

Teachers' Perceptions About the Role of Transformative School Leaders in Developing Teachers' Professional Competence

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Abstract

Introduction: Over the past decade, there has been growing concern within contemporary educational discourse over the role of transformative leadership in developing the professional competence of teachers. Transformative leaders steer schools toward appropriate academic goals but also play a crucial role in providing opportunities for teacher growth and development. To this end, this study aims to explore what the teachers perceive the input of transformative school leaders to be toward their own development by creating a conducive learning environment.

Methodology: Data was collected from teachers using in-depth interviews using a qualitative approach.

Findings: Transformational leadership has a significant role in the teaching professional competence influence through mentorship, articulation of a clear and inspiring vision, encouraging a collaborative and supportive work environment. Transformational leaders encourage reflective practices, professional learning communities' development and provides constructive feedback.

Moreover, the study accepted the fact that leadership facilitates an encouragement to a teacher toward innovation and adoption of new practice.

Implications: *The state of schools has to implement the above models and strategies of leadership in practice that support professional development in the service of teachers and help promote a culture of lifelong learning.*

Keywords: *Transformative leadership, professional competence, teacher development, mentorship, collaborative learning, school leadership*

1. Introduction

One of the elements contributing to education's success is its teachers (Hasanah et al., 2020). The level of education is largely determined by the calibre of its teachers (Estiyani & Hasanah, 2022). The success of the learning process is a measure of the calibre and earnestness of educators in doing their tasks, and high-quality learning is generated when the teacher in charge of the process is an expert in their subject (Rahim et al., 2017). Learning activities required teacher professionalism so that objectives set could be attained to their maximum. Professional standards mean the qualification, sufficient character and state of mind that a teacher should have in order to carry-out their duties (Saine et al., 2023). Teacher development is commonly viewed as individualistic whereas leadership is thought of as being central in creating and sustaining a living and learning environment (Haider et al., 2022). This paper is part of the pilot work conducted to trial the interview schedule developed for the purpose of collecting data for my PhD in ELM. By researching the ways in which transformative school leaders can improve teachers' professional competence, this study delineates a valuable source of insight for the main research of the dissertation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transformative Leadership in Education

Transformative leadership theory, first introduced by Burns in 1978 and then developed by Bass in 1985, is based on the inspirational and moral influence on followers that motivates them to do more than promote self-interest. In order to forge a fresh path for the organization's growth and profitability, executives that practice transformational leadership look for fresh ideas and viewpoints. Managers and employees are inspired to make fundamental changes to the organization's foundation and core values by cultivating a sense of commitment, passion, and loyalty among them. This helps the organization become ready and acquire the skills it needs to move forward and achieve higher, more ideal performance peaks (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016).

Within the realm of education, transformational leadership is a management strategy that highlights the necessity of altering an organization's operational procedures to attain intended results. Although the strategy is based on methodology and human resource management (HRM), it emphasizes culture and the necessity of employees being actively involved in the change process (Alainati, 2021). Young people are better able to comprehend the world, their place in it, and their duties to it when they are able to integrate their unique experiences with the

larger picture thanks to transformational leadership. Furthermore, transformative leadership helps students develop a sense of independence and self-worthiness that empowers them to take ownership of their own lives and accomplishments. Thus, by helping students gain a deeper awareness of both themselves and the world around them as well as the ability to engage with the world constructively, transformative leadership enhances the quality of students' lives (Veeriah et al., 2017). Moreover, transformative leadership welcomes and encourages professional development opportunities by fostering an atmosphere friendly to work in partnership, mentorship, and reflective practice. Leaders identify and provide opportunities for professional learning, be it through workshops, collaborative communities of learning, or individualized mentorship. The culture thus spearheaded is full of students who know they are valued, appreciated, and encouraged to enhance professional competence.

Transformational leadership is therefore not only a propeller of institutional success but also stresses the personal development of teachers because their growth and competence are vital for the achievement of long-term improvements in educational outcomes and creation of a lively learning environment.

2.2 Teachers' Professional Competence

Professional competence in teaching is a multi-dimensional tool which involves a great number of skills, knowledge, and dispositions applied in enhancing effective teaching. Simplistically stated, professional competence majorly involves mastery of subject matter but then extends far beyond what one knows about the content (Haider et al., 2022). The knowledge, skills, and talents a teacher possesses to successfully instruct students in their subject matter are referred to as their "competence." It requires a variety of skills, including the capacity to develop interesting and successful lesson plans, communicate clearly, and manage the classroom well (Ahmad et al., 2017).

As per Haider et al. (2022), professional competence involves responsiveness to the continuously changing education environments. Teachers must respond and be flexible and creative, as the world is constantly undergoing change, at least in some recent shifts such as the integration of technology, diverse populations within their classrooms, and a changing nature for education. Reflective practice is yet another element of professional competence. It helps teachers to be continuously aware of and to improve their methods of teaching so that they encourage effective learning and appropriate development among their students.

Literature (Hastuti et al, 2023; Estiyani & Hasanah, 2022) shows that professional competence is connected with leadership. Schools with transformative leaders tend to provide an environment where the teachers become more committed to lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Transformative leaders engage teachers in reflective practice, trying new approaches, and professional growth opportunities (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021). Thus, the future instructional leader fosters and nurtures a culture of continuous learning and improvement, which not only keeps educators competent but allows them to grow throughout their careers, with ultimate impact on student outcomes.

2.3 Role of Leadership in Developing Professional Competence

School leaders exert influence over the ways and means of the professional life of teachers, since they have much to do with teachers' growth and development (Metaferia et al., 2023). Of course, good school leadership includes doing more than just routine administrative work; it involves an environment that supports and guides the professional journey of teachers continually. One such way in which school leaders do this is by offering targeted professional development opportunities. These could include conferences, mentoring, and in-service professional development involving teachers in workshops, on-going training sessions, to equip them with the latest pedagogy, instructional technology, and content specific knowledge (Sonedi, 2016). The opportunities thus empower teachers to improve their abilities while creating a lifelong learning culture within the school.

A collaborative culture is also a key part of leadership. Transformational leaders understand that collaboration among teachers has the most powerful potential for professional growth and, therefore, promote the formation of professional learning communities; by working together, teachers can offer suggestions for solving problems, share best practices, and engage in collective inquiry (Tarhid, 2017). The cooperative environment where this is possible allows teachers to reflect on their practice, make contacts with their peers, and respond to new challenges in education. This way, school leaders create a culture of shared responsibility for both the students' success and personal professional growth (Nadeem & Lillah, 2024).

On the other hand, transformational leaders provide continuous performance feedback that is constructive and growth oriented. Periodic sessions of providing feedback through classroom observations and reflective discussions allow teachers to reflect upon areas of needed improvement and succeed at using successful strategies to administer instruction. This support encompasses much of what builds teachers' professional skills and towards a culture of reflective practice. Transformational leaders ensure the teachers are adaptive and committed to their continuous professional development by encouraging reflective practices and challenging teachers to critically evaluate their instructional methods (Kang, 2021).

2.4 Mentorship and Coaching as Key Leadership Practices

A school leader shapes teachers' professional trajectory through strategic impact on teachers' growth and development (Mansor et al., 2021). Leadership implies more than being an administrator. A school leader, for instance, is supposed to create an environment whereby teachers are assisted in following a professional trajectory. Among the most important ways in which school leaders can assist is by availing targeted professional development opportunities. They may include workshops, conferences, mentorship, and other training that helps in equipping the teacher with the latest pedagogies, instructional technologies, and content-specific knowledge. The above opportunities will not only enrich teachers' skills but also help create a culture of lifelong learning within the school (Andriani et al., 2018)

Another critical aspect of leadership is fostering a collaborative culture. Transformational leaders recognize that collaboration among teachers is a powerful tool for professional growth. They encourage the formation of professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers work together to solve problems, share best practices, and engage in collective inquiry. This

collaborative environment allows teachers to reflect on their practice, learn from peers, and adapt to new educational challenges (Pourbarkhordari et al., 2016). In doing so, school leaders help create a sense of shared responsibility for both student success and individual professional growth. Therefore, transformational leaders give constant constructive and growth-oriented feedback. They have steady classes observations, reflective discussions, and constant in-service sessions to enhance the teaching practices of the practitioners (Noureen et al., 2020). The ability of educators being provided with professional guidance from time to time is essential so that teachers' professional competence can be maintained, and a culture of reflective practice can be encouraged (Klar et al., 2021). Hence, transformational leaders ensure that teachers remain adaptive and committed to continuous professional development by encouraging reflective practice and making them critically scrutinize methods used in teaching.

More recent studies demonstrate that transformative leaders often utilize mentorship and coaching as a means of professional development toward professional competitiveness among teachers (Gao et al., 2024). Such leaders comprehend the fact that only individualized and tailored assistance would be able to avail growth in a place that continually underscores the importance of improvement. In the role of mentorship, transformative leaders provide systems of support as they give value-driven feed backs that are not just evaluative but also developmental. It also gives the teachers an opportunity to be able to reflect on what they are practicing in their instructional systems, learn their weak zones, and come up with improved teaching approaches (Çelik & Konan, 2021). Coaching further enhances this process by creating a collaborative, goal-oriented approach to professional development. Transformative leaders work alongside teachers to set specific, actionable goals and provide the necessary support to achieve them. This might include modeling best practices, facilitating peer observation, or encouraging experimentation with new teaching methods (Çelik & Konan, 2021). Such individualized attention helps teachers build confidence in their skills while fostering a culture of continuous learning.

A key element of this leadership approach is the emphasis on trust-building. Transformative leaders understand that professional growth is most effective in environments where teachers feel safe to express their challenges and seek help. By fostering open communication and collaborative problem-solving, these leaders cultivate a supportive school culture where teachers are encouraged to share ideas, seek feedback, and work together to overcome obstacles (Andriani et al., 2018). This trust and openness are critical, as they promote teacher autonomy and empower educators to take ownership of their professional development, ultimately leading to sustained growth and improved instructional quality.

2.5 Fostering a Collaborative Culture

One of the characteristics of transformative leaders is facilitating collaborative and inclusive cultures within schools. They support teamwork and shared decision-making with the tendency to achieve a more valued and empowered team of teachers for self-directed professional development (Duignan, 2020). When teachers are engaged in improving the processes of decision-making, they gain agency over improvement automatically which energizes them to develop greater dedication to their professional skills. Collaboration also ensures professional competences are built through peer learning and collective problem-solving. Teachers share best

practices and work through what has been challenging as they find ways to learn from one another. Such professional interaction leads to better understanding of instructional strategies and fosters innovation in teaching methods (O'Brien et al., 2021). Such leaders insist on the kind of culture that focuses on collaboration, which in turn gives assurance of teachers' continuous professional development in line with the requirements and enhancement of their competencies.

3. Methodology

In order to achieve research aims and objectives, qualitative research methodology with phenomenological design was used as the study was intended to record the experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding transformational leadership's role in developing teachers' professional competence. 9 secondary school teachers (3 each from government, semi-government, and private sectors schools) were recruited using purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on a minimum of five years of teaching experience, ensuring sufficient exposure to school leadership practices. A semi-structure interview was developed to collect data. Interviews with participants were carried out in person by the researcher. Each interview took approximately 45-50 minutes. Data was analysis using thematic analysis which enabled the researcher to identify of recurring themes pertinent to the role of transformational leadership in development of teachers' professional competence. Responses were coded and categorized into major themes in line with the study's research objectives, providing insights into how leadership influences teachers' professional competence.

4. Findings

Findings based on interviews have given insight into how the teachers perceive transformative leadership in terms of professional competence development. Three significant themes as a result emerge from the data: mentorship and coaching, collaborative culture, and leadership support for innovation and reflective practice.

The first theme about the development of mentorship and coaching towards the improvement of professional competencies. Teachers stated that good transformational leaders provided them with person-specific guidance, feedback, and chances for professional development to enable critical reflection about their own instructional practices and develop new teaching techniques. Mentorship and coaching were reported to be the leading strategies wherein teachers felt supported in their development process.

The second important theme identified was related to the collaborative culture that is built. Teachers discussed the importance of working in a collaborative environment where shared decision-making, peer learning, and collective problem-solving is valued. They reported that, for transformational leaders, community means that teachers get an opportunity to share, raise challenges, and collaborate together over what to do to innovate their teaching methods. This helped to engender a sense of collaborative culture and hence added to their professional learning since the members could learn from each other, and they developed a collective approach towards changing the outcomes of students.

Finally, leadership support for innovation and reflective practice becomes a critical theme. Teachers report about how transformational leaders allowed them to try out the new instructional models and into an environment where reflection and self-assessment could occur in a non-threatening fashion. This sense of leadership support for innovation and reflective practice empowered the teachers to continually improve their teaching practices since they believed it was critical for them to enhance their professional practice and deliver effectively in the classroom.

4.1 Mentorship and Coaching

The participants commented on the importance of mentorship by school leaders in professional development. Teachers posited that transformative leaders provided mentors, hence guidance and feedback, which helped changes in teaching styles. *"...my principal is always accessible for advice, and she is always challenging me to try new things in my teaching,"* one teacher said. *"...through ongoing feedback sessions, my principal has helped me to know the areas where I can do better and given me confidence to try new things in my classroom."* One of the participants even echoed, *"...the support that I'm getting from my principal is not only limited to some feedback; it's the continuous encouragement and mentorship that encourages me to keep on becoming a better teacher."*

4.2 Fostering a Collaborative Culture

The second major theme was the establishment of a collaborative environment. The participant valued leaders who assisted in teamwork and shared best practices. In one participant's words, *"...in our school, we have weekly team meetings where we discuss challenges and strategies. This has helped me learn from my peers."* This collaborative culture was very instrumental in fostering professional development and bettering the practice of teaching. Another respondent further added, *"...our principal encourages us to work with other departments and this has not only broadened my knowledge but also inspired me to try out different teaching methods."* The results revealed that transformational schools had significantly stronger professional learning communities that allowed continuous teacher development. Only through open discourse and a collaborative problem-solving process did transformational leadership contribute to the environment within which teachers learned to reflect on practice and thus obtained new knowledge and competence in teaching and learning.

4.3 Support for Innovation and Reflective Practice

The respondents emphasized that their leaders encouraged them into adopting new strategies of teaching and to critically reflect on how they work. At one point, one participant was heard saying: *"...my leader constantly pushes us to try new methods and reflect on how they work in the classroom"*. This has made me reflect more on my practice and take necessary adjustments in the process. Another teacher pointed out *"...reflection is big part of our school culture."* *Our leader asks us to evaluate our lessons, and share what we learn which made me more open to change and innovation."* This reflective practice was an essential part of professional competence as this helped the teachers remain continuously in a process to update their teaching methodology and assess its result on students while attuning to the changing educational

demands of a society. Transformative leaders supported the development of their teachers personally as well as professionally through regular reflection and encouraging teachers to pursue new approaches, thereby maintaining an environment of an improving and innovative setup.

5. Discussion

The results of the current research share an alignment with other extant studies concerning transformative leadership and teacher development: the findings of this study find common ground with the works of Ahmad et al. (2021) and Scherer et al. (2022), showing the need for teachers to have a leadership that is in support of their professional growth, most especially through mentorship and collaborative practices. Teachers feel that supervising and mentoring leaders take a long time to stay because these leaders, more like the transformative kind, can be supportive and guide their teachers in proper professional development. Like Kang, (2021) emphasizes on school leaders as the main agents of nurturing of teacher capacity and creating work-environment that stimulates continuous learning.

The second theme of establishing collaborating environment resonates with what Pourbarkhordari et al. (2016) consider a key role of school leaders: guiding teachers through personalized feedback and support. Here, the leaders took the role of mentorship, giving each teacher customized feedback and support, hence facilitating reflection of own practices and introduction of changes to implement new strategies. This concurs with earlier research done by Li, (2022) that depicts how mentorship and coaching can be an effective enabler for professional development while at work, particularly in school settings that give teachers permission to be innovative. Similarly, the emphasis on collaboration corroborates studies suggesting that transformative leaders foster a culture of teamwork, which is vital for teacher development (Duignan, 2020). The participants reported how their schools promoted collaborative practices, such as team meetings and peer learning, where teachers could share ideas and strategies. This approach aligns with the work of Vescio et al. (2022), who argue that professional learning communities (PLCs) are instrumental in promoting teacher competence and collective efficacy.

However, difficulties on the part of some teachers arise as well. This tends to happen when the school leaders were more traditional or hierarchical than others. Such participants reported experiencing more difficulty related to professional support, suggesting that head leadership in schools indeed impacts teacher growth. Similar findings could be related to the state of research by Hargreaves and Fullan (2022), which was geared toward the way overly strict, downward leadership models hinder innovation and reduce opportunities for professional development. Teachers in each environment indicated feeling somewhat cut off from the leadership and less motivated to engage in reflective practice; therefore, a more transformational leadership model would be more ideal. These point out the presence of a great need for leadership style to play a determining role in the overall professional growth of any teacher.

6. Conclusion

This article reports on the study of school teachers' perceptions of school principal's transformative leadership in transforming teachers' professional competence. The study would

have many implications regarding mentorship, collaborative leadership, and innovation, as well as reflection, in shaping learning practices among teachers. This research concluded that transformative leadership initiated through professional development involving constructive advice and collaborative culture influences teachers' teaching practices and professional development. Encouragement of reflective practice, support to innovation, and availability of resources would make it possible for teachers to change as educational needs change. Thus, when encouraged, teachers could learn to adapt to the changed demands on education, thereby improving professional competencies and teaching efficacy.

Transformative leadership works not only for the development of an individual teacher but also transforms the culture of schools, which continuously improves or innovates. Future studies could also look at how transformative leadership influences teacher retention and long-term student outcome results. Further probes into varying styles of leadership in different cultural or institutional settings and its implications on professional competence can be linked to deeper understanding of the subtleties of education leadership. This also opens up a rather interesting scope for examining teacher autonomy as part of the role played within leadership-based professional development programs.

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