

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS' IDEALIZED INFLUENCE: A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP IN LEBANON'S IB WORLD SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study sought to examine whether teachers' communication strategies reveal leadership qualities put forth by Burns (1978) and whether students could embody these strategies as a means of revealing comparable leadership traits under the guise of learning leadership through social constructs, primarily communication.

Methods: The study follows a mixed-method approach, incorporating data collection tools that are quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (observations and interviews). Survey items included leadership traits as well as verbal and nonverbal communication moves. Observations recorded speech acts and nonverbal cues and yielded an interpreted leadership trait. They also included the physical aspects of the classroom proposed by Galloway (1969). Interview questions were thematically constructed addressed Burns' (1978) transformational leadership characteristics.

Findings: The study reveals that effective teacher-student interactions have a positive effect on the development of leadership qualities.

Practical Implications: The data analyzed do not allow for an irrefutable connection between the manifested teacher leader language and its impact on student acquisition of leadership traits. Nonetheless, it is promising in certain aspects.

Originality/Value: Through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the investigated data do not support a conclusive link between teacher leader language and the development of leadership skills in students. However, it does show some promise in several areas.

INTRODUCTION

Language and linguistic studies in addition to dyadic relationships are an indispensable part of and an essential criterion to the identification, understanding, and practicing of leader practices and traits. Communication is a major entity of leadership and is inseparably examined alongside leadership markers (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). The rise of the communicative perspective to leadership with a number of theories, such as hermeneutic leadership (Jian, 2019), the communicative leadership (Eriksen, 2001), and the discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2009), among others, posits the ability of one to learn leadership practices through a communicative lens.

Vygotsky (1978), through a social construct approach, has explain how mental processes are develop as social cues observed on an interpsychological level are internalized and manifested

on an intrapsychological level. With a notion such as this and the idea of examining leadership through a communicative lens, one can hypothesize that the social cues of a well-practiced leader can be internalized by an attentive follower and later manifested in thoughts and, potentially, actions. “The set of leadership acts is of the same order of magnitude as the set of sentences in a natural language. Language is after all one of the key tools of social influence” (Pondy, 1978, p. 91). Communicative events in sociolinguistic interaction should not be regarded as a process of encoding and decoding but as an ongoing process of inferring what is conveyed from others and what is being conveyed from oneself in order to deduce accurate interpretations (Gumperz, 2001). Along those lines, “people are socialized to conventionally associate specific communicative resources with specific interpretive claims” (Heller, 2014, p. 192). A study that qualitatively analyzed, through a sociolinguistic lens, 1500 interactions from different organizations concluded that ‘every day’ talk promotes leadership, and leaders typically orient themselves to a particular leadership style and means of communication based on the context (Vine et al., 2008). In addition, according to Fairhurst (2008), when examining leadership, the first question to answer is what is seen, thought, and talked about with a discursive lens directed toward leadership, and the second provides an answer to the gains in leadership knowledge as interplay between the discursive lens and the psychological one occurs.

Bringing this into the educational realm, it is seemingly concluded that teachers who ‘speak’ leadership yield students who ‘speak’ it, as well. Given that leadership is learned and that the communicative lens is at the core of the leadership acquisition journey, this article aims at exploring the validity of the communicative aspect to leadership through examining verbal and nonverbal communiques of teachers and their students in a classroom environment and measuring their subsequent promotion of leadership traits and practices. The study focuses on one leadership trait, proposed by Burns (1978), idealized influence. Idealized influence is defined as the capacity of the leader to acquire the admiration and respect of their followers, resulting in imitation of desired behavior. A leader who leads with idealized influence role-models to their followers what the expected behavior is, ultimately ‘leading by example.’ As such, the goal of idealized influence leadership is to inspire followers to internalize the leader's vision, values, and mission.

The study hypothesizes that teacher leader communication practices positively impact student acquisition of the leadership trait, idealized influence. Vygotsky (2004) distinguishes an educational leader as having a reasoned educational identity. An educational leader performs ‘pedagogic-strategic discretion,’ which entails determining an educational goal and adapting the necessary educational tools to actualize that goal through inspiring, building collaboration, instilling a vision, and stimulating followers’ ideas (Nissim, 2020). Nonetheless, most literature on leadership in academic settings posits the notion of leadership as a position of power or authority rather than a set of traits and/or characteristics that any individual can acquire. More specifically, “Classroom leadership in many aspects remains unexplored although it appears to promise data of paramount importance for various research areas related to both leadership and education” (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020, p. 82). This study contributes to bridging the gap in literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

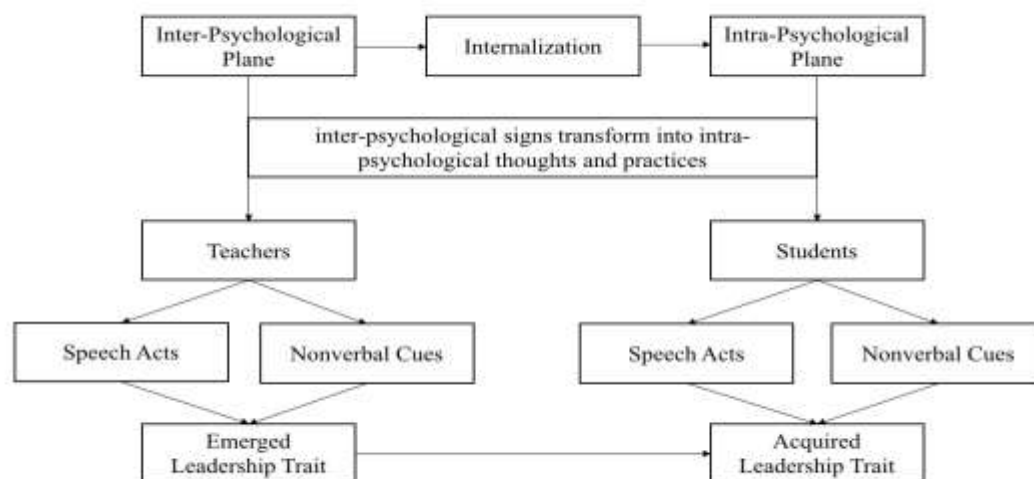
From a leadership perspective and for the purposes of this study, the transformational leadership style is to be examined. The definition adopted for this style is that of Burns (1978), whereby the leaders and followers reciprocally motivate and inspire on another. Burns (1978), known as the father of transformational leadership, explains that a

transformative leader (1) has an idealized influence through role-modeling and a consistent approach based on predetermined principles and values, (2) exhibits inspirational motivation through establishing meaningful goals and celebrating wins, (3) intellectually stimulates followers through challenging the status-quo, and (4) possesses individualized consideration through showing care and support and providing coaching and mentoring to followers. For the purposes of this study and to provide more rigorous results only the notion of an idealized influence from Burns (1978) is examined.

From a communication perspective, this study adopts the Interactional Sociolinguistic theory proposed by Gumperz (1982a). The theory requires studying communication in its entirety with a thorough examination of the holistic social interaction. The Interactional Sociolinguistic theory takes into account the empirical communicative, which is manifested in what is said and what is done at the time of the spoken act, in order to create meaning (Bailey, 2015). Along those lines, speech acts and nonverbal cues in addition to the classroom environment is to be examined in this study. Speech acts are adapted from Malcolm (1979), which, for the purposes of this study, include eliciting acts, nominating acts, replying acts, informing acts, and acknowledging acts. With nonverbal cues being adapted from Galloway (1969), the study incorporates cues that address the continuums of congruity-incongruity, responsive-unresponsive, positive affectivity-negative affectivity, attentive-inattentive, facilitating-unreceptive, and supportive-disapproving. Alongside these dimensions, Galloway (1969) called for examining the factors of space, travel, time, and control within the classroom, all of which have been adopted in this study.

With Vygotsky's (1978) take on the theory of social constructs, the conceptual framework of this study is displayed in the figure below:

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The study follows a mixed-method approach, incorporating data collection tools that are quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (observations and interviews). The tools of the study have been constructed based on the aforementioned conceptual framework. Survey items included leadership traits as well as verbal and nonverbal communication moves. Observations recorded speech acts and nonverbal cues and yielded an interpreted leadership trait. They also included the physical aspects of the classroom proposed by Galloway (1969).

Interview questions were thematically constructed addressed Burns' (1978) transformational leadership characteristics.

The sampling method adopted was a purposive one. The targeted sample included students enrolled in 'Studies in Language and Literature' and 'Language acquisition' courses of either the Standard Level (SL) or the High Level (HL) with English as a language of instruction, in International Baccalaureate – Diploma Program I (IBDP1) schools in Lebanon and their teachers. IBDP1 is equivalent to grade 11.

Data collection from teachers occurred once during the 2020-2021 academic year to identify transformational leadership markers. Six interviews, six surveys, and 12 observations were collected.

Data collection from students occurred twice a year to detect acquisition of leadership traits. Twenty-five interviews, 64 surveys, and six observations were collected at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, and twenty-three interviews, 64 surveys, and six observations were collected at the end of the same academic year.

All interviews and observations were thematically coded and compared, first between round one and two of student data collection process to assess whether growth is evident and second between round two and teacher data to note down whether students have developed similar leadership traits that the teachers manifested. For surveys, a t-test was conducted between round one and round two of student data, and a regression analysis was conducted between teacher data and round two of student data as teacher traits might be predictors of student traits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From teacher observations, sixty interactions were recorded, yielding a total of 161 instances of give-and-take dialogue. Out of these 161 instances, only six (3.73%) were interpreted as yielding an idealized influence. Teachers revealed a range of communication techniques that yielded an interpreted leadership trait. Although varied, these techniques mostly included speech acts that elicit students' thoughts that acknowledge their ideas, and inform them about a specific subject of interest. Also, teachers, to a certain degree, exhibited non-verbal cues that lie on the negative continuum of nonverbal communiques but have mostly expressed support, facilitation, and positive affectivity when responding to students and their needs.

During round one of student observations, thirty interactions were recorded, yielding a total of 115 instances of give-and-take dialogue. Out of these 115 instances, only three (2.61%) were interpreted as yielding a leadership characteristic. Given that the instances that revealed a manifestation of leadership were only 22, it was difficult to identify patterns of verbal and nonverbal communiques. Nonetheless, the replying speech act was one of the most common acts apparent while interpreting the leadership characteristics while the nonverbal communiques mostly revealed the positive end of the continuum, such as facilitative, attentive, and responsive.

During round two of student observations, thirty interactions were recorded, yielding a total of 126 instances of give-and-take dialogue. Out of these 126 instances, only two (1.59%) were interpreted as yielding a leadership characteristic. Despite seeing a slight increase in instances that yielded an interpretation of leadership characteristics, similar to round one, it was difficult to identify patterns of verbal and nonverbal communiques. Nonetheless, what is noteworthy to mention in this round is that student speech acts were more varied to include

acknowledging, eliciting, and informing, as opposed to mostly replying. This reveals that students have gained a better understanding of maneuvering through their speech acts. For non-verbal cues, the majority remained on the positive end of the continuum and along the same lines of round one.

The classroom space, travel, time, and control remained consistent all throughout the observations. Classroom space differed from one room to the other but was mostly viewed in a non-traditional kind of setup, with chairs and desks being randomly placed or forming a U-shape. Travel time was contingent with the type of lesson being given and the role of the teacher during that session. Nonetheless, the teacher responded to students whenever the need arose. Time spent during these observations remained consistent to one topic; the teacher and students did not introduce/discuss another topic. In most classes, teachers had a solid control of classroom management with minimal instances of interruptions.

Results from these observations reveal little data on teachers' manifestation of idealized influence and students' acquisition of this transformational trait. With such little leadership instances, yielded interpretations are inconclusive.

Gandolfi and Stone (2017) explain that "leaders are made not born" and that all individuals have the capacity to become leaders (p. 21). Kouzes and Posner (2013) explain that leadership is learned through "observable pattern of practices and behaviors and a definable set of skills and abilities" (p. 7). They explain that the leadership skills can be honed but what is essentially required is the readiness to be improved. Student leadership has mainly been promoted through the implementation of extensive leadership programs (Ostrom-Blonigen, Bornsen, Larson-Casselton, & Erickson, 2010) rather than learned through more authentic, less-staged experiences. Hence, the acquisition of leadership traits might need to be more targeted in order for students to acquire the essential transformational leadership characteristics. Students might have acquired speech acts from teachers as their second round of observations revealed a more varied use of speech acts than the first round but had not acquired leadership traits, which can potentially be attributed to the lack of focus on these skills as teachers were giving their sessions. In fact, schools have taken various approaches to nurture student leadership characteristics be it through civic service or engagement within the community (Dugan & Komives, 2007), through training elected student leaders via school camps (Chapman & Aspin, 2001), or through delivering particular leadership programs (Coffey & Lavery, 2018). These programs can include a communicative lens in delivery and acquisition of leadership traits.

During their interviews, teachers expressed in their interviews the need to set expectations at the beginning of every academic year and remind the students of them on a regular basis. These expectations are best maintained through continuous guiding and modeling. All teachers expressed the importance of their role in ensuring that the students are engaged in the lesson and have always attempted to contextualize and authenticate the learning material in order to instigate student interest. One teacher explains, "They feel it is not only about English or literature, it is about the world as a whole, and that is why they become more and more interested. We involve history, business, economy, politics, religion, so they feel like this diversity within the course pushes them to be more interested in the topic." Establishing a relationship with the students was also a common way that teachers used in ensuring that students are up to par with their studying and the course requirements. Teachers also expressed that they challenge the status quo by being risk-takers in their classrooms and venturing into topics that are controversial with their lessons and their approach to the teaching. Teachers have allowed students to have a voice and an ownership of their learning

processes however were somewhat impeded by giving students the choice of leading classrooms as they all had a set syllabus that needed to be completed and followed up on by coordinators and other superiors. As caring individuals of their students, teachers mostly expressed that they make themselves available for them at any time. One teacher explains, “I want them to know that there is an extra person to seek anytime they feel like they are struggling with something, they have certain concerns or worries, they can come to me, let us say, they can find someone else to talk to.”

Results from teacher interviews indicate that teachers exhibit the transformational leadership characteristics proposed by Burns (1978). Teachers continue to model and maintain expectations as part of their idealized influence.

Students’ answers in both rounds of interviews were similar and did not show any area of significant growth. In both rounds of students’ data collection, results from interviews revealed that students have a lack of understanding of what a leader is as they usually associate it to being in control and ‘having the last say.’ Also, they expressed initiative to do the entire assignment should their groupmates not participate or choose not to. Results from student interviews indicate that students were unable to elaborate on or show their practice in idealized influence.

According to the results from these interviews, the notion of transformational leadership being a western concept is challenged, particularly among teachers. According to Shah (2006), “The concept of educational leadership varies across societies and cultures” (p. 364). Shah (2020) also speculates that theories in education and in leadership are mostly ‘ethnocentric,’ and predominantly follow a western outlook. Literature is being developed to bridge this gap as studies are tackling transformational leadership in the Arab World, such as that of Mattar (2016), who concluded that the western understanding of transformational leadership is present in the Lebanese context, and Al Johani (2019), whose study on Saudi principals revealed a great deal about their transformational approaches in schools. The current study also reveals that teachers in Lebanon exhibit transformational leadership traits, particularly that of idealized influence; however, the study’s findings did not indicate that students had acquired idealized influence as a leadership trait.

Results from surveys revealed no significant values in both, the t-test and the regression analysis, accentuating the following:

- (1) the growth of leadership traits among students between round one and round two was invaluable,
- (2) and teachers’ manifested leadership traits are not a valid predictor of students acquired leadership traits.

These results rejected this study hypothesis; in a quantifiable form, there seems to be no connection between teachers’ manifestation of leadership traits and students’ acquisition of these traits.

There might be different contributing factors that nurture their leadership traits and communicative practices other than their language teachers. The proposed study does not take into account these factors. However, the study contextualizes the data collection instruments used within the English language classroom and targets them at group work and collaboration.

Nonetheless, research has capitalized the role of other factors in promoting leadership. Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio and Johnson (2011) have systematically and qualitatively reviewed the literature on leadership. Their findings have resulted in two essential dimensions to the understanding of leadership, termed as the 'locus' and the 'mechanism.' The locus of leadership answers the question, "Where does leadership come from," and the mechanism of leadership answers the question, "How is leadership transmitted" (p, 1166). According to Hernandez et al. (2011), in answering the former question, leadership theorists have speculated that leadership is initiated from the (1) leader, (2) the followers through possessing unique traits that would enable leadership, (3) the context through the situational opportunities as well as the organizational environment, cultures, and norms, among others, (4) the collectives through the set of relationships among all group members, and (5) the dyads through the leadership-follower relationship. Moreover, Hernandez et al. (2011) have answered the latter question on mechanism, explaining that leadership theorists have perceived the transmission of leadership through (1) traits, such as personality characteristics, (2) behaviors, including those that make leadership possible, (3) cognition, including scripts and schemas to influence thinking and attitudes among followers, and (4) affect, which captures the emotion of the leader. Moreover, language and discourse took on a more analytical perspective, incorporating policies, institution processes, culture, and economy, among others in an effort to deduce meanings that would be ultimately grounded in ideological beliefs and practices (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The purpose behind this study was to determine whether teachers' communication practices revealed the leadership traits proposed by Burns (1978) and whether these communication practices can be embodied by students as a tool to reveal similar leadership characteristics under the pretense of learning leadership through social constructs, mainly communication. It hypothesizes that teacher leader communication practices positively impact student acquisition of leadership traits. The study sampled teachers and students attending schools in Lebanon that have been accredited by the International Baccalaureate Organization.

Through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the study incorporated three phases of data collection, one for teachers and two for students at the beginning and end of the 2020-2021 academic year. Upon analysis, results from observations revealed that teachers use a variety of speech acts, some of which are used to promote leadership traits. In their second round, students revealed a more diverse use of speech acts that could be attributed to their teachers'. Nonverbal communiques were mostly on the positive end of an inhibiting-encouraging continuum in both teachers and students. However, results from the observations cannot yield conclusive evidence that students acquire leadership traits from teachers' manifestation of these traits. From interviews, results revealed that teachers exhibit the idealized influence leadership trait proposed by Burns (1978) whereas students do not and had not acquired it through the teacher's communicative practices. From questionnaires, results revealed no connection between teachers' manifestation of leadership traits and students' acquisition of these traits as well as no significant growth in leadership traits between round one and round two of students' data.

The data analyzed do not allow for an irrefutable connection between the manifested teacher leader language and its impact on student acquisition of leadership traits. Nonetheless, it is promising in certain aspects.

To begin with, although it might be argued that leadership is culturally bound (Eagly & Chin, 2010), the notion of transformational leadership can be applied to a Middle Eastern context as

other studies have also concluded (Al Johani, 2019; Mattar, 2016). Nonetheless, further studies are needed to fortify this claim and the presence of transformational leadership traits among educational institutions in Lebanon and surrounding areas.

Moreover, observations have revealed that students acquired a more diverse set of speech acts in round two than they had revealed in round one. Teachers had exhibited similar speech acts during their rounds of observations. While the evidence of students acquiring these speech acts solely from teachers is not decisive, it is worth investigating on how students have acquired these verbal skills in order to further promote them in the classroom. Teachers' lexical material could have been "a prosodic trigger" that invoked frames and scenarios within students and promoted them to use what they have interpreted in their future interactional moves (Levinson, 2002). As leadership is a learned concept, it needs to be taught in a more targeted manner through programs. Turnnidge and Côté (2018), upon reviewing a total of 151 research articles, conclude that transformational leadership among students can be developed through intervention programs. Finally, the results yielded from this study have yet to be corroborated by further, similar research studies. Consequently, despite filling a gap in the underdeveloped literature, this study's limitation lies in its novelty.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest shall arise from the publishing of the study.

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