

The influence of transformational leadership on teacher motivation towards more inclusive education

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Abstract

A major challenge faced by educational institutions is managing student diversity. Inclusive education is a human right and the central axis for achieving a fair and equitable society. There has been an increasing focus on inclusion in higher education. Employee motivation is one of the key requirements for promoting inclusivity in the workplace. A strong leadership can motivate employees and promote inclusion at workplace. This study aims to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and student motivation in higher education. A survey was conducted among 289 academicians from private universities in the Delhi-NCR region. A mediation model was run to test the mediating effect of training towards inclusive education on transformational leadership and teacher motivation relationship. The findings support the hypothesized relationships, indicating the significant impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation which is significantly mediated by training towards inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusivity, inclusive education, transformational leadership, student motivation, teacher motivation, training

Introduction

There has been extensive activity in many countries, over the past few decades, to promote inclusive practices in educational policy (Hegarty & Alur, 2002; Daniels & Garner, 1999) but there are challenges in their promotion and implementation (Mittler, 2000). Inclusive education, that is educating children with disabilities and those without through mainstream schooling is a better approach towards managing diversity and respecting differences. In a study conducted by Stevens and Wurf (2018) to identify perceptions towards inclusive education, parents of special children reported that inclusive education benefitted their children. The other important finding from the study is that teachers need to be well trained in dealing with inclusive classrooms in order to make inclusive education successful.

The number of students with disabilities pursuing higher education is on a rise. Vickerman and Blundell (2010) had also reported an increase in participation by students with

disability due to universities' commitment towards social inclusive practices, leadership styles, curricula development, personal development plans, and support services. The objective of the universities is to promote social inclusion and community engagement, and to have a positive impact on students and communities (Collins, Azmat, & Rentschler, 2019). Wilson, Getzel, and Brown (2000) suggested that universities should offer admissions support, counselling for assessments, liaison services, and other information as required. Apart from the support services mentioned above, there must be special pedagogy and teaching aids (Squelch, 2010). Sachs and Schreuer (2011) found that while the academic outcomes for students with or without disability were similar, there was a difference in student experiences according to disability type. Students with physical disabilities reported higher satisfaction than students with psychiatric disabilities. Academic difficulties are linked to the quality of teaching, teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, engagement, and flexibility.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of disabled children can influence acceptance in a mainstream classroom (Subban & Sharma 2005). Positive attitudes towards inclusive education promote inclusion whereas negative attitudes create a hurdle (Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Butler & Shevlin, 2001). The impact of attitudes on behaviour warrants an assessment of attitude as a variable in studies concerning the efficacy of inclusive education (Biklen et al., 1985), specifically, the attitude of teachers concerning the impact of assimilating students with disabilities in regular schools (Li & Ruppap, 2021).

Leadership is an important indicator of inclusive education. Many authors have reported the importance of transformational leadership in higher education. The role of transformational leadership in building motivation, improving performance and advancing educational institutions and addressing the challenges of industry 4.0 are some suggestions from scholars (Antonopoulou, Halkiopoulos, Barlou, & Beligiannis, 2021; Vermeulen, Kreijns, & Evers, 2020; Top, Abdullah, & Faraj, 2020). Educational leaders need to identify the inclusive practices that they can implement to ensure socially-just education for all. Shields and Hesbol (2019) concluded that leaders need to demonstrate and exercise equitable, socially just leadership to create welcoming, inclusive schools where all students, including those who are minoritized or economically disadvantaged, feel affirmed, respected, and academically challenged. Universities that promote social inclusion follow a unique leadership style. Inclusive practices are more successful in universities with a strong leadership style and an open mind set to adapt inclusion and embrace diversity. Transformational leadership is claimed by many researchers to be the most dynamic leadership style to bring change (Kouzes &

Posner, 2007). Research indicates that transformational leaders can transform the people and culture within an organization (Pepper, 2010; Masumoto & Brown Welty, 2009). Al-Omari, Khasawneh, & Abu Tineh (2009) stated transformational leaders achieve extraordinary results by developing a shared vision, setting examples, challenging the status quo, and supporting staff. Successful leaders implement a transformational style to improve teacher performance (Nash & Norwich, 2010). Better academic results and achievement are a result of transformational leadership (Thompson & Matkin, 2020; Turan & Bektas, 2013; Knab, 2009).

Training is an important human resource function to bridge the skill gap and develop the skills required. Due to the paradigm shift in education where educators are trying to make it inclusive it is necessary to develop teachers who can accommodate students with diverse educational requirements in their classroom (Pit-ten Cate, Markova, Krischler, & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2018). Many universities have developed teacher training programs in order to prepare teachers for inclusive education (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005). Government of India has launched various schemes to train the teachers for inclusive education. Teacher training in India for special education is imparted through both face-to-face and distance mode.

According to the UK Department for International Development (DFID), “Inclusive education in a developing country implies the equal right of all children to the ‘educational package’, however basic that package may be” (2001, p. 12). The Government of India, in its Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–12) and later in the Twelfth Five-year Plan (2012–17) had already indicated a shift towards inclusive growth and also launched various schemes to promote inclusion in education.

The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to examine how transformational leadership impacts teachers’ motivation in higher education. This research advances the literature by exploring if training towards inclusion mediates the transformational leadership-teacher motivation relationship. This paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, it provides a broad overview of the transformational leadership, teacher motivation and teacher attitude towards inclusive education literature. Next, the study tries to develop and draw linkages between these three and formulate hypotheses. The subsequent sections present a research model, analysis and findings with their implications before providing a conclusion.

Literature review

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In 1997, IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). The Persons with Disability Act, 1995 has a provision of providing education to children with special needs in the most appropriate environment. The SSA launched by the Govt. of India, in 2001, underlines the prerogative of a child with disability to be included in the mainstream of education.

MHRD (2006) in its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework clearly states that “SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment. SSA will adopt zero rejection policy so that no child is left out of the education system. It will also support a wide range of approaches, options and strategies for education of children with special needs.” Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was approved in India in September, 2008 to replace IEDC Scheme from 2009-10. The Scheme is 100% centrally funded.

Transformational leadership for inclusive education

Inclusive education has been a primary focus over the past few decades. Educational leaders need to be more creative, supportive and sensitive of inclusion for student development (Bublitz, 2016), therefore they must demonstrate transformational leadership traits to develop an inclusive environment. Transformational leaders bring change: they develop a shared vision by inspiring others to support student learning (Hack, 2014; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The transformational leadership model has influenced people by building from the bottom-up rather than from the top down. Therefore, the educational change shaped a helpful academic environment.

Transformational leadership has been reported to have a greater impact on attitude change in people as compared to other leadership styles. A study conducted by Leithwood (1992) examined the relationship between aspects of transformational leadership and change in teachers' attitudes both towards school improvement and altered instructional behaviour. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders raise followers' awareness levels about

the importance and value of shared goals, and the means to achieve them. Bass and Avolio (1990) recommend that transformational leaders inspire followers with a vision of accomplishment through extra effort, hence motivating followers to achieve more than they thought they would achieve.

In an academic set up, teachers appreciate transformational leadership styles from heads and view them as role models who inspire trust in school staff (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Leithwood (1994) provides the early pioneering research on transformational leadership styles in school settings. The study reported that transformational leadership has a positive impact on school leadership's ability to facilitate change in school restructuring initiatives, and for coping with the schools' requirements in the twenty-first century. Valentine and Prater (2011) indicate that intellectual stimulation, high performance, group work, and individualized support have a positive impact on student achievement, excellence, quality and supportive inclusive education.

Al-Husseini, El Beltagi, and Moizer (2021) conducted a study on transformational leadership and innovation amongst higher education faculty and identified knowledge sharing as a mediator between the two.

Teacher motivation for inclusive education

One of the important factors for the success of inclusive education is teacher influence and pedagogy which is an outcome of their self-motivation. Teachers must accommodate heterogeneous student populations. The attitude of teachers is critical as it influences motivation. Therefore, teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion may be highly motivated to work in an inclusive environment. Sergiovanni (1991) implies that a set of shared values and beliefs of teachers increase motivation and commitment to effective teaching and learning. Lamb-Zodrow (1987) stated that teachers might experience negative emotions in inclusive environments as they might have to bear extra responsibility, work pressure because of additional demands, and lack of competence owing to lack of training for the task. This might further lead to stress and resistance to change. Lack of competence to train disabled or diverse students triggers negative motivation as there is a major requirement for change in pedagogy (Daumiller, Stupnisky, & Janke, 2020; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991; Salvia & Munson, 1986).

Teacher motivation or the ‘the ideal of the good shepherd ethic’ is important for providing the best education for all students. It asks for more dedication, time, effort, and energy; in case of failure, blame is bestowed on the teacher instead of students, which further leads to demotivation. There is a need to instil positive motivation in teachers to make inclusive education successful and effective. There is a need to provide a conducive environment for teachers by making resources available and providing the technical support required (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005). Some other requirements are small classroom set up, more time for designing and developing teaching material, and opportunities for personal development from training (Talmor et al., 2005). Our first hypothesis, framed on the basis of findings from the two streams of literature reviewed above, is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Transformational leadership will enhance teacher motivation for inclusive education.

Training towards inclusive education

The answer to the challenges faced due to inclusive education is training. It is important to increase the competency levels of teachers by imparting training to manage an inclusive classroom. A teacher’s competency level is one of the factors that has a direct impact on the quality of teaching. Many teachers lack the use of the pedagogical tools required for training special students (Shulman, 1986). Teacher training should not only entail course preparation but also knowledge and understanding, attitudes and willingness to include all students in regular classrooms (Borg, 2011; Forlin, 2010).

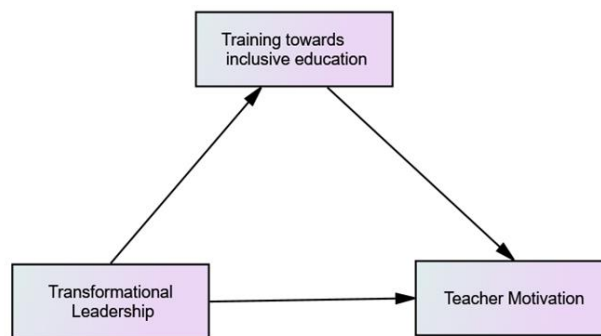
Baker-Ericzen, Garnand Mueggenborg, and Shea (2009) reported significant positive changes in perceived competence and attitudes toward inclusion after a complete training program for childcare professionals. Glashan, Mackay, & Grieve (2004) stated that teacher training on inclusion increases perceived efficacy and acceptance to inclusion. Some studies conducted in Australia have reported that certain courses combining lecture method and practice results in pre-service teachers’ competence levels and positive attitude towards inclusion (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003).

A study conducted by Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008), which tested the effects of training on teachers’ attitude towards inclusion, reported that course content and pedagogy are strong predictors of teachers’ attitude. Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) conducted a study on the role of teachers’ competence and attitude in inclusive education and reported that training teachers

is necessary to develop positive attitudes and meet the requirements of students with special education needs. This study supports Carroll et al. (2003) whose findings show that training aimed at attitude change results in higher levels of perceived competence. Therefore, training is necessary for special education needs. In the Indian context, regulatory bodies like the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the central Ministry of Education are taking certain measures to promote inclusive education through training teachers and leaders. In light of these findings, our second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Training towards inclusion will mediate the transformational leadership-teacher motivation relationship.

Research model



Source: Authors' own

This paper attempts to predict the impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation either in a positive or a negative way. The indirect effect of training towards inclusion which mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher motivation is further tested.

Research design and method

The current study is based on the literature on teacher motivation and examines transformational leadership and training for inclusion in universities who provide higher education. A survey of 289 academicians in 7 Indian universities was conducted. The majority of the participants are women (65.5%), and the median age group of the sample is 30-38 years (32.1%). The majority of the faculty members are Ph. D degree holders (78.8%). The participants' designations are Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor, and they

all work on a regular basis. The participants come from various disciplines like Management (42.2%), Engineering (48.8%) and Law (9%).

Measures

Transformational leadership

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), the standard instrument for assessing transformational and transactional leadership behaviour (TL; Bass & Avolio, 2000; Avolio & Bass, 2004), has been used for the study. The MLQ-5X short which contains 45 items is used for the study. The reliability of this measure is evident from its Cronbach's α coefficient value of 0.82.

Teacher Motivation

An instrument designed by Rodzi, Mukhlis and Marif (2017) to test teacher motivation (TM) was used for the study. The questionnaire comprises of a five-point Likert scale with questions like "I feel motivated to teach special need students because it will fulfil my needs", "The profession is most suitable career for me". In total there are 10 items in the scale to test teacher motivation for special education. The reliability of this measure is evident from its Cronbach's α coefficient value of 0.92

Training towards inclusion

The global teacher training and inclusion survey (Pinnock & Nicholls, 2012) was used to measure training towards inclusion (TIE) in this study. The instrument contains 8 items with questions like "Inclusive education has become stronger in teacher training recently", "Inclusion of learners with disability has become stronger in teacher training recently". It is a 3-point scale with Agree, Disagree and Neutral. The reliability of this measure is evident from its Cronbach's α coefficient value of 0.79.

Results

Psychometric strength of the measures

The psychometric properties of the measures used in this study were estimated using an exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation and promax rotation (Hair

et al., 2006). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.912 with a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p = 0.000$).

Mediation analysis

The first hypothesis was that transformational leadership (TL) influences teacher motivation (TM). The results obtained were $\beta=0.10$, $p<0.001$, thus supporting H1. The mediating effect of training need for inclusive education (TIE) was tested using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2013) on SPSS. Demographic variables like age, gender, and experience were controlled. The direct effect from TL to TM was found to be significantly positive ($B=0.10$, $p<0.001$). The mediating path TL-TIE(M1)-TM is also significant ($B=0.16$, $p<0.001$). The total effect was found to be $B=0.43$, $p<0.001$. The Sobel test also demonstrated significant indirect effect (Sobel $z=2.276$, $p<0.01$). Mediation was found to be significant, therefore, H2 is also supported.

Discussion

Universities act as a catalyst for teacher motivation and student development which makes their role critical. Successful inclusion of students may, however, only be possible within a setting where there are optimum resources and required support (Borg, 2011). Transformational leadership should be practiced by universities to support inclusive education. Bass (1997) conceptualized three essential factors of transformational leadership: charisma, consideration, and creativity. Transformational leadership affects teacher motivation, therefore, a motivated teacher will be able to perform better and have greater impact on student performance. Segall and Campbell (2012) conducted a study on professionals to test their attitude on children with autism and reported that positive attitude towards inclusion makes a difference. In another qualitative study, second level teachers were interviewed about their perceptions on inclusive education for children with autism. The findings, similar to the previous study, indicated that positive attitude towards inclusive education is necessary (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell 2014).

To develop a positive attitude towards special education, there is a need to develop resources, leadership support and a conducive environment. Teachers believe that access to

special education teachers is necessary to support inclusive education. Problems like lack of adequate resources and support has also been found in Irish teachers (O'Toole & Burke, 2013). Leonard and Smyth (2020) conducted a study on primary school teachers to test their attitude towards inclusive education and found that teachers with adequate resources were motivated to accept inclusion and developed a positive attitude towards the same, however teachers without adequate resources developed a negative attitude towards inclusive education.

Teacher training is considered as an essential tool to construct inclusive education schools and universities. The objective of this study was to promote training for teachers to develop inclusive education. A few principles stated in the study are importance of teachers, examining teaching practices, participative training etc. Our study presents an important finding that transformational leadership is necessary for universities to build teacher motivation, but adequate training is equally important, rather, it strengthens the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher motivation.

Limitations and future research directions

This study presents a holistic understanding of transformational leadership from an academic point of view and highlights its direct influence on teacher motivation but there are certain limitations too. Firstly, the sample size is a key limitation and testing the hypotheses through cross-sectional surveys is a constraint. Longitudinal data collection and analysis can be conducted to test the training effects. Secondly, the study is perception-based; motivation levels at the universities may vary, depending on multiple other factors like compensation, work culture, leadership, career growth opportunities etc. Thirdly, there is only one mediating relationship tested in the study, more mediators can be tested and a few more variables used to moderate the mediated relationship.

Implications for educational practice

India promotes inclusive education to a great extent. Governments have been taking certain measures to promote inclusive education, develop education in the rural areas by promoting massive open online courses (MOOCs) through various regulatory bodies. This study has a lot of practical implications for academic institutions in practising diversity in the form of inclusive education. Leadership is the heart of every organization and hence practising transformational leadership to promote inclusive education is an effective method to ensure inclusive education. It is very important to test teacher motivation for inclusive education:

inclusive education will be successful only if teachers have a positive attitude towards it, whereas negative attitude could lead to student dissatisfaction and immense loss for the university. The interesting finding from this study is training towards inclusive education which is often ignored even by premier institutions. To improve teacher motivation, there are other parameters which are necessary like leadership, support, culture, growth, and monetary benefits but more important is training which cannot be ignored. If teachers are unaware of the use of pedagogical techniques for teaching classes which have considerable heterogeneity, their motivation levels will suffer. Inclusive education can be linked to a strong commitment to enhancing and assuring that the needs of all diverse groups are met and to being an active member of communities (Ainscow, 2001; Susinos, 2007).

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