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# **Exploring the impacts of transformational leadership on transformational teaching in higher education: Empirical evidence from Kuwait**

## **Introduction**

This chapter reports on the findings of the study undertaken to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and transformational teaching/learning in the Kuwaiti context. Using interpretivism and qualitative research methods, this study relies on 21 in-depth interviews, which comprise a range of academics at different levels. The interviewees were academics who have experienced the varying nature of Heads of Departments' (HoDs') leadership behaviour, which has impacted their motivation, engagement, commitment, and personal satisfaction/growth and in turn affected transformational teaching. In addition to the previously identified transformational leadership impacts, four themes emerged that explain the impacts that HoDs' leadership style has on academics' and students' learning, development and outcomes. Additionally, this study found that transformational leadership positively impacts transformational teaching and learning. The study implies that transformational leadership correlates with transformational teaching that enables academics and students to learn, develop and be motivated.

Keywords: transformational leadership, transformational teaching, academics, Kuwait, higher education institutions, head of department

## **Background**

Contemporarily, higher education institutions (HEIs) are preoccupied with the advancement of leadership skills and behaviour to improve academics' leadership skills (Dopson et al., 2019) and to advance transformational teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Many scholars and

leaders agree that leadership is both a skill and learned behaviour (Burns, 1978; Darwish et al., 2020), which is critically important in transforming the educational structure, quality, and impact, particularly within the context of Kuwait's higher education (Winokur & Sperandio, 2017). Transformational leadership is thus critically important in achieving better student outcomes and inspiring teachers to ensure that students master foundational course concepts while transforming their learning behaviour, value system, and skills (Kuechler & Stedham, 2018; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Thus, school leaders and/or instructional leaders should carefully consider how to transmit knowledge that can enable transformational leadership and teaching.

Different leadership skills and practices, including inspirational and motivational leadership in teacher-learner interface and development, have directly impacted student outcomes (Dartey-Baah, 2014) and are central to changing people's values and perceptions about education (Beattie, 2020). As a result, academics in Kuwaiti higher institutions who are involved in students' knowledge improvement and transformational learning/teaching (Kezar et al., 2018) should be adequately motivated by Heads of Departments' (HoDs') leadership styles to realize these factors (Winokur & Sperandio, 2017). While different leadership types and styles are linked to disparate approaches to transforming teachers' behaviour and performance, transformational leadership is associated with the successful transfer of improved teaching and learning (Boyd, 2009). Transformational leaders are considered inspiring, motivating and encouraging followers to rise beyond self-interest and pursue collective goals (Kotter, 1990) as well as promote their followers' personal satisfaction and growth (Klempin & Karp, 2018), consequently creating a climate for motivation and learning aimed at transformation (Kezar, 2012). Within the context of the educational system, it can also be described as a form of leadership that moves individuals towards a level of commitment to realize academic goals by identifying and articulating the institution's vision, promoting the acceptance of collective

goals, providing individualized support, fostering intellectual stimulation, and creating an appropriate model, which positively impacts high-performance expectations (Balwant, 2016). This process eventually leads to an enabling workplace environment essential for organizational change, such as educational transformation (Kezar et al., 2018).

This chapter reports on our research findings to explore the relationship between leadership styles and practices of a transformational nature (Kezar, 2012; Schmitt et al., 2016) and the transfer of transformational teaching in Kuwaiti higher institutions – universities. In this study, the research participants (interviewees) were academics who have been impacted by their HoDs' leadership styles and practices. Central to this study's aim was to critically explore these academics' perceptions of the leadership practices, behaviours, and styles of their HoDs, which impact their motivation, commitment, personal satisfaction and growth and support their commitment to transfer learning to their students in the classrooms. Additionally, this research aims to examine the extent to which such transfer of learning – transformational teaching – identified as successful was associated with a transformational leadership style. In-depth interviews with 21 academics were undertaken, which comprised a range of academics at different levels. In addition to the previously identified transformational leadership impacts, four themes emerged that foster transformational teaching for academics. This study contributes to the (transformational) leadership literature by specifically using the lens of transformational teaching. It also has valuable contributions to the notion of transformational teaching/learning from the developing countries' perspective, which is understudied (Winokur, 2014). Following this introduction is the literature review to explore the understudied theoretical concept. Thereafter, the research context is explained, followed by the research methods used to undertake the study. Finally, the study findings are presented and discussed, and the implications for research are highlighted.

## **Literature Review**

The literature focusing on educational management and leadership, specifically in developing countries such as Kuwait, indicates that the notion of leadership is at the incipient stage and requires critical and empirical examination (Hallinger & Chen, 2015). For example, Brooks & Jean-Marie (2015) have stressed that leadership has yet to be studied thoroughly and used as a critical success factor to transform organizations in developing countries. Bush & Glover's (2016) research is consistent with this notion. To this end, critical and systematic exploration of the nature of leadership is crucially important to the future of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Oplatka & Arar, 2017), including Kuwait. Winokur (2014) has noted that this nature of leadership inquiry is significant for these countries to be competitive and economically viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The phenomenon of leadership style and behaviour impacting organizational performance (Schmitt et al., 2016), motivation and commitment (Kotter, 1990) is an established area of research. For over one hundred years, researchers have begun to describe, quantify and investigate the nexus between leadership style, organizational practices and behaviour (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991). These scholars have explained that leadership is essentially a function of the behaviour and style of leading people. Leadership is often considered one of the most studied or researched phenomena (Kezar, 2012; Walker, 2018); it is one of the most discussed topics, yet it is least understood (Rost, 1991). Accordingly, Bass (1997) notes that "there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (11), making it a somewhat "elusive" concept (Connell & Parry, 2002, p. 139). Accordingly, Bennis & Nanus (2007) reported that there are approximately 350 definitions of leadership. Consequently, Dopson et al. (2019) submitted that there are varied definitions of leadership, as individuals have identified what it means.

Nevertheless, leaders can be defined as individuals who establish goals for a working group of people and motivate them to realize these goals.

### ***Styles and theories of leadership – transformational leadership***

One of the key typologies of leadership came from Lewin's (1939) work, where he presented what is often taken as the classical types of leadership: 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 the decision-making process (Burns, 1978). Central to the laissez-faire leadership style is the delegation of duties, which entails that all and sundry are given what Bennis & Nanus (2007) refer to as "free hand"; however, supervision is part of this process. On the other hand, leadership theories are considered various methods by which a leader's leadership style 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) identified the leadership characteristics and behaviours associated with these leadership forms.

According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership describes a type of leader who, rather than focusing on their followers' belief system and ideals, focuses on the relationship between the leader and follower. It occurs when there is a transaction or exchange between leaders and followers. Transactional leaders may apply positive or negative rewards in their relationship with followers. For instance, they incentivize subordinates/employees by offering them

incentives, including recognition, promotion and allowances, as well as penalties for not meeting objectives or targets (Zareen et al., 2015). Conversely, transformational leaders focus on the process of leading in which a leader concentrates on their followers' needs, beliefs, and values (Northouse, 2012). This argument is consistent with Kotter's (1990) position on leadership. He contends that transformational leaders are visionary in establishing purpose and motivating, inspiring, and aligning people's actions in tandem with organizational purpose. They also communicate organizational 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 an "energy surge" (Kotter, 1990, p. 64), the fountain of transformational leadership. Great leaders such as Lincoln, Mandela and Gandhi led in transformational and charismatic ways.

Furthermore, Burns (1978) considered transformational and transactional leadership to be opposite. Central to Bass' (1990) theorization of transformational leadership is that transformational leaders are agents of commitment, inspiration, motivation and vision that can lead to transforming the ideals and behaviours of academics in Kuwaiti universities (Winokur, 2014) to reach their ambition and career goals (Kotter, 1990). In this study, such leaders are considered those who change an organization's direction, vision, and resources but who, through their personal exemplary leadership behaviour, propel their followers to change for the better. Kotter (1990) notes that major changes in the behaviour and thought processes of the organization's management, governance, and functioning underlie the transformation. Moreover, Kezar (2012) stresses the importance of (transformational) leadership by arguing that understanding leadership's function and critical role may be the single most significant intellectual task of leading change and desired result. The success of contemporary organizations, as in the past, will be contingent on how well leaders understand their roles, as well as vision, values and the leadership process. Thus, academics have a vital role in the

function of Kuwaiti's educational system that requires academics who are motivated and committed to realizing transformational teaching. Failure in this direction can potentially bring about an educational system in Kuwait that is not competitive in the global marketplace, particularly in the postoil era (Hallinger & Chen, 2015).

In demonstrating how leaders develop relationships with their followers, which leads to transformation, Bass (1985) articulated four dimensions of transformational leadership that are central to attaining organizational change. First, intellectual stimulation suggests that transformational 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' perceptions and awareness about issues and mobilize solutions to them by galvanizing their intellectual participation and engagement (Rao, 2014). Second, inspirational motivation is related to transformational leaders' ability to energize and empower their followers by expressing a compelling vision of the organization (Boukamcha, 2019). They behave and perform in a way that motivates and inspires followers by offering solutions to their challenges 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 by suggesting ways things can be changed for the better, a process that instils confidence in the followers (Bass, 1985).

Third, transformational leaders exert idealized influence such that they serve as ideal role models for their followers; they are traditionally admired by their followers (Kotter, 1990). Put simply, they "walk the talk", a characteristic admired by their followers. They also engender a sense of loyalty, trust, respect and admiration among their followers by engaging in charismatic behaviour and practice. They also symbolize organizational norms and values, which followers



learn, internalize and adopt. Fourth, these leaders are characterized by their individualized consideration, which is the most important aspect of transformational leadership. It can take the forms of negative and positive feedback processes to build and develop followers (Bass, 1978). By providing individual consideration to each follower, transformational leaders are not only aware of the present needs of their followers but also make an effort to elevate those needs to a higher level (Sharif, 2019). For instance, these can be realized through mentoring, coaching and instructional engagements, such as providing feedback, giving tasks and other developmental measures relevant to followers' developmental needs (Boukamcha, 2019). Such leaders offer their followers developmental support, educate the next generation of leaders, and help them attain self-worth and personal satisfaction/growth.

### ***From transformational leadership to transformational teaching***

Transformational teaching was first used by Slavich (2005) to explain that teachers can enhance meaningful change in students' lives if they consider teaching as "stages upon which life-changing experiences can occur" (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 6). Transformational teaching comprises building dynamic relationships among teachers, students and a shared body of knowledge to encourage personal growth and learning (Boyd, 2009). Transformational teachers have a "larger view of education" (Boyd, 2009). They are seen as intellectual coaches that assume the traditional role of facilitating students' acquisition of knowledge but do so while encouraging students to achieve personal development and attitudes regarding learning (Slavich, 2006). They accomplish these objectives by establishing a shared vision of education, challenging and encouraging students, providing modelling and mastery, personalizing feedback/attention beyond the confines of the classroom, and encouraging reflection opportunities (Bednall et al., 2018; Kuechler & Stedham, 2018). This study proposes that such transformative leadership models are synergistically interrelated and, when used together, they maximize students' and teachers' potential for personal growth and intellectual development.

Slavich & Zimbardo (2012) argued that although there is a range of theoretical foundations for explaining transformational teaching, such as social cognitive theory and intentional change theory, transformational leadership theory is at the heart of its philosophical foundation. Transformational teaching considers teachers or leaders as role models, intellectual nurturers and motivators. Transformational teaching enables the realization of a positive learning attitude, participation/collaboration, personal development, and shared vision (Tse et al., 2018; Sims et al., 2020). It, therefore, shares comparable characteristics with the tenets of transformational leadership; hence, it is based on participation, motivation and inspiration that propel people to act towards shared objectives without coercion (Kotter, 1990).

### ***The impact of transformational leadership styles on transformational teaching to students***

To date, transformational leadership is still widely applied in academic institutions (Francisco, 2019; Firmansyah et al., 2022). Bottom-up participation is utilized to connect teachers' individual actions with the school's collective action, and this requires the leader to play a facilitative role (Purwanto et al., 2020). Specifically, transformative leaders have a number of hallmark traits (Algohani & Mydin, 2022). One way a leader can inspire and motivate their team is through charisma or inspiring motivation, which Purwanto (2022) explains as the ability to increase buy-in to the team's overall mission (Algohani & Mydin, 2022; Messmann et al., 2022). In addition, leaders who adopt a transformational leadership style inspire their teams to work together more effectively by fostering a learning environment where both students and staff feel comfortable speaking out and sharing their ideas (Purwanto et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, transformational leaders have the quality of individualized consideration, which they demonstrate by treating each employee as an individual and showing true and honest interest in their professional development (Algohani & Mydin, 2022).

The literature on educational leadership (e.g., Francisco, 2019; Saputra et al., 2022) and the literature on international organizational psychology (e.g., Schermuly & Meyer, 2020) find that transformational leadership is associated with (1) (intrinsic) motivation at work, (2) affective organizational commitment, and (3) job satisfaction. Moreover, studies in organizational psychology have shown that teams are more productive when their leaders are transformational and provide opportunities for their members to learn and develop as individuals (Saira et al., 2021). A transformational leader's capacity to increase team members' sense of belonging (Purwanto, (2022), demonstrate awareness of and belief in team members' competences (Saputra et al., 2022), and foster an engaging and demanding work environment all reflect the supportive function of leadership and its relationship to intrinsic motivation (Messmann et al., 2022). Alghohani and Mydin (2022) wrote about leadership in education and found similar results when applied to the classroom. In particular, they observed a favourable correlation between transformative leadership and the intrinsic motivation of educators.

### ***Research context***

Kuwait is a hierarchical and high-power distance society, and the leader-follower relationship is autocratic and nonparticipatory (Magalhaes & Abouzeid, 2018). According to Winokur & Sperandio (2017), both cross-cultural and Project GLOBE studies reveal the historical and religious foundation of this nonparticipatory leadership model in the Arab Gulf states, including Kuwait. This explains why leadership in Kuwait's HEIs follows a hierarchical approach. Additionally, Magalhaes & Abouzeid's (2018) study unpacks an Arabian Gulf that culturally endorses implicit, transactional and autocratic leadership models, which indicates that the most desirable leadership models are charismatic-value based and transformational leadership. As a result, Alsaeedi & Male (2013, p. 2000) have argued for "transformational leadership behaviour in Kuwaiti schools [including HEIs] since these have been found to be a suitable style of education reform and challenging circumstances".

Furthermore, Kuwait was among the first countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to embark on economic and educational reform and development (Magalhaes & Abouzeid, 2018). Kuwait's economic prosperity dates back to the 1960s, but this situation changed a few decades ago, prompting reforms, including educational reforms (Winokur, 2017), in the wake of competition from other countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Dubai (Blair, 2009); educational reforms have been considered central to reinventing Kuwait (The World Bank, 2015). According to Kuwait's former education minister, Dr. Moudhi Alhmoud, repositioning the region economically and developmentally has a great deal of relationship with reforming the education sector (Krol, 2012). Winokur (2014) has noted that such restructuring includes changing leadership structure at both national and organizational levels. A report in 2005 by the World Bank and the Kuwait Ministry of Education reveals significant concerns about the educational system that requires reform (The World Bank, 2015). Fundamental to this reform was a collaboration between the Kuwaiti government, the World Bank, studies by the Tony Blair Foundation and the Work Foundation. One of the recommendations in the collaboration was educational leadership reform for economic prosperity and leadership. Additionally, recommended were changing education curricula, teachers' motivation, and engagement with key stakeholder groups (teachers, parents, and students) in developing new approaches to educational leadership. This effort culminated in Vision 2035, which set five objectives to transform Kuwait's education and economy (Blair, 2009). Winokur (2014) noted that such a vision translates into educational leadership reform (transformation) to realize such change.

### ***Towards educational transformation – the role of HoDs***

Leadership reform is crucially important to realize the objectives of Vision 2035 (Winokur, 2014). Given the country's bid to diversify its economy and innovate and depend less on oil revenue, effective leadership and education are important (Winokur & Sperandio, 2017; Walker, 2018). Consequently, Bednall et al. (2018) contend that effective educational leaders

(e.g., academics) are critically needed to provide skilled human capital and empowerment essential for socioeconomic and human development. The educational leadership role is important in identifying, articulating and prospecting a vision for change – educational transformation (Beattie, 2020). Therefore, transformational leadership in the education setting is conceived as one of the core issues in creating and nurturing an empowered set of leaders (academics) for an effective educational system. It is vital to prepare effective leadership capable of actualizing reforms in the Kuwaiti education system.

Additionally, there is consistent pressure from key stakeholders to effectively reform Kuwait's educational system to enhance student outcomes (Alsaleh, 2019). Therefore, exploring transformational leadership for transformational teaching becomes crucial within the study context. A reflection from the extant reviewed literature suggests that transformational leadership may offer better solutions in reforming and developing education in Kuwait. Moreover, as Tse et al. (2018) suggest, transformational leadership can influence creativity among academics and promote motivation and commitment, which is necessary to enhance student outcomes. To this end, the Kuwaiti Education Department established objectives, which are enshrined in Vision 2035. To realize these set objectives, the Head of Department (HoD) role is central (Alsaeedi & Male, 2013). HoDs can be role models of good behaviour, values, and attitudes towards academics and students. Accordingly, students and academics learn more from the “invisible” curriculum, domiciled in the leadership style of a leader rather than the “visible” curriculum (Al-Hamdan & Al-Yacoub, 2005).

## **Methods**

Given the need to have in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of academics (stakeholders) in Kuwait in relation to the impacts of transformational leadership style and behaviour on transformational teaching, we adopted interpretative phenomenological analysis

(IPA). According to Larkin & Thompson (2011), this process allows for a rigorous interpretation of stakeholders’ opinions and perspectives about a phenomenon, such as educational leadership style and its impacts. The IPA method aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how people construct meanings of social actualities (Larkin & Thompson, 2011), such as leadership style. This study is also exploratory research aimed at investigating the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and uses qualitative research methods to gain rich, deep, nuanced and contextual issues, where there is relatively little or no research (Cohen et al., 2011).

Data were collected between February and May 2022. This study involved 21 semistructured interviews with male and female academics in Kuwait. The interviews were conducted using video conferencing platforms (such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams). This was deemed fit to allow for a wider reach and timely collection of the data. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. All the participants were anonymized in compliance with data confidentiality. To do this, pseudonyms (names starting with letter ‘J’) were used in place of the participants’ real names to conceal their identity. The sample size shows the authors’ intention to do justice to the richness of the qualitative data gathered by avoiding the pitfall of unnecessarily including a large sample (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Accordingly, Saunders et al. (2016) note that in-depth interviews ensure a richer and higher quality of sampling and require fewer participants to garner relevant and valuable insights about a phenomenon. This study also adopts the purposive sampling technique specifically for selecting a range of key stakeholders who have experience with how HoDs’ leadership practice and behaviour impact academics in relation to transformational teaching.

**Table 1: Demographic information of participants**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Position/rank</b>
James	Male	42	11	Assistant Professor

Joseph	Male	35	8	Assistant Professor
Juliana	Female	45	16	Associate Professor
Jayden	Male	45	15	Senior Lecturer
Joyce	Female	40	13	Assistant Professor
Jade	Female	38	7	Senior Lecturer
Joshua	Male	54	22	Assistant Professor
Jacob	Male	49	15	Associate Professor
Jack	Male	28	4	Lecturer
Juan	Male	35	10	Assistant Professor
Jude	Male	27	4	Lecturer
Julie	Female	29	5	Lecturer
Jonny	Male	50	19	Associate Professor
Juliet	Female	36	6	Lecturer
Jay	Male	28	3	Lecturer
Jimmy	Male	32	6	Senior Lecturer
Jane	Female	39	9	Assistant Professor
Jennifer	Male	43	13	Associate Professor
Jedidah	Female	38	10	Senior Lecturer
Jamir	Male	40	10	Assistant Professor
John	Male	44	14	Assistant Professor

Apart from our interview schedule, participants were also asked to raise additional issues regarding the relationship between (transformational) leadership and academics' commitment, motivation, personal growth and satisfaction. Three universities in Kuwait City (the capital) were used in this study.

Furthermore, to facilitate the analysis process, after seeking permission from the participants, all the interviews were recorded electronically to ensure that salient issues were not omitted. The interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim immediately after they were conducted. After transcription, member checks were conducted by contacting the interviewees to review the transcribed version and ensure that their exact statements were captured to avoid misrepresentation and misinterpretation (Saunders et al., 2016). Data analysis followed a thoroughly grounded theory technique. Following Corbin & Strauss' (2008) procedure for data analysis, the process involved three main phases. The first was open coding, which involved reading the transcript iteratively and indexing the transcript; it also involved

labelling concepts found in the transcript. This gave rise to a large number of codes. The units of coding were statements made individually by participants. The second aspect of this procedure resulted in axial coding, which involved developing categories based on comparable features among codes. We searched for identical codes emerging from data, which were merged to form the subcategories. The third phase, selective coding, was based on further refining the categories developed by examining interconnections between them to create and develop main categories. Given this process, four main categories emerged, which formed the key (four) themes of the study. To enhance the reliability of the process, we undertook investigator triangulation by recruiting an independent qualitative researcher to perform coding on a random sample of our transcript. This ensured that the authors' interpretations of the data were similar to the independent researcher for data congruence (Saunders et al., 2016). Findings and discussion are presented next.

## Findings and discussion

The findings from the interviews consist of four main themes, including person-centred development and satisfaction/growth, engagement and intellectual development, role model, and motivation and vision attainment, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Qualitative data analysis**

<b>Research inquiry</b>	<b>Illustrative quotes</b>	<b>Creation of conceptual categories through codes consolidation</b>	<b>Main themes</b>
Leadership practices	<i>My HoD gives me personal feedback because he performs teaching observations regularly...it helps me to know my strengths and work on my weaknesses (Julie).</i>	Personalized feedback	Person-centred development and satisfaction/growth
	<i>It's no more hearsay that we are achieving our personal goals and aspiration in this institution. This is</i>	Personalized support	



	<i>because of the person-centred support from the HoD (Jamir).</i>		
Impact of leadership style on academics personal growth and teaching	<i>Having a leader that listens to your ideas is very important in this sector...I can say that the new leadership allows for employee voice and engagement (Jacob).</i>	Engagement	Engagement and intellectual development
	<i>The university encourages us to be creative and innovative in our responsibilities, for example, curriculum development and lecture delivery. In the last few years, I feel fulfilled as an academic because of the leadership style which supports personal growth (John).</i>	Intellectual empowerment	
	<i>We're inspired, motivated and challenged to do our best (James).</i>	Inspired followership	Role model
	<i>I respect and admire my HoD because it is not an easy task to lead an academic department and lend an ear to everyone's ideas...I hope if I become HoD, I can imbibe the same (Jane).</i>	Respect and admiration	
	<i>This mode of relationship [transformational leadership] motivates me in my teaching (Jennifer).</i>	Motivation	Motivation and vision attainment
	<i>The leadership style in my faculty is one that reiterates the goals and vision of the institution...in fact, it is written at the end of the communication emails from every HoDs' (Jayden).</i>	Commitment to organizational vision	

### ***Person-centred development and satisfaction/growth***

This theme focuses on how transformational teaching can enhance person-centred development as well as personal satisfaction and growth (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). In this instance, academics assume the traditional role of enabling students' acquisition of core subject knowledge, but they do so while enhancing students' personal development and promoting their disposition toward learning. This process helps in establishing a set of personal ideals and standards, which the individual (student) needs to "close the gap" between their ideal self and

their real self (Slavich, 2006). The following quotes characterize the shared perspectives of interviewees:

The way my HoD asks us to take charge of issues has been instrumental in developing my personal views about becoming an accomplished academic. It has also made me a better teacher to my students. For example, I now receive glowing testimonies from my students that my teaching style helps them learn more. They also report that I give them individualized consideration by looking at their individual works and assignments, as well as pastoral advice that they're enthused about (Jayden).

It's no more news that we as a body of professionals are achieving our personal goals, and the student body is also satisfied with the personal growth achieved, as seen in last year's report. Individual concerns are appreciably addressed these days whenever we send emails or report to our HoD. Personalized feedback gives students an incredible opportunity for personal reflection, which helps their learning experience. Thanks to my departmental head for the wonderful way we've been led rather than managed (Juliana).

I had some objectives I wanted to achieve as a professional when I joined this institution. At the moment, I'm not far from these objectives in terms of personal satisfaction and growth. My HoD finds time these days to see the areas I need support. This approach helps my teaching and the impact I make on my students (Jane).

The views expressed above are widely shared by participants. They suggest that students' and academics' personal growth and satisfaction, as well as person-centred development, are given consideration in HoDs' leadership style. Against the background of autocratic and transactional leadership in Kuwait's schools before the reform (Winokur & Sperandio, 2017), HoDs are currently leading to ensure that Vision 2035 (Winokur, 2014) is attained. Therefore, they lead by being conscious that their actions constitute "invisible" curricula (Al-Kazemi & Ali, 2002) to both academics and students. The scenario also suggests the actualization of individualized

consideration, a core aspect of transformational leadership (Kotter, 1990). Juliana and Jayden supported this contention in their responses. In particular, Jay, a relatively new academic, stated that “my time here has been quite unbearable until recently when the leadership mode changed”. Basic factors that impact personal growth and satisfaction are now given attention. These findings are consistent with Alazmi & Al-Mahdy’s (2020) research in the Arabian Gulf, where educational leadership is beginning to facilitate engagement levels among academics and students. In sum, these findings show that actualizing educational reform in Kuwait requires effective, transformational leadership and teaching that will address the growth opportunities and personal satisfaction of both academics and students. Accordingly, Dopson et al. (2019) note that one of the concerns of leadership is promoting personal satisfaction and individualized consideration, which is integral to person-centred development and transformational teaching.

### ***Engagement and intellectual empowerment***

The findings point to the impact of leadership behaviour and style of HoDs on promoting creative and innovative methods among academics in the education system. This can occur when they (HoDs) stir up a sense of imagination and creativity among academics that challenges old methods and assumptions and mobilizing solutions through their intellectual involvement (Tse et al., 2018). Such a pattern of leadership can provide solutions to organizational problems. In the Kuwaiti educational context, this process can help academics have a sense of participation in educational leadership realized by the HoD’s transformational leadership behaviour (Kotter, 1990). An interviewee pointed out the following:

The truth is that what we see happening these days about school management is a case of leadership underscored by participation, commitment and engagement. This never used to be the case. Our society is historically structured in such a way that leaders are seen as gods, making it

difficult to challenge their actions or add to what they say. This process limited our inputs and commitment, but this is changing now (Juliet).

Other participants stated the following:

I have no hesitation in saying that my institution's plan to move from a centrally controlled management style to a diffused one is working! We're all participants in this drama. I'm personally inspired to do my best as a professional since my opinion is sought these days (James).

Looking back, I think the increasing number of higher institutions in the country has changed the leader-follower exchange and relationship. There's a transition going on, and we're happy about it; what we've been doing since the beginning of this academic year is supporting our Heads of Departments in this bid. Currently, my HoD asks for my input in curriculum development and ways of improving student satisfaction rate and outcome (Jayden).

I've told myself that I would contribute to this evolving leadership landscape and put my best into realizing it. My views are sought these days, and I think that explains the condition of my colleagues...the educational environment is changing with the rise in employee engagement (Joshua).

As can be gleaned above, a new dawn is gradually coming into existence as HoDs reframe their leadership behaviour by producing and nurturing an inspired and empowered set of academics (and students) by involving them. This approach helps create a climate of creative and innovative solutions that hitherto besieged the Kuwaiti education system (Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2020). The process resonates with transformational leadership in the education setting (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Moreover, this argument is consonant with Alsaleh's (2019) findings that leadership influences the style of the educational regime in Arab nations.

Additionally, most participants stated that the current leadership style is instrumental in empowering them to bring more creative, innovative solutions to teaching and learning challenges. For instance, a senior lecturer commented that:

We're at this moment experiencing real involvement and commitment to the ideals of this organization because our ideas and opinions are sought, which builds our loyalty and support to my Head of Department's vision and that of the university (Jimmy).

The above statements reflect a sense of participation and engagement that helps create an educational environment where academics contribute to the educational leadership process (Balwant, 2016). Schmitt et al. (2016) argued that engagement implies an individual's participation, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work. It also considers the intimate involvement with and processes of the work experience. When people are engaged and their opinions are sought, they are emotionally connected to others and cognitively aware and supportive of an organization's direction. An Assistant Professor noted that such a situation helps them to "get involved in growth opportunities. We have a feeling that we're contributing to things that concern us. We also allow input from our students, which has been positive in curricular development and preparation" (Joyce). This approach to teaching and learning is consistent with the view of Stupnisky et al. (2017) regarding the importance of "motivation as a mediator of balance, expectations, and collegiality". This is capable of bridging the HoD-academics gap and enabling inputs from colleagues and students. Accordingly, such an educational context creates an environment of dialogue, mutual sense-making, and sense-giving (Ganon-Shilon & Chen, 2019). Furthermore, by seeking followers' inputs, HoDs create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, which fosters opportunities for (personal) growth and sustainable relationship building.

### ***Role model***

As an emerging theme from the findings, role model relates to the leadership style that employs idealized influence, as leaders serve as ideal role models for their followers. As argued by Sullivan (2012), such leaders “walk the talk” charismatically and inspiringly, which helps to elicit a sense of trust, mutuality, loyalty, respect and admiration. Accordingly, as role models, such leaders symbolize organizational norms, values and culture enshrined in an organizational culture that followers learn, internalize and adopt for organizational success (Sims et al., 2020). Wolfe & Dilworth (2015) define organizational culture as the totality of how an organization operates, including leadership behavior and patterns. Some of the viewpoints expressed by interviewees in this regard are presented below:

I am most impressed and motivated by the current regime of leadership that my university currently has. It instils pride in us...followership and admiration for our Head of Department, who always builds trust in us and lets us understand that he’s a charismatic leader and a leader who leads by example (Jack).

Thinking about the changed organizational system we have now that stems from a new leadership culture of our able and effective HoDs...most academics here will agree with me that things have changed for the better. We’re inspired, motivated and challenged to do our best (Joseph).

Reflecting on the above statements, Robinson et al. (2008) contend that the logic of transformational leadership is the proposition and development of consistent values, norms and vision of a group or organization. Hence, transformational leaders guide and direct their followers’ behaviours and actions by providing them with a sense of meaning and challenge. Accordingly, followers (academics) admire such leaders and consider them role models who deserve their respect, support and contribution (Sullivan, 2012) and symbolize organizational culture. This perspective corroborates Oplatka & Arar’s (2017) study that educational

leadership and management in the Arab world have evolved since the 1990s, transforming into an ideal educational system due to the change in leadership style. Moreover, despite the criticism that the above scenario can potentially lead to control (Tu et al., 2018), it is argued that the adoption of transformational leadership to transform educational institutions during a challenging moment, for example, in the Kuwait context, can lead to good results and performance (Schmitt et al., 2016).

The preceding argument is essential to the educational reform programme by the Kuwait Ministry of Education. The core drivers of this reform include improving the quality of teaching, building capacity, improving the quality of education, monitoring the impact of education quality, and empowering teachers and students (Blair, 2009), which are the tenets of the Kuwait National Education Development Plan (Winokur, 2017). Although all participants shared the notion that organizational culture is essential in transforming Kuwaiti HEIs, Jude and Jade, in particular, stressed this notion. Such organizational culture focuses mainly on developing shared meanings and collective goal pursuit:

For me, I go well above the call of duty, in my opinion, to contribute to whatever will influence and inspire my students for better student outcomes. This is because my HoD physically and emotionally gets involved in academic matters like having one-on-one sessions with me to boost my confidence, and I do so with my students. I personally come in early for my classes because I'm inspired by what I do, and my students do so as well. It has become a culture, and I'm inspired by the role of my HoD (Jude).

Given the collaborative nature of the relationship between my HoD and us (other academics), we stay longer than required and get committed to our work. He does the same. We ensure that students obtain value for money by supporting them through person-centred teaching and inclusive-experiential teaching. This creates a productive student-teacher network and relationship (Jade).

These statements bolster the impact of HoDs in motivating academics by laying personal examples to rise beyond individual self-interest and pursue a collective goal for the greater good of the institution. This is shown through self-commitment on the part of the HoDs, which contributes to inspired followership, respect and admiration on the part of the academics. The statements further emphasize the commitment to the collective mission of the educational transformation strategy in Kuwait. Thus, HoDs symbolize and possess idealized influence, as academics (and students) consider them a charismatic personification of the institution's mission and values.

### ***Motivation and vision attainment***

The study findings reveal the influence of HoDs to energize and empower academics by expressing a compelling vision of schools. As revealed from the data, such HoDs behave and perform in a manner that motivates and inspires followers, as their behaviour facilitates solutions to these academics' challenges and provides meaning to what they do. According to Rao (2014), such leaders can be likened to motivational speakers, as they inject a sense of enthusiasm, optimism, and team spirit into their team. Sometimes, transformational leaders accomplish this process by engaging in dialogue with the people, one-on-one sessions with teachers and stimulating teamwork and positive outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Constant dialogue and engagement are central to this process, which helps galvanize academic support. These academics, in turn, bring this experience to bear in their teaching, which motivates students. The responses below exemplify the impact of transformational leaders' motivation to achieve goal realization:

The nature of the relationship and communication that I have at present with my line manager is so amazing. He's always reminding me that we are chasing the same ideals and dream of reforming our institution. This mode of relationship motivates me in my teaching. Recently, my



students are getting committed to their schoolwork because I try to inculcate a sense of belonging and unconsciously help them take their studies seriously by encouraging and inspiring them (Jedidah).

My HoD believes in speaking to us regularly to facilitate the institution's goal in the reformation process. Her disposition and belief in this have changed the dynamics of student outcomes, satisfaction rate, and motivation of academics. Similarly, I use a person-centred approach for my students, and some of them have come to me to say it's a very supportive approach to their learning (Jonny).

Early this year, the HoD introduced what he called the "leader-follower support procedure" to ensure a bidirectional and pluralistic form of communication. In this forum, we can discuss how his leadership style affects our motivation, commitment and professional support. We're also advised to replicate this approach, which has made it possible to have regular meetings with students...it creates a stimulating environment for learning (Juan).

The above quotes reflect participants' shared views concerning the relationship between transformational leadership and motivation and commitment, which leads to collective vision attainment. This notion relates to Flores' (2004) hypothesis about the influence of school leadership on teachers' learning, motivation and outcome, as it helps frame a pattern of social networks, teaching culture and structure.

Within the context of the education system, transformational leaders provide a structure to help academics contribute to attaining the vision of the educational system through effective and efficient leadership (Beattie, 2020). However, Klempin & Karp (2018) note that resistance to change is one of the main reasons for the failure to reform educational institutions. This is because, oftentimes, academics feel marginalized by a specific structure, which sometimes creates conflict in transforming HEIs. Hence, educational transformation involves a participatory and supportive environment that encourages academics and students to realize

collective ideals, personal development, and satisfaction. This is echoed by one of the academics:

As a young academic, I went through some difficulties in getting my promotion. However, my HoD made me realize the importance of publishing papers for promotion by writing one with me through his personal influence. This helped to change my situation. I now encourage PhD students to take publishing seriously for a more fulfilled academic career (Jimmy).

Overall, individuals become motivated and committed when the leadership style supports, inspires and challenges them to do their best and achieve set objectives (Dartey-Baah, 2014). These features are crucial to academics, who should originate and be championed by HoDs for a reformed Kuwaiti higher educational system facilitated by the ideals of transformational leadership and teaching (Slavich, 2006). In this regard, Dopson et al. (2019) note that an educational leadership system associated with a transformational leadership ideal characteristically transforms academics and the entire organizational structure. Hence, Kuwaiti academics can take up opportunities to attain HEIs' mission statements and objectives. Accordingly, Sims et al. (2020) argue that transformational leadership (and teaching) can enhance learning and teaching culture that facilitates academics' commitment and motivation and positive student outcomes.

### **Conclusion, implications, limitations and future research**

This study identified four main themes that are important in transforming higher education in Kuwait: person-centred development and satisfaction/growth, engagement and intellectual development, role models, and motivation and vision attainment. These themes are significant in realizing transformational leadership and teaching from our findings. This research confirms the theorizing of the educational system and leadership style from the angle of transformational leadership that is anchored in the notion of inspiring, motivating and influencing leaders. Such

a transformational leadership environment characterizes the findings of this study, where HoDs' leadership styles and behaviour directly impact academics and facilitate transformational teaching and learning. Therefore, instructional leaders in Kuwait need to be aware of the significance of transformational leadership in bringing a transformative educational landscape and realizing the ideals of higher education reform. Additionally, the findings provide evidence that education reformation in Kuwait, which the Kuwaiti government has addressed, requires transformational leadership/teaching to achieve the goals of Vision 2035. Additionally, the findings of this study, including works focusing on Arab nations (see Winokur, 2017; Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2020), underscore the changing educational landscape and the need for transformational leadership and teaching. While the Kuwait Ministry of Education has made significant efforts to reform schools (including higher education), this study suggests that considering the impact of transformational leadership will facilitate achieving educational reform and economic growth in the country.

This research implies that appropriating transformational leadership teaching will facilitate the realization of Kuwait's Vision 2035. Thus, we recommend that transformational leadership be instrumental in rising above the autocratic and high power distance culture between HoDs and academics that hitherto characterized educational leadership in Kuwait and negated transformational teaching. This study responds to wider calls (see Winokur, 2014; Winokur & Sperandio, 2017) in educational leadership to support the transformed education system's learning and teaching climate. It also contributes to transformational leadership research through the prism of transformational teaching, which requires development (Slavich, 2006).

Given the remit of this study, we interviewed only academics whose views are pertinent in understanding the interface between transformational teaching and transformational leadership in Kuwait. Thus, we acknowledge that including students' perspectives could impact data analysis, as seen here. Potentially, this process could constitute bias in our analysis. In light of

this, we acknowledge potential criticism for not including students in the interviews; hence, academics' views were deemed sufficient to arrive at data saturation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A comparative approach was adopted by Winokur & Sperandio (2017), who collected data from teachers to explore leadership practices of a transformational nature and the transfer of teacher training in public high schools in the Kuwaiti context. Accordingly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that sample size is typically smaller in qualitative research because acquiring more data may not generate significantly more information. Despite the benefits of qualitative research, further research can be undertaken quantitatively (or comparatively) to better understand and appraise the impact of transformational leadership and teaching on academics' motivation, commitment, engagement and personal development/satisfaction and to realize positive student learning outcomes. This can be operationalized by juxtaposing academics' and students' perspectives or comparing different institutions in a country or different countries. Future research could also explore the views of HoDs (as transformational leaders) to understand the effort and strategies employed toward transformational leadership and teaching. Further research geared towards this direction will facilitate realizing effective frameworks for change in higher education focusing on transformational leadership and teaching and change of organizational practice about education as a consequence.

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