EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER'S TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT CREATIVITY IN CHINESE HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES: A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

A research framework is an essential component of each research project, as it outlines the key variables and their interrelationships and provides specific and essential guidance for the formulation of research questions. This article presents a research framework on the relationship between transformational leadership and student creativity in Chinese higher vocational colleges. The framework defines the basic knowledge of higher vocational colleges in China, establishes particular aims and objectives, and addresses the problems facing China's vocational education. In addition, the article provides a review of the research on the concepts of transformational leadership and student creativity, exploring the theoretical knowledge behind both concepts. The paper then describes particular research methodologies and proposes a conceptual framework that posits the relationship between transformational leadership and student creativity in the context of China's technical and vocational colleges.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Creativity, Chinese higher vocational colleges

INTRODUCTION

Many countries recognize the importance of higher vocational education in strengthening their national power and competitiveness, as it equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet labor market demands. China is currently undergoing significant socioeconomic transformation and industrial innovation to become a major manufacturing nation by 2025(State Council, 2015). As a result, there is a need for more high-quality talent to support national development. To address this need, the Chinese government has implemented policies to improve the quality of teaching in vocational colleges, such as the "China Education Modernization 2035" plan, the "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan," (MOE, 2019a) and the "Action Plan for Improving the Quality of Teaching." (MOE, 2020a). These initiatives emphasize the crucial role of teachers and the quality of their teaching in enhancing the quality of higher vocational education.

There has been an increase in the significance of teacher leadership in promoting effective teaching and learning. The findings of a study conducted by Öqvist and Malmström (2016) indicate that teachers who demonstrate stronger leadership are able to create a more positive learning environment, encourage academic motivation, and improve student performance. The Chinese Ministry of Education is aware of its significance and has included teacher leadership in the "National Training Program" for the year 2020. This was done with the goal of enhancing the fundamentals of elementary education as well as the abilities of teachers to exercise leadership (MOE, 2021). However, there currently needs to be a training program in China designed to improve the leadership skills of college teachers. Chinese vocational teachers do not consider themselves classroom leaders, nor do they know how to demonstrate leadership practice (Tan, 2020). Given the significance of teachers and their leadership in improving the quality of higher vocational education in China, there is a need for research that focuses on enhancing teaching quality and teacher leadership in Chinese colleges. Several researchers have suggested that transformational leadership is the most effective style of leadership. Therefore, this study aims to apply the principles of transformational leadership in the context of teaching and investigate how teaching quality can be improved in Chinese colleges.

The characteristics of the vocational education setting themselves are the primary factor that plays a role in determining the evaluation criteria for the teaching quality of the vocational education system. The most important indicator of the quality of teaching provided by vocational teachers is whether or not students graduate with high-level employment skills that are adequate to meet the requirements of both economic and social development (MOE, 2007). It is widely believed that one of the most important employability skills is creativity. According to projections made by the World Economic Forum, creativity will be the third most in-demand skill by 2025 (Forum, 2020). Since the lack of creativity displayed by Chinese students has been criticized by a large number of academics both in China and around the world, China is acutely aware of the significance of the creative output of its students (Guo et al., 2018; Mullen, 2018).As a consequence of this, the government of China has released several documents aimed at encouraging creativity among students. These include "Implementation Opinions on Deepening Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Reform in Higher Education" (MOE, 2015) and "National University Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program" (MOE, 2015b). These policies make it abundantly clear that the purpose of higher education is to foster the development of creativity in students. Consequently, in the realm of Chinese vocational education, encouraging the growth of creative potential in students is an important concern that calls for attention.

Overall, the high standards for teaching quality in higher vocational education, which are

driven by economic demand and national policies, are the impetus for the purpose of this study, which is to investigate how teachers can adopt a transformational leadership style with an enterprise perspective in the classroom and the effect that this leadership style has on student creativity. This study will provide a framework for future professional development training for teachers in Chinese institutions of higher vocational education in order to enhance their teaching effectiveness if the expected relationship between variables holds true.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the twenty-first century, the scope of Chinese higher vocational education has expanded dramatically. Diverse stakeholders, including students and employers, are unsatisfied with the teaching quality of higher vocational education institutions due to the rapid increase in enrolment, which has precipitated a major reduction in overall quality (Ma, 2020).Many studies have shown that leadership theory may enhance teaching and that students benefit from teachers with leadership skills (Calderone et al., 2018; Meier, 2016; Öqvist & Malmström, 2016).In recent years, some governments have suggested teacher leadership development programs. To promote the advancement of teacher leadership, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) in the United States produced the "blue book" (also known as "Standards for Teacher Leadership") in 2014. China has not yet implemented explicit policies and training programs to cultivate higher education teacher leaders. China also has recognized the value of teacher leadership and put it on the "2020 Chinese National Training Program" list to improve the principles of primary education (MOE, 2021). Although the leadership of college teachers was mentioned in the "Second Phase of China's Higher Education Teaching Reform and Teaching Quality Project" in 2013 and 2016, So far, there has been no specific implementation plan.This may result from a dearth of research linking leadership theory to classroom practice and student learning in colleges. To increase the quality of Chinese higher vocational education, it is vital to for the researcher to examine whether teachers who demonstrate leadership traits in the classroom positively impact student learning.

Researchers have made several efforts to describe teacher leadership and its positive impact on students' learning achievements. (Cheung et al., 2019; Öqvist & Malmström, 2018).However, only a select few have made an effort to locate teacher leadership within the conceptual frameworks of contemporary leadership theories (Pushpanadham & Mammen Nambumadathil, 2020). Since the early 1980s, transformational leadership (TL), a central principle of the "new leadership" paradigm, has been the primary focus of research in the field of leadership (Balwant, 2016; Northouse, 2021). According to the findings of Crowther's research, the transformational leadership traits present in the teacher leaders he studied were numerous. According to research on the topic, learning, creativity, and morality may all be enhanced under the transformational leadership of educators (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009). As a consequence of this, it is feasible to investigate teacher leadership by incorporating the model of transformational leadership. In spite of this, there was a dearth of quantitative and empirical research on the leadership function of teacher transformational leadership in the classroom until relatively recently, particularly in higher education (Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). This study seeks to add to the existing research on the subject by examining how teacher's transformational leadership affects student learning outcomes in higher vocational education institutions.

International observers and Chinese academics agree that students in Chinese vocational colleges do not demonstrate enough creative thinking. The average Chinese person has a pessimistic outlook on their ability to be creative and adapt to the changing world. It is a common criticism levelled at China that the country places a higher value on children's performance on standardized tests and maintaining instructor authority than on teaching them to think critically (Mullen, 2020). These findings are consistent with empirical research that was conducted by Dai (2019) and Liu

(2019), which suggests that overall, students' creativity development in vocational colleges in China is below the average level, and only a small number of students demonstrate exceptional creativity in multiple domains. The lack of creativity displayed by college students in China can be attributed to a number of different factors. The 2016 Chinese Higher Education Quality Report highlights the lack of attention paid to students' creativity development in higher education institutions (Alencar et al., 2017). The report also notes that few teachers can assist students in developing their creativity while they are enrolled in their classes. This is because some educators might consider children's creative behavior to be inappropriate, which would lead to disciplinary action (Guo et al., 2021). Because creativity is a fundamental skill for scientific and social advancement and because it is essential for all nations, this incorrect teaching practice inhibits the growth of creativity among students and China's overall progress. Thus,improving the teaching effectiveness of faculty members is crucial for developing the creative abilities of students in higher education institutions in China.

To address the above two issues, namely, first, the low creativity of students in higher vocational colleges, with the core influencing factor being the inappropriate teaching methods of frontline teachers; second, regarding the project of teacher leadership in colleges as one of the strategies to improve teaching quality, more empirical research needs to be conducted. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether transformational leadership in higher education has a certain impact on students' creativity through literature review and empirical data analysis. Despite some studies indicating a positive link between transformational leadership and creativity in other settings (Mao et al., 2020; Zacher & Johnson, 2015), research on this relationship in the context of higher education, particularly in Chinese vocational institutions (Khan et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020)., remains scarce. Moreover, the measurement tools such as the creativity scale developed by Zhou and George (2001) used to evaluate creativity in previous studies have not been rigorously validated. So this study seeks to address these limitations by using validated assessment scales to investigate the relationship between teacher transformational leadership and student creativity in the context of Chinese vocational colleges. By doing so, the study hopes to fill gaps in the literature and offer insights into the impact of transformational leadership on creativity in the higher education context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary goal of this research is to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature to determine whether the principles of transformational leadership in business can be integrated with the concept of teacher leadership to create teacher's transformational leadership in higher education institutions. This will be accomplished through the study. The second goal is to investigate, through empirical research, whether or not transformational leadership on the part of college teachers has a positive impact on the cultivation of their students' creativity. is As a means of accomplishing the overarching objective, providing assistance to China's higher vocational colleges in their efforts to enhance the quality of their instruction is necessary. Thus based on the objectives mentioned above, the research question is" Can a correlation be established between the transformational leadership exhibited by teachers and the level of creativity displayed by students in higher vocational colleges in China?".

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study set out to examine whether or not teachers who exhibited transformational leadership behaviors were linked to increased student creativity by analyzing the theory of transformational leadership in instructional setting of Chinese higher vocational colleges. It is based on contemporary issues in Chinese higher education and the research gap identified through a review

of the extant literature. As such, it has theoretical and practical implications. This study contributes to current body of knowledge about transformational leadership in educational settings and supports it from a theoretical perspective.

From a practical point of view, the potential significance of these findings for stakeholders in higher education is self-evident. Through a leadership lens, the quality of teaching has been found that transformational leadership behaviors may provide teachers with future professional development training frameworks to increase their teaching effectiveness and enhance their student creativity. These structures, in turn, are critical for their educational and subsequent life success. Additionally, students can be exposed to good leadership prior to joining the professional sector through teacher-leaders who model skills that students can learn and use in their business strategy. Finally, the results of this study can be used in a variety of related situations that incorporate transformational leadership theory into the teaching process and guide the government or other countries that provide national training programs for teachers or lecturers in Higher Education that introduce transformational leadership theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Leadership

The concept of teacher leadership is now widely accepted and increasingly debated among education scholars, particularly in educational leadership. However, no precise definition of teacher leadership exists at this time. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) ,for instance, define a teacher leader as someone who leads both inside and outside the classroom and actively influences colleagues to improve their teaching practices. In Wenner and Campbell (2017)'s view, teacher leaders act as instructional leaders both in and outside of the classroom, and their focus is on teacher behaviors that improve student learning (Leithwood & Duke, 1999), such as using effective instructional strategies and providing positive feedback to motivate students. Pounder (2006) places greater emphasis on instructional effectiveness and teacher leadership in student interactions. Teacher leadership is defined by Balwant (2016) as the process by which teachers exert deliberate influence over students in order to instruct, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships. In conclusion, teacher leadership has yet to be uniformly defined in academic circles; therefore, this research is required to comprehend its evolution and select an appropriate definition.

Silva et al. (2000) categorized teacher leadership development into three waves. In the initial phase, teacher leadership was defined as instructors who held formal management responsibilities, such as principals or department heads (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). In the first wave, teacher leadership responsibilities were separated from teaching. In the second wave, teacher leadership was defined as instructors in informal positions, such as curriculum leaders, who help other teachers enhance their teaching and learning environments. The second wave of teacher leadership emphasizes instructional guidance responsibilities. In the third wave, teacher leadership was defined as all teachers who can offer professional development opportunities to colleagues and are accountable for creating a positive learning environment for all school teachers. In the third wave, teacher leadership stressed the need of fostering a positive school climate. Pounder (2006) developed the fourth wave of teacher leadership based on the teaching qualities of the third wave, which stresses the leadership skills of teachers in classroom interactions with students and promotes teaching effectiveness.

In the fourth wave of teacher leadership, Pounder's perspective on teacher leadership parallels that of several scholars. For instance, according to Balwant (2016), teacher leadership is the process by which teachers positively affect students to guide and develop learning activities and interactions. Smith et al. (2017) asserts that teacher leadership is an impactful process in which teachers prioritize enhancing teaching practices with student learning as the primary goal. Lin et al. (2018) believe that teacher leadership is a skill that teachers possess in addition to classroom teaching, which is advantageous for enhancing the quality of teaching. Although researchers assess teacher leadership differently in different studies, their fundamental qualities stay the same. Scholars agree that teacher leadership is a process with a beneficial influence rather than a leadership style based on position or authority. Based on the author's research background in higher education, this study will implement Balwant (2016)'s notion of teacher leadership. This is due to the fact that this definition highlights college teacher leadership as a process of

influencing students, which is consistent with the aim of this study.

Transformational Leadership

Many empirical studies have found that transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership. Researches conducted by Avolio and Bass (2001) and Johnson and Hackman (2018) have shown that the most successful leaders exhibit behaviors associated with transformational leadership. Thus, this study utilizes the concept of transformational leadership, as outlined by Bass and colleagues, to examine the effectiveness of teacher leadership. This includes four components: idealized influence, where followers can trust and respect the leader's behavior as a model; inspirational motivation, which involves leadership behaviors that inspire followers to pursue common goals with enthusiasm and optimism; intellectual stimulation, which encourages followers to approach problems from new perspectives; and individualized consideration, where leaders attend to the needs and growth of their followers by listening to and coaching them (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Teacher's Transformational Leadership

Many researchers have demonstrated that the behavior of teacher leaders is closely related to the characteristics of transformational leadership (Crowther et al., 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, it is conceivable that teacher leaders themselves are unaware of these transformational characteristics. For instance, York-Barr and Duke (2004) demonstrate that the key characteristics of teacher leadership are establishing trustable relationships with colleagues, encouraging their professional development, and possessing strong communication skills. These characteristics resemble those of a transformational leader characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration. Nevertheless, according to Crowther et al. (2009),excellent classroom teaching is a fundamental characteristic of a teacher leader. Given the correlation between the aforementioned transformational qualities of teacher leaders and their superior teaching performance, Pounder (2006) argues that teachers who exhibit these qualities in the classroom can inspire superior classroom performance.

Previous studies have shown a strong correlation between teacher leadership and transformational leadership characteristics (Crowther et al., 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), yet it's possible that teacher leaders may not be aware of these traits. For example, York-Barr and Duke (2004) highlights the important qualities of teacher leadership such as building trustworthy relationships with colleagues, promoting their professional growth, and possessing effective communication skills. These characteristics resemble those of a transformational leader characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration. Nevertheless, according to Sharon's research ,excellent classroom teaching is a fundamental characteristic of a teacher leader. Given the correlation between the aforementioned transformational qualities of teacher leaders and their superior teaching performance, Pounder argues that teachers who exhibit these qualities in the classroom can inspire superior classroom performance.

According to Pounder's research, teachers' transformational leadership is most evident in the following aspects: First, the teacher pays close attention to the growth of each student and actively assists them (this is the individual consideration behavior in transformational leadership). Second, the teacher encourages students to solve problems from different perspectives by posing knowledge challenges (this is intellectual stimulation behavior in transformational leadership). Third, the teacher assists students in establishing learning objectives and motivates them to achieve them (this is the inspirational motivation behavior in transformational leadership). Fourth, the teacher communicates his beliefs and teaching objectives to the students and serves as a mentor or coach (this is the idealized influence behavior in transformational leadership).

However, other scholars are also continuously seeking descriptions of teachers' transformational

leadership behaviors. For instance, research conducted by Bolkan et al. (2011) revealed that teachers' primary manifestations of transformational leadership are charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. According to research findings of Bolkan et al. (2016), teachers' transformational leadership behaviors are most evident in intellectual stimulation, reflection, guidance, and alignment. The research of Tahir (2018) classifies teachers' transformational leadership behaviors as intellectual stimulation and charisma. However, other researchers have criticized these studies because these studies examine teacher leadership behaviors without taking the original concept of transformational leadership into account. Therefore, this research adopts Pounder's notion of teacher transformational leadership. Furthermore, many scholars have emphasized the need for further research into the influence of teacher transformational leadership on student learning (Treslan, 2006; White et al., 2017) .
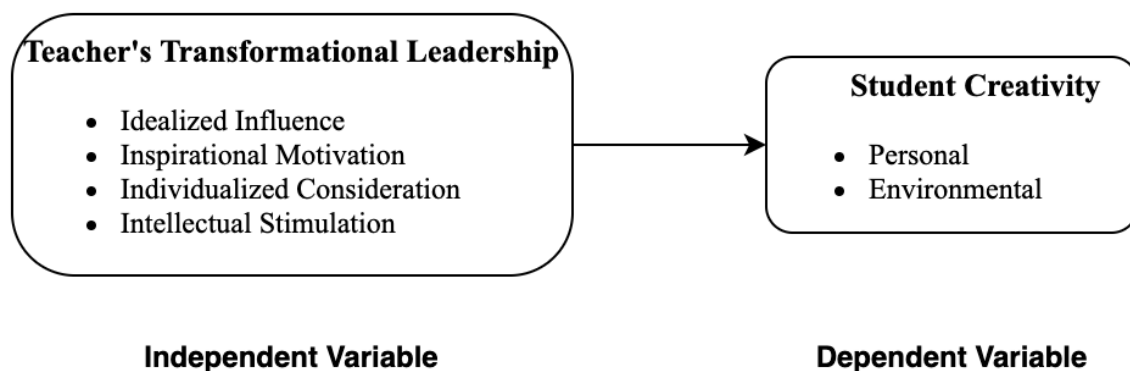
Creativity

Creativity is utilized in numerous domains and contexts and is frequently misunderstood, particularly in education(Davies et al., 2014).Different scholars have diverse definitions of creativity. Torrance (1962) believed that divergent thinking is the primary determinant of creativity. According to Sawyer (2011), creativity is directly related to IQ, and those with a higher IQ are more creative. According to Baer (2011), creativity is a field-specific concept that stems from specialized expertise and skills. However, scholars in the field have questioned these definitions. Many other creativity experts back the component theory of creativity proposed by Amabile (1983). He believes that creativity results from a combination of domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant abilities, intrinsic motivation, and social environment. As a framework for a comprehensive understanding of student creativity, this study will use Amabile's creativity concept, consisting of three internal and one external component.

Conceptual Framework

Overall, the focus of study on teacher leadership has shifted from the leadership of formal leaders to the leadership of ordinary teachers. Some researchers have attempted to examine transformational leadership in education as an effective leadership style for teachers, and their empirical researches have demonstrated the feasibility of transformational leadership in higher education and its positive influence on student academic achievement and development. Yet, the number of such empirical studies is limited and numerous academics demand for more of it . In addition, the literature suggests that student creativity can be fostered and is influenced by the teachers' teaching style. Thus In order to solve the problem of poor student creativity in Chinese vocational colleges, the purpose of this study is to examine, from a transformational leadership viewpoint, the impact of teachers' transformational leadership on student creativity in Chinese higher vocational colleges. Based on the selected concepts of all variables, the conceptual framework is formulated for the study in figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The proposed study is to investigate how transformational leadership is associated with student creativity in vocational colleges in China. The investigation will employ a quantitative cross-sectional design. Jiangsu Province in eastern China was selected as the sample region, and a technique called cluster sampling was utilized to conduct a survey among 500 students from five public vocational colleges and 100 students from a private vocational college in the province. Students were given a questionnaire containing questions about their perceptions of teacher transformational leadership and their creativity, and they were instructed to select the answer choices that best represented their perspectives and experiences. This questionnaire was composed of closed-ended questions with three sections. When conducting quantitative research, the use of a survey questionnaire is useful for identifying individuals' significant emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. This is due to the fact that closed-ended questions help respondents feel more at ease and focused within the parameters of the instrument (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

Instrumentation

The questionnaire contains three distinct parts. The initial section of the survey asks for the participants' fundamental demographic data, such as age, gender, and area of study. The remaining three sections are designed to measure the transformational leadership of teachers and the creativity of students. In the second section of the questionnaire, which was designed to assess teacher transformational leadership, a 45-item multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ 5X) was utilized. This questionnaire was created by Bass and Avolio (2000) and edited by Pounder (2008b) for use in higher education classrooms. The greater the score, the greater the teacher's capacity for transformational leadership. However, only twenty items out of the hundreds that could be used to measure transformational leadership were selected for this study. Sen et al. (2014)'s Personal-Environment Fit Creativity Scale (PEFSC) was utilized in the creativity questionnaire as the third section of the questionnaire. Each of the 14 items on the scale is subdivided into one of two categories (personal and environmental).

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of a questionnaire are crucial to the effectiveness of quantitative research. Before distributing the questionnaire formally, the researchers conducted a pilot study with 50 vocational college students to ensure the reliability and validity of each questionnaire instrument. In general, the validity of a questionnaire involves both content validity and structural validity. This study will invite two domain experts from the University of Malaya to verify the questionnaire's content for content validity. For structural validity, AMOS 26.6 software will be used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis to assess the structural validity of this study. In terms of the questionnaire reliability, researchers will utilize Cronbach's alpha to determine. According to Pallant (2020), Cronbach's alpha is one of the most often employed measures for measuring the internal consistency of a scale.

Data Collection

Based on the sample size and sampling method described previously, the Questionnaire Star electronic questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. Then the researchers contacted the relevant teachers who were selected and provided them with a specific incentive as a thank-you for the participation. A teacher was identified for each college and is responsible for

collecting the data for that college. In addition, before the questionnaire was administered, the researchers provided video training to these responsible teachers, communicated with them in-depth, and explained potential issues and precautions associated with questionnaire completion. All data were collected on the Questionnaire Star electronic questionnaire platform following the completion of the survey.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researchers will utilize SPSS26.0 to conduct reliability and validity tests and factor analysis on the teacher transformational leadership scale and the student creativity scale. The construct validity of each of these scales will be subsequently validated using AMOS26.0. In addition, the researchers will conduct a correlation analysis on the relationship between teacher transformational leadership and creativity, as well as a regression analysis on the impact of each of these variables. Not only is it necessary to determine the direction and significance of the influence between variables when investigating the causal relationships between variables, but it is also necessary to define the paths and methods of influence and analyze the implicit structural relationships between variables. It is impossible to determine the causal relationships between variables without first establishing the direction and significance of the influence between variables. As a result, the researchers will employ structural equation modelling to examine how various indicators contributed to the overall situation and how they interacted with one another.

CONCLUSION

It is evident, based on relevant theoretical literature and previous empirical research, that the concept of leadership can be applied to frontline teaching teachers, and that the transformational leadership style in business is highly effective in teacher leadership. Teachers who are capable of transformational leadership are in a better position to care for their students, to inspire them, and to release the potential that lies within them. The main goal of this study is to gather empirical evidence and detailed insights on how the transformational leadership behaviors of teachers in higher vocational colleges are related to student creativity. The purpose is to enhance the quality of teaching continually. The academic community is only just beginning to recognize the existence of this relationship between these variables, and to my knowledge, no one in China has investigated it. This research has some shortcomings due to the fact that it was only carried out in a single cultural setting, which was China. All of the participants in the sample are students from China. Research conducted by Javidan et al. (2006) found that people's conceptions of leadership differ from culture to culture. As a consequence of this, the findings of this research might not be applicable to the situations in other countries; at best, they can act as a point of reference.

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