



Exploring Transformational Leadership Behavior in Higher Education: A Case Study from Sudan

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is comprised of four dimensions named idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore transformational leadership behavior in higher education with focus on Al-Gezira University. Therefore, this study followed survey research design. 332 participants were taken through stratified random sampling techniques. Data was collected from teachers using closed ended questionnaire. To analyze data, mean scores, and one sample t-test was used. The study found that idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration were practiced at Gezira University. The findings confirmed that Gezira University demonstrated transformational leadership behavior. The study recommended a Gezira University should organize training program, courses and workshops to equip staff members with leadership skills and competencies that enhance the practices of transformational leadership.

Keywords: Idealized influence, Intellectual stimulation, Inspirational motivation, Individualized consideration, Higher education

Introduction

Leadership is a process whereby other people are influenced to understand and agree with what is to be implemented and how it should be effectively and collaboratively implemented to achieve a goal (Yukl, 2002). Northouse (2013) stated that leadership is the ability to influence others. Hence, it is a two way process in which a leader influences and is influenced by the members that is a transactional occurrence which occurs between a leader and his or her followers. It involves a followership who works for a common purpose or task. In this respect, a leader requires style that enable him communicate his visions with the subordinates (Islam et al., 2021). Therefore, leadership style is the general way a leader behaves towards his subordinates for attaining objectives (Mescon, Albert & Khedouri, 1985). Accordingly, a leader needs to change his leadership style considering the needs of the situation. In this regard, Burns' (1978) stated that transformational leadership styles are the

most prominent. He manifested that transformational leaders are those who involve themselves with others in a certain way in that both leaders and subordinates can increase motivation and working spirit to a much higher level (Grošelj et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership as defined by Yukl (1989) as the process of influencing major change in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members and building commitment for the organization's mission or objectives. Therefore, transformational leaders give importance to personal development and intrinsic motivation of the followers. They stress on alignment of needs and aspirations of the followers along with desired outcomes for the betterment of organization. Transformational leaders also try to foster the commitment of the followers towards the organization and give them inspiration to enhance their performance (Bass, 2000). Transformational leadership encourages followers to take risks and think independently in situations of problem solving (Northouse, 2013).

Transformational leadership is comprised of four dimensions named idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration (Sudibjo & Prameswari, 2021). An idealized influence leadership relates to formulation of vision by the leaders to motivate followers. Intellectual stimulation relates to motivating and inspiring their followers to work in achieving organization's goals. Another dimension is the inspirational motivation refers to the process by which leaders motivate their followers in achieving organizational goals. The fourth dimension is individualized consideration where followers act as a mentor or coach and guides each individual follower (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1997). These types are highly required in higher education. Harvey, Royal, and Stout (2003) showed positive relationships between the three leader behaviors of charisma, individualized considerations and intellectual stimulation, and student ratings of instructor performance and involvement. Kezar and Eckel (2004) identify wrong decision-making processes, and not creating a culture of collaboration as direct paths to institutional failure. In another piece, these same authors warn that financial situations and community morale must be addressed in order for strategies of transformational leadership to have meaningful impact on campus. Basham (2010) asserts that the elements of transformational leadership, specifically motivating and stimulating followers toward the collective mission, must be combined with a university presidents "individual quality of commitment demonstrated with passion, intensity, and persistence" in order for that institution to achieve success.

Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) sought to remedy this shortcoming of the research, and their results supported positive relationships between transformational leadership and more typical educational outcomes, including cognitive and affective learning, and instructor credibility. Bogler, Caspi, and Roccas (2013) examined a large cohort of undergraduate students participating in distance learning courses conducted via a virtual learning environment extended these findings. Their results corroborated previous findings suggesting that transformational leadership is positively related with student ratings of satisfaction and leader assistance, although it was not related with participation or grade performance (Klein, 2023). Hence, this study sought to explore transformational leadership behavior in one of the higher education institutions in Sudan.

Despite, higher education institutions are facing issues of rapid changing environment, new challenges and demands for innovation, greater uncertainty and change coupled with the accountability nowadays; transformational leadership behavior has shown significant achievement in growth and improvements in mergers and policies and for the development of innovative higher education (Chipunza, 2010). According to USAID (2014), there is need for transformational leaders and managers of African Higher Education institutions is of immense importance given the importance of higher education in transformation of African economies. Daniels and GooDboy (2014) stated that effective teachers exhibit a variety of behaviors in the classroom that have positive impact on student learning. Teachers play different roles in the classroom, but the focus of this study is on their role as transformational leaders. They revealed that transformational leadership (Bass, 2000) is an important predictor of student learning in the U.S. college classroom.

Furthermore, EDU (2024) stated that through strategic implementation, transformational leadership not only shapes the future of higher education but also ensures its adaptability and sustainability in an increasingly dynamic global context. Lizhenyu (2025) highlights the need for empirical testing of the framework and future exploration of additional mediators, moderators, and cross-cultural applications. Etomes, Endeley, Aluko and Molua (2024) assert the need for transformational leadership in the sustainable development of the productivity in higher education institutions (HEIs). On the other hand, a few of studies dealt with the transformational leadership behavior in the Sudanese higher education context. Therefore, the current study sought to address this gap and explore transformational leadership behavior in one of the higher education institutions in Sudan (Al-Gezira University). Accordingly, the study is successfully seeking answer to the following research question: To what extent transformational leadership has practiced at Al-Gezira University?

Conceptual Framework

This study in its conceptual framework based on the transformational leadership theory of (Bass and Avolio's, 1994). Bass and Avolio (1994) transformational leadership theory comprises four dimensions. The first is individualized consideration where a leader acts as a mentor and coach. The second is intellectual stimulation where the leader engages individuals in the group in problem-solving matters and welcomes differing perspectives. The third is inspirational motivation whereas leader enthusiastically and clearly defines the goals, vision, and the expected outcome, set high expectations for the group, and maintains optimism about the future of the organization. The fourth is idealized influence where a leader becomes a role-model who displays of honesty, integrity, and genuine care for others is admired by his/her followers.

Kieres (2012) observed that leaders who are transformational exhibit the four dimensions and thus improve the capacity and commitment of the led. According to (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) as cited in Sidaoui, (2007) transformational leadership is differentiated from other leadership styles for its emphasis on moral leadership. For example, a transformational leader leads with an ethical philosophy, gives the organization its ultimate measure of worth, and satisfies the needs and aspirations of the organization's constituents. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study is discussed in detail below.

Idealized Influence

In this dimension, the transformational leader establishes herself as a role model for her followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Omar and Hussin (2013) observed that idealized influence is associated with how a leader is viewed by their subordinates in terms of charisma, confidence, trust, power, consistency, and ideals. High moral standards and ethical conduct serve as the foundation for great respect and trust in the leader's abilities and a sense of common purpose among followers (Northouse, 2013). The transformational leaders serve as role models for followers. It is because the followers trust and respect the leader they emulate the leader and internalize his or her ideals. Idealized influence includes the leaders' values, beliefs, moral considerations, moral behavior and selfless acts. It is also the extent to which the leader articulates goals and arouses followers' interests. Establishing a common vision is an integral part of idealism (Qalati et al., 2022). So, transformational leaders demonstrate behaviors that allow them to serve as role models for their followers. In addition to admiring, respecting, and trusting them, followers tend to identify with the leaders and want to emulate them. Followers view their leaders as having extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination. In addition, leaders who exhibit idealized influence are willing to take risks and are consistent. They can be counted on to do the right thing as they demonstrate high standards of ethical and moral conduct (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders try to build relations with their followers via interactive contact which serves as a cultural link between them. This leads to a change in the values of both parties towards a common ground. The leader creates crystal clear vision of the future in his followers through realization of expectations and demonstrating commitment to goals and common vision. This dimension is measured by the leaders' ability, confidence in his or her values and vision. Transformational leaders demonstrate behaviors that inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work (Tian et al., 2020). They also arouse team spirit, enthusiasm and optimism. Transformational leaders involve their followers by clearly communicating stated expectations they followers to meet and also demonstrate commitment to goals and a shared vision. These leaders articulate a compelling vision of the future. In this respect there is high expectations and an emotional sense of commitment to the group typify this dimension of Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Intellectual Stimulation

Yukl (1999) describes the dimension of Intellectual Stimulation as encouraging innovation and creativity. Leaders that exhibit intellectual stimulation encourage innovative thinking and the discovery of new ways to complete jobs (Anjali & Anand, 2015). Intellectual stimulation leaders are characterized as a leader who provide their followers with an opportunity to rethink the procedures in a traditional ways while observe the situation in new, and intellectual stimulation is the leader's condition of opportunities for followers to rethink traditional procedures and to examine situations in new and novel ways (Griffith, 2004). Therefore, the followers of this kind of leadership are encouraged to have a good thought of

any problems occurs as well as capable to solve by their own beliefs and standards (Yaghoubipoor, Tee and Ahmed, 2013).

Intellectual stimulation leader challenges followers to re-examine some of their assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Specifically, transformational leaders intellectually stimulated followers by encouraging them to question norms, as well as engage in innovative and creative thinking (Bono & Judge, 2004). They always inspire their followers to try new methods or methods to resolve the problems by innovative thinking and creative. Intellectual stimulation leadership also is characterized as one who promoting intelligence, rationality, logical thinking and careful problem solving (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa and Nwankwere, 2011).

Individualized Consideration

Individualized consideration is described as the willingness of the leader to stimulate and create learning experiences in delegating projects to followers as well as treat each of the followers as a unique individual (Griffith, 2004). Transformational leaders remain attentive to the individual needs of followers, serving as mentors in the followers' growth and development (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013).

Individualized consideration may be demonstrated in behaviors such as providing more autonomy, providing more constructive feedback, or providing a more formalized task structure; however, all behaviors have stemmed from the transformational leader's ability to recognize and appreciate individual differences (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In simple terms, individualized consideration denotes the leader's ability to make their followers feel special (Balyer, 2012). Marnis (2012) recognized individualize consideration leaders who have the capability and accountability to offer satisfaction and enhance their followers' productivity by being pleasant, casual, close, assist and support job development among their followers. Hamidifar (2009) further stated that individualize consideration leadership still maintains a sense of responsibility in providing learning ability, while support their followers individuality. Therefore, Belia, and Koustelios (2014) described transformational individualize consideration leaders as individualized attention to the desires of the followers by making each person feel appreciated and treated differently but still fairly on a one-to one basis.

Literature review

Review of the research demonstrate that transformational leadership in higher education has been a topic for researchers around the world. Lizhenyu (2025) examines the role of transformational leadership in fostering innovative behavior among university teachers in Chinese higher education, with a focus on the mediating role of commitment to change. Theoretical contributions include advancing understanding of the mechanisms linking leadership and innovation and providing a framework for studying leadership within diverse cultural and institutional contexts. The study highlights the need for empirical testing of the framework and future exploration of additional mediators, moderators, and cross-cultural applications.

Da and Rany (2025) investigate the application and impact of transformational leadership in higher education institutions. By employing a systematic methodology, findings reveal that transformational leadership positively influences vital organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction, employee performance, and innovation within higher education institutions. However, challenges such as shared governance and academic autonomy hinder its implementation.

Yang, Chen, Wang, Du, Zhang and Cai (2025) investigate how transformational leadership engages in sensemaking to drive sustainable strategic transformation in Chinese higher education institutions. The findings reveal that transformational leaders employ discursive strategies rooted in sensemaking to align organizational action with strategic goals. These strategies foster a shared vision, enhance internal support for talent development, and promote reflective, organized research. Ambiguities in the transformation process are managed through purposeful leadership communication and cognitive framing.

Etomes, Endeley, Aluko and Molua (2024) investigate the need for transformational leadership in the sustainable development of the productivity in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cameroon. A positive and significant relationship was observed between transformational leadership and the productivity of HEIs. While the practice of transformational leadership was observed more in state-owned HEIs, the impact was more in private than in state HEIs. The mean value for intellectual stimulation for sustainable productivity of higher institutes of learning is higher for the private as compared to that of state institutions showing that intellectual stimulation is more used in private HEIs to improve their productivity than in state-owned HEIs in Cameroon. While the correlational analysis showed that intellectual stimulation has the strongest correlate effect on sustainable productivity, the regression analysis showed that inspirational motivation has more added value to productivity. Based on these findings, we recommend a leadership model for sustaining organizational productivity, where the essence of the effective practice of transformational leadership is collaboration, especially in the change process.

Allaoua, Shaqour and Amari (2024) focus on the concept of transformational leadership within the context of higher education institutions, particularly at Palestine University. Key results indicate that idealized influence has a strong positive effect on leadership excellence, while inspirational motivation also significantly improves leadership outcomes albeit to a lesser extent. Individual consideration and mental stimulation show statistically insignificant impacts. The study confirmed hypotheses suggesting a meaningful correlation between transformational leadership behaviours and perceived leadership success, particularly in promoting innovative practices and enhancing institutional performance.

Adekoya, Olatunji (2023) explore the relationship between transformational leadership and transformational teaching/learning in the Kuwaiti context. This study found that transformational leadership positively impacts transformational teaching and learning. The study implies that transformational leadership correlates with transformational teaching that enables academics and students to learn, develop and be motivated.

Jackson (2016) revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership style (independent variables idealized attributes, idealized behaviours, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration) and employees' perception of leadership success (Outcomes of Leadership dependent variables, effectiveness, extra effort, and satisfaction) within higher education.

Method

The study followed survey research design. According to (Creswell, 2012), a survey research design are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. Hence, in this study the quantitative data was collected through questionnaires to offers answers to questions of the frequency of a phenomenon being tested.

The population for this study comprises of all teachers in different 20 colleges in the Gezira University. The number of teachers in the university is 1226. In this study, the teachers of Gezira University were selected through stratified random sampling technique because it allows the researcher to select the participants from each category that leads to create sample representative of a given population. The estimated size of sample from the target population of 1226 teachers, at 95% confidence level with 5% level of precision is found to be 332 teachers. The researcher applied Yamane's (1967) formula to determine the sample size: $n = \frac{N}{1+N/(e^2)}$, where: n = sample size, N =Population size 2146, and e = level of precision 0.05. Hence, $n = \frac{1226}{1+1226/(0.0025)} = 302$. After add 10% from the sample, the estimated sample size becomes 332 respondents to compensate for persons who the researcher is unable to contact (Israel, 1992).

In this study, the questionnaire was used as a data-gathering tool, which consists of two parts. The First part of the questionnaire is Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S in order to rate the four dimensions of transformational leadership contains of 12 items (3 items for each dimension) with five points scale (1= Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Partially agree 4 = Agree 5= Strongly agree). The questionnaire is designed to identify the staffs' perceptions of Transformational leadership behavior at the Gezira University.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the final administration of the questionnaires with all respondents. In order to check the reliability of the researcher instruments a pre-test was carried out on 40 teachers in a faculty of education, those who were not involved in the respondents. The results of the Cronbach's alpha (α) is shown in table 1 below;

Table 1. Reliability test using Cronbach's alpha

Components	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Idealized influence	3	.781
Inspirational motivation	3	.704
Intellectual stimulation	3	.798
Individual consideration	3	.741
All dimensions	12	0.939

Table 1 above shows that the overall transformational leadership and its sub-dimensions satisfied the acceptable criteria ($r = 0.70$). The Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire was 0.939. This indicates that the items are highly correlated with accurate scores. It means that the questionnaire was valid to use for data gathering.

Result and Discussion

This section mainly concerns with the presentation of the results of the study based on the data collected using questionnaire as the main data-gathering tool.

Demographic characteristics

The information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents for the questionnaire as shown in Table 2 given below.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Item	Criteria	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	206	62.0
	Female	126	38.0
	Total	332	100.0
Academic rank	Professor	12	3.6
	Associate professor	98	29.5
	Assistant professor	69	20.8
	Lecturer	116	34.9
	Teaching assistant	37	11.1
	Total	332	100.0
Experience	1 – 5	101	30.4
	6 – 10	80	24.1
	over 10	151	45.5
	Total	332	100.0

As depicted in Table 2, the majority of respondents was males (62%), and (38%) for females. In terms of academic rank, the majority of the staff was lecturers (34.9%), associate professor (29.5%), assistant professor (20.5%), teaching assistant (11.1%), then full professor (3.6%). The data in Table 2 also shows that the proportion of respondents increase with an increase in the interval years of service ranging from (45.5%) with respondents over 10 years to (24.1%) for 5-10 years, to (30.4%) of those serving less than 5 years.

The extent of transformational leadership practices at Al-Gezira University

Mean scores and one sample t-test was conducted to determine the extent of transformational leadership practices at Al-Gezira University, and the result is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. One sample t-test of the extent of transformational leadership practices at Al-Gezira University

Dimensions	N	Mean	Test Value	Std. D	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Idealized influence	332	9.4828	6	2.86659	22.138	331	.000
Inspirational motivation	332	9.6045	6	2.69672	24.354	331	.000
Intellectual stimulation	332	8.8439	6	3.14506	16.476	331	.000
Individual consideration	332	8.9611	6	2.87164	18.788	331	.000
Overall transformational leadership practices	332	36.892	24	9.93150	23.653	331	.000

The result in Table 3 shows that the mean scores of each dimension of transformational leadership practices (idealized influence $m = 9.4828$, inspirational motivation $m = 9.6045$, intellectual stimulation $m = 8.8439$, and individual consideration $m = 8.9611$) were significantly higher than their respective test values which were (6) for all of them at their respective $t(331) = 22.138, 24.354, 16.476$, and 18.788 at $p < .05$. This result implies that idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration were practiced at Gezira University. In line with this result, Jackson (2016) revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership style (independent variables idealized attributes, idealized behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration) and employees' perception of leadership success within higher education.

This result is contrary to Etomes, Endeley, Aluko and Molua (2024) who compared that while the practice of transformational leadership was observed more in state-owned HEIs, the impact was more in private than in state HEIs. The mean value for intellectual stimulation for sustainable productivity of higher institutes of learning is higher for the private as compared to that of state institutions showing that intellectual stimulation is more used in private HEIs. While the correlational analysis showed that intellectual stimulation has the strongest correlate effect on sustainable productivity, the regression analysis showed that inspirational motivation has more added value to productivity. Allaoua, Shaqour and Amari (2024) indicate that idealized influence has a strong positive effect on leadership excellence, while inspirational motivation also significantly improves leadership outcomes albeit to a lesser extent.

Besides, the mean of the aggregate score of transformational leadership practices (36.892) was also significantly greater than the expected test value (24) at $t(331) = 23.653$, $p < .05$. Since the aggregate mean value was significantly higher than its test value, the result

shows that the transformational leadership was practiced at Gezira University with its different dimensions.

Based on the findings of this study, Al-Gezira University demonstrated transformational leadership behavior. To elaborate, the dimensions of transformational leadership; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration were practiced in the Gezira University. This result agreed with the Daniels and GooDboy (2014) revealed that transformational leadership is an important predictor of student learning in the U.S. college classroom. Basham (2010) asserts that the elements of transformational leadership, specifically motivating and stimulating followers toward the collective mission, must be combined with a university presidents “individual quality of commitment demonstrated with passion, intensity, and persistence” in order for that institution to achieve success. ADEKOYA, Olatunji (2023) found that transformational leadership positively impacts transformational teaching and learning. On the other hand Da and Rany (2025) mentioned that challenges such as shared governance and academic autonomy hinder the application and impact of transformational leadership in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This study designed to investigate the extent of transformational leadership practices at Al-Gezira University in Sudan. To meet the objectives of the study, different literatures that pertinent to the study were reviewed. To this end, the study has been guided by a survey research design.

Depending up on the results of data analysis, the transformational leadership practiced at Al-Gezira University in all its dimensions. This means that the dimensions of transformational leadership; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration were behaved in Al-Gezira University

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended that Al-Gezira University should organize training program, courses and workshops to equip staff members with leadership skills and competencies that enhance the practices of transformational leadership.

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