

# THE EFFECT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON TEACHERS' WORK ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF ZHANGQIU MIDDLE SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

This study's objective was to evaluate Zhangqiu Middle School's teachers' work engagement based on the impacts and effects of transformational leadership. With the education landscape evolving, a critical factor of teacher engagement has emerged resulting in a must for there to be quality teaching aligned with sustainable institutional performance. Transformational leadership refers to how teacher motivation, emotional commitment and overall work engagement are all enhanced based on idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. A quantitative research approach encompassing a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 396 teachers and staff members across Zhangqiu Middle School. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: demographic information, dimensions of transformational leadership, and teacher work engagement components which extended to aspects of dedication, absorption and vigor. The reliability and validity of the instrument were evaluated using item-objective congruence and Cronbach's alpha. The findings revealed that instructors felt a high level of transformative leadership in their institution, and strong overall work engagement. The correlation study found a statistically significant positive link between transformative leadership and work engagement at the 0.01 level. Among the leadership components, inspirational motivation had the most significant association with teacher engagement. The findings of the study indicate that teacher enthusiasm, persistence and engagement in work can be effectively fostered when transformational behaviors are adopted by teachers. This also extends to the need to develop transformational leadership skills across institutions, by also evaluating further applications of such leadership across diverse school settings for more and better comprehensive evaluations. **Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Teacher Engagement, Educational Management, Zhangqiu Middle School

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## INTRODUCTION

Changing academic perceptions and expectations has resulted in a global shift in education with learners' and administrators seeking better support especially in terms of administrative demands. To ensure an institution's success, the level of teacher engagement seen is a key indicator of this as it can influence classroom performance, motivation levels of students and the ability to support an institution's wider and long-term goals. The higher level of engagement from a teacher, the more positive results will be seen in terms of there being an effective learning environment with level of engagement also indicating a correlation on student outcomes and institutional performance (Schaufeli et al., 2022; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Engaged instructors are more likely to display a higher commitment to innovation, collaborate meaningfully with colleagues, and contribute to a culture of continuous development, all of which help students' overall educational experiences.

Leadership is one of the most important influences on teacher engagement. Transformational leadership has drawn attention in the field of education for its ability to foster a positive school culture, inspire instructors, and encourage creativity. This leadership style emphasizes four crucial dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. When school leaders employ these strategies, they foster an environment in which teachers feel supported, empowered, and motivated to make an investment in their profession (Bass & Riggio, 2018; Li & Zhang, 2021). Teachers in such environments are more likely to take the initiative, provide new concepts, and stay committed to professional growth. Transformational leadership not only increases morale, but it additionally strengthens trust between teachers and administrators, laying the foundation for collaborative decision-making and ongoing engagement.

Schools are able to benefit from robust leadership as it can help them navigate complex environments and circumstances while also developing institutional improvement alongside encouraging higher levels of teacher engagement. With the education sector changing, and more demands being made for form, it is crucial to understand the correlation between teacher engagement and leadership style. Strong leadership provides both direction and stability during times of transition or reform. It shapes a school's professional culture, promotes teacher morale, and creates an environment conducive to collaboration and innovation. Recognizing how leadership styles influence engagement can provide useful insights into enhancing teaching quality and overall school success.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the level of teachers' work engagement at Zhangqiu Middle School influenced by impacts of transformational leadership.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### **Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Teachers' Work Engagement**

In educational settings, one kind of leadership style has emerged as being crucial in influencing teacher engagement levels and outcomes of institutions, this is transformational leadership. This kind of leadership style comprises four key elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration which all combine to help support and encourage an educational institution's culture to foster support, recognition and collaboration. Moreover, when these elements are present, teachers feel higher levels of engagement with their profession and contribute to achieving outcomes based on absorption, dedication and vigor (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Several recent studies examined the relationship between transformative leadership and teacher work engagement. Zhang and Lee (2020) illustrate how transformational leaders enhance both professional involvement and psychological well-being by reducing stress and fostering a positive work atmosphere. Similarly, Kim and Lee (2021) indicate that this leadership style helps teachers develop a better sense of professional identity, which leads to increased

motivation and commitment. Bennet and Trautwein (2021) support these findings with a meta-analysis that revealed transformational leadership to be a consistent predictor of teacher engagement in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education settings. This corresponds with findings by Saks (2021), who highlighted that work engagement is maintained when leaders exemplify ethical and motivational conduct in intricate organisational settings.

When transformational leadership is effectively implemented, it can also further support an environment in which open communication occurs, team collaboration and cohesion and a shared sense of purpose and belonging. Leaders who can successfully adapt to these leadership styles do so based on understanding psychological safety which allows several instructors to be able to share ideas and take charge without being subject to criticism, thus creating a work environment that pushes everyone to thrive. According to Chen, Wang and Liu (2022), transformational leadership not only creates trust and a sense of belonging, but allows for long-term and sustainable development in retaining teachers. This is also supplemented by research by Al Harb and Alzahrani (2022) who note that with transformational leadership in place, teachers feel more enthusiastic to work and stay committed to their professions. Further research by Ng and Burke (2019) indicates that intellectual stimulation is a fundamental aspect of this leadership model as it significantly contributes to workplace creativity and enhances intrinsic engagement in learning-centric professions such as teaching.

H1: Transformational leadership influences teachers' work engagement.

### **Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Teacher Motivation and Commitment**

Motivation and dedication are two essential components of a teacher's professional standing, and school leadership policies have a significant impact on both. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been recognized for its capacity to improve teachers' internal motivation by linking one's individual purpose to broader institutional objectives. Teachers who received training in transformational leadership report a stronger connection to their work, greater determination, and a deeper commitment to professional responsibilities (Avolio & Bass, 2020; Dvir & Shamir, 2019). Brown and Ryan (2019) assert that genuine commitment to professional responsibilities is frequently maintained when leaders recognise personal purpose and align it with institutional principles.

Kim and Lee's (2021) research notes that in order for teachers to maintain and develop a strong professional identity, the role of transformational leadership and its impacts need to be outlined clearly. With such leadership in play, instructors feel a higher need to invest into their job duties emotionally which intrinsically influences motivation and commitment levels. This is because such teachers are given the space to grow in an environment that is centered around offering guidance and encouragement, even when faced with navigating challenging situations and environments. In a transformational leadership setting, instructors and various administrators of an educational institution have a shared vision allowing there to be alignment across the board thus further enhancing loyalty and engagement levels.

Sosik and Godshalk (2017) argue that transformative leadership improves teamwork and employee morale. Teachers feel appreciated and encouraged when they communicate openly, with mutual respect, and in a collaborative environment. These favorable conditions increase job satisfaction and lower turnover. Administrators who instill confidence and trust can foster a work environment in which teachers are more likely to remain dedicated and put forth effort in their teaching practice. Wang and Tsui (2021) further state that motivational leadership enables instructors to move beyond individual interests and focus on shared goals, reinforcing long-term commitment to the field. Keller and Buschor (2021) emphasise that leadership solutions incorporating cognitive innovation such as mentorship and professional autonomy enhance commitment by granting teachers control of their development.

Essentially, transformational leadership provides opportunities for enhancements in intrinsic motivation and commitment to one's job as it can help teachers engage with a shared vision, more ethically and more attentive to their jobs. In order for institutions to maintain quality teaching, transformational leadership stands to provide a foundation for high standards and allows for long-term development to be carried out in a stable and sustainable manner, with teachers, administrators and students benefiting.

H2: Transformational leadership influences teacher motivation and commitment.

### **Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Psychological Safety in Educational Settings**

Psychological safety is the general belief among individuals that they can express themselves, take risks, and provide ideas without fear of shame or bad consequences. The presence of psychological safety in classrooms is critical in promoting teacher engagement, creativity, and collaboration. Transformational leadership is well-known for its capacity to foster this kind of environment, particularly by encouraging openness, mutual respect, and emotional support. As per Chen, Wang and Liu (2022), transformational behaviors that are strongly demonstrated and exhibited by school leaders with traits such as active listening, recognition and constructive feedback being seen can extend to helping create an environment in which teachers feel like they can share their opinions without fear of repercussions and feel valued. This refers to trust and teachers are able to rely on administrators to make them feel like they're heard such as when sharing innovative ideas and are also given the right kind of guidance and support when needed. As a result, the study notes that schools that have transformational leaders experience stronger and higher levels of collaboration amongst staff, with each leader sharing responsibility.

Zhang and Lee (2020) additionally address the psychological effects of transformative leadership on teachers. Teachers who are encouraged and supported by their leaders are more likely to experience less stress, have better well-being, and a stronger sense of purpose in their roles. This emotional security promotes long-term engagement by helping teachers feel more stable in their professional identity and more confident in negotiating the obstacles of teaching. Aside from this, Nguni, Slegers and Denessen (2019) also report how in order for there to be enhanced levels of psychological safety present, it is up to leaders to reinforce an environment that allows for inclusive decision-making to be accepted, experimentation is allowed and encouraged and the environment is one with respect where mistakes are not criticized but rather used as learning opportunities. With these kinds of environments, teachers' performances are enhanced while also aiding in contributing to the school culture that becomes more adaptive and resilient over time which is highly important in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Overall, transformational leadership contributes to psychological safety by establishing and maintaining a trusting and respectful environment. This dramatically boosts teacher engagement, professional development, and school improvement.

H3: Transformational leadership influences psychological safety in educational settings.

### **Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Teachers' Professional Commitment**

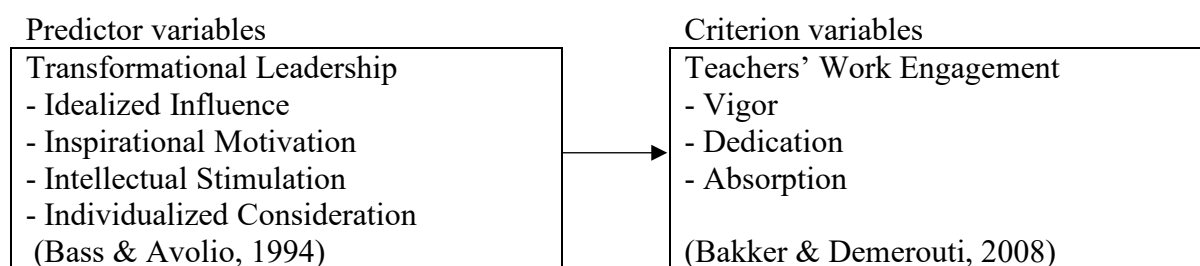
Teachers' professional commitment refers to the extent to which educators are emotionally committed in their work, connected with their school's goals, and motivated to constantly improve themselves for the benefit of students. It is regarded as an important aspect in determining teaching quality and consistency, professional retention, and overall school effectiveness. One of the biggest predictors of this type of devotion is school administrators' leadership style, particularly transformational leadership.

A study by Bennet and Trautwein (2021) noted that transformational leadership significantly enhances a teachers' motivation and commitment to their job duties, with these results being

based on a meta-analysis that evaluated various educational levels. The reason for this is that trust, ethical behavior and encouragement for continuous professional development occur when transformational leadership is present in an educational institution allowing teachers to feel more valued, appreciated and their job has meaning to them.

This is also further supported by Kim and Lee (2021) who emphasize that professional identity is strengthened when transformational leadership is in effect. With administrators and leaders engaging in such leadership practices, teachers working under them feel more connected, are empowered to grow and have the ability to overcome various challenges. It is considered to be a sense of alignment that helps teachers build stronger bonds across their professions. Al Harbi and Alzahrani (2023) also show that teachers who work under transformational leaders had higher levels of loyalty, tenacity, and long-term involvement. Their findings indicate that transformational leadership motivates teachers to take the initiative, participate in school-wide decisions, and actively invest in the development of their students and colleagues. Nurturing professional commitment benefits not only individual teachers, but also the educational institution as a whole. Schools with devoted educators tend to have better instructional consistency, higher student achievement, and a more favorable school culture. H4: Transformational leadership influences teachers' professional commitment.

Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey research design was used to examine the impact of transformational leadership on teacher work engagement at Zhangqiu Middle School. The population included 35,345 teachers and personnel from three middle schools in Longshan, Bucun, and Shengjing Subdistricts. The schools are Longshan Subdistrict Middle School with 11,420 students, Bucun Subdistrict Middle School with 5,627 students, and Shengjing Subdistrict Middle School with 18,298 students. The necessary sample size was estimated using Yamane's formula (1967) with a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error, yielding 396 individuals. To ensure that each subdistrict was represented fairly, proportional stratified sampling was utilized. The sample included 128 people from Longshan, 63 from Bucun, and 205 from Shengjing.

A questionnaire with four parts was used as the data collection tool with each part being as follows. Part 1 entailed collecting data based on demographic aspects such as age, gender, educational background, monthly income and work experience. Part 2 covered four dimensions of transformational leadership which are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Part 3 assessed teachers' work engagement level across three dimensions of vigor, absorption and dedication. The questionnaire's various items were measured using a five-point Likert scale with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement, and scores were interpreted based on 5 rating levels ranging from lowest to highest.

Cronbach's alpha was used to examine instrument reliability and internal consistency. The reliability values exceeded the conventional criterion of 0.70 across all variables, indicating

that the instrument is reliable. Transformational leadership characteristics varied from 0.945 to 0.951, whilst teachers' work engagement dimensions ranged from 0.904 to 0.920. The total dependability coefficient for all items was 0.989.

396 respondents received questionnaires via online and in-person, however to ensure reliability and accuracy, each response was checked for completeness with incomplete responses being replaced. Descriptive statistics which comprised frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation dimensions were used as the data analysis tool. This was supplemented with multiple regression analysis which allowed for the hypothesis to be tested, and an examination to be made to evaluate teachers' work engagement levels influenced by transformational leadership. The following section outlines the study's results.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Teachers' Perception of Transformational Leadership

The data gathered from 396 teachers and staff at Zhangqiu Middle School show a high consensus that transformational leadership practices exist among school leaders. As indicated in Table 1, all four characteristics of transformational leadership had high average ratings, with mean values more than 4.20, indicating that respondents strongly agreed with the leadership techniques demonstrated. The dimension with the greatest mean was individualized consideration ( $\bar{X} = 4.37$ , S.D. = 0.88), followed by idealized influence ( $\bar{X} = 4.35$ , S.D. = 0.89). Both inspirational motivation ( $\bar{X} = 4.33$ , S.D. = 0.91) and intellectual stimulation ( $\bar{X} = 4.30$ , S.D. = 0.92) received excellent ratings.

The results indicate that when school leaders are perceived to be ethical role models, provide support and mentorship and engage based on shared visions, it motivates and encourages teachers to be more engaged in innovation and personal and professional development. Table 1 Show mean, standard Perceptions of Transformational Leadership.

**Table 1** Show mean, standard Perceptions of Transformational Leadership

Perceptions of Transformational Leadership	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	mean
1) Idealized Influence	4.52	0.85	strongly agree
2) Inspirational Motivation	4.55	0.87	strongly agree
3) Intellectual Stimulation	4.55	0.86	strongly agree
4) Individualized Consideration	4.53	0.89	strongly agree
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.54</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>strongly agree</b>

Note: Table 1 presents the average scores and standard deviations across four key dimensions of transformational leadership. Each value reflects teachers' agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate stronger endorsement. The consistently high ratings suggest that school leaders at Zhangqiu Middle School are perceived as effective in inspiring, supporting, and intellectually engaging their staff in alignment with transformational leadership practices.

### Teachers' Work Engagement

Table 2 indicates that instructors at Zhangqiu Middle School report high levels of work engagement on all three dimensions: vigor, devotion, and absorption. The component of devotion had the highest mean score (4.36), closely followed by absorption (4.34) and vigor (4.29). This implies that teachers are engaged in their work, are involved in their teaching activities, and have high mental resilience and energy when doing their duties. The consistently high average scores across all aspects reinforce the notion that work engagement is a well-established trait among the school's teaching team.

Teachers find their work meaningful along with being dedicated which can be ascertained from the high levels seen in the results. Psychological involvement and enjoyment in teaching are

also highly present based on the strong absorption scores seen which indicates that teachers are taking their jobs seriously and are deeply providing care toward carrying out their works. The other dimension vigor was noted to be lower than the rest, but despite facing pressures in their professions, most teachers responded with "strongly agree" indicating that they are still dedicated to providing quality teaching based on being enthusiastic and energized about their work. When viewing these dimensions together, the hypothesis has been validated that teachers' engagement levels are positively influenced when transformational leadership is in effect.

**Table 2** Show mean, standard deviation Perceptions of Transformational Leadership Individualized Consideration

<b>Individualized Consideration</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>mean</b>
1) My school leader recognizes and supports my individual needs.	4.53	0.93	strongly agree
2) My school leader acts as a mentor to help me grow professionally.	4.55	0.88	strongly agree
3) My school leader listens attentively to my concerns and suggestions.	4.50	0.94	strongly agree
4) My school leader provides personal feedback to support my development.	4.53	0.92	strongly agree
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>strongly agree</b>

Note: Table 2 demonstrates teachers' levels of participation across energy, devotion, and absorption. All ratings are in the "strongly agree" category, indicating a high level of psychological investment in teaching tasks. This is consistent with the expected effects of transformational leadership influence.

### **Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Teachers' Work Engagement**

The third component of the study looked into the relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' work engagement at Zhangqiu Middle School. Table 4.4 demonstrates a statistically significant and positive association between the two constructs. The overall Pearson correlation coefficient between transformational leadership and work engagement is 0.877, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This substantial positive link means that the more teachers believe their school leaders are showing transformational leadership skills, the more involved they are in their work. Idealized influence showed the strongest correlation with work engagement at a correlation of  $r = 0.887$ , with inspiration motivation coming in second at  $r = 0.865$  followed by intellectual stimulation at  $r = 0.859$  and individualized consideration was the lowest of the four leadership components standing at  $r = 0.856$ . Critical thinking and personalized support play a vital role in enhancing teacher engagement when aligned with principles of ethical leadership. These findings support the conceptual model, which claims that transformational leadership. Directly contributes to job engagement by influencing teachers' psychological and motivational states. Teachers are more likely to demonstrate greater energy, passion, and immersion in their professional tasks when school leaders inspire trust, stimulate creativity, and support personal growth.

**Table 3** Transformational leadership has a statistically significant positive effect on teachers' work engagement at Zhangqiu Middle School.

<b>Transformational leadership</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Relationship level</b>
Idealized Influence	0.881**	.000	Very high
Inspirational Motivation	0.796**	.000	high
Intellectual Stimulation	0.822**	.000	Very high
Individualized Consideration	0.856**	.000	Very high
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.838**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>Very high</b>

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Table 3 illustrates Pearson correlation coefficients for the aspects of transformational leadership and teacher work engagement. All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), demonstrating that leadership behaviors are substantially linked to teacher involvement in all evaluated dimensions.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate how transformational leadership affects teachers' work engagement at Zhangqiu Middle School. The data reaffirmed the hypothesis that each component of transformational leadership had a favorable impact on teacher engagement levels. Among the four aspects of transformational leadership, inspirational motivation yielded the highest overall score, indicating that instructors favor leaders who communicate clear aims and have shared ideals and values. Idealized influence also received high scores, indicating that teachers prioritize ethical behavior and robust leadership approaches. Intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration were also high but not as high as the other two dimensions, demonstrating that both guidance for innovation and attention to individuals' needs play a critical role in enhancing teacher engagement levels.

The findings also revealed that overall, teachers noted higher levels of engagement indicating that emotional attachment to one's job plays a key role in ensuring obligations are maintained and fulfilled on the premises of purpose and pride. Vigor and absorption also yielded high results, highlighting enthusiasm in one's work. The findings show that when motivation, ethical behavior and individual professional development are prioritized, teachers will engage more with their work, be more committed and determined to achieve professional goals.

The study also found significant correlations across all four dimensions of transformational leadership and their relation with work engagement levels. This adds to the notion that leadership styles that clearly define aims, support personal development and critical thinking contribute to higher levels of teacher performance and morale. It also demonstrates how transformational leadership may serve as a basis for developing emotional engagement and a greater feeling of involvement in the teaching profession.

These findings correspond with prior research by Zhang and Lee, Kim and Lee, and Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen, all of which emphasize the role of leadership in changing teacher behavior and thinking. The findings also support the validity of Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership theory, and Bakker and Demerouti's job demands-resources model. This research has practical importance since it can help school leaders enhance their leadership practices. Emphasizing emotional support, intellectual challenges, and ethical modeling can boost teacher involvement. Teachers who feel encouraged and motivated are more likely to stick around, handle stress, and contribute to the school's long-term success. These findings may also inform professional development programs for school leaders seeking to foster a healthy and high-performing school culture.

The study also has its limitations which is that since it is a quantitative study, personal reflections and first hand accounts were not taken into consideration. Future studies could



incorporate interviews or group discussions to further evaluate how teachers perceive leadership. Furthermore, since the study was conducted in a single school, the findings may not be applicable to all educational settings. Comparative research in other schools or regions would help confirm the reliability of these findings.

Finally, the findings support the notion that transformative leadership has a direct and meaningful impact on teacher engagement. When school leaders demonstrate vision, honesty, and concern for individual growth, teachers become more engaged and committed to their work. These findings demonstrate that good leadership is more than simply strategy or policy; it is also about how leaders connect with others on a daily basis.

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