



## Character Transformation of University Students in Covid-19 Era and Beyond: A Paradigm Shift on the Role of Lecturers in Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership

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### Abstract

Despite the extensive research on character development in students, a lot is required on the relationship between transformational leadership, emotional intelligence of lecturers and character transformation among students in universities. The objectives of this research were to assess the relationship between emotional intelligence of lecturers and transformational leadership in universities in Kenya, determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and character formation, and to establish the relationship between transformational leadership and character Transformation. The study was based on intelligence leadership theory advanced by Thorndike and Lewin Change Model. The research adopted cross-sectional survey design. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from 200 lecturers and 70 Student leaders from 10 universities in Kenya that were purposively and randomly selected. Data was collected using Survey Monkey and analyzed using

spearman correlation test. The results showed a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence ( $r = 0.768$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating high strength of relationship. The study also established a significant positive relationship between character formation of students and emotional intelligence of lecturers ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The study further shows a significant positive relationship between character formation of students and transformational leadership ( $r = 0.587$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The rating of lecturers on emotional intelligence by the students was the lowest. The findings suggest that lecturers do not pay satisfactory attention to the students' character transformation. The findings support the emotional leadership theory that links leadership and emotional intelligence as integrated elements. Emotional intelligence compliments transformational leadership. Lecturers require more competency skills in emotional intelligence to stimulate character behaviour

in students. Universities should therefore conduct training needs for lecturers and student leaders on emotional intelligence and transformative leadership. This would enable lecturers to refreeze forces that maintain status quo and increase striving forces for change in students' behaviours for them to cope with challenges such as in the Covid-19 pandemic era and beyond.

**Key Words:** Character transformation, Emotional intelligence, Transformational leadership, University Students, Covid-19 Era

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Thorndike (1920) advanced the theory of emotional intelligence that brings up beliefs in different forms of intelligence. The first form was abstract intelligence which was measured using IQ tests. The second is concrete intelligence that is used in understanding and manipulating objects and shapes. The third is social intelligence which was identified as the ability to understand and relate to people which is currently referred to as emotional intelligence and is anchored in this research.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, integrate emotions to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth (Bar-On, 2010; Mayer and Salovey, 1997). It is the capacity of a person to identify his/her emotions that enable him/her to become sensitive to those that he/she perceives from the environment and the circle of people he/she interacts with (Khokhar and Kush, 2009).

The scale for assessing emotional intelligence is the multifactor emotional intelligence (Salovey *et al.*, 2003, 1999, and 1998) which requires the participant to complete tasks associated with emotional

intelligence. Bar-On's (2002) model of emotional intelligence relates to the ability of being aware of oneself, understand and express oneself, understand and relate to others, ability to deal with strong emotions, the ability to adapt to change and solve problems. Mayer *et al.*, (2000) views emotional intelligence as competency expected to enhance positive attitudes towards work and drive positive behaviours and better outcomes. Goleman (1998) believes that social skills encompass influencing tactics; effective communication; conflict management skills; leadership abilities; change management skills; instrumental relationship management; collaboration and co-operation abilities; and effective team membership capabilities.

The key features of emotional intelligence are empathy, adaptability, and stress management skills (Doek, 2009); cited in Bii, 2016). Empathy is a process where a person understands how others feel and responds to others' situations in a caring way and acting to support the person. Swick (2005) says development of empathy is influenced by several factors, including environment, culture, and temperament. Zeece (2004), Strayer and Roberts (2004) show that children who fail to develop empathy are prone toward anti-social and self-destructive behaviors. Stress management is the ability to understand one's emotional state and individuals who are unable to regulate their own emotions frequently show poor emotional adjustment (Extremera & Pizarro, 2006). On the other hand, individuals who account for greater understanding and regulation of their emotions had higher levels of self-esteem. Swick recognized that lower emotional intelligence may inhibit the selection of adaptive and appropriate coping mechanisms. Surveys found that character education programs increase emotional intelligence in children (Ulutus & Omeroglu,

2007). Character development in higher institutions of learning is capable of creating new attitudes and self-perceptions that can stimulate independence, confidence, reliance and empowerment amongst the teams (Coetzee *et al.*, 2005).

Avolio and Bass (2002) asserts that transformational leadership style ignites passion and evokes a spirit of hard work, challenging environment and room for innovators. Transformational leaders work on follower's capacity building by motivating them to create new ideas. Transformational leadership emphasizes having a shared mission and infusing a sense of purpose, direction and meaning to the followers (Bass, 1999). Transformational leadership is the engine and transmitter of innovative culture and dissemination of knowledge. Transformational leaders have charisma, provide inspiration, intellectual stimulation, pride, faith and respect (Allen, 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been debate that university graduates are decently ill prepared to take up jobs in the labour industry. Developing emotional intelligence in lecturers may transfer the traits to the students who failed to acquire it at earlier stages of education and deter antagonistic and offending behaviors in youths.

Career development majorly rests on curriculum implementers, though little attention has been given to the lecturers to spearhead it in the universities. University management is doing little to train lecturers on transformative leadership and emotional intelligence to be able to develop character formation in students. Thus, the need for the current study to unearth the messy business. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership, emotional

intelligence of lecturers and character transformation of students in universities.

### **Objectives**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To assess the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership of lecturers in universities in Kenya.
- ii. To determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and character transformation of students in universities in Kenya
- iii. To establish the relationship between transformational leadership and character transformation of students in universities in Kenya

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested:

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership of lecturers in universities in Kenya
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence of lecturers and character transformation of students in universities in Kenya
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership of lecturers and character transformation of students in universities in Kenya.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Methodological Approach**

The study embraced cross-sectional survey design with positivism philosophical paradigm. It employed structured questionnaires: Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (Salovey *et al.*, 2003, 1999, and 1998); Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio, 1997) and Character transformation (Janssen (2000) The respondents were required to rate variables using Likert Scale

## Sampling Method

The research used purposive and random sampling to obtain 200 lecturers and 70 students' leaders from 10 universities in Kenya. Survey monkey tool was utilized to administer the questionnaires

## Data Analysis

Spearman correlation test was used in analyzing ordinal data collected from Likert-scale

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Emotional Intelligence

The responses for both the lecturers and the Students' leaders (raters) were used to determine the mean emotional intelligence of the lecturers. The emotional intelligence had 7 constructs that form items in the questionnaire as follows: Self-management, Self-motivation; Change resilience; Interpersonal relations; Integration of head and heart; Emotional literacy and Self-esteem. The lecturer rate himself/herself and the student leader (rater) rate the lecturer. There was a total of 196 lecturers with 4 who filled questionnaire items incorrectly. There were 70 students' leaders (raters) drawn from 10 public universities.

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was based on 5 constructs in the 7-point Likert scale as Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation, Idealized Attributes, Idealized Behaviors and Intellectual Consideration. The leadership style of lecturers was rated by the lecturers themselves and the students' leaders (raters)

### Students Character Development

The character behavior of the students was obtained using responses from both the lecturers and the student leaders themselves (raters) on a 7-point Likert scale that were

based on the items: enthusiastic, mobilization, Creativity, seek new knowledge, I look for opportunities and Explore new ways

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The three research hypotheses were subjected to both descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. There were only 4 lecturers whose questionnaires were invalid whereas all the students' questionnaires were valid. The results were tabulated in tables 1 and 2

**Table 1:**

*Descriptive Statistics for the variables*

Variable	Average	Ratings Lecturers
Students	n=70	n=196
Emotional intelligence of the lecturers	2.9719	3.7927
Transformational Leadership of the lecturers	3.6386	3.6703
Character Transformation of the Students	3.1453	3.0569

*Source: Survey data (2020)*

The statistics show the lowest rating of lecturers in Emotional intelligence by students as a mean of 2.979, equivalent to **59%**

Further, the lowest rating in character transformation of students was a mean of 3.0802, equivalent to **61%**.

The respective respondents rated themselves higher. These findings agree with Brett (2005) cited in Bii (2017) who postulated that people tend to view themselves more positively. Lecturers were rated the lowest by students which implies that students do not receive enough emotional attention from the lecturers.

High average rating (73%) of lecturers in transformational leadership, implies that lecturers provide inspiration and hope to the students. There was lower rating of students by the lecturers (61%) in Students character transformation which implies that there is need to fill the gap as far as students' morals and responsiveness are concerned.

**Correlation Analysis**

Spearman correlation analysis was done to determine the relationships among the variables. The results of the correlation test are tabulated in table 2.

**Table 2**

*Spear correlation analysis Matrix (N=266) for the study variables*

	Char acter form ation	Emoti onal intellig ence	Transfor mational Leaders hip
Character formation	1		
Emotional intelligence	.468* *	1	
Transformational Leadership	.587* *	.768** *	1

Source: Survey data (2020)

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) with p =0.000*

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

**Discussion of Correlations Results**

H<sub>01</sub>: Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership (r =0.768, p<0.001). P-value indicates a highly statistically significant relationship (at 99% confidence level), while r=0.768 shows a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and transformational

leadership. Overall, there is a highly statistically significant strong positive relationship between the two variables.

H<sub>02</sub>: Emotional intelligence and character transformation of students (r =0.468, p<0.001). P-value indicates a statistically significant relationship and r=0.468 shows a positive weak correlation between emotional intelligence and character transformation of students. Generally, there is a statistically significant positive weak relationship between the two variables

H<sub>03</sub>: Transformational leadership and Character Transformation of lecturers (r =0.587, p<0.001). P-value indicates a statistically significant relationship and r=0.587 shows a positive moderate correlation between transformational leadership and character transformation. On the overall, there is a statistically significant positive moderate relationship between the two variables

**Conclusion**

The findings support the emotional leadership theory that links leadership and emotional intelligence as integrated elements in emotional leadership. Leaders influence their followers to a common goal with the help of emotional intelligence. There is low attention by lecturers on emotional intelligence to stimulate character behaviours in students' intelligence and to stimulate character behaviour in students

**Recommendation**

Universities should conduct training needs assessment for lecturers and student leaders on emotional intelligence and transformative leadership. This will enable lecturers to unfreeze restraining forces that maintain the status quo, and increase striving forces for change in students' behaviours. Consequently, students can better cope with

challenges, moreso in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

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