

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' job satisfaction is a key factor influencing education quality and school effectiveness. Transformational leadership, widely recognized for its positive impact, has been shown to effectively enhance such satisfaction. While existing studies confirm a correlation between transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction, systematic investigation into the underlying mediating mechanisms remains limited. From an educational management perspective, this study integrates theoretical insights to conduct an in-depth analysis of the specific pathways through which transformational leadership affects teacher job satisfaction. The findings indicate that this leadership style enhances job satisfaction primarily by fulfilling teachers' intrinsic psychological needs—such as for meaning, autonomy, competence, and respect—through four key mechanisms: spiritual motivation and vision integration; intellectual stimulation and professional autonomy; individualized consideration and psychological support; and high expectations with role modeling. This research provides a theoretical foundation and strategic insights to support educational administrators in consciously applying transformational leadership practices.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Teacher job satisfaction, Influence mechanism, Educational management, Psychological needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the educational organizational ecosystem, teachers are the core human capital, and their job satisfaction directly relates to teaching engagement, rates of professional burnout, staff stability, and even student academic achievement.[1] Therefore, exploring effective pathways to enhance teacher's job satisfaction has become a crucial issue in educational management research and practice. Among various influencing factors, the leadership style of school leaders is considered a key variable. Existing research indicates that transformational leadership, compared to transactional or laissez-faire leadership, can more significantly and positively predict teacher job satisfaction.[2] Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring subordinates' higher-level needs and intrinsic motivation through vision inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence.[3]

Although existing studies have confirmed the positive association between transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction,[4][5] most findings remain at the level of verifying correlation. The deeper mechanisms of "how" and "why" it works—specifically, the underlying mediating processes and psychological pathways—have not been systematically theorized and deconstructed. Teacher job satisfaction, as a multidimensional construct, is influenced by external factors but relies more heavily on the fulfillment of intrinsic psychological needs.[6] Based on Self-Determination Theory, the satisfaction of an individual's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is key to intrinsic motivation,[7] and the behavioral characteristics of transformational leadership are precisely poised to act upon these core psychological mechanisms.

Based on this, this study focuses on the following question: Through which specific intrinsic pathways does transformational leadership style influence teacher job satisfaction? It aims to

construct a clear mediating mechanism model through theoretical integration and logical deduction, providing a theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical testing and offering targeted strategic references for school leaders to optimize their management practices.

2. MECHANISM ANALYSIS OF HOW TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION

Based on Self-Determination Theory and related empirical research, this study proposes that transformational leadership primarily enhances teacher job satisfaction by fulfilling their higher-level psychological needs. The specific pathways of action are illustrated in the “Figure 1” below and elaborated as follows:

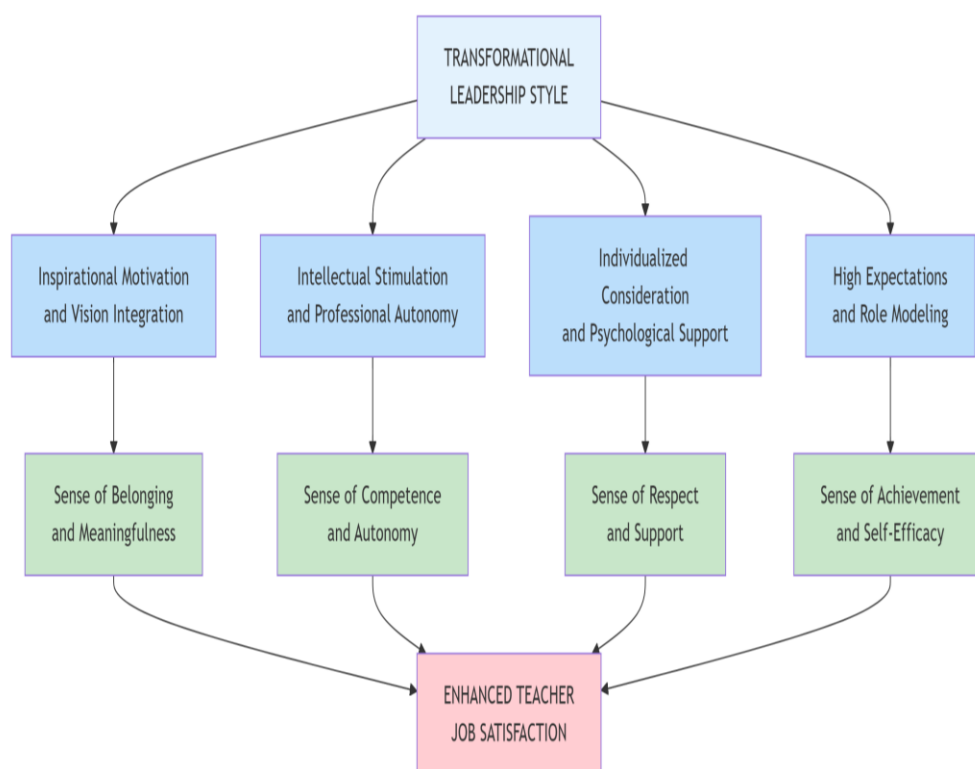


Figure 1 the pathways of transformational leadership style.

2.1 Pathway 1: Inspirational Motivation and Vision Integration → Enhancing Sense of Belonging and Meaning

Transformational leaders are adept at constructing and communicating an inspiring shared vision, linking the school’s development goals with the noble mission of education. [3] This inspirational motivation helps teachers recognize that their daily work transcends mere livelihood, contributing instead to the achievement of socially valuable collective goals. When teachers see themselves as part of a larger narrative, their sense

of meaningfulness at work and their sense of belonging to the organization are enhanced.[8] This affective commitment, stemming from value identification, forms a solid foundation for deep-level job satisfaction.

2.2 Pathway 2: Intellectual Stimulation and Professional Autonomy → Satisfying Needs for Competence and Autonomy

Transformational leaders encourage teachers to question conventions, explore innovative teaching

methods, and grant them ample professional autonomy. This behavior conveys trust in teachers' professional judgment. When teachers can take the lead in instructional design and implementation and successfully meet challenges, their needs for competence and autonomy—two basic psychological needs—are fulfilled.[7] This sense of control and accomplishment derived from the work itself is central to intrinsic motivation and far more likely to yield lasting job satisfaction than external rewards or punishments.[4]

2.3 Pathway 3: Individualized Consideration and Psychological Support → Enhancing Sense of Respect and Support

Transformational leaders pay attention to each teacher's professional growth and personal well-being, understand their unique needs and difficulties, and provide targeted guidance and resources (individualized consideration). This makes teachers feel seen as whole, valuable individuals, thereby fostering a strong sense of respect and support. When facing work pressure, this psychological support from leadership acts as a crucial buffer, effectively alleviating emotional exhaustion and safeguarding mental health and work enthusiasm.[9]

2.4 Pathway 4: High Expectations and Role Modeling → Stimulating Sense of Achievement and Self-efficacy

Transformational leaders hold high performance expectations for teachers and believe in their ability to achieve these goals, while simultaneously leading by example, demonstrating qualities such as dedication and fairness. High expectations are essentially an expression of trust, pushing teachers to challenge themselves. When teachers achieve goals with support, their sense of achievement and confidence in their own abilities significantly increase. This experience of success and positive evaluation of one's professional capability is one of the most direct sources of job satisfaction.

3. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

The mechanism analysis of this study indicates that the process by which transformational leadership enhances teacher job satisfaction is essentially a process of precisely fulfilling teachers'

intrinsic psychological needs through a series of specific leadership behaviors. These four pathways work together to explain why transformational leadership can effectively stimulate teachers' intrinsic motivation, whereas transactional leadership, which relies solely on external rewards and punishments, has limitations in promoting long-term satisfaction.

Important implications for educational management practice include:

- The first is to emphasize vision, and shape meaning: Administrators should act as "meaning-makers," skilled at connecting school goals with the educational mission to enhance the perceived value of teachers' work.
- The second is to empower and promote innovation: It is necessary to trust and delegate professional autonomy, encourage teaching innovation, and foster an atmosphere that dares to try and tolerates failure, thereby strengthening teachers' sense of control and achievement.
- The third is to provide support and show care: Management needs to be "on the front lines," implementing individualized consideration, paying attention to individual teacher development, and building a supportive psychological environment.
- The fourth is to set benchmarks, place high hopes: Leaders should practice what they preach, becoming professional role models, and by setting challenging goals, express trust in teachers' potential, motivating them to pursue excellence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study systematically constructs a model of the intrinsic mechanisms through which transformational leadership style influences teacher job satisfaction. It concludes that the influence does not occur directly, but is mediated through behaviors such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, which satisfy teachers' psychological needs for meaning, autonomy, competence, and respect, ultimately leading to enhanced job satisfaction.

The value of this study lies in opening the "black box" of the interaction, providing a more nuanced theoretical explanation for understanding the effectiveness of transformational leadership.

Future research can build upon this foundation to develop measurement tools and empirically test the proposed mediating pathways using large-sample surveys and structural equation modeling. Furthermore, longitudinal studies or cross-cultural comparisons could be conducted to further explore the potential moderating effects of factors such as different school contexts and teacher demographic characteristics within this mechanism.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Xieraili Nuermaimaiti completed the writing of the main text. Aminamu Abuduwalli contributed to the writing and editing of the text.

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