

# Does Transformational Leadership Matter in The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Internationalization of Higher Education?

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**Abstract:** Emotional intelligence plays an important role in the development of leadership and the performance of organizations. However, little is known about the effect of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership and the internationalization of higher education. To address this gap, the present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, internationalization of higher education, and transformational leadership. Data collected from 283 top management of five universities in Malaysia was analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results showed that emotional intelligence was significantly and positively related to transformational leadership, and, in turn, transformational leadership was positively and significantly related to the internationalization of higher education. Furthermore, the findings revealed that transformational leadership mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. The results, discussions, implications, and limitations of the study are discussed.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Internationalization

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector is an important element of national economic competitiveness and development (Tyler et al. 2014; Hayes & Al'Abri, 2019). Higher education also produces "positional goods" (Hirsch 1976) that can easily provide access to income-earning and social prestige (Marginson 2006, Dakowska 2015). However, over the course of time, the higher education sector has witnessed an unprecedented period of accelerating change that is driven by shifts in public attitude, reductions in public support (Wisniewski 2004, Horta and Jung 2014, Khanna et al. 2014, Cuthbert 2015). This change in public attitude and public support has adversely affected the performance of higher education. This is because the performance of higher education is not only dependent on factors such as financial relations, administrative relations, the flow of personnel, flows of information, knowledge, the issue of status conferral, and ideology (Sirat 2010, Cuthbert 2015). Furthermore, the performance of higher education is also conditioned upon various stakeholders (e.g. students, local communities, and government) (Davies et al. 2001; El Ikhsan, 2018). Despite the

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significance of internationalization of higher education (Khodakarami, P., & Zakaria, Z. 2017), little is known about the antecedents that may improve the performance of higher education sectors, especially in developing countries such as Malaysia.

A growing body of literature suggests that transformational leadership is one of the factors that play a central role in the performance of higher education sectors. Transformational leadership refers to a form of “leadership in which relationships are organized around a collective purpose in ways that transform, motivate, and enhance the actions and ethical aspirations of followers” (Simola et al. 2012 p.p 229-237). Leaders with high transformational leadership skills not only see changes as opportunities but also aspire, motivate, and inspire subordinates to mend the changes in favor of the organization. Hence, transformational leadership is associated with the success of the organization, employee performance, and motivation (Arif & Akram, 2018; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). While transformation leadership is central to the performance of organizations, theory and literature have inadequately considered the role of transformational leadership and transformational leadership traits in the performance of higher education, especially the internationalization of higher education.

Furthermore, previous studies revealed that transformational leadership is shaped by various factors such as the context (Pawar & Eastman, 1997), the environment, the attributes of the leader, and the relationship (Middleton, 2013). One of the attribute of effective transformational leaders is his or her emotional intelligence (Arunima, et.al 2014). The research revealed that leaders with high emotional intelligence are more satisfied with life (Kulshrestha & Sen, 2006), more effective, and can bring innovation in the organization and region (Boyatzis & Soler, 2012). Although the linkage between emotional intelligence and transformational intelligence has been investigated to some extent, however, there is a lack of understanding of how emotional intelligence is associated with different attributes of transformational leadership such as follower orientation and self-regulation. The purpose of this study is to address this gap in the literature by examining a model that links emotional intelligence with transformational leadership, and, in turn, linking transformational leadership to internalization of higher education. Furthermore, the study is also aimed to examine whether transformational leadership mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and the internationalization of higher education.

In doing so, the present research contributes to our understanding of the empirical linkage between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and the internalization of higher education. Furthermore, this study also extends our understanding of the mediating role of transformational leadership in between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. Besides, the present study is aimed to affirm the validity and reliability of the scale used for the measurement of the variables under study.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership*

Emotional intelligence has received due attention in mainstream leadership literature due to its association with leadership emergence, leadership style, and leadership effectiveness (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006). Emotional intelligence refers to the “one’s ability to accurately identify, appraise, and discriminate among emotions in oneself and others, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, and to regulate both positive and negative emotions in self and others”(Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002). On the other hand, transformational leadership is a leadership style that inspires and motivates followers through charisma, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). According to (Goleman, 1998) emotional intelligence is one of the basic requirements of effective transformational leadership. Barling, Slater, & Kevin Kelloway, (2000) stats that the major features of emotional intelligence are understanding and managing one’s emotion, emotional self-control, and understanding others' emotion and managing relationships. Research has shown that leaders who can understand and

control their emotions serve as role models for their followers and enhance self-respect of the leaders among followers (Barling et al., 2000).

Furthermore, emotionally intelligent people are better able to manage and adapt to environmental, social, and personal changes (Bar-On, 2007), understand others' emotions, and are more successful than less intelligent people (Deutschendorf, 2015). Previous research also demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to manage their followers, inspire, and motivate subordinates. Thus, following the preceding theoretical and empirical findings, we hypothesize that:

H1: Emotional intelligence is positively related to transformational leadership.

#### Transformational leadership and internalization of higher education

Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership behavior that motivates and inspires followers through five key leadership traits such as intellectual stimulation, charismatic leadership/idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration (Barling et al., 2000). Within the leadership literature, transformational leadership has achieved considerable attention due to its association with the desired individual and organizational outcomes. For example, leadership theory and literature suggest that a transformational leadership inspire and motivate employees (Ensley, Pearce, & Hmieleski, 2006), which, in turn, enhance employees collective job performance (Hamzah, Othman, Hashim, Rashid, & Besir, 2013), make employees more productive (Horwitch & Callahan, 2016), efficient and, enhance their willingness to work towards organizational goals (Sajuyigbe, Olaoye, & Adeyemi, 2013). Previous literature also demonstrates that organizations with transformational leadership are more productive than an organization with low transformational leadership (Harsanto & Roelfsema, 2015).

Despite the fact that transformational leadership has received considerable attention from the researchers and practitioners, however, limited studies are available on the significance of transformational leadership in higher education sectors. Higher education plays a crucial role in the development of a nation and future generations to deal with the social challenges ahead (Barth et al. 2014). Unfortunately, the education sector is lagging behind in the achievement of its desired objective because its main focus is on profit-seeking (Amran et al. 2010). Malaysian higher education is no exception, especially Malaysia's higher education universities are influenced by the globalization and transformation of society (Yusoff 2012).

According to (Sibbel 2009), there are many challenges that higher education is confronting if it is to actualize its potential for contributing to sustainability. In the educational literature, one of the key challenges is the lack of cohesion among the key players such as teachers, top management, and policymakers (Karakhanyan et al. 2012). Besides, the lack of transformational leadership qualities in key leaders may result in unintended outcomes (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Prior research has shown that transformational leaders not only bring innovation within the organization (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), they also inspire and motivate employees, and enhance the performance of the organization (Ensley et al., 2006; Horwitch & Callahan, 2016; Netshitangani, 2018). Following the preceding discussion, we predict that transformational leadership is a key factor in the internationalization of higher education, especially Malaysia. We presume that when the top leadership has transformational leadership qualities, they are more likely to motivate and inspire employees, and, which, in turn, may enhance the internalization of higher education in Malaysia. Following this, we hypothesize that:

H2: Transformational leadership is positively related to the internalization of higher education in Malaysia.

#### The mediating role of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership may be the mediator between emotional intelligence and the internalization of higher education. In other words, it is possible that individuals with high emotional intelligence have more charisma, idealized

influences, and individual consideration than those with low emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a type of social intelligence that helps individuals to identify their own emotion and feelings and understands the thoughts and feeling of others (Duckett & Macfarlane, 2003; Solanki, 2019). The individual with high emotional intelligence is also likely to have more charisma and ability to influence the subordinates (Barling et al., 2000; Swid, 2014). Likewise, emotional intelligence help in the development of workforce and citizenship (Green, 2003), balancing family and work responsibilities (James & Jaymohan, 2018) and enhance the effectiveness of the leadership and improve the performance of the leader (Malik & Shahid, 2016).

Consistent with preceding discussions, literature in higher education has also shown that transformational leadership is the prerequisite of a change, nation economic, and social development (Ackerman, 2000; Rodriguez, Valenzuela, & Ayuyao, 2018). As mentioned above, on the one hand, emotional intelligent is said to enhance the transformational leadership traits. On the other hand, research has shown that organizations with transformational leadership are more productive, more competitive, and perform better than rival firms (Singh, 2019; Yamin, 2020). Hence, it is logical that emotional intelligence may relate to the internationalization of higher education through transformational leadership. In other words, we presume that transformational leadership is a mediator between EI and internationalization of higher education. Thus, we propose that:

H3: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and the internationalization of higher education.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is non-experimental and cross-sectional in nature. The target population of this research is top management (Senate Members) and administrative team of the top five universities of Malaysia such as UTM, USM, UM, UPM, and UKM. Furthermore, purposive, nonprobability sampling was used to choose the respondents of the study. To determine the minimum sample size, the power analysis proposed by Gefen *et al.* (2000) was used. Gefen *et al.* (2000) power analysis determine sample size by multiplying the largest number of items of any construct with 10. In the present study, the construct transformational leadership has the highest number of items (21). Therefore, the required minimum sample size for this study is 210.

#### Instruments

All the constructs of the present study were measured with five-point Likert scales, except otherwise mentioned. The scale range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). For the measurement of construct emotional intelligence, 16 items were used. The instruments were adapted from (Wong & Law, 2002). The sample items of the construct EI include “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time”.

For the measurement of transformational leadership, 21 items were used. These scales were adopted from (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The sample item for the measurement of transformational leadership is “I express with a few simple words what we could and should do”. Likewise, the internationalization of higher education was measured with 15 items. An example item is “The faculty/school’s constantly seeks fresh ways through which it can successfully compete against other institutions in foreign markets”.

### IV. RESULTS

The mean, standard deviation, and correlation among constructs of the study were calculated using SPSS 24. The results show that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and transformation leadership (0.878\*\*). Further, the results revealed a positive and significant correlation between transformation leadership and internationalization of higher education (0.809\*\*).

Model Evaluation

As mentioned above, the present study is aimed to explain the amount of variance in the dependent variable (internationalization of higher education). Therefore, partial least square structural equation modeling was appropriate to use. Recent studies in higher education have also used have used PLS-SEM (Kakar et al., 2019; Kakar et al., 2019; Rahimi et al., 2013). Furthermore, the constructs of the present study are complex and having a large number of items, which further justify the use of PLS-SEM. In PLS-SEM, the model is evaluated in two steps. The first step of PLS-SEM is to assess the measurement model, which was assessed through Smartpls 3.2.8 software.

Measurement Model

The measurement model describes the relationship between latent constructs and observable indicators. The measurement model evaluation entails the assessment of factor loading, Cronbach alpha, and composite reliability. Factor loading, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability are the measure of items and constructs reliability. According to (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011), an item is said to be reliable if the value of factor loading exceeds 0.70. The results show that the values of factor loading exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, and ranged between 0.70 and 0.84 for internationalization of higher education, and between 0.701 and 0.792 for emotional intelligence, and ranged between 0.709 and 0.808 for transformational leadership. Furthermore, the reliability of the constructs was verified through Cronbach alpha and composite reliability. According to (Hair et al., 2011), constructs are said to be reliable if the values of CA and CR exceed 0.70 thresholds. Table 1 shows that all the constructs are reliable.

Table 1: Measurement Model Results

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EI	0.902	0.919	0.532
Int of Higher Edu	0.901	0.918	0.555
TL	0.934	0.942	0.503

We also assessed the convergent and discriminate validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was measured through Average variance extract. A construct is said to be convergent valid if the values of AVE exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2011). Table 2 shows that all the constructs are convergently valid. Besides, we assessed the discriminate validity through Fornell-Larcker criteria and HTMT. Table 3 also shows that all the constructs ensured discriminate validity.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	EI	Int of Higher Edu	TL
EI	0.730		
Int of Higher Edu	0.675	0.745	
TL	0.469	0.480	0.709

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	EI	Int of Higher Edu	TL
EI			
Int of Higher Edu	0.746		
TL	0.483	0.502	

Structural Model

As mentioned above, PLS-SEM was used to test the proposed model to explain the hypothesized relationship between the variables of the study. The results of PLS-SEM shows that the model is a good fit, as the values of coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for internationalization of higher education is 0.230, and that for transformational leadership is 0.220. We also assessed the model fit by calculating the values of effect size. The effect size for emotional intelligence is 0.283, and that for transformational leadership is 0.299. These results show that the model is a good fit for further analysis.

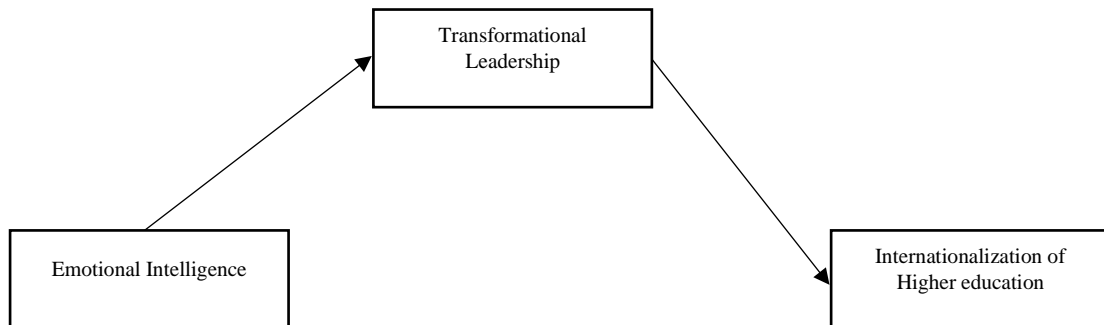


Figure 1: Structural Model

The findings of the hypothesis testing of the structural model are summarised in Figure 1 and Table 4. The results displayed that emotional intelligence was positively related transformational leadership ( $\beta = 0.469, p < 0.05, t = 8.412$ ), and transformational leadership was also positively related to internalization of higher education in Malaysia ( $\beta = 0.480, p < 0.05, t = 8.622$ ). Furthermore, to examine the mediating role of transformational leadership between emotional intelligence and internalization of higher education, we used the procedure of 5000 re-sampling bootstrapping. The findings revealed that transformational leadership mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and internalization of higher education ( $\beta = 0.225, p < 0.05, t = 4.641$ ).

Table 4: Structural Model

Hypothesis	$\beta$	T Statistics	P Values
Emotional Intelligence->Transformational leadership	0.469	8.412	0.000
Transformational leadership->internationalization of higher education	0.480	8.622	0.000
Emotional Intelligence->Transformational leadership->internationalization of higher education	0.225	4.742	0.000

**V. DISCUSSION**

This study was aimed to examine the relationships between transformational leadership, internationalization of higher education, and emotional intelligence among top management of Malaysian Universities. The findings of the study showed that emotional intelligence is positively related to transformation leadership, and, in turn, transformational leadership is positively related to the internationalization of higher education. The findings of this study confirm emotional intelligence and leadership theory that a person high on emotional intelligence has the ability to inspire and motivate subordinates and acts a role model for the follower (Arif & Akram, 2018; Bass, 1999). Consistent with the conclusions of (Prem, Scheel, Weigelt, Hoffmann, & Korunka, 2018), the study confirms that emotional intelligence is

an important predictor of leadership. The findings that transformational leadership is positively related is in line with conclusions of (Hamzah et al., 2013; Horwitch & Callahan, 2016) that transformation leadership will enhance the performance and productivity of the organization. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization is mediated by transformational leadership. This findings is in agreement with the conclusion that emotional intelligence is indirectly related to individual and organizational outcomes such as perceived social support (Rey, Extremera, & Sánchez-Álvarez, 2019), burnout and job satisfaction (Lee, 2019).

#### Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study have certain theatrical and practical implications. First, this study extends our understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership literature. Prior research had mainly focused on the role of emotional intelligence and the effectiveness of leadership. Furthermore, this study has explored the relationship between the said variables in the context of higher education. Previous research is mainly conducted in non-education sectors, e.g. (Barling et al., 2000; Rey et al., 2019). Second, this research empirically examines the influence of transformational leadership on the internationalization of higher education, which, to the best of authors' knowledge has rarely been investigated. Third, the important contribution of this study is the mediating role of transformational leadership. The study extends the literature by confirming that emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education are indirectly related through transformational leadership.

#### VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that emotional intelligence is an important predictor of transformational leadership and the internationalization of higher education. Furthermore, the study provides empirical support to the relationship between transformational leadership and internationalization of higher education. One of the main conclusions of this study is the mediating role of transformational leadership between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. The results of the study imply that in order to improve the performance of higher education, especially universities, the management should focus on understanding the emotions and feelings of the employees and develop transformational leadership skills among top management of the universities.

#### Limitations and directions for future research

Although this study contributes to the literature of emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education, it does have several limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional; therefore, one should be cautious in interpreting the causal relationship between variables of the study. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a longitudinal study to further explore the relationship among variables of the study. Second, the data was collected from the top management team of higher education of five universities in Malaysia. This small number of universities may limit the generalizability of the study. Future research may extend the literature by taking a sample from all universities in Malaysia. Furthermore, this study only investigated transformational leadership as a mediator between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education, and we encourage researchers to explore transactional leadership as mediator between the said constructs.

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