



Transformational prophetic leadership in building a culture of quality in higher education

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the role of transformational prophetic leadership in building a culture of quality in higher education. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving university leaders, quality assurance personnel, and academic staff. The data were analyzed using an interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that transformational leadership contributes to the development of a quality culture through vision building, innovation, and active stakeholder engagement. At the same time, prophetic leadership reinforces ethical values such as honesty, trustworthiness, transparency, and wisdom, which serve as the foundation of organizational behavior. The integration of these two leadership approaches referred to as transformational prophetic leadership creates a holistic model that balances performance orientation with moral and spiritual values. Furthermore, the study shows that a sustainable culture of quality is achieved not only through formal quality assurance systems but also through leadership practices that foster trust, participation, and continuous improvement. This study contributes to the development of leadership theory by integrating transformational and value-based perspectives, and provides practical implications

for higher education leaders in designing effective and ethical leadership strategies.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, prophetic leadership, quality culture, higher education, educational leadership*

Introduction

The landscape of higher education in the 21st century is undergoing profound transformation driven by globalization, digital disruption, and increasing demands for accountability and institutional performance. Universities are no longer perceived merely as centers of teaching and research; rather, they are expected to function as agents of social change, innovation hubs, and producers of globally competitive human capital (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Marginson, 2016). These shifts have intensified the need for higher education institutions to strengthen quality assurance systems and develop sustainable competitive advantages.

In this context, the concept of quality culture has become a central paradigm in higher education reform. Quality culture goes beyond formal accreditation mechanisms and performance indicators; it reflects shared values, beliefs, expectations, and commitments toward continuous improvement embedded within organizational practices (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Ehlers, 2009). A strong quality culture requires the active engagement of all members of the academic community in internalizing quality as a core value rather than viewing it as a compliance-driven obligation. However, cultivating such a culture remains a major challenge, particularly in institutions facing structural constraints, bureaucratic rigidity, and fragmented governance systems (Sallis, 2014).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining a culture of quality in higher education. It is not merely a formal position but a dynamic process of influence that shapes organizational vision, values, and collective behavior (Bush, 2011). Among various leadership paradigms, transformational leadership has received significant attention due to its ability to inspire change, foster innovation, and enhance organizational performance. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership is characterized by four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions enable leaders to motivate organizational members to exceed expectations and commit to continuous improvement. In educational

settings, transformational leadership has been shown to positively influence organizational commitment, teacher performance, and institutional effectiveness (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Despite its strengths, transformational leadership alone may not sufficiently address the ethical and moral challenges faced by contemporary higher education institutions. Issues such as academic dishonesty, commercialization of education, and declining public trust highlight the limitations of performance-oriented leadership models (Brown & Treviño, 2006). These challenges underscore the importance of integrating ethical and value-based dimensions into leadership practices.

Prophetic leadership offers a value-oriented framework grounded in moral integrity, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness. It is rooted in core principles such as *sidq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (transparency and communicativeness), and *fathanah* (wisdom and intelligence), which guide both individual behavior and organizational culture (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Antonio, 2013). This model aligns closely with the concept of ethical leadership, which emphasizes moral conduct and role modeling as key drivers of organizational behavior (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In the context of higher education, prophetic leadership contributes to the development of academic environments that prioritize integrity, justice, and holistic human development.

The integration of transformational and prophetic leadership referred to as transformational prophetic leadership provides a comprehensive framework for addressing both performance and ethical dimensions of leadership. This integrated approach combines the visionary and change-oriented aspects of transformational leadership with the moral and spiritual foundations of prophetic leadership. As a result, it offers a more holistic strategy for fostering sustainable quality culture in higher education institutions (Rafsanjani, 2020).

In building a culture of quality, transformational prophetic leadership plays a strategic and multidimensional role. Leaders who embody this approach are capable of articulating a shared vision, fostering trust, and encouraging active participation among stakeholders. They not only drive institutional transformation but also serve as moral exemplars whose values influence the internalization of quality principles across the organization. This perspective aligns with the view that organizational culture is shaped through the interaction of leadership, values, and practices (Schein, 2010).

Despite its conceptual relevance, the integration of transformational and prophetic leadership in higher education remains underexplored in the literature. Most studies tend to

examine transformational leadership or ethical/value-based leadership separately, with limited attention to their combined effect on organizational culture. Furthermore, empirical research examining how value-based leadership contributes to the development of sustainable quality culture in higher education is still relatively scarce.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of transformational prophetic leadership in building a culture of quality in higher education. It seeks to contribute to the theoretical advancement of educational leadership by integrating transformational and value-based perspectives, as well as to provide practical insights for higher education leaders in designing sustainable, ethical, and quality-oriented leadership strategies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the role of transformational prophetic leadership in fostering a culture of quality in higher education. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, including university leaders, quality assurance personnel, and academic staff involved in institutional quality development.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis (e.g., strategic plans and quality assurance reports). These methods enabled data triangulation to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were systematically coded and categorized into themes related to transformational leadership, prophetic values, and quality culture.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation and member checking. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality.

Result & Discussion

Transformational Leadership Practices in Higher Education

The findings indicate that transformational leadership is strongly reflected in the leaders' ability to articulate a shared vision, inspire academic members, and promote continuous improvement. Institutional leaders demonstrated *idealized influence* by acting as role models in upholding academic standards and integrity. This was evident in their consistency in aligning institutional policies with long-term quality goals.

Furthermore, *inspirational motivation* was manifested through the communication of clear institutional visions related to excellence and quality assurance. Leaders actively encouraged academic staff to participate in quality enhancement programs, accreditation processes, and curriculum innovation. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of visionary leadership in fostering organizational commitment and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

In addition, *intellectual stimulation* was observed in leaders' efforts to encourage innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving among faculty members. Academic staff were given opportunities to develop new teaching strategies, research initiatives, and community service programs. Meanwhile, *individualized consideration* was reflected in leaders' support for professional development, including training, mentoring, and academic career advancement.

These findings confirm that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping adaptive and innovative institutional environments, which are essential for building a sustainable culture of quality.

Integration of Prophetic Values in Leadership Practices

Beyond transformational dimensions, the study reveals that leadership practices are deeply embedded with prophetic values, which serve as the ethical foundation of organizational behavior. The value of *sidq* (truthfulness) was reflected in transparent decision-making processes and honest communication between leaders and academic staff. This transparency contributed to increased trust and openness within the institution.

The principle of *amanah* (trustworthiness) was evident in leaders' accountability in managing institutional resources and responsibilities. Leaders demonstrated commitment to fulfilling their duties in accordance with institutional goals and ethical standards. This fostered a sense of responsibility among organizational members.

The value of *tabligh* (communicativeness) was observed in the leaders' ability to effectively disseminate policies, vision, and quality-related initiatives. Open communication channels enabled collaboration and reduced resistance to change. Meanwhile, *fathanah* (wisdom and intelligence) was reflected in strategic decision-making, particularly in responding to challenges related to quality assurance and institutional development.

These findings support the argument that value-based leadership enhances ethical climate and organizational trust, which are critical components of a strong quality culture (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Transformational Prophetic Leadership as a Hybrid Model

One of the key findings of this study is the emergence of *transformational prophetic leadership* as an integrated leadership model. This model combines the change-oriented nature of transformational leadership with the ethical and spiritual dimensions of prophetic leadership.

The integration is evident in how leaders not only drive institutional change but also ensure that such changes are grounded in moral values. For instance, quality improvement initiatives were not merely pursued to meet accreditation standards, but also to fulfill ethical responsibilities toward students, society, and stakeholders.

This hybrid leadership approach creates a balance between performance and ethics, which is essential in higher education institutions facing complex challenges. It extends existing leadership theories by incorporating spiritual and moral dimensions into organizational transformation processes.

Building a Culture of Quality through Leadership

The study finds that transformational prophetic leadership significantly contributes to the development of a culture of quality through several mechanisms:

First, leaders establish a shared vision of quality that is understood and accepted by all members of the institution. This vision serves as a guiding framework for organizational practices.

Second, leaders foster organizational commitment and participation by involving academic staff in decision-making processes and quality initiatives. This participatory approach strengthens ownership and accountability.

Third, leaders promote continuous improvement practices, such as regular evaluation, feedback mechanisms, and innovation in teaching and learning. These practices are embedded in daily institutional activities.

Fourth, leaders cultivate an ethical organizational culture, where values such as integrity, responsibility, and transparency become integral to academic life. This ethical foundation reinforces the sustainability of quality culture.

These findings are consistent with organizational culture theory, which emphasizes the role of leadership in shaping shared values and practices within institutions (Schein, 2010). Moreover, they highlight that quality culture is not merely a technical construct but a value-driven process.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of leadership theory by proposing transformational prophetic leadership as a comprehensive framework that integrates performance-oriented and value-based approaches. It bridges the gap between transformational leadership and ethical/prophetic leadership, offering a more holistic understanding of leadership in higher education.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that higher education leaders should not rely solely on managerial or transformational competencies, but also incorporate ethical and spiritual values in their leadership practices. Institutions aiming to build a sustainable culture of quality should prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize both competence and character.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that transformational prophetic leadership plays a significant role in building a sustainable culture of quality in higher education. The findings reveal that transformational leadership contributes to institutional development through vision articulation, innovation, and stakeholder engagement, while prophetic leadership strengthens the ethical and moral foundation of organizational practices. The integration of these two approaches forms a holistic leadership model that not only promotes performance improvement but also ensures that such progress is guided by integrity, responsibility, and social values.

The study further confirms that a culture of quality cannot be developed solely through formal systems, policies, or accreditation mechanisms. Instead, it requires strong leadership that is capable of internalizing quality values across all levels of the organization. Transformational prophetic leadership fosters trust, encourages participation, and embeds

continuous improvement into everyday academic practices, thereby making quality a shared commitment rather than a procedural requirement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the advancement of educational leadership by proposing an integrative framework that combines transformational and value-based leadership perspectives. Practically, it offers insights for higher education leaders to develop leadership strategies that balance institutional performance with ethical and spiritual considerations.

However, this study is limited to a qualitative approach within a specific institutional context. Future research is recommended to employ quantitative or mixed-method designs to further validate the model and examine its impact on institutional performance and educational outcomes across diverse settings.

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