

Transformational Leadership in Chinese K12 Private Schools: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This article provides insights into the use of transformational leadership in private K12 schools in China, its impact on school development and the challenges it faces. The article emphasises the importance of transformational leadership, which has positively impacted the field of education by stimulating intrinsic motivation in followers and promoting innovation and improvement. In particular, Leithwood's model of transformational leadership has been shown to be particularly effective in educational reform. Using a literature review approach, the study explores the specific impact of transformational leadership on private K12 schools and the main challenges these schools encounter in implementing transformational leadership by analysing existing research data and theories. The article first provides a detailed introduction to the concept and characteristics of transformational leadership, and then analyses the current situation of private K12 schools in China, including their efforts and achievements in improving the quality of teaching and learning, and promoting the all-round development of students. The main findings suggest that despite the challenges, the positive impact of transformational leadership on private K12 schools is significant, and it helps schools adapt to the demands of educational reforms and contributes to the overall development and progress of the school. The article also suggests that to realise the full potential of transformational leadership in China's private K12 education environment, further research is needed to address the existing challenges and propose strategies to adapt to the local culture and education system. Finally, the article suggests directions for future research, including the development of a theoretical framework for transformational leadership that is more appropriate for the Chinese private K12 school environment and the development of strategies to address specific challenges. These studies will help optimise the application of transformational leadership in Chinese private K12 schools and provide theoretical and practical support for continuous improvement and development in the field of education. Through these efforts, the research aims to provide guidance on leadership in Chinese private K12 schools and to contribute to the improvement of educational quality and the modernisation of school management.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, K12, Private Schools, School Development

Introduction

K12 (Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade) is mainly used in the United States, Canada, and other North American countries (Kong, 2010). As a whole, education in North American countries can be divided into four progressive stages: preschool, primary education, secondary education (middle and high school), and higher education. According to the Ministry of Education's 2020 Statistical Communique on China's Education Development: the total number of private schools at all levels in China was 186,700 (Cheng, 2020). So in the face of a large number of students and school proportion. It has been a hot topic in recent years that primary and secondary schools run by citizens in China have attracted extensive attention. Private schools have become widely associated with exceptional quality and standards in numerous countries, making them the preferred option for affluent and elite families (Cheng, 2020). The vast majority of national and local governments also adopt the attitude of supporting, and strengthening the management of private education. According to some researchers, a long-term study of the culture and education system of private K12 schools in the United States has found that private schools play a very important role in cultivating and shaping students' daily habits and interests after they enter college (Coughlin & Castilla, 2014). Research by some researchers also found that private K12 schools can increase opportunities and provide students with better learning resources. More and more students choose to study at private K12 schools, not only in the United States but also around the world (Binelli & Binelli, 2013). With the continuous improvement of the requirements of school reform on school leaders leadership, the existing school transformational leadership theory is also in the process of continuous expansion and deepening. The current school transformational leadership theory especially needs special and systematic research on school leadership from the perspective of reform.

When it comes to implementing transformational leadership in private K12 schools in China, leaders face numerous challenges in practice. However, implementing transformational leadership is crucial as it can help schools address new challenges such as educational reform and global competition. The characteristics of private K12 education in the 21st century, a period of rapid development, and the problems exposed, as well as how to use the theoretical model of transformational leadership to solve these problems, all require exploration and answers from researchers. Therefore, understanding the integration of transformational leadership with private K12 schools in China and conducting research on it holds significant importance for school transformation, innovation, and teacher satisfaction.

Methodology

As the literature review is a crucial component of this study, it involves identifying relevant research findings and organizing them into a coherent whole. To gather as many relevant published articles as possible, the researchers of this study utilized search engines such as Baidu Scholar, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) and Google Scholar. They entered keywords and phrases such as "transformational leadership", "K12", "education" and "schools" for searching and downloading purposes. The researchers also consulted relevant books and website to gather data. The researchers compared and discussed well-known theories of transformational leadership, combining them with the current status of private K12 schools in China. They provided insights, prospects, and recommendations regarding the practical implementation and development of transformational leadership in private K12 schools in China.

Transformational Leadership

Leadership can be described as a set of actions that motivate people to follow their leader to a place rather than simply obey (Zhang, 2007). Burns tried to link the roles of leaders and employees in 1978. He describes leaders as people who try their best to motivate employees to better achieve common goals (Li, 2010). According to the definition of leadership, we see it all around us, in management, in the classroom, on the football field, in government, in the military, in public multinational companies, in small companies up to a family, we can see leadership at all levels, in all fields, it is at the heart of everything we do. Titles or positions do not automatically create leaders (Zhang, 2007). Leadership is a kind of influence. Leadership is an influence process. It is the act or process of influencing people's willingness and enthusiasm to make efforts to achieve organizational goals (Koontz & Wehrich, 2014).

Transformational leadership is the ability of leaders to motivate followers to achieve self-transformation and guide organizational transformation to deal with various challenges and seize opportunities in the process of promoting organizational goals and challenges in the period of organizational transformation (Chen, 2013). Transformational leadership is timely and applicable. For transformational leadership, the characteristics of the times are that transformational leadership can effectively capture the changes of the times, find that the changes of the times or transitional changes will bring about the new development of the new situation, accurately grasp the characteristics of the new development of the new situation, and then actively mobilize themselves and their organizations according to the requirements of the times.

Burns proposed transformational leadership in 1978, it has gradually been introduced into education in the 1980s and 1990s. The transformational leadership theory is a concept proposed by Burns in 1978. He proposed two basic types of leadership: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Burns believes that transactional leadership refers to a leader exchanging material and non-material benefits for the labor of his subordinates (Wang, Wang, Zhang & Shi, 2020). The relationship between the leader and the led is a kind of short-term benefit behavior. Transformational leadership leads and manages by motivating subordinates to stimulate high-level needs and motivations such as justice and fairness to achieve long-term goals (Burns, 1978).

Bass Transformational Leadership

Bass transformational leadership model is one of the most influential models, which consists of many transformational leadership factors. Bass(1985) explained the psychological mechanism of transformational and transactional leadership on the basis of Burns (1978). Bass also uses the word "transformational" instead of "change". Bass adds to Burns (1978) original concept to help explain how transformational leadership can be measured and how it affects the motivation and performance of followers. A leader's degree of transformation is first measured in terms of his impact on his followers. Followers of this leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader and are willing to work harder than originally expected because of the transformational leader's qualities (Li, 2018). These results occur because transformational leaders offer followers more than working for their own benefit; They provide followers with an inspiring mission and vision and give them an identity (Bass, 2008). In addition, this leader encourages followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the current state and change the environment to support success. Finally, unlike

Burns, Bass believes that leadership can demonstrate both transformational and transactional leadership.

Bass proposed in 1985 that transformational leadership has three dimensions : 1. Individual consideration: the degree to which the leader pays attention to the needs of each follower, acts as a mentor or coach to the follower and listens to the concerns and needs of the follower. 2. Intellectual stimulation: the extent to which leaders challenge assumptions, take risks, and solicit ideas from followers. Leaders in this style inspire and encourage creativity in their subordinates. 3. Charismatic-inspirational Leadership: leaders set an example to their followers and expect a lot from their followers (Wei, 2011). At that time, Bass established Multifactors Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), an evaluation tool to measure the leadership pattern according to the transformational leadership theory, when conducting the survey in South Africa (Yin, 2019). At present, it has become the most widely used questionnaire form. When Bass first applied MLQ, he surveyed 102 senior military officers and found that transformational leadership is a three-dimensional structure. Bass then added 74 more samples for exploratory analysis. Similarly, there are three dimensions of Charismatic-inspirational leadership, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration (Chen & Xu, 2012). Later, Bass and Avolio further divided "Charismatic-inspirational leadership" into two dimensions. Into a four-dimensional transformational leadership model: charisma, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, enable employees to maximize their potential to achieve the highest level of performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994) (Figure 1).

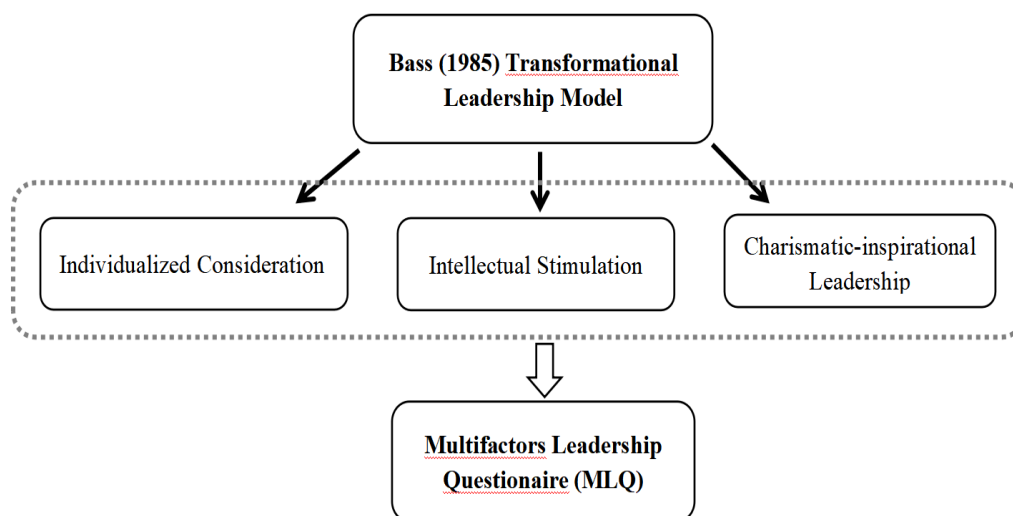


Figure 1 Bass (1985) transformational leadership and MLQ

In addition, based on Burns theory, this theory distinguishes transactional leadership from transformational leadership. Transactional leadership is based on exchange, and leaders offer rewards for desired behaviors (Clawson, 2002). Transformational leadership is based on whether the leader can inspire the trust, loyalty and admiration of followers, so that followers are willing to subordinate their personal interests to the interests of the group (Bass, 1995). In addition, Bass believes that transactional and transformational leadership are not independent bodies that are unrelated to each other, but models of continuous change, that is, from free-for-all leadership to transactional leadership and then to transformational leadership (Qi, 2021). Transformational leadership considers and sets a long-term vision,

while transactional leadership focuses on a short-term vision, position and rewards for achievement. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring others to follow, which requires a high degree of coordination, communication, and collaboration. Transformational leadership increases the motivation and ethics of the leader and cultivates followers by developing personal relationships (Arenas, 2019) (Figure 2).

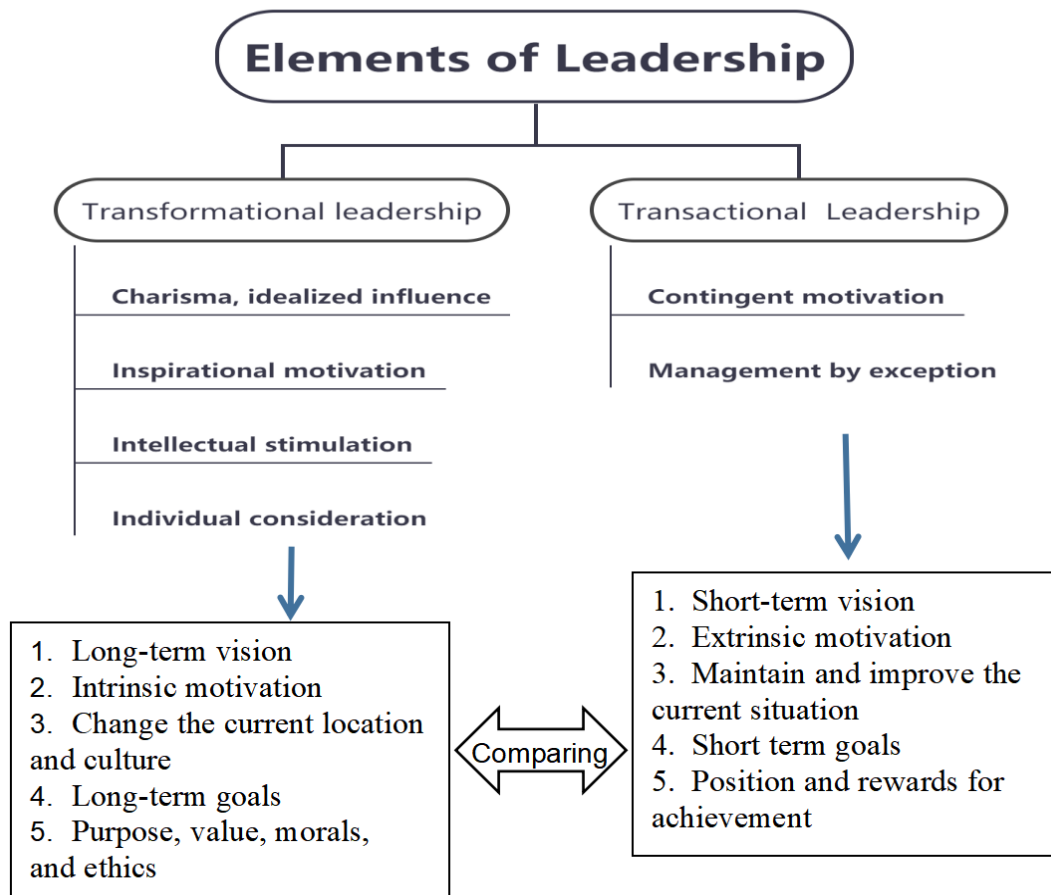


Figure 2 Comparing transactional and transformational leadership

Bass transformational leadership theory gives a more profound explanation of leadership. His MLQ questionnaire has been widely used by many researchers up to now. Bass's transformational leadership enables subordinates to go beyond their own self-interest and beyond self to achieve the long-term goals of the organization. In the school context, it has also been widely studied by many educators and has made great contributions to the development of schools. Bass transformational leadership theory is also considered one of the most important and popular transformational leadership theories in the world (Berkovich & Hassan, 2023).

Kouzes and Posner Transformational Leadership Model

Kouzes and Posner in 1990 put forward the vision of the Leadership model, and the corresponding measuring tools are MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) and LBQ (Leadership Behaviors Questionnaire). In developing the original Leadership Practices

Inventory (LPI), case studies from over 2,500 leaders about their personal-best experiences as leaders were collected (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Content analyses of these case studies suggested a pattern of behaviors and actions used by people when they were most effective as leaders: 1. Model the Way: Leaders need to identify their values and find their own path; Align actions with shared values and set an example for others. 2. Inspire a Shared Vision: Look to the future and imagine exciting and sublime possibilities; Describe a common vision and inspire others to fight for common aspirations. 3. Challenge the Process: Leaders seek opportunities for improvement by capturing ideas and obtaining innovative approaches from outside; Experiment, take risks and learn by doing. 4. Enable Others to Act: Great leaders effectively harness the talents of their subordinates and foster collaboration by building trust and relationships; Strengthen others by strengthening their sense of autonomy and developing their capabilities. 5. Encourage the Heart: Leaders encourage their subordinates by encouraging their achievements; Recognizing the contributions of others by recognizing individual excellence; By creating a collectivist spirit to celebrate the realization and victory of value (Kouzes & Posner, 2006) (**Figure 3**).

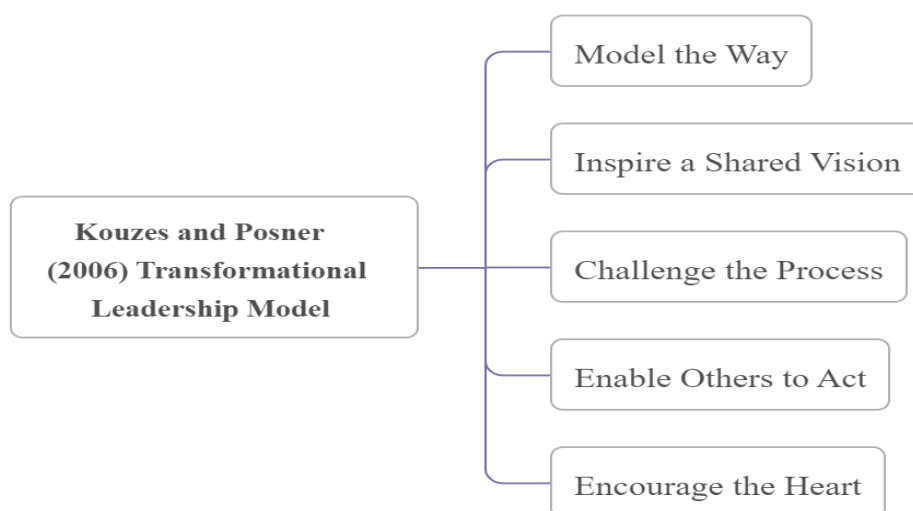


Figure 3 Kouzes and Posner (2006) transformational leadership model

Based on years of empirical research, Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership model contains a set of must-have qualities and must-apply practices that provide principals in every school with practical guidance on how to lead and practical advice on how to act in difficult situations. Roland Barth, founding director of the Harvard University President's Center, believes that the Leadership Challenge model provides school leaders with the qualities to be good leaders and enables them to improve their schools (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009).

Bennis and Nanus Transformational Leadership

Bennis and Nanus (1985) undertook the subject of leadership as the central ingredient to the way progress is created and to the way organizations develop and survive. A series of 90 interviews were conducted, 60 with successful CEOs, all corporate presidents or chairmen of boards, and 30 with outstanding leaders from the public sector. It was a combination of interviewing and observations research (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). By studying Bennis and Nanus, four strategies for enterprise leadership are drawn: 1. The development of self. 2. The

trust through positioning. 3. Meaning through communication. 4. Attention through vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) (Figure 4).

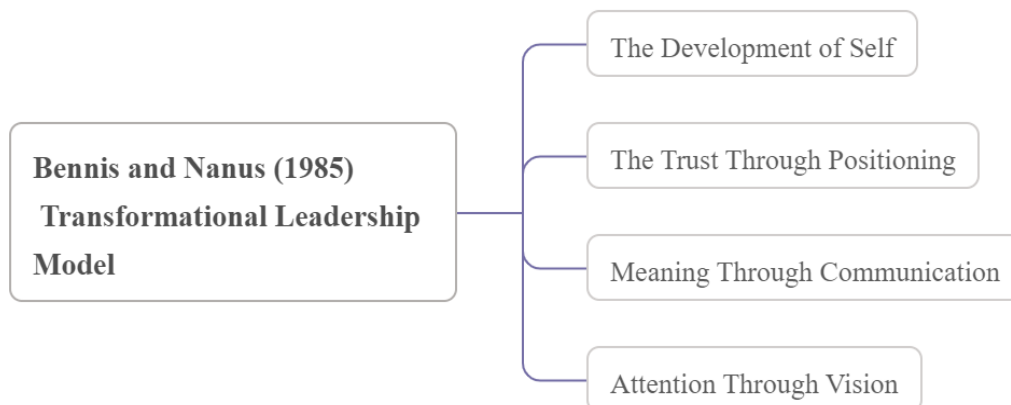


Figure 4 Bennis and Nanus (1985) transformational leadership model

The trust through positioning is an important feature of the transformational leadership model proposed by Bennis and Nanus(1985). According to the model, leaders must build trust by building relationships and emotional connections with followers, and leaders must understand their positioning and role in order to build a solid foundation of trust with followers. However, the subjects studied by Bennis and Nanus are leaders of commercial enterprises, and the researchers found that in many transformational leadership studies in educational contexts, the model is used less frequently and there is a lack of research on schools and education. The transformational behavior in this study is carried out in the specific environment of the school.

Leithwood Transformational Leadership Model

Leithwood's leadership model (1994) explains the components of leadership transformational through the dimensions build the vision and goals of the school, providing intellectual stimulation, offering support individually, being exemplary to the important values of the organization, indicating high work performance, building creative school culture and developing structures and encourage involvement in the decision-making process (Leithwood, 1994). The leadership of the transformational by Leithwood also shows high leadership value through a commitment to achieve the intent by encouraging the involvement of teachers, developing intellectual and stimulating teacher motivation to give full commitment. Transformational leadership practices can create a creative school culture, especially in the way of thinking for solving the problem through the challenge (Marenee et al., 2017). Furthermore, after continuous research, Leithwood further optimized the practical dimension of transformational leadership in the school in his 1996 study, the following six dimensions are used to describe transformational leadership: building school vision and goals, modeling behavior, poster commitment, individualized consideration, provide intellectual stimulation and high-performance expectations (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) believed that transformational leadership has seven dimensions in schools: Establishing school vision and establishing school objectives, providing intellectual stimulation, providing personalized support, modeling best practices and organizational values, setting expectations of high academic standards, creating a productive school culture, and promoting participatory decision-making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Leithwood, Aitken and Jantzi (2001) transformational leadership model were measured using the Nature of School Leadership survey (NSL). Leithwood (2010) proposed a transformational leadership model specifically designed for school organizations, which has four main dimensions, Setting Directions, Developing People, Redesigning the Organization, and Managing the Instructional Program (Leithwood, 2010). The most important research of Leithwood was in 2012, which established a new theoretical framework about leadership practice, which described the key categories and specific practical behaviors. By using meta-analysis, they synthesized 79 research results on the nature of transformational school leadership (TSL) and its impact on school organizations, teachers and students. They finally found that the practice of transformational leadership in school can be divided into 5 categories and 11 specific practical behaviors (Leithwood, 2012) (**Table 1**).

Table 1

Leithwood and Sun (2012) transformational leadership

| | Dimensions | Specific sets of practices |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Leithwood and Sun (2012) Transformational Leadership | Setting Directions | 1. Develop a shared vision and building goal consensus. 2. Hold high performance expectations. |
| | Developing People | 3. Provide individualized support 4. Provide intellectual stimulation 5. Model valued behaviors, beliefs, and values. |
| | Redesigning the Organization | 6. Strengthening school culture. 7. Building structures to enable collaboration. 8. Engaging parents and the wider community |
| | Improving the Instructional Program | 9. Focus on instructional development |
| | Related Practices | 10. Contingent reward 11. Management by exception |

Leithwood was the first person to introduce transformational leadership into the educational context (Li, 2018). Leithwood (2010) argues that transformational leadership is combined with other leadership style-related leadership behaviors that are effective in both school and non-school organizations (Morilloshone, 2015). However, Chinese K12 private schools have both commercial and school characteristics, so the researcher believes that Leithwood's transformational leadership model is more suitable for this study. Compared with Leithwood (2010); Leithwood and Sun (2012) transformational leadership theoretical framework is more detailed, adding a new category, "Related Practice" and several key behaviors (Leithwood & Sun, 2012) (**Table 1**). At present, the transformational leadership theory of Leithwood and Sun (2012), as the further development of Leithwood (2010), has become a very important field, so this theory has the value of further exploration. The addition of the dimension of "Related Practice" gives the leaders of private K12 schools in China more space to play, which can be adjusted according to the special circumstances of

the schools themselves. So the researchers believes that Leithwood and Sun (2012) transformational leadership model is more suitable for education situation.

Private K12 Education

K12, from kindergarten to 12th grade, is an American expression that indicates the range of years of publicly supported primary and secondary education found in the United States, which is similar to publicly supported school grades before college in several other countries (Glavin, 2014). For instance Australia, Canada, China, Philippines, South Korea, and Turkey (Heritage College Cooranbong Archived, 2011). K12 private schools and K12 public schools have different uniqueness: from the perspective of management structure, K12 private schools are usually managed by private institutions, while K12 public schools are managed by government institutions (Gutmann & Thompson, 2017). In terms of education quality, K12 private schools usually have better teachers, educational resources and smaller class size, which is helpful to improve the quality of education (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006). In terms of the student body: K12 private school students usually come from middle to upper income families and usually have more stringent admission restrictions and admission criteria, but K12 public school students have a more diverse student body (Ni, 2017). In China, K12 education mostly refers to the basic education, including kindergarten and six years in primary school, three years in junior middle school and three years in senior high school, covering extracurricular tutoring, training and school informatization (Yue, 2016). K12 education and training can be divided into private education, traditional face to face education and online education (Zhang, 2019).

Private K12 Education in the World

In some places, private schools means high quality and standards (Cheng, 2020). According to Coughlin, and Castilla, a long-term study of the culture and education system of private K12 schools in the United States has found that private schools play a very important role in cultivating and shaping students' daily habits and interests after they enter college (Coughlin & Castilla, 2014). In India, private school students have higher test scores, better resources and infrastructure, and students score higher in English and math tests than public school students, according to a study by Indian researchers. The growth of private schools is seen as a positive impact on the goal of education for all and should be encouraged (Woodhead et al., 2013). Research by Binelli and Rubio-Codina found that private K12 schools can increase opportunities and provide students with better learning resources. More and more students choose to study at private K12 schools, not only in the United States but also around the world (Binelli & Binelli, 2013). This shows that in the world, private education is playing a positive role in guiding and contributing greatly to the world's talent supply.

The report titled "Malaysia Private K12 Education Market Outlook to 2026– Driven by Rising Population and Increasing Affluence along with Shift in Parent Preference Towards Holistic Education" provides a comprehensive analysis of the potential of the private K12 education industry in Malaysia. Private school is offered in Malaysia on all levels from nursery schools up to tertiary education. Pre-primary and secondary levels that account for close to 75% of market share dominate the Malaysian private K12 education market (Gurugram, 2022). Malaysia's private K12 education market is expected to grow at a more higher percent due to the increasing number of Malaysian families choosing to enrol their children in their local international schools, most enrolling them from early years on, and some joining for

secondary education (Gurugram, 2022). A sustainable business model and clear strategic positioning are key to competing in a saturated market in the future.

In other foreign countries, especially developed countries, their well-known universities have a high admission rate, while the quality of students is high, pay attention to the development of moral education of students. In developed countries, preference is given to the more prestigious private K12 schools. That is to say, in foreign countries, private schools have a "brand" effect (Li, Lu & Qian, 2020). Similarly, private K12 schools also seize the development period of students, cultivate intellectual power and improve ideological and moral education, school itself has its own characteristics, and curriculum diversity. For example, the elite education of the British private K2 school makes a large number of international students flock to it. From 2007 to 2020, more and more international students will be boarding in various British private K12 schools (Kew, 2020) (Figure 5).

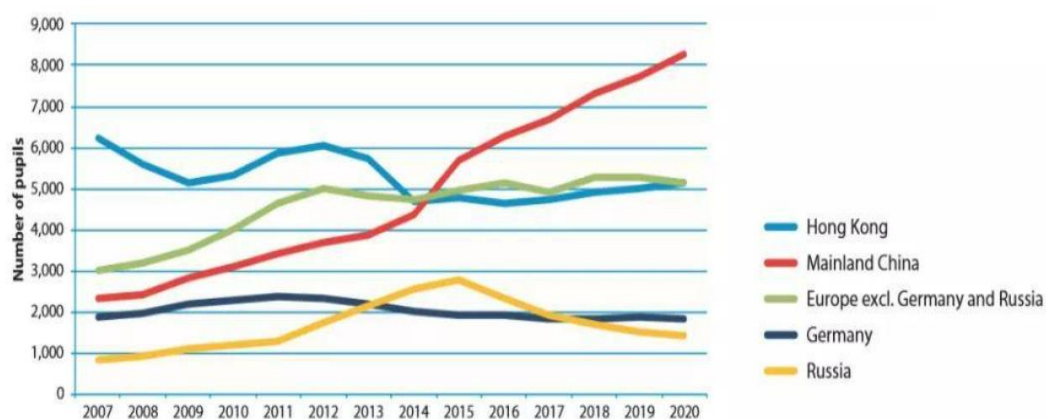


Figure 5 Number of British international students selected private schools

Private K12 Education in China

In China, K12 education refers to a total of kindergarten and 12 years of basic education, including 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior middle school and 3 years in senior high school, covering extracurricular tutoring, training and school informatization (Qianzhan Industrial Research Institute, 2021). K12 education forms can be divided into private education, traditional face to face education and online education (Zhang, 2019). According to the information of Ministry of Education in 2020. The total number of private schools at all levels in China was 186,700, 4,820 less than last year, accounting for 34.76%. The number of students enrolled was 17.3047 million, 2.47 % lower than last year. Among them, private K12 schools: 6,187 local private primary schools, 41 fewer than last year, it decline 0.66% and the enrolment rate dropped by 8.71 %. 6,041 private middle schools, it increase 248 schools and higher 4.28% than last year, the enrolment rose 0.23 %. There were 3,694 private high schools, an increase of 7.79 % over the previous year. Enrolment increased by 12.91%; There were 4,012,900 students, an increase of 11.57% over the previous year (Yang, 2021) (Figure 6). So in the face of a large number of students and school proportion. It has been a hot topic in recent years that primary and secondary schools run by citizens in China have received keen attention. As an educational problem that each of us may experience, it has also attracted the attention of scholars in the fields of education, sociology, and public administration, as well as government departments, journalists, and legal professionals around us.

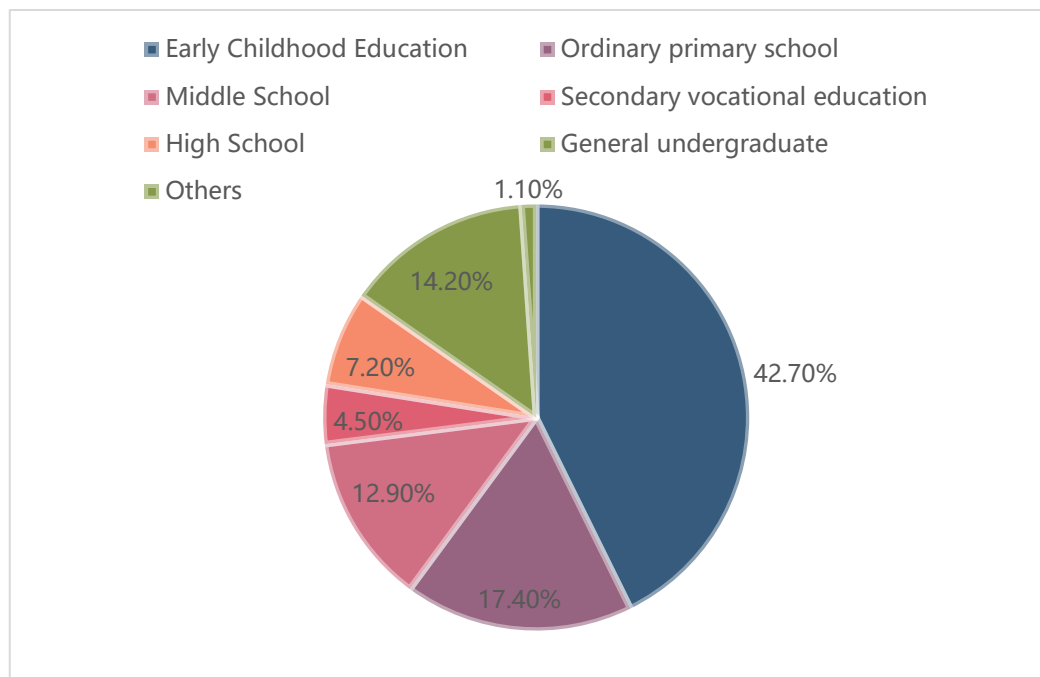


Figure 6 Student scale of private education in China

China's academic circle has discussed the strategic planning of the development of basic education from multiple perspectives, from the macro-level, and social level, and closely combined with modern education theory, in the practice of investigation. Premier in China Li Keqiang said, Deepening education transformation can stimulate greater vitality. (Yang & Wang, 2016). To observe the current private education transformation, we must catch the breakthrough and seize the opportunity to transformation, so that private K12 schools can effectively stimulate the enthusiasm of social forces to invest in education by providing high-quality education services, providing more public service products for education, and drive education consumption and economic development. Wen (2004), a professor of education at Peking University, argues in his article *On the Non-Contradiction between the Non-profit and Profit-making nature of Private Education*: Private education can learn from the experience of the development of public education, and at the same time, it should also pay attention to the exploration of its own bright points (Wen, 2004). For example, it can pay attention to some personalized training of students, and at the same time pay attention to efficiency in management to make the management mechanism flexible to better adapt to the market's related needs and so on.

The comprehensive effect of the transformation and development of private education has been continuously released, which is of great value to improving the level of education supply, deepening the transformation of the school running system, promoting the integration of education and various fields, and expanding the total amount of educational capital (Jing & Zhou, 2020). Therefore, for private K12 education, it has greatly promoted the transformation of our current educational system and made our education more diversified, multi-dimensional, and international. This means that K12 private schools in China are a very popular and important part of China's education. There is an old Chinese saying that "a school is a ship, and the leader is the captain and helmsman". The leadership of leaders is closely related to the development of all aspects of the school, even the development of every staff and teacher (Wen, 2022). Since China began the transformation of the education system and

school system in 1985, and fully implemented the "leaders are responsible for school leadership and management" in primary and secondary schools (Zhang & Sun, 2021), the leadership of leaders has become a top priority. In this context, with the development of headmaster leadership, there is an urgent need for many studies and theories to support the work of China private K12 leader. Leadership theories, especially those related to transformational leadership, have gradually attracted the attention of China's education sector.

Transformational Leadership in Chinese K12 Private Schools

Many researchers admit that leadership styles and views on the characteristics and practices of school leaders are different. Many studies have been done on successful school leadership in various contexts. There was a research among the studies conducted is the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) leadership research project implemented by (Day et al., 2002). Until 2020, ISSPP has conducted studies in more than fourteen countries in the world, namely Australia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey and America company, which involves more than 100 studies from various perspectives. This project is the largest and most famous study in the world and aims to identify what leadership practices are used by successful principals in the world (Day, 2010). Qualitative methods were used and the findings of this study show the important characteristics of successful school leaders from the fourteen countries. The ISSPP study found that outstanding school leaders tend to practice the transformational leadership dimension introduced by Leithwood et al (2005) with four main dimensions, which are setting direction, developing people, structuring the organization and managing the process or instructional program (Day, 2010). This ISSPP study also found that there are characteristics and practices in the leadership of successful school leaders and that their leadership affects the success of the school.

China's K12 education market consists of public K12 education and private K12 education. The promulgation and implementation of The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Private Education, legally affirms the equal status of private education and public education (Yang, 2011). Since then, national private education has entered a period of vigorous development. However, with the development of private education, the rapid development and transformation have led to more problems in private K12 schools. In recent years, the growth of private K12 schools has been slowing down yearly (Zhang & Lu, 2022). In the context of the economic environment and the sharp decline in China's population growth, private K12 education has faced a development bottleneck (Zhang & Lu, 2022). According to the research conducted by Liu, Zhang, and Hu, in 2021, private education entered a new inflection point period, with the overall growth rate declining from the past double-digit growth to single-digit growth and even negative growth in some areas (Liu et al., 2021) (**Figure 7**). Overall, the strength and influence of private K12 education cannot avoid the continuous expansion of the scale of public education and the impact of the wave of education internationalization. With the decrease in the school-age population, the popularization of compulsory education, and the influx of overseas education resources, the competition in the education market is becoming increasingly fierce, and private schools are divided in the survival of the fittest (Secretariat of China, 2013). Some develop and form brands, while others shrink and even quit running schools, which are expressly stated as in **Figure 7**. Although the school leaders have been given training and courses before they are appointed as leaders in China, unfortunately there are a few leaders who are still incompetent

to lead (Zhang, 2021). There are also leaders who use a leadership style that is inappropriate for the situation and their followers.

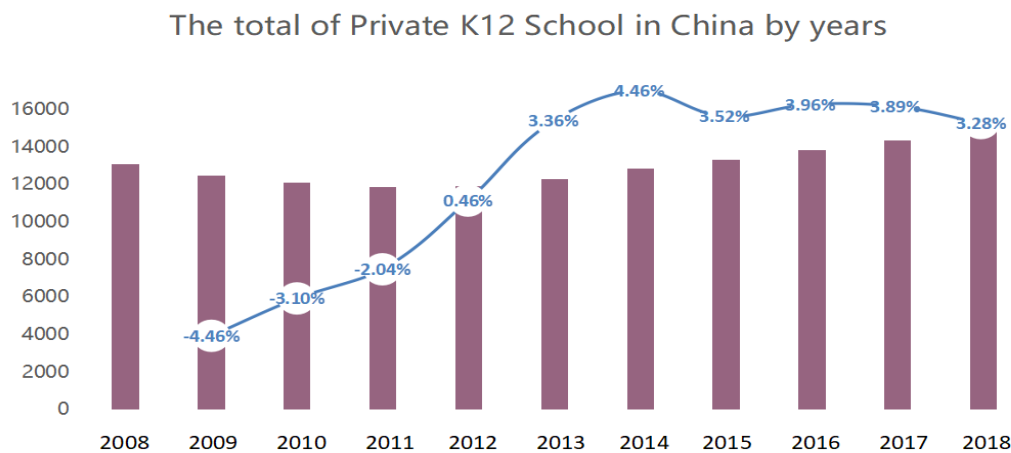


Figure 7 Growth curve of private K12 schools (Liu et al., 2021).

Private schools today need transformational leadership, because the educational environment and student needs are changing rapidly Harris (2012), which requires schools to adapt to these changes and create educational models and teaching methods that suit the current environment (Fullan, 2001). Transformational leadership can improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of schools by encouraging innovation and experimentation, developing new curriculum and teaching methods to meet student needs, or creating an innovative culture that adopts flexible teaching approaches and technologies Barnett & McCormick (2003), and creating a more comprehensive and diversified educational system (Huber & Levin, 2018). China's private K12 schools are faced with the above objective problems, which calls for the implementation of transformational leadership in China's private K12 schools. China's education sector is facing a rapidly changing social, economic and technological environment, and private schools need leaders with transformational leadership to cope with these changes. Transformational leadership helps to stimulate the enthusiasm and intrinsic work motivation of the school staff, thus improving the performance and competitiveness of the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). A positive learning environment encourages students and staff to develop innovation and creativity. Transformational leadership leads the school to build good partnerships with the community and other stakeholders, thereby enhancing the school's social impact (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Some school leaders have the vision to practice transformational leadership, but China's private K12 schools face many problems when practicing transformational leadership, such as the number of schools are decreasing and the need to cope with the impact of the wave of competition through school transformation that the research wrote above. There are also many issues in the implementation of private K12 transformational leadership such as the wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in Chinese K12 private schools (Jiao & Liu, 2017). Their role as leaders are very challenging and sometimes, unclear (Li, 2021). There are problems on communication between private K12 school leaders and their subordinates (Xia, 2014). The issue of not having the best leadership strategy that can be used as a guide for school leaders (Jiang, 2010). There are also leaders who use a leadership style

that is inappropriate for the situation and their followers. Lack of framework in implementation of transformational leadership (Zhang, 2021).

The wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in Chinese K12 private schools is a significant issue

The wrong implementation of transformational leadership style in Chinese K12 private schools is a significant issue (Jiao & Liu, 2017). The limitation of transformational leadership, as with several other leadership models, is that it was conceptualised and refined in developed Western contexts and subsequently applied in many other settings (Bush, 2017). Some researchers also pointed out that transformational leadership needs to be modified to suit different countries, especially by respecting and preserving the characteristics of national cultures (Litz & Scott, 2017). When the schools choosing a transformational leadership model, schools should consider factors such as school culture, student and teacher characteristics, and match them with the core principles of transformational leadership, to ensure effective practice. Most Chinese educational scholars' research theories are based on the transformational leadership theory by Burns and Bass but the theoretical boundaries are unclear (Yang, 2013). Although the academic community accepts these theories, they are primarily applied in business management. The essential difference between a business and a school is that a business is a for-profit organization whose purpose is to seek the best interests of its shareholders. The school is a non-profit organization whose goal is to cultivate talent and scientific research for the benefit of society (Yang, 2013). Zhao and Liang (2019) stated the difference between the essence of school and enterprise leads to the difference in the choice of leadership theory. Structural content such as teaching plans and teaching development will inevitably be involved in the school development process. The choice of transformational leadership in schools differs from that in businesses due to the differences between campus culture and corporate strategy (Zhao & Liang, 2019). Jiao and Liu (2017) showed that the primary deficiencies in applying transformational leadership in schools are as follows: unclear theoretical definition, unitary research methods, and insufficient attention to educational situations, etc (Jiao & Liu, 2017). In recent years, it has been essential to clarify the changes that school leaders have faced and led. The school leader is facing changes mainly in the school. Leithwood (1994) analyzed the process of school transformation. He believed that compared with the school transformation in the 1970s and 1980s, the current change was more flexible, which made the traditional way of achieving the purpose of transformation by strengthening control no longer applicable (Leithwood, 1994). Therefore with the change of times, private K12 schools, as an essential part of the education system, need specific transformational leadership that is more in line with the school environment.

The role as leaders are very challenging and sometimes, unclear

The school leaders of private K12 schools is facing so many challenges in leading the organization. Their role as leaders are very challenging and sometimes, unclear (Li, 2021). In transformational leadership, the leader should recognize that he is a school leader, not only a manager. They should emphasize in setting the direction, developing the people, redesigning the organization, improving the instructional program and other related practices. The current leadership role of leaders is dislocated, weak, misaligned, offside, and other phenomena (Li, 2021). In addition, some studies have also found that K12 school leaders may face role demands and expectations from different stakeholders, such as government, students, parents and teachers, etc., which may be contradictory and conflicting (Hallinger et al., 2018).

Yang (2008) also found that the majority of the school leaders in practice was more on "management" than "leadership." They were either tied up in school affairs all day or were tired of dealing with various external inspections (Yang, 2008). These are far from the expected leadership role of transformational leadership in schools. Huang (2021) stated that school leaders are unable to deal with the centralization and decentralization of their rights in the practice of leadership. And because the role of the school leader is complex, heavy, and unclear, the school leader also bears frustration (Huang, 2021). The school leader's over-emphasis on centralization leads to solidifying his power, which is not conducive to implementing transformational leadership.

There are problems on communication between private K12 school leaders and their followers

There are problems on communication between private K12 school leaders and their subordinates (Xia, 2014). Leaders must communicate their ideas and concepts to staff and the stakeholders through verbal or non-verbal communication to achieve the goals. The transformational leadership behavior can help subordinates achieve maximum performance by guiding them beyond their interests and instilling common organizational values (Qi & Zhang, 2001). Some researchers (2021) found that private educational institutions have problems such as opaque decision-making processes, lack of effective communication channels, and lack of feedback mechanisms (Torlak et al., 2022). The authoritarian management of K12 schools can lead to inconsistent goals among followers, distrust of leaders, discouragement and unresponsiveness among followers. This will become a major problem for transformational leadership practices. Meanwhile, Nguyen (2022) pointed out that poor communication often leads to decline in the quality of education in schools in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2022). Poor communication not only between school leaders and followers, but also between students and teachers will increase the sense of distance between students and teachers, making students feel frustrated. The school leaders emphasize contact with superior leaders while ignoring communication down. Some leaders do not listen to teachers' opinions in making decision and working toward the school development (Xia, 2014). Besides, there are different perspectives, understanding, and status differences between teachers and leaders, which lead to communication misunderstandings. The communication problem between leaders and teachers will affect the play of transformational leadership, which is not conducive to the setting of school direction and personalized support, according to a recent study by Xia (2014). Many of the teachers' needs and desires are not given proper attention and many of their opinions are not taken into account by school leaders. Leaders are not proactive enough in removing communication barriers. Some of the school leaders in China is lacking of communication skills, applying single communication channels, having poor communication feedback and other problems (Xia, 2014). The research of Li (2009) also shows that there is no effective communication mechanism in many schools. Leaders cannot often communicate with their superiors and subordinates, mainly caused of the obstacles caused by the position difference between school leaders and their superiors and subordinates. It also reflects the lack of smooth communication channels (Li, 2009). Nowadays, with the rapid development of technology, email, as a new way of communication, has not been used by most school leaders in China. There may be ideological and technical reasons (Liu, 2018).

The issue of not having the best leadership strategy that can be used as a guide for school leaders

The issue of not having the best leadership strategy that can be used as a guide for school leaders is another issue that needs to be studied. And lack of framework in implementation of transformational leadership in China. A study of K12 schools in Australia found that many school leaders attempted to implement change but lacked appropriate strategies and resources to accomplish those changes (Mulford & Silins, 2003). Jiang (2010) stated that school leaders in China need to improve leadership, however, there is no strategy that can be referred to, in addition to heavy workloads, long-term demotivation and lack of internal creativity, directly contributing to overall weak leadership (Jiang, 2010). And Hong (2016) pointed the lack of a good strategy and the implementation of the "try and error" strategy have a negative impact on the leadership results of leaders in K12 private schools in China (Hong, 2016). Therefore, an effective and clear strategy needs to be introduced as a reference for K12 private school leaders so that they can carry out their responsibilities and have focus when leading the school. Many previous studies have been conducted on transformational leadership in China. However, these studies are more about identifying leadership, looking at the difference between two or more variables or looking at the relationship between the selected variables. Studies related to the development of leadership framework are very few and only focused on non-private school organizations (Jiang, 2010; Zhou, 2010; Hong, 2016). A study to develop a transformational leadership framework for private K12 schools in China should be carried out so that it can be used as a reference by all other school leaders.

Conclusion

This paper provided research-based knowledge to the Ministry of Education about the transformational leadership practices of private K12 school leaders in China. This paper will help not only school leaders but also education officers in district, state and national level in an effort to provide appropriate training, select, organize and evaluate more effective and quality programs for the schools leaders in China. This paper will also give a benefit to the teachers, where it can enhance teachers' sense of organizational identity in many ways and play a key role in teachers' career development. For schools, it can help schools cope with the changing times and promote school transformation. For the society, this paper will provide the theoretical value of transformational leadership theory practice and research in private K12 schools, and promote the development of transformational leadership theory in China. In conclusion, this paper contributed to leaders to understand the application of transformational leadership in Chinese K12 private schools, finding the problems on nowadays, and provide implications for educational institutions in other cultural contexts.

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