



The effect of Transactional Leadership style on leadership outcomes among head teachers

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Abstract

The achievement of educational institution goals depends on how effective leadership is exercised in the institution. One leadership style known for quick achievement of goals is transactional leadership also known as managerial leadership. Characterised by structured roles, clear expectations, and reward-based performance, it offers a pragmatic and results-oriented alternative to leadership. Transactional leadership is operationalized in two dimensions of Contingent rewards and management-by-exception- active (MBEA). This study aimed to examine how transactional leadership style affects leadership outcomes in Head teachers of secondary schools in Kabwe district, Zambia. Using a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional design, data were collected from eight (8) randomly selected headteachers and fifty-six (56) teachers. The multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ-5X) short form was used as a research instrument to collect perceptions on the Head teacher from among the teacher respondents and self-perceptions of the Head teachers added on to the data. The data were analysed with the help of IBM SPSS version 23. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were used to answer the research objectives. The study found that the use of transactional leadership style was moderate among the headteachers, but the practice of the dimension of management by exception-active (MBEA) was found to be prevalently high. The study also found that transactional leadership style, when practised through MBEA, has a highly positive and significant effect on the leadership outcome of effectiveness. However, the effect on the other leadership outcomes of extra effort and satisfaction was not significant. The study concluded that transactional leadership, although effective as a leadership style, in the educational sector, cannot be used in isolation, it needs to go alongside other leadership styles like transformational leadership, so that it takes care of long-term effects. The study recommends the use of transactional leadership for short-term assignments but in the education, sector be combined with transformational leadership style that inspires and motivates teachers and learners to achieve long term effects. The study also recommends future research on transactional leadership as it has been overshadowed by the studies undertaken on transformational leadership.

Keywords: Transactional leadership, management-by-exception, contingent rewards, multifactor leadership questionnaire

Introduction

Effective governance requires effective leaders. Without the presence of effective principals in schools, the penultimate goal of educating students is nearly impossible. The workplace's change is necessitated by the headteacher's leadership embedded in the goals and objectives (Cheruse, 2023) ^[11]. Salahuddin (2015) ^[19] pointed out that effective school leadership is a fundamental principle for successful schools, as the school's outcome depends on the quality of the leadership (Salahuddin, 2015) ^[19]. While transformational leadership has often dominated scholarly discourse, transactional leadership, characterised by structured roles, clear expectations, and reward-based performance, offers a pragmatic and result-oriented alternative. In Transactional Leadership, the leader is concerned with the basic needs of the person through a reward system in exchange for favourable group or educational outcomes (Hackman, 2000) ^[12]. This type of leadership is effective in crisis and emergencies, as well as for projects that need to be carried out in a specific way. Transactional leadership involves setting clear expectations and holding individuals accountable for their performance in the short term (Hackman, 2000) ^[12] (Matandiko *et al.*, 2024) ^[16]. In low-resourced settings where systemic challenges persist, such as in many developing regions, transactional leadership may provide a practical framework for enhancing teacher motivation and learner academic performance to

meet institutional goals. Despite extensive research on transactional leadership across various contexts, there is still a lack of full understanding regarding its effects on leadership outcomes of the leaders' extra effort, effectiveness and teacher satisfaction in secondary schools. This study examines how transactional leadership, when applied strategically, impacts educational outcomes. It aims to investigate the relationship between transactional leadership behaviours, such as contingent reward and management-by-exception-active and key leadership outcomes of effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction in learning institutions.

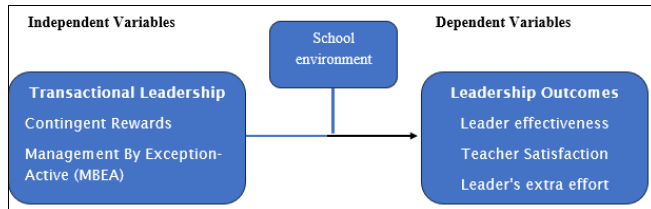
1. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks of the Study

The study is underpinned by the transactional theory of Leadership, which focuses on the exchange of skills, knowledge, resources or effort between leaders and subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 1994). First introduced by Burns (1978) ^[8], positing that the relationship between the leader and employee is based on an exchange of power and benefits (Bo Dong, 2023) ^[9]. Bass and Avolio (1994) expanded this framework, identifying key components of contingent reward and management-by-exception. In transactional leadership, the leader prioritises individual extrinsic motivation in order to get positive outcomes. By setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), transactional

leaders place a strong emphasis on performance and can efficiently track progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the achievement of their objectives.

Critics of transactional leadership argue that an overemphasis on performance metrics may lead to short-term planning and undermine innovation and creativity.

The Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed from review of literature (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio 1994; Matandiko 2024) [8, 16]

Literature Review

In a school setup, leadership can be seen as the ability of the head teacher or school manager to influence the activities of the teachers to meet defined school objectives and goals. Welgemood (1995) defined school leadership as the ability of the principal to encourage teachers to change to do things they would not ordinarily consider doing without the leader. Pasilio (2019) defined School leadership as the process of influencing and supporting others to work enthusiastically toward achieving school goals and objectives. Leithwood (2021) conceptualized school leadership as the influence on organisational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals.

Adding to the various conceptions of school leadership, Boateng (2021) [7] stated that the concept involved authority and responsibility in terms of deciding the way ahead and being held responsible for the success or failure of achieving agreed objectives. Shedding light on the concept of school leadership, Ogunode *et al.* (2023) [18] posited that school administrators have the opportunity to adopt different leadership styles that best suit the situation of their schools. A leader's leadership style influences the orientation of their team as well as the direction they should take. As a change agent are eager to effectively motivate and prepare staff for the achievement of the institutional goals. Leaders can, therefore have a range of leadership styles, one of which is defined by relationship exchanges known as transactional leadership (Mansaray, 2019) [15]. While transformational leadership has often dominated scholarly discourse, transactional leadership, which forms part of the full range of leadership continuum proposed by Bass (1994) stands as another effective leadership style.

1. The Transactional Leadership Style

Within the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transactional leadership works at the basic levels of need satisfaction, showing that transactional leaders focus on the lower levels of the hierarchy. Transactional leaders use an exchange model, with rewards being given for good work or positive outcomes. Conversely, people with this leadership style can also punish poor work or negative outcomes until the problem is corrected. One way that transactional leadership focus on lower-level needs is by stressing specific task performance. Transactional leaders are

effective in getting specific tasks completed by managing each portion individually. Transactional leaders get concerned with processes rather than forward-thinking ideas.

Recent research has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness, limitations and interactions of transactional leadership style in contemporary organizational contexts. They highlight the importance of considering the specific circumstances and the complementarity of different leadership styles when designing and implementing effective leadership practices, as alluded to by the studies below.

Zhang and Luo (2014) investigated the relationship between transactional leadership style and employee performance in Chinese organisations. The findings were that transactional leadership, particularly contingent rewards, had a positive impact on employee performance. Another study by Al-Tamimi & Al-Tamimi (2016) [2] examined the effects of transactional leadership on employee job satisfaction and organisational commitment in the health sector. The findings were that transactional leadership was positively associated with both job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Asare and Agyemang (2023) [1] also conducted a study aimed at investigating the relationship between transactional leadership and student academic performance in Ghanaian Secondary schools. The study revealed a strong positive impact, particularly, contingent rewards having a positive correlation with student academic performance. The study showed the importance of clear expectations, rewards, and consequences in fostering a positive learning environment.

According to the postulate of the theory, Bass (1985) observed that transactional leadership was a process which followed management by exception and contingent reinforcement. He further observed that transactional leaders were generally split into two dimensions, namely, contingent reward and management-by-exception: active, which were reviewed separately in the study;

2. Contingent Rewards

As Bass (1985) indicated in the theory, the type of leader who focuses on contingent rewards, also known as contingent positive reinforcement, gives rewards when the set goals are accomplished on time, ahead of time, or to keep subordinates working at a good pace at different times throughout completion. Contingent rewards are also given when the employee engages in any desired behaviour. According to Bass (1985) [4], the relationship is based on leader-follower cost-benefit exchange processes. Here, the leader clarifies the performance criteria (what is expected to be done) and what they receive in return, giving both bargaining power at the beginning.

3. Management by Exception- Active (MBEP-A)

Recent scholarly work on 'management by exception' (Lindberg, 2022) primarily focused on its role as a transactional leadership style dimension, examining how proactive monitoring and intervention by leaders could identify and address potential issues early on, often within the context of employee performance and task-oriented environments. Most research positions 'active management by exception' as a key element of transactional leadership, where leaders actively monitor performance and intervene when deviations from standard occur, providing corrective

feedback or rewards based on outcome. Over-reliance on management by exception-active can lead to a negative feedback loop, demotivated employees and could hinder creativity due to a high focus on error detection and correction.

Hasija *et al.* (2019) ^[13] found that management by exception-active a component of transactional leadership, fosters organisational learning and improves leadership performance with followers.

Iqbal, Anwar, and Haider (2015) demonstrated the relationship between organisational effectiveness and leadership style. They concluded that transactional leaders who focused on rewards usage and recognition to motivate their employees to achieve higher-end goals, encouraged employees to increase their shared interests.

4. Headteachers' leadership Outcomes

Research shows that leadership's extra effort correlated with followers' output and led to organisational performance Shafiu *et. al* (2020). According to Schuetz (2017) ^[20], personal contact serves as one of the most important acts that lead to leadership effectiveness because it draws direct attention to the issues that both sides (the leader and the follower) need and want to give to each other. This mutual sharing of information on expectations and proposals leads to higher engagement that results in higher effectiveness. White (2014) added that 'although effective leadership required the accomplishment of the organization's objectives that serve its vision and mission in a way that was personally fulfilling to those involved, both the degree to which objectives are accomplished and the satisfaction of those involved are quite subjective, often inherent contradictions and conflicts make it virtually impossible to please everyone all the time'. Effective leadership by head teachers was essential for creating a positive school climate, setting high expectations, promoting a culture of continuous improvement, and achieving positive educational outcomes. According to Ghasemy *et. al.* (2018), leadership effectiveness, defined as the process of directing followers to the desired goals, requires social power and mobilising existing resources for the purpose. In addition, an important indicator of the effectiveness of the leader was measured by the levels of satisfaction of the followers.

According to Shafiu (2019) ^[22], the absence of effective leadership could constitute serious problems in many public or private learning institutions, and its outcome is poor staff attitudes to work, poor performance and poor growth and societal output.

Yazdanifard and Hao (2015) ^[23] noted that through fostering a culture of high expectations, collaboration, and support, effective school leaders could help students reach their full academic potential and beyond. The purpose of leadership effectiveness is organisational effectiveness. Shapiro (2014) emphasised that a precious resource in team building was honest people because, in an effective executive team, all the members work together to achieve the goals. According to Altin *et al* (2018) ^[3], leaders who demonstrate effectiveness in their practices could foster workers' engagement and are more likely to encourage workers to devote extra efforts in the process, increasing individual and team performance. These researchers illustrate the connections between the leadership practices. They pointed out that where the leaders exhibited extra effort, this translated into their effectiveness and that of their followers.

In schools, leadership is seen as a way to encourage and support teachers and learners to enthusiastically participate in achieving their school goals. According to Cansoy (2018), school principals are expected to support teachers whose job satisfaction and commitment contribute to better performance and overall school effectiveness. Meyer & Norman (2020) pointed out that recent contemporary research paid more attention to transformational and transactional leadership styles as influencing teacher satisfaction and effectiveness. There were evidence that transformational and transactional leadership styles greatly influenced teacher job satisfaction (Kheir Faddul & Danalata, 2019; Mahshwari, 2021). Another study by Mickson & Anlesinya (2020) reported that transformational and transactional leadership styles positively impact employee job satisfaction.

Obonyo (2019) carried out a study which examined principals' leadership styles and their relationship with the teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools. The study established a positive and significant correlation between transformational leadership style and the teachers' job satisfaction; no significant correlation was evident between transactional leadership style and the teachers' job satisfaction.

Tran *et al* (2022) investigated the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles of principals on teacher satisfaction through a quantitative study approach. The result showed a significant correlation of transformational leadership style with teacher satisfaction and a negative correlation between transactional leadership style and teacher satisfaction.

Methodology

1. The study used a quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional research design beginning with data collection and analysis. The researcher used a validated survey questionnaire called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) to assess the transactional leadership behaviours among school leaders. A stratified sample of secondary school head teachers and teachers across Kabwe district in Zambia. Eight headteachers and Fifty-six (56) teachers were selected as the sample size for the study. Data was analysed using the IBM SPSS version 23 statistical package. The study employed both descriptive statistics using means and standard deviations to determine the prevalence of transactional leadership style among the selected Head teachers, and inferential statistics that relied on Spearman Correlation Coefficient to determine the correlation between transactional leadership and leadership outcomes.

2. Ethical Considerations

The study ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation throughout the study.

Findings

1. Transactional leadership style among the Headteachers

Table 4.1 below presents the descriptive statistical analysis showing Means and Standard Deviations (SD) on the Transactional leadership style used to determine its prevalence among the eight (8) secondary school headteachers in Kabwe district in Zambia. Transactional

leadership style had a Mean of 8.756, falling in the Moderate score range (5-9) and a SD of 2.01808. The subscale of Contingent rewards scored a high Mean (10.1996), more than the overall Mean of the leadership

style, while MBEA scored a lower-than-average Mean of 7.3122. The SD of MBEA was higher (2.62477), showing that there were more variations in the perceptions among the teachers than there were on CR, whose SD was 2.22335.

Table 4.1: shows the Means and SD of Transactional Leadership Style among Head teachers

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
Transactional Leadership Style	8.7559	2.01808	Moderate
Contingent Reward	10.1996	2.22335	High
Management by Exception -Active (MBEA)	7.3122	2.62477	Moderate

Score range: Low =0-4, Moderate =5-8 and High =9-12

2. The Correlation between Transactional Leadership Style and Leadership Outcomes

Transactional leadership style strongly correlated with effectiveness ($r=0.545^{***}$, $P\text{-value}=0.002$), showing a statistically significant outcome. On the subscales, Management-By-Exception-Active (MBEA) had no statistically significant correlation with two of the three

leadership outcome variables, but had a high and significant correlation with effectiveness at ($r=0.584^{***}$, $P\text{-value}=0.001$). The dimension of contingent rewards did not show any significant correlation with the leadership outcomes of extra effort, effectiveness or satisfaction as observed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: shows the Correlation between Transactional Leadership Style and Leadership Outcomes of Extra Effort, Effectiveness, and Satisfaction

Independent variable	Dependent Variables			
		Extra Effort	Effective	Satisfaction
Transactional Leadership Style	Spearman Correlation	.226	.545***	.098
	<i>p</i> -value	.221	.002	.599
Contingent Rewards	Spearman Correlation	.057	.281	.020
	<i>p</i> -value	.761	.125	.914
Management by Exception-Active	Spearman Correlation	.322	.584**	.123
	<i>p</i> -value	.077	.001	.509

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion of Findings

Transactional leadership style was found to have a moderate Mean (8.756, $SD=2.018$), which meant that transactional leadership was perceived to be moderate among the head teachers, but there were variations in opinion among the teachers. This meant that the head teachers, as transactional leaders, set clear expectations and held individuals accountable for their performances. This can be particularly important in Secondary schools, where there are often high expectations for learner academic achievement, student behaviour, adherence to religious principles, and a demand for teacher commitment. This is in line with Hunt and Wallace (2000), who posit that in the context of secondary schools, this might involve offering incentives for good behaviour, academic achievement, or participation in extracurricular activities while also implementing consequences for misconduct.

The subscale of Contingent rewards scored a high Mean (10.1996), more than the overall Mean of the leadership style, while MBEA scored a lower Mean of 7.3122. The SD of MBEA was higher (2.62477), showing that there were more variations in the perceptions among the teachers than there were on CR, whose SD was 2.22335. This meant that management by exception – active subscale scored a Mean falling in the High score range (9-12), and the difference in variation of opinion among the teachers only increased by 0.6. In addition, it meant that the teachers perceived their Headteachers as highly practising management by exception actively. Lindberg (2022) places ‘active management by

exception’ as a key element of transactional leadership, where leaders actively monitor performance and intervene when deviations from standards occur, providing corrective feedback early on.

The findings on transactional leadership style’s effect on leadership outcomes indicated that Transactional leadership style strongly correlated with effectiveness, showing a statistically significant outcome. On the subscales, Management-By-Exception-Active (MBEA) had no statistically significant correlation with two of the three leadership outcome variables, namely extra effort and satisfaction, but had a high and significant correlation with effectiveness at ($r=0.584^{***}$, $P\text{-value}=0.001$). This meant that teachers perceived their headteachers to be very effective when they practised MBEA. This finding resonates with other scholars like Altin *et al* (2018) [3], who posit that leaders who demonstrate effectiveness in their practices could foster workers' engagement and are more likely to encourage workers to devote extra efforts in the process, increasing individual and team performance. These researchers illustrate the connections between the leadership practices. According to Shafiu (2019) [22], the absence of effective leadership could constitute serious problems in many public or private learning institutions, making these findings necessary for any school.

The transactional leadership style did not show any significant correlation with the leadership outcomes of extra effort and satisfaction as observed in Table 4.2. This finding is in line with researchers such as Obonyo (2019), who

found that no significant correlation was evident between transactional leadership style and the teachers' job satisfaction.

However, the findings of this study contradict the works of Meyer & Norman (2020) and Cansoy (2018), who pointed out that recent contemporary research paid more attention to transformational and transactional leadership styles as influencing teacher satisfaction and effectiveness. Kheir Faddul & Danalata (2019); Mahshwari (2021); Mickson & Anlesinya (2020) reported that transformational and transactional leadership styles positively impact employee job satisfaction, while this study found that transactional leadership has no significant correlation with teacher satisfaction. Some studies have found that in certain situations, having a clear expectation of things to be done and leaning on leader-follower exchange relationships have a positive impact on the readiness to engage in proactive and risk behaviours (Ma & Jiang, 2018) [14]. However, this positive influence needs the support of the institutions to furnish Head teachers with resources that the teachers require in their job. Without delegating resources and creating opportunities to reward for excellence, transactional headteachers will face challenges in motivating their teachers leading to insignificant effects of contingent reward effects.

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, the current study sheds new and important light on the moderate predominance of transactional leadership style among the headteachers, MBEA showing to be highly practised among them. Transactional leadership showed a positive and highly statistically significant effect ($r=0.545$ ***, $p\text{-value}=0.002$) on leadership effectiveness. The study further, found that the sub-dimension of transactional leadership, MBEA, when practised, had a higher positive effect on leadership effectiveness.

This study recommends that, in future research, while this study may have focused on investigating the direct connection between transactional leadership and the three leadership outcomes, future research could employ a comparative analysis approach. This approach would allow for a comparison of the effectiveness of transactional leadership with other leadership styles, such as transformational or passive avoidance have a multilayered influence on leadership behaviors (outcomes). Such a comparative analysis would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and synergistic effects of different leadership styles on leadership outcomes. Also, future research would explore how transactional leadership can effectively address educational goals such as learner performance among finalist secondary school learners in these schools.

Funding

This research received no external funding

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Sample size

Sampled Secondary Schools in Kabwe	Total Population of Head Teachers	Total Population of Teachers (HODs)	Study Sample Size

8	8	$8 \times 8 = 56$	62
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Table showing the Test of Normality for the Population of the Sample

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk test		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Transformational	.116	52	.080	.898	52	.000
Transactional	.095	52	.200*	.970	52	.208
Passive avoidant	.184	52	.000	.810	52	.000
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.						
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Table showing the distribution of responses from the respondents

School Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Totals	Percentage
Number of Head Teachers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	100
Total Number of Teachers	8	8	8	8	7	7	5	5	56	100
Emailed MLQ Self-Form	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	100
Completed	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	100
Emailed MLQ Rater Form	8	8	8	8	7	7	5	5	56	100
Completed Rater Forms	8	8	8	8	7	7	5	5	46	100
Incomplete Rater Forms	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table showing the Results of the Full Range of Leadership Model (FRLM) Correlated with leadership Outcomes

Leadership Style	Dependent Variable	Extra Effort	Effectiveness	Satisfaction
Transformational Leadership Style	Spearman Correlation	.335*	.479**	.577***
	<i>p</i> -value	.005	.001	.001
Transactional Leadership Style	Spearman Correlation	.221	.545***	.098
	<i>p</i> -value	.115	.002	.966
Passive Avoidant Leadership Style	Spearman Correlation	.097	.147	-.0966
	<i>p</i> -value	.496	.299	.487

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