system

Hypothesis

- Strategic leadership practices do not significantly predict sustainable development of Departments in the University System

METHODOLOGY

The study employed both descriptive survey and correlational research designs. The descriptive survey design was considered suitable because it enabled the researchers to systematically describe existing phenomena as they naturally occur within the study population. This design involves the collection of data to provide accurate descriptions of individuals, groups, events, or situations (Asim et al., 2017). In addition, the correlational research design was adopted to examine the nature and extent of the relationship between the study variables without manipulating them. This design is particularly appropriate when the objective is to investigate naturally occurring relationships among variables and to predict future trends based on observed associations through methods such as surveys, naturalistic observations, and archival studies (Isangedighi, 2012).

The study population comprised 139 Heads of Departments (HODs) across the various departments of the University of Calabar, from which a sample of 80 HODs was drawn. Data were collected using researchers-developed instrument titled Strategic Leadership Roles of Heads of Departments and Sustainable Growth of University Departments Questionnaire (SLRHDSGUDQ).

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A elicited information on strategic leadership practices, while Section B focused on the sustainable development of departments within the university system. The instrument underwent face and content validation by three lecturers from the Department of Educational Management and three lecturers specializing in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Calabar.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was administered to 20 academic staff members who were not part of the study sample. Using the Cronbach Alpha reliability technique, a coefficient of .891 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming the instrument's suitability for data collection.

Following the acquisition of informed consent from the respondents, copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers to participants in their respective departments. The collected data were coded and analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis at the .05 level of significance. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.

RESULTS

Research Question: To what extent is of strategic leadership practiced by the HODs in the university system

Table 1: Mean response of the extent of the extent of strategic leadership practices by the HOD

S/N	The extent of strategic leadership practices by the HOD: My HOD	Mean	SD.	Extent of strategic leadership practices
1.	Communicates departmental strategic goals through meetings.	2.44	1.42	Low Extent
2.	Engages staff to work towards departmental vision accomplishment	2.96	1.65	High Extent
3.	Focuses on long-term objectives for the department	2.42	1.75	Low Extent
4.	Creating sense of purpose among academic staff were low	2.23	1.34	Low Extent
5.	Gives opportunities to staff to actively contribute to department planning.	2.61	1.60	High Extent
6.	Listens to staff members' inputs during decision making processes.	2.53	1.54	High Extent
	Total Average Mean Score and SD. Score	**2.53**	**1.55**	**High Extent**

The extent of strategic leadership practices by the HOD with respect to engaging staff to work towards departmental vision accomplishment (Mean = 2.96), giving opportunities to staff to actively contribute to department planning (Mean = 2.61) and listening to staff members' inputs during decision making processes (Mean = 2.53) were practiced by HODs to high extent. However, communicating departmental strategic goals through meetings (Mean = 2.44), focuses on long-term objectives for the department (Mean = 2.42) and creating sense of purpose among academic staff (Mean = 2.23) were practiced by HODs to a low extent.

Hypothesis: Strategic leadership practices do not significantly predict sustainable development of Departments in the University System

Table 2: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the predictive validity of strategic leadership practices and sustainable development in the Nigeria's University System

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	101.328	1	101.328	6.678*	.002
Residual	1335.231	88	15.173		
Total	1436.559	89			
Model	B	Std Error	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	57.592	5.382		10.701*	.000
Strategic leadership practices	.866	.289	.404	2.999*	.004

*significant at .043, R = .404, R^2 = .164, Adjusted R^2 = .145.

The test statistic used in testing the hypothesis was Simple Linear Regression. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. Results of the analyses in Table 2 show a calculated F-ratio of 6.678 at a p-value of .002. Since the p-value of .002 is less than .05 the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that strategic leadership practices significantly predicts sustainable

development of departments in the Nigeria's university system. The results also show a correlation coefficient, measuring the strength of association between the two variables (R) of .404, and coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2) of .145. This shows the extent to which the variation of the dependent variable about its mean is explained by the independent variable. It means that 14.5% of the variation in sustainable development of departments Nigeria's university system was due to variation in strategic leadership practices, while the other 85.5% (1-R^2) was as a result of variables extraneous to the study. The regression equation, $Y^1 = a + bX + e$ is, therefore, given as:

Predicted sustainable development of departments Nigeria's university system = 57.952 + .404(X) + .289

The test of significance using the t-statistic (t=2.999) shows significance at .004 level, confirming that strategic leadership practices significantly predict sustainable development of departments in Nigeria's university system in the study area. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of .404 shows a positive strong relationship strategic leadership practices and sustainable development of departments in the Nigeria's university system. This means that the better the strategic leadership practices by the HODs, the more sustainable development of departments in Nigeria's university system.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding indicates that strategic leadership practices significantly predict sustainable development of departments in the Nigeria's university system. The implication of this result is that Strategic leadership practices significantly predict sustainable development of departments in the Nigeria's university system. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of .404 shows a positive moderate relationship between strategic leadership practices and sustainable development of departments in the Nigeria's university system. This study finding supports the study outcome of Suriyankietkaew and Kungwanpongpun (2022) that discovered a significant positive effect of strategic leadership practices on sustainability of healthcare. The result is also in line with Kising'u (2017) who found that strategic leadership practices played significant role in promoting organizational innovation for sustainable competitive advantage in Kenyan public and private universities. By implication, the better the strategic leadership practices in terms of communicating departmental strategic goals through meetings, engaging staff to work towards departmental vision accomplishment, focusing on long-term objectives for the department, creating sense of purpose among academic staff were low, giving opportunities to staff to actively contribute to department planning and listening to staff members' inputs during decision making processes by HODs, the more sustainable development of departments in the university system.

The findings from research question one indicates high extent of strategic leadership practices by the HOD with respect to engaging staff to work towards departmental vision accomplishment, giving opportunities to staff to actively contribute to department planning and listening to staff members' inputs during decision making processes. This result appears the way it is because the HODs must have not been limited in practicing the above dimensions of strategic leadership. Nevertheless, it was found that, strategic leadership practices by the HOD in terms of communicating departmental strategic goals through meetings, focuses on long-term objectives for the department and creating sense of purpose among academic staff were practiced to a low extent. This result implies that, HODs must have been restrained by limited authority

and organizational bureaucracy and organizational structure in terms of taking directives from the Deans, Directors College Provost and the Vice Chancellor.

CONCLUSION

The study has successfully investigated the strategic leadership roles of Heads of Departments' and sustainable growth of university departments. The findings from this study revealed a significant the relationship in the critical role of effective strategic leadership at the departmental level and the promotion of long-term academic, human and structural development of departments within the university system. The results imply that strategic leadership practices employed by Heads of Departments (HODs) are essential for promoting sustainable departmental growth through enhanced teaching, learning and research activities, sustained student enrolment and the maintenance of an appropriate staff composition. Furthermore, such leadership practices contribute to the promotion of research initiatives that address contemporary societal challenges at both local and global levels.

The study revealed that HODs demonstrated a high level of engagement in certain strategic leadership practices, particularly in encouraging staff to work towards the realization of departmental goals, providing opportunities for staff participation in departmental planning, and considering staff opinions during decision-making processes. However, the findings also indicated that some key strategic leadership practices were implemented to a relatively low extent. These included effectively communicating departmental strategic goals through regular meetings, emphasizing long-term departmental objectives and promoting shared sense of purpose among academic staff.

Recommendations

Arising from the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Heads of Departments in the university system should improve upon their strategic leadership practices so as to facilitate sustainable development in their respective Departments in the university system.
- The university management should give leverage and encourage every departmental heads to always work strategically for the benefit of individual department in particular and the university system in general.

REFERENCES

Abdeen, H., De-Pablos-Heredero, C., Cosculluela-Martínez, C., & Montes-Botella, J. L. (2025). Strategic leadership and its impact on dynamic capabilities and sustainable competitive advantages. *Management Decision*. https://www.emerald.com/md/article-abstract/doi/10.1108/MD-07-2024-1682/1259234/Strategic-leadership-and-its-impact-on-dynamic?redirectedFrom=fulltext.

Abusamra, A., & Abusamra, M. A. (2022). Strategic Leadership and The Effectiveness of Educational Institution Performance: The Palestinian Academic Departments as A Case Study. *Professional Guidance and Counseling Journal*. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Asmaa-

Alagele, H. K. H., Rahi, A. K., & Neama, N. H. (2025). Using SEM to Analyze the Relationship between Strategic Leadership and Sustainable Development: A Field Study of Health Institution. https://eprints.cihanuniversity.edu.iq/id/eprint/3567/.

Alayoubi, M. M., Al Shobaki, M. J., & Abu-Naser, S. S. (2020). Strategic leadership practices and their relationship to improving the quality of educational service in Palestinian Universities. *International Journal of Business Marketing and Management*, *5*(3), 11-26.

Atoum, Y. A., Alrawashedh, N., Almarashdah, M., Harahsheh, A., Zraqat, O., Hussien, L., & Alamad, T. (2024). The impact of strategic leadership on strategic performance in higher education institutions: The mediating role of change management. *Periodicals of Engineering and Natural Sciences*, *12*(2), 315-330.

Atoum, Y. A., Alrawashedh, N., Almarashdah, M., Harahsheh, A., Zraqat, O., Hussien, L., & Alamad, T. (2024). The impact of strategic leadership on strategic performance in higher education institutions: The mediating role of change management. *Periodicals of Engineering and Natural Sciences*, *12*(2), 315-330.

Channuwong, S., Phudarat, B. S. S., Jirachottrakul, P., Pleansamai, J. L. K., Khamsom, S., & Kanhabutr, A. (2024). Strategic management for sustainable business development: Concepts, theories and practices. *Sciences of Conservation and Archaeology*, *36*(3), 11-22.

Edet, A. O., & Asuquo, M. E. (2019). Principals' management ability and institutional sustainability of public secondary schools in Cross River Sate, Nigeria. *Prestige Journal of Counselling Psychology,* 2(1), 106-115

Ekpoh, U, I., & Asuquo, M. E. (2025). Assessing corruption in educational leadership: Implications for sustainability of university system. International Journal of Leadership, Quality Education and African Development, 2(1), 57-67.

Hill, S. 2019. Understanding the factors which enable and hinder the academic head of department in their ability to be effective in people management. Faculty of Commerce ,Organisational Psychology. http://hdl.handle.net/11427/31579

Kebede, D. A., Werke, S. Z., & Kebede, T. A. (2024). Strategic leadership practices in emerging economies: A systematic review and empirical investigation. *Cogent Business & Management*, *11*(1), 2418425.

Kising'u, T. M. (2017). *Role of strategic leadership for sustainable competitive advantage in Kenyan public and private universities* (Doctoral dissertation, JKUAT-COHRED). http://ir.jkuat.ac.ke/handle/123456789/3426.

Malik, L., & Amin, M. (2023). Professional Development of HoDs at University Level: Needs, Opportunities and Challenges. *Journal of Educational Research and Social Sciences Review*, *3*(3), 1-10. https://ojs.jerssr.org.pk/index.php/jerssr/article/view/215.

Onwuzulike, O. C., Buinwi, U., Umar, M. O., Buinwi, J. A., & Ochigbo, A. D. (2024). Corporate sustainability and innovation: Integrating strategic management approach. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, *23*(3), 270-284.

Ruggerio, C. A. (2021). Sustainability and sustainable development: A review of principles and definitions. *Science of the Total Environment*, *786*, 147481.

Suharto, S. (2023). Strategic leadership: Effective leadership in strategic management. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Indonesia*, *2*(01), 38-44.

Suriyankietkaew, S., & Kungwanpongpun, P. (2022). Strategic leadership and management factors driving sustainability in health-care organizations in Thailand. *Journal of Health*

Organization and Management, *36*(4), 448-468. https://www.emerald.com/jhom/article-pdf/36/4/448/1526131/jhom-05-2021-0165.pdf

Suriyankietkaew, S., & Kungwanpongpun, P. (2022). Strategic leadership and management factors driving sustainability in health-care organizations in Thailand. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, *36*(4), 448-468.

University of Calabar at 50 (1975-2025). Celebrating excellence & service to humanity. Unical Press.

Willis, A. C. O., Kinyua, G., & Muchemi, A. (2022). Strategic leadership as an antecedent of competitive advantage: A review of literature. *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research*, *10*(1), 18-33.