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Review Article

Transformational Leadership Practices and Their Impact on Academic Performance of Students with Diverse Disabilities in TVET Institutions: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions are pivotal in equipping students, including those with disabilities, with skills for a dynamic global economy. However, effective leadership is crucial for fostering inclusivity and enhancing academic outcomes. This systematic review examines the impact of transformational leadership practices on the academic performance of students with diverse disabilities in TVET settings. Using a systematic approach, electronic searches were conducted on Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, identifying 28 studies, of which 7 met the inclusion criteria (2010-2024, English-language, empirical studies in TVET contexts). Data were synthesized qualitatively, focusing on the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Findings reveal that transformational leadership significantly enhances academic performance by promoting inclusive environments, motivating teachers, and addressing diverse needs, though challenges like resource constraints and inadequate leadership training persist. The review recommends targeted leadership development, increased resource allocation, and stakeholder collaboration to strengthen inclusive education in TVET institutions. This study highlights the transformative potential of leadership in improving educational equity for students with disabilities, offering insights for policymakers and educators while identifying gaps for future research in diverse cultural and resource contexts.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership, Academic Performance, Students with Disabilities, TVET Institutions

1. Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions can play a very important role in equipping people, including those with disabilities, with the skills needed to be productive in a dynamic global economy [1-3]. However, effective leadership that enables inclusiveness and innovation is one of the biggest determinants of success in TVET pro-grams [4]. In line with this, transformational leadership, a style of leadership that focuses on inspiring followers and driving positive change has come out as a significant factor in ensuring quality education and training [5, 6].

The four dimensions of transformational leadership include: idealized influence, where leaders become role models and

gain the trust and respect of others; inspirational motivation, involving the communication of an appealing vision and the establishment of high expectations; intellectual stimulation, where leaders promote critical thinking and innovation; and individualized consideration, where personalized support and mentoring are emphasized [7-9]. This literature review will explore these dimensions in an attempt to understand the specific leadership practices that create a sense of inclusivity and ultimately improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities in TVET institutions [10, 5].

Despite the increasing awareness of the potential of transformational leadership in improving educational outcomes, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge regarding academic performance of students with disabilities in TVET institutions. Most of the existing research is grounded in traditional educational settings instead of TVET contexts, which pose unique challenges and opportunities [11, 12, 5].

Despite some acknowledging the importance of inclusive leadership for students with disabilities, few have directly examined transformational leadership's effect on the academic performance of students with disabilities [13, 5, 14]. This has limited the extent to which strategies needed to support this diverse population can be understood. Moreover, more clarity is needed on which transformational leadership practices are important to promote academic success among students with disabilities [10, 15].

In addition, existing research is restricted by the dominance of quantitative methods, which do not allow for an in-depth understanding of how transformational leadership is enacted and experienced. Mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative data on student outcomes with qualitative insights, are needed to address these complexities.

It has been a major obstacle in the development of strategies for creating greater inclusion and improved academic outcomes among students with disabilities due to a lack of research into transformational leadership practices in TVET institutions [4, 5, 14].

Through this review, an attempt will be made to highlight the contribution of transformational leadership practices on academic performance among this vulnerable population and hence serve valuable insights into effective leadership strategies that are inclusive and innovative within the TVET institutions [4, 1].

The central research question for this review is:

What are the effects of transformational leadership practices on the academic performance of students with disabilities in TVET institutions?

The aim of this review is to:

1) Assess the impact of transformational leadership on academic performance, particularly among students with disabilities in TVET institutions.
2) Identify critical transformational leadership practices that have positive impacts on academic outcomes.
3) Identify gaps in the literature and suggest recommendations for future research.

2. Methods

2.1. Developing the Review Protocol

The methodology of this systematic review will ensure a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of evidence. Right after the formulation of the research question, which is to identify and synthesize transformational leadership practices and their impact on academic performance among students with disabilities, a review protocol has developed. A review protocol is the documentation of the methods that will be used to undertake the review. This includes the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies, databases, and sources to be searched for primary studies, the search strategy, selection strategy, data extraction, and synthesis of the extracted data.

2.2. Eligibility Criteria (for Including and Excluding Studies)

This section identifies those studies that are relevant and appropriate for inclusion in the review as determined by the reviewer. Inclusion criteria were based on the research question. Eligibility criteria identified include setting of study, study design and methodology, period of study, type of publication, and languages of publication, which were clearly stated.

Included is a study that has to have used either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method designs literature review, and be published within the last 14 years, 2010-2024. Only English language publications were considered for inclusion to ensure consistency in the interpretation and analysis of such works. The scope of the review was higher education, TVET institutions, globally, to capture a diversity of contexts.

The selection criteria were works studying the Transformational leadership and its impact on the performance of students, conducted in educational institutions and presenting empirical evidence based on recognizable methodologies. Excluded from this review are works that address only individual leadership without the aspect of transformational leadership behaviours, are conducted outside the framework of educational education, or are non-empirical materials such as opinion pieces or theoretical framework pieces devoid of data. Such strict selection ensures the relevance and reliability of the findings.

2.3. Sources and Searching Strategies

An advanced or comprehensive source has been used in order to answer the review question. The databases used in the study for the search of articles relevant to the review included Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used to get published and unpublished documents. The search terms used were the following subject headings: "transformational leadership and academic performance," "transformational leadership and inclusive education," "transformational leadership

and special needs education," "effective leadership and student outcome," and "transformational leadership and TVET institutions." The inclusion criteria covered studies published and unpublished studies between the period of 2010 and 2024 that focused on transformational leadership practices and their effect on students with disabilities' academic performance in TVET institutions or educational institutions. To avoid duplication, the prevalence of systematic reviews on the topic of interest was checked. Primary search was conducted in advance as PubMed data database. Boolean operators like "OR" and "AND" were used for searching either separately or in combination of the mentioned terms.

2.4. Study Selection Procedure

The procedure followed to search the relevant primary studies has been carried out by reviewing the title, the abstract, and conclusion of the reviewed studies. The selection of the studies made depending on whether they answer the developed research question and might match with inclusion criteria. From identifying 28, 7 studies have decided to be included and reviewed thoroughly. The selection process of included studies have been decided after trial searchers have taken place using various combinations of search terms, which derived from the review objective and made after full texts have been retrieved.

2.5. Data Extraction

Data extraction: The reviewer extracted all relevant data independently using a format-developed excel spreadsheet. Qualitative data from the selected studies were extracted through a process of reading more than twice using a predetermined data collection template.

Data and information to be extracted and collected from the included primary studies were reviewed. The data extraction format was developed from an Excel spreadsheet and will include authors, methods used, and major findings of the reviewed studies.

2.6. Data Synthesis

Data synthesis involves the gathering and condensing of results from the original studies included. This review has adopted the qualitative descriptive (non-quantitative) technique of data synthesis to synthesize findings obtained from the primary studies that have been included.

3. Results

A systematic review was done in order to synthesize the evidence from the selected studies examining transformational leadership practices that may affect students' academic performance with disabilities in TVET institutions. In fact, there are seven relevant studies related to the research question that help illustrate dimensions of transformational leadership and their particular effects in an inclusive education setting. Synthesis of evidence from the seven selected studies showed that transformational leadership practices play a huge role in ensuring that inclusivity is fostered, leading to improved academic performance for students with disabilities in TVET institutions. Grouped findings according to thematic dimensions of transformational leadership are as follows:

3.1. Transformational Leadership Practices

Transformational leadership is widely regarded as a key factor in creating an enabling environment for academic enhancement and skills development. Transformational leaders motivate their employees and students by way of inspirational activities, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, thus creating an enabling environment for academic enhancement and skills development [16]. The function of such leaders in shaping environments that support student achievement and faculty performance has been stressed [16]. Indeed, a careful review of the studies established the crucial function of transformational leadership in changing TVET institutions towards improvement. Emerging from these studies, though, was the recurrent finding that transformational leadership exerts positive effects on the academic performances of students, including those with disability status through the following four dimensions:

Idealized Influence

Leaders who act as ethical role models and trust builders provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment. As explained by [17], these leaders can inspire teachers to embrace inclusive practices that would improve the learning experience for all students, particularly those with disabilities. Building from this finding, visible leader commitment to inclusivity is identified as key to raising the levels of teacher and student engagement [18]. Idealized influence helps in building trust and respect between the leaders and followers, hence inspiring them to work towards a common goal [19].

Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders have high expectations and articulate compelling visions, which have been strongly associated with better academic outcomes. As noted by [20], leaders who espouse inclusivity inspire innovative teaching practices in addressing diverse learner needs. Transformational leaders articulate high expectations and provide meaning to their work while fostering a shared vision [19]. They encourage teamwork, enthusiasm, and optimism in encouraging followers to strive for excellence. Evidence shows that motivational leadership supports high aspirations and leads to developing a culture of success for both students and teachers [21].

Intellectual Stimulation

Another feature of effective transformational leadership is encouraging critical thinking and innovation. Intellectual stimulation allows the adoption of appropriate teaching ap-

proaches for the varying abilities of students [19, 22]. This becomes even more relevant in TVET schools, which focus more on practical skills. Leaders encourage critical thinking among followers to challenge assumptions and develop innovative solutions [19].

Individualized Consideration

Personalized support and mentorship always accompany positive academic outcomes. Leaders who address individual needs empower students to overcome barriers [19, 23]. Good teacher-student relationships contribute to better academic success [18].

All the four components of transformational leadership contribute significantly to the quality of vocational training colleges [19]. Therefore, transformational leadership practices characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support become of paramount importance to improve the academic performance among students with disabilities in TVET institutions. The inclusivity practices thus inspire innovation and a culture of success, ensuring effective and quality education for all learners.

3.2. Impact on Academic Performance

One of the consistent findings from a number of studies is that transformational leadership has a very strong positive effect on students' academic performance, particularly for students with disabilities within TVET institutions. Transformational leaders "build high expectations, promote teamwork, and motivate personnel, which then leads to improved teaching results and student achievements," as mentioned by [21]. Similarly, transformational leadership creates a culture of motivation, thinking, and innovation all attributes that have a positive effect on academic achievement [17].

Furthermore, transformational leadership has been noted to respond to critical issues in education, such as students' dropout and underachievement. TVET institutions under the leadership of transformational leaders are better prepared to deal with such challenges because this kind of leadership promotes inclusive learning environments and increases student engagement, self-efficacy, and achievement [20]. This view is supported by the insistence on the instructional and transformational leadership on the part of principals in creating conducive environments that allow for inclusive education and culminate in successful training [18].

Equally important in the transformational leadership framework is teacher motivation and professional development. For example, training in pedagogical techniques about diverse classrooms is sure to motivate teachers toward the path of inclusive practice [21]. Targeted professional development within a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework best achieves desired results by matching leadership strategies to the unique needs of individual teachers [18].

In line with this, there is the increased call for good leadership to address the academic underperformance issue in institutions, attributing high failure cases in TVET institutions to unsatisfactory practices of leadership and arguing that institutions require transformational leadership for an improved teaching-learning outcome [22]. This sentiment has been echoed in tandem, to whom transformational leadership is crucial not just in inspiring and facilitating teacher effectiveness but also in enabling conducive environments for desired student success [21, 20].

In the final analysis, all of the studies point out that transformational leadership is important in enhancing academic performance in the TVET institutions through inclusive learning environments, creating motivation among educators, and system-related challenges. An overall culture of collaboration, innovation, and high expectations is built, which finally brings about increased student engagement and better achievement.

3.3. Challenges

TVET institutions face unique challenges, including resource constraints and the relevance of industrial skills, to mention but a few. Among the constraints identified on the practice of transformational leadership in TVET institutions include the following: though the study has presented moderate practices in all the four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—it also noted serious challenges in effective leadership and generally in the performance of the TVET institutions [22].

The limitation to the full adoption of practices related to transformational leadership is inadequate investment in the area of leadership development programs [18]. Moreover, the greatest barriers faced by transformative leadership are from the inadequate training of leaders and institutional support [22]. A focus on perceptions of leadership has its limits [19]. Further research is called for so that the views of teachers and other stakeholders may be used to build up a more holistic understanding of the complexities involved in the implementation of inclusive education. It is in this line that inetitutions are sought to provide appropriate resources and support for effective inclusion [21]. Professional development and industry partnership are suggested as the ways through which these barriers could be surmounted [22]. Leaders should lead through these challenges while promoting inclusiveness [17].

4. Discussion

The analysis puts emphasis on the role of transformational leadership in creating an atmosphere conducive for academic improvement and skills development while promoting inclusivity in TVET institutions. Transformational leaders, by nature, inspire their staff and students through motivational activities, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to move toward an atmosphere that is conducive for academic improvement and skills development [18, 22]. This

agrees with the assertion that transformational leaders play a role in creating visionary environments for the improvement in students' results and faculty performance [17]. The research findings of the reviewed studies will contribute to the burgeoning body of literature indicating the need for transformational leadership to improve the quality of education within institutions of TVET. The biggest barriers to transformation are failure of investment in leadership development and a persistent hierarchical model of leadership [18]. We do stand in need of those professional development programs which will offer transformational leadership tools.

The heads that carry these four key dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration create an innovative culture toward commitment to diversity [9, 1]. The findings have shown that transformational leadership can be of critical importance in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities in TVET institutions. Practices that promote inclusivity, motivation, and individual support are recommended for educational leaders [22, 18].

The analysis reveals that the effectiveness of transformational leadership varies across cultural and resource contexts, necessitating tailored strategies. In Ethiopia, for instance, where TVET institutions face significant resource shortages and cultural stigma toward disability, leaders must leverage inspirational motivation to shift attitudes [24]. A case from Central Ethiopia illustrates this: a TVET college principal used community engagement forums to challenge stereotypes, aligning with idealized influence to build trust and foster inclusivity, resulting in a 15% increase in enrollment of students with disabilities over two years [24]. Conversely, in resource-rich contexts like Botswana, intellectual stimulation—through teacher training in adaptive technologies improved practical skills acquisition for students with visual impairments, highlighting the role of resource availability in enabling innovation.

These examples underscore the need for context-specific leadership approaches. In resource-scarce settings, leaders must prioritize stakeholder partnerships to secure funding for adaptive materials [21]. In culturally conservative environments, inspirational motivation can drive attitudinal change, while individualized consideration ensures personalized support, as seen in a study of Pakistani TVET educators who implemented mentorship programs for students with mobility impairments, boosting completion rates by 20% [23]. However, hierarchical leadership models, prevalent in many developing countries, often stifle such innovation [18]. Professional development programs tailored to transformational leadership principles are thus essential to equip leaders with the tools to navigate these challenges, promoting a collaborative culture that aligns with global inclusivity standards.

The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on transformational leadership in TVET, emphasizing its potential to improve educational quality for students with disabilities. However, they also highlight the need for further research into how cultural backgrounds and resource conditions shape leadership effectiveness, offering practical guidance for educators and policymakers in diverse TVET settings.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The six reviewed studies are consistent in showing the transformational leadership that is possible in improving academic performance in TVET institutions. Transformational leadership embodies innovation, creates an open environment, and addresses systemic challenges by building a culture of collaboration, high expectations, and adaptability. This eventually leads to improved teacher effectiveness, increased student engagement, and equitable educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Transformational leadership makes a great difference in the academic success of students with disabilities by creating an inclusive, supportive educational environment. Ethical leadership, a compelling vision for inclusivity, innovation, and personalized support are at the heart of responding to the diversity of students' needs within TVET institutions.

This review brings to the fore questions around leadership adaptability within resource constraints and cultural influences, which require institutional support and professional development programs. These findings provide a roadmap for developing inclusive education through transformational leadership in TVET settings.

However, for the full realization of transformational leadership, there are a few challenges that need to be addressed. Such include: poor training of leaders, hierarchical structures, and lack of resources. The existing barriers should thus be mediated by the following recommendations:

Leadership Development: Impart specific training on principles and strategies concerning transformational leadership for inclusive TVET systems.

Resource Allocation: Strengthen resource allocation to enhance inclusive practices, including adaptive teaching materials, improvement of infrastructure, and professional development for educators.

Stakeholder Engagement: Strengthen partnerships with industry stakeholders to overcome possible constraints on resources and ensure that TVET programs remain relevant to diverse learners.

Policy Implementation: Develop and champion policies that will provide an enabling environment for transformational leadership practices.

Future Research: Longitudinal studies should be conducted to appraise the long-term effect of transformational leadership on student outcomes, and explore the interaction of leadership styles and institutional contexts.

Abbreviations

TVET   Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Author Contributions

Tesmamu Mirre Jobir is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this manuscript.

Appendix

Table 1. Data Extraction.

Reviewed literature	Method used	Result of the study		
		Major findings	**Challenges**	**Implication**
Ahuja and Yada (2023)	Quantitative Survey	Transformational leadership significantly impacts teacher motivation for inclusive education. Training towards inclusion mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher motivation.	Negative emotions in inclusive environments and a lack of competence due to, and insufficient training.	Practice transformational leadership, Provide training programs, Provide necessary resources and support.
Bletzinger (2023)	Quantitative Survey	Positive perception of perceptions of their leadership and the academic growth of students with disabilities and transformational leadership are crucial in creating a supportive environment for inclusive education.	Complex perceptions of various stakeholders; insufficient resource and inadequate training	Provide adequate resources and support for successful inclusion, professional development and training
Keyredin & Abeya, 2017	Quantitative Survey	Low practice of transformational leadership in TVET institutions. A positive link between leadership style and academic outcomes.	Insufficient leadership investment. Lack of leadership support and professional resources.	Implement leadership development programs. Invest in ongoing support for leaders. Promote a more collaborative leadership model.
Atieno Opiyo's (2019)	Literature review	Transformative leaders are needed to successfully transform schools into inclusive learning environments. There is a close connection between inclusive education and transformative leadership	Lack of clarity on the specific leadership competencies. Practical barriers to implementation, such as high student-teacher ratios, inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and persistent social and economic inequalities. Ambiguous service delivery models and poorly defined roles for stakeholders.	Develop a comprehensive action plan, Establish clear leadership standards, Develop inclusive education indicators, Establish model inclusive schools, and Prioritize continuous professional development
Pirzada et al. (2024)	Qualitative	Leadership practices can influence inclusive education and, by extension, impact student outcomes. Effective leadership practices are essential for academic improvement.	Lack of resources Insufficient training Potential negative impact on the academic performance of other students	Transformative leaders can advocate for increased resources, training, and support systems, Professional Development, and Collaboration and Communication
Dagmawit Zewdu W/Tsadik (2024)	Mixed methods	Moderate practices across all four dimensions of transformational leadership (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration), it also identifies significant challenges hindering	Lack of competency in transformational leadership, shortages of supplies, poor service, and incomplete facilities, disruption by routines, misuse and abuse of power, lack of skill to inspire others, lack of respect for others,	Provide leadership training, foster positive relationship, and address resource constraints. Increased government funding to ensure high-quality training.

Reviewed literature	Method used	Result of the study		
		Major findings	**Challenges**	**Implication**
		effective leadership and the overall performance of these institutions	lack of communication skills.	
Mugo & Kiboss (2023)	Mixed methods	Transformative leadership has a strong positive influence on the quality of vocational training. Students receive services as promised, and training staff are perceived as qualified and competent	Inadequate structures, funding delays, and irrelevant training programs. Low enrollment due to negative perceptions of polytechnics stemming from poor facilities and training quality.	Public awareness campaigns to promote polytechnics and address negative perceptions. Promotion and support of transformative leadership practices within polytechnics.

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