THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO ENHANCE STUDENT TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR APPLICATION-ORIENTED UNIVERSITIES IN SHANXI PROVINCE, CHINA

Mengyan Li
Matthew Reed Merritt
Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand

In this research, the primary purpose was to create a model for developing transformational leadership skills for application-oriented university students in Shanxi, China. The aim was to help college students smoothly enter society and have better career prospects. This study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods, conducting content analysis on ideal AOUs student transformational leadership skills, which include a sense of responsibility, self-dedication, vision, teamwork, innovation, problem-solving skills, communication, and listening. The results of the content analysis were validated by five experts. The study also collected 1,002 survey questionnaires from AOUs students in Shanxi, China. The study found that five leadership activities influenced the level of transformational leadership skills: participation in leadership workshops, students’ councils, student clubs, volunteer activities, and social practice activities. Additionally, the study highlighted the similarities between Chinese Confucian thought and Western transformational leadership theory. The four philosophical ideas of Confucianism were found to be applicable in understanding Western leadership theories and guiding students’ participation in related activities. The recommendations emphasize the prioritization of transformational leadership skills by stakeholders, recognizing their broad utility and crucial role in students’ future success.

Mengyan Li
Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Programs in Doctor of Philosophy in educational administration and leadership, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand
Research interests: pedagogy, educational methods, educational management
Email: lmy415@126.com

Matthew Reed Merritt
Ph.D. Instructor, School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand
Research interests: pedagogy, educational methods, educational management
Email: lmy415@126.com
Introduction

Over the past half-century, China's rise as a global economic superpower has led to intensified international trade competition, causing significant upheaval and challenges within Chinese society, particularly for university students seeking quality job opportunities (Zhong et al., 2020). This increased competition has potential implications for student unemployment rates. In response to these societal pressures, universities worldwide, including China, are integrating leadership education into their curricula. Such initiatives aim to equip students with essential leadership skills like communication, organization, coordination, and critical thinking to enhance their employability and broaden their job prospects (Zhang & Li, 2019; Cress et al., 2001).

The university years are recognized as a crucial period for molding students' values and cultivating their leadership potential, given the pivotal role this plays in fueling China's ongoing economic growth and maintaining its global competitiveness (Zhang & Li, 2019; Tao, 2014).

Cultivating leadership skills in students, even if not all become elites, helps them to be better in their professional and social roles (Jiang & Li, 2022).

Research objectives

There are four research objectives:
1. To determine the students’ ideal transformational leadership skills in AOUs China.
2. To determine students’ current transformational leadership skills level at AOUs in Shanxi Province, China.
3. To determine the significant leadership activities that affect the development of student level of transformational leadership skills at the three AOUs in Shanxi, China.
4. To develop a model for student transformational leadership skills for AOUs in Shanxi province, China.

Literature review

This study employs the theoretical basis of the study: (1) Bass & Avolio (1994) Transformational Leadership theories, (2) Astin (1984) Student Involvement Theories, and (3) Confucius (Late spring and Autumn period) Confucianism. These theories are used as a comprehensive theoretical foundation for shaping leadership development in the context of China's application-oriented higher education. These three theories provided a model, also built a stronger understanding of how AOUs students’ development go through.

The transformational leadership theory as the primary theoretical foundation in this study. Meanwhile, Ingleton (2013) stated that transformational leadership theory is an ideal theory for educational institutions, and it is crucial to be consistent with the contemporary social context.
Transformational leadership, which integrates moral and ethical thinking into leadership and argues that the theory of transformational leadership is well suited as a foundational theory for undergraduate leadership development programs.

In 1980s, transformational leadership has been a focal point in leadership research. First introduced by Downton (1973), the concept was extensively detailed by Burns (1978), who sought to connect leaders and followers by focusing on their common goals and understanding motivations. Burns (1978) distinguished leadership from power, underscoring the leader's role in meeting followers' needs. The theory is underpinned by four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence or charisma involves leaders inspiring passion and unity around a shared vision, thereby building confidence, trust, and respect among their followers while promoting ethical standards and prioritizing collective interests (Bono & Judge, 2004; Simic, 1998).

Transformational leaders exhibit selfless dedication and a strong sense of responsibility (Van Eeden et al., 2008). Trust and commitment to such leaders are crucial for successful organizational change (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Inspirational Motivation is about leaders instilling a compelling vision, creating positive expectations, and fostering a shared sense of purpose towards a common goal (Kelly, 2003; Stone et al., 2003). They foster team spirit and enhance teamwork through motivational speeches and public displays of optimism (Simic, 1998).

Intellectual Stimulation encourages followers to think critically, innovate, and problem-solve creatively (Barbuto, 2005). Leaders enhance their followers' cognitive abilities, fostering a culture of innovation and continuous learning (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Individualized Consideration involves leaders providing personalized support and guidance (Bass, 1985; Stone et al., 2014). They create a supportive and empathetic environment by actively listening to their followers' needs and concerns, serving as mentors, coaches, and advisors. Through effective communication, transformational leaders foster open dialogue and establish a climate of trust and mutual respect (Stone et al., 2014). In this study, application-oriented university student’s practice in terms of leadership skills were examined by Avolio & Bass (1994) four I’s.

Astin's student involvement theory emphasizes active engagement in learning, encompassing students' physical and psychological investment in academic experiences and activities (Astin, 1984). This theory supports 5 popular categories of university student leadership activities:

Leadership Workshops: according to Evans et al. (2002), leadership workshops are planned programs for developing university students' leadership skills. Students find these workshops beneficial, as they improve goal setting, clarify personal values, and enhance problem-solving, decision-making, and adaptability skills (Hilliard, 2010).

Student Councils: in China, student councils known as Xue Sheng Hui, serve as vital intermediaries between students and school organizations (Shi & Wan, 2008; Shao & Ma, 2020). They convey students' concerns to school departments, help disseminate university rules, and contribute to a shared campus culture (Zhang & Cao, 2018). Additionally, student councils foster students' communication, teamwork, and leadership skills, preparing them for success in society (Duan, 2018; Montelongo, 2002).
The Development of a Model to Enhance

Club Activities: in Chinese universities, student club activities known as She Tuan, unite students with shared interests, transcending academic boundaries (Li, 2016). These differ from student councils due to their spontaneous formation and flexible structure. Clubs emphasize teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills (Liu, 2018). They also promote innovation, positive thinking, and improved self-confidence (Xu, 2010).

Volunteer Activities: Volunteering is a vital avenue for university students to gain practical experience and foster social responsibility, driven by their passions (Wang, 2022). Engaging in community-based volunteer work encourages altruism, as it involves dedicating one's time without monetary compensation (Fitch, 1991). In the UK, programs like "Community Care Service" and "Family Assistance" address a range of societal issues, from supporting the elderly and individuals with disabilities to underprivileged children's education and environmental conservation (Zhan, 2017). Additionally, participation in community volunteer activities enhances leadership skills (Tao, 2014).

Overall, volunteering empowers students to contribute to their communities, develop social responsibility, and enhance leadership abilities while positively impacting society (Wang, 2022; Fitch, 1991; Zhan, 2017; Tao, 2014).

Social Practice Activities: in China, social practice activities encompass university credit internships and vacation internships (Yang, 2022). University credit internships integrate social practice into coursework, while vacation internships offer flexibility for skill acquisition (Ren, 2021). These activities help students engage with society, enhance their skills, and bridge the gap between academia and the workforce (Niu & Zhang, 2021).

Confucianism is the most representative school of thought in Chinese traditional culture (Shao, 2010; Xi, 2014). Over the course of two millennia, Confucianism has deeply permeated the Chinese consciousness, leaving a lasting impact (Bai, 2006).

It encompasses a broad range of subjects and fields, including philosophy and its profound wisdom (Wu, 1988). Confucian ideology extends to politics, nature, life, morality, history, education, art, economy, and military, establishing a comprehensive and intricate theoretical system that serves as a fundamental basis for subsequent developments in ideology and culture (Shao, 2010). Confucius advocated moral education as it aids in the establishment of appropriate values and the development of leadership skills in college students. Confucian teachings of harmonious relationships and cooperation contribute to beneficial behaviors and prepare students for societal integration (Cao, 2019).

Benevolence advocated by Confucius lies at the core of the moral system and represents the fundamental value of Confucianism (Zhang & Zhang, 2001). This concept originates from the Analects of Confucius, particularly from the passage of Yan Yuan. At its essence, benevolence embodies the fundamental meaning of love and care for others, which Confucius strongly emphasized.

However, Confucius also recognized that while benevolence is easy to comprehend in theory, it proves to be challenging for individuals to put it into practice consistently. Zhuang (2010) proposes that benevolence is a value that requires self-transcendence, suggesting that those who possess strength or resources should actively assist those in need (Zhuang, 2010). Moreover, the concept of benevolence (ren) in Confucian ethics bears resemblances to the ethics of caring discussed by Schneider (1975) and Victor & Cullen (1988).

These similarities highlight the universal significance of benevolence and its impact on ethical considerations across different philosophical perspectives.
Thus, benevolence, as the core value in Confucianism, exemplifies the importance of compassion and concern for others in the human experience. Confucius emphasized "Xiu Ji An Ren" in Confucianism, found in The Analects' Xianwen section. It involves self-cultivation to stabilize and positively influence others. "Xiu Ji" focuses on improving personal qualities, knowledge, moral, and abilities, serving as a fundamental idea for leaders and individuals. The ideal Confucian leader, a sage or gentleman (Junzi), embodies moral character (Lin et al., 2013). "An Ren" aspect of Xiu Ji An Ren creates peace and happiness in others, requiring virtue and ability. Self-cultivation fosters an invisible connection, mutually reinforcing well-being.

Confucianism stresses the equal importance of learning and thinking (Xue Si Bing Zhong), considering both crucial. Confucius warned against learning without thinking leads to confusion, and thinking without learning is perilous (Qiu, 2008). Active thinking and understanding are essential for effectively applying knowledge. 'Xue' represents learning knowledge and wisdom is inseparable from profound thinking. 'Si' involves perceptive and independent thinking during learning, and reflection and introspection for self-improvement (Yu & Sun, 2019).

Xun Zi's proposition of "Qun Ju He Yi" emphasizes harmony in social interactions. The term "Qun" refers to the gathering of similar things and forming a group. The pre-Qin Confucian idea highlights that humans are inherently social beings and cannot exist in isolation. Xun Zi stresses the importance of coexisting harmoniously, enhancing teamwork, and recognizing unity as strength in overcoming challenges. Fan (2010) argues that this concept involves a social division of labor, with leaders and followers cooperating to foster common moral emotions and promote group harmony.

**Conceptual framework**

This study aims to develop a model to enhance students' transformational leadership skills at Shanxi application-oriented universities. The study reviewed and analyzed three theories supporting the study (Fig. 1).

By integrating relevant high-quality literature including books, research, articles, journals, and online publications, researchers use systematic literature review to summarize the factors that affect the development of students' transformational leadership skills from the perspective of leadership activities. The independent variable is students' participation in leadership-related activities. The dependent variable is the level of transformational leadership skill.

**Method & procedure**

This study involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including systematic literature review, interviews, questionnaires, and data analysis via SPSS.

(1) Objective One leveraged systematic literature reviews and semi-structured interviews for six experts to meet its research objective. Data was derived from Chinese policies, academic literature, and expert interviews. By integrating varied data and expert perspectives, the study achieved a thorough understanding of the topic and reinforced the validity of its findings.
(2) The data sourced for Objective Two was the questionnaire surveys on the three sample AOUs students. The sample for this study consisted of first year to fourth-year students from three pilot’s application-oriented universities in Shanxi Province, totaled a student population of 41,025 for the 2023 academic year. Considering feasibility, a sample size was decided using the Krejcie & Morgan table (1970), resulting in 387 students from A university, 368 from B university, and 377 from C university.

(3) Objective Three applied systematic literature reviews, questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews. Among 39 articles related to leadership activities, five factors were found related to leadership skills. Then through 1,002 surveys they used multiple linear regression to measure the relationship between 5 types of leadership activities and levels of transformational leadership skills.

(4) The research for Objective Four developed a model for AOUs students to consider Confucianism ideals in China and chose 76 relevant related Confucianism articles.
On the basis of the findings from objective one, two, three and four, this study developed a model for the development of student transformational leadership skills for application-oriented universities in Shanxi province, China.

Then, the model was validated by seven experts from higher education institutions in Shanxi Province, China, with specialized knowledge in leadership training. Validation methods followed Hillston's (2003) recommendations, which include expert intuition, systems measurement, and theoretical analysis.

Findings

The main findings and conclusions were detailed in the following section meeting with each research objective.

Research objective One

To determine the students’ ideal transformational leadership skills in AOUs. The results from the literature review and the interviews shared similarities about the importance of the skills for AOU students, including communication, selfless dedication, innovation, problem-solving skills, vision, teamwork and sense of responsibility.

![Figure 2 - Summary of ideal transformational leadership skills needed for AOU students](compiled by co-authors)

Research objective Two

To investigate AOU students’ current transformational leadership skill levels in Shanxi Province, China. A survey with 30 items across eight domains, including sense of responsibility, self-dedication, visionary, teamwork, innovation, problem-solving, communication, and listening, was used to investigate AOU students' transformational leadership skill levels in Shanxi Province, China.

The survey was distributed to 1,120 students in three AOUs, and 1,002 respondents with an 89.5% response rate answered questions using a five-point Likert-type scale. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to determine the levels of student transformational leadership skills in the three target AOUs.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO ENHANCE

To interpret levels of students' transformational leadership skills among the domains, the average mean scores were compared and ranked in descending order. As a result, the ranks of each dimension level from high to low were (1) listening, (2) a sense of responsibility, (3) vision, (4) teamwork, (5) problem-solving, (6) self-dedication, (7) communication, and (8) innovation.

The students’ highest level was listening skill (Mean=3.931, S.D.=.872) while the lowest one was innovation skill (Mean = 2.789, S.D.= 1.25). Detail of the ranking of the students’ transformational leadership skill levels was presented by Tab. 1.

Table 3 - Ranking of students’ transformational leadership skill levels
(compiled by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3.931</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of responsibility</td>
<td>3.868</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>3.865</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>3.838</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>3.824</td>
<td>0.804</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-dedication</td>
<td>3.756</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.543</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>2.789</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.677</td>
<td>0.551</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=1,002

**Research objective three**

To determine the significant leadership activities that affect the development of student level of transformational leadership skills at the three AOU's in Shanxi, China.

The literature review primarily focused on journal papers related to leadership activities. These 5 dimensions with 7 items were identified for the second part of the survey. This section mainly presents the frequency of joining leadership activities for AOU students in Shanxi. All the data obtained from 1,002 valid survey responses were analyzed by employing descriptive, correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

Table 2 - AOU students' frequency of joining leadership activities
(compiled by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Activities</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership workshops</td>
<td>Leadership development programs</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership skills training programs</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student council</td>
<td>Student council</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club activities</td>
<td>Cultural club</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports club</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer activities</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social practice activities</td>
<td>Vacation internships</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student frequency of joined leadership skills training programs highest mean was item 2 about leadership workshop (Mean= 2.45, S.D.=0.84). The lowest mean was item volunteer activities (Mean= 1.98, S.D. = 0.94).

Besides, the correlation between students’ frequency of joining leadership activities and the transformational leadership skill levels were tested to ensure the variables used in calculating the regression were valid to be included in the analysis (see Table 20). the correlation coefficients of all variables are greater than 0, indicating a significant positive correlation.

There is a significant correlation between the independent variable (leadership workshops, student council, club activities, volunteer activities, social practice, and total activities) and dependent variable (a sense of responsibility, self-dedication, visionary, teamwork, innovation, problem-solving, communication, listening and level of transformational leadership skills).

Table 3 - Correlation between the transformation leadership skills and leadership activities
(derived by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Activities</th>
<th>A sense of responsibility</th>
<th>Self-dedication</th>
<th>Visionary</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Problem-solving</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>TLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Workshops</td>
<td>0.300**</td>
<td>0.352**</td>
<td>0.332**</td>
<td>0.356**</td>
<td>0.213**</td>
<td>0.336**</td>
<td>0.485**</td>
<td>0.347**</td>
<td>0.531**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Council</td>
<td>0.346**</td>
<td>0.379**</td>
<td>0.335**</td>
<td>0.364**</td>
<td>0.276**</td>
<td>0.380**</td>
<td>0.547**</td>
<td>0.368**</td>
<td>0.588**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Activities</td>
<td>0.320**</td>
<td>0.398**</td>
<td>0.334**</td>
<td>0.385**</td>
<td>0.243**</td>
<td>0.366**</td>
<td>0.481**</td>
<td>0.330**</td>
<td>0.560**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Activities</td>
<td>0.331**</td>
<td>0.349**</td>
<td>0.350**</td>
<td>0.367**</td>
<td>0.235**</td>
<td>0.355**</td>
<td>0.541**</td>
<td>0.329**</td>
<td>0.558**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Practice</td>
<td>0.278**</td>
<td>0.373**</td>
<td>0.314**</td>
<td>0.350**</td>
<td>0.232**</td>
<td>0.363**</td>
<td>0.498**</td>
<td>0.317**</td>
<td>0.533**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>0.421**</td>
<td>0.496**</td>
<td>0.446**</td>
<td>0.487**</td>
<td>0.323**</td>
<td>0.484**</td>
<td>0.687**</td>
<td>0.453**</td>
<td>0.743**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), TLS is transformational leadership skill. LA is leadership activities.

This part employed multiple linear regression analysis tested that there is a relationship between leadership activities and transformational leadership skills that the dependent variable is the levels of transformational leadership skills; the independent variables are the leadership activities.

Table 4 - Factors affecting student transformational leadership in Shanxi province, China:
a multiple regression analysis
(derived by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.744*</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>0.36877</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), social practice activities, volunteer activities, club activities, leadership workshops, student council
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO ENHANCE ANOVA

ANOVA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F Value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>168.241</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.648</td>
<td>247.424</td>
<td>0.000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>135.450</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>303.692</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Level of Transformational Leadership Skills
b. Predictors: (Constant), social practice activities, volunteer activities, club activities, leadership workshops, student council

Note: Sig is significance.

Coefficients*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.(p)</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta(β)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td>VIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>2.384</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Workshop</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>6.853</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>1.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Council</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>5.856</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.476</td>
<td>2.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Activities</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>6.878</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>1.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Activities</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>8.259</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.647</td>
<td>1.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Practice Activities</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>9.021</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.729</td>
<td>1.371</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: total level of transformational leadership skills

As can be inferred from Tables, firstly, a significant powerful predictive linear relationship between the DV and the IVs. R= .744. F (5, 996) = 247.424, p < .001. The coefficient of determination obtained indicates that the IVs account for 54.4% of the variance of the DV, R Square = .544.

Secondly, as shown the coefficients table the "B" cells, the estimated regression equation for this objective is the total level of transformational leadership skills = 2.384 + 0.122*Leadership Workshop + 0.092*Student Council + 0.144*Club Activities + 0.127*Volunteer Activities + 0.108*Social Practice Activities.

Thirdly, show 'Beta(β)' and 'Sig. (p)' cells: β=.180, p=.000 <.05, leadership workshop have a significant relationship with total level transformational leadership skills; β=.180, p=.000 <.05, and student council have a significant relationship with total level transformational leadership skills; β=.201, p=.000 <.05; club activities have a significant relationship with total level transformational leadership skills; β=.217, p=.000 <.05, volunteer activities have a significant relationship with total level transformational leadership skills; β=.224, p=.000 <.05., Social practice activities have a significant relationship with total level transformational leadership skills; Comparison β of five independent variables, the social practice activities have a stronger significant relationship with total transformational leadership skills.

Finally, observed collinearity statistics' Tolerance' and 'VIF' cells are reciprocal relations; when tolerance (tolerance) < = 0.1, the multicollinearity between independent variables is serious. When the VIF value is less than 10, there is no multicollinearity.
problem. Considering that the tolerance of the results is much larger than 0.1 and the VIF is close to 2, there is no multicollinearity.

In summary, from the multiple regression analysis finding, the leadership workshops, student council, club activities, volunteer activities, and social practice activities were essential elements significant that affect the development of student transformational leadership skill. Comparison β of five independent variables, ranking higher to low influence they are the social practice activities, volunteer activities, club activities, student council and leadership workshop.

A focus group with 24 students from three AOUs aimed to identify practical elements for a detailed leadership list, providing an authentic student voice. The focus group discussions were divided into three groups: Group 1 (A), Group 2 (B), and Group 3 (C), each consisting of eight students. Content analysis was used for data analysis of this objective.

Table 5 – Specific Leadership activities generated from focus-group interviews (compiled by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Club Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Campus festivals of culture art activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Psychology workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Running race activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Workshops</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Leadership training program- elective course of entrepreneurial innovation leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Leadership development programs - Movers programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Council</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Student council assistant work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Publicity department work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Student council Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Practice Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Vacation internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) China college student’s innovation and entrepreneurship competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Community volunteer activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Learning from Lei Feng volunteer activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed in Tab. 7, students' perspectives collected from focus-group interviews were organized into five themes, namely club activities, leadership workshops, student council, social practice activities, and volunteer activities.

**Research objective Four**

Since this study was developed in the Chinese context, considering Confucianism as a traditional Chinese culture, implicitly influences the values of the Chinese people, and through the literature, this study identified four Confucian concepts that are similar to the 4I's theory of Transformational Leadership, which can help the university students to be better guided when participating in the practical activities.

Specifically, firstly, according to Confucianism, "Xiu Ji An Ren" (Stabilizing others with self-cultivation) advocates for people to elevate their own moral level. This concept naturally aligns with the idealized influence of transformational leadership theory, both emphasizing the importance of personal moral cultivation and character.
In Confucian thought, moral cultivation is considered a lifelong pursuit. It is related not only to personal growth but also to the positive impact on others. Meanwhile, today's educational system, especially college life, encourages individuals to focus on their own moral cultivation.

The idealized influence aspect of transformational leadership theory shares many similarities with Confucianism's moral education philosophy. Both stress enhancing the overall positive effect by elevating individual moral standards. The focus on moral cultivation in Confucianism and the idealized influence in transformational leadership theory are consistent in many ways, highlighting the significant role of individual moral levels in the broader society.

Confucianism's concept of "Qun Ju He Yi" (Harmony during socialization) emphasizes the necessity of harmony between people, as no one can survive independently of society. This idea, also reflected in Xunzi's belief in cooperative living and the limitations of individual strength, corresponds with transformational leadership's focus on cooperation.

For students, adopting the Confucian principle of harmonious coexistence means learning to work better with others, listening, and communicating, thereby creating a harmonious environment. This alignment between ancient philosophy and modern leadership theory illustrates the timeless importance of teamwork and cooperation.

Confucianism's concept of "Xue Si Bing Zhong" emphasizes continuous innovation and creativity through thinking and learning, corresponding with transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation. Therefore, university students should integrate the study and reflection of Confucian concepts in their practical activities to help foster continuous improvement. This connection between ancient wisdom and modern leadership theory provides a rich framework for enhancing individual problem-solving abilities and overall personal growth.

Finally, the Ren Ai (Benevolence), one of the core ideals of Confucianism, promoted empathy through communication and listening in interpersonal relations. It is similar to the dimension of individualized consideration of transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes helping and caring for their followers, listening to their needs, communicating effectively with them, and accompanying empathy.

Table 8 - Relationship between transformational leadership theory and Confucianism
(Compiled by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational leadership theory</th>
<th>Confucianism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Influence</td>
<td>Stabilizing others with self-cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation</td>
<td>“Qun Ju He Yi”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harmony during socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually Stimulating</td>
<td>“Xue Si Bing Zhong”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pay equal attention to learning and thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Consideration</td>
<td>“Ren Ai”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final proposed model

Interpretation and implications of the model

This model has three parts; the first is AOU's students' ideal stated transformational leadership skills are eight skills in the middle circle. The second part has five main factors and 12 specific activities. The third part has four ideals of Confucianism.

Transformational leadership skills needed for AOU's students
This part offers eight skills for student transformational leadership: sense of responsibility, selfless dedication, vision, teamwork, listening skills, communication, innovation, and problem-solving skills.

Sense of responsibility
A sense of responsibility is a subjective consciousness. It is the spirit of positive and beneficial effects of individuals on themselves, others, society, and the country. The sense of responsibility plays a significant role in the development of the individual and prompts the individual to make significant contributions to society.

Selfless dedication
The spirit of dedication can be summarized as a persistent belief that helps students pursue faith. It is an individual who contributes his time, energy, and talent to help others and
serve society voluntarily without seeking any reward. It is the spirit of promoting national development and progress.

**Visionary**
Students of AOUs need to have a vision of local economic needs and development plans and use this information to formulate life goals and plan future careers.

**Teamwork**
Teamwork, a kind of soft skill for students, is critical. Training this skill can stimulate students’ personal potential and cooperation with others, amplify energy, and achieve tremendous success.

**Innovation**
Innovation is a thinking activity with pioneering significance, which is beneficial for developing human cognitive fields and creating new achievements in human cognition. Being willing to create, daring to create, and being good at creating are new requirements for students in the new era.

**Problem-Solving Skill**
Problem-solving skills – a bridge built between school and work – are essential for a person's survival and development. Students who have studied and been trained can help their personal career development at work. The problem-solving skill of AOU students was indispensable when they successfully entered the "workplace" from "campus." This ability was a lifelong benefit.

**Communication**
Communication skill has become an essential manifestation of their comprehensive quality. Mastering communication skills can help AOU students develop their personal self-awareness and improvement and their relationships with family members, colleagues in the units, and other people in society.

**Listening**
Listening is a meaningful way to transmit positive energy in higher education, which is conducive to improving the quality of students. Therefore, it helps AOU students correct their wrong thoughts, rebuild their inner world, and build harmonious relationships with teachers, family members, and friends. Listening is the most effective communication skill, which improves students’ communication skills but also helps them to enhance humility and empathy.

**The leadership activities**
This part has five pathways to developing student transformational leadership skills.

**Leadership workshop**
A leadership workshop is an effective way to cultivate transformational leadership skills.
In Shanxi AOU's, this study recommends university students participate in two types of activities: leadership program development and leadership training courses, for example, the Mover program, elective courses-entrepreneurial innovation leadership, etc.

**Student council**

Student council is an essential and effective leadership activity in AOU's. It is a platform for university students to self-develop and assist the school in solving problems students encounter in their studies and life. It is conducive to cultivating their transformational leadership skills to prepare for entering society, for example, the student council assistant, publicity department, and, as chairman of student council.

**Club activities**

Clubs’ activities, such as “She Tuan” at China University, influence student transformational leadership skills in AOU. Campus festivals of culture art activities, psychology workshops, and running race activities are popular and helpful in developing student transformational leadership skills.

**Volunteer activities**

Volunteer activities are types of leadership activities that have been encouraged as a meaningful way to develop student transformational leadership skills. For example, community volunteer activities and learning from Lei Feng volunteer activities are favored by AOU students.

**Social practice activities**

Social practice activities have substantial educational and social values and can help students be out of the classroom to understand society. Vacation internships and China college student innovation and entrepreneurship competitions are popular among student activities.

**Confucianism ideals**

In this part, the literature review found that Confucianism has gone through thousands of years and has a substantial foundation. Its following features are essential in establishing values and guiding students' behaviors; Stabilizing others with self-cultivation (Xiu Ji An Ren), developed by Kongzi. This ideal focuses on individual morality and paying attention to morality will be reflected in their practices and positively impact others. The Qun Ju He Yi, developed by Xunzi, emphasizes that no one can survive independently of society and harmony, teamwork between people is necessary, people need to respect each other, live in harmony, and jointly create a harmonious and happy living atmosphere.

The Kongzi proposed the “Si Xue Bing Zhong”, emphasized that thinking and learning are equally critical. It can make individuals innovate continuously, improve creativity, and improve the ability to solve problems. Benevolence (Ren Ai), one of the core ideals of Confucianism proposed by Kongzi, promotes communication and listening through empathy in interpersonal relations.

Therefore, students can continuously improve their transformational leadership skills by learning Confucian ideas and practicing the connotation of Confucianism.
Conclusions

This model aims to develop students with transformational leadership skills, foster personal growth, and make valuable contributions to society's evolving needs.

Firstly, the findings reveal a ranking of the current transformational leadership skills among AOU's students in Shanxi Province, China, topping the list is the skill of listening, underscoring the importance of empathetic understanding and attentiveness to the perspectives and concerns of others. Innovation is ranked eighth, and students score the lowest regarding innovation ability. As a result, AOU's students must focus on enhancing their innovation skills. To achieve this, emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' creative thinking.

Secondly, finding leadership activities and their respective influence on the development level of transformational leadership skills can be ranked from higher to lower as follows: social practice activities, volunteer activities, club activities, student council, and leadership workshops. Meanwhile, through students focus group interview the particular activities included club activities (campus festivals of culture art, psychology workshop, and running race activities); leadership workshops (leadership development programs-Mover program and an elective courses-entrepreneurial innovation leadership); student council (the department of student council assistant, publicity department, and as chairman of the student council); social practice activities (vacation internships, China college student’s innovation and entrepreneurship competition); and volunteer activities (learning from Lei Feng volunteer activities and the community volunteer activity). This study encourages Shanxi application-oriented university students to participate more in the activities mentioned above, in particular, encouraged to participate in type of social practice activities.

Finally, considering China context, the Confucianism ideal as Chinese traditional culture influence Chinese, also, this study finding Transformational leadership theory 4 components Confucian: Xiu Ji An Ren, Qun Ju He Yi, Xue Si Bing Zhong, and Ren Aisome part can assist AOU's student development individual leadership activities, for example, Xiu Ji An Ren, Qun Ju He Yi, Xue Si Bing Zhong, and Ren Ai. Thus, the model proposed the four Confucian ideals to promote transformational leadership skills for Shanxi AOU students in China.

Discussion and recommendations

This study synthesizes previous views, suggesting that leadership transcends merely a position of authority, embodying a positive impact that reflects an individual's multifaceted skills and characteristics (Maxwell, 2011; Xi, 2012). Aligning with Ingleton's assertion in 2013, it identifies transformational leadership theory as an ideal leadership training framework for educational institutions, specifically emphasizing its alignment with contemporary social contexts.
Furthermore, after a review of research by various scholars, the study highlights the importance of establishing a leadership model imbued with Chinese characteristics, recognizing it as a necessary evolution in the field (Tao, 2014; Zhang, 2021).

In higher education, student leadership development necessitates support from various sources like policy, campus, administrators, teachers, and students. This study offers recommendations in these areas to foster leadership growth.

For Government Education Departments in Shanxi Province: cultivating transformational leadership skills in AOU students is crucial in the challenging job market. Recommendations include defining department roles, supporting competent personnel teams, ensuring funding for practical activities, improving facilities, and standardizing evaluation methods. These steps will prepare students to be influential leaders in their communities.

For AOU's in Shanxi Province: nurturing transformational leadership skills in AOU requires strategic alignment of internal and external resources. Internally, fostering a school-wide educational atmosphere and integrating leadership courses, including psychology, can enhance leadership quality. Externally, collaboration with communities, industries, and overseas partners creates opportunities for student engagement and leadership development, benefiting universities, students, and stakeholders.

For Teachers: to cultivate students' transformational leadership skills, teachers should shift from traditional roles to facilitators guiding self-development, social participation, and the pursuit of meaning in life. Counselors and professional teachers play key roles, with counselors guiding leadership skills and professional teachers integrating these skills into their practices. This shift empowers students to positively impact their lives, careers, and society.

For Students: in the competitive job market, students should actively cultivate transformational leadership skills within and outside their educational environment. Engaging in leadership workshops, student councils, clubs, volunteer activities, and social practice activities contributes to personal growth and leadership enhancement.

**Limitations**

This study has limitations, including a small sample size from three AOU's in Shanxi, China, which may limit generalizability. Future research should use a larger and more diverse sample. Another limitation is the evaluation tools used; further investigation is needed to validate their structure and adaptability in cross-cultural contexts, considering differences in hierarchical authority, philosophical foundations, and language nuances.

While incorporating Confucian moral education is innovative, its applicability in other cultural contexts should be explored. Future research should address these limitations, such as expanding the sample and validating tools, to enhance the findings' robustness and reliability.

**References:**


THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO ENHANCE


THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO ENHANCE


*Paper submitted*  23 September 2023  
*Paper accepted for publishing*  08 November 2023  
*Paper published online*  30 November 2023