

Exploring the Pressures of Managerialism on Achieving Transformational Educational Leadership

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Abstract: *The key preoccupation of this article is to investigate the nexus between “managerial turn” in higher education and transformational leadership in educational context. Leveraging on qualitative methodological approach linked to secondary data analysis, this paper explores the relationship between managerialism and transformational educational leadership. The analysis undertaken emphasises that transactional leaders in contrast to transformational leadership fails to inspire, motivate and encourage academics and other higher education staff given the pressures of managerialist regime that is buffeting the educational institutions. Managerialist pressures encourage cost minimisation, compliance regime, control, marketization of educational values and efficiency rhetoric that pervade the current landscape of higher education globally. This analysis and insights provided here will help to guide policymakers, educational institutions, academics and researchers to rethink the place of managerial practice in organisations for a better academic outcome, freedom of faculty members, restoring the pristine values of education and motivation of academics. Consequently, this paper contributes to the growing discourse on managerialism in educational institutions, which is currently under-theorised and understudied. It further sheds light on how reworking leadership style could bring innovativeness, competition and development within the educational sector for transformation as well as to rise against the backwater of management-oriented practices and policies that stifle effort at transformed educational leadership.*

Keywords: *Managerialism; Fellowship; Organizational Renewal/Transformation; Transactional Leadership; Educational Institutions; Leading Change; Organisational Effectiveness.*

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Introduction

Recently, there has been an increase in emphasis on leadership in educational institutions, and the impact leadership style has on transforming educational leadership has also advanced (Winokur and Sperandio, 2017; Hallinger, 2003). Educational institutions including higher education institutions are currently challenged to rethink impacts of leadership style on school transformation (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2010). In recent time, educational institutions are focusing on advancing leadership skills, competences and behaviour so as to improve academics' leadership skillsets and culture (Drago-Severson, 2007), commitment (Hallinger, 2003), performance (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000), engagement (Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi, 2013), job satisfaction (Bogler, 2001; Obiakor, 2004) less staff turnover (Griffith, 2004), educational transformation (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008) and transformational teaching (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). Specific leadership competences and practices such as motivational, distributed and for the foremost part, transformational leadership in leader-follower relationships and development are inextricably connected with improved commitment and support from followers and positive student outcome (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2010). It is on this score that for many leadership theorists and practitioners leadership incarnates with skills development, mutual support, influence and learned behaviour (Bass, 1985) that are quite vital in transforming educational philosophy, impact, structure, and quality with precise focus on higher education (Obiakor, 2004; Udegbe, 2016).

As a result, teachers and other stakeholders, who are involved in transforming education as well as building values and culture of impactful education, should be adequately motivated through Heads of Departments' (HoDs') leadership styles, which could serve "as a catalyst" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins, 2006, p. 4) for transforming education. In the widely-cited report by Leithwood et al. (2006), they noted that leadership style from head teacher leadership accounts for more than 35% of total leadership colouration in school. Bush and Glover's (2016) research demonstrate the centrality of the dynamics of the leaders' role and impact on learning outcomes and educational transformation. Thus, direct leader involvement in professional planning, curriculum development and transformational teaching are connected with moderate or large leadership impacts (Ghadi et al., 2013). These findings provide much of the empirical basis for the current paper.

Unlike the earlier conceptualisations of leadership that did not include ethical, moral and motivational element, Burns (1978) linking transformational leadership to higher-order norms and values considers inspiration as a crucial component of leadership. In contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leadership is consequently significant not only in ensuring there is more student outcome, but in mobilising academics (teachers/lecturers) to go beyond the call of duty to accelerate the pace of engagement, zeal, commitment and performance while transforming learning culture, value system and competences (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). Transformational educational leadership is implicated in this argumentation (Mpungose and Ngwenya, 2017). As observed by Leithwood (1992) insightfully, transactional and transformational leadership practices are often conceived as complementary. However, while transactional leadership practices are focused on maintaining organisational status quo by facilitating routinisation, control, compliance, and hierarchy that characterise managerially driven philosophy including centralising and limiting power, such practices do not stimulate motivation and transformation (Sergiovanni, 1990). Contrastingly, in creating an empowering and motivational culture as well as realising the purpose of education, transformational leadership is proposed (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000). Therefore, educational management and leadership have to be essentially focused on the purpose and goals of education, which provide the critical sense of direction underpinning school management (Simkins, 2000). As argued by Bush (2003) unless the nexus between educational purpose and management is clear and interrelated, "there is a danger of 'managerialism' (p. 1), which triggers "stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values" (Bush, 1992, p. 240) as well as aligns with the

tenets of market-based principles, which characterise transactional leadership (Simkins, 2000). Therefore, the present study is based on exploring the pressures of managerialism on achieving transformational educational leadership.

Within the context of school leadership Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017, p. 7) observed that transactional, managerialist form of leadership promotes “the commercialisation of ... providing services to the people” including taking attention away from people’s empowerment, motivation, development and engagement. This system is similar to Taylorist scientific management approach to people management (Pollitt, 1990). Taylorist scientific management approach to managing people when linked to managerialism, recommends an efficient, productive and strategic organisational philosophy as well as advances the ethos of ‘one right way’ to organisation and leadership that frustrates alternative perspectives from employees triggering unequal power relations, lack of motivation and poor inclusion culture (Pollitt, 1990) as well as transactional leadership (Li, Casteno and Li, 2018; Ghadi et al., 2013). Managerial leadership maintains that the focus of leaders ought to be functionalist and task-oriented (Clarke and Newman, 1997) and that if these functions are undertaken effectively, the work of others (including lecturers/teachers) will be facilitated (Shepherd, 2018). As noted in extant literature (see Mueller and Carter, 2005) organisations with managerially driven business philosophy exert enormous pressures on managers (HoDs) as it focuses on the interest of management and the role of individual managers in how companies are managed efficiently (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000).

Clarke and Newman (1997) describe the process for institutionalising and practising managerial ideals as managerialism, which is often achieved through the application of strict, managerial procedures or “control technique” (Shepherd, 2018, p. 1671) in the form of administrative efficiency (cost-saving and control), practical measures (including setting target and performance indicators) and compliance system (such as strict rules and regulation). For example, Clarke and Newman’s (1997) research supports the notion that leaders in managerialist orientated organisations will not be inclined to engage in transformational leadership, hence, managerial approach to leadership advocates that the behaviour and actions of leaders are rational, cost-saving and efficient, which can lead to efficient management of educational organisations (Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka, 2012). Most of the attempts to implement managerialism – the New Public Management (NPM) reform – find expression in cutting cost for managerial gains, managerialist philosophy and shareholder-centric persuasion as well as a lack of political will and incongruous implementation of plans and programmes thwarting effective reforms (Ikeanyibe, 2015).

Although managerialism is an important facet of successful leadership, however, it should not supplant values-based, ethical and participatory approaches to school management. Furthermore, research on educational leadership is an incipient stage (Bush and Glover, 2016) and requires broadening to understand both contextual as well as leader behaviours and leadership styles in influencing employees’ work outcomes, educational outcomes, performance, commitment and motivation. Thus, this paper responds to wider calls in the literature (Mpungose and Ngwenya, 2017; Bush and Glover, 2016) to further broaden perspectives and knowledge about educational leadership and school management approaches for a more nuanced understanding of country-specific aspect of the phenomena (Bush and Glover, 2016).

Understanding Leadership

Literature focusing on school management and leadership indicates that notion of leadership is at incipient stage as well as requires critical and empirical examination (Anazodo et al., 2012). Bush and Glover’s (2016) research is consistent with this notion. To this end, critical and

systematically exploring the nature of leadership is crucially important to the future of education (Udegbe, 2016). The phenomenon of leadership style and behaviour impacting organisational performance motivation and commitment is an established area of research Bass (1997). For upwards of one hundred years, researchers have begun to describe, quantify and investigate the nexus between leadership style, organisational practices and behaviour (see Bennis and Nanus, 2007). These authors have explained that leadership is essentially a function of behaviour and style of leading people. Leadership is often considered as one of the most studied phenomena; yet least understood (Kotter, 1990). Accordingly, Bass (1997) notes that “there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 11), making it a somewhat an “elusive” concept (Kotter, 1990). However, leadership can be defined as individuals who establish goals for a working group of people, and who then motivate the people to realise these goals (Bennis and Nanus, 2007).

Transformational Leadership

The classical typologies of leadership constitute democratic, autocratic and *laissez faire*. While democratic leadership is inclusive, collective and anticipatory, autocratic leadership is authoritarian and exclusive of wider stakeholders’ inputs and views in decision-making process (Burns, 1978). Central to *laissez faire* leadership style is delegation of duties, which entails that all and sundry is given what Bennis and Nanus (2007) refer to as “free hand”; however, supervision is part of this process. On the other hand, leadership theories are considered as various methods a leader’s leadership style or pattern can be interpreted (Rotberg, 2012). These include Behavioural Theory, Situational Theory, Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Contingency Theory, Transactional Theory and Transformational Theory. These theoretical perspectives are traditionally applied in understanding and interpreting leadership behaviour and practices. Central to this study is Burns’ (1978) theory of leadership, which has two main forms: transactional and transformational. Although it has been noted that Downton (1973) was the first to differentiate transactional leadership from transformational leadership, Burns (1978) was the first to identify the leadership characteristics and behaviours associated with these leadership forms.

According to Burns (1978) transactional leadership describes a type of leaders who rather than focus on the belief system and ideals of their followers focus on the relationship between the leader and follower (Bass, 1985). It takes place when there is a transaction and/or exchange between leaders and followers. Transactional leaders may apply positive or negative rewards in their relationship with followers. For instance, they incentivise subordinates/employees by offering them incentives, including recognition, promotion and allowances as well as penalties for not meeting objectives or targets. Conversely, transformational leaders focus on the process of leading in which a leader concentrates on the needs, beliefs, and values of their followers (Abdalla and Al-Hamoud, 2001; Northouse, 2012). This argument is consistent with Kotter’s (1990) position on leadership. He contends that leaders are visionary in establishing purpose and as well as motivating, inspiring, and aligning people’s action in tandem with organisational purpose. They also communicate organisational goals, direction and planning to achieve set goals within the remit of collective vision. Thus, central to leadership are collectivist ideals, motivation and commitment, which lead to “energy surge” (Kotter, 1990, p. 64), the fountain of transformational leadership. Great leaders like Lincoln, Mandela and Gandhi definitely led in transformational and charismatic ways. In fact, Burns (1978) considered transformational and transactional leadership as opposite. Central to Bass’s (1985) theorisation of transformational leadership is that transformational leaders are agents of inspiration, motivation and vision that can lead to transforming the ideals and behaviours; while transactional leaders’ key motivation is seeing relationship as mere transaction (Kotter, 1990). Therefore, leadership is about followership anchored in mutual benefit and collective goal attainment (Bennis and Nanus,

2007). Next section considers various facets of transformational leadership within the context of inspiring, mobilising, and stimulating subordinates, who are influenced by school leaders' leadership actions and styles (Winokur and Sperandio, 2017; Litz, 2014).

Leadership as Followership

If leadership is essentially premised on followership, the managerialist critique suggests that the psychological contract between leaders and their subordinates (educational leaders and their subordinates like teachers, teaching assistants and other stakeholders) has been broken and as such staff may no longer follow their leading and/or there will be a lack of followership (Leithwood et al., 1996). In demonstrating how leaders develop relationship with their followers, which leads to transformation, Bass (1985) articulated four dimensions of transformational leadership, which are central to attaining organisational change including inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealised influence and individualised consideration, which are central to the objectives of this study. One of the dimensions of transformational leadership is *intellectual stimulation*. This leadership typology argues that *leaders* stimulate their followers' efforts to be creative, committed and innovative by stirring up their imagination, propelling them to question assumptions, challenge old practices and reframe problems including looking for innovative methods to do things (Bass, 1985). Accordingly, such leaders motivate and change their followers' perception and awareness about issues and mobilising solutions to these issues by galvanising their intellectual participation and engagement.

Leadership as Vision and Inspiration

Visionary leaders are considered as those who not only change the direction, vision and resources of an organisation, but who through their personal exemplary leadership behaviour propel their followers to change for the better. Kotter (1990) notes that underlying the transformation are major changes in the behaviour and thought processes about the management, governance, and functioning of the organisation. Moreover, Bass (1985) stresses the importance of (transformational) leadership by arguing that understanding the function and critical role played by leadership may be the single most significant intellectual task of leading change and desired result. Success of contemporary organisations as in the past will be contingent on how well leaders understand their roles as well as vision, values and the leadership process. Thus, lecturers have a vital role to play in the function of Kuwait's educational system that requires teachers who are motivated and committed in order to realise transformational teaching. Failure in this direction can potentially bring about an educational system that is not competitive in the global marketplace particularly in the post-Covid-19 era. *Inspirational motivation* is another aspect of transformational leadership. These leaders energise and empower their followers by expressing a compelling vision of the organisation. They behave and perform in a way that motivates and inspires followers by offering solutions to their challenge and providing meaning to what they do. Inspirational leaders can be seen as motivational speakers as they build enthusiasm, optimism and team spirit among their team through personal example and suggesting ways things can be changed for the better, a process that instils confidence in the followers.

Leadership as Influence and Values

Another dimension of transformational leadership is *idealised influence*. Leaders that exert idealised influence serve as ideal role models for their followers; they are traditionally admired by their followers (Nwagbara & Kamara, 2015; Nwagbara, 2012; Kotter, 1990). Put simply, they "walk the talk", a characteristic admired by their followers. They also engender sense of loyalty, trust, respect and admiration amongst their followers by engaging in charismatic behaviour and practice. They also symbolise organisational norms and values, which followers

learn, internalise and adopt. Lastly, *individualised consideration* is another facet of transformational leadership construct. Avolio and Bass (1991) consider it as the most important aspect of transformational leadership. It can take the forms of negative and positive feedback processes that are aimed at building and developing followers. By providing individual consideration to each follower, transformational leaders are not only aware of the present needs of their followers; they also make effort to elevate those needs to a higher level. For instance, these can be realised through mentoring, coaching and instructional engagements, such as, providing feedback, giving tasks and other developmental measures that are relevant to followers' developmental needs. Such leaders not only provide developmental support to their followers, they educate the next generation of leaders and help them attain self-worth and personal satisfaction/growth. According to Leithwood et al. (1996), transformational leadership model is required within the educational context that is in dire need of renewal, given the realities of COVID-19 pandemic, which meted serious problem to leading change within the education institutions as well as contemporary pressures like managerialism, competition, the challenge of innovation and teaching style that is inspiring, collaborative and student-centered (Nwagbara & Brown, 2021).

The Rise of Managerialism

One critical case for the advent of managerialism in the west, for example in the UK and USA, was political and economic ideology stemming from Thatcherism and Reaganism respectively in the 1980s, which introduced privatisation of public enterprises (Miller, 2009). Miller (2009) reveals the ideological, political and socio-economic state of Britain's 1980s and 1990s using the case of the National Health Service (NHS), which witnessed the coming of managerialism within the conduit of public sector management constituting financial control, competitive market, performance management and severe marketization serving managerialist, political and managerial ends, which disadvantage employees. Consequently, managerialism spawned and fostered a clinical governance system, which panders to the attractions of "transactional style of management" necessitating high employee turnover (Miller, 2009). This system has since the 1980s sipped into other parts of the world. As a result, the domination of managerialism in the world of work is often taken as a global movement of managerialist ideology (Mueller and Carter (2005).

Managerialism and Educational Organisation

Managerialism is an ideology and idea and associated organisational practices that have been promoted in the private sector since at least the 1970s (Pollitt, 1990). Since the 1980s, there has been unrelenting advocacy in the public sector to implement managerialist rationality, which explicates a system predicated upon the assumptions, ethos and belief that managers (in this context HoDs) are rational entities (Miller, 2009), whose behaviours, style of operation and leadership styles are forged essentially by economic self-interests (Thomas, 2015; Miller, 2009). It is thus, a business principle and system anchored in the philosophies of agency theory and transaction-cost economics (Mueller and Carter, 2005). In reducing transaction cost and inefficiency in management process, managerialism helps in shaping business processes and culture that are essentially non-participatory, authoritarian, shareholder centric, and hierarchical (Bambacas and Kulik, 2013). As observed by Brunetto (2002) such a management style advances the rationality of in which non-managerial members of staff, specifically employees, have negligible power and/or influence on important issues, which impact their inputs, commitment, happiness and wellbeing at work, for example, legitimate WLB policies, voice articulation and participation. It is on this strength that it has been argued that managerialism legitimises and also makes normal unwholesome power differential, unfair relations, unjust

system and dictatorial employment ethos via the instrumentality of employment culture, which frustrate wellbeing of staff, commitment, and voice in the final analysis (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Mpungose and Ngwenya, 2017).

Managerialism and Educational Leadership

The higher education sector all over the world, for example in the UK, is experiencing unusual and increasing amount of market accountability triggered by the legislative procedures of subsequent administrations (Shepherd, 2018). Connected with their new responsibilities and management functions, educational institutions are becoming increasingly “business-like” and transactional, which has precipitated the need for managers to rationalise their actions and demonstrate effectiveness and quality that has never been the case until the coming of managerialist thinking and practices (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000). One of the consequences of this new thinking has been the preoccupation with efficiency, cost-reduction, TQM, control, and compliance, which this paper argues is inseparable from performance management, “hard” HRM and compliance regime. The so-called “hard” approaches to people management and leadership stress the importance of the market system and, hence, cost effectiveness.

Using a sample of 292 first-year school teachers and leveraging on path analysis, Thomas, Tuytens, Devos, Kelchtermans, and Vanderlinde (2018) concluded that transformational leadership of the principal (managers) is directly associated with teachers’ job attitudes in a positive way. Correspondingly, Mpungose and Ngwenya’s work (2017) supports Thomas et al.’s research and specifically unpacks how hard HRM stemming from managerialist pressure shapes school manager’s pursuit of efficiency and compliance at the expense of service quality, employee satisfaction and engagement in the South African context. This argumentation continues in the work of Litz (2014) within the context of United Arab Emirates (UAE). Consequently, this article argues that the quest for transactional approach that saves cost and the concomitant development of a managerialist ideology has led to the inevitable and completely inappropriate adoption of methods to HRM policy and practice, which are functionalist and transactional in nature limiting motivation, commitment and engagement (Thomas et al., 2018; Litz, 2014).

Transformational Leaders and Leading Change: Suggesting the Way Forward in Educational Leadership

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) contend that effective school leaders are critically needed in providing skilled human capital and empowerment essential for socio-economic and human development. School leaders’ role is important in identifying, articulating and prospecting a vision for change – educational transformation. So, transformational leadership in education setting is conceived as one of the core issues in creating and nurturing an empowered set of leaders (lecturers) for effective educational system. It is vital in preparing effective school leaders that have the capacity actualise reforms in the educational system. Hallinger and Heck’s (1998) qualitative case study and Marzano, Waters and McNulty’s (2005) quantitative meta-analysis support the influence of leadership as significant in educational reform. These studies’ findings have comparable features with Leithwood et al.’s (2008) work, which concluded that school leadership, affected the quality of a school organisation.

There has been pressure from citizens for the governments all over the world to reform educational system since the outcomes of students began to wane. Literature has also suggested the influence of school leaders on quality of education, teachers’ motivation and commitment as well as student outcomes for an effective transformation (Leithwood et al., 2008; Litz, 2014). Accordingly, students and teachers learn more from the “invisible” curriculum, domiciled in

leadership style rather than “visible” curriculum (Al-Hamdan and Al-Yacoub, 2005). While disparate leadership models and approaches are connected to different leadership theorising to transforming competences, behaviours and actions amongst academics, transformational leadership framework is often touted as integral to effective organisational transformation as well as positive educational leadership (Boyd, 2009; Hallinger, 2003). As these leaders empower, motivate and develop a culture that nurtures followers to rise above personal interest chiming with shared goal attainment (Kotter, 1990) as well as promote followers’ personal growth, development and satisfaction (Silins, 1994), accordingly creating an environment for continuous learning and motivation aimed at transformation. Within the context of school system, this can be argued as a form of leadership model resonating with collective goal, shared vision, mutual commitment, individualised support, intellectual stimulation, personalised support/consideration and drive, which positively impacting performance expectations/outcomes. This process essentially precipitates an enabling workplace environment inseparable from organisational change, such as school transformation.

Conclusion, Implications, Limitations and Future Research

This paper has used the methodological choice of secondary literature reviewed to shed light on the dynamics of transformational leadership in leading change in the managerialist times (Adams, 2006). Through the analysis undertaken, it can be gleaned that transformational leadership environment nurtures creativity, innovation, motivation, commitment and the required energy to lead educational institutions effectively in the contemporary era, which challenges educational institutions. It has thus been argued in this paper that leaders’ leadership styles and behaviour have direct impact on their subordinates and can facilitate transformational teaching and learning. Therefore, educational leaders need to be aware of the import of transformational leadership in bringing transformative educational landscape and to realise the premise of school reform.

The implication of this research is that appropriating transformational leadership will help in realising the ideals of school vision. Thus, we recommend that transformational leadership will be instrumental in rising above autocratic and high power distance culture in higher education. This study responds to wider calls in the literature (see Deem, 1988) in educational leadership for supportive learning and teaching climate for transformed school system. This paper equally makes contribution to school, transformation literature through transformational leadership paradigm, which requires development (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). Analogous approach has been applied by Winokur and Sperandio (2017), where they gathered data from teachers to explore leadership practices and styles of a transformational nature as well as the transfer of teacher training in the public high schools within Kuwait. Despite the benefits of qualitative research, further research can be undertaken quantitatively (or comparatively) to better understand and gauge what impact transformational leadership style has on teachers (and other stakeholders) with specific focus on their commitment, motivation, engagement and personal development including realising positive student learning outcomes.

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