

# Investigating And Validating The Relationship Between Leadership Style And Employee Engagement Among Teaching Professionals In Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a critical role in influencing employee engagement, especially in educational institutions where motivation and commitment of teaching professionals directly affect student outcomes and institutional success. This study aims to explore the relationship between leadership style and employee engagement among teaching professionals in higher education institutions. The study focuses on key leadership styles transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire and their influence on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement of faculty members.

Primary data were collected from 200 teaching professionals in higher education institutions in Chennai City using a structured questionnaire. Statistical tools such as descriptive analysis, reliability testing, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that transformational leadership has a strong positive influence on employee engagement, while transactional leadership exhibits a moderate impact, and laissez-faire leadership demonstrates a negative correlation. The results emphasize the importance of transformational leadership behaviors such as inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in fostering faculty engagement...

**Keywords:** Leadership Style, Employee Engagement, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Teaching Professionals, Higher Education, Chennai.

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## INTRODUCTION

In universities, good leadership is very important to determine the motivation and spirit of the academic staff and the institutional culture of the university. Universities' teaching staffs are the leading figures of the academic institutes and are very active imposing good educational standards; promoting innovative ideas and improving the students' learning experiences. However, the degree of employee engagement, which is the amount of emotional and intellectual commitment the employees show organization changes enormously among the practices and behaviors utilized by the top executives and/or the Chairpersons of the Departments.

The leadership style is the one which gives shape to the leader-faculty members relationship, motivation and the alignment of the personal goals with the institutional ones. Particularly, in the academic setting, a leader, who is transformational in nature, that is, a leader who arouses, camps and brings out high sense of dedication tends to create higher engagement compared to the transactional or laissez-faire styles.

The current study investigates how the different leadership styles of principals affect the teachers' level of involvement at higher education institutions in Chennai City. Schools that want to improve faculty members' satisfaction level,

commitment to work, and performance should follow leadership practices which are supported by this study.

### Statement of the Problem

Only by keeping the teaching staff highly motivated and engaged, the universities can achieve the academic excellence they aim at, and, as a consequence, their sustainability will be ensured. But the situation goes the other way round because the institutions do not see the faculty as acknowledged for the excellent work they are doing. Instead, the faculty faces burnout on one side, and productivity goes down and morale weakens.

In such cases, the employees are left to feel unsupported and the team spirit is weakened hence employees experience fatigue, and even in rare cases, output is reduced.

The leader's presence is a trigger for involvement; yet, various educational settings, however, have not imbued any leadership infrastructure models. Thus, the employees may feel unsupported and left ultimately leading to burnout, low productivity, and employee morale drop.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study conducted in the year 2017, Anitha revealed that the professors' interest in the institution increases a lot when the leaders of the institution show participative and empowering behaviors. The research enlightened that the professors become psychologically possessing when they

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are allowed to discuss their problems, take part in decision-making, and get involved in the planning of the institution. This feeling of participation actually adds to the enthusiasm, job satisfaction, and the sense of the staff members' high achievements. Moreover, the participative leadership according to Anitha shapes a collaborative working environment, which in turn, decreases the teacher's exhaustion and enhances the engagement level with the job duties.

Albrecht (2018) reported that the transformational leadership style directly boosts worker well-being and in case of workplaces with educational premises, improves lesser known and new employee's commitment to the work. These leaders are the ones that give purpose, encouragement, and tailoring to the teachers, which fosters their motivation and dedication to the organisation.

Priya (2021) did on the education industry in India, that provided supportive leadership in the workplace does not only win the heart of the employees but also keep them collaboratively involved. Manikandan, and Priya (2021) also found that supportive leadership, which includes providing directions, giving approvals, and offering learning and development, results in the faculty forming leaders. This supportive environment makes instruction, student support, and university life participation the focal areas for which teachers commit greater effort. Additionally, the examination made it clear that the provision of supportive leadership effectively mitigates the negative effects of role ambiguity and stress, thus increasing employees' long-term engagement and organizational commitment.

Nair and Thomas (2023) characterized by transformational leadership like trust, feedback, and empathy are significant predictors of involvement levels in higher education. Moreover, they illustrated that whenever leaders are transparent in their communication and offer feedback that is helpful, the teaching staff experiences a higher level of connection with the institutional goals. Empathy coming from the leaders also was a crucial point of their study in that it helped them get deeper insights into the challenges in turn, way of them establishing a pleasant working climate.

It is a presently occurring event that the whole of the related literature speaks in one voice to prove that engagement is the most positive and noticeable one in the academic world.

### Objectives

1. In order to scrutinize the association between the various leadership styles and the level of commitment of the employees in the group of education faculty in higher learning institutions, the following academic research will be conducted.

To identify which leadership style most strongly influences employee engagement.

To examine the extent to which leadership behavior impacts faculty motivation and commitment.

### Hypotheses

- H01: The correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement is not important.
- H02: The effect of transactional leadership on employee engagement is not significant.
- H03: Employee engagement is not dramatically associated with laissez-faire leadership.

### Research Methodology

Descriptive and analytical research design to investigate the connection between the leadership style and the degree of employee engagement. The survey was targeted towards faculty and staff in Chennai City such as universities, engineering colleges, and arts and science colleges.

A cohort of 200 people was selected in any specific subgroup by the simple random sampling method. The inputs in the form of the responses were obtained through the application of the questionnaire comprising the five-point Likert scale to them (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The study conducted illustrates two sections- one section was created for examining the leaders' characters and their styles- three options of leadership styles: transformational, transactional, laissez-faire; the other section focused on employee engagement aspects- vigor, dedication, and absorption- modeled by three factors.

Data were analyzed by using SPSS software to do the descriptive statistics reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) and correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis for the hypotheses testing and predictive engagement determination.

### Analysis and Results

#### 1. Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	41.0
	Female	118	59.0
Age Group	Below 30 years	36	18.0
	31–40 years	90	45.0
	41–50 years	54	27.0
	Above 50 years	20	10.0
Type of Institution	Public	74	37.0
	Private	126	63.0
Experience (Years)	Less than 5	44	22.0
	5–10	86	43.0
	Above 10	70	35.0

The demographic profile elucidates that the sample includes quite a varied group of teaching professionals, among whom the majority are females (59%) in comparison to

males (41%), thus suggesting a remarkable presence of females in the educational sector. The biggest share of the participants belong to the 31-40 age group (45%) - this is followed by the 41-50 age group (27%).

A significant part of the participants, that is, 63% are working in private universities which means these colleges are the major contributors to the higher education in Chennai. On the other side, the government colleges have a 37% share in the higher education institution section forming the second-largest group of employees in the study. People with 5 - 10 years of experience consist of 43% of the total employees. This a strong reason for moderately experienced faculties who generally engage in both academic and administrative actions. Group with more than 10 years of experience in teaching comprises 35% of the total experts and the remaining 22% are the newcomers with less than 5 years of teaching experience.

### 2. Reliability Analysis

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational Leadership	4	0.86
Transactional Leadership	4	0.82
Laissez-Faire Leadership	4	0.79
Employee Engagement	4	0.88

The internal consistency of all constructs was found to be very high as the reliability analysis gave Cronbach's Alpha values between the range of 0.79 to 0.88; particularly transformational leadership ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) and employee engagement ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ) were found to have very high levels of reliability which also implies that they are highly effective constructs. Nonetheless, transactional leadership also achieved a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) but laissez-faire leadership that scored a little lower 0.79 is still among the acceptable level for social science studies; hence, the methods used to measure the constructs are very efficient. As a result, the measurement scale can be considered as being very consistent and hence suitable for further statistical analysis like correlation and regression.

### 3. Correlation Analysis

Variables	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-Faire	Engagement
Transformational Leadership	1	0.62**	-0.40*	0.78**
Transactional Leadership	0.62**	1	-0.33*	0.61**
Laissez-Faire Leadership	-0.40**	-0.33**	1	-0.52**

Variables	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-Faire	Engagement
Employee Engagement	0.78**	0.61**	-0.52*	1

Note:  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

The results of the correlation analysis ( $r = 0.78$ ) strongly support the argument that there is a direct and strong relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. More specifically, the findings suggest that the three leadership styles of inspirational, supportive, and empowerment have an effect on the degree of employee engagement in the positive direction. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, is positively associated with engagement as well ( $r = 0.61$ ), but to a smaller extent, implying that the imposition of formal expectations, the provision of rewards, and the use of performance-oriented measures have a much weaker impact on engagement than transformational leadership. On the con side, the laissez-faire, or non-leading, style of leadership is found to have a negative correlation with faculty engagement ( $r = -0.52$ ), showing that passive leadership can lead to decreased motivation and deplete the commitment of teaching staff. The inconsistent relationship between laissez-faire and other leadership styles is a clear sign that a lack of structure and support can have at least as much or even a more negative impact on the educational environment as the presence of those two elements. The study at hand certainly provides evidence that teacher-aide interactions are the primary factors affecting whether there is support or not, or both. The most significant thing that the research discovery brings to light is the understanding that the employee involvement can be significantly increased through the implementation of active and supportive leadership principles while the lay-back leadership problem is, on the other hand, a power of disengagement in itself.

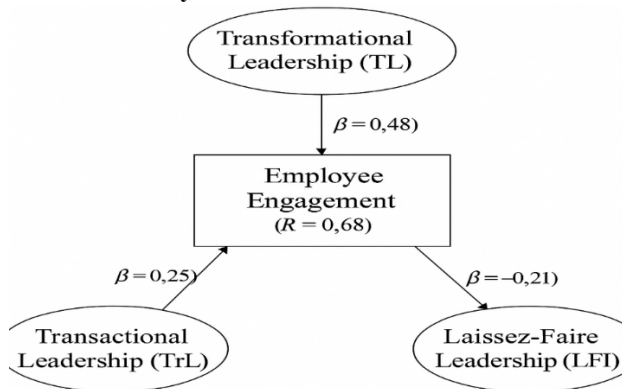
### 4. Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig. (p)
Transformational Leadership	0.48	7.32	0.000
Transactional Leadership	0.25	3.85	0.000
Laissez-Faire Leadership	-0.21	-3.40	0.001
$R^2 = 0.68, F = 87.25, p < 0.001$			

The analysis incorporated a plural regression model, with the R-squared value of .68, giving the percentage of variance that is explained by the predictors included in the model. So, one can say that a moderate relation exists between the independent relations and in the whole model there is still a strong casual relationship of the dependent variables with the leadership styles on a happy medium. Moreover, the three independent variables were beneficial towards the common success when used together and they could be one and the same since there was such a significant increase in the one through the other. In other words, the

relationship was one of the components of the independent variable clusters. The high coefficient value of transactional leadership ( $\beta = .25$ ) indicates leadership that is much more directive as contrasted with transformational leadership. The latter fosters personal growth and achievement among the followers and is seen as wholeheartedly embraced while the former leader, who is mainly the controller, takes away the autonomy of the followers and makes them dependent. Transformations, transactions, and Laissez-faire only symbols; their interactions cannot be done probably symbols or anyone symbol.

### SEM-Path Analysis



It is confirmed by the SEM path model that the leadership style is an influential variable on employee engagement among teaching professionals and this support is also seen in the multiple regression results. The positive path to employee engagement is the strongest for the transformational leadership approach ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), which implies that giving educational vision, treating each employee individually, and giving intellectual challenges are significant contributors to the staff's energy, involvement, and absorption. Moreover, another thing that the transactional leadership was also ( $\beta = 0.25$ ) significantly connected with, signifying that rewards and expectations were factors that underpinned employee-engagement-directed behavior but transformational behaviors manifested that to a much greater extent.

### CONCLUSION

The results given in the study confirm the supposition that the choice of a particular leadership style is a dominant agent in the level of professors' involvement at universities. The greatest advancement concerning involvement has been made by the transformational leadership that is accompanied by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. Transactional leadership is capable of getting followers by the rule, keeping the system running, and is a perfect choice only when a moderate engagement level is required. On the contrary, laissez-faire leadership saps the spirit and the participation.

The leaders of the higher education institutions required the commitment of the staff to carry out changes successfully. These changes, among the others, are open communication, showing understanding, giving power and having a common vision. Moreover, classroom crowns must run leadership training programs to create academic leaders with a humane and cooperative style of leadership, thus, cultivating the high spirit of the faculty and promoting the growth of the institution.

The sky is the limit as to how much more faculty participation, innovation, and academic quality can be achieved in Higher Education Institutions of Chennai if the leadership culture is built on trust and empowerment.

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