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Non-formal leadership in higher education: a case study of the transformational leadership of a young female academic in a Nigerian university

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Keywords

Academic success;
learning experience;
transformational leadership;
university students.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the transformational leadership qualities of a young female academic in a Nigerian university through a qualitative descriptive technique. The study was grounded in the transformational leadership model of Bass (1990, 1997, 1999) and Bass and Avolio (1994) as the theoretical framework. Data were generated from the comments posted on the Facebook timeline of the young academic by her ex-students on her birthday. Obtaining data from Facebook users provide opportunities for qualitative research (Franz et al., 2019). The data were analysed using four themes based on the four components of transformational leadership proposed by Bass and Avolio which are *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration*. The findings showed that the young academic demonstrates these four attributes or components in teaching and learning and in engagements with her students. The findings of the study underscore the need for academics to demonstrate transformational leadership, especially in Nigerian universities. The study also makes a contribution to the current debate on transformational-instructor leadership.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the transformational leadership qualities of a young female academic in non-formal leadership position in a Nigerian university. This has become important given that researchers (e.g. Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Samman, 2018) have emphasized the need for higher education instructors to develop leadership skills in improving teaching and learning in the classrooms. It is reported that learning is enhanced when lecturers are portrayed as leaders by their students (Richards, 2011) because the leadership of lecturers creates a supportive learning environment where students get positively engaged in academic activities (Andy-Wali & Wali, 2018). Yet, the literature has focused largely on formal leadership with scanty studies on how the non-formal leadership practices of academics are developed in teaching and learning to enhance students' experiences (Hofmeyer et al., 2015). While formal leaders occupy formally assigned positions such as heads of department, subject coordinator, which move away from the classroom, non-formal leaders on the other hand perform classroom related leadership roles (Harris, 2003).

The traditional and long-held view of leadership as hierarchical and vertical (Goncalve, 2018) has been challenged by the emergence of distributed leadership which sees the development of multiple leaders as sources of influence (Ameijde et al., 2009) rather than only those occupying formally assigned positions. Schools are becoming complex and are experiencing expansion in size in recent times which necessitates that leadership should be distributed and based on a collective effort in the school systems (Angelle, 2010). By this, everybody becomes part of the leadership process rather than restricting it to only formal leaders (Northouse, 2016).

Leadership is perceived as influence (Vroom & Jago, 2007; Surji, 2015; Northouse, 2016) which occurs in any group – whether small task group or big organizations (Northouse, 2016). The classroom has therefore been conceived as a small social organization where the teacher leads while the students follow (Pounder, 2008) and in such a setting, the lecturer exercises influence on students' motivation in their engagement with the class activities. While research (e.g. Reeve et al., 1999) has established a connection between teaching styles and students' motivation, it should be noted that leadership is not just about classroom teaching. Lecturers' conducts, their out-of-classroom activities with students and overall engagements with their students describe their leadership practices. Students can only maximise their academic potentials and enjoy the best of their studies in the university when there exists a cordial relationship between them and their lecturers where their lecturers are very supportive to the students, present themselves as role models, mentors and scholars that they truly are. As reported by Sokola et al. (2015, p. 1981), students appreciate lecturers who provide emotional support, give timely feedback, monitor their work efficiently and support them in dealing with the challenges they encounter in their work. Such lecturers shape the students' personality as they leave the university to become part of the pool of efficient human capital (Sokola et al., 2015).

However, it is regrettable that in most public universities in Nigeria, students continue to report dissatisfaction in their university experiences because of the ineffective classroom leadership practices of some academics. Reports keep emerging about unethical conducts of some academics who ought to be an inspiration and role models to their students. The poor relationships between students and their lecturers are well-reported (e.g. Okoedion et al., 2019; Apeh & Dagwa, 2019) as a good number of lecturers have made themselves unapproachable and unsupportive to their students. Where students are concerned about their relationships with lecturers, it could lead to the development of a negative attitude towards the campus environment (Apeh & Dagwa, 2019). Concerns are being raised regarding the poor quality of graduates turned out of Nigerian universities which is partly due to the poor quality of teaching (Idaka & Joshua, 2009) and poor leadership qualities of some instructors or lecturers. The growing confrontations between lecturers and students (Elegbe, 2018) have impacted significantly on lecturer-student engagements. Some lecturers are less concerned about the welfare of the students which in turn impact on students' ability to relate issues with their lecturers (Apeh & Dagwa, 2019). It is no surprise to see students nick-naming lecturers by calling them negative names such as sadist, smiling devil, walking disaster, psycho, tormentor, angel lucifer (as reported in the study of Mensah & Ndimele, 2020) and other derogatory names that do not portray them in a good light. Universities in the country are now marred by corrupt and unethical practices as lecturers engage in extortion, bribery, absenteeism and sexual harassment (Uche, 2014). These practices of lecturers impact directly on the moral conducts of the students even after they have left the university in that when they realize that success does not depend on personal efforts, but on corrupt and unethical conducts, they also would develop such unethical behaviour which can be passed on to the next generation (Abanobi, 2017).

Students always desire lecturers that can meet their learning needs and possess attributes that make them effective (Aregbeyen, 2010). Effective lecturers are those who establish good rapport with their students which builds positive connection both within and outside of the classroom. They show commitment and support to the success of their students and exude leadership qualities which students do not only admire, but also influences their own moral values. Lecturers should be role models to their students (Sharra, 2013) by demonstrating leadership qualities that motivate and inspire their students in enhancing their learning outcomes in the university and their engagements with the wider society. However, in a situation where lecturers are perceived by their students as poor leaders, it impacts negatively on their motivation and improvement (Hendry, 2013). Idaka and Joshua (2009) assert that ways should be sought on how to improve the educational activities of Nigerian lecturers and their impact on students. Therefore, one way this study seeks to contribute is to bring to light the transformational leadership qualities of a young academic in a Nigerian university as attested to by her ex-students. By so doing, academics in Nigerian universities can learn from the testimonials with a view to improving the leadership of lecturers, especially those in non-formal positions so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning and strengthen

lecturer-student engagements. The term 'young academic' will be used all through this study to refer to the academic who is in her middle thirties.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is based on the transformational leadership model of Bass (1990, 1997, 1999) and Bass and Avolio (1994) as the theoretical framework. Transformational leadership has become one of the most widely studied leadership models in the last few decades (Liu & Li, 2018) and has been shown by overwhelming findings to positively correlate with individual and organizational outcomes (Chen et al., 2018). Although originally introduced by Burns (1978) (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2011), Bass (1985) and his colleague, Avolio, made significant contributions in further developing the model (Towler, 2019). Transformational leadership is an approach to leadership that persuades, inspires and motivate followers through the building of a collective vision for followers to pursue (Lee, 2014). Transformational leaders elevate the level of maturity of followers and their ideals and show concern for the "achievement, self-actualization and the wellbeing of others, the organization and society" (Bass, 1999, p. 11). Transformational leaders "take personal responsibility for the development of their followers" (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 113) and thus, encourage followers to maximize their full potentials in transcending beyond their perceived expectations. They set challenging expectations and support others to achieve higher level of performance (Lievens et al., 1997). Followers are moved beyond their immediate self-interests (Bass, 1999) to the collective interests of the organization. By taking personal responsibility of developing their followers, transformational leaders create an environment where followers believe that every member of the organization should have their full potentials developed (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Pounder (2008) asserts that the effect which transformational leadership has on followers is measured based on three outcomes: extra efforts generated by the leader from followers, perception of the effectiveness of the leader by followers and satisfaction followers derive from their leaders. According to Bass (1999), transformation leaders influence their followers through inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Inspirational motivation is when the leader inspires followers towards a collective vision ((Molenberghs et al., 2017); idealized influence deals with role modelling (Bass, 1999); Individualized consideration occurs when the leader meets the needs of followers and supports them to overcome challenges (Bass, 1999); and intellectual stimulation is when the leader encourages followers to become innovative and creative (Bass, 1999). The components are presented in the diagram below.

Transformational leadership model demonstrates many positive leadership attributes (Allen et al., 2016) and thus, research has begun to apply this theory or model in higher education classroom (e.g. Pounder, 2008; Daniels & Goodboy, 2014; Andy-Wali & Wali, 2018) and findings have shown that it positively impacts on students' learning outcomes and academic experience.

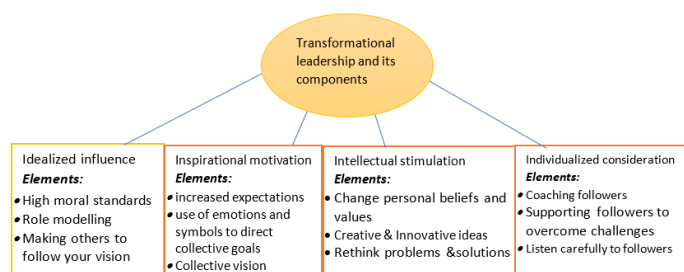


Figure 1: Components or qualities of transformational leadership. Sources: Bass (1990, 1997, 1999); Bass and Avolio (1994)

3. Review of literature on transformational leadership qualities in HE classrooms

Samman (2018, p. 85) asserts that "developing leaders and leadership are key factors to improve learning and teaching in higher education". For this reason, Andy-Wali and Wali (2018, p. 42) assert that "every lecturer in the higher institution is a leader". However, they note that the leadership of lecturers can have either a positive or negative effect on students' academic engagements. While lecturers have the responsibilities of teaching and research (Su & Wood, 2012), they are experiencing expanding roles (Briggs, 2005) as they are now taking up other roles such as pastoral support (Hilliam & Williams, 2019), administrative duties (Billot, 2010), mentorship (Samman, 2018), among others. With the emergence of multiple academics' roles which are reshaping their work (Billot, 2010), more leadership skills are required (Shahmandi et al., 2011).

Certain factors shape the leadership skills and qualities of lecturers. Manwa et al. (2020) note that the qualities possessed by a lecturer covers their qualifications, competencies and attitudes in catering for the needs of the students. However, the focus of this study is on how lecturers demonstrate transformational leadership in leading teaching and learning and in their engagements with their students, both within and outside of the classroom.

Hendry (2013, p. 254) posits that lecturers as leaders influence the motivation, performance and satisfaction of students and also provide "a supportive, participatory environment consistent with achievement". By this, lecturers demonstrate that they value their students as they see them as critical stakeholders in the classroom and the university. This is why Su and Wood (2012) proposed that more should be done to engage students in higher education as "co-producers of knowledge about pedagogy and practice" in order to deepen and produce deeper knowledge and understanding. Therefore, lecturers have a crucial role to play as facilitators of this process of co-constructing knowledge with students and shaping a positive learning experience.

Andy-Wali and Wali's (2018) qualitative study in a UK university revealed that the transformational leadership qualities of lecturers influenced the learning experiences of the students in that they (the lecturers) created a participatory learning environment, made themselves accessible to the students both inside and outside the classroom, provided

timely feedback, were willing to provide academic and moral support to the students and passionately taught them. Bogler et al's (2013) study centred on the transformational and passive leadership qualities of lecturers and their findings revealed that the more transformational lecturers were, the more satisfied students were. Transformational teachers are those who create "dynamic relationships between teachers, students, and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth" (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 1). Slavich and Zimbardo (2012, p. 1) further state that such "instructors are intellectual coaches who create teams of students who collaborate with each other and with their teacher to master bodies of information". By working closely with their students and monitoring their progress through their transformational leadership practices, lecturers coach and inspire students to maximise their full academic potentials and become high achievers.

Transformational lecturers demonstrate qualities such as respect for students and show concern for their needs, demonstrate appropriate professional conduct, set high academic expectations, display good sense of humour, reward appropriate behaviours, challenge the thinking ability of students, exude confidence, knowledge and always prepared (Hendry, 2013). Pounder (2008) adapted the four components of transformational leadership of Bass (1990, 1999) and Bass and Avolio (1994) and his findings showed the transformational characteristics demonstrated in the classroom (that is, idealized influence – behaviours, idealized influence – attribute, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation) led to positive student outcomes which are satisfaction, extra effort and effectiveness. Similarly, Bolkan and Goodboy (2011, p. 10) adapted the operationalized qualities or components of transformational leadership of Bass (1985) and reported that:

(a) charisma was communicated through teacher confirmation, nonverbal immediacy, humor, caring, availability, content relevance, verbal immediacy, attitude homophily, equality, and self-disclosure; (b) individualized consideration was communicated through teacher availability, individualized feedback, verbal immediacy, personalized content, conveying interest, special considerations, student history, and encouraging participation; and (c) intellectual stimulation was communicated through teaching style, challenging students, independent thought, classroom participation, humor, and content relevance.

Harrison's' (2011, p. 91) study revealed that the transformational leadership behaviours of instructors significantly predicted the "cognitive learning, affective learning, perceptions of instructor credibility and communication satisfaction" of the students. This implies that students will have positive learning experiences when instructors or lecturers are transformational in their teaching and engagements with their students. As reported from the study of Noland and Richards (2014, p. 5) transformational leadership "significantly predicted student state motivation,

learning indicators and affective learning" and thus, concluded that transformational leadership serves as "an appropriate and effective model for classroom instruction".

4. The current study

The current study is in the form of a qualitative descriptive research (Hofmeyer et al., 2015) aimed at describing the transformational leadership qualities of a young academic in the Faculty of Education of a Nigerian university. The study was influenced by the overwhelming encomiums posted on the Facebook timeline of the academic by her ex-students on her birthday. Thus, the need to bring to light some of the qualities that are said to be demonstrated by this young academic which have made her outstanding in the eyes of her students. It is hoped that through this, other academics can be inspired to improve on their leadership qualities in Nigerian universities so that the quality of teaching and learning can be enhanced and students can have the best of university experience. To guide the study, the following question was raised:

In what ways does the young academic display transformational leadership?

To answer the research question, comments of eight of her ex-students were reported. Reporting the comments of these number of participants is sufficient as the literature suggests 5 to 50 participants for a qualitative study (Shari, 2012). Their names were pseudonymised to ensure privacy. As noted by Franz et al. (2019), although Facebook provides opportunity for obtaining qualitative data for research, it is important to ensure the anonymity and safety of individual's Facebook information regardless of whether or not they are research participants. Their comments are reported using ex-student A, ex-student B, etc.

5. Analysis

Findings show that the young academic demonstrates transformational leadership through the display of the four components or qualities inherent in the transformational leadership model of Bass (1990, 1997, 1999) and Bass and Avolio (1994). The components and how they are demonstrated are reported below.

Idealized influence

According to Bass (1997), idealized influence (or charisma) involves leaders leading with a conviction, emphasizing trust, taking a stand on difficulties, presenting important values and emphasizing the importance of commitment, purpose and ethical implications of decisions. By demonstrating idealized influence, "leaders are admired as role models generating pride, loyalty, confidence, and alignment around a shared purpose" (Bass, 1997, p. 133). A measure of this quality or component involves ascertaining the extent to which the leader is respected and admired by followers (Pounder, 2005).

From the comments of her ex-students, the young academic demonstrates idealized influence in engaging with her students. She commands so much admiration and serves as a role model to her students.

Ex-student A states:

I will never forget those days when I would refer to you as a STAR (that you really are) you would say sincerely and meaningfully to me that I could become one too if I studied hard. There are so much to admire in you. . .

Ex-student C wrote:

This is to a gracious Woman who I watch from afar and so much want to be like [. . .] Thank you for making a career in education an admirable career [. . .] especially to me. I never loved my course until I met you[. . .]

Student C's comment show that her interest in the programme of study was kindled by the young academic. It should be noted that most students in Nigeria do not choose to study Education to become teachers and many of them who are admitted into the Faculty of Education are those who could not obtain the cut-off points in the Post-University Matriculation Examination (Post-UME) for their preferred course of study. Post-UME is an entrance examination, or a method of admission conducted by universities in Nigeria to select suitable candidates for admission into various programmes of study after they had written the University Matriculation Examination (UME).

Ex-student D commented thus:

I feel super elated celebrating this momentous day with my AMIABLE COURSE ADVISER. A mother, a role model, undaunted personality and one who's diligent and assiduous in her engagements.

Ex-student F:

It is an awesome privilege to be raised by you [. . .] I learned more from you than the University of [. . .] had to teach me in four years.

You are one of the most valuable persons in my life and I do not take for granted your simplicity and humility [. . .]

Inspirational motivation

According to Bass (1997), inspirational motivation involves leaders articulating a future that is appealing to both the leaders and the followers, setting high standards to challenge their followers, being optimistic and enthusiastic by the way they talk, and providing encouragement and meaning for what needs to be done. The measure of this dimension or component is "the leader's ability to engender confidence

in the leader's vision and values" (Pounder, 2005, p. 5). This attribute is seen in the young academic by the comments of her ex-students.

Ex-student B notes:

I remembered that very day I stepped into Auditorium to be cleared as a direct entry student to the department of [. . .], you happened to be my clearance officer. You told me something that I will never forget in my life, which later become [became] my inspiration till the end; you asked: " Can you cope in [. . .] department since you did Primary Edu. in NCE"? And I answered yes, then you told me that since am determined that I can do it but it takes hard work and focus. This particular word to me on that first day inspired me and made me to graduate with good result. Seeing you again in the lecture hall as my lecturer and been introduced by Prof [. . .] as a first class student made me to admire you more.

Ex-student G wrote:

Words fail me to explain how much love and respect have got for you, my beautiful, intelligent lecturer. You just so amazing, humble, sweet, down to earth and encouraging [. . .] Remembered rushing down to your office that beautiful morning to lay a report on my missing scripts years back.

Your words of encouragement having had 5 missing scripts [. . .]. Your exact words "having missing scripts doesn't mean you won't graduate when its your time" Stay Focused! Go & register the courses and I believe you won't have any issues again.

Intellectual stimulation

Bass (1997) notes that transformational leaders demonstrate intellectual stimulation by questioning old assumptions, beliefs and traditions; stimulating others to embrace new ways and perspectives of doing things; and encouraging the expression of reasons and ideas. This component or dimension deals with the extent to which followers are provided with challenging and interesting tasks and encouraged to adopt their own ways of solving problems (Pounder, 2005). Regarding the young academic, this transformational quality is seen to be demonstrated based on what is written about her by her ex-students.

Ex-student A wrote:

Your method of teaching is equal to none in the whole Faculty of Education because there's a different [difference] between 'teaching' and 'lecturing', when you teach the whole 100Lt become [becomes] as cold as ice block because of your charisma, intelligence, and method of teaching.

Ex-student B states:

Being a teacher to many of us then was really beautiful but I watched in amazed [amazement] how you did this with so much humility and desiring that we understood. This effort we hardly got from our lecturers you know [. . .]

Ex-student D:

A good teacher teaches but great teachers demonstrates [demonstrate] and live by what they teach.

Ex-student E:

She is a teacher: If she teach you and you no understand. Then forget it. Schooling no be your calling [expressed in pidgin. It means that if she teaches you and you do not understand, then schooling is not for you].

Ex-student G:

I felt so pained on hearing you've gone for your PhD back then, got to the point whenever I tried reading my Edu. materials I would complain all through lamenting "if only you had being the one who took the course" understanding wouldn't be of great difficulty [. . .]

Individualized consideration

By individualized consideration, transformational leaders "deal with others as individuals, consider their needs, abilities, and aspirations; listen attentively; further their development; advise; teach; and coach" (Bass, 1997, p. 133). This component demonstrates the extent to which the leader cares about the needs and concerns of individual follower (Pounder, 2005). The young academic demonstrates this quality by listening to her students and seeing to their needs and concerns as identified from the comments of her ex-students.

Ex-student F states:

You taught me to be diligent yet prayerful; outspoken yet humble... Your passion to see others grow and become the best version of themselves is indeed contagious.

From you, I learned to be studious yet sociable; jovial yet respectful. Thank you for consistently guiding me in the right direction, offering practical solutions to my unending puzzles [. . .] I am forever indebted to you for the lasting impact you've had on my life. Thank you for always creating time out of your very busy schedule to attend to my challenges.

Ex-student E wrote:

She is a mentor: She is always ready to listen and to give the best advice you can ever get.

She doesn't discriminate and there's this sense of comfort you get when you are around her [. . .]

Ex-student C stated:

My undergraduate final year days were blessed because I had you in it. [. . .] Thank you for readily answering my many questions till date

According to ex-student B,

All the students of Faculty of Education loves [love] you for who you are and what you carry because you love them so much that you always reach out to them when they are confused with love as a mother would do for her children.

Ex-student A notes;

I fell in love with you the more the day I ran into your time table for studies; [. . .] your schedule was quite tight and yet you had time to put us through. Just incase you have forgotten, there were times some people came after the class. You still went ahead to have classes with them. God! You are super human. [. . .]

Student H wrote:

I have read so many epistles detailing your great services to humanity in your chosen field. To those who are not in the know, they may not understand. But for us who have had a first hand feeling of your angel-like nature, we cannot but say THANK GOD for an UNCOMMON BREED in the midst of the ordinary.....will never in my lifetime forget the uncanny effort and sacrifices you made back in the days just to ensure my successful graduation from [name of the university]

Ma'am, the little seed you took extra pain and effort to 'nurture' is blossoming into a great oak tree. We the beneficiaries of your magnificent show of support and selflessness will continue to sing your praise for all to hear.

6. Discussion

Findings from the comments of the ex-student revealed that the young academic possesses all the attributes of transformational leadership according to the model of Bass (1990, 1997, 1999) and Bass and Avolio (1994) which are idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. This is consistent with the attributes of transformational-instructor

leadership reported in the literature (e.g. Pounder, 2008; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011). As Harrison (2011) and Noland and Richard (2014) reported, the transformational leadership qualities of instructors lead to students' motivation, satisfaction and learning experiences.

Through idealized influence, the young academic is admired by her students as she communicates the importance of being committed in the face of difficulties, being purpose-driven in achieving goals and placing values in decision-making. She is seen to "be diligent and assiduous in her engagements" (ex-student D) and thus, students admire and respect her and look up to her as a role model. As reported by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), transformational tutors through their charisma (idealized influence) command "attitude homophily".

The young academic's inspirational motivation disposition makes her to set a clear vision and values for her students through optimism and enthusiasm. By this, she does not allow her students to concentrate on challenges, rather, they are trained and encouraged to set high expectations and as reported from the comments of the ex-students, she communicates clear expectations of success. Her values revolve around focus and determination. She upholds a clear vision of academic success and this she imbued in her students.

The quality of Intellectual stimulation is seen by the way she teaches. As reported from the study of Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), instructors communicate the attribute of intellectual stimulation through their "teaching style, challenging students, independent thought, classroom participation, humor and content relevance". From the comments of the ex-students, it is observed that the young academic has excellent pedagogical skills which she utilizes in ensuring that her students are passionately taught and supported both within and outside the classroom. Her dedication is highly appreciated by her students which one of the ex-students noted they hardly got from other lecturers. As ex-student G lamented, the young academic's absence in pursuit of a PhD abroad created a vacuum in that study materials became difficult to understand.

By demonstrating the quality of individualized consideration, the young academic shows commitment towards the needs of her students and helping them to resolve their challenges. Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) report that instructors who demonstrate this quality made themselves available to their students, provided individualized feedback, verbal immediacy, encouraged participation in the teaching and learning process, among others. The young academic is ready to listen to her students, answer their unending questions, reach out to them when they are confused and willing to repeat lessons for those that came late for classes. All this she does even in her tight schedules. From student H's comments, it is seen that the young academic's supportive and empathetic disposition continues to resonate in the minds of her students even after they have left the university.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the transformational leadership qualities of a young female academic in a Nigerian university. Findings revealed that the young academic demonstrates all the four components or qualities of transformational leadership. She is seen as a mentor and role model to the students (idealized influence), commands a clear vision of academic success to her students through determination and enthusiasm (inspirational motivation); demonstrates excellent pedagogical skills (intellectual stimulation); and is always available and ready to meet the needs of her students and resolve their challenges (individualized consideration). These qualities have endeared her to her students and made her to be an outstanding university teacher. By being transformational in her engagements with the students, she positively influences their university experiences which keep lingering even after they leave the university to become highly productive university graduates as they strive to live up to the standard set by the young academic in their various leadership positions and other endeavours.

The study has contributed to the current debate on transformational leadership in the classroom as it is considered to be the best approach to leading teaching and learning. The more transformational instructors are, the more students get positively engaged in the teaching and learning process and in the entire university environment.

8. Implications for practice

Findings from the current study have implications for leadership practices in Nigerian university classrooms. The display of transformational leadership qualities by the young academic have shown to positively impact on the academic experiences of her ex-students and their achievement outcomes. The high level of satisfaction derived by followers (in this case students) (Pounder, 2005) from such leadership is a testament to the integral role leadership plays in enhancing students' learning experiences.

It is therefore important for university instructors in Nigeria to avail themselves of all the opportunities of developing leadership skills and demonstrating them in and out of the classroom. The young academic's exemplary leadership challenges the current status quo and presents a huge challenge on academics to change the narrative. This can only be achieved by demonstrating the four components of transformational leadership. Academics can demonstrate Idealized influence by emphasizing on diligence, commitment and communicating important values to the students. They should discourage all forms of laziness in the students and those in the habit of encouraging 'blocking' should stop. 'Blocking' is a pidgin slang used by Nigerian students to mean offering bribes to lecturers to pass a module or course. From the comments of the ex-students, the young academic's emphasis on hard work and commitment to studies has made her to be admired as a role model.

Academics can demonstrate intellectual stimulation by creating a classroom learning environment that encourages creativity, participatory learning and independent thinking.

By encouraging students to embrace challenging and interesting tasks (Pounder, 2005), students will love learning and they will develop higher-order thinking skills rather than learning by rote. The young academic puts so much effort in facilitating high quality teaching and learning which one of the ex-students noted they did not get from other lecturers.

Through inspirational motivation, university tutors can communicate a clear vision of academic success to their students. They should be enthusiastic about their students, believe in them and encourage them to maximize their full potentials. Academics can demonstrate individualized consideration by making themselves more accessible/approachable to their students, provide prompt feedback on students' academic tasks, show commitment towards their needs and support them in overcoming their challenges.

9. Recommendations for policy

The findings of this study have demonstrated the importance of transformational leadership in the classroom. Therefore, universities in Nigeria should encourage leadership development programmes for academics both in formal and non-formal leadership positions. This is particularly important for academics in non-formal leadership position as they will be trained on how to be transformational in the classroom. This could be in the form of seminars, workshops, online training sessions and mentoring. It is also important that universities put in place policies aimed at obtaining feedbacks from students on a regular basis regarding the leadership practices of lecturers. Information from these feedbacks could be used to shape leadership development programmes.

10. Limitation of the study

The study relied on the posts made by the ex-students to report the transformational leadership practices of the young academic. Some of the comments or posts did not shed more light on the qualities of the young academic. A combination with an interview would have provided an opportunity for a deeper insight where the students would have offered more clarifications on some of their comments or posts. For instance, regarding teaching, the students would have been asked to highlight various approaches utilized by the young academic in facilitating teaching and learning in the classroom.

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