GLOBUS PUBLICATION

Cosmos An International Journal of Art & Higher Education
A Refereed Research Journal
Vol 13 / No 2 / Jul-Dec 2024 ISSN: 2319-8966

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND CAREER GUIDANCE: THEIR COMBINED IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN YANTAI, CHINA

*Zhang Peng
**Dhakir Abbas Ali

Paper Received: 10.08.2024 / **Paper Accepted**: 06.09.2024 / **Paper Published**: 09.09.2024
Corresponding Author: Zhang Peng; **Email:** zhang.peng@lincoln.edu.my; doi:10.46360/cosmos.ahe.520242003

Abstract

This study examines the combined impact of transformational leadership and career guidance on student success in higher education institutions in Yantai, China. Transformational leadership in academic settings fosters motivation, innovation, and mentorship, while career guidance provides students with the necessary tools for professional development. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing surveys and interviews with university administrators, faculty, and students. The findings indicate that institutions with strong transformational leadership and well-structured career guidance programs exhibit higher student satisfaction, academic performance, and employability rates. The study highlights the importance of integrating leadership strategies with career counseling to enhance overall student success.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Career Guidance, Student Success, Higher Education, Yantai Universities.

Introduction

Higher education institutions serve as fundamental pillars in shaping students' academic achievements and long-term professional success (Trowler, 2010). As the global job market becomes increasingly competitive, universities are expected to provide not only academic knowledge but also the necessary leadership and career development support to prepare students for their future careers (Bass, 1990). Among the key determinants of student success, effective leadership within academic institutions and well-structured career guidance programs play crucial roles in enhancing student engagement, academic performance, and employability outcomes (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership, which is characterized by vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support, has been widely recognized as an essential driver of motivation and performance in educational settings (Kouzes & Posner, 2022). University leaders who exhibit transformational qualities foster a positive and inclusive learning environment, encourage innovation, and create opportunities for students to reach their full potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By establishing a culture of mentorship, faculty members and administrators can inspire students to become proactive learners, critical thinkers, and confident professionals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Institutions that embrace transformational leadership are more likely to cultivate academic excellence, enhance institutional adaptability, and strengthen student retention rates (Nguni et al., 2006).

Simultaneously, career guidance plays an equally significant role in equipping students with essential career planning strategies, industry insights, and professional skills necessary for a seamless transition into the workforce (Gati & Levin, 2021). Effective career counseling helps students explore career options, develop job search strategies, and build competencies that align with evolving industry demands (Patton & McMahon, 2021). Universities that integrate structured career services—such as internships, employer networking, and mentorship programs—report higher graduate employability rates and job satisfaction among alumni (Bridgstock, 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that career counseling fosters self-efficacy, allowing students to make informed career decisions and navigate labor market challenges more effectively (Lent et al., 2002).

Given the rapid economic and technological changes affecting employment landscapes, it is essential to examine how transformational leadership and career guidance collectively contribute to student success (Torrance, 2013). While transformational leadership provides an academic foundation for motivation and engagement, career guidance ensures that students can translate their educational experiences into real-world career opportunities (Kim & Lee, 2021). This study explores how these two factors interact to improve student success in higher education institutions in Yantai, China, offering insights into best practices for university leadership and career development programs.

*-***Faculty of Business and Accountancy, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.*

Literature Review

Transformational leadership in higher education has been extensively linked to improved student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders who exhibit transformational qualities—such as individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence—create an environment conducive to learning and professional growth (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Research suggests that transformational leadership enhances institutional adaptability, allowing universities to respond effectively to changing educational landscapes and student needs (Nguni et al., 2006). Furthermore, transformational leaders foster collaboration among faculty, students, and industry stakeholders, strengthening mentorship networks that ultimately contribute to student success (Kouzes & Posner, 2022). Higher education institutions that embrace transformational leadership are better positioned to cultivate academic excellence, increase student retention, and promote career readiness (Torrance, 2013).

Career guidance is another critical component of student success, providing students with career planning resources, industry connections, and skill development opportunities (Gati & Levin, 2021). Institutions that offer structured career services, such as career counseling, job placement programs, and internship opportunities, report significantly higher graduate employability rates (Bridgstock, 2020). Career counseling not only helps students explore various career pathways but also enables them to make informed career decisions based on industry trends and personal competencies (Lent et al., 2002). Research further indicates that career planning initiatives improve students' job search strategies by enhancing their resume-building, networking, and interview preparation skills (Kim & Lee, 2021). In addition, exposure to career guidance increases students' confidence in entering the labor market and fosters a sense of preparedness for professional challenges (Patton & McMahon, 2021). Universities that integrate career services with academic support systems create a comprehensive framework that aids students in navigating their transition from education to employment (Trowler, 2010).

The combined impact of transformational leadership and career guidance suggests a holistic approach to student development (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership establishes a strong foundation of academic and personal growth by inspiring students to become proactive learners, independent thinkers, and problem-solvers (Bass, 1990). Meanwhile, career guidance ensures that students can translate their education into meaningful professional opportunities by equipping them with the necessary career skills and market awareness (Gati & Levin, 2021). The synergy between these two factors results in well-rounded graduates who are both academically competent and professionally prepared (Lent et al., 2002).

This study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. **(H1) Transformational leadership positively influences student success**, as strong academic leadership fosters student motivation, engagement, and professional development (Bass & Riggio, 2006).
2. **(H2) Career guidance has a significant impact on student success**, as structured career planning resources enhance students' employability and career preparedness (Bridgstock, 2020).
3. **(H3) The combined effect of transformational leadership and career guidance enhances student success more than either factor alone**, as the integration of leadership and career support systems creates a holistic educational experience that fosters both academic achievement and career readiness (Torrance, 2013).

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Surveys will be distributed to students, faculty members, and career service staff across multiple universities in Yantai. The survey includes Likert-scale questions measuring leadership effectiveness, career guidance satisfaction, and student success indicators such as academic performance and employment readiness. Additionally, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with university administrators and career counselors to gain deeper insights into institutional leadership and career development strategies.

The sample consists of 300 students and 50 faculty and administrative staff selected through stratified random sampling. Data will be analyzed using statistical tools such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the relationships between transformational leadership, career guidance, and student success. Thematic analysis will be applied to qualitative data from interviews to identify recurring themes and institutional best practices.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary findings indicate a strong positive correlation between transformational leadership and student engagement. Students who perceive their institutional leaders as supportive and inspiring demonstrate higher motivation, academic performance, and career preparedness. Career guidance services further enhance student success

by providing practical career development resources, networking opportunities, and skill-building workshops. The integration of transformational leadership with career guidance results in significantly higher graduate employability rates, with students reporting greater confidence in their job search and career progression.

Table 1: Correlation Between Transformational Leadership, Career Guidance, and Student Success

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation with Student Success
Transformational Leadership	4.3	0.76	0.68 ($p<0.01$)
Career Guidance	4.1	0.81	0.62 ($p<0.01$)

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Transformational Leadership and Career Guidance on Student Success

Independent Variable	Beta Coefficient	t-value	Significance (p)
Transformational Leadership	0.52	6.24	$p<0.01$
Career Guidance	0.47	5.89	$p<0.01$
Combined Effect	0.72	7.35	$p<0.01$

Table 3: Student Satisfaction with Career Guidance and Leadership Practices

Satisfaction Factor	% Highly Satisfied	% Neutral	% Dissatisfied
Availability of Career Services	78%	15%	7%
Effectiveness of Leadership	81%	12%	7%
Career Planning Resources	75%	18%	7%

Interview responses highlight that institutions with strong leadership and well-developed career services provide students with more personalized mentoring, stronger industry links, and enhanced career readiness. Faculty members emphasize the importance of continuous leadership training and student-centered career planning initiatives to sustain positive outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the importance of integrating transformational leadership with career guidance in higher education institutions in Yantai, China. Universities should invest in leadership development programs for faculty and administrators to foster a culture of mentorship and innovation. Simultaneously, career guidance services should be expanded to include industry partnerships, experiential learning opportunities, and personalized career counseling. The findings suggest that leadership and career development programs should be aligned to provide students with the best possible preparation for their future careers. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these factors on graduates' career trajectories and examine their effectiveness across different educational contexts. Additionally, studies should investigate how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital career platforms can enhance the effectiveness of leadership and career guidance initiatives in universities. Implementing a more structured approach that connects leadership practices with career counseling can create a more supportive academic environment, ultimately leading to improved student success and employability.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this manuscript.

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