

Slovak Teacher's Transformational Leadership and Student Teachers' Ideas: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The contribution brings an analysis of transformational leadership among Slovak secondary education teachers in comparison with ideas of student teachers. The research sample consists of secondary education teachers (N = 142) and student teachers (N = 142). Data are obtained from the Slovak version of the LPI/Leadership Practices Inventory. Results indicate statistically significant differences in three dimensions favouring students against teachers: Model the Way, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act. Slovak students consider transformational leadership practices essential as Slovak teachers apply them in their daily practice. Results are discussed mainly from the perspective of ontogenetic and educational practice.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, leadership practices, teachers, student teachers.*

Introduction

The importance of leadership for any organisation is indisputable because it is linked to its success. According to Schultz (2003), the success or failure of any organisation primarily also depends on the quality of its leaders. It is no different in the case of such an institution as the school. Leadership in education has long been paid attention in relation to reforms. The literature identifies characteristics

important for effective leadership at all levels of the educational system (Balcerek, 1999; Fullan, 2005, Hall & Hord, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Previously, research has focused more on leaders' characteristics (Heinzová & Kaliská, 2020; Hu, Wang, Liden, & Sun, 2012; Judge & Bona, 2000; Khoo & Burch, 2008; Lussier & Achua, 2007; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005). However, leaders' behaviour, situational and integrated leadership has gradually gained importance.

Currently, one of the most influential leadership theories is transformational leadership (Felfe & Schyns, 2010; Judge & Bobo, 2000; Procházka & Vaculík, 2015). Burns (1978) argued that this leadership type can raise human behaviour and aspirations in leaders and their followers, thus having revolutionary effects on both parties involved. In other words, transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons communicate so that leaders and followers raise one another to a higher level of motivation and morale. Burns summarised observed differences in transformational leaders in four categories: 1) Charismatic/Idealized Influence (model) where the leader is an example for others to imitate; 2) Inspirational Motivation, i.e., the ability to evoke enthusiasm, team spirit and shared vision; 3) Intellectual Stimulation – a permanent challenge to discover one's possibilities and innovative approaches; 4) Individualised Consideration/Approach, showing respect and regard to all individuals in the organisation. If a leader has such characteristics, he/she transforms subordinates to put organisational goals ahead of their own, „transforms” them by creating changes in their goals, values, needs, beliefs, and aspirations (Buelens, 2011). The social environment in such an organisation can be called inspiring, mobilising, stimulating or „full of enthusiasm” for a common cause. Followers or supporters of such a type of leader retain the possibility of influence and mutual support in attaining a shared vision.

There is evidence of transformational leadership showing similar signs in the school or business settings (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). As remark Hargreaves and Fink (2004), with a departure of a successful leader, successful and dynamic schools can quickly slip back. The positive relationship between the school management's leadership skills and academic performance as an indicator of secondary school success has been recently proved in the study by Ndiritu, Mbugua, and Ndiritu (2019).

Kouzes and Posner (1995; 2002) have pursued the research of effective leaders' behaviour and skills in the long run and arrived at five domains of leadership practices, further specified by ten corresponding measurable behaviours (*Leadership Practices Inventory/LPI*):

- Model the Way: clarify values and set an example;
- Inspire a Shared Vision: envisage the future and motivate others;
- Challenge the Process: search for opportunities, experiment and take risks;
- Enable Others to Act: foster collaboration and strengthen others;
- Encourage the Heart: recognise and appreciate contributions, create a sense of community.

The undeniable advantage of this leadership theory is that it is built on the tenet that successful leadership is not the prerogative of a select few but that such specific practices and behaviours can be purposefully developed and trained in a person. That is why we have chosen this theory for our study.

Posner (2016), when verifying psychometric properties of both LPI versions (Self & Observer), finds the tool to be sufficiently robust and applicable in various settings and populations, including education and teachers. It has also been proved by a study aimed at intercultural comparison of leadership practices of secondary school principals in the USA and Thailand (Srisaen, Somprach, Sombatteera, Srisomjak, & Thana, 2014). The importance of including transformational leadership skills training into pre-gradual education is dealt with, e.g., in the study by Waite and McKinney (2015).

Research Problem and Aim

The Slovak transforming society has long been calling for changes in the education system that fails to reflect its needs. The transformation of universities in eastern European countries is dealt with in more detail, e.g., in the study by Parubchak, Smolińska, and Marszałek-Kawa (2019). Since the most effective and the most lasting changes come from below, from the individual, and the teacher can also be perceived as a manager (due to many managerial activities), we focus on rank and file teachers. We are interested in teachers' leadership behaviours in terms of the transformational theory in relation to their pupils, as well as in student teachers' ideas about ideal teacher leadership behaviour in terms of this theory.

This study aims to compare students' ideas (i.e., candidates for the teaching profession) about desirable leadership behaviour in terms of the LPI with declared leadership behaviours of teachers in practice. In this context, the research question is formulated as follows:

Do student teachers' ideas about leadership behaviour regarding the LPI differ from practising teachers' declared leadership behaviour?

Research Methodology

General Background of Research

The present research study is of a quantitative, comparative design. The research sample (N = 284) is obtained by intentional (secondary education teachers and secondary education student teachers) and convenience sampling, with anonymous and voluntary participation in the research.

Sample of Research

The group of teachers consists of elementary and secondary school teachers from the district of Košice (N = 142, n_{men} = 20, n_{women} = 122, AM_{age} = 40.04, SD_{age} = 9.37, AM_{experience} = 12.89, SD_{experience} = 9.10). The group of students consists of master study students from various teacher training faculties from various regions of Slovakia (N = 142, n_{men} = 13, n_{women} = 129, AM_{age} = 23.93, SD_{age} = 1.42).

Instrument and Procedures

Data are obtained from the Slovak version of the LPI/Leadership Practices Inventory (Copyright © 2013 James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission for Lada Kaliska and APVV-17-0557 team). It consists of 5 domains: *Model the way (MOD)*, *Inspire a Shared Vision (INSP)*, *Challenge the Process (CHALL)*, *Enable Others to Act (ENAB)*, *Encourage the Heart (ENCO)*. Respondents assess their behaviour (teachers) or ideas about desirable leadership behaviour (student teachers) in 30 statements on a scale from 1: almost never to 10: almost always. We have taken the liberty to modify the wording in individual items for the needs of the educational setting and replace the general concepts of people and organisation with the concepts pupils/students and class/school; and formulate the teacher assessed statements in the first person (e.g., I develop collaboration among the pupils/students I work with) and the student assessed statements in the third person (The ideal teacher-leader develops collaboration among the pupils/students he/she works with).

Reliability of the adapted LPI scale and internal consistency of individual scales is satisfactory for both respondent groups (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Reliability of the LPI Slovak version in the student group (0) and teacher group (1)

	MOD		INSP		CHALL		ENAB		ENCO	
	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
ω	.83	.69	.83	.84	.86	.72	.85	.76	.86	.82
α	.84	.68	.83	.84	.86	.71	.86	.76	.86	.81

Legend: ω = McDonald, α = Cronbach, MOD = Model the Way, INSP = Inspire a Shared Vision, CHALL = Challenge the Process, ENAB = Enable Others to Act, ENCO = Encourage the Heart

Data Analysis

The obtained data are processed and analysed in the table processor MS Excel and statistical program JASP.

Results

Concerning the comparative purpose of the present study, the variables studied in individual groups of respondents are presented descriptive characteristics (Table 2).

Results of the normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) and values of skewness and kurtosis in both groups prove that the data do not meet the condition of normal distribution. Therefore, a non-parametric variant of the statistical procedure (Mann-Whitney U-Test) is used in the remainder.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of LPI subscales in compared respondent groups

	MOD		INSP		CHALL		ENAB		ENCO	
	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Number	142	142	142	142	142	142	142	142	142	142
Mean	52.21	50.20	47.82	47.29	50.37	45.58	53.35	50.40	51.85	51.58
Median	54.00	50.00	49.00	50.00	52.00	46.00	55.00	52.00	54.00	53.00
St. deviation	7.27	3.74	8.17	7.48	7.26	5.54	6.95	4.24	7.67	5.56
Minimum	9.00	33.00	7.00	22.00	6.00	34.00	8.00	41.00	8.00	30.00
Maximum	60.00	58.00	60.00	57.00	60.00	57.00	60.00	58.00	60.00	60.00
Skewness	-2.27	-.52	-1.45	-1.72	-2.17	-.029	-2.90	-.56	-2.05	-1.20
Kurtosis	2.94	2.16	3.76	3.42	2.39	-.15	3.61	-.57	2.09	1.77
Shapiro-Wilk	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Legend: MOD = Model the Way, INSP = Inspire a Shared Vision, CHALL = Challenge the Process, ENAB = Enable Others to Act, ENCO = Encourage the Heart, 0 = teacher students, 1 = teachers

Results of the comparative analysis of leadership practices in terms of the LPI and/or students' ideas and their implementations in the teaching practice are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences (Mann-Whitney) in assessments of leadership behaviour in terms of the LPI between student teachers and practising teachers

	MOD	INSP	CHALL	ENAB	ENCO
W	13578.00	10593.00	15035.00	14559.50	11299.50
P	< .001	0.46	< .001	< .001	0.08
d _{Cohen}	0.35	0.05	0.49	0.44	0.12

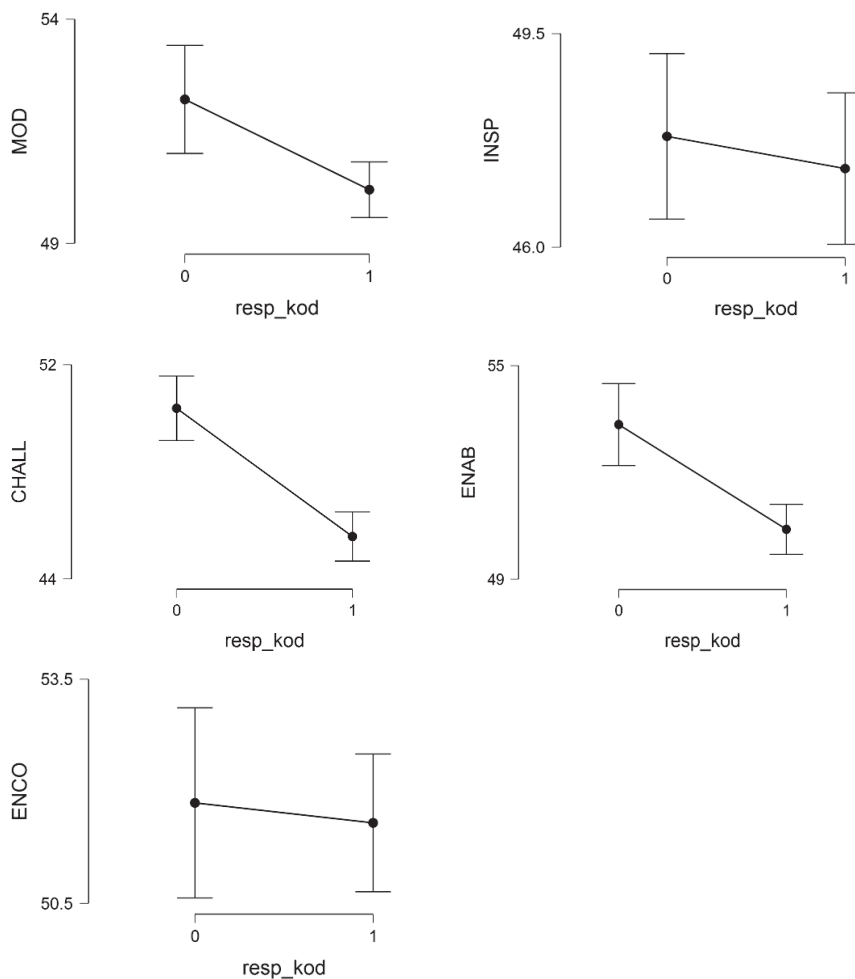
Legend: MOD = Model the Way; INSP = Inspire a Shared Vision; CHALL = Challenge the Process; ENAB = Enable Others to Act; ENCO = Encourage the Heart

Results of the comparison by Mann-Whitney U-Test show that there are statistically significant (at the significance level of .01 adjusted by Bonferroni) differences between student teachers and teachers, this in the subscales Model the Way (MOD), Challenge the Process (CHALL) and Enable Others to Act (ENAB). The practical significance of the measured differences indicates a weak effect. For illustration, graphic representations of the differences between the respondent groups also are presented.

Discussion

Despite its weaknesses (especially the lack of conceptual clarity), the transformational approach is the current and investigated leadership model in the educational setting (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). It creates an environment where every person has his/her highest needs satisfaction ensured and becomes a member of a productive educational community (English, 2006). It develops self-actualisation, self-regulation, and self-control in followers, which is desirable not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also in the context of life-long learning.

The study aims to compare students' (i.e., candidates for the teaching profession) ideas about desirable leadership behaviour in terms of the LPI with practising teachers' declared leadership behaviours or leadership practices in relation to pupils/students. Since the authors of the transformational conception believe that these are skills that can be trained and developed over time, we have decided to



Picture 1. Differences in assessments of leadership behaviours in terms of the LPI between student teachers (0) and practising teachers (1)

compare the ideas of candidates for this profession (students in the last phase of their training) with the reality of school practice.

Test results of differences bring significant differences between students and teachers in three of five dimensions of leadership practices in terms of the LPI. Interestingly, student teachers score higher in them than practising teachers. The higher scores in thus formulated items lead us to the conclusion that student teachers attribute high significance or importance to them. They are the so-called

Model the Way and set an example to followers (MOD), Challenge the Process – support initiative and innovativeness, search for opportunities, experiment, and, not infrequently, take risks (CHALL), and Enable Others to Act, delegate tasks with competencies and foster collaboration (ENAB). Students scoring significantly higher in individual dimensions can be understood against the background of adolescent enthusiasm and idealism of a sort that could project to the evaluation or assessment of the significance of specific leadership behaviours in teaching activities. Certain „overestimation” of the significance of their use can be associated with their lack of intensive teaching practice. Teachers assess individual behaviours present in their daily educational work. A closer look at the mean values (means and medians) in both groups of respondents reveals that taking into account the possible scoring range in each dimension (6 to 60), students and teachers score above average. Thus, student teachers consider individual leadership practices important in their future activities and, according to our results, practising teachers use them when managing the work of their pupils and students. Teachers in our group are people in the middle adulthood period (mean age of 40 years) and with a mean experience of 13 years, where considerable stabilisation and routine procedures in work performed can be assumed. Therefore, it is welcome that they declare these transformational leadership practices in their work. Rosenberg (2013) also highlights the significance of transformational leadership. However, she studies such elements in school principals and finds that they are related to positive school climate and teacher morale. Saka (2018) confirms similar relationships, with Model the Way in terms of the LPI appearing to be the crucial element. Likely, a similar positive influence of transformational leadership may also be observed at a lower hierarchy level of traditional school in relation to the direct leadership of pupils. That, however, will have to be subject to further research. Similarly, we recommend further research on transformational leadership in the teaching profession to focus on practising teachers. Although we have addressed students on the threshold of their career paths, their experience is still quite limited. Therefore, we have formulated the LPI statements in the third person in terms of ideal teacher-leader behaviour. Further differentiating research could focus on differences between groups of teachers by the length of their teaching experience or verify the effectiveness of the training developing transformational leadership practices (Middleton, Jones, & Martin, 2021; Waite & McKinney, 2015). Limitations of our research study can also be seen in the self-report method (LPI Self), which may have caused some data bias. In this connection, we bring to attention the LPI Observer version, where the leader’s behaviour is assessed by his/her followers, which may add to the objectivity and validity of results.

Conclusions

As mentioned, Waite and McKinney's study of 2015 informs about the importance to include training of transformational leadership skills in pre-gradual nurse education. Middleton, Jones, and Martin's (2021) study deals with translating leadership skills into practice in healthcare after postgraduate training. We assume that transformational leadership has its justification also in such a helping profession as the teaching profession. And this is not only at the level of education system management, school management, but also direct leadership of pupils/students by class teachers or rank and file teachers. The transformational leadership theory, underpinning the LPI method used, is based on leadership practices, presents a leader who clarifies his/her values and leads by example. One envisaging the future and winning others. Searching for possibilities, experimenting and taking risks. Fostering collaboration and strengthening others. Appreciating contributions of others and celebrating shared values and victories. These are all behaviours applicable and desirable also in the teaching profession. A transformational manager-teacher can see higher goals and is aware of the importance of his/her work. He/she can link the needs and goals of the organisation to the needs and goals of an individual. He/she is active in his/her position, increases his/her effort and is at the head of the transformation. A transformational leader acts on those around not only by his/her experience and knowledge but also by his/her charisma and power of personality. His/her leadership is based on respect for co-workers/followers, persuasiveness and ability to win them. Transformational managers make good use of themselves where it is necessary to adequately respond to changing conditions. Where it is necessary to change a conception and enforce considerable strategic changes in the organisation, which is directly necessary for the system of our reforming education. Therefore, the result of our study is encouraging, although it is only a pilot study with limitations preventing generalisation.

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