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Exploring the Link between Transformational Leadership and Teacher Innovation

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Abstract: Transformational leadership is a shared belief between academic leaders and their followers. Studies support the significant and progressive influence of transformational leadership behavior on academic followers, especially teachers. The close relationship between transformational leadership in the university and teachers' organizational commitment paved the way for a proposed theoretical analytical model to understand how university leadership affected teachers' organizational commitment. The technological demand, the innovation of teachers, and transformative leadership in the educational system are also faced in China. In the university context, Chinese university professors' innovative work behavior is found to be directly linked to their transformational leadership and trust. For this reason, the study on transformational leadership and innovation was conducted for its influence on the university teachers' enhancement plan in China. Through quantitative descriptive comparative design, the evaluation, experiences, and behaviors of university teachers across different areas of specialization were compared between transformational leadership and teacher innovation. This study was anchored on the elements of transformational leadership theory specifically the intellectual stimulation element of transformational leadership theory which was focused on innovation. Results revealed that teachers' assessments regarding perceptions of transformational leadership "expects excellence" was more evident than "respect others." While teachers' innovative work behavior was generally average, teaching content was viewed as most favorable, and challenges/issues were the least. Since transformational leadership was positively correlated with the assessment of the innovative work behavior of teachers, recommendations were noted in designing the enhancement plan for university teachers to strengthen the link.

Keywords: Department Heads Leadership; Teacher Innovation; Transformational Leadership; University Teachers in China.

1. Introduction

Transformational leadership is a widely studied concept not only in business leadership but also in educational leadership. It is described as a set of behaviors delivered by leaders to improve overall organizational performance and outcomes. Academic institutions have promoted this concept among their leaders and supported its evidence.

Since Bernard Bass introduced it in 1985, transformational leadership established idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation from academic leaders that can positively impact the school environment and stakeholders. First, idealized influence manifests the institution's mission and vision to the leaders as they display total commitment to it. Second, inspirational motivation communicates the leaders' high-performance expectations through enthusiasm and encouragement. Third, individualized consideration demonstrates the leaders' role as a coach, mentor, and provider of consistent feedback to their followers. Lastly, intellectual stimulation calls leaders to challenge their followers to welcome new concepts and practices to reassess their values and beliefs.

Eventually, transformational leadership styles have been implemented in school settings to influence and equip academic leaders in facilitating restructuring school initiatives to cope with the demands of 21st-century classrooms. For this reason, Kenneth Leithwood pioneered empirical research to prove the promising enhancement of transformational leadership styles in facilitating meeting stakeholder accountability and performance improvement demands. Based on his transformational leadership approaches, preparing employees to learn new things, building and strengthening new organizational norms, establishing new meaning and ways of thinking, and establishing new norms to transform school culture should be practiced and featured as components of principal preparation programs (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Moreover, transformational leadership is viewed to suit education because it empowers followers through motivation, influence, consideration, and stimulation to achieve one vision and goal. However, the transformational leadership concept across organizational cultures needs further discussion since its reliability and viability within educational environments may vary in terms of organizational learning, institutional effectiveness and improvement, and student outcomes (Litz & Blaik-Hourani, 2020).

In other words, transformational leadership is a shared belief between academic leaders and their followers. Studies support the significant and progressive influence of transformational leadership behavior on academic followers, especially teachers. A leader who solicits new ideas from followers and shows tolerance for mistakes is well appreciated by teachers. In fact, teachers are supportive leaders who naturally practice transformational leadership because their individualized consideration promotes cooperative and trusting relationships. The leaders' regular feedback and encouraging reflections develop teachers to be professional, motivational, and effective in producing excellent students (Anderson, 2017). In particular, the transformational leadership style suitably guides the students in any school condition based on its: 1) ethical dimension or

moral basis; 2) validity of previous empirical evidence, and 3) literature on leaders' practice in the field of education (Jovanovica & Ciricb, 2016).

Indeed, the advancement of educational institutions is greatly challenged and influenced by educational leaders. Its success or failure is defined by its ability as leaders to be able to carry out motivational and innovative activities. Thus, transformational leadership is done through building commitment and awareness among all stakeholders of educational institutions to actualize themselves and use technological advances, information, and communication in the education process (Prestiadi et al., 2020).

Hence, the influence of transformational leadership among university teachers is an interesting facet to investigate since literature mostly provides evidence among academic leaders and school administrators.

2. Statement of the Problem

The proposed study determined the influence of transformational leadership and innovation to enhance university teachers in China.

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

(1)What is the assessment of the teachers on the transformational leadership of their heads in terms of:

1)Idealized Influence

2)Intellectual Stimulation

3)Inspirational Motivation

4)Individualized Consideration

5)Empowering

(2)What is the innovative work behavior of teachers in terms of:

1) Creative thinking

2) Teaching local and indigenous resources

3) Teaching methods

4) Teaching content

5) Multiple evaluation

(3)Is there a significant relationship between the assessment of transformational leadership and the innovative work behavior of teachers?

(4)What are the challenges and issues encountered by teachers in transformational leadership and innovative work?

3. Hypothesis

There was no significant relationship between the assessment of transformational leadership of the heads and the innovative work behavior of teachers.

4. Scope and Delimitation of the study

This study explored how leadership transforms and influences the innovative behavior of teachers in universities. It covered the demographic characteristics of the teachers in universities. Specifically, the teachers evaluated the perspectives of transformational leadership characteristics of their institutional heads such as idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and empowerment, and their innovative work behavior covering the five dimensions: (1) Opportunity Exploration (OE); (2) Idea Generation (IG); (3) Idea Promotion (IP); (4) Idea Realization (IR); and (5) Idea Sustainability (IS). Moreover, the study will look into the disparities, if there were any, in the teachers' evaluations based on their respective profiles. The findings of the study will be the basis for the enhancement plan of teachers in universities.

Moreover, the demographic parameters included their sex, age, academic background, and years of teaching regardless of their socioeconomic standing and rank in the university. The study's emphasis on the transformational leadership demonstrated by the heads and the innovative behavior from the perspective of the university teachers. Their assessment of their heads was regardless of their heads' gender and background. Likewise, their communication skills may not include the whole range of elements associated with leadership in the university.

On the other hand, the limitations of the study were anticipated which may affect the results of the study. First, the research locale consisted of five universities in Jinan, China namely Shandong Normal University (SNU), Shandong University of Architecture, University of Jinan(UJN), Qilu Normal University (QLNU), and Shandong University of Finance and Economics (SUFE), which may provide limited assessments on their leaders and innovative behavior and may restrict the generalizability of findings to other institutional contexts.

Second, the research instrument to assess the transformational leadership of university heads was adapted from the Institute of Behavioral Research of Texas Christian University entitled the Survey of Transformational Leadership (TCU, 2009). The nine scales in this survey are: Scale 1- Genuine concern for others Scale 2 - Political sensitivity and skills; Scale 3 - Decisiveness, determination, self-confidence; Scale 4 - Integrity, trustworthiness, honesty and openness; Scale 5 - Empowers, delegates, develops potential; Scale 6 - Inspirational networker and promoter; Scale 7 - Accessibility, approachability; Scale 8 - Clarifies boundaries, keeps others informed, involves others in decision making; and Scale 9 - Encourages critical and strategic thinking, are used as the research variables to reveal the leadership characteristics of the university heads. Thus, their assessment might be limited within the coverage of the provided leadership scales.

Lastly, the interpretations of the study may be subjected to possible self-report bias which may influence the teachers' replies, so introducing possible mistakes in their assessments of transformational leadership and innovative behavior. In addition, the limited sample size may not provide sufficient generalizability of findings. Due to the inherent subjectivity of leadership experiences, the diverse interpretations of leadership attributes across individuals may lead to variations in response consistency. Various external elements, including personal situations, current life events, and environmental changes, had a potential impact on the assessment of leadership. It was considered that the findings of the study may be influenced by the distinct features of the social work institutions under investigation, which may limit the generalizability of the results to a broader range of situations. Thus, systematic and objective data collection and analysis were monitored to control these limitations.

5. Research Design

The overall strategy and analytical approach enabled to integration, coherently and logically, of the different components of the study, to ensure that the research problem was thoroughly investigated. The research design for the study was the descriptive comparative approach. Through this quantitative approach, the examination of the influence of transformational leadership in the innovation of university

teachers in China was helpful.

First, the descriptive approach describes an existing phenomenon and its relation between the other variables in a study. The quantitative descriptive approach observed no interference or manipulation of the responses. The independent variable in the study was transformational leadership while the dependent variable is the work innovative behavior of teachers in higher education institutions. This approach provided descriptions of the demographics of university teachers in China which may affect their assessment of the transformational leadership of their heads and their innovative behavior.

And, the correlational approach in quantitative research examines a variable in the study about another variable. The study applied a correlational approach to defining key variables, such as the aspects of transformational leadership (e.g., inspirational motivation, individualized consideration) and measures of teacher innovation (e.g., new teaching methods, curriculum changes). Using statistical methods, like correlation coefficients, this approach analyzed the strength and direction of the relationship between transformational leadership and levels of teacher innovation.

Overall, the descriptive correlational design helped bring together the evaluation, experiences, and behaviors of university teachers across different areas of specialization. This approach may help the investigation develop a rich understanding of recurring behaviors in transformational leadership and innovation because it aims to make meaningful comparisons across variables and establish a theoretical basis for understanding design in a broader sense. And it provided a reasonable progression or logical procedure for solving the research questions.

6. Results, Analysis, and Interpretation

Preliminary Analysis

Reliability

Table 1. Reliability Measurement – Assessment of Transformational Leadership (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Item/s Deleted	No. of Item/s Retained
Idealized Influence	0.91	0	13
Sensible Risk	0.91	0	6
Intellectual Stimulation	0.91	0	8
Demonstrates Innovation			
Inspirational Motivation	0.92	0	7
Individualized Consideration			
Develop Others	0.95	0	24
Empowering			
Expects Excellent	0.86	0	3
	0.89	0	5
	0.94	0	14
	0.83	0	3

Assessment of Innovative Work Behavior of Teachers (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Item/s Deleted	No. of Item/s Retained
Creative Thinking	0.84	0	5
Teaching local and Indigenous Resources			
Teaching Methods	0.82	0	5
Teaching Content			
Multiple evaluation	0.94	0	7
	0.90	0	5
	0.92	0	7

Assessment of Challenges and Issues on Transformation Leadership (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Item/s Deleted	No. of Item/s Retained
Challenges and Issues on Transformation Leadership	0.84	0	9

Table 1 presents the evaluation of the reliability of the scales, assessment of transformational leadership (idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and empowering), innovative work behavior of teachers (creative thinking, teaching local and indigenous resources, teaching methods, teaching content, and multiple evaluation), and challenges and issues. Cronbach's alpha (CA) was used to evaluate internal consistency measurements. Nunnally (1978) and Fornell and Larker (1981) state that a coefficient alpha (CA) value of 0.70 or higher implies high-quality items as well as internal consistency. The estimated coefficient alpha (CA) values range from 0.82 to 0.95, indicating that all of the items exhibit acceptable quality and show significant internal consistency.

Table 2. Normality Test

		Shapiro-Wilk	
	N	W	p
Transformational Leadership	215	0.97	0.094
Innovative Work Behavior	215	0.97	0.094
Challenges and Issues	215	0.98	0.102

All of the p-values obtained from the Shapiro-Wilk test were greater than 0.05, suggesting that the scores followed a

normal distribution. Therefore, in order to determine if there was a significant relationship between the assessment of transformational leadership and the innovative work behavior of teachers, a parametric test, particularly the Pearson correlation, was performed.

7. Conclusion

Based on the summary of findings, the following conclusions were drawn on the link between transformational leadership and teacher innovation:

1)More results-driven leaders might inadvertently neglect the relational aspect of leadership. This could lead teachers to feel that excellence is a priority over mutual respect, even if both are important for a healthy school environment.

2)Actions that promote excellence-like setting ambitious goals, celebrating achievements, or implementing rigorous standards-are often more visible than those fostering respect, such as conflict resolution or inclusive dialogue.

3)Innovative work behavior can be influenced by systemic barriers, such as lack of resources, administrative support, or professional development opportunities. If teachers face challenges that impede their ability to innovate, their assessments may reflect that struggle, resulting in an average perception of innovation.

4)Many teachers may prioritize traditional teaching methods over innovation due to time constraints, curriculum demands, or pressure to meet standardized testing requirements. This focus on routine can lead to a perception that innovation is secondary.

5)Transformational leaders often inspire and motivate their staff by creating a compelling vision for the future. This can encourage teachers to embrace innovative practices, as they feel aligned with a larger purpose.

6)Transformational leaders tend to recognize and celebrate innovative efforts. Positive reinforcement can motivate teachers to engage in innovative work behaviors, reinforcing a cycle of creativity and achievement.

7)Without proper coaching, teachers may feel unsupported in their professional development, leading to uncertainty in their teaching practices and reducing their confidence to innovate.

8. Recommendation

Based on the conclusions, the following suggestions were presented to strengthen the link between transformational leadership and teacher innovation:

1)Actions that promote excellence-like setting ambitious goals, celebrating achievements, or implementing rigorous standards-are often more visible than those fostering respect, such as conflict resolution or inclusive dialogue. Department heads and teachers can deliver actions on conflict resolution and inclusive dialogue by organizing workshops that focus on effective communication and empathy-building exercises. They can also create regular forums for open discussion, establish clear protocols for addressing conflicts, and model respectful dialogue in their interactions.

2)In many educational settings, there may be a strong emphasis on achievement and results, overshadowing the importance of fostering respectful relationships. School heads and staff can develop the expectation of excellence by clearly communicating ambitious goals and consistently reinforcing high standards. They can implement regular performance assessments, celebrate achievements, and provide professional development opportunities. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and encouraging collaborative teamwork can enhance this expectation throughout the school community.

3)Transformational leaders typically foster an environment where teachers feel safe to take risks and experiment with new ideas. Department heads can offer access to training, materials, and time for teachers to explore new ideas. Facilitate regular team meetings or brainstorming sessions where teachers can share ideas, discuss challenges, and seek feedback in a supportive atmosphere.

4)Transformational leaders prioritize professional growth and provide opportunities for teachers to develop their skills. Department heads may create mentorship programs where experienced teachers support newer ones, facilitating skill sharing and growth. Support teachers in attending external workshops, conferences, or courses by providing funding or time off.

5)Department heads should often promote collaboration among staff, encouraging teamwork and the sharing of ideas by creating interdisciplinary teams focused on specific projects or goals, allowing staff to work together and share diverse perspectives. They may promote co-teaching opportunities, allowing teachers to collaborate directly in the classroom and learn from one another.

6)Transformational leaders tend to recognize and celebrate the innovative efforts of teachers by establishing awards for innovative teaching practices and celebrating winners at staff meetings or school events. They may highlight innovative projects of teachers in newsletters, on school websites, or during staff meetings to share successes with the wider community. Or simply send personalized notes or messages recognizing individual contributions and efforts of teachers, making the recognition feel genuine and meaningful.

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