

Transformational Leadership of Head Teachers and Academic Optimism: Perspectives of Teachers in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The ideal leadership behaviour of head teachers has become extremely important for the overall progress of schools. This research aimed to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism in secondary schools. The population of this research comprised of all secondary school teachers: male (65331) and female (59885) in Punjab province. The sample of 900 teachers was selected through multistage random sampling technique based on the district performance rankings from 2017-18, presented by Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP), however a total of 872 teachers responded. The researcher developed the instrument (TLQ) based on transformational leadership of head teachers and adapted an instrument (SAOS) for academic optimism. Validity of both research instruments was ensured by expert opinions and reliability of both instruments was checked through Alpha value 0.944 and 0.823 respectively. The study inferred a significant and strong positive correlation between transformational leadership of head teachers and academic optimism in schools. This study can provide guidelines for the ideal leadership model at the school level in order to improve the performance of teachers and students.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Collective self-efficacy, Faculty trust, Academic emphasis, Academic optimism.

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Academic performance of students is a very important factor at the school level and school leaders are being required to initiate positive changes to improve learning environment. However, relatively few research studies established the criteria of effective leadership practices at school level even though it is one of the main factors contributing to school improvement. An effective leader definitely influences many of the factors which contribute to school improvement and play a role in student outcome (Wright, 2007). Likewise, it is essential for school leaders to develop their teaching staff and other school characteristics that contribute to student success (Donovan, 2014). Indeed, school head teachers are responsible for the formation of school conditions (shared goals, organizational culture, and processes) and classroom conditions (instructional content, classroom conditions, and instructional pedagogy) which are directly responsible for increasing students' learning (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010).

According to Kamete (2014), head teachers hold a core position and authority for establishing an effective operation for an educational institution. They have more authority and can set clear goals for the future of their schools. Likewise, they seek support from their teaching staff and boost their professional strength towards achieving the objectives of schools and fulfilling learning needs of students. Moreover, effective school leaders aim to build a range of positive relationships and cooperation ties especially with parents, teachers, and other community members to support their pupil's learning and progress (Faraz, 2016). However, adopting an ideal leadership model is still debatable and varies in context. Recently, the transformational leadership model has gained importance even in the education sector, as it helps in building relationship and establishing suitable working conditions between a leader and his or her followers (Bass, 1990). It might be worthwhile to apply this leadership model at a school level where head teachers may face challenging circumstances. As recent literature illustrated, this model outlined the variables related to the school environment, which can directly correlate with student performance.

There have been various theoretical frameworks and understandings about leadership throughout the decades. It started with the thinking of leaders' personal traits or attributes in 1940s and then the idea of leadership shifted towards leaders' behaviour in early 1960s. After continuous development in this area in late 1960s, the idea of leadership again moved towards a contingency approach in which the situation context got more importance than specific traits or behaviour (Komolthiti, 2016). It is critical in leadership to gain the ability to understand the situation and then influence other team members to achieve the desired goals (Hughes et al., 2009). The true spirit of leadership might be shown through assessing the situation and determining action on a rational basis. A leader should keep all emotional concerns in his mind while influencing others because leadership is a social process sharing ideas with all group members. Therefore, later in the 1980s, the idea of transformational leadership was presented with an aim to highlight the way a leader influences their followers to help make them satisfied and move towards achieving the goals of organization (Burn, 1978).

Transformational leadership plays important role in increasing the capacity, engagement, and commitment of members to support the leaders so that they could accomplish their goals (Moolenaar, Daly & Slegers, 2012). However, the idea of transformational leadership was extended by Bass and Riggio (2006) in which they presented four dimensions of transformational leadership such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions/attributes are behaviours of transformative leaders who bring enthusiasm among the followers and encourage them to pursue organizational goals despite adverse conditions.

Idealized influence (charisma) means a leader has a clear vision. He attains respect, confidence, and trust in others. Moreover, he gains personal and strong identification from his followers (Mech & McCabe, 1998). This is the ability of a leader to inspire others positively so he could become a role model for others. This attribute can be reflected through a leader's language, manners, and etiquette (Lynch, 2012). This attribute is same as a charismatic leader who attains a high level of trust and upholds a high set of moral values and integrity (Avey et al., 2008).

Intellectual stimulation means a leader carefully examines the traditional methods with new thoughts and creativity and stimulate followers to use their intelligence. He provokes the rethinking of the previous context on which capabilities and goals were based (Mech & McCabe, 1998). Leaders aim to stimulate the minds of the followers to encourage them to become creative and realize the importance of organizational goals (Lynch, 2012).

Individual consideration means a leader provides personal attention to every group member. A leader always tries to deal with the followers on a personal basis rather in groups. He makes everyone feel positive and valued in their contribution to achieving the desired goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders behave like a coach, guide, and advisor for everyone and offers guidelines for personal and professional development (Mech & McCabe, 1998).

Inspirational motivation means a leader frequently talks with his followers and increases their motivation, optimism, and enthusiasm. Moreover, he clearly and confidently presents his vision to the followers (Mech & McCabe, 1998; Lynch, 2012). A leader must motivate and support his or her employees and this can be achieved through dealing with work challenges (Avey et al., 2008). Team spirit must be aroused among the employees to attain desired goals.

Recent research has evidence that school leadership may not have a direct relationship with student performance instead, it influences some other factors that might affect students' achievement. However, the concept of academic optimism was an attempt of Hoy and his colleagues to identify the school characteristics or properties which might influence student achievement. As a result, they traced the research conducted by Hoy et al., (2006) on collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis to form a single and integrated construct called "academic optimism".

Collective Efficacy

This construct has its roots in social cognitive theory presented by Bandura (1977, 1993) based on motivation and learning. He explained the theory of social cognitive with reference to someone's functioning and means of taking actions (Bandura, 2012). Moreover, strength of efficacy supports the person to set high goals and pay commitment to accomplish those goals (Bandura, 1993). However, collective efficacy can be defined as a belief of teachers that their collective effort can have positive influence on students' learning and achievement (Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010). Similarly, Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) also defined that teacher's collective work might have positive effect on students' performance and this belief is called collective efficacy.

Faculty Trust

Faculty trust is also a basic school characteristic associated with student achievement. Like collective efficacy, this characteristic also has same importance in school settings (Hoy et al., 2006). School teachers are expected to have good relationship with students and their parents based on trust. Moreover, aspect of trust is important to have positive interaction with students maximize their learning (Beard et al., 2010), as well as to maintain a good relationship during teacher-parent's interactions (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). These researchers also inferred that parent's participation in educational decisions requires teachers to trust parents (Goddard et al., 2001). Hoy et al. (2006) defined trust as "one's vulnerability to another in terms of the belief that the other will act in one's best interests".

Nevertheless, school heads can develop a trusting environment in which they maintain respect and regard of others in schools. So, faculty's trust is mostly determined through the actions and behavior of head teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). This is same as trust in different colleagues is determined by the way professionals behave with each other. Also, effective head teachers can promote the trusting environment and structure which can be helpful for both students and teachers (Youngs & King, 2002).

Academic Emphasis

Academic emphasis is also one of the prominent school characteristics that can directly impact students' achievement in the same way as collective efficacy and faculty trust. This refers "to the extent to which a school is driven by a quest for academic excellence, a press for academic achievement" (Hoy et al., 2006). It ensures the learning and achievement of the students should be a central focus. Hoy and Miskel (2008) investigated that schools having achievable goals are higher in their academic emphasis. Moreover, students are encouraged to work hard and maintain their academic performance. According to Goddard et al., (2000), the school characteristic "academic emphasis" promotes the demand on students for academic success as well as on teacher expecting high performance from students. Many studies conducted by Goddard, Sweetland and Hoy, (2000); Hoy and Sabo (1998); Hoy, Tarer and Bliss (1990) and Hoy and Miskel (2008) determined positive relationships in academia emphasize academic achievement.

Academic optimism is an outcome of three above mentioned school properties having triadic relationship with one another which forms a synergy and direct link with student achievement. Mainly having roots in positive psychology, effective, cognitive, and behavioural domains work together to bring optimism in educational settings. Moreover, these domains have a reciprocal causation influence on how individuals believe, think, and feel when they behave. At school level, academic optimism can be a belief that faculty could bring to make a positive difference by increasing the learning capacities and achievement of students. Therefore, this research study aimed to establish a connection between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism, which has been linked directly to increasing student performance (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Hoy et al., 2006; Rutledge 2010; Woolfolk et al. 2008).

The conceptual framework of the present study was as follows:

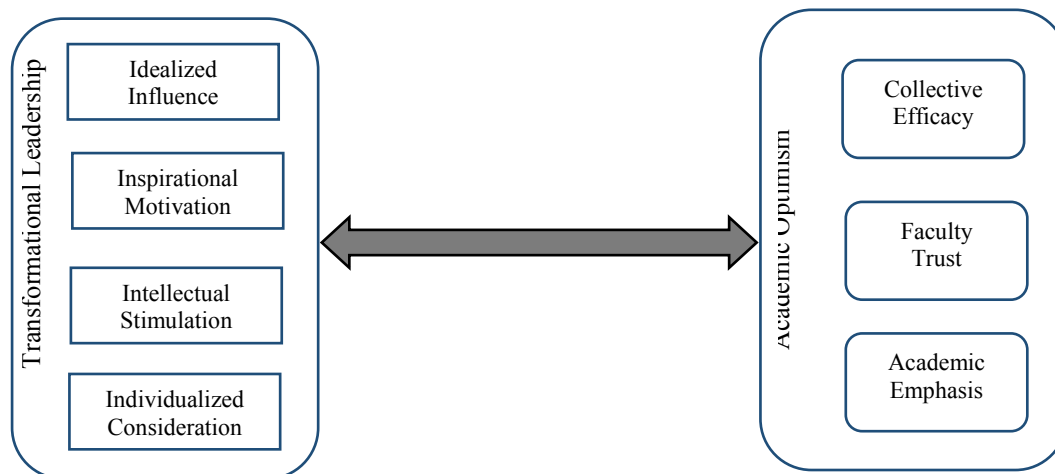


Figure 1. *Conceptual framework indicating hypothesized relationship*

Objectives of the Study

The research study aimed to

1. Investigate the relationship between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism.
2. Compare the teachers' views about the transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism based on their gender and locale.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised based on above research objectives.

1. What are teachers' views regarding transformational leadership behaviour of the head teachers and academic optimism in secondary schools?
2. Is there any relationship between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism?
3. What is the difference between male and female teachers' views about transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism?
4. What is the difference between urban and rural teachers regarding transformational leadership behavior of head teachers and academic optimism in secondary schools?

Methodology

A descriptive correlational research design was adopted to investigate the correlation between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism at the secondary school level. The population comprised of male (65331) and female (59885) teachers at public secondary schools in Punjab province (School Education Department, 2018). Further, multistage sampling technique was used for the sample. At the first stage, districts of the Punjab were divided into three categories i.e., high, average, and low performance according to districts ranking 2017-18 reported by Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP). At the second stage, two (2) districts from each category were selected randomly. At the third stage, twenty (20) schools were selected randomly from each selected district in a way that ten (10) boys and ten (10) girls' schools from each district category. The average numbers of teachers in secondary schools in Punjab were around fifteen (15) teachers per school and all the teachers were selected from each selected school. In this way, finally 900 teachers were selected as a sample from 60 secondary schools in Punjab province. The researchers distributed almost 1000 questionnaires to the participants, but the response rate was 87%. Some of the teachers chose not to participate in the study.

Researcher used two research questionnaires to collect the data for this research study. The researchers developed one questionnaire on transformational leadership (TLQ) whereas school academic optimism scale (SAOS) was adapted for measuring academic optimism in public secondary schools of Punjab. Both instruments were based on 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the instruments was ensured by administering on 60 male and 60 female teachers and the reliability value of both instruments were 0.944 and 0.823 respectively. Moreover, four experts in the field of research and English language were requested to ensure the validity and appropriateness of research instruments. After finalization of the instruments, the researchers followed ethical considerations and gained formal consents from the school heads to access their teachers. Then the researchers personally visited and accessed the teachers for data collection in their respective schools. The collected data were analyzed by multiple analysis techniques i.e., descriptive, and inferential statistics.

Data Analysis

The following section comprised of data analysis because of applying statistical techniques.

Table 1

Perceptions of Teachers about different dimensions of Transformational Leadership behaviour

| Transformational Leadership | Mean | SD |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Idealized Influence | 19.320 | 6.1852 |
| Inspirational Motivation | 17.197 | 5.7659 |
| Individualized Consideration | 20.066 | 7.0427 |
| Intellectual Stimulation | 16.418 | 5.5567 |

Table 1 indicates the mean and standard deviation value of the idealized influence is ($M = 19.32$, $SD = 6.1852$), inspirational motivation ($M = 17.197$, $SD = 5.7659$), individualized consideration ($M = 20.066$, $SD = 7.0427$), and intellectual stimulation is ($M = 16.418$, $SD = 5.5567$). The table value indicated that the mean score of individualized consideration is greater than the other three dimensions of transformational leadership.

Table 2

Perceptions of Teachers about different facets of Academic Optimism

| Academic Optimism | Mean | SD |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Collective Efficacy | 29.89 | 5.306 |
| Faculty Trust | 25.50 | 7.037 |
| Academic Emphasis | 18.08 | 5.500 |

Table 2 indicates the values of mean and standard of different factors of academic optimism. The value of collective efficacy is ($M = 29.894$, $SD = 5.3096$), faculty trust ($M = 25.5$, $SD = 7.0372$), and academic emphasis is ($M = 18.089$, $SD = 5.5005$). The table value indicated that the mean score of collective efficacies is greater than other factors of academic optimism.

Table 3

Relationship between Transformational Leadership behaviour of head teachers and Academic Optimism in Secondary Schools

| Variables | Pearson <i>r</i> | Sig. |
|---|------------------|------|
| Transformational Leadership Behaviour and Academic Optimism | .573** | .000 |

** $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the relationship between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and school academic optimism by using a Pearson Correlation Coefficient and the value of correlation coefficient ($r = 0.573$; $p < .000$) inferred that there was a significant and strong positive correlation between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism of schools.

Table 4

Difference between Male and Female Secondary School Teachers regarding Transformational Leadership behaviour of head teachers and Academic Optimism

| Factors | Gender | <i>N</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> -value | <i>Df</i> | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|--------|----------|-------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------|
| Transformational Leadership | Male | 423 | 73.86 | 22.964 | 1.155 | 870 | .248 |
| | Female | 449 | 72.15 | 20.594 | | | |
| Academic Optimism | Male | 423 | 74.93 | 15.745 | 2.833 | 870 | .005 |
| | Female | 449 | 72.11 | 13.671 | | | |

Table 4 shows the comparison of male and female secondary school teachers' perceptions regarding transformational leadership and academic optimism through applying independent sample t-test. By comparing the perceptions for transformational leadership, the value of male teachers ($M= 73.860$, $SD= 22.9643$) and value of female schoolteachers ($M= 72.155$, $SD= 20.5940$) while assuming an alpha level of significance .05. The calculated t-value was (1.155) at $df=870$ on 0.05 level of significance. As a result, the value of p was $0.248 > 0.05$, which indicated that there was no significant difference in views of male and female secondary school teachers about transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers.

Whereas, by comparing the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding academic optimism, the male teachers score ($M= 74.938$, $SD=15.7456$) and female teachers score ($M=72.113$, $SD= 13.6711$) were compared by using an alpha level of significance .05. The calculated t-value was (2.833) at $df=870$ on 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the value of p was $0.005 < 0.05$, which indicated the significant difference in perceptions of male and female secondary school teachers about academic optimism.

Table 5

Difference between Rural and Urban School Teachers Regarding Transformational Leadership behaviour of head teachers and Academic Optimism

| Factors | Locality | N | Mean | SD | T value | df | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----|-------|--------|---------|-----|------|
| Transformational Leadership | Rural | 357 | 72.91 | 21.404 | .750 | 870 | .940 |
| | Urban | 515 | 73.02 | 22.057 | | | |
| Academic Optimism | Rural | 357 | 73.70 | 14.690 | .374 | 870 | .709 |
| | Urban | 515 | 73.32 | 14.842 | | | |

Table 5 shows the difference between rural and urban secondary school teachers' opinion regarding transformational leadership and academic optimism by using independent sample t-test. For transformational leadership, independent sample t-test was used to compare the views of rural ($M= 72.916$, $SD= 21.404$) and urban schoolteachers ($M= 73.029$, $SD= 22.057$) while considering the alpha level of significance value .05. The t-value was (0.750) at $df= 870$ on 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the value of p was $0.940 > 0.05$, which indicated no significant difference in opinion between rural and urban secondary school teachers regarding transformational leadership of head teachers.

For academic optimism, the comparison in the scores of rural ($M= 73.708$, $SD= 14.690$) and urban school teachers ($M= 73.328$, $SD= 14.842$) examined while considering alpha level of significance .05. The calculated t-value was (0.374) at $df=870$ on 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the value of p was $0.709 > 0.05$, which indicated no significant difference between perceptions of rural and urban schoolteachers regarding academic optimism.

Results

This study proves after applying statistical tests that there was a strong positive correlation between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism of schools in views of secondary school teachers. Moreover, results of the study showed that the mean value of the individualized influence is greater than all other factors of transformational leadership i.e., inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation. The values of mean and standard deviation of collective efficacy are greater than other factors of academic optimism i.e., faculty trust and academic emphasis. Based on gender and locale, there was no significant difference founding views of secondary school teachers about transformational leadership behaviour. On the other hand, significant differences were found in views of male and female secondary school teachers about academic optimism while no significant difference was found in views of secondary school teachers based on the locale.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the head of the institutions deal with teachers individually rather to consider them as a group. They help their staff in solving their problems, motivate and guide them, encourages teamwork, appreciate them if they do put extra efforts in work.

Discussion

Recently, academic achievement of students has been a concerning area of research especially in public schools. Performance of public schools has been questioned, as many parents concerned the quality and learning environment in public school and prefer to send their children in private schools. Moreover, there are comparatively less quantitative evidence that the behaviour of head teachers makes any difference in student achievement. This study has opened a window of research into the connection to transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers who can influence student achievement through increased academic optimism. Transformational leadership is a form of head teacher behaviour through he inspires other staff toward high level of commitment to achieve school goals. Head teachers adopt this transformational behaviour through idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS) and individualized consideration (IC) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Whereas the term academic optimism measures the school-wide attitude of teachers and its impact on students' achievement (Hoy et al., 2006). This study has shown that Bass and Riggio's model of transformational leadership has a positive relationship with academic optimism, which ultimately is linked with student achievement (Hoy et al., 2006). Previous literature is evident that school head teachers influence their teaching staff in establishing a certain kind of attitude towards all progress of the school. Moreover, by adopting transformational behaviour practices, head teachers try to get their teachers inspired and

encourage them to play a positive role in the success of a school. Therefore, this research study confirms the transformational leadership practices of head teachers have a positive relationship with teachers' belief that they can attain educational objectives through collective effort and a positive attitude.

The main assumption of this research was to identify the relationship between transformational leadership practices of head teachers and academic optimism in secondary schools. This research confirms the assumption that there is a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers and academic optimism in secondary schools. It means, this study supported the assumption that the more transformational behaviour of head teacher, the more teachers' collective efficacy, faculty trust and academic emphasis in secondary school. More specifically, this research study has confirmed that each category of transformational leadership behaviour: idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS) and individualized consideration (IC) of head teachers positively related to academic optimism. The findings support the previous research of Leithwood (2006) and Wright (2007) on transformational leadership practices in schools. Both previous research studies considered transformational leadership as a key to promote the learning environment at school level.

Conclusion

The present study was designed to investigate the relationship of heads' transformational leadership with academic optimism of secondary schools in Punjab, Pakistan. The findings of the study confirmed that the mean value of "individualized influence" is greater than all other dimensions of transformational leadership behaviour which were inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the head of the institutions deals with teachers individually rather to consider them as a group. They help their staff in solving their problems, motivate and guide them, encourages teamwork, appreciate them if they do put extra efforts in work. Likewise, the findings about academic optimism that is another variable of the study showed that the mean score of collective efficacies is greater than faculty trust and academic emphasis. It concludes that the teachers in the schools have strong belief that their actions can change the behaviour of students and almost all students have the capability to learn in the situation.

Finally, findings revealed that a strong positive correlation existed between transformational leadership style of head teachers and academic emphasis in views of secondary school teachers. Although moderate correlation exists in transformational leadership style of head teachers and collective efficacy and faculty trust. It can be concluded that strength of academic emphasis varies by the transformational leadership behaviour of head teachers.

Recommendation

Head teachers can be offered refresher training to understand and implement transformational leadership in schools. Transformational leadership approach has positive effect on academic optimism of schools, however, head teachers may promote teachers' collective efficacy, faculty trust and academic emphasis through transformational leadership. Different authorized bodies such as CEO's, DEO's may introduce inclusive environment based transformational leadership to improve the quality and performance of schools from various aspects. Teachers are the backbone in any education system and their well-being should be the priority of head teachers so they could facilitate and improve the performance of student learning. There is a need to extend the research on the prescribed variables at other levels i.e., primary, elementary, or higher education where the role of head may be different from secondary schools.

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