



Transformative leadership: Exploring the role and responsibilities of teachers and student leaders practicing leadership in higher secondary education in Nepal

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of teachers and student leaders practicing transformative leadership in the field of education in Nepal. The researcher aims to explore the significance and impact of transformative leadership and behavioral transformation, as well as effective methods for transforming institutions and individuals. To gather data, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with fourteen participants as part of a qualitative research approach. Transformative leadership occurs when behavioral change is driven by personal initiative, commitment, and determination. It can help individuals realize their potential by fostering an environment of growth, creativity, innovation, and shared purpose. Leaders inspire others to work together toward common goals, empower individuals to think beyond their limitations and build resilience in the face of challenges. Transformative leaders must embody five core spiritual values in the modern era: magis, cura personalis, companionship, openness, and being people for others. A positive institutional culture and increased teacher motivation contribute to meaningful changes in students' lives.

Keywords: Transformative, Leadership, Education, Teachers, Students

INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership was first introduced by James V. Downton in 1973 and later developed by scholars such as James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, and Bruce J. Avolio (Cherry, 2023). The core idea behind this leadership style is the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate followers to achieve more than they initially

believed possible. Transformational leadership focuses on fostering positive change within individuals, teams, and organizations by encouraging growth and development.⁸

Leadership is crucial in any organization, and among the various leadership theories, transformational leadership stands out for its effectiveness in driving significant improvements, particularly in education. Transformative leaders are essential in educational institutions to drive changes at social, economic, and other societal levels. These leaders are vision-oriented, self-motivated, resilient, and able to collaborate to build trust and mutual respect, prioritizing the well-being of others above personal motivation or self-interest. They actively seek and value new ideas from those they work with as a team.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic, social, moral, and emotional development. Effective leadership is vital for shaping students' attitudes, values, academic achievements, and participation in extracurricular activities. Transformational leadership inspires and motivates both students and staff to work towards a shared vision and common goals.

The effectiveness of leadership is measured by a leader's ability to provide continuous and progressive guidance to staff and students, moving them toward the institution's vision. A transformational leader fosters trust, commitment, dedication, a sense of belonging, and overall satisfaction among their followers.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of leaders in practicing transformative leadership within an educational institution. Additionally, this study seeks to investigate the qualities of transformation and identify effective methods for transforming both individuals and institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been similar research on these topics in Nepal, although related studies have been conducted in other countries. This paper focuses on exploring the role and responsibilities of transformational leadership and practicing leadership in higher secondary education in Nepal. Transformative leadership is an ongoing activity of the individual and institution and it is a process of learning from the past, challenging the present, and creating a new future.

According to Bass (1985), the dimensions of transformational leadership include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Accepted behaviors such as motivation, intellectual challenge, inspiration, and individual consideration are core functions of exceptional leaders who are recognized globally.³

"The positive elements of transformational leadership foster positive psychological states by enhancing intrinsic motivation among employees. Employees with increased intrinsic motivation are more effective and efficient in their work performance." "When a transformational leader demonstrates support for fairness and integrity in matters related to employees, the employees feel less exhausted and more motivated. Intrinsically motivated employees, who are driven by their interest in the work itself, are more likely to work harder, experience less fatigue and emotional exhaustion, and develop a stronger desire to engage with the organization".⁸

"Transformative leadership suggests that everyone can lead and create, and in fact, does lead—even if only by example. Becoming a transformative leader involves recognizing the broader context of global transformation and understanding the way all humans participate in the world. We cannot step outside of this transformation. We are the transformation, and our choices, actions, and ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing contribute to the direction this transformation will take".¹⁰

By focusing on vision, collaboration, innovation, and empowerment, transformational leadership can bring significant progress to educational institutions.¹¹ Transformational leadership embraces change and fosters collaboration (Cherry, 2023). Mishra et al. (2024) emphasize the critical role of transformational leadership in cultivating positive organizational environments. Positive relationships are identified in areas such as creativity, commitment, performance, engagement, and the potential benefits for institutions.⁹ School principals can foster a positive culture by building confidence in both teachers and students.

METHODS

The study was conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, with a total of 14 participants. Among them, 6 were subject leaders from the teaching profession, and 8 were student class representatives, including school leaders. The participants were from different schools across various districts in Nepal. Eight young student leaders, aged between 17 and 20 years, were interviewed. Both student leaders and teachers were interviewed based on ten prepared questions. The student leaders and teachers included male and female participants from higher secondary schools and colleges, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Similarly, 6 experienced teachers, including subject heads, who teach at the higher secondary level, were also interviewed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with both student leaders and teachers, with the participants' consent for recording. Data was gathered through the sharing of experiences by the leaders in educational institutions, as well as the knowledge they had gained from various sources.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher reviewed relevant journal articles and books written by scholars. An online search was conducted to identify the top thirty scholarly articles on the topic.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

This paper discusses transformational leadership in private schools. The core concept of transformational leadership is to motivate followers to lead and inspire others. It challenges followers to think creatively and empowers them to take initiative.

1. Importance of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is essential in any educational context. Creating a platform for growth, innovation, and shared purpose, brings out the best in individuals. This type of leadership fosters creativity, encourages individuals to think beyond their limitations, and builds resilience in the face of challenges. It is not just about achieving goals; it's about inspiring others to believe in their potential and work collaboratively toward a vision that benefits everyone.

Education plays a critical role in shaping not only academic achievements but also values, confidence, and critical thinking skills that prepare students to thrive in a constantly changing world. Transformational leadership ensures that progress is meaningful and sustainable, leaving a lasting impact on communities and future generations. It enables the entire team to break both personal and collective limits.

Transformational leadership is crucial because it fosters growth and ensures that everyone feels involved and valued. It creates an environment where each person's voice matters, encouraging collaboration and innovation. Transformational leadership strengthens a group by bringing out the best in people and helping them work together toward a common goal. One participant shared, "As a leader, I've come to appreciate its importance even more, realizing that true progress happens when everyone feels included and inspired to contribute." In today's world, students not only learn from teachers but also look to them as role models. This kind of leadership fosters the growth of an organization.

2. Role of a Transformative Leader

As a transformative leader, the role involves being an ambassador for innovation, challenging the status quo, introducing new ideas, and empowering others to achieve a shared vision. A transformative leader leads by example, creating a bridge to connect ideas, people, and resources to drive meaningful initiatives. The goal is to ensure that the collective efforts of the team lead to a lasting and transformative impact on the community. The leader's role is to organize and support each team member, ensuring smooth communication, setting deadlines, making important decisions, brainstorming ideas, and filling in gaps by taking on various tasks to ensure the team functions effectively.

The primary role of a transformative leader is to foster an environment where everyone feels included, valued, and empowered. True leadership goes beyond directing—it involves bringing people together, recognizing their potential, and ensuring that each voice contributes to the collective success.

Transformative leaders ensure that every team member's voice is heard, which fosters innovative ideas and strengthens the team dynamic. This collaborative approach helps create a collective vision for the institution that reflects everyone's contributions. The leader encourages collaboration, helping team members realize their potential. By fostering open communication and teamwork, the leader aims to bring out the best in everyone, guiding the group toward collective success and growth.

A leader's role also involves developing strong communication skills, sound decision-making abilities, and the capacity to make the right decisions when needed. Transformational leadership is team-focused, prioritizing the growth of the team over individual interests. Increased motivation among teachers plays a crucial role in the lives of students, and a positive school culture has a lasting impact on students' development.

The leader's role is to empower others by creating opportunities, offering guidance, and celebrating their unique contributions. It is essential to foster an environment where everyone thrives, challenges are embraced, and growth is seen as a shared journey. Above all, a transformative leader must lead by example, demonstrating that true leadership is about lifting others, embracing change, and leaving a legacy of progress and possibility.

3. Transformation through Education

Transformation through education can be achieved by creating an environment where students feel free to express their creativity, personalize their learning experiences, and apply the knowledge they gain to real-world scenarios. For example, in the classroom, incorporating project-based learning in algebra allows students to understand how to apply algebraic expressions to solve real-world problems. Personalized learning approaches, which cater to each learner's preferred style of learning, are another effective way to bring transformation through education.

Additionally, promoting values such as empathy and collaboration through group activities helps prepare students to become socially responsible leaders. By blending these aspects, education can shape students into adaptable and empowered individuals who are ready to make a positive impact on the world.

Transformation through education also involves fostering critical thinking and creativity, enabling individuals to address real-world challenges in innovative ways. By promoting inclusivity, equity, and access to quality education, we empower diverse communities to break the cycles of poverty and discrimination. It is crucial to develop a mindset focused on collaboration and teach essential social skills, dedication, and commitment—instilling a sense of unity with the mentality of "all for one and one for all."

4. Institutional Transformation and Individual Change

A transformative institution embraces a clear vision for growth, development, and inclusivity. It is an institution that continually evolves, listening to the needs and demands of its members. For example, a school becomes

transformative when it integrates modern teaching methods and adapts to emerging trends, while still upholding the tradition of lifelong learning.

A transformative individual is someone who thrives in difficult situations, embraces challenges, and leads by example through their actions. Many transformative individuals are driven by curiosity and a strong sense of purpose. For instance, a transformative teacher goes beyond the textbook to adapt to students' needs. Such individuals create a ripple effect, motivating those around them to strive for excellence and positive change.

An institution can be transformative by nurturing a culture of growth and development. This culture encourages individuals to embrace challenges, develop their potential, and strive for excellence. It fosters innovation, inclusivity, and continuous learning, enabling everyone to contribute meaningfully to both personal and collective progress.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to transformative leadership. It depends on the team members, the type of work, and the existing culture before the leader's appointment. Leaders should identify the weak points and address them specifically. For example, a team may lack motivation due to a lack of vision. By providing a clear vision, leaders can address underlying issues and fully embrace transformative leadership.

5. Qualities of Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership is built on a combination of vision, commitment, teamwork, motivation, innovation, and communication. While each element is important, communication and teamwork are particularly fundamental in a classroom setting, especially in the role of a school leader. One of the research participants shared that five spiritual qualities must be developed in every individual to become a transformative leader. These qualities are openness, companionship, magis, personal care (cura personalis), and being a person for others.

Vision: Vision is a cornerstone of transformative leadership because it provides direction, inspires action, and fosters commitment. A clear and compelling vision not only offers direction but also gives purpose. It tells everyone where they are heading and creates a sense of shared purpose, aligning individuals toward common objectives. Vision helps guide the team toward a unified goal.

Commitment: Leaders must be committed to their vision in order to see growth. This commitment helps maintain focus through challenges and inspires others to remain dedicated. It fosters sustained progress, builds trust, provides inspiration to others, and encourages continuous self-development. Leaders who embrace transformational leadership possess the qualities needed to stay focused and dedicated to the long-term vision and mission, even when facing setbacks or obstacles. Commitment means that everyone gives 100% for the sake of the team.

Working in a team exposes you to diverse ideas and perspectives. It helps you understand each other's differences in thought, allowing for more inclusive and effective planning. Teamwork fosters collaboration, innovation, and collective growth, creating a sense of unity and ownership. Becoming a leader's best ally helps keep the team strong.

Motivation boosts confidence, empowers individuals, and drives them to exceed expectations. It fosters personal and collective growth and leads to the achievement of organizational goals. **Innovation** allows leaders to seek new ways to solve problems, improve situations, and adapt to ever-changing circumstances. It nurtures creative thinking and problem-solving skills. **Effective communication** ensures that everyone clearly understands the vision, goals, and expectations, fostering transparency, trust, and alignment within the team. Transformational leaders use effective communication to articulate their vision, expectations, and goals while also listening to feedback and ideas from others.

Innovative thinking is crucial for transformational leadership. **Empowerment** is another key quality. It is important for leaders to maintain integrity and emotional intelligence. A transformative leader must also possess tremendous courage. Other essential qualities include visionary thinking, strong communication skills, adaptability, and empowerment. **Strong communication skills** involve clearly conveying ideas and actively listening, particularly when representing a group. Integrity and authenticity are crucial: leaders must be honest and consistent in their actions and decisions, building trust, respect, and credibility. Additionally, **resilience** is key; leaders should remain focused and positive, even in challenging situations. As a transformative leader, the goal is to keep the team steady and motivated through adversity, maintaining momentum and fostering a positive environment during difficult times.

Leaders must lead with purpose and authenticity, setting a clear vision that excites and unites everyone around a common goal. A transformational leader ignites a spark in others, inspiring them to dream bigger, think creatively, and believe in their potential.

As a leader, it is crucial to have the utmost trust in team members. A leader should give them space for creative freedom and trust them in the process. Leaders must also learn to dream big, never thinking anything is impossible. They must be aware of the standards they are held to and strive for growth alongside their team members. It is important to be open, possess good listening skills, accept criticism, and recognize that training—not just academic certificates—is essential for personal growth.

Decisiveness: One research participant shared, “As an executive member, I have learned to make informed decisions confidently, even in uncertain situations, and take responsibility for the outcomes. This is a great asset that any transformative leader must have to drive the team to a higher potential.”

Adaptability: Transformational leaders are flexible and can adjust to new challenges and environments. They make it look easy to navigate change effectively.

Empathetic Listening: Transformational leaders understand and care about the needs and concerns of others, building stronger relationships and trust within the team.

Self-Confidence: All leaders must learn to believe in themselves before putting faith in others. They must have confidence in their own capabilities and skills.

6. Practices of Transformational Leadership

Building bonds and trust among team members is essential. Feeling trusted helps develop a strong sense of belonging at work, enabling individuals to perform their jobs effectively. Building strong relationships is another key practice of transformational leadership. These leaders promote open communication and transparency while also practicing courtesy. Transformational leaders empower others to grow personally and professionally. They provide guidance, constructive feedback, and recognition, ensuring that team members feel encouraged and valued.

Enhancing Continuous Growth – Transformational leaders believe that there is always room for improvement. They consistently seek creative ways to expand both their own and their team's knowledge and skills.

Leading by Example – In transformational leadership, leaders set the standard for ethical conduct, dedication, and passion. They model behaviors that others look up to and strive to emulate.

Learning to Admit Mistakes – Transformational leaders are open to receiving criticism, feedback, and comments about themselves. They are willing to accept their mistakes when made and find solutions immediately.

Another important practice of transformational leadership is **active listening**, which involves mindful and focused participation in the communication process. Active listening goes beyond simply hearing someone—it's about understanding the meaning and purpose behind the communication. Receiving feedback is essential for professional development and effectiveness as a transformational leader. Leaders should receive feedback with an open mind, actively listening to the feedback giver in a respectful manner.

A leader's decisions and behavior should not negatively affect the team. Good behavior and wise decisions from the leader consistently motivate and inspire the team members to perform at their best.

7. Behavioral Transformation

Behavioral transformation is the process of changing attitudes, habits, and actions to align with new goals and values. It involves a shift in mindset, allowing new solutions and ideas to emerge. For example, a teacher might

transition from a lecture-based approach to a student-centered one, encouraging participation and collaboration. Behavioral transformation often begins with self-awareness, where individuals recognize the need for change and commit to it. It's about embracing growth, learning new skills, and developing habits that support positive change, both personally and within a team. Behavioral transformation refers to significant and lasting changes in an individual's actions, habits, or attitudes, often driven by a shift in mindset or values.

One student leader participant shared, “My role as a transformational leader involves inspiring and motivating my peers by setting a clear vision and leading with integrity. To guide the class toward success, I need to understand my schoolmates' strengths and weaknesses, allowing me to provide tailored support. For example, during our track and field events, I focused on each team member's strengths—assigning sprinters to short-distance races and endurance runners to longer events—which helped us perform better collectively.”

By fostering open communication and promoting teamwork, a leader aims to create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered, ensuring both academic and personal growth. A leader must create a lasting impact on others' lives, recognizing their unique qualities. Through good behavior, a willingness to help others, and a commitment to self-transformation, a leader can inspire positive change in those they lead.

8. Suggestions for Transformational Leadership at a Higher Level

Transformational leadership at the highest level should serve as a beacon of vision, innovation, and empowerment. Leaders at this level must not only dream big but also inspire others to recognize their own potential and strive for greatness. They should create an environment where creativity thrives, risks are embraced, and every voice is heard. By leading with integrity and authenticity, they set a standard that fosters trust and loyalty. These leaders must act as mentors, empowering individuals to grow and contribute meaningfully while championing collaboration and inclusivity. Above all, transformational leadership at the top level is about creating a legacy of impact—building teams and systems that don't just adapt to change but drive it, leaving a lasting imprint on the organization and beyond.

At the top level, transformational leadership should focus on setting a clear vision and fostering a culture of innovation, accountability, and collaboration. By prioritizing empowerment, ethical practices, and open communication, leaders can inspire sustained growth and align the team with strategic goals. Good behavior inspires team members, while pride and inflated ego have no place in transformational leadership. Openness, readiness, and a willingness to learn create opportunities for growth and lead to effective leadership.

9. Different Ways to Implement Transformation in Academic and School Activities

Here are some key ways to bring about transformation:

Personalization of Learning: Tailor teaching methods to the unique strengths, interests, and challenges of each learner, ensuring that every student feels seen and supported.

Integration of Technology: Incorporate digital tools such as videos, online collaboration, and interactive virtual platforms to engage more learners and enhance their educational experience.

Going Beyond the Syllabus: Emphasize social, emotional, and ethical growth in addition to academics. Activities like mindfulness sessions, leadership programs, and arts integration are vital to students' overall development.

Promote Experiential Learning: Provide learners with real-world experiences through hands-on projects, fieldwork, and practical applications of their learning to make education more engaging and relevant.

Encourage Critical Thinking and Creativity: Fostering creativity and critical thinking is essential in today's educational landscape. Encourage students to challenge conventional ideas and think outside the box.

Adapt Interdisciplinary Approaches: Develop a holistic approach to learning by combining concepts and insights from different subjects to offer students a broader perspective and deeper understanding.

Promote Environmental Awareness and Social Responsibility: Encourage eco-consciousness, equality, and diversity, while treating everyone with respect. Emphasize the importance of giving back to the community and embracing social responsibility.

Leaders should make wise decisions that benefit the team and the community, ensuring that their actions do not negatively impact others. Good behavior, encouragement, and support can inspire and motivate team members. Motivation doesn't always have to come from material rewards—small words of encouragement can have a transformative effect on individuals.

10. The Inspirational and Innovative Way of Transforming as a Leader

An inspirational and innovative way of transforming as a leader is by leading with curiosity and openness. It involves inviting others to explore new ideas, embrace change, and trust in their ability to contribute to something bigger. Instead of having all the answers, ask the right questions, listen deeply, and create space for others to share their unique perspectives. By celebrating progress over perfection and turning challenges into creative solutions, you can foster an environment where transformation feels like a natural and exciting adventure for everyone involved.

The most inspirational and innovative way to transform as a leader is to maintain a growth mindset. This mindset helps develop skills because, with the right mindset, anything is possible. Setting a clear vision and staying true to your values are key elements of this approach. It involves listening effectively to others, reflecting on feedback, and encouraging creativity. True transformation happens when the entire team grows together. By growing alongside the team, you can inspire positive change and achieve collective success. Good behavior inspires others, so always strive to motivate your team members.

An inspirational and innovative leader leads with a clear, compelling vision that motivates others to embrace change and reach their full potential. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, encouraging creative problem-solving, and empowering individuals to take risks, leaders can drive innovation. To transform, we must first change ourselves and accept who we are before offering suggestions. We should strive to be careful and unique in our approaches.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Research should continue to focus on effective leadership practices, especially the importance and qualities of transformational leadership in different contexts with similar objectives. It is essential to focus future research on transformative leadership in both private and public schools in rural and urban areas in Nepal.

CONCLUSION

Having transformational leaders in the modern era is crucial. The findings of the study show that private schools invest considerable effort into improving transformational leadership. The study reveals that transformational leaders require a clear vision and mission. Additionally, they need to empower individuals to lead the institution with commitment, motivation, effective communication, and innovative, visionary thinking. Transformational leaders are responsible for providing direction and empowering staff, students, and followers, motivating and inspiring them. A positive school culture can significantly impact student outcomes and overall school success. Behavioral transformation at the individual level is essential for institutional transformation. To achieve this, certain qualities and practices are necessary both individually and institutionally. The role of transformational school leadership should continue to evolve, with a focus on instructional and pedagogical strategies, while providing greater autonomy to address contextual differences.

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