



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 15, Issue, 10, pp. 69200--69203, October, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.30134.10.2025>



REVIEW ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGY IN ADOPTING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN NURSING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 29th September, 2025
Received in revised form
30th September, 2025
Accepted 15th October, 2025
Published online 25th October, 2025

Key Words:

Transformational leadership in nursing,
Challenges, Strategy.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Health care environment is changing in the digitalized world which is challenging to the nurses who are the major task force in health care sector. Nurses need very high level of coordination to provide organized service which demand an adoptable leadership. Transformational leadership is a flexible leadership style which is found effective in health sector. At what extent Transformational leadership is applied in nursing, it's challenges and strategy of overcoming such challenge is explored in a systematic review. **Method:** A systematic review conducted including existing literature from English data bases that published in the last 13 years. Relevant articles were identified using key words and available data from the reviewed articles were summarized, categorized and interpreted based on research question. **Result:** The great impact of Transformational leadership is observed across the world from General ward to Emergency care setting among staff nurse, first level nurse manager, nurse leader and nurse educator. The major challenge in adopting Transformational leadership was identified as lack of leadership training, communication, workplace culture, professionalism, workload, resistance to change etc. Nurses may overcome that challenge through agreed role definition, empowering staff, setting goal and finding strategy collectively.

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Citation: Mamtaz Begum. 2025. "Challenges and Strategy in Adopting Transformational Leadership in Nursing: A Systematic Review". *International Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 15, Issue, 10, pp. 69200--69203, October, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Health care Ecosystem is continuously changing with the changed need of society. Technological advancement specially digital transformation of health care, ageing population and their growing awareness demands for the change in the health care environment. As a result, health care approach is gradually shifting from curative to promotive and the uses of personalized therapy becoming more popular. In this changing health care environment nurses are major task force who need to change their leadership style to adopt with this change. Majority (70%) of the global health workforce are women and out of 27.6 million nurses 25.1 million or 90% are women but they hold only 25% of leadership positions (WHO,2021).Although any particular leadership style is not effective to every situation but Transformational leadership style is flexible and it can be adopted by the nurses for attaining individual and organizational goal (Broome ME, 2024). Nurses in every position from staff nurse to chief nursing officer can adopt Transformational leadership style while working in a team of infection control, patient safety, Risk management, Quality control, Ethics committee, Staff development committee or to lead the whole organization (Ystaas L M K, 2023). At what extent nurses are ready for adopting transformational leadership style is important to know and their strategy in accepting the challenge.

Background

Transformational Leadership and its application in nursing: Transformational Leadership is a leadership style that applied to transform the workplace by encouraging, inspiring, and motivating employees to grow and shape an organization according to the changing needs of the industry, society for the future success of organization. Sociologist James Downton coined the term "transformational leadership" in 1973. The theory further developed by an American historian and political scientist James MacGregor in the year 1978. In 1980s the American scholar Bernard M Bass suggest four important elements of Transformational leadership that includes Idealized influence, Intellectual stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized consideration. In Transformational leadership, leader becomes the ideal to the followers through instilling trust and respect; providing clear vision and sense of belonging. In this leadership style leader recognizes IQ level of followers and play an influential role to apply their creative potential. Leader also uplifts team's morale through motivational techniques, positive communication, building trust and commitment. Transformational Leader understands individual differences of team member and respecting it, offers support and appreciates their contribution. Transformational leadership in nursing is defined by the American Nursing Association as "a management style that motivates nurses to take ownership of their roles and perform beyond minimum

expectations” (B.T. Joanne Clavelle, M. Prado-Inzerillo, 2018). The characteristics of Transformational leader is described as open communication, inspiration, enthusiasm, supporting positive change, and empowering others through shared decision-making (American Nurse, 2018). The key principle of transformational leadership includes: Focus on inspiring and empowering followers, building trust and credibility with team members, fostering a positive work environment, Recognizing and rewarding outstanding performance.

Qualities of transformational leader: A nurse leader who likes to transform organization considering the changes of external and internal environment should have the personality traits along with behavioral modification through self-awareness and humility; Building trust and credibility; Encouraging innovation and autonomy; Active listening; and leading by example. Self-awareness and humility help a leader to bring changes by recognizing own strength, weakness, values and to create a non-threatening environment. Being consistent with words and actions a leader can build trust and through open communication share innovative ideas which also facilitate to assign challenging task to bring changes. Active listening and feedback of leader ensure psychological safety of followers for practicing new skill. In transformational leadership, leader not only think or speak but also act to exhibit the set standard which motivate followers to exceed expectation. (Meridian University, 2022, December 6). Some amount of risk is there in the process of transformation for which a leader must be willing to pursue the changes through risk benefit analysis and also assume responsibilities for each decision. A transformational leader must consider interdependence, able to collaborate and ensure authentic presence of self and others in the workplace. (SCS G, n.d.). The eight attributes of Transformational leadership are described as Charismatic, Inspiring, Creative, Moral and ethical, Encouraging, Open-minded, Visionary and Hard-working (Core Transformative leadership, MU). To practice the transformational leadership style effectively, a leader should have the key skill of time management, Risk assessment, Proactivity, Visionary thinking, Modesty, Decision making (Indeed Career Guide). Transformational leadership attributes were identified as visionary, strategic, supportive, stamina, and agility. In this five-theme stamina recognized by courage, assertiveness, and resilience while facing challenges and agility addresses a leader’s presence, accessibility, rapid responsiveness and adaptability (Kleine J, *et al*, 2024).

Impact of Transformational leadership in Nursing:

Transformational leadership was more common compared to transactional or passive/avoidant leadership styles among Nurse manager at Regional Australia and the Nurse Manager’s higher education ($p = 0.02$) and older age ($p = 0.03$) were associated with Transformational leadership styles. (Moon SE *et al*, 2019). The positive influence of transformational leadership was observed on nurses’ job satisfaction, intentions to stay at work and quality care. (Gebreheat G *et al*, 2023). Employees who stays longer period in an organization are mostly committed and organizational commitment was significantly associated with Transformational leadership style that observed in a cross-sectional study of USA (Brewer CS *et al*, 2016). Transformational leadership has indirect effects on innovative behaviour of nurses (Weng RH *et al*, 2015). There is also a strong positive influence of Transformational leadership in nurses workplace empowerment, which increases nurses’ job satisfaction and decreases the frequency of adverse patient outcomes. (Boamah SA *et al*, 2018). Nurses’ work environment is positively affected by Transformational leadership through structural empowerment, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. (Yastaas LMK *et al*, 2023; Notarnicola I *et al*, 2024). Transformational leadership was predominant in the general ward of Jordan that significantly influence clinical nursing performance. (Al-Rjoub S *et al*, 2024). In emergency setting also nurses transformational leadership behaviors foster work satisfaction that contributes to quality of nursing care (Labrague L J, 2024). Transformational leadership has indirect effects on nurses’ innovative behavior via the mediation of patient safety climate and innovation climate. (Weng RH *et al*, 2015). Medicine administration is an important function of nurses and medication safety contributes

to patient safety. Study finding shows a significant correlation between transformational leadership and medication safety. (Lappalainen M *et al*, 2020). Implementing transformational leadership style is important in creating and sustaining sound patient safety culture that evident again in a cross-sectional survey of Norway. Transformational leadership explained 47.2% of the variance in patient safety culture and 25.4% of overall perception of patient safety, controlling for age and gender ($p < 0.001$) (Seljemo C *et al*, 2020). Transformational nursing leadership is not only beneficial to employees but employers also benefited in terms of effective resource management, high quality care, and sustainability as described in a systematic review. (Tsapnidou E *et al*, 2024). Transformational leadership have a positive and significant impact on employee engagement (*A survey of the Indian power sector*(n.d.); enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment that contributes significantly to retention (Goens B & Giannotti N, 2024). Though several benefits of transformational leadership is recognized at personal and organizational level but its application barrier also perceived by First Line Nurse Managers and Registered Nurses which includes: lack of awareness for the concept of transformational leadership style, lack of accessible leadership education and training, multiplicity of job burdens and work stress, no time for teaching and coaching the nurses, preference for traditional administrative leadership styles, lack of support from higher authority regarding modern style of leadership, fear from loss of power, lack of selection criteria of leaders and unclear vision regarding Transformational leadership style (Abdulsalam TA, 2018). Nurses’ opinion on transformational leadership style was assessed in a descriptive study (Suji M *et al*, 2020) of Pune, India involving 95 nurses. According to the study finding 54.74% staff nurses said their nurse supervisors are having average level of transformational leadership, 38.95% perceived good transformational leadership and 6.32% perceived poor transformational leadership qualities. The study findings suggest that nurse managers had average transformational leadership qualities. The concept of Transformational leadership was analyzed by Fischer SA (2016) in the context of nursing and highlighted that transformational leadership as a set of teachable competencies but the mechanism of its influence on patients’ outcomes was unclear. Though the concept of Transformational leadership is not new but its wide application is limited in nursing for which the challenges and strategy of application is important to understand.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic review conducted including existing literature from English data bases: Pub med, Science Direct, Web of Science and Google scholar. Relevant articles were identified using key words, Transformational leadership (TL), Challenges and strategy. Out of 50 articles 9 articles were assessed during the period of 2012 to 2025. The articles focused on challenges of adopting transformational leadership and its strategy in nursing was included for review. Gery literature such as unpublished theses, dissertation and non-peer reviewed articles are not included for review. Data available from the reviewed articles were summarized, categorized and interpreted based on research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges of Transformational leadership style: Lack of encouragement from the institution for the training of leaders; professional inexperience young age, resistance to leadership and insubordination were identified as the challenges of nurses for the exercise of Transformational Leadership in a university hospital in the state of Bahia, Brazil (Ferreira VB *et al*, 2020). Though transformational leadership was found as most effective than other types of leadership in nursing but basic challenge was communication and barrier identified as workplace culture and professionalism (Kamaryati NP). Development of transformative education through Transformational leadership in nursing was explored in a qualitative study and identified: resistance of teachers and students in adapting and aligning Transformative education; common use of traditional

learning methods, lack of requirements for innovative education, limitation in empowerment, and educational policy-making deficiencies (Ghorbani A *et al*, 2023). Transformational leadership and job stressors on nurses' work engagement was examined in a model testing design and revealed that workload demands, which was perceived as challenge stressors that bring positive effect of transformational leadership on nurses' work engagement and make patients more satisfied (Ding B & Cao C, 2024). Nurses perceive about the need of leadership training in Transformational leadership approach and also mentioned about the non-reporting of errors and blame culture (Ystaas LMK & Nikitara M, 2023). Transformational leadership capacities of nurse supervisors were explored in a study of Saudi Arabia and identified challenges were sudden increase in patient numbers, limited resources, and nurses' concerns about health and safety. Researcher also recognized the need of developing leadership programs for effective management of crisis situations (Lagura GNL *et al*, 2024).

transformative management; requirements on educational policymaking; providing a platform to transform education, and community-centered education. Transformational management indicates the needs of transformative manager who should have the positive attitude and belief toward change, emotional intelligence; being a forerunner, realistic, unidealistic, energetic; having the courage for change, genius to discover and create opportunities and optimistically manage conflicts (Ghorbani A *et al*, 2023). Regular positive feedback and staff appraisals helps to increase self-esteem and performance; Performance evaluation in terms of 360° evaluation is found more effective for constructive feedback that useful for team work. A transformational leader empower staff by holding team meetings regularly which facilitates in setting goal and finding strategy collectively. Agreed role definition and formal preparation with skill development is a measure of optimum team performance. Expressiveness of leader by acknowledging effort, Fair workload distributions, individualized career planning, mentoring, professional

Table 1. Challenges of Transformational leadership in nursing

Authors	Year & Place	Nature of study	Challenges
Ferreira VB, Amestoy SC <i>et al</i> ,	Bahia, Brazil -2020	qualitative and exploratory study	lack of encouragement from the institution for the training of leaders; professional inexperience and young age; resistance to leadership and insubordination.
Kamaryati, N. P., Suyasa, I. G. P. D. <i>et al</i>	Bali, Indonesia-2024	Literature review-PICO framework	Basic challenges were communication, and other major obstacles includes workplace culture and professionalism.
Ding, B., & Cao, C.	China, 2024	Survey approach, Modelling testing design	Workload demands were perceived as challenge stressors
Ystaas LMK <i>et al</i> .	Cyprus, 2023	Systematic review approach	Lack of leadership training Non-reporting of errors Blame culture
Lagura GAL, Celdran MCB <i>et al</i> .	Saudi Arabia, 2024	Quantitative cross-sectional study	Sudden increase in patient numbers. Limited resources Nurses' concerns about health and safety.

Table 2. Strategy of overcoming challenges of Transformational leadership in nursing

Authors	Year & Place	Nature of study	Strategies
Ghorbani A <i>et al</i>	2023, Iran	Qualitative approach with the Grounded theory method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative management • Requirements on educational policymaking. • Providing a platform to transform education. • Community-centered education.
Doody O & Doody CM	2012, University of Limerick, Ireland	Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular positive feedback and staff appraisals, 360° evaluations. • Empowering staff by holding team meetings regularly, setting goal, finding strategy collectively. • Agreed role definition and formal preparation with skill development. • Expressiveness of leader by acknowledging effort, Fair workload distributions, individualized career planning, mentoring, professional development activities.
Aluora JA,	Feb 2025, Kenya	literature review & case study in Kenyan context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a clear and inspiring vision. • Aligning vision with the organization's goals and values • Communicating this vision to team member. • Capacity building through training • Mentorship. • Collaborating, networking and Benchmarking.
Mahmoudriad G & Akbari A.	Feb 2025, Iran	Qualitative content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing the path of transformation • Fostering a transformation-based culture • Facilitating transformational change

The practice and application of Transformational leadership in nursing is challenging and common challenge identified as lack of leadership training. Other several challenges reported that includes resistance to change, Professional inexperience, workplace culture, workload demand, communication and non-reporting of error. Realizing the need of leadership training among Iranian nurse, a quasi-experimental study conducted and reported that educational intervention of Transformational leadership was effective for enhancement of leadership skill and sense of responsibility in nurses (Ahmed AJ & Ibrahim RH, 2024). Not only in nursing but other field of management, common challenges were lack of influencing skill, communication and lack of honest feedback (Yadav S & Agarwal V, 2015).

Strategy to adopt Transformational leadership in nursing- The suggested strategy of overcoming challenges of Transformative leadership approach in nursing education was identified as

development activities are essential to motivate followers individually (Doody O & Doody CM, 2012). The adaptation of Transformational leadership and its improvement is discussed (Aluora JA, 2025) in a Kenyan context based on reviewing literature and case studies. The author highlighted on aligning vision with the organization's goals and values, communicating this vision to team member; Capacity building through training and Mentorship; Collaborating, networking and Benchmarking. The strategy of overcoming challenges of transformational leadership in the field of management was observed as distribution of responsibility, honest and open information sharing, raising and testing ideas, experienced based learning and practicing transformational leadership. Among these strategies need of training, information or communication was consistent in nursing also (Yadav S & Agarwal V, 2015). Educational interventions can effectively enhance leadership skills and foster a heightened sense of responsibility among nursing leaders.

CONCLUSION

On the changing context, multi-challenges were observed when transformational leadership applied in nursing. More common identified challenges are lack of leadership training, communication and professionalism and to overcome this challenge, recommended strategies are establishing inspiring vision, empowering staff with leadership skill, honest feedback with acknowledging effort, mentorship and collaboration. To strengthen the backbone of health care organization through effective application of transformational leadership in nursing is desirable.

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