

## Previous Research and Introspection: A Literature Review of Transformational Leadership in Chinese K12 Schools

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i8/17638> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i8/17638

**Published Date:**09 August 2023

### Abstract

Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in educational reform by inspiring teacher innovation and motivation, and driving school development and transformation. Currently, China's K12 education is undergoing a period of significant change, and transformational leadership can greatly assist K12 schools in navigating this transformation. This study systematically collects, organizes, and analyzes research on transformational leadership to explore educational reform in China's K12 education context, the theoretical concepts of transformational leadership, and how it has been implemented in recent years. The paper investigates the challenges faced, strategies employed, and the selection of theoretical frameworks in the practical application of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 schools. This research lays the groundwork for future studies in China.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, Chinese K12 Schools, Educational Management, Leadership, Leader.

### Introduction

Nowadays, our life, work, and study are in an era of change. Education, as a part of the social system, is also undergoing many changes in the ever-changing society. Education is the future profession, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) presented the theme of transforming education, transforming the world at the Transforming Education Summit held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2020. Transformation has become a key driving force for improving the quality and relevance of education in the world today (The United Nations, 2022). The transformation of education calls for transformational leadership. In the field of education, transformational leadership is a model that education practitioners - deans, principals, professors, and teachers can adopt to lead by example. It places great emphasis on building community bonds and encouraging students and educators to achieve greater accomplishments (Fontein, 2022). In China, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there have been seven curriculum reforms. To facilitate the smooth implementation of these reforms, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of regulations regarding the transition from exam-oriented

education to quality-oriented education (Liu, 2013). Therefore, the implementation of transformational leadership in Chinese schools is particularly important.

This paper by introducing Chinese K12 education and transformational leadership theories, this paper uses the literature research method to explore how transformational leadership is practiced in China's K12 in recent years, the challenges it faces, the strategies it uses and the theoretical framework. This paper lays the foundation for the future research.

### **Educational Transformation in China**

The Chinese government has given high priority to education, put forward a strategic decision on national development, and deepened transformation of the education system. To facilitate educational transformation, the Chinese government has been making comprehensive efforts from within and outside the system.

To domestic, in June 1999, China issued the Decision on Deepening Educational Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Quality-oriented Education, which pointed out the direction for building a vibrant socialist education system with Chinese characteristics in the 21st century (Zhi, 2001). In July 2010, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council held the first National Conference on Education in the new century in Beijing and issued the Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), which outlined the grand blueprint for future education transformation and development and pointed out the direction for the scientific development of education (Wang, 2018).

Externally, multilateral and bilateral international cooperation and cultural exchanges have been expanding, and a significant amount of foreign educational theories and practices have been introduced to China. In recent years, educational approaches such as MOOC, STEAM education, and flipped classrooms have flourished in our country (Sun & Xu, 2019). International exchange and cooperation in K12 education provide opportunities and channels for China to understand global educational trends, learn from advanced educational concepts and models from various countries, and promote international understanding education.

In 2019, China's television station conducted a sharp discussion with Ren Zhengfei, the founder and CEO of Huawei, regarding the transformation of China's basic education. He pointed out that the transformation of K12 education in China requires leaders to have a broad perspective, establish long-term goals and visions, encourage innovation, deepen curriculum reforms, expand school's openness and cooperation with the outside world, empower the values of schools, and inject a strong intrinsic force and spiritual energy into the development of K12 schools, making the school a development community that consolidates the hearts and wisdom of all teachers and students (Long, 2020). The prominent requirements of vision, long-term goals, transformation, and innovation closely align with the key elements of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is also the preferred choice for schools both domestically and internationally when undergoing transformations. There is a project the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) leadership research project implemented by (Day et al., 2002). Until 2020, ISSPP has conducted studies in more than fourteen countries in the world, which involves more than 100 studies from various perspectives and aims to identify what leadership practices are used by successful principals in the world (Day et al., 2010). The ISSPP study found that outstanding school leaders tend to practice the transformational leadership dimension introduced by Leithwood et al (Day et al., 2010).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Leadership is a kind of influence. Leadership is an influence process. It is the act or process of influencing people's willingness and enthusiasm to make efforts to achieve organizational goals (Koontz & Weihrich, 2014). Transformational leadership is the ability of leaders to motivate followers to achieve self-transformation and guide organizational transformation to deal with various challenges and seize opportunities in the process of promoting organizational goals and challenges in the period of organizational transformation (Chen, 2013). Burns in 1978 proposed two basic types of leadership: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. He also highlighted the differences between transformational leadership and transactional leadership under traditional leadership theories. Transactional leaders, based on past leadership theories, fulfill the exchange of values by meeting the followers' interests and demands, creating a transactional relationship. In contrast, transformational leadership emphasizes the mutual influence and elevation between leaders and followers. Therefore, transformational leadership goes beyond the level of transactional exchanges. Burns' classification of these two leadership types has provided guidance for future leadership theory research.

Bass proposed a richer and more accurate theory of transformational leadership based on Burns' research, emphasizing "Idealized Influence, Inspirational motivation, Intellectual stimulation, Individualized Consideration (Bass & Avilio, 1990). Although the variables used in the above versions of transformational leadership are different from those used today, there is no doubt that they are the same core and spirit-emphasizing the importance of human development to the development of organizations. Therefore, early transformational leadership in other fields and subsequent development cannot be separated from the emphasis on people development. In response to these four dimensions, scholars have developed a well-known assessment tool called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). This questionnaire has been widely used in empirical research on transformational leadership to this day.

In the early 1990s, transformational leadership theory was introduced into the field of school leadership research. Transformational leadership in schools refers to the ability of school leaders to improve the level of teachers' internal needs, promote teachers' recognition of school goals and objectives, encourage teachers to grow, and ultimately realize the motivation for school development (Thompson, 2020). In 1990s, Leithwood, a Canadian scholar with other scholar, recognized the relationship between transformational leadership theory and the challenges faced by leaders during their research on K12 schools in educational transformation, and introduced it into the educational context, clearly proposing the concept of transformational leadership in schools for the first time (Liu, 2011).

### **Leithwood and Sun (2012) Transformational Leadership**

In 2012, Leithwood and Sun used meta-analysis to integrate studies on transformational leadership and found that transformational leadership has a positive impact on many aspects of teachers' psychology. Different dimensions of transformational leadership have different effects on teachers and their specific paths are not the same (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Continuing to reward teachers, for example, also has significant positive effects. Other transformational leadership dimensions, such as high-performance expectations, organizational restructuring, and communication concerns, also have significant effects on teachers (Wang et al., 2012). Leithwood and Sun (2012) proposed an important theoretical framework: there are five key behaviors, which are important indicators and standards of transformational leadership: Setting Directions, Developing People, Redesigning the

Organization, Improving the Instructional Program and Related Practices (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). This framework has greatly affected a series of follow-up studies' development.



Figure 1: Leithwood and Sun (2012) Transformational Leadership

### **Setting Directions**

Setting direction includes develop a shared vision and building goal consensus and hold high performance expectations (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Leaders who develop this practice identify, develop, and articulate a shared vision or broad goals for their school that are attractive and motivating to teachers. They also build consensus among teachers about the importance of shared goals and more specific goals, motivate teachers with these challenging but achievable goals, and convey optimism about achieving them. These leaders also monitor progress toward common goals and place those goals at the forefront of teacher decisions. School leaders expect high levels of professionalism from faculty, their teaching colleagues to have high expectations of students, and faculty to be effective innovators (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Goal-setting, or creating a shared vision are all terms used to mark. Leadership practice aims at direction setting and is a key function of most leaders (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Transformational leadership has accumulated a large number of studies, aiming to prove the important impact of goal setting on education and school transformation (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). In their study of transformational leadership behaviors, Leithwood et al (1996) identified six practices that create high performance: Expecting staff to be innovative, hardworking and professional (these qualities are included among the criteria used in hiring staff), demonstrating an unflagging commitment to the welfare of students, often espousing norms of excellence and quality of service, establishing flexible boundaries for what people do, thus the school leaders are permitted freedom of judgment and action within the context of overall school goals and plan, and being clear about one's own views about what is right and good (Kathrine, 2015). In sum, direction-setting leadership practices aim to help one's colleagues develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that provide a compelling sense of purpose (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

***Developing People***

Developing People include the initiative to provide individualized support, provide intellectual stimulation and model valued behaviors, beliefs and values. Among the various definitions of providing individualized support are leaders who listen to and pay attention to the opinions and needs of individuals, act as mentors or coaches to teachers, treat teachers as individuals with unique needs and abilities, and support their profession (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). School leaders make teachers feel valued and motivated, helping them achieve their goals and development. On the side of providing intellectual stimulation, school leaders who develop this set of practices challenge teachers' assumptions, stimulate and encourage their creativity, and provide teachers with information that helps them evaluate their practices, refine them, and perform their tasks more effectively. School leaders support teachers to try new theories, create new ways to solve problems, and encourage teachers to think independently (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). In addition, the school leaders provide a model of high ethical behavior that instills pride, respect and trust in teachers (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

***Redesigning the Organization***

Redesigning the organization include strengthening school culture, building structures to enable collaboration and engaging parents and the wider community. Strengthening the school culture promotes an atmosphere of mutual care and trust among staff, builds a cohesive school culture around a shared set of values, and promotes the school's vision. Leaders can build a structure that supports collaboration (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Leaders ensure teachers participation in project and mentoring decisions, establish working conditions to promote teachers cooperative planning and professional growth, and distribute leadership broadly among teachers. Beyond that, transformational school leaders should involve parents and the wider community and reflect the community character and values of the school, and actively encourage parents and guardians to be involved in their children's education at the school (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

The researchers believe that organization culture is particularly important in a stage of school change. Culture building and practicing the art of purposing are essential leadership forces (Bates, 1984). Successful schools have strong functional cultures aligned with a vision of excellence in schooling. Such cultures include values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings among all stakeholders (Kathrine, 2015). Research studies reveal that transformational leadership can significantly impact positive school culture associated with norms, beliefs, and values as well as effective classroom environments and students' and teachers' connection with the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

In fact the leadership development of K12 schools in China is uneven, that some schools seem to be conducting transformational leadership, but it only involves the technical level of teaching, but it involves the cultural level of the campus less (Yang, 2008), and in some schools, there will be more transactional behaviors than transformational behaviors during the transformation (Zhao & Xi, 2018). As mentioned above, strengthening the construction of campus culture can make teachers change from money-driven to value-driven. Among other things, establish working conditions to foster collaborative planning and professional growth among teachers, and distribute leadership widely among teachers. In theory, these can make the leadership development of K12 schools in China more balanced.

***Improving the Instructional Program***

Improving the instructional program includes focus on instructional development. The development and inclusion of this set of leadership practices represents the most substantial difference between models of transformational leadership developed for school and nonschool contexts (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Instructional development is a component (a large component) of broader teacher development and refers to a wide range of activities at various levels aimed at improving teaching and thus student learning (McKinney, 2002). These activities can be individual, pair or group. Examples are individual (e.g.: a teacher's private recording), pair (e.g.: a teacher working with a leader), group (e.g.: a teacher joining a teaching circle to discuss their teaching), or organizational (e.g.: a teaching seminar; National Teaching Conference).

### ***Related Practices***

The two practices in this category are traditional approaches to leadership in their own right. The first : Contingent reward. The leader rewards staff members for completing agreed-on work. This reflects traditional models of motivation and is a key feature of what Bass (1985) called transactional leadership. Even though transactional leadership can be seen as the more autocratic and less visionary sibling of transformational leadership, under the leadership of transformational leadership and different national conditions, it needs to be discussed after careful study and practice. The second (management by exception) often manifests itself as non leadership. The leader monitors the performance of staff members and interacts with them when their behavior deviates from expectations. Several of the most widely advocated effective models of educational leadership actually include many of the same practices. Practitioners need to pay more attention to the impact of specific leadership practices and less attention to leadership models (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Transactional leadership can make members of the organization understand the standards and expectations of task completion, and also enhance the self-confidence and drive of employees (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). School leaders mobilize teachers' achievement motivation through rewarding behavior, improve their sense of fair participation and job satisfaction, spontaneously pursue higher goals, and adopt innovative working methods to improve teaching level. Zhang (2008) believes that although transactional leadership is full of utilitarianism in material exchange, it can meet people's basic material needs. Without basic material security, leaders and teachers cannot live a decent and dignified life (Zhang, 2007). This is the basic condition to induce teachers' motivation of teaching innovation and improve innovative teaching behavior, and avoid the problems of empty talk and too idealization of transformational leadership. Leaders need to focus more on the impact of specific leadership practices and less on leadership models (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

### **Previous Study on Practices of Transformational Leadership**

After decades of studies, transformational leadership can be shown to play a positive role in school transformation and exert influences on various aspects of school development (Jiao & Liu, 2017). The following is a summary of the previous study on practices of transformational leadership by the researcher through literature review. Through literature review, the researchers found that most of the practical studies of transformational leadership in China's K12 by Chinese scholars were conducted in the four aspects of teachers' organizational commitment, teachers' innovative behavior, teachers and students' satisfaction and work performance.

Transformational leadership in practice has a positive effect on the organizational commitment and innovative atmosphere of teachers in K12 school. Waruwu et al.'s study in 2020 discussed the influence of transformational leadership on teachers' innovative ability. The quantitative method was used in Indonesia. The results show that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on organizational learning and organizational structure (Waruwu et al., 2020). From the perspective of learning organization and organizational structure, this study proposes a model to construct teachers' innovation ability through transformational leadership. It lays a foundation for improving Indonesian private school teachers and effectively facing school reform. In China, some Chinese scholars have conducted in-depth research on the influence of various dimensions of transformational leadership on teachers' innovative behavior from the perspective of transformational leadership.

Liu (2022) used a mixed research method to explore the relationship between school leaders' transformational leadership behavior, school organizational innovation climate, and teachers' organizational commitment. The research sample was 407 primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province, China, and the research tools were Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire, Organizational Innovation Climate Scale, and Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. The research results show that the two factors of vision motivation and intellectual stimulation have a greater contribution rate to each dimension and the overall teacher organizational commitment, while the two factors idealization influence and individualized care have relatively small contribution rates to each dimension and the overall teacher organizational commitment. Transformational leadership behavior significantly affects school organizational innovation climate (Liu, 2022). Chinese traditional culture pays attention to collectivism and the social egoism that individuals obey the collective (Li, 2019). Therefore, the two dimensions of vision motivation and intellectual stimulation that represent group indicators have a more significant impact, while idealization related to personal performance and the contribution rate of individualized care to teachers' organizational commitment is not large, which is related to Chinese special cultural background and individual psychology.

Transformational leadership not only promotes innovation, but also affects student and teacher satisfaction. Researchers Abdullah, Arokiasamy, and Penglok used 450 students from three different universities as participants in the 2018 study. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was used to collect data to determine perceptions of transformational leadership practiced by student faculty and staff and to measure student satisfaction. Researchers believe that transformational leadership can have a positive impact on student satisfaction through various mechanisms, such as creating a supportive and empowering learning environment, promoting open communication, and promoting innovation and creativity (Abdullah et al., 2018). In China Ji et al (2022) conducted a structural model analysis on the survey data of 336 primary and secondary school teachers in a province in China and found that school leaders' transformational leadership has a significant positive predictive effect on primary and secondary school teachers' job satisfaction (Ji et al., 2022). The key to improving the quality of education lies in teachers. The transformational leadership of school leaders has a positive impact on the job satisfaction of K12 teachers in China, and is of great significance to stabilizing the teaching staff of primary and secondary schools and improving the quality of education.

Transformational leadership establishes vision and creates a supportive environment to encourage teachers' professional development and care for their lives by means of common

vision, intellectual stimulation and individual care, thus enhancing teachers' trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for principals, and thus improving job satisfaction. Zhao and Xi (2018) distributed 1040 questionnaires to teachers in 40 primary and secondary schools in a certain district of Beijing. The questionnaire was measured by the revised Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) for principals' transformational and transactional leadership. Through the regression analysis and structural equation model analysis of the questionnaire data, it is found that the two kinds of leadership have a great impact on teachers' job satisfaction, transactional leadership is more basic, and transformational leadership is more important than transactional leadership (Zhao & Xi, 2018). In the new era, the material needs of teachers are no longer the most important motivating factor. School leaders need to strengthen value leadership and shift to the practice of transformational leadership. However, material needs are an important guarantee to meet the basic needs of teachers, which can also avoid the excessive conceptualization of transformational leadership. How to implement transformational leadership more effectively in the Chinese context is a gap that many Chinese researchers need to study.

Transformational leadership has a positive impact on teacher performance and helps to improve teachers' professional competence and work efficiency. Some researches show that transformational leadership has a positive impact on the performance of primary and secondary school teachers. Among the dimensions of transformational leadership, the two dimensions of moral model and leadership charm have a greater impact on the work performance of K12 school teachers (Sunwu, 2016). School leaders influence their subordinate teachers through their own noble morality and unique charm, so that teachers have trust in leaders and are willing to follow them, so that teachers can devote more enthusiasm to their work and produce better performance.

Most studies have shown that transformational leadership plays a positive role in the four aspects of teachers' organizational commitment, teachers' innovative behavior, teacher-student satisfaction, and performance. However, the researchers found that in these domestic studies, the research angles are relatively scattered. Further advantages of transformational leadership were not discovered. Compared with foreign research results, the research angle seems to be a little single, and the research methods mostly use quantitative research. The researchers believe that the research can also be analyzed by complete qualitative research, so as to understand the problems more deeply, discover problems, and obtain richer insights data to solve problems.

### **Previous Study on Challenges of Transformational Leadership**

In practice, transformational leadership may face various challenges in leading the organization. Some of these challenges may include: lack of resources and lack of the best leadership strategies on the part of leadership to effectively lead transformation. The lack of professional theoretical knowledge of transformational leadership leads to the unbalanced development of transformational leadership and there are also a few leaders who are still incompetent to lead. The wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in Chinese K12 schools is a significant issue. There are also problems on communication between K12 school leaders and their subordinates.

The ability of Chinese K12 school leaders to transformation needs to be improved, the management of many schools lacks good leadership strategies to effectively lead transformation. Gao (2021) selected more than 80 K12 schools in China, and all the selected schools and teachers have experienced or are undergoing school transformations to varying



degrees. A total of 800 questionnaires were issued. The research results show that, there is a significant lack of transformational leadership among K12 school leaders in China (Gao, 2021). There is still a lot of room for school leaders to develop transformational leadership. In addition, in all dimensions, teachers have the highest score in the dimension of transformation attitude and behavior, and the lowest score in the dimension of cognition (Gao, 2021). This shows that although teachers will follow the leaders' strategies to make transformation behaviors. But the awareness of transformation needs to be strengthened. Transformational leadership can stimulate the intrinsic work motivation that motivates followers (Merry et al., 2022). It can be seen that leaders have not found appropriate strategies or adopted appropriate leadership behaviors to motivate teachers.

In the practice of transformational leadership, the development of various dimensions and stages is not balanced, which also brings challenges to the transformational leadership of leaders in K12 schools in China. Han (2020) adopted the method of random sampling in his study. Among more than 100 K12 schools participating in school transformation across the country, 650 valid questionnaires were collected. The results of the study show that school leaders' transformational leadership behaviors are high, but the performance of "individualized consideration" is relatively low, and there is a significant difference between the transformational behavior and the school stage. Better performance in leadership behaviors; the higher the academic level of school leaders, the better the transformational leadership behaviors they exhibit (Han, 2020). Leadership literature has established that individualized consideration by the leader may defeat the degree of social loafing (Kahai et al., 2003). By stimulating teachers' high-level needs and intrinsic motivation, transformational leadership builds a school atmosphere of mutual trust and enables teachers to achieve results beyond the original organizational performance (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Teacher team building is inseparable from leaders' more diversified and personalized care for different teachers. The personalized care of school leaders directly influences the organizational commitment of teachers (Liu & Kong, 2020). Besides, education often represents the knowledge level of things and theories. It also indicates that school leaders need to improve their expertise in transformational leadership.

In the stage of school transformation, inappropriate leadership behaviors will also challenge the practice of transformational leadership. The researcher (2018) summarized a large number of literatures through the literature research method. According to the description of the survey, the statistical results were shown. When leaders practice more leadership behaviors, transactional leadership behaviors are more, while transformational leadership behaviors are less (Zhao, 2018). Transactional leadership has a stronger explicit type, and teachers are more likely to feel the role of leaders in meeting individual needs, while value leadership has a stronger implicit influence on satisfaction (Sui, 2018). In the context of rapid economic development, teachers are in great need of leaders to take management measures in line with their economic conditions and personal development. Too much transactional leadership will become an obstacle to the play of transformational leadership. The wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in Chinese K12 schools is a significant issue.

Yadav and Agrawal explored the challenges faced by transformational leadership in the practice process through literature analysis in 2017 and gave some relevant suggestions. Research points out that although leaders have a lot of employees, they cannot really discuss problems with them and lack honest feedback in the leadership process, which leads to delayed decision making or inability to make the right decision (Yadav & Agrawal, 2017). This

indicates that there is a communication problem in the practice of transformational leadership. In an educational context. There are also problems on communication between K12 school leaders and their subordinates.

On the basis of reading a lot of literature, researcher Li (2018) studied the current situation and problems of communication between leaders and teachers in K12 schools through questionnaire survey, comparative research and cross-research. Research shows that the current K12 school leaders and teachers in the communication of communication intention is not strong, poor communication ability and other problems (Li, 2018). This may be due to insufficient understanding of the importance of communication among K12 school leaders and teachers, K12 school leaders and teachers. The reason why communication awareness, communication skills and communication art need to be improved, and the mutual trust relationship needs to be built. Yan (2020) investigates and analyzes the cognitive differences between leaders and teachers of K12 in Y City on leaders' leadership behaviors by using questionnaire, interview and other methods. The results show that leaders and teachers lack professional awareness and professional quality due to lack of resources and enthusiasm. Leaders also have a single way and insufficient communication with teachers (Yan, 2020). Communication can both parties pass information and ideas through certain means and reach consensus, so as to better achieve education management. In addition, the researcher found that most of the studies on school communication problems were on the communication between students' families and schools, while there were few studies on the communication between leaders and teachers.

The transformation of schools may require resources, and the uneven distribution of education in China will affect the implementation of transformational leadership. Due to unbalanced regional economic development, there are still great differences in the level and quality of education between schools. Rural schools are facing existential crisis and in urgent need of transformation (Zhang, 2021). Qi (2022) collected data through qualitative case study and observation, interview and other methods. Taking a middle school in a village in China as a case, the study showed that the disadvantaged middle school in a village is poor in terms of tools or gadgets and some good teaching resources were tilted towards high-quality schools, even though it relied on the support of national policies and financial assistance. The effect of such a transformation is only temporary (Qi, 2022). Transformational leadership requires leaders who are not only committed to developing vision, but who also have the skills to work with others to realize it (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Transformational leadership requires the effective use of various resources in educational organizations, as well as the continuous expansion and improvement of leaders' skills and knowledge to meet various challenges. The lack of good resources is also a challenge that transformational leaders face in practice.

In general, transformational leadership faces a variety of challenges in practice, such as: the lack of resources and the lack of good leadership strategies, the unbalanced development of transformational leadership, and a few leaders are still not competent for leadership and the wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in K12 schools in China. There are also problems in communication between leaders and subordinates in K12 schools. Through reading literature, researchers found that school leaders should promote transformational leadership from the inside out and fundamentally promote school reform. In addition, the researchers found that some foreign studies cannot give opinions based on China's national conditions. In addition, almost most of the studies are quantitative studies, which may lead to the unification of measurement tools and the inability to obtain more abundant data like qualitative research through measurement tools and questionnaires, thus

ignoring the views of participants (Patton, 2014). Focusing too much on the relationship between variables may neglect some special cases in practical applications. This is also the gap that the future study needs to fill.

### **Previous Study on Strategies of Transformational Leadership.**

Transformational leadership has played a positive role in schools, The strategies practiced during the school transformation process are varied. Successful heads use the same basic leadership practices, but there is no single model for achieving success (Leithwood et al., 2017). Successful school leaders work from intuition and experience, adapting their leadership strategies to their particular school environment. Their ability to respond to their environment, as well as to identify, acknowledge, understand and focus on the needs and motivations of others, determines the extent to which they succeed (Day et al., 2010).

A study in 2019 by Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins used a literature analysis to summarize seven strong claims of successful school leadership. The article focuses on the fact that almost all successful leaders use the same basic leadership practices that help address each internal and observable dimension of employee performance, particularly as it relates to teachers. These practices strategies include: developing a shared vision, building professional communities, providing intellectual stimulation, providing support, and building trusting relationships (Leithwood et al., 2019). These specific practical strategies coincide with the multiple dimensions of transformational leadership. It also provides leadership strategies and support for school leaders to better lead their schools.

The study in 2016 by academics Day, Gu and Sammons of the University of Nottingham and the University of Oxford used a mixed research over three years and used case studies at 20 schools. The findings suggest that successful principals directly and indirectly promote improvement through a combination of transformational and instructional strategies (Day et al., 2016). The study incorporates a lot of specific strategies in the discussion section, Such as measured success both in terms of student test and examination results and broader educational purposes. Leaders should have clear vision, determination, courage, fairness, openness, etc., and their work is driven by clear ethics and values. The study also found that successful leaders followers trust and respect, and gradually assign responsibility and build trusting relationships to improve followers' leadership. Successful leaders support school improvement by emphasizing the creation of learning and development opportunities for all staff and students, and using tools such as data, research, and observation to improve teaching and learning (Day et al., 2016). This study puts forward a new hybrid leadership strategy when exploring transformational leadership, which opens the research barrier for researchers and expands their thinking. However, the study did not directly observe the work of the school in the case study.

The proposal of transformational leadership theory provides a new idea for creating a new situation in China's K12 school transformation (Deng, 2020). Therefore, the strategies implemented by school leaders are mostly based on the multiple dimensions of transformational leadership. The practice of school transformation based on transformational leadership is concretized to develop a shared vision and building goal consensus, intellectual stimulation, building structures to enable collaboration, etc. (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Chen (2017) used qualitative research methods and took Shanghai Q Primary School in China as the case study object to record the successful transformation process of the primary school. Research showed that the school has successfully achieved transformation through the improvement of school management mode, innovation of curriculum content and form,

improvement of teachers' teaching ability, innovation of students' learning style and promotion of educational informatization (Chen, 2017). It can be seen that organizational structure redesign, curriculum improvement, focus on human development and other dimensions of transformational leadership have played an important role in the transformation of K12 schools in China.

Follower conversion is the core stipulation of transformational leadership. The essence of the theory of transformational leadership is the process in which leaders establish followers' commitment to organizational goals and cultivate followers to achieve organizational goals and complete transformations (Bao et al., 2022). Ji (2020) conducted a case study on a school in Shanghai through qualitative research and analyzed its transformational strategies. The research results showed that the school successfully achieved school transformation through the strategies of vision motivation, charismatic leadership, intellectual stimulation, caring thinking and distributed leadership. The maximum validity gives play to transformational leadership (Ji, 2020). Each school organization internal demand conditions and external environment is different, the path and strategy of transformation is bound to be different. The specific way transformational leadership strategies are implemented in schools may vary from school to school.

In summary, the practical strategies of transformational leadership can be determined by the specific circumstances of the transformative school and different dimensions of the chosen transformational leadership model, and the strategies can also be adjusted according to the specific needs of the school. The practice of transformational leadership in Chinese schools needs to take into account the characteristics of Chinese culture and educational environment (Chen, 2019).

### **Previous Study on Framework of Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership has been the focus of leadership studies in the past 40 years. On the basis of Burns' research, more and more studies have conducted in-depth research on transformational leadership and constructed different kinds of framework. For example, Bass four-dimension transformational leadership model (1985) is favored by many researchers and leaders (Bao et al., 2020). MLQ (Multifactors Leadership Questionnaire), an evaluation tool established by Bass during the survey period, has become the most widespread form of questionnaire (Chen & Xu, 2012).

Canadian scholars, Leithwood et al (1990s) realized the correlation between transformational leadership theory and the challenges faced by principals in their research on K12 schools in educational transformation, introduced it into educational context, and explicitly proposed the framework of transformational leadership in schools for the first time. Chinese scholars are influenced by Western scholars. Li and Shi (2005) also made a transformational leadership model with four dimensions in China, which included morale modeling, charisma, visionary and individualized consideration (Li & Shi, 2005). Although the results of this study were significant, it is an important attempt of Chinese scholars in the context of Chinese culture. But it was not conducted in an educational context.

Leithwood continues to improve and study transformational leadership after introducing it into the educational environment. Leithwood and Sun (2012) integrated multiple transformational leadership frameworks with the meta-analysis method, and found that transformational leadership in schools can have a positive impact on teachers' psychology in various aspects, such as teachers' organizational commitment and job satisfaction. These influences are finally reflected in the transformations of teachers' abilities

and behaviors, such as the improvement of teachers' teaching ability and leadership ability and the increase of teachers' cooperative behavior (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). It is worth pointing out that different dimensions of transformational leadership in schools have different effects on teachers and their specific action paths.

As for the research on China's educational environment, Liu (2013) adopted the method of content analysis to find out the key words related to transformational school leadership practice from the questionnaire answers of teachers, and compiled the questionnaire for China's transformational school leadership. This study identified 29 effective leadership practices in the context of transformations in Chinese urban high schools, among which 12 can work effectively in Eastern and Western cultures and 17 are unique in the Chinese context (Liu, 2013). This study is a novel attempt to understand how Chinese teachers perceive transformational school leadership. But, the study was too broad and the results were not widely used by K12 school leaders in China.

There are few researches on all theoretical aspects of transformational leadership in the educational context of China. The research results of foreign countries provide reference for the research on transformational leadership in the situation of China. There are still some shortcomings: the definition of theory is unclear, the research method is relatively simple, and the attention of education situation is not enough (Jiao & Liu, 2017). As transformational leadership in education is "transplanted" from theories in the business field, it should also be adjusted to different degrees in the process of constantly adapting to the background of education.

**Conclusion**

Here is a figure about the conclusion of previous study on practices, challenges, strategies, framework of transformational leadership (Figure 2).

	Summaries
Previous Study on Practices of Transformational Leadership	Transformational leadership plays a positive role in the four aspects of teachers' organizational commitment, teachers' innovative behavior, teacher-student satisfaction, and performance (Liu, 2022; Waruwu et al., 2020; Sunwu, 2016; Abdullah, Arokiasamy & Penglok, 2018). However, the researchers found that in these domestic studies, the further advantages of transformational leadership were not discovered. Compared with foreign research results, the research angle seems to be a little single. The researchers believe that the research can be analyzed by complete qualitative research, so as to understand the problems more deeply, discover problems, and obtain richer insights data.

<p><b>Previous Study on Challenges of Transformational Leadership</b></p>	<p>Transformational leadership faces other challenges in practice, such as: the lack of resources and good strategies, the unbalanced development of transformational leadership, and a few leaders are still not competent for leadership and the wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in China (Qi, 2022; Gao, 2021; Han, 2020). There are also problems in communication (Yadav &amp; Agrawal, 2017; Li, 2018).</p> <p>The researchers also found that some foreign studies cannot give opinions based on China's national conditions. Too much quantitative studies, which may lead to the unification of measurement tools and the inability to obtain more abundant data like qualitative research through interview and observation, thus ignoring the views of participants (Patton, 2014). Focusing too much on the relationship between variables may neglect some special cases in practical applications. This is also the gap that the future study needs to fill.</p>
<p><b>Previous Study on Strategies of Transformational Leadership</b></p>	<p>Almost all successful leaders use the same basic leadership practices that help address the teachers performance. These practices strategies include: developing a shared vision, building professional communities, providing intellectual stimulation, providing support, and building trusting relationships (Leithwood, Harris, &amp; Hopkins, 2019). Successful principals directly and indirectly promote improvement through a combination of transformational and instructional strategies (Day, Gu &amp; Sammons, 2016). The school has successfully achieved transformation by improving the content and form of innovative courses and promoting the informatization of education (Chen, 2017).</p> <p>In summary, the practical strategies of transformational leadership can be determined by the specific circumstances of the transformative school and different dimensions of the chosen transformational leadership model, and the strategies can also be adjusted according to the specific needs of the school. The practice of transformational leadership in Chinese schools needs to take into account the characteristics of Chinese culture and educational environment.</p>
<p><b>Previous Study on Framework of Transformational Leadership</b></p>	<p>Bass established the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), and Bass' four-dimensional framework is widely used today (Bass &amp; Avolio, 1994). Some of the behaviors that good leaders exhibit in practice can be learned and developed through training and practice (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2012). Leithwood 1990s introduced it into educational context, and explicitly proposed the framework of transformational leadership in schools for the first time. Leithwood and Sun (2012) improve the transformational leadership with five dimensions to provide school leaders with greater play in different situations space (Leithwood &amp; Sun, 2012).</p> <p>There are few researches on all theoretical aspects of transformational leadership in the educational context of China. The research results of foreign countries provide reference for the research on transformational leadership in the situation of China.</p>

	There are still some shortcomings: the definition of theory is unclear, the research method is relatively simple, and the attention of education situation is not enough. As transformational leadership in education is "transplanted" from theories in the business field, it should also be adjusted to different degrees in the process of constantly adapting to the background of education.
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Figure 2: The Conclusion of Previous Study on Practices, Challenges, Strategies, Framework of Transformational Leadership

China's K12 education is undergoing reforms, and the Chinese government has implemented a series of strategies and measures to drive these changes. Although these strategies and measures do not explicitly specify the specific leadership approaches for school leaders, they largely align with transformative leadership and have been employed by many successful K12 schools in China. Among the models of transformational leadership, Bass's transformational leadership model is widely used, while Leithwood's transformational leadership model has been effectively validated in the educational context. However, there are still some findings regarding the implementation of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 schools.

In the practice of transformational leadership, most research has primarily focused on innovation, satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment. This narrow focus has limited the research on transformational leadership, preventing it from realizing its full potential. Additionally, the implementation of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 education faces several challenges. These include a lack of resources and transformational strategies in schools, insufficient leadership capabilities and theoretical knowledge among leaders, and a mismatch in leadership style selection and uneven development across dimensions (communication issues between leaders and subordinates). In practice, K12 school leaders in the application of transformational leadership often employ similar strategies, which are derived from various dimensions of transformational leadership. While successful leaders use similar foundational leadership practices, there is no single success model (Leithwood et al., 2017). However, overall, there are not many innovative strategies being utilized. In terms of the choice of transformational leadership models, Chinese scholars' research in this area is relatively weaker compared to foreign scholars, with fewer contributions. Many leaders still rely on outdated theories to support their practices. Most researchers select Bass's transformational leadership model, but in practice, they apply specific dimensions from Leithwood's transformational leadership model. This has resulted in confusion regarding the development of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 schools. This article provides researchers with research directions and gaps in practice, challenges, strategies, and frameworks, laying a foundation for the better development of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 schools.

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