

# The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Performance Through the Mediating Role of Organizational Culture in Higher Education Institutions in Iraq

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**ABSTRACT**--Today, most of educational institutions in higher education sector need for leaders who are willing to works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group. Higher Education in Iraq faces many challenges which affected the educational performance of most universities in Iraq. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of transformational leadership on organizational performance of Iraqi universities as well as examining the mediating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance. The problem that is discussed in this study is the inability of leaders in higher education institutions to face the challenge of being effective to boost the performance of their universities which is reflected on the ability of Iraqi universities to compete in higher education market. The result of this study showed that transformational leadership in educational institutions affected the performance of universities and mediated by the culture of the organizations. The methodology used in this study is based on a quantitative methods and survey. Population and sample consist of individuals represent academics staff in five universities located the south area of Iraq. The significance of this study comes from the analysis of essential factors that enhance the performance of educational institutions in Iraq.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Organizational Culture, Organizational Performance

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century leaders face the challenge of being effective in a global knowledge environment. Nowadays, more than ever, leaders must play the key role in helping organizations cope with the challenges they face from expanding knowledge and knowledge systems (Crawford, 2014). Today, most of modern and large organization need for leaders who are willing to works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group (Bernard, 2000).

Iraq is rich in natural resources and its geographical location makes it strategically important. But despite its glorious past in the field of education, Iraq's current educational system faces great challenges. Without adequate

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higher education and research institutions that provide a trained and educated critical population, no country can guarantee endogenous and sustainable development. Therefore, well-organized and fully-supported, high-quality scientific and higher education researchers are considered the heart of any country to access progress in daily life (Sabah, 2013).

Higher Education in Iraq faces many challenges, education Institutions governance, the teaching staff, and the graduate's qualities, where all these factors affect the performance of universities. It is found that Iraqi universities need to empower institutional leadership and independent commissions on higher education to take the lead in reform efforts, recognizing that internal reforms cannot be dictated—they must be internalized to succeed (Sabah, 2014).

Although Iraq has a very large number of universities in different specializations, the country has been denied the normal technical exchange between countries which has had a terrible impact on Iraq's educational and training infrastructure because of lack to transformational leadership. Many universities in Iraq are lacking effective leadership that can deal with the rapid competition in higher education market (Mukdad et al., 2014).

Thus this study concludes that Iraqi universities are facing numerous challenges which have quickly brought down the quality of higher and continuous education to a point where it is impairing the capacity of the younger generation to rebuild their civil and democratic society. Therefore, there is an imminent need to develop the skills of leaders in Iraqi universities and retraining existing professionals (Sawsan and Jawad, 2014).

The aim of this study is to examine the mediating influence of organizational culture of Iraqi universities on the relationship between transformational leadership in higher education institutions and the performance of Iraqi universities. The direct association between these three variables also examined using SEM analysis and regression equations.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used quantitative methods. The data analyzed using statistical approaches. A survey research is undertaken in selected universities in Iraq, these universities are distributed in at the south area of Iraq in order to get a precise and wide cover answers on research questions. The respondents are Academics staff. The total number of respondents in the selected universities = 6294 individuals who represent Academic Staff in five universities located the south area of Iraq.

## **III. CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ**

The higher education sector was one of the sectors that suffered major and continuous destruction of its infrastructure during the war of 2003. Direct war was damaged by 61 buildings and university institutes, while 101 were looted. Laboratories, libraries and other applied classrooms had the largest share during that period (Rakesh et al., 2009).

Higher Education in Iraq faces many challenges which represent with, infrastructure, Quality of Education System, academic staff & faculty qualification, textbooks, scientific research and publications, education

institutions and labor markets, education Institutions governance, the teaching staff, and the graduate's qualities (Sabah, 2014).

The most fundamental of the many challenges facing Iraq's higher education sector is that of re-establishing its universities as independent institutions, dedicated to education, and free of political, religious, and ethnic influence. There has been no independent quality control agency to monitor and ensure minimum standards in teaching and research across higher education institutions. And there have been no government or private research-funding bodies to consistently encourage, nurture, and reward excellence in research (Zahra, 2009).

The rehabilitation of the Iraqi higher education sector, already affected by two decades of neglect and isolation, has been undermined by structural and structural weaknesses and limited capacity in the areas of planning, policy-making and management of higher education programs. On the other hand, the gap between the level of education available in Iraqi universities and the requirements for sustainable economic development continues to widen. Poor security conditions and instability undermined normal university activity and led to an unexpected brain drain that in turn reduced the chances of education for Iraqi students. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research requires substantial technical support and capacity-building in order to ensure access to higher quality education resources (UNESCO office of Iraq, 2010).

#### **IV. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership behaviour that transforms the norms and values of employees, whereby the leader motivates the workers to perform beyond their expectations. Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that transformational leadership impact was best understood by everyday leadership practices, or causal mechanisms, where Gerring (2012) argued that transformational leadership occurred within a dynamic management process.

Research has indicated specific leadership practices positively influence academic achievement and reform the didactic institution (Whitney et al., 2009; Jeanette, 2015). The transformational leadership model in educational institutions has been studied and applied to organizations such as schools, universities. Crispin & Gwarinda, (2010) studied how the transformational leadership model impacted employees of two institutions of higher education in South Africa involved in a merger, they concluded that transformational leadership plays a significant role in achieving success in higher education market.

Other scholars have concluded the same factors that influence transformational leadership. For example, Idealized influence defines the sense of loyalty, admiration, trust, and respect that followers attribute to these leaders (Puffer and McCarthy 2008; Imran and Masood, 2018). Inspirational motivation refers to the fact that transformational leaders set high expectations on employees and employ imagery and signs to emphasize struggle and communicate the significance of organizational goals (Hoffman et al. 2011; Imran and Masood, 2018). Intellectual stimulation relates to the aptitude of leaders for the development of an environment that is suitable for creativity and innovation, including the empowerment of followers or employees to solve difficult issues. Finally, individualized consideration states that leaders pay attention to the needs and requirements of individual followers or employees and assist them with their self-actualization and growth. This study employed all elements to measure transformational leadership (Eyal & Kark 2004; Chung-Wen 2008; Imran and Masood, 2018).

In the same context, Qistina & Khashini (2017) found that transformational leader typically uses the components of leadership to transform and motivate followers. These components include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Hellriegel & Slocum (2009) concluded that inspirational motivation implies the level vision appears in a leader to be more attractive and inspiring personality. The suggested that leaders with the component of inspirational motivation challenge their supporters with high expectations or goals in order for them to have strong sense of enthusiasm in exerting more effort in performing their task to achieve the goals. Bass and Riggio (2006) supported the findings of Bass and Avolio (2012). They stated the second factor of transformational leadership is the individualized consideration. It fosters a supportive relationship through personal attention such as needs and feelings of leaders to their supporters. The review of literature showed the importance of transformational leadership in higher education. Table1 summarizes the findings from previous studies on transformational leadership within academic environment.

**Table 1:** Importance of transformational leadership in higher education

The sources	Findings
Kouzes and Posner (2007)	University leaders who use the five transformational leadership practices will generate positive educational reform and achieve exemplary results. They discovered that inspiring a shared vision, modeling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart were the leadership practices utilized regularly by successful transformational leaders.
Knab (2009)	Leaders in high performing universities utilize transformational leadership practices more effectively than principals in low performing schools and performance is correlated with transformational leadership
Chegini et al. (2010)	Lecturers' performance improves dramatically when the university leader is seen engaging in the organization's shared vision and goals
Govier & Nash (2010)	Successful leaders in educational environment use transformational leadership practices to improve teacher performance and student achievement.
Valentine & Prater (2011)	Transformational leaders motivate their staff and teacher leaders to initiate reform efforts and develop new approaches to improve educator and student performance
Turan and Bektas (2013)	Academic achievement is positively impacted by transformational leadership
Jeff et al. (2015)	The leadership practices needed to improve academic achievement and generate positive change in school organizations

## V. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture encompasses values and behaviors that "contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization" (Schrodt, 2002). According to Needle (2004), organizational culture represents the collective values, beliefs and principles of organizational members and is a product of such factors as history, product, market, technology, strategy, type of employees, management style, and national culture; culture includes the organization's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, environment, location, beliefs, and habits. Organizational culture is defined as an expression of the values of influential individuals inside an organization. These values also affect the concrete aspects of the institution and the behavior of individuals, as well as the manner in which individuals act in their decisions and management of their subordinates and organizations (Chaubey et al., 2012).

Bernard (2013) defined organizational culture as "an emergence – an extremely complex incalculable state that results from the combination of a few simple ingredients". Islam and Zyphur (2009) stated that organizational culture refers to an interior philosophy adopted by the leaders of the organization to deal with employees in any type of organization including that of schools, universities, not-for-profit groups, government agencies, or business entities.

If organizational culture is seen as something that characterizes an organization, it can be manipulated and altered depending on leadership and members. Culture as root metaphor sees the organization as its culture, created through communication and symbols, or competing metaphors. Culture is basic, with personal experience producing a variety of perspectives (Modaff et al., 2011). The organizational communication perspective on culture views culture in three different ways (Beyer and Haug, 2014):

- Traditionalism: views culture through objective things such as stories, rituals, and symbols
- Interpretivist: views culture through a network of shared meanings (organization members sharing subjective meanings)
- Critical-interpretivist: views culture through a network of shared meanings as well as the power struggles created by a similar network of competing meanings

Understanding a set of values that might be used to describe an organization's culture helps organizations to identify, measure, and manage that culture more effectively. The study framework that provides insight into the different types of organizational culture is presented in the two-dimension (teamwork and innovation) as described below:

### ***5.1 Teamwork Culture***

Fostering teamwork is creating a work culture that values collaboration. In a teamwork environment, people understand and believe that thinking, planning, decisions, and actions are better when done cooperatively.

Team is in fact a working group which has all conditions for a real team and its members are totally committed to each other's promotion and success. This commitment often leads to team development. A team with high executive power specifically performs all actions better than other teams and meets all logical expectations of the members. Teamwork is a mental and emotional preoccupation in individuals in group situations which motivate them to help each other for achieving group goals and to participate in the work responsibility (Masoud, 2013).

### **5.2 Innovation Capability**

Innovation is the term creative development. The development of new consumer values through solutions that respond to new requirements, or requirements for the individual, or to the old requirements of the consumer or the market, but in new ways (Iddris, 2016).

The world of work is changing with the increase in the use of technology and both companies and businesses are becoming increasingly competitive. Companies will have to downsize and re-engineer their operations to remain competitive. This will affect employment as businesses will be forced to reduce the number of people employed while accomplishing the same amount of work if not more (Anthony et al., 2008).

Successful innovations, on the other hand create change in the marketplace and in society. Just think of innovatively disruptive companies such as Uber, Airbnb, Facebook, and many others. In fact, it can be said that innovation isn't about creating new products. Innovation is really about changing behavior (Iddris, 2016).

## **VI. ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

Organizational performance comprises the actual output (outcome) of an organization as measured against its intended (expected) outputs (objectives and goals). In general, organization performance includes the identification of outcomes that organization aims to achieve, also the plans to achieve those outcomes, and carrying out those goals and plans, then determining whether the measured outcomes were achieved or not (Ndabahaliye, 2013).

Anees (2013) stated that the conceptualization of organizational performance depends on the behavior and skills of employees to satisfy the customers. Many studies have been conducted on organizational performance and discussed its definitions from difference perspectives. Organizational performance has been defined by Oluseyi and Ayo (2009) as "the level of an organization's work achievement after having exerted effort by employees".

According to Chen (2012), organizational performance means the "transformation of inputs into outputs for achieving certain outcomes. With regard to its content, performance informs about the relation between minimal and effective cost (economy), between effective cost and realized output (efficiency) and between output and achieved outcome (effectiveness)". Abdullah (2014) argued that the administrative and organizational procedures is a basic measurement of organizational performance, where employees should focus on developing their performance in increase the performance of the organization. Abdullah (2014) suggested that evaluating organizational performance contributes to enhancing performance comprehensively and achieving the following benefits such as achieving organizational goals and objectives, ensure that all individuals understand what is expected of them, for example, skills and knowledge need by their organization, ensure effective communication throughout the organization, and linking the organization's goals, and strengthen individual-managers relationship, and encourage executives to build positive relationships with individuals on the basis of trust and empowerment.

## **VII. ELABORATING HYPOTHESES**

Many scholars in business and management fields have concluded transformational leadership, organizational culture, and organizational performance are correlated. The relationship between transformational leadership and

organizational performance has been examined in the past. Atif (2015) attempted to identify the impact of the transformational leadership on organizational performance in the banking sector. His study showed that transformational leadership dimensions (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration) are affecting organizational performance at the structural, technological and people level from the branches managers' perspective. Ehsan (2009) examined the effect of leadership styles on performance of employees and in general the overall performance of the organization. The result of his study revealed that transformational leadership has a strong impact on organizational performance and more effectiveness rather than transactional leadership. Based on the findings and results of previous studies, this study assumes that transformational leadership affects organizational performance in a direct correlation. Thus, the following hypothesis will be investigated.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Performance

The association between transformational leadership and organizational culture shows a lack of empirical evidence despite there are some studies who shows a strong connection between leadership style and the culture of organizations. Masood et al., (2006) investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture. The results from of this study showed some discrepancy between the hypothesized research model and the actual data. The hypothesis that transformational leaders prefer to work in culture has been supported by the data: 94.5 per cent of the transformational leaders showed a preference for a clan culture, whereas only 5.5 per cent showed a preference for a hierarchy–market culture. In the same context, Ragad (2010) have examined the nature of relationship between the powers of leadership on achieving organizational change in industrial organizations in Iraq. The result of his study showed a strong impact of leading people through transformational leadership style on the culture of organizations in this area of Iraq. While Ahmad & Muhammad (2013), study have examined the effect of transactional and transformational leadership approaches on the implementation of strategic objectives for organizations. The study concluded that the effect of transformational leadership approach was more than the effect of transactional leadership approach in implementation of strategic goals of the organizations. Accordingly, this study assumes that organizational culture affected by transformational leadership in a direct correlation. Thus, the following hypothesis will be examined.

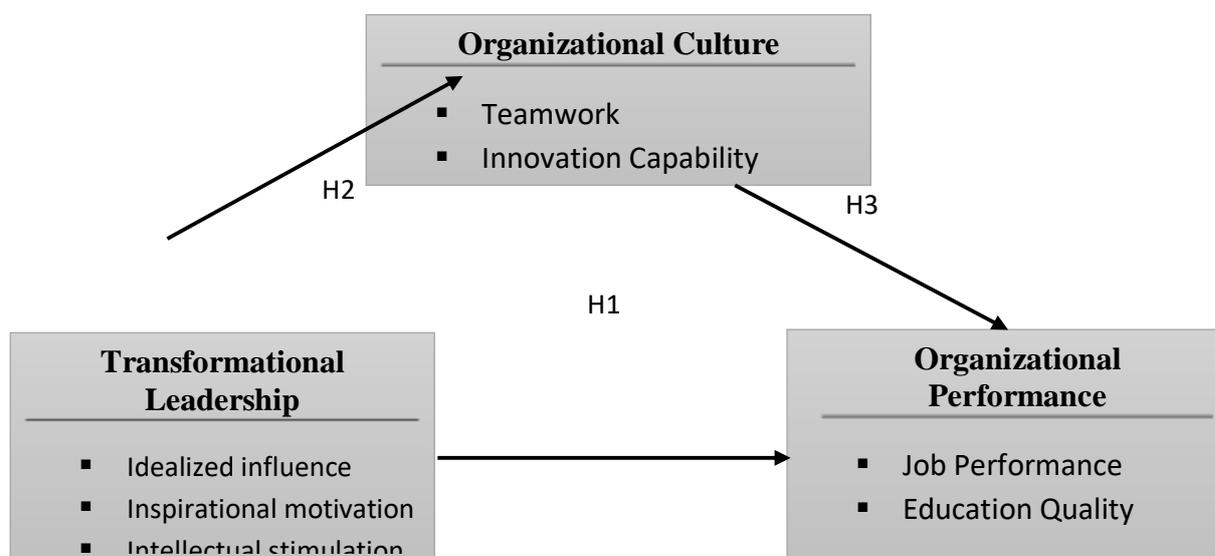
**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture

Finally, the influence of organizational culture towards organizational performance has been approved by several studies in the past. Mashal and Saima (2014) stated that organizational culture is one of the most important influences of performance. They examined organizational culture on organizational performance. The findings of their research indicated that all the dimension of organizational culture influence the different perspective of organizational performance. Moreover, Amin (2017) has provided empirical evidences on the association between organizational culture and organizational performance. The findings of his research indicated that organizational culture has a direct impact on organizational performance. While Tewodros (2016) suggested that the lack of effective organizational culture and poor cultural integration in the corporate group affect organizational performance significantly and decrease shareholders return. In the same context, Fatih (2018) investigated the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance using the methods of Denison's model to measure this relationship in a sample from different universities. He found that organizational cultural traits and

organizational performance are positively correlated and there is a significant linear relationship between them. In the same domain. Based on the findings and results of previous studies, this study assumes that organizational culture affects organizational performance in a direct correlation within higher education environment. Thus, the following hypothesis will be tested.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant relationship between Organizational Culture and Organizational Performance.

The review of literature reveals that organizational culture is one of the determinant of success in most industries including higher education institutions. But the influence of this variables has not been examined as moderator on the association between transformational leadership and organizational performance. There are limited studies shows the existence of theoretical relationships between these three variables: transformational leadership, organizational culture and organizational performance, in particular higher education environment also, this this study is the first attempt to provide empirical evidences on the moderation impact of organizational culture. The review of literatures shows that transformational leadership is measured through four factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, while organizational culture is measured through two factors: teamwork and innovation capability, and finally organizational performance is measured through two factors: job performance and education quality. The correlations between these three variables is examined through a conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.



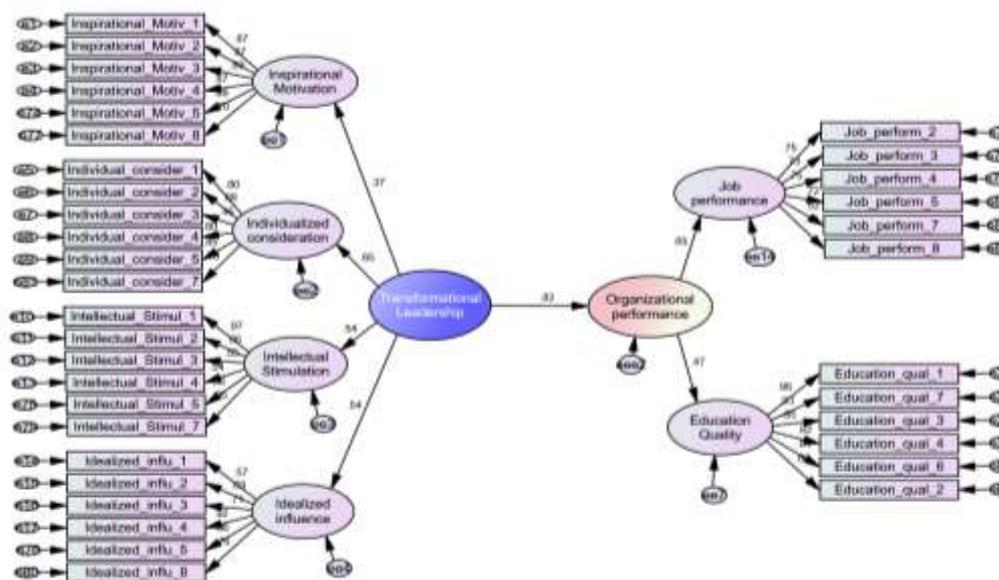
**Figure.1:** The conceptual Framework

## VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To test this hypothesis, the mediation analysis is conducted based on Baron and Kenny's (1986) theory for mediation analysis. According to this theory, to establish a mediation model, Equations 1, 2, and 3 should be below fulfilled. Where M is I the mediator variable (organizational culture), IV is the independent variable (transformational leadership), and DV is the dependent variable (organizational performance).

$M = i_1 + bIV + e_1$	Equation.1
$DV = i_2 + aIV + e_2$	Equation.2
$DV = i_3 + aIV + cM + e_3$	Equation.3

To test mediation, one should estimate the three regression equations (1, 2, and 3): first, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable; and third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. Figure.2 shows the relationship between independent variable (transformational leadership) and the dependent variable (organizational performance) before taking the effect of mediation through organizational culture.



**Figure.2:** The conceptual model before mediation effect of organizational culture

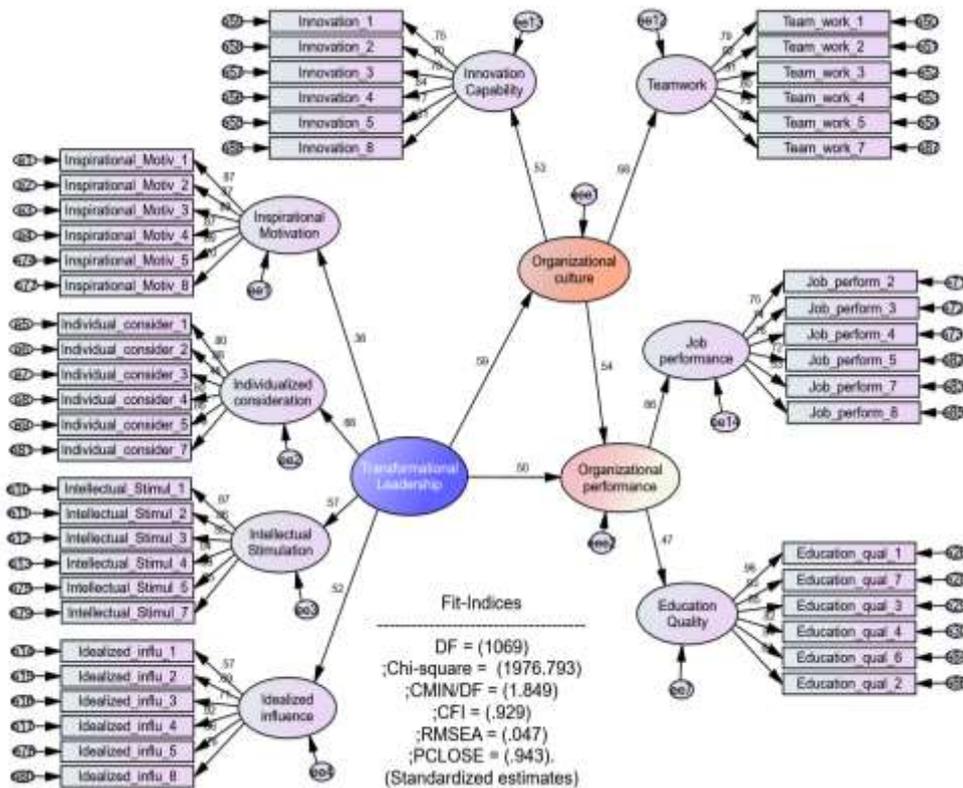
As shown in Figure 2, the standardized regression between transformational leadership and organizational performance = 0.820 before mediation effect, this regression is significant, CR = 5.155 ( $\geq 1.95$ ). Thus, Equation 2 is obtained.

To establish mediation model through the effect of organizational culture, the following conditions must hold: First, the independent variable (transformational leadership) must affect the mediator (organizational culture) as in the first equation 1; second condition, the independent variable (transformational leadership) must affect the dependent variable (organizational performance) as in the second equation 2, and third condition, the mediator must affect the dependent variable (organizational performance) with the existent effect of the IV (transformational leadership) as in the third equation 3 regardless if IV (transformational leadership) have a significant or non-significant relationship with the DV (organizational performance) (Baron and Kenny's, 1986). The result of equations 1, 2, and 3 are shown in Table.2.

**Table.2:** Output of mediation effect of organizational culture

IV	M	DV	A	a <sup>2</sup>	B	C
Transformational Leadership	Organizational culture	Organizational performance	0.820	0.496	0.538	0.585
			Sig.=0.000	Sig.=0.000	Sig.=0.000	Sig.=0.000

Reading the data in table.2 shows that the relationship between the independent variable (transformational leadership) and the dependent variable (organizational performance) before and after entering the effect of the mediator (organizational culture). It is evident that, the direct and causal effect of transformational leadership on organizational performance is decreased from 0.820 to 0.496 due to the mediation effect of organizational culture. Moreover, organizational culture plays a partial mediation role on the relationship transformational leadership and organizational performance as shown in Figure.3.



**Figure.3:** The conceptual model after mediation effect of organizational culture

Baron and Kenny advise that the strongest evidence of mediation exists when IV affect DV in a significant relationship as in Equation.2, but to this relationship turns non-significance after entering the mediator as in Equation.3. In the case of this study, the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance remained significant after organizational culture mediated this relationship. This is an evidence of “partial mediation.” It is found that when there is a significant “direct” effect of IV on DV in Equation 3, this can inform theorizing about added mediators of the IV- DV relationship. Second, there need not be a significant “effect to be mediated” in Equation.2. Finally, the result of mediation analysis reveals the organizational culture partially mediates the effect of transformational leadership towards organizational performance as shown in Figure.3.

## IX. CONCLUSIONS

The review of literature reveals that organizational culture is one of the determinant of success in most industries including higher education institutions. But the influence of this variables has not been examined as a mediator on the association between transformational leadership and organizational performance. There are limited studies shows the existence of theoretical relationships between these three variables: transformational leadership, organizational culture, and organizational performance, in particular higher education environment also, this study is the first attempt to provide empirical evidences on the moderation impact of organizational culture. The study examined the relationships between transformational leadership, organizational culture, and organizational performance. The results reveals significant correlations between transformational leadership, organizational culture, and organizational performance. In addition to that, organization culture plays a mediation role between transformational leadership and the performance of higher education institutions.

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