Teachers as Leaders: Probing into the Class Routines of Selected Iranian ELT Contexts

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Abstract
In the absence of studies on leadership skills of English language instructors, this enquiry explored transformational leadership skills of ten English teachers in the contexts of five private language institutes in Tehran. Purposive sampling was adopted to choose ten experienced male and female teachers, holding an academic degree in English, teaching intermediate level students in five English language teaching centers. Data was collected through classroom observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews. The framework for transformational leadership offered by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) was utilized. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that our participants represented the majority of behavioral indicators of transformational leadership skills- including indicators of charisma, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation- in their classroom practice.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership Skills, Charisma, Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration, ELT, Gender, Iranian Teachers

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Introduction

Among various theories of leadership, transformational leadership has been applied into the educational contexts due to its emphasis on the interrelation between leaders and followers; in such contexts, the term transformational leadership is used interchangeably with teacher leadership. Teacher leadership has emerged in educational literature within the last three decades (Chui, Sharp, & McCormick, 1996). The concept was first employed to refer to teachers as leaders within their school organizational hierarchy or teachers as curriculum developers and team leaders (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). More recently, however, Pounder (2006) uncovered another aspect of teacher leadership, stressing the leadership skills of teachers inside the classroom and placing more emphasis on the pedagogical excellence of teachers who teach effectively.

A careful review of research reveals that explorations into the educators’ leadership skills have been, mainly, grounded in the context of general teaching and have not been reflected in ELT practices globally. To our knowledge, in English Language Teaching (ELT) context, there is only one study, namely Khany and Ghoreyshi (2013), which examines the relationship among English teachers’ classroom management, reflective thinking and transformational leadership style, utilizing a quantitative type of design. In addition to the dearth of studies on ELT teacher leadership, another concern which justifies further research on the issue is that the existing research, notably conducted in general education locations, inclusively favors quantitative research designs. As also acknowledged by Balwant (2016), this literature predominantly, pays head to inspecting the relationship, if any, among university professors’ transformational leadership and students’ motivation, their educational outcome and their satisfaction with the course. Accordingly, qualitative explorations of how teachers’ leadership skills are realized and represented in the English language teaching contexts have yet to be substantively included in the literature. Another concern is that research in areas related to teacher gender is in short supply to document how teacher leadership skills are portrayed in classes of instructors with different genders. To probe into aspects of such less-addressed concerns, the present study was conducted to inspect how teacher leadership is realized in classes of ELT instructors of different genders teaching in varied language institutes. More simply, this exploration aimed at elucidating the behavioral indicators of teacher leadership in the contexts of concern.

By scrutinizing ELT teachers’ transformational leadership skills, this study can provide a new insight into the communicative dimension of ELT classrooms. More specifically, through raising teachers' awareness of these skills, this exploration can enhance the quality
interactions among class members. As stated by Bolkan and Goodboy (2009), one of the resources at teachers’ disposal which can help them widen their potential in the classroom comes from the literature on leadership. According to them, appreciation of leadership competence can provide teachers with a wide range of appropriate communication skills which can boost the quality of their interaction with the students. As stated earlier, the enhanced quality interactions among class members will further encourage students’ learning, foster their positive attitude towards class life, and facilitate teachers' realization of students’ personal and educational goals. Obviously, all these benefits will further, contribute to creating a positive classroom environment conducive to effective class management and effective teaching, eventually. All these positive ramifications of quality communication can be obtained in both general teaching contexts as well as the language classrooms. What adds to the beneficiary of enhancing teacher leadership in the language teaching contexts might be the higher emphasis which needs to be placed on promoting learner participation in class discussion or giving them individual feedback as two indicators of teacher leadership. Finally, since elucidating the behavioral indicators of teacher leadership is among the neglected areas in the literature of ELT, the present study can provide ideas for and raise awareness of the ELT teacher preparation community in other parts of the world on the necessity of giving more priority to probing into this overlooked side of teaching. Additionally, as the issue of teacher leadership is of global significance, findings of the present study are likely to be applicable for ELT teacher training programs in other countries, the consequence of which would be enhanced professional development of English language teachers- the goal for teacher preparation programs addressed by all figures exploring the issue throughout the world (e.g., Breen, 2006; Weng, Zhu, & Kim, 2019; Zohdijalal & Mohammadi, 2021).

**Literature Review**

Burns (1978) first introduced transformational leadership to characterize the most successful political leaders. Bass (1985, 1990) and Bass and Riggio (2006) applied the concept to the organizational context, introducing four components for it: a) charisma or idealized influence which deals with the extent to which leaders can be role models for their followers by demonstrating high moral and ethical conduct; b) inspirational motivation which refers to how much leaders can inspire their followers by optimism and enthusiasm; c) intellectual stimulation which shows how leaders encourage their followers to be creative and discover new ways of thinking by reframing problems and questioning assumptions; and d) finally individual consideration which recognizes individual differences in terms of needs and desires.
Later research (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011) tended to combine the two leadership components of charisma and inspirational motivation.

Within the educational literature, Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) operationalized features of educational transformational leaders introduced above. More specifically, they presented the main behavioral indicators for the themes of charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. According to them, charisma includes the indicators of confirmation, enthusiasm, humor, caring, availability, content relevance, verbal immediacy, homophily, treating students as equals, and self-disclosure. Intellectual stimulation is realized through promoting participation, interactive teaching style, challenging students, independent thought, humor, and content relevance. Finally, individual consideration is actualized through availability, individual feedback, verbal immediacy, personalized content, conveying interest, special consideration, and remembering students’ history.

Bolkan and Goodboy’s (2011) characterization of transformational leadership seems to dominate the recent discourse surrounding the concept in the educational sphere. Balwant, Birdi, Stephan, and Topakas (2018), for instance, define transformational instructor-leadership as an instructor “who guides students towards a [course’s] learning objectives, stimulates students intellectually and pays attention to the differences between students” (p. 2). Other educational researchers had already enumerated characteristics of transformational teachers. Pounder (2003) highlighted three notions: a) integrity, which indicates to what extent leaders' actions and beliefs are congruent; b) innovation, which refers to the extent to which the leader encourages followers to experiment with new ideas; and c) finally impression management, which shows how much the leader cares for the subordinates and their needs.

The heightened interest in transformational leadership in varied contexts, along with the positive ramifications of it in distinct settings have urged educational scholars to consider its possible positive impacts on the classroom contexts (e.g., Bowman, 2004; Hoover, 1991; Marzano & Waters, 2005; Treslan, 2006; White, Pearson, & Hendricks, 2017). As a consequence, the last three decades have been marked with the initiation of applying transformational leadership to the educational contexts. For instance, Harvey and Royal (2003), Pounder (2008), Tsai and Lin (2012), Ponder, Stoffell, and Choi (2018), and Balwant et al. (2018) detected a positive relationship between instructor transformational leadership skills and students’ class involvement, satisfaction with the course, and teacher effectiveness. Correspondingly, with reference to the university contexts, the existing publications (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009, 2011; Harvey et al., 2003; Pounder, 2003, 2008; Walumbwa, Wu, & Ojode, 2004), collectively demonstrate that professors’ transformational leadership skills
can lead to students’ satisfaction with the course, their appreciation of their instructors' conduct, advancing their learning outcomes, and developing their ability to think critically. With a broader focus, Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) unearthed that teachers’ transformational skills related strongly to students' cognitive and affective learning, their motivation and communication satisfaction, participation and their perception of teacher credibility. By the same token, within the context of physical education, Wilson et al. (2012) and Castillo, Molina-Garcia, Estevan, Queralt, and Álvarez (2020) broadcasted a positive association between transformational teaching and students' self-determined motivation, affective response, self-efficacy, intention to engage in the subject matter in leisure time, as well as their intention to continue their subject matter in future.

As the preceding section illustrates, the literature of teacher leadership is still in its infancy. Hence, many areas are missing, including how transformational leadership skills can be realized in ELT classes of various genders, which was pursued in this study. Since the behavioral indicators of teachers' transformational leadership exemplified in Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) could provide us with the richest information on the issue, we considered it as the guiding framework of our study.

Method

This section gives a detailed account of the method we used to reveal the transformational leadership skills of Iranian English teachers.

Participants

We utilized purposive recruitment (‘sampling;’ Ary, Jacob & Razavieh, 1990) to choose 10 ELT teachers, five male and five female, with an academic degree (BA or MA) in English (Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Literature or Translation Studies), teaching general English courses to students at five private language institutes in Tehran. Experienced teachers- namely, those with approximately five years of experience (Gatbonton, 1999)- were selected, since, as stated by Fuller and Brown (1999), those in the early stages of their teaching experience seem to be more concerned about controlling their class and the content of their instruction and, consequently, their class might not provide the sufficient level of interaction we needed for extracting their transformational leadership skills. The same reasoning was applied for the students’ level of language proficiency. Intermediate level classes were selected since we thought they were more likely to include the most instances of interactions between teachers and students. At the beginner levels, as mentioned by Brown
(2007), the classes are more teacher-centered and teacher-controlled; students struggle to communicate in second language; and the level of interaction is limited to the students’ pair work and group work using a very basic language.

**Data Collection**

We used class observation, field notes and interviews to collect data. First, one of the authors observed five sessions of each teacher’s class, for a total of 75 hours. We did not observe the beginning sessions of the terms since we thought our teachers might not have familiarity with the students then, a prerequisite for behaving as a transformational leader. While observing the class sessions, the researcher took detailed field notes, writing all the aspects of the teachers’ behavior that could be categorized as a component of transformational leadership based on the behavioral indicators reported by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011). In order not to miss any important point, the class sessions were audio-recorded, so that we could listen to them more carefully later and to extract episodes representing teachers’ transformational leadership skills unnoticed during class observations. Finally, to make sure of the trustworthiness of our interpretations of teachers' leadership skills, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers once we observe d the whole five sessions. The language of the interviews was selected by the participants. They were conducted in institute managers’ office, in teachers’ classes or teachers’ room. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded. Throughout the interview sessions, we asked interviewees to interpret selected class events. In other words, they were required to explain about the reasons behind their actions in episodes of their class we had selected for their actualization of teachers' transformational leadership. Finally, all data were transcribed and organized into Word files. Overall, transcripts of classroom recordings, observation field notes, and interviews were examined to build a triangulated understanding of teachers’ transformational leadership skills.
Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from field notes, audio-recordings, and interviews. To organize data into themes, the behavioral indicators of transformational leadership reported by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) were used. Based on this framework, each theme consists of different behavioral indicators, some of which are included in more than one theme. For example, sense of humor and content relevance were categorized under both charisma and intellectual stimulation; additionally, availability and verbal immediacy were included in both charisma and individual consideration. So as to remove redundancy in reporting the findings, we made a decision to report the indicators categorized in more than one theme by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) under a single theme. Following the lead of Bolkan and Goodboy (2014), we considered sense of humor, availability and immediacy as the behavioral indicators of charisma. Regarding content relevance, we thought that this behavior is more apt to indicate a teacher’s promoting intellectual stimulation. This thought was stimulated by Schussler (2009) which advanced that a person will be intellectually engaged with a message to the extent that the message is personally relevant to them. Finally, contrary to Bolkan and Goodboy, who discussed teachers’ nonverbal behaviors as part of the indicator of enthusiasm, we decided to rename the indicator enthusiasm as enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy, due to the primacy of nonverbal behaviors for our teachers.

Results

Three themes of transformational leadership extracted from our participants’ classes and their behavioral indicators will be discussed in more detail (see Table 1)

Table 1 Transformational leadership themes and their behavioral indicators observed in this study

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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Behavioral indicators</th>
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<td>Charisma</td>
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<td>Self-disclosure</td>
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<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
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<td>Conveying interest</td>
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To elucidate the themes, examples are provided from observations and field notes. For each episode, the researchers' interpretation of how the event characterizes teacher’s leadership skills is provided, which is at times accompanied with the observed teacher’s interpretation of the issue collected through the semi-structured interview. Furthermore, whenever possible, the results are justified with reference to the literature of leadership or effective teaching. It is worth mentioning that since related literature in the context of teaching is scare, for the most part, we will not be able to compare our findings with the existing publications. The language of the excerpts is the exact wordings of our participants.

**Charisma**

As shown in Table 1, humor, enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy, caring, availability, verbal immediacy, and self-disclosure were the behavioral indicators of charisma in our teachers' conduct.

**Enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy**

We considered instances of our teachers' eye contact with the pupils, their gestures, smiles, as well as directing body position towards students, their movement in the class, proximity with the students, and using vocal variety as indications of their enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy. This behavioral indicator was more prevalent in all male teachers' and three female ones' class disposition. A vivid example of this indicator can be discerned from the following field note taken in Ahmad's class:

Students are engaged in group discussion; Ahmad gets close to them, bends himself or even sometimes sits on the floor and helps students with their questions and problems. While teaching, he rarely sits; he walks around the class and approaches individual students. He continuously changes the tone of his voice and makes funny voices, especially when he feels students are tired or board.

When we inquired Ahmad about his motive for proximity with the students, he mentioned that he aimed to express his personal enthusiasm about language teaching to the students: *I think enthusiasm is contagious and if I show that I enjoy teaching, the students will also get enthusiastic about the class and will enjoy it.* He added *If they enjoy the class, they have less stress, concentrate better and have more motivation to attend the class.*

Nonverbal immediacy was also observed in Reza's class, an instance of which is his
high-fiving with his foot. When asked about his reasons for using this behavior, he recalled *since they are females and I cannot touch them, I invented this trick (giving a high-five with foot) to create rapport with them and make them enjoy my class.* In addition to male teachers, female participants exhibited indications of enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy. The field notes taken during Shirin's class, for instance, revealed the primacy of eye contact, proximity and smiling to the students for her. In her interview, Shirin, referred to the significance of creating rapport with the students: *No matter how much knowledge you have, if you cannot create a rapport with your students, they will reject you.* She added *the most important thing for me is eye contact, smiling and showing with all my heart that I care for my students.* All these remarks, shared openly and proudly, can testify our conception of our teachers' recurrent maneuvering of nonverbal immediacy in their class affairs. In fact, the participants’ planned utilization of this behavioral indicator can evince aspects of their transformational leadership skills.

As one can discern from the examples given above, our teachers used nonverbal immediacy and demonstrated enthusiasm to make the students enjoy the class, create rapport and even to increase their motivation. In addition to the literature on effective teaching which captures the positive effects of teacher enthusiasm (e.g., Patrick, Hisley & Kempler, 2000), scholars in the context of organizational leadership believe that the use of nonverbal immediacy by leaders help establish rapport and build a constructive relationship with their subordinates which can in turn increase their job satisfaction (e.g., Andersen, 1988; Kay & Christophel, 1995).

**Humor**

We categorized our teachers' making fun of students not offensively, using mimic and gesture to define the new words, using funny code-switching to Persian, using nicknames for the students, and changing the tone of their voice in a funny way as representing our teachers' humor. This theme was more prevalent in male teachers' conduct as well as one of the females. The following incident reveals an instance of Ali’s humorous use of using nicknames for the students which can be taken as an indication of his displaying transformational leadership skills.

Teacher: We begin from…. What is the name of your father?
Elham: What?
Teacher: What is the name of your father?
Elham: Naaser.
Teacher: We begin from “gaspasha Elham Naserovna”. Go on. I made a Russian name for you, go on.
(Students laugh.)

As we found out in the interview session, Ali intentionally used sense of humor, by using nicknames and making funny faces and gestures in his classes, since creating rapport with the students was important for him. He admitted that his main concern was to make students feel relaxed and reduce their stress by making a funny environment. Though the above episode might look like a typical part of many other ELT conversation-based settings, a deeper exploration of our teachers’ deliberate use of humor for the sake of the students’ well-being can highlight an aspect of their possessing the leadership skills. As we observed our teachers through five class sessions, we found how much their sense of humor could cheer the students up, promoting their class participation, leading to their fuller engagement with the lesson which is regarded as one of the main prerequisites of learning to communicate, the goal in a conversation-oriented class. The benefits of humor in teaching have been vastly echoed in discussions on effective teaching. However, as mentioned previously, the literature on teachers’ transformational leadership is scare. Within this literature, Bolkan and Goodboy (2011, 2014), emphatically, maintained that humor, as a component of charisma, can increase students’ intrinsic motivation. The positive vibes of humor have, also, been highlighted in the context of leadership in organizations (e.g., Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Caring

Bulkan and Goodboy (2011) define caring as 'willingness to help students with class needs and other needs and caring for the students on a personal level' (p.13). As the second part of this definition, i.e., caring for the students on a personal level, is part of another indicator, namely conveying interest, we delimit our discussion of caring to the class needs of the students. This behavior was more dominant in six teachers’, three males and three females, conduct, who constantly expressed interest in the students’ learning process. If one student was shy or weaker than the others, they involved him/her in the class activities by using encouraging phrases. An example from Mina’ class:

[The students were listening to an audio.]
Teacher: So what was the invention?
Students: White out.
Teacher: Who invented it?
Students: A secretary.
Teacher: A secretary called?
Students: Bette Nesmith.
Teacher: ... What happened to her?
Homa: She made a lot of mistakes …

[Elahe and Narges looked confused, they avoided making eye contact with the teacher, and were quiet. The teacher noticed this, stopped the exercise and got close to them. She tried to make eye contact with them and make them feel comfortable by talking with a compassionate voice.]

Teacher: Sorry, sorry, thank you. Elahe, tell me what happened to her?
[Elahe was quiet.]
Teacher: Oh, honey! What is your problem?
Elahe: It’s hard.
Teacher: [With a compassionate voice] was it hard? Do you want to listen again?
[She plays the listening exercise again and asks Elahe and Narges questions from the audio and they can answer correctly. After a while, Elahe and Narges seemed more engaged and even more relaxed.]

In the interview, Mina recalled her reasoning for caring about her students:

If I see that one student has problem understanding a point, or she has problem speaking in English, I definitely stop the class and give him/her time to correct himself/herself. But if I see that she is very slow and take a lot of time of the class, I continue the class and then once others are doing the exercises, I will approach that student and make him/her understand the point.

This response vividly indicates that the teacher is attentive to all the students and responsive to their needs by respecting the class time which belongs to all, not a few students. Unquestionably, this caring inclination which results in students' caring about the class and consequently learning the materials (as also advanced by Teven & McCroskey, 1997) can be taken as evidence on teachers' transformational leadership.

Availability

We found three of our teachers (two males and one female teacher) as the most available ones, spending time in their offices or teachers' room meeting their students. They were also available via email and through online instant messengers. Among them, Ahmad seemed to
be the most available one, warmly receiving even his former students in the teachers’ room. At the end of each session, he reminded his students that they could meet him in teachers’ room, stay after the class or even contact him via telegram to raise their questions. The following note shows a related episode from his class:

Guys, if you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to ask me, even outside the class, after or before the class. You can even send me your writings through email or Telegram.... Before the class, I am in the teachers’ room, downstairs; please feel free to come to me if you have any questions.

We could spot similar orientations in two other teachers' class disposition. Their interview responses revealed that they, all, believed in the positive ramifications of being available to the students, in terms of providing them with inspiration for more effective learning. This index can signal these teachers' displaying facets of leadership skill. Despite the importance of the concept of teacher’s availability, as also maintained by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), this behavior has not received the attention it deserves in the literature of effective teaching as well as transformational leadership.

**Verbal immediacy**

As the definition for verbal immediacy introduced by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), namely 'learning and using students’ names in the class' (p.13), seemed too narrow, we consulted the scale introduced by Gorham (1988) as well as the behavioral indicators described by Weiner and Mehrabian (1968) to identify verbal immediacy of our participants. In his definition of verbal immediacy, Gorham (1988) included teacher actions like encouraging students to talk by asking questions; addressing students by name; referring to the class as our class and not my class; and praising students’ work, actions or comments. Weiner and Mehrabian (1968) described a variety of behaviors that communicate immediacy, including closer proximity, inclusiveness, verb tense, and voluntarism.

Though all of our teachers were found to be verbally immediate, we could spot more indications of verbal immediacy in seven of our teachers' conduct. For instance, as we noted in the field notes, in the third session of Sara’s class observation, we noticed her frequent use of verbally encouraging comments addressing the students, including 'excellent', 'perfect', 'very good point', and 'you are getting much better in speaking'. We regarded these instances along with a myriad of similar favorable examples as signals to Sara's verbal immediacy towards her pupils. This hunch was corroborated by the awareness she shared with us of her intentions in
using positive remarks in her class:

I believe in positive energy. Even if they have a lot of mistakes while speaking, I try to use positive verbal encouragements. Of course, I correct their mistakes, but I do not want them to feel disappointed when they make a lot of mistakes. That is why I use more encouragements to inspire them to talk.

Our teacher's intentional use of verbal encouragements to motivate the students and reduce their stress is in line with the research pointing to the positive relation between teachers’ verbal immediacy and affective learning (e.g., Andersen, 1979; Richmond et al. 1987; Witt, Wheless & Allen, 2004).

**Self-disclosure**

Following the lead of Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), we defined self-disclosure as teachers' telling personal stories related to the subject matter. This behavior was more dominant in two of our male teachers' and one female's conduct. In the following, we present a related episode from Reza's class.

In his third class observation, Reza aimed to create a warm up for a reading exercise which explored the relationship between social media’s profile pictures and people’s personality. When all the students showed their Telegram profile’s picture, Reza showed his too.

Teacher: Ladies, do you have an account in Telegram?
Students: Yes.
Teacher: Tahereh, can I see your photo? Is it OK if I see your photos?
Tahereh: Yes, I am OK.
Teacher: [Looks at the photo] Aaah, are you going to Karbala?
Tahereh: No, no, no. We are going to Qom.
Teacher: Eh, I lived in Qom for three years.
Tahereh: We lived for six years.
Teacher: Aha, where in Qom did you live?
Tahereh: We lived in Charmandan district.
Teacher: I lived in Shah Seyed Ali district.
Teacher: Do you want to see my photo?
Students: Yes, yes.
Teacher: Here, this is my profile photo. [He shows his photo to the students.]
Since he was a fan of Esteghlal club, he had some photos of Winfried Shafer, the coach of Esteghlal, as his profile pictures.] Yes, this is Shafer, Winfried Shafer. What do you think about me? What do you understand about me from my picture? [Students are talking] Ladies, ladies, ladies! [Students continue talking and he shouts at them.] Aaah! [Everybody gets quiet.] When you see my profile photo and you don’t know me, what do you think about me? What do you think about my character?

Zohreh: You are self-confident.

Zohre: I realized that you are single.

Teacher: Do you wanna see my wife’s photo? OK, I’m single; I love Esteghlal; I am arrogant, then what? [He shows his wife’s photo.]

Tahereh: Oh, she is very nice.

In this episode, which aimed at involving the students in class discussion, the teacher revealed personal issues about himself. As he mentioned in his interview, through the above conversation, he, intentionally, aimed to create rapport with the students and get closer to them, as well as to encourage them to talk. He also sought to promote a positive relationship with the students, so that they can view him as one of them and feel closer to him. In addition to Reza, Hessam recalled that he, intentionally, shared his opinions to encourage the students to talk freely about their feelings and opinions, with no fear of being judged. Our teachers' conscious self-disclosure, which possessed the quality of relevance - as advanced by Cayanus and Martin (2004)-, though with the aim of advancing the students' discussion on the issue, can be taken as indications of their transformational leadership. On similar grounds with the concerns shared by Hessam and Reza, the educational literature (e.g., Goldstein & Benassi, 1994; Luthans, Norman & Hughes, 2006; McCarthy & Schmeck, 1982), repeatedly, associates teacher self-disclosure with enhancing students’ class participation, their affective, behavioral and cognitive learning, as well as teacher effectiveness.

**Intellectual Stimulation**

Among the behavioral indicators of intellectual stimulation reported by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), we could only record content relevance. Surprisingly, we could not detect other behavioral indicators including challenging students, independent thought, interactive teaching style and promoting participation in our teachers' conduct. Though class group discussions are always intrigued with promoting participation, we were spying those instances in which the teacher stimulated students' intellect by posing challenging issues and promoting
their critical thinking skills– an intellectual quest for discovering different points of view– which were missing from our classes.

Content relevance

According to Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), content relevance involves making the course content relevant to the life of the students. In other words, to be relevant, the course content should satisfy students' personal goals and needs. This behavioral indicator was more prevalent in six of our teachers' classes, three male and three female ones, who encouraged their students to talk about their own personal experiences related to the content of the course. An example from Reza's class:

[The reading exercise is about famous places in London, New York and Toronto where a lot of movies have been shot. Tahereh cannot understand the link between places and the concept of shooting movies. The teacher gets close to her.]

Tahereh: I don’t understand.
Teacher: Do you know “Shams Al Emare” [One of Tehran's historical buildings] palace?
Tahereh: Yes.
Teacher: Where is it?
Tahereh: In Tehran
Teacher: Where exactly in Tehran?
Tahereh: In bazar [the old market place in Tehran].
Teacher: In the past, “Naseredin Shah” [one of the kings of Qajar dynasty] used to go there and it was the center of Iranian government, right?
Tahereh: Yes.
Teacher: How about now? Has it had the same role?
Tahereh: [Inaudible]
Teacher: Answer my question please. Does it have the same role now?
Tahereh: No.
Teacher: So, it’s changed. It’s like a museum. Right? How about that alley? [The alley mentioned in the course book.]
Tahereh: A lot of movies shot in that alley.
Teacher: For example, a lot of movies have been made in “Haft Hose”, [the
most famous square in east of Tehran which is located near the institute] but there are a lot of shops and people go shopping there, so there is no change in the usage of “Haft Hose”. Right? It is the same for that alley.

In this scenario, Reza is attempting to clarify an unfamiliar concept through replacing it with a relevant familiar one from learners’ own culture. He reasoned this act of content relevance in this way:

I do not want them to get disappointed only because they cannot understand a culturally unfamiliar concept. I want to keep them engaged, so I try to relate as many concepts as possible to their own lives or their own culture. The important thing for me is that they learn, be engaged, motivated and active in the class.

Reza's class except as well as recollections illustrating his deliberate attempts in relating the lesson focus to the students' lives can evince his possessing transformational leadership skill. The benefits of content relevance in promoting learners' motivation have already been captured in the literature (e.g., Sass, 1989; Visser & Keller, 1990).

**Individual Consideration**

In addition to availability and verbal immediacy explained above, we could identify instances relevant to individual feedback, conveying interest and remembering students’ history as behavioral indicators of Individual consideration, defined as being supportive of followers by Bass (1985).

**Individual feedback**

By individual feedback, Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) meant providing specific corrective feedback on students’ performance during or after the class. Following their lead, we found more instances of this behavioural indicator in two male and three female instructors' conduct. To provide individual feedback, they were standing up most of the time and were ready to get close to the students to remove their problems. While students were engaged in group discussion, they got close to each group and answered their questions and corrected each student’s mistakes individually. Ali, Shirin and Mina paid close attention to the weaker and shyer students and constantly helped them to participate in the class activities. In this sense, individual feedback bears resemblance to caring. Additionally, we could spot indications of individual feedback in four other classes. For instance, as recorded in our field notes, every now and then, especially during the exercise time, Ahmad approached the students and
whispered to their ears to help them in doing their exercises. As he clarified in his interview, he seemed to have his own routine dealing with the learners' problems:

I usually try not to waste the class time for one student, but sometimes it is more beneficial to provide feedback on the spot. If I see that most of the students have the same problem, I will explain it for the whole class, but sometimes, in the case of weaker students, this is not the case. I try to explain individually some important points immediately, and if I see the student still has problem understanding the point, I will ask him/her to stay longer after the class to further clarify the issue.

The above evidence on our teachers' providing individual feedback to the students in need can verify their displaying facets of transformational leadership skill.

*Conveying interest*

Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) defined this indicator as 'taking an interest in students’ personal lives' (p.13). This behavior was more dominant in five of our teachers’ classes, two male and three females. An episode from Mina’s class:

*[It was one of the beginning sessions of the class and the teacher did not know the students very well. She was asking about the students’ interests.]*

Teacher: (To Mohammad) what about you?
Mohammad: I wanna be a volleyball player and maybe later, an engineer.
Teacher: Do you want to be a professional volleyball player?
Mohammad: Yes.
Teacher: You need to know that in every one million athletes, only a small number get the chance to be famous and successful. Right? [*To students*] But how many engineers are successful? Most of them...
Mohammad: I don’t agree with you. I hear the name of a lot of volleyball players, but not a famous engineer.
Teacher: Not hearing their names doesn't mean they aren't successful. But in sport if you want to be successful you should only be on the top.
Mohammad: I play volleyball for three years and I will become successful.
Sajad: You have to try very hard.
Teacher: Yes, if you try hard you get good results.
Mohammad: I promise you one day I become famous.
Teacher: I hope so. Let me give you some advice. Time is the most precious thing in this world. Time is really money. Now you are at the age that you have to capitalize. Do you know what capitalize mean (sic)?

Yalda: I don’t know.

Teacher: Capitalizing means investing money. Now you have to capitalize your time. When you study, you are capitalizing your time and you will see the result in future. If you capitalize your time wrongly, you will regret it for the rest of your life. The same thing happened to me and I don’t want you to suffer from the same thing. I wasted seven years of my best years to do something that was wrong. If I had studied those years, I would have been very successful and now I might have taught in a good university even in another country. I wasted seven years of my life for the same goal that you have now.

Her responses in the interview session revealed her intentional effort in evincing interest in the learners' personal issues:

I care so much about my students, especially because they are so young. I want them to be happy and successful. I feel responsible for them. When I give them advice, I know that for now they might not listen to me, and they don’t agree with my point of view. But, I am sure that this will have an effect on their unconscious mind, and one day, they will remember my advice.

Overall, Mina's expressing interest in her students' personal narratives provides another confirmation on her leadership skills.

Remembering students' history

Remembering students' history is defined by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) as 'remembering students from previous interactions' (p.13). In the present study, four male teachers and three female ones seemed to utilize their remembering students’ history in warming up the class or augmenting learners' class participation. An example episode from the fifth session of Sepideh's class observation:

Teacher: How is your mother Roja?
Roja: She is good.
Teacher: Is she better? Has she recovered?
Roja: Yes, thank you.
Teacher: You should take good care of her. What about you Elahe? Did you go to the gym?
Elahe: Yes.
Teacher: Was it useful?
Elahe: Yes, it was very good.
Teacher: I think these days, with this stressful life going to the gym is very useful.
Elahe: Yes, absolutely.

Her declarations in the interview room revealed her awareness of the positive ramifications remembering learners’ history might bring:

I mainly do that for greeting and warm up, but I prefer to start the class by asking personal questions to further connect with them and create rapport. I want them to feel important and to know that I care for them. I think that showing interest in their lives makes them feel closer to me and see me as their friend rather than a teacher whose duty is just to teach.

Overall, it seems that the majority of teachers remembered their students’ history and male teachers were found to slightly surpass their female counterparts in this behavior.

Discussion

As stated above, this study explored how transformational leadership skills of a number of Iranian ELT teachers are realized in their class settings according to the transformational leadership framework (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011). Six indicators related to the theme charisma, namely humor, enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy, availability, self-disclosure, caring and verbal immediacy were identified in the conduct of our participants. Except for indicators of caring and verbal immediacy, which were recorded in the practices of equal number of male and female teachers, teachers of different genders, devoted unequal attention to the indicators of charisma. For instance, while we could notice indexes of sense of humor as well as enthusiasm and nonverbal immediacy in the class performance of all male participants, surprisingly, they were, at best, detected in the class doings of one and three female instructors, respectively. Correspondingly, we perceived indicators of availability and self-disclosure in the actions of two male practitioners versus one female teacher. Counter to these indicators which were more prevalent in male teachers' classes, caring was practiced by equal number of
teachers of different genders, as three male and three female participants manifested indications of this behavior in the sessions we observed. Finally, we recorded verbal immediacy in the actions of all participants.

Regarding intellectual stimulation, we could only discern content relevance, practiced by equal number of male and females, in our teachers’ class practices. Notwithstanding the weight given to challenging the students, interactive teaching style, encouraging independent thought and promoting participation in advancing learners' critical thinking, none of our teachers exhibited these behaviors, which was not unpredictable given the policies advanced, more or less, by the authorities of language institutes on the requirement to stick to the book assigned for their teaching.

With reference to individual consideration, we were able to locate all indicators of individual feedback, conveying interest and remembering students’ history in the class performances of our participants. Providing individual feedback was observed in the conduct of equal number of male and female teachers, as four males and four females benefitted their students with their individual comments on their performance. Male teachers, however, functioned slightly better at remembering their students’ history, as four male instructors exhibited this behavior versus three females. Regarding conveying interest, male and female teachers were found to have equal status, with two male and two female teachers portraying indications of this behavior in their conduct.

Altogether, results of this enquiry can convey that diverse indicators of transformational leadership skills were exercised by ELT teachers of different genders. Irrespective of charisma which sounded to be more prevalent in the class routine of male participants, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration were operationalized by approximately equal number of teachers of diverse genders. This outcome is partly corroborated by Munir and Aboidullah (2018) who reported no significant gender difference in their teachers' practicing transformational leadership behaviors.

From among the various behavioural indicators of transformational leadership broadcasted by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), seven indicators, namely confirmation, homophile, treating students as equals, interactive teaching style, challenging students, independent thought and promoting participation, were not recorded in our teachers’ class practices. Our teachers’ personality types as well as the rules and regulations set in the local language institutes as to the minutes of teacher behavior and teaching activities might justify the findings obtained. In addition to the absence of a number of indicators in the class manner of our teachers, other noticeable results emerged. There were some leadership behaviors which
did not appear in some of the classes. For instance, the majority of female teachers did not use sense of humor; two females did not reveal instances of enthusiasm or nonverbal immediacy; seven teachers seemed unaware of the primacy of availability and self-disclosure; four instructors did not exercise content relevance; two practitioners were not cognizant of the import of providing individual feedback; six did not demonstrate their interest in students’ personal lives; and finally, three did not demonstrate any indication of remembering students’ history. Conversely, verbal immediacy was performed by all teacher participants. Except this indicator, enthusiasm, and nonverbal immediacy as well as individual feedback were the most favorite types of leadership behaviors to our teachers. Yet, availability and self-disclosure were the least favorite indicators of leadership for our teachers.

Spying the realization of transformational leadership skills in the classes of individual teachers, we found that Hessam, Reza and Mina practiced the most number of indicators of leadership, exercising seven types of its behavioral signals. Additionally, Shirin and Ali demonstrated a slightly lower index of six types of leadership behaviors. Conversely, Sepideh and Sara seemed to favor the least types of leadership indicators, representing one and two behavioral indicators respectively. The disparity in our teachers' loyalty to the leadership skills can be explained by no other reason but the variations in their character. Given that the five language institutes we audited shared similar regulations on their pedagogy, including their materials as well as teaching approaches among others, and the fact that our teachers had completed teacher preparation courses of matching fundamentals, we can speculate that the discrepancies in the actualization of leadership skills in the conduct of our participants can be traced back to variances in their own disposition and mentality about teaching. As they recollected in their interview, Hessam, Reza, Mina and Shirin were passionate about their job, enjoying high levels of job satisfaction. Apparently, their enthusiasm about their job had urged them to equip themselves with the most number of features conducive to effective teaching, embracing behavioral indicators of leadership.

Conclusion

This research attempted to address the call made by Bolkan and Goodboy (2014), mentioning that the study of transformational leadership skills in the classroom context is still in an early stage and the possibility for further research are many. It pointed to the prevalence of behavioral indicators of transformational leadership skills in the class practices of ten ELT teachers of various genders. Conversely, there were few teachers, mainly females, who seemed unaware of the primacy of equipping themselves with these skills. Due to the primacy attached
in the literature of teacher leadership to this skill and the positive ramifications it can bring about in the classroom context, we highly recommend that discussions on transformational leadership skills and its possible behavioral indicators be integrated into the available teacher education programs. Though the most numbers of indicators of transformational leadership skills were observed in our data, the absence of nine of them, including three related to improving students’ intellectual stimulation, from the whole corpus, highlights the necessity of incorporating talks on various themes of leadership skills and their behavioral indicators in teacher training courses. This integration will raise awareness of ELT teachers of teacher leadership and its behavioral indicators, conducive to their effective teaching.

As advanced by Bolkan and Goodboy (2014) and reiterated throughout this article, the literature on teacher leadership is still in its infancy; hence, many possibilities are welcomed for further research. One main concern which can be addressed in future studies is exploring the class learners’ perspectives on their teachers' leadership skills. A cross comparison of teachers' intentions in their utilization of leadership indicators with their students' impressions of the same issues can provide an appealing piece of research. Future research can also cross compare how teacher leadership is realized in various teaching contexts, including high schools and higher education settings. Finally, though the low number of participants in our research permitted us to provide thick description of their leadership skills, further studies can explore ELT leadership skills in a wider context with higher number of teachers.
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