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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: REVISITING ITS ROLE IN TEACHER MOTIVATION, ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE, AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract: *Educational institutions worldwide are experiencing unprecedented demands for innovation, accountability, quality assurance, and sustainable improvement. In Nigeria, where schools continue to confront challenges associated with inadequate resources, teacher motivation, policy implementation gaps, declining instructional quality, and organisational instability, effective educational leadership has become central to achieving meaningful transformation. This conceptual review examines transformational leadership as a strategic approach in education management, focusing on its influence on teacher motivation, organisational change, and school improvement. The manuscript adopts a conceptual review methodology involving systematic identification, analysis, and synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature on transformational leadership within educational contexts, with particular attention to Nigerian education systems. The review argues that transformational leadership provides a framework for moving schools beyond administrative compliance toward innovation-oriented, collaborative, and learning-centred organisations. Evidence suggests that transformational school leaders enhance teachers' professional commitment, encourage instructional innovation, strengthen organisational culture, and facilitate sustainable school improvement. The study concludes that transformational leadership should be integrated into educational management policies, leadership development programmes, and school improvement strategies in Nigeria. Strengthening transformational leadership capacity among principals, head teachers, and educational administrators is essential for developing resilient schools capable of responding effectively to contemporary educational challenges.*

Keywords*: Transformational leadership, educational management, teacher motivation, organisational change, school improvement, Nigeria, educational leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership remains one of the most influential determinants of educational quality, organisational effectiveness, and institutional sustainability. Schools are not merely administrative structures; they are complex social organisations where leadership decisions influence teacher behaviour, professional culture, student learning, and community relationships. Consequently, contemporary educational management requires leadership approaches that move beyond routine administration toward approaches capable of inspiring commitment, encouraging innovation, and sustaining continuous improvement. Transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential leadership perspectives in education because of its emphasis on vision, motivation, collaboration, and organisational transformation. Originally developed within the broader leadership discourse by Bass and Riggio (2021), transformational leadership explains how leaders motivate followers to transcend personal interests for collective goals. Unlike transactional leadership, which relies primarily on exchange relationships involving rewards and sanctions, transformational leadership seeks to reshape values, beliefs, and commitment among organisational members (Orunbon, & Beyioku, 2025).

Within educational institutions, transformational leaders act as change agents who create shared visions, empower teachers, promote professional learning, and establish cultures of innovation. School principals operating from a transformational perspective are expected to inspire teachers, support instructional improvement, encourage reflective practices, and mobilise stakeholders toward achieving institutional goals (Solihun & Wiyani, 2025). Contemporary reviews have consistently identified teacher motivation, professional commitment, collaborative culture, and school quality as major pathways through which transformational leadership affects educational outcomes. The Nigerian education system provides a particularly important context for examining transformational leadership. Despite significant expansion in access to education, Nigerian schools continue to experience persistent challenges including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, declining morale, weak accountability systems, and difficulties implementing educational reforms. These challenges require leaders who can manage complexity, motivate teachers, and facilitate adaptive change rather than simply maintain existing administrative procedures (Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2006). Recent Nigerian studies demonstrate growing evidence of the relevance of transformational leadership within educational organisations.

For example, research among public secondary schools in Lagos State found that transformational leadership practices of school principals were positively associated with teachers' organisational citizenship behaviours, suggesting that transformational leadership can encourage teachers to demonstrate commitment beyond formal job requirements. Similarly, studies examining educational leadership in Nigeria have highlighted the importance of visionary and participatory leadership approaches in addressing school improvement challenges (Solihun & Wiyani, 2025). However, despite increasing recognition of transformational leadership, questions remain regarding how effectively the model addresses the realities of Nigerian educational management. Issues relating to cultural expectations, leadership preparation, institutional constraints, and resource limitations require deeper conceptual examination. Therefore, this review revisits transformational leadership by analysing its theoretical foundations and examining its implications for teacher motivation, organisational change, and school improvement within Nigeria's educational landscape.

The purpose of this conceptual review is to critically examine transformational leadership in education management and explore its relevance to improving Nigerian schools. Specifically, the review seeks to examine the conceptual meaning and dimensions of transformational leadership, analyse how transformational leadership influences teacher motivation, explore its contribution to organisational change processes in schools, evaluate its relationship with school improvement, discuss challenges affecting the application of transformational leadership within Nigerian educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a conceptual review methodology. Conceptual reviews focus on examining, integrating, and interpreting existing theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to develop deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Unlike empirical studies that collect primary data, conceptual reviews analyse existing knowledge to identify patterns, relationships, debates, and gaps within a research field. The approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to revisit transformational leadership as a theoretical and practical framework in educational management rather than measure specific variables statistically. Relevant academic literature was identified through searches of scholarly databases and academic repositories, including: Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed

educational journals, African educational research databases and Nigerian education journals. The reviewed literature was analysed using thematic synthesis. Findings were organised around three major themes: Transformational leadership and teacher motivation, Transformational leadership and organisational change and Transformational leadership and school improvement. Thematic analysis enables researchers to identify recurring concepts, relationships, and explanations across multiple studies. Contemporary systematic reviews of transformational leadership research have similarly used thematic approaches to identify relationships between leadership practices, teacher outcomes, and school effectiveness.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study adopted a conceptual review methodology. Conceptual reviews focus on examining, integrating, and interpreting existing theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to develop deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Unlike empirical studies that collect primary data, conceptual reviews analyse existing knowledge to identify patterns, relationships, debates, and gaps within a research field. The approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to revisit transformational leadership as a theoretical and practical framework in educational management rather than measure specific variables statistically. Relevant academic literature was identified through searches of scholarly databases and academic repositories, including: Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed educational journals, African educational research databases and Nigerian education journals. The reviewed literature was analysed using thematic synthesis. Findings were organised around three major themes: Transformational leadership and teacher motivation, Transformational leadership and organisational change and Transformational leadership and school improvement. Thematic analysis enables researchers to identify recurring concepts, relationships, and explanations across multiple studies. Contemporary systematic reviews of transformational leadership research have similarly used thematic approaches to identify relationships between leadership practices, teacher outcomes, and school effectiveness.

Conceptual Clarification, Theoretical Framework, and Transformational Leadership Dimensions

Conceptual Clarification of Transformational Leadership

1. Meaning and Evolution of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership represents a leadership philosophy centred on inspiring individuals and organisations to achieve higher levels of performance, commitment, and innovation. The concept emerged from the work of James MacGregor Bass, who introduced the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership. Bass and Riggio (2021) described transformational leaders as individuals who elevate the motivation, morality, and aspirations of followers by creating meaningful relationships and pursuing collective purposes.

Building upon Bass' foundation, Hallinger P. expanded the concept by developing a more measurable model of transformational leadership. Hallinger (2018) argued that transformational leaders influence followers by increasing awareness of organisational goals, encouraging commitment beyond self-interest, and developing followers' capabilities. According to Bass and Riggio (2021), transformational leadership is particularly relevant in environments characterised by uncertainty, complexity, and the need for continuous adaptation. In educational management, transformational leadership extends beyond the traditional administrative responsibilities of planning, organising, directing, and controlling. Instead, it positions school leaders as vision builders, instructional facilitators, and change agents who create conditions where teachers and other stakeholders become active contributors to institutional development. Schools operating under transformational leadership are characterised by shared vision and collective purpose, collaborative decision-making, teacher empowerment, continuous professional learning, innovation in teaching and administration and strong organisational commitment. Consequently, transformational leadership has become increasingly associated with effective school management and sustainable educational improvement.

2. Transformational Leadership in Educational Management

Educational management involves coordinating human, financial, material, and intellectual resources to achieve educational objectives. Traditionally, school leadership was often dominated by bureaucratic and managerial approaches, where principals

primarily focused on maintaining regulations, supervising teachers, and ensuring compliance with government directives. However, contemporary educational environments require leaders capable of managing rapid changes in curriculum reforms, technology integration, accountability demands, and changing social expectations (Solihun & Wiyani, 2025). Transformational leadership provides a framework for addressing these challenges because it emphasises adaptation, empowerment, and collective engagement. Within schools, transformational leaders perform several critical functions:

(a) Developing a Shared Educational Vision

Transformational leaders establish clear and inspiring visions that provide direction for teachers and students. A shared vision enables school communities to understand institutional priorities and align individual efforts with broader educational goals. In Nigeria, where many schools face fragmented planning and inconsistent implementation of reforms, visionary leadership is essential for ensuring that improvement initiatives are understood and supported by teachers and communities. A principal who communicates a compelling vision of improved learning outcomes, teacher professionalism, and student development is more likely to mobilise collective commitment than one who relies solely on administrative authority.

(b) Empowering Teachers as Professional Leaders

A central feature of transformational leadership is the belief that followers possess valuable knowledge and capabilities. In educational settings, this translates into recognising teachers as professionals capable of contributing to decision-making and school development. Teacher empowerment may involves teachers in policy decisions, encouraging participation in curriculum planning, supporting professional development and creating opportunities for leadership roles. Studies in educational leadership indicate that empowered teachers demonstrate stronger professional commitment, higher job satisfaction, and greater willingness to engage in innovative practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

(c) Building Collaborative School Cultures

Transformational leadership promotes collaboration rather than isolation. Effective school leaders create professional communities where teachers share knowledge, reflect on

instructional practices, and collectively solve problems. A collaborative culture is particularly important in Nigeria because many schools experience limited professional support systems. Through transformational leadership, principals can encourage peer mentoring, teacher learning communities, and teamwork.

Theoretical Framework

This conceptual review is anchored primarily on Transformational Leadership Theory developed by Bass and Riggio (2021). The theory explains how leaders influence followers by transforming their attitudes, motivations, values, and behaviours. The framework proposes that transformational leaders achieve organisational outcomes through four interconnected dimensions: Idealised Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualised Consideration. These dimensions provide the foundation for understanding how school leaders influence teacher motivation, organisational change, and school improvement.

Idealised Influence - Idealised influence refers to the ability of leaders to serve as role models who demonstrate ethical behaviour, commitment, confidence, and professional competence. In schools, principals demonstrate idealised influence when they act with integrity, show commitment to educational goals, demonstrate fairness in decision-making and model professional behaviour. Teachers are more likely to trust and follow leaders whose actions reflect the values they promote.

In the Nigerian educational context, where concerns about accountability, transparency, and institutional trust remain significant, ethical leadership is essential. A principal who demonstrates fairness and dedication can strengthen teacher confidence and institutional commitment.

Inspirational Motivation - Inspirational motivation involves communicating a compelling vision and encouraging followers to pursue challenging goals. Transformational leaders inspire teachers by creating optimism, confidence, and a sense of collective responsibility. In education, inspirational motivation may include communicating expectations for improved student achievement, celebrating teacher achievements, encouraging commitment to professional excellence and creating enthusiasm for school reforms. Teacher motivation remains a significant challenge in many Nigerian schools due to factors such as workload pressures, limited resources, inadequate recognition, and poor

working conditions. Transformational leadership can address motivational challenges by providing psychological support, recognition, and meaningful professional goals.

Intellectual Stimulation - Intellectual stimulation refers to encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and innovative problem-solving. Transformational leaders challenge existing assumptions and encourage followers to develop new approaches to organisational challenges. In schools, intellectual stimulation occurs when principals encourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods, integrate educational technologies, analyse learning problems critically and participate in action research. This dimension is particularly relevant to Nigerian schools as education systems increasingly require innovative approaches to address issues such as overcrowded classrooms, learning inequalities, and changing curriculum demands.

Individualised Consideration - Individualised consideration involves recognising and responding to the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations of followers. Transformational school leaders demonstrate individualised consideration by mentoring teachers, providing professional guidance, recognising individual contributions and supporting career development. Teachers differ in experience, competence, motivation, and professional needs. Effective principals therefore provide differentiated support rather than applying uniform leadership approaches. In Nigeria, where teachers often work under challenging conditions, supportive leadership relationships can contribute significantly to morale, commitment, and retention.

Conceptual Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Educational Outcomes

The relationship between transformational leadership and school effectiveness can be conceptualised as follows:

Transformational Leadership Practices

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Teacher Psychological and Professional Outcomes

increased motivation, enhanced job satisfaction, stronger organisational commitment and greater professional collaboration.

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Organisational Transformation

improved school culture, effective implementation of reforms, increased innovation and stronger stakeholder engagement.

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School Improvement Outcomes

improved instructional quality, enhanced student learning and improved institutional effectiveness.

This conceptual pathway suggests that transformational leadership does not directly produce school improvement alone. Instead, it operates through intermediate mechanisms such as teacher motivation, professional capacity, and organisational culture.

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation is a critical determinant of educational quality because motivated teachers are more likely to demonstrate commitment, creativity, and persistence in instructional activities. Motivation influences teacher attendance, classroom engagement, professional development participation, and willingness to implement reforms.

Transformational leadership contributes to teacher motivation through several mechanisms.

a. Creating Meaning and Purpose

Transformational leaders help teachers understand that their work contributes to broader social and educational goals. When teachers perceive their profession as meaningful, they are more likely to demonstrate intrinsic motivation. Rather than viewing teaching merely as employment, transformational leaders encourage teachers to see themselves as contributors to national development and student transformation.

b. Recognition and Professional Support

Recognition is a powerful motivational factor. Transformational principals acknowledge teachers' achievements and provide opportunities for professional growth. Examples include public recognition of excellent teaching, recommendation for professional opportunities, encouragement to attend training programmes and mentoring support. Such practices can improve teachers' sense of value and belonging within the school organisation.

c. Increasing Teacher Autonomy

Transformational leadership supports teacher autonomy by allowing educators to participate in decisions affecting teaching and learning. Autonomous teachers are more likely to

develop innovative instructional strategies, take ownership of school goals and demonstrate professional responsibility. This is especially important in Nigeria, where excessive bureaucratic control has sometimes limited teacher creativity and initiative.

Transformational Leadership and Organisational Change in Schools

Educational institutions operate in environments characterised by continuous change. Nigerian schools experience frequent reforms involving curriculum restructuring, examination policies, digital learning initiatives, and quality assurance mechanisms. Transformational leadership provides a change-oriented approach by helping schools manage transitions effectively. Transformational leaders support organisational change by Creating readiness for change and Leaders communicate why change is necessary and how it benefits stakeholders.

Transformational Leadership and School Improvement

a. Conceptualising School Improvement

School improvement refers to deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, organisational effectiveness, and student outcomes. It involves changes in school structures, professional practices, leadership approaches, organisational culture, and stakeholder relationships. Contemporary perspectives view school improvement as more than improving examination results. Rather, it encompasses the development of schools as learning organisations where teachers continuously improve their practice and where students receive equitable opportunities to succeed (Onwubiko, 2023). According to Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues, effective school leadership is one of the most significant school-level influences on student learning because leaders shape organisational conditions that enable teachers to perform effectively (Leithwood et al., 2020). Leadership influences school improvement indirectly by strengthening teacher capacity, motivation, collaboration, and commitment. Transformational leadership aligns strongly with school improvement because it focuses on changing the beliefs, practices, and organisational systems required for sustainable educational development.

b. Transformational Leadership as a Driver of Instructional Improvement

Instructional improvement requires schools to continuously examine and enhance teaching practices. Transformational leaders contribute to instructional improvement by encouraging teachers to reflect on pedagogy, adopt innovative strategies, and focus on student learning outcomes. A transformational principal does not merely supervise classroom activities but actively participates in improving instruction through classroom observation and constructive feedback, supporting teacher professional development, encouraging collaborative lesson planning and promoting evidence-based teaching practices (Osagie & Obasi, 2021). In Nigeria, where instructional challenges such as teacher-centred pedagogy, limited access to professional development, and inconsistent teaching quality remain concerns, transformational instructional leadership can provide an avenue for improving classroom practice. Research on educational leadership demonstrates that principals who combine transformational behaviours with instructional leadership practices are more likely to create environments supportive of improved teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2018).

c. Transformational Leadership and School Culture Development

School culture represents the shared beliefs, values, norms, and expectations that influence how members of a school organisation behave. A positive school culture encourages collaboration, innovation, trust, and commitment. Transformational leaders shape school culture by establishing shared values, promoting teamwork, encouraging professional dialogue and modelling commitment and ethical behaviour. A healthy school culture is particularly important in Nigeria because many schools operate within challenging environments characterised by resource constraints, administrative pressures, and changing policy expectations. Where principals create cultures of trust and collaboration, teachers are more likely to engage positively with reforms and demonstrate commitment to institutional goals.

d. Transformational Leadership and Student Achievement

Although transformational leadership primarily influences teachers and organisational processes, its ultimate objective is improved student learning. The pathway between transformational leadership and student achievement can be explained through several mechanisms:

Transformational Principal Leadership

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Improved teacher motivation and professional capacity

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Better instructional practices

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Positive classroom environment

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Enhanced student learning outcomes

Research suggests that leadership effects on student achievement are usually indirect because leaders influence the conditions under which teaching and learning occur rather than directly teaching students (Leithwood et al., 2020). Therefore, transformational leadership contributes to student success by creating systems that enable teachers and learners to perform effectively.

Transformational Leadership in the Nigerian Educational Context

a. Overview of Nigerian Educational Leadership Challenges

Nigeria operates one of Africa's largest education systems, comprising public and private schools across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Despite significant policy reforms and expansion efforts, the system continues to face challenges affecting educational quality. Major challenges include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient instructional resources, teacher shortages, limited professional development opportunities, weak accountability mechanisms, inconsistent policy implementation and low teacher morale. These challenges require educational leaders who can manage complexity, inspire stakeholders, and implement sustainable reforms.

b. Relevance of Transformational Leadership to Nigerian Schools

Transformational leadership is particularly relevant to Nigeria because many educational challenges cannot be solved through administrative compliance alone. Traditional bureaucratic leadership approaches often emphasise maintaining regulations, enforcing procedures, monitoring attendance and completing administrative tasks. While these functions remain important, they are insufficient for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Transformational leadership offers additional capabilities by enabling school

leaders to inspire teachers despite difficult conditions, mobilise communities around educational goals, encourage innovation, strengthen professional commitment and manage educational reforms effectively.

Empirical Evidence from Nigeria

a. Recent Nigerian studies have increasingly examined the relationship between transformational leadership and educational outcomes.

According to studies conducted by Osagie and Obasi (2021) among Nigerian secondary schools indicate that transformational leadership behaviours among principals are associated with improved teacher commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour, and positive workplace relationships. Principals who demonstrate supportive leadership, communicate clear goals, and involve teachers in decision-making tend to promote stronger organisational engagement among teachers.

Similarly studies by Omoregie and Okafor (2022), research in Nigerian higher education institutions suggests that transformational leadership contributes to organisational effectiveness by improving staff motivation, teamwork, and commitment to institutional goals.

However, evidence also indicates that transformational leadership effectiveness is influenced by contextual factors, including institutional structures, leadership training, available resources, and organisational culture.

b. Challenges Limiting Transformational Leadership Implementation in Nigeria

Although transformational leadership offers significant benefits, its application within Nigerian Limited Leadership Preparation and Professional Development. One major barrier is inadequate preparation of educational leaders. Many principals and school administrators assume leadership positions based primarily on teaching experience rather than specialised leadership training. Effective transformational leadership requires competencies in strategic planning, communication, conflict management, change leadership, teacher development and organisational psychology. Without appropriate preparation, leaders may struggle to move beyond traditional administrative roles

c. Bureaucratic and Centralised Decision-Making Structures

Many Nigerian educational institutions operate within highly centralised administrative systems. Excessive bureaucratic control can restrict leaders' autonomy and limit opportunities for innovation. Transformational leadership requires flexibility and shared decision-making; therefore, rigid administrative structures may reduce leaders' ability to implement creative solutions.

d. Resource Constraints

Transformational leadership depends partly on organisational capacity. Schools facing severe shortages of teaching materials, infrastructure, technology, funding and qualified personnel may find it difficult to implement improvement initiatives.

Leadership alone cannot compensate entirely for systemic resource limitations.

e. Resistance to Change

Educational reforms often encounter resistance from teachers and other stakeholders. Resistance may arise due to fear of increased workload, inadequate communication, previous unsuccessful reforms and limited involvement in decision-making. Transformational leaders must therefore develop strong communication strategies and participatory approaches to overcome resistance.

f. Cultural and Contextual Considerations

Leadership theories developed largely within Western contexts may require adaptation when applied in Nigeria. Nigerian schools operate within unique cultural environments influenced by respect for authority, communal values, hierarchical relationships and diverse social expectations. Effective transformational leadership should therefore incorporate local cultural realities rather than simply adopting external models.

Implications for Educational Management

The findings of this conceptual review have several implications for educational stakeholders.

Implications for School Principals and Head Teachers - School leaders should move beyond managerial responsibilities and develop transformational capabilities by creating shared visions, supporting teachers professionally, encouraging innovation and promoting collaborative cultures. Principals should recognise that sustainable school improvement depends largely on developing people rather than merely managing structures.

Implications for Government and Education Policymakers - Educational authorities should strengthen leadership development through mandatory leadership training programmes, continuous professional development, mentoring systems for new principals and leadership competency frameworks. Leadership preparation should become a central component of education reform strategies.

Implications for Teacher Development - Teacher professional development programmes should incorporate transformational leadership principles by encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners, collaborative professionals and instructional innovators. Teachers should be supported as partners in school improvement rather than passive recipients of administrative decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conceptual analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Establish Comprehensive Educational Leadership Training - Government agencies and educational institutions should develop structured transformational leadership programmes for principals and administrators.

2. Promote Distributed Leadership Practices - Schools should encourage shared leadership by involving teachers, students, parents, and communities in decision-making.

3. Strengthen Teacher Motivation Systems - Educational organisations should improve recognition, professional development opportunities, and supportive working environments.

4. Encourage Evidence-Based School Improvement - School leaders should use data, research findings, and reflective practices to guide improvement initiatives.

5. Adapt Transformational Leadership to Nigerian Realities - Leadership models should incorporate Nigerian cultural values, institutional conditions, and community expectations.

CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership represents a powerful framework for addressing contemporary challenges in educational management. By emphasising vision, motivation, empowerment, innovation, and collaboration, transformational leadership provides school leaders with strategies for improving teacher commitment, facilitating organisational change, and strengthening school effectiveness. Within Nigeria's educational context, where schools face complex challenges requiring adaptive solutions, transformational leadership offers an opportunity to shift educational management from routine administration toward purposeful transformation. However, transformational leadership should not be viewed as a standalone solution. Its success depends on supportive policies, adequate resources, leadership preparation, and institutional commitment. For Nigerian schools to achieve sustainable improvement, educational leaders must develop the capacity to inspire people, manage change, and create learning organisations where teachers and students can thrive.

Future research should continue examining transformational leadership through empirical studies across Nigeria's diverse educational contexts, including rural and urban schools, private and public institutions, and different levels of education.

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