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Transformational Leadership and Educational Openness: A Cross-Border Comparative Study of Pakistan and Afghanistan Under Taliban Governance

Dr. Asghar Ali

Ph.D (Education) Deputy Controller of Exams, The University of Haripur.

asgharali@uoh.edu.pk

Dr. Noreen Ayaz

Ph.D (Education) Principal Government Girls Higher Secondary School Dingi Haripur.

noreenamir1244@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Shahzia Gul

Ph.D (Psychology) Principal Government Girls Degree College Sari Saleh, Haripur.

zoagula@yahoo.com

Mowaddah Bibi

(M.Phil Education) The University of Haripur.

mowaddah015@gmail.com

Abstract

*This study investigates the relationship between **transformational leadership practices** and **educational openness** in Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban governance. Using a multi-staged stratified random sampling technique, data were collected from **260 educational leaders** (Pakistan $n = 160$; Afghanistan $n = 100$) across primary, secondary, and college institutions. A structured questionnaire measured four dimensions of transformational leadership i.e. idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration and six dimensions of openness, including intellect, adventurousness, emotion, artistic, values/liberalism, and imagination. The findings reveal significant cross-border differences. In Pakistan, transformational leadership demonstrated **moderate to strong positive correlations** with all aspects of openness, with regression analysis showing that openness explained **52% of the variance** in leadership, particularly through openness to intellect. In Afghanistan, correlations were **weak and only marginally significant**, with openness explaining just **19% of the variance**, primarily through imagination and values. Independent samples t-tests confirmed that mean scores for both transformational leadership and openness were significantly higher in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. These results highlight the **contextual dependency of leadership effectiveness**. In Pakistan, transformational leadership acts as a powerful driver of openness, fostering inclusivity, adaptability, and innovation in education. In Afghanistan, however, restrictive governance under the Taliban constrains both openness and leadership practices,*

limiting their interaction and impact. The study underscores the importance of governance structures in shaping educational leadership and suggests that fostering openness is essential for enabling transformational leadership to thrive.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Educational Openness, Taliban Governance, Cross-Border Comparison, Pakistan–Afghanistan Education Systems

Introduction

This comparative research study explores the transformational leadership and the openness personality trait of educational leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban governance. Transformational leadership has emerged as a pivotal framework in shaping educational institutions, particularly in contexts marked by political instability and social and cultural upheaval. Rooted in the principles of vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration, transformational leadership emphasizes the role of leaders in fostering openness, inclusivity, and innovation within educational systems (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In South Asia, the contrasting trajectories of Pakistan and Afghanistan provide a unique lens through which to examine the interplay between leadership styles and educational openness. While Pakistan continues to grapple with challenges of access, equity, and quality in education, Afghanistan under Taliban governance presents a starkly different reality, characterized by restrictions on girls' education, curriculum overhauls, and ideological control of learning spaces.

Educational openness, defined as the accessibility of learning opportunities across gender, socio-economic, and cultural divides, is a critical indicator of national development. In Pakistan, despite systemic challenges such as underfunding and regional disparities, efforts toward inclusivity through policy reforms, international collaborations, and digital learning initiatives reflect a commitment to expanding educational horizons (UNESCO, 2022). Conversely, Afghanistan's educational system under Taliban rule has undergone profound transformations since August 2021. The prioritization of religious studies over secular subjects, the banning of girls from secondary and higher education, and the removal of modern curricula underscore a regression in educational openness, with long-term implications for social and economic development.

This comparative study seeks to explore how transformational leadership can serve as a catalyst for educational openness in Pakistan, while simultaneously analyzing the restrictive governance of the Taliban in Afghanistan. By juxtaposing these two contexts, the research highlights the potential of leadership-driven reforms to counteract systemic barriers and promote inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of cross-border dialogue and regional cooperation in addressing shared challenges, including gender disparities, resource allocation, and ideological influences on education.

Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to the broader discourse on leadership and education in conflict-affected regions. It emphasizes that while transformational leadership offers pathways to resilience and innovation, governance models rooted in exclusion and ideological rigidity pose significant threats to educational openness and human capital development.

The Leadership Theory

The pioneer of this theory of leadership was James MacGregor Burns (1978) and he explained this theory in his research work on theories of transformational style (TFL) and also transactional

leader ship style (TSL) he further explained that the educational leader/administrators must fall into one of the mentioned leadership's categories. Bass (1985) further explained Burns' research work on leadership styles and elaborate specific categories of leadership styles and named these styles as transformational leader ship style (TSL), transactional leader ship style (TFL), and non-leadership style/laissez-faire leadership (LFL). According to Bass (1985) professional leaders/administrators cannot follow one leadership style but most leaders possess some part of each leadership style within their personality. The credit for dividing leadership style goes to Bass and Avolio (1996), they divide leadership in three main types and nine subgroups and these subgroups represent different levels of behaviors and leadership styles.

Tupes and Christal (1961) introduced the existing BFFP Theory, by investigating the research records and finding patterns in the data. In addition to that, in the research of Goldberg (1990) elaborate the results, that there are five defined categories of personality traits the for identification of people, to define themselves and eventually developed a list of personality traits inventory within the five personality traits domains. The link between transformational leadership styles and the BFFP Theory was first highlighted in the research work of Judge and Bono. (Judge and Bono 2000).

Transformational Leaders as Educational Administrators

The transformational leadership theory does not completely represent the leadership but only represents some particular ideas that were observed in the behavior of leadership (Avolio, 1999). According to [Connelly \(2008\)](#), the secondary school administrators must possess the qualities transformational leader as school administrators visualize the future, work for it, and lead their subordinates for the positive change in the society.

According to the multidimensional model of leadership, personal qualities of the leaders, such as ability to manage the responsibilities and personality, are directly propositional to behavior of the leader, ([Chelladurai, 1980, 1993](#)). Duckett, H., and Macfarlane, E. (2003) who developed the concept of TFL and TSL theory by investigating the political leader of that time (Seltzer and Bass, 1990). According to Burns all leaders possess the qualities of one leader ship style at a time , either following TFL style or TSL style but not both because both of them are different styles of leadership(Nielsen et al., 2008).

The research work of Burns was extended by Bernard Bass (1985) and he highlighted that leaders can possess the factors of different leadership styles a time (Felfe and Schyns, 2006). According to Bass and Avolio (1996) leadership styles can be divided in three different styles different categories that is transformational leaders hip style (TFL), the transactional leader ship style(TSL), and the laissez-faire leader ship(LFL)/non-leadership style and 9 different subcategories to explain any leadership behavior (Cerit, 2009). The TFL theory is mainly depended on the motivation of subordinates and self-realization of the followers (Bass, 1985). Nash and Bangert (2014) indicate that followers are emotionally attached to the transformational leader and followers are inspired by their leader which results in excelling in their performance beyond expectations.

According to Tannenbaum et al. (1961) effective leaders are those who fulfill the needs of their followers, help them to achieve their goals, and improve their skills to upper level. According to

the academic researcher, most the PT is related to TFL styles and effectiveness of leaders (Bono and Judge, 2004). According to Smith and Bell (2011) an individual will be a transformational leader if he/she has the ability to encourage, influence, to motivate his/her followers, and most importantly they can shape the attitudes of their followers according to the surrounding environment. A transformational leader encourages their followers by showing positivity, encouraging them to achieve their common objectives, promising to their mentors, and a strong and unshakable belief in the upcoming events in near future (Smith and Bell, 2011). Tejada et al. (2001) stated that transformational leaders are always positive and always help their followers for the achievement of the desired objectives. (Luthans, 1994) indicates that a transformational always welcome positive change, which occurs in followers or in the organizations.

Transformational leadership style and Transactional leadership style have some important and known characteristics, and these characteristics are different from each another i.e. transactional leadership style is associated with the assigned task and how the outcomes of the assigned task are presented. The transactional leadership style is related with implementation of rewards and punishments policy and also closely supervised the subordinates (Harm and Credé, 2010). According to Northouse, (2016) the transformational leadership style is mainly concerned with ethics, standards, emotions, and long term objectives, and these leaders are less task oriented and more people oriented. When Bono and Judge, (2004) studying the two leadership style i.e., transactional leadership style, transformational leadership style and its correlation with personality traits, they found that the correlation is strong and positive among leadership styles and five aspects of PT.

A transformational leader sees an organization like a machine and not like a growing organism (Smith and Bell, 2011). According to Bycio (1995) it is the Transactional leader responsibility to assign and identify the responsibilities to the followers and a collective vision must be created for the organization. According to (Zopiatis and Constanti, 2009) the followers will be charismatic and inspirational if the leader leads them as a role model. The motivation and overall work performance of the followers are highly dependable on the attachment with their leader and the connection between leader and follower is highly important (Herzberg, 1959).

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that inspires and motivates followers to exceed expectations by fostering vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. Research consistently shows that these aspects enhance employee performance, organizational innovation, and overall effectiveness.

Aspects of Transformational Leadership

Idealized Influence (Charisma)

Idealized influence is one of the four pillars of transformational leadership (alongside inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration). **These** Leaders demonstrate strong values, integrity, and vision, which makes them admired and emulated by followers. The Charisma in education builds credibility, encouraging teachers and students to align with the leader's mission Khan, I. U., & Saif, N. (2022). The Principals and head teachers who embody charisma inspire teachers to adopt innovative practices. Charismatic leadership increases teacher job satisfaction and commitment to school goals. Charismatic

leaders act as role models, motivating students to pursue academic excellence. A study in Kenya found that head teachers' idealized influence practices positively impacted learner academic performance. Charismatic leadership fosters a positive, forward-thinking school environment. It encourages collaboration, inclusivity, and resilience in the face of challenges Baptiste, M. (2019).. The Leaders who articulate a clear vision for school improvement and embody it in their actions. **These** Leaders who demonstrate fairness, integrity, and empathy, inspiring trust among staff and students. Teachers who, through charisma, motivate students to go beyond rote learning and embrace creativity Chonga, F. P., & Mutulu, B. M. (2025).

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation refers to a leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision, communicate high expectations, and inspire followers to commit to shared goals. It is one of the four components of transformational leadership (alongside idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration). Educational leaders inspire teachers and students by presenting a clear, meaningful vision for the school or institution Bass, & Riggio,. (2006). A principal motivating staff with a vision of inclusive, technology-driven education. Leaders set ambitious but achievable goals, encouraging teachers and students to strive for excellence. Inspirational motivation fosters hope and resilience, especially in challenging contexts such as under-resourced schools. Leaders use positive language and symbolic actions to energize their communities. Teachers who practice inspirational motivation encourage students to see learning as purposeful and connected to their future. In Pakistan the inspirational motivation is visible in reformist educational leadership that promotes digital learning and inclusivity. In Afghanistan under Taliban rule the Inspirational motivation is suppressed, as leaders restrict vision to narrow ideological frameworks, limiting student engagement and hope Khan, I. U., Amin, R. U., (2022).

Intellectual Stimulation

The Intellectual stimulation refers to a leader's ability to encourage creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving among followers. It is one of the four components of transformational leadership (alongside idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration). Leaders challenge assumptions, reframe problems, and invite innovative solutions rather than imposing rigid answers Bass, & Riggio,. (2006). The School leaders who practice intellectual stimulation encourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods, curricula, and technologies. They promote professional growth by challenging educators to think beyond traditional approaches. Teachers who embody intellectual stimulation inspire students to question, analyze, and explore multiple perspectives. This fosters creativity, independent learning, and resilience in problem-solving. Intellectual stimulation creates a culture of innovation and inquiry. It reduces conformity and promotes adaptability in rapidly changing educational environments. In Pakistan, Educational leaders using intellectual stimulation drive reforms in digital learning, inclusivity, and critical pedagogy and in Afghanistan under Taliban **rule**: Intellectual stimulation is suppressed, as rigid ideological control discourages questioning and innovation Khan, I. U., Amin, R. U., (2022)..

Individualized Consideration

The Individualized consideration refers to a leader's ability to pay attention to each follower's unique needs, strengths, and aspirations. It is one of the four components of transformational leadership (alongside idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation). Leaders act as mentors or coaches, providing personalized support and encouragement to help individuals grow Bass, & Riggio,. (2006. School leaders who practice individualized consideration recognize teachers' different talents and challenges. They provide tailored professional development opportunities, mentoring, and emotional support. This increases teacher satisfaction, retention, and motivation. Teachers who embody individualized consideration adapt instruction to meet diverse learning styles and abilities. They give personalized feedback, encourage creativity, and support students' personal goals. This fosters inclusivity and equity in classrooms. Individualized consideration builds a culture of care and respect. It strengthens relationships, promotes collaboration, and ensures that no learner or teacher feels overlooked. In Pakistan the Educational leaders practicing individualized consideration promote inclusivity and reform, supporting diverse student populations and in Afghanistan under Taliban rule the Individualized consideration is suppressed, as rigid ideological control prevents leaders from addressing individual needs, especially for girls and marginalized groups Khan, I. U., Amin, R. U., (2022).

Openness Personality Trait and Leadership Styles

Berr et al., (2000) defined openness as the experience of a person's degree of openness to new concepts. Principal, who is willing and enjoy the new skills and naturally exhibit, logical curiosity, possess the propensity to be inventive and perceptive (McCrae and John, 1992). The person who scores high on the openness traits of personality has strong imaginative powers and shows patterns of different thinking (McCrae, Kurtz, et.al 2011). A leader who possesses the openness traits personality has strong positive behavior and the capacity to manage the change in the organization and to manage and have the aptitude to imagine changes for the institute (Holland, 1973). A Leader who possesses the openness traits personality is always open to new experiences; these leaders question guesses and push group members to new things in a new way within the institute (Bass, 1999). All Leaders who possess the openness traits personality that is open to new experiences and have the tendency to reject predictable directorial organizations (McCrae et al., 2011).

The leaders who possess the openness traits personality can sometimes lend themselves to escape from imaginations and developing interruptions when concentrating on modern ideas (McCrae and John, 1992). A leader who possesses the openness traits personality, experiences the tendency to keep away from the conclusion of simple responsibilities while also avoiding important tasks due to not having the ability for making reliable decisions (Judge et al., 2009; Zhang and Huang, 2001).

In addition to that, followers of the leader who have openness in their personality, may become irritated with the level of uncertainty and are not trusted their leader (Avolio, 1999). The leaders who possess the openness traits personality are eventually make a hectic situation in the institute as there is no of structure in the organization (Brown-Ferrigno and Muth, 2004 The leaders who does not possess or score low in the openness traits personality are seen as more

conservative than leaders who possess the openness traits personality (Scollon and Diener, 2006). The leaders who do not possess or achieve little in the openness traits personality domain are the leaders who are more realistic and always very sensible to their followers (Furnham, 2008).

Avolio, (1999) defines a pragmatic leader as related to the personality traits such as practicality and a no-nonsense attitude. In addition, the leaders who do not possess the openness traits personality are supposed to find very real dimensions and are truthfully driven (Judge et al., 2009). A Pragmatic leader unresponsive and indifferent individual to his/her followers (Bass, 1999). Pragmatic leaders assume that their followers are not creative, not active, and do not have a sense of practicality (Block, 1995). These leaders are blocked off to new knowledge and tendency toward follow already set rules and normally have a low interests in comparison to principals who have openness to new knowledge (Feist and Feist, 2002). Pragmatic leaders are straightforward and very clear and do not have any ambiguity in their minds (Burke and McKeen, 1994).

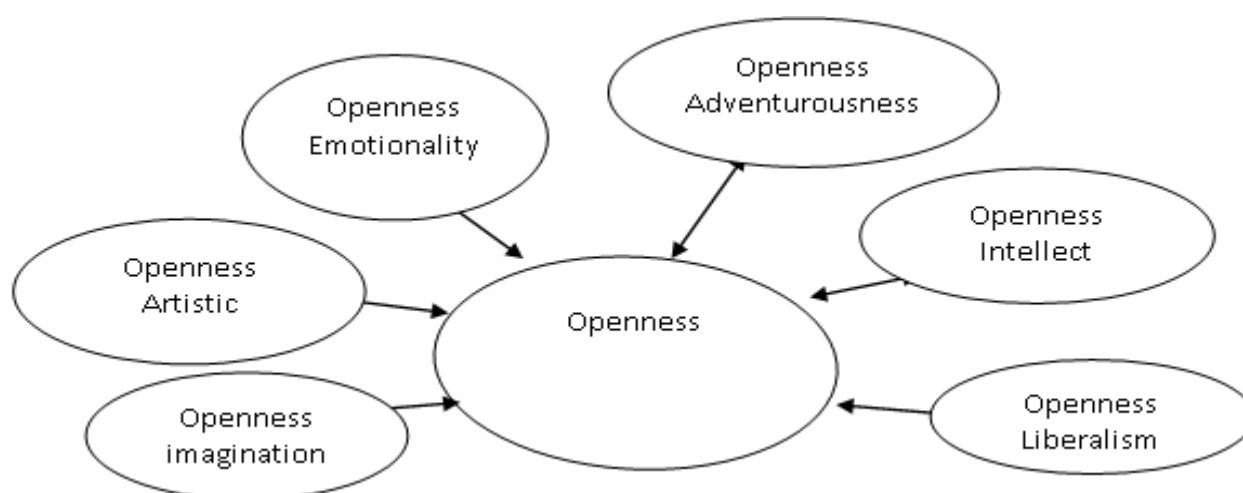


Figure 1. Aspects of Openness (Ali.A et al 2025)

Openness Imagination in Educational leadership

In educational philosophy, openness refers to accessibility, inclusivity, and the removal of barriers to learning. It allows learners to explore knowledge beyond rigid structures, encouraging creativity and innovation. Imagination enables learners to envision new possibilities, challenge existing norms, and create alternative futures Class, B. (2022). When paired with openness, imagination transforms education into a dynamic, exploratory process rather than a static transfer of information. Scholars argue that openness nurtures imagination by providing learners with freedom of thought, diverse perspectives, and collaborative spaces Hug, T. (2018). This synergy is vital for fostering critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving in complex global contexts. In regions like Pakistan and Afghanistan, openness in education can empower imagination to resist ideological rigidity and promote inclusive visions of society. Conversely, restrictive governance limits imagination by narrowing the scope of permissible knowledge. The

educational leaders with high in openness often display rich imagination and original thinking. They enjoy exploring abstract ideas, engaging in creative pursuits like art, writing, or innovation. This aspect is linked to divergent thinking, which helps in problem-solving and generating novel solutions (Ali.A et al 2025).

Openness Artistic in Educational leadership

Artistic interpretations of educational openness often draw from visual and symbolic language to express its core values. Light is a recurring motif, representing knowledge, clarity, and the breaking of ignorance. Open windows, radiant books, and glowing pathways are common artistic elements. These symbolize access and transparency, key tenets of open education. They suggest that learning is not confined but flows freely across boundaries Campbell, C. (2025).. Artistic depictions often include learners of different ages, genders, and backgrounds, emphasizing inclusivity and collective growth. Swirling lines, flowing fabrics, or birds in flight convey the dynamic nature of open learning, where ideas and people move freely. Trees, seeds, and landscapes are used to represent the organic development of knowledge and the nurturing aspect of open education Hug, T. (2018).

Openness Emotionality in Educational leadership

Emotionality involves the ability to feel, express, and regulate emotions. When paired with openness, it fosters authenticity, empathy, and deeper interpersonal connections. Openness to emotions in classrooms allows learners to engage more fully, creating safe spaces for dialogue, creativity, and resilience. Teachers who practice emotional openness model vulnerability and trust, which strengthens transformational leadership Gross, J. J. (2015). Transformational leaders often embody emotional openness by showing empathy, recognizing individual needs, and inspiring through authentic emotional connection. This contrasts with restrictive governance models, which suppress emotional expression and limit openness Bass, B. M., & Riggio, (2006). Emotional openness is frequently symbolized in art through motifs of flowing water, open hands, or radiant colors, suggesting transparency, vulnerability, and shared humanity Bozkurt, A., et al. (2023).

Openness Adventurousness in Educational leadership

Students high in adventurousness are willing to explore new subjects, challenge conventional ideas, and engage in experiential learning. Teachers who embody adventurousness experiment with creative teaching methods, such as project-based learning, digital tools, or cross-disciplinary approaches McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1997). Adventurous learners often seek international exchange programs, diverse cultural experiences, and interdisciplinary studies, broadening their worldview. Adventurousness helps learners adapt to rapidly changing educational environments, such as online learning or conflict-affected schooling Bass, B. M., & Riggio, (2006). Leaders who embrace adventurousness inspire followers to take bold steps, innovate, and pursue ambitious visions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Adventurous leaders are more comfortable with uncertainty and risk, making them effective in reforming institutions or navigating crises. By modeling adventurousness, leaders encourage teams to experiment, fail safely, and learn from mistakes. In **Pakistan**, educational leaders adopting adventurousness push reforms like digital learning and

inclusivity and In **Afghanistan under Taliban rule**, adventurousness is suppressed, restricting innovation and reinforcing rigid ideological control.

Openness Intellect in Educational leadership

Openness to Intellect is a facet of the broader personality trait Openness to Experience. It reflects curiosity, abstract thinking, and enjoyment of complex reasoning (DeYoung et al., 2007). Leaders high in this trait are drawn to ideas, theories, and problem-solving, making them more adaptable and innovative. Educational leaders with intellectual openness encourage questioning, debate, and evidence-based decision-making. They are more likely to develop long-term strategies that integrate diverse perspectives and anticipate future challenges. Intellectual openness drives experimentation with new teaching methods, curricula, and technologies. Leaders foster environments where teachers and students feel empowered to share ideas and challenge assumptions. In contexts of uncertainty (e.g., Pakistan's reform efforts or Afghanistan's restrictive governance), intellectual openness helps leaders navigate complexity rather than retreat into rigidity. In Pakistan intellectual openness in leadership is visible in reforms promoting digital learning, inclusivity, and global collaboration and in Afghanistan under Taliban rule the intellectual openness is suppressed, with leaders enforcing rigid ideological curricula that limit critical inquiry and innovation.

Liberalism openness in Educational Leadership

The **openness to values facet** is often described as **liberalism** (DeYoung et al., 2007). It reflects a willingness to re-examine social, political, and moral norms, and to embrace diversity, inclusivity, and progressive change. Educational leaders who embody liberalism are open to questioning outdated practices and policies. They encourage reforms that align with inclusivity, equity, and modern pedagogical needs. Liberal-minded leader's value diversity in classrooms, ensuring access for marginalized groups (e.g., girls, minorities, rural learners) Bass, B. M., & Riggio, (2006). This dimension of openness fosters democratic participation in education. Liberalism in leadership supports environments where students and teachers can freely debate, challenge assumptions, and explore multiple perspectives. This strengthens intellectual openness and innovation. In Pakistan the Liberal dimensions of openness are visible in reforms promoting digital learning, inclusivity, and international collaboration. In Afghanistan under Taliban rule, Liberalism is suppressed, with governance restricting diversity of thought and limiting access to education, especially for women.

Purpose of the Study

This quantitative research study aims to critically examine the relationship between transformational leadership and educational openness in two contrasting social, economic and political contexts. In Pakistan's reform oriented educational system and in Afghanistan's restrictive governance under the Taliban. By focusing on the four dimensions of transformational leadership i.e. idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration and the six dimensions of openness i.e. intellect, adventurousness, Emotionality, Artistic, values/liberalism, and Imagination openness, this study seeks to understand how leadership styles and openness traits shape educational practices, inclusivity, and innovation across borders.

Significance of the Study

For Pakistan this research study provides evidence on how openness and transformational leadership can accelerate reforms, inclusivity, and digital innovation. **The study also contribute to the Afghanistan under Taliban rule** and highlights the consequences of suppressing openness and transformational leadership, offering data for advocacy and international policy interventions. The study Bridges psychological traits (openness) with leadership theory across diverse political context and offers corrective strategies for educational leaders to balance tradition with innovation, and authoritarian control with democratic openness.

Research Questions

How do transformational leadership practices interact with the six dimensions of educational openness in shaping educational outcomes in Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban governance?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership practices and educational openness dimensions in Pakistan.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership practices and educational openness dimensions in Afghanistan under Taliban governance.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the interaction between transformational leadership and educational openness when comparing Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Methodology

Quantitative method of research strategy was applied in the current research study. Salvador, J. T. (2016) defined the quantitative research is the systematic pragmatic examination of obvious phenomena through statistical techniques, mathematical techniques or computational techniques.

Population of the Study (Pakistan and Afghanistan Under Taliban Governance)

The population of this study consists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province of Pakistan located in the northern region of the country. KP covers an area of 101,741 km² and has a total population of approximately 35 million, representing 11.9% of Pakistan's population. Of this population, 52% are male and 48% are female (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, www.kp.gov.pk). Administratively, the province is divided into 36 districts, which are further clustered into five zones by the Public Service Commission of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the official recruiting body of the province. The distribution of districts across zones is as follows:

Zone One: Orakzai, North and South Waziristan, Khyber, Bajaur, Kurram, Mohmand, and some frontier region areas attached to Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, and Dera Ismail Khan.

Zone Two: Mardan, Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, and Swabi.

Zone Three: Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Shangla, Kohistan, Malakand, Chitral, Swat, Buner, Battagram, and parts of Haripur, Abbottabad, and Mansehra.

Zone Four: Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Kohat, and Karak.

Zone Five: Haripur, Abbottabad, and Mansehra (with some areas overlapping into Zone Three). For this study, Zone Two and Zone Five were selected as the sampled population.

In addition, the study includes educational leaders in Afghanistan during the year 2024 under Taliban governance. These leaders comprise school principals, administrators, and college principals, providing a comparative perspective between Pakistan's reform-oriented educational system and Afghanistan's restrictive educational environment.

Sample of the Study (Pakistan and Afghanistan Under Taliban Governance)

To draw the quantitative data sample from the statistical population, a multi-staged stratified random sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, two zones (Zone Two and Zone Five) were randomly selected from the five available zones using simple random sampling.

In the second stage, the heterogeneous sampled population within these zones was further divided into homogeneous strata based on the type of educational institution: primary schools, secondary schools, higher secondary schools, and colleges. Stratified random sampling was chosen because it minimizes sampling error and ensures equal probability of representation for all items across different strata (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The sample size was determined using a 4% sampling error with a 95% confidence interval.

Zone Five consisted of three districts: Haripur, Abbottabad, and Mansehra.

Zone Two consisted of five districts: Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, and Peshawar.

Using equal allocation, 20 educational leaders were randomly drawn from each district. Within each district, the distribution was: 10 primary school leaders, 5 secondary/higher secondary school leaders, and 5 college leaders. In total, 160 educational leaders were selected, comprising 50% primary school leaders, 25% secondary/higher secondary leaders, and 25% college leaders. For the Afghanistan sample, a purposive stratified sampling technique was used. The population was divided into three strata: primary school leaders, secondary/higher secondary leaders, and college leaders. From five districts i.e. Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar (Jalalabad), and Herat and 100 participants were drawn (20 per district). Each district sample included 10 primary school leaders, 5 secondary/higher secondary leaders, and 5 college leaders. This technique was selected for its ability to minimize sampling error and provide equal representation across strata. The final sample size was determined based on a 4% sampling error and a 95% confidence interval (Ali et al., 2025). In total, 260 educational leaders ($n = 260$) participated in the study, ensuring sufficient statistical power for comparative analysis between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Table 1. Sample representation

Step	Country	Zones/Districts	Stratification	Sample Allocation	Total Sample
1	Pakistan	Zone Two (Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, Peshawar)	Primary, Secondary/Higher Secondary, College	20 leaders per district (10 Primary, 5 Secondary/Higher Secondary, 5 College)	100 leaders
2	Pakistan	Zone Five (Haripur, Abbottabad, Mansehra)	Primary, Secondary/Higher Secondary, College	20 leaders per district (10 Primary, 5 Secondary/Higher Secondary, 5 College)	60 leaders

Step	Country	Zones/Districts	Stratification	Sample Allocation	Total Sample
3	Afghanistan	Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar, Herat	Primary, Secondary/Higher Secondary, College	Secondary/Higher Secondary, 5 College) 20 leaders per district (10 Primary, 5 Secondary/Higher Secondary, 5 College)	100 leaders
Final Comparative Sample	Pakistan (n=160)	Afghanistan (n=100)	Stratified across all levels	all Equal representation ensured	260 leaders

Tools of Educational Transformational Leadership Style and Openness

A questionnaire was designed to assess the educational transformational leadership style of educational leaders, specifically focusing on the four dimensions of transformational leadership. The instrument consisted of 28 items, which were reviewed by experts, including education professors and practicing school administrators, to ensure content validity.

The questionnaire aimed to measure the transformational leadership style of educational leaders using a Likert scale with options ranging from “not accurate” to “very accurate.” After incorporating expert feedback, the instrument was piloted to assess its reliability, yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.89, which indicates strong internal consistency.

This tool was developed with guidance from experts in educational psychology and focused on the six dimensions of openness i.e. Openness to Intellect, Openness to Adventurousness, Openness to Emotion, Openness to Artistic, Openness to Values (Liberalism) and Openness to Imagination

This adaptation ensured that the measurement of openness was aligned with the educational context, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how leaders’ openness traits interact with their transformational leadership practices. The questionnaire aimed to measure the openness of educational leaders using a Likert scale with options ranging from “not accurate” to “very accurate.” After incorporating expert feedback, the instrument was piloted to assess its reliability, yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.80, which indicates strong internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

In the year 2024, data for this study was collected from Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban governance through the administration of structured survey questionnaires. The surveys were designed to capture responses from educational leaders working across different institutional levels, including primary schools, secondary schools, higher secondary schools, and colleges.

The questionnaires were administered in person to ensure clarity of instructions, immediate resolution of queries, and higher response accuracy. Prior to administration, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality. Ethical considerations

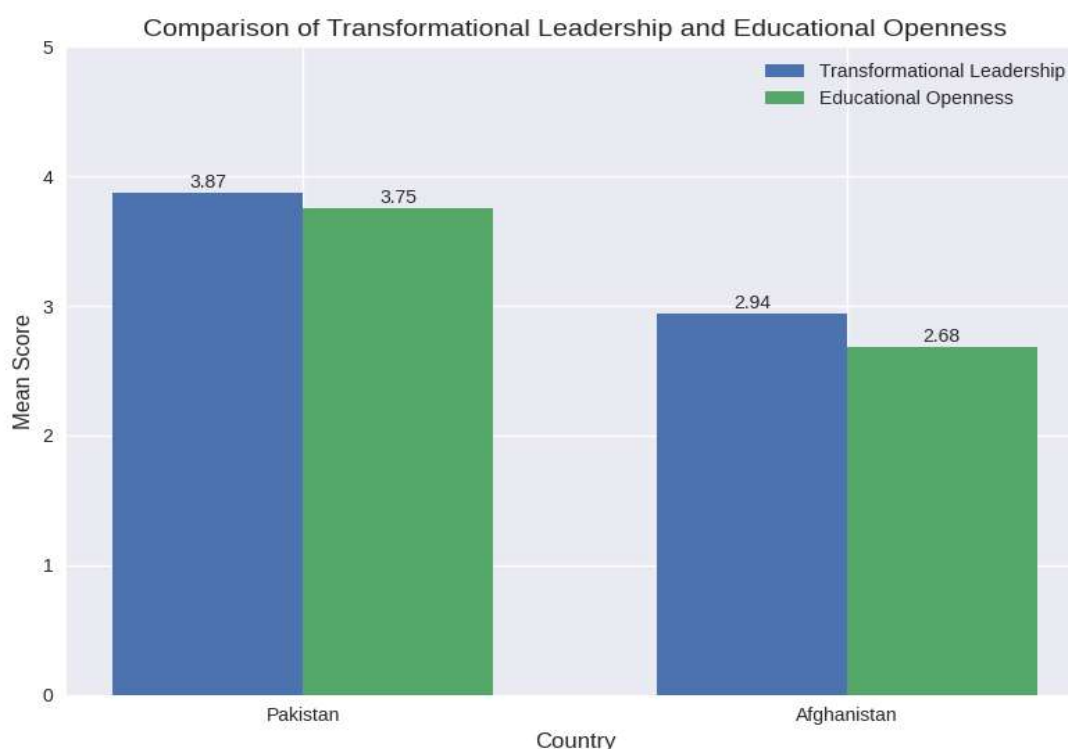
were strictly observed, and participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage. To maintain compliance with national regulations, the data collection process adhered to the Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) issued by the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. These procedures included were

1. Following official protocols for research access in educational institutions.
2. Ensuring gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate engagement with participants.
3. Respecting institutional hierarchies by securing permission from school and college administrations.
4. Implementing safety and ethical guidelines relevant to each country's governance context.

In Pakistan, surveys were conducted across selected districts in Zone Two and Zone Five of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ensuring representation from diverse educational strata. In Afghanistan, surveys were conducted in five major districts i.e. Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar (Jalalabad), and Herat, to reflect the realities of educational leadership under Taliban governance.

Analysis of the Study

Graph 1. Comparison of transformational leadership and educational openness of Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban Governance.



The above graph indicate that Pakistan shows higher mean scores in Transformational Leadership which is 3.87 and Openness is 3.75 and Afghanistan under Taliban Governance shows lower mean scores in Transformational Leadership which is 2.94, and Openness is 2.68.

Table 2. Pearson's Correlation between Transformational leadership aspects and aspects of Openness in Pakistan (Sample size n = 160)

Leadership Aspects	Openness Intellect	Openness Adventurousness	Openness Emotion	Openness Artistic	Openness Values (Liberalism)	Openness Imagination
Idealized Influence	0.41**	0.39**	0.37**	0.39**	0.43**	0.40**
Inspirational Motivation	0.47**	0.40**	0.37**	0.43**	0.46**	0.41**
Intellectual Stimulation	0.52**	0.46**	0.39**	0.50**	0.53**	0.50**
Individualized Consideration	0.40**	0.37**	0.41**	0.40**	0.39**	0.44**

p < 0.01 .

All the four aspects of Transformational leadership i.e. Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration show **modest to strong positive correlations** with all six Aspects of openness i.e. Openness to Intellect, Openness to Adventurousness, Openness to Emotion, Openness to Artistic, Openness to Values (Liberalism) and Openness to Imagination. This indicates that transformational leadership is significantly related to educational openness in Pakistan.

Table 3. Pearson's Correlation between Transformational leadership aspects and aspects of Openness in Afghanistan (Sample size n = 100)

Leadership Aspects	Openness Intellect	Openness Adventurousness	Openness Emotion	Openness Artistic	Openness Values (Liberalism)	Openness Imagination
Idealized Influence	0.17	0.11	0.10	0.16	0.10	0.13
Inspirational Motivation	0.22*	0.12	0.14	0.18	0.15	0.17
Intellectual Stimulation	0.25*	0.22*	0.16	0.23*	0.18	0.23*
Individualized Consideration	0.15	0.13	0.12	0.14	0.16	0.16

*p < 0.05,

All the four aspects of Transformational leadership i.e. Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration show weak **positive correlations** with all six Aspects of openness i.e. Openness to Intellect, Openness to Adventurousness, Openness to Emotion, Openness to Artistic, Openness to Values (Liberalism) and Openness to Imagination. And only marginally significant. This suggests that under Taliban

governance, transformational leadership has **limited influence** on openness. This indicates that weak but the presence relationships exist.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-Test of comparison of means of Transformational Leadership and Openness in Pakistan vs Afghanistan

Variable	Pakistan Mean	Afghanistan Mean	t-value	Sig. (p)
Transformational Leadership	3.87	2.94	7.21	0.000
Educational Openness	3.75	2.68	6.89	0.000

The analysis revealed that the **mean scores of transformational leadership and educational openness in Pakistan are significantly higher than those in Afghanistan under Taliban governance**. Specifically, educational leaders in Pakistan demonstrated stronger practices of **idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration**, which were positively associated with higher with all six Aspects of openness i.e. Openness to Intellect, Openness to Adventurousness, Openness to Emotion, Openness to Artistic, Openness to Values (Liberalism) and Openness to Imagination. In contrast, the Afghan sample showed comparatively lower mean scores, reflecting the restrictive educational environment under Taliban rule, where openness and leadership practices are constrained. This significant difference indicates that **the interaction between transformational leadership and openness varies substantially across the two countries**. In Pakistan, transformational leadership acts as a powerful driver of openness, fostering inclusivity, adaptability, and innovation in education. Conversely, in Afghanistan, the limited influence of leadership on openness highlights the challenges faced by educational leaders in promoting progressive values within a restrictive governance framework.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Transformational Leadership (composite score) and Educational Openness (composite score) in Pakistan vs Afghanistan under Taliban Governance

Country	R ²	F-value	Sig. (p)	Strongest Predictor (Openness Dimension)
Pakistan (n=160)	0.52	42.3	0.000	Openness to Intellect
Afghanistan (n=100)	0.19	8.6	0.004	Openness to Imagination (Inspirational Motivation aspect)

The table above shows that, in Pakistan Educational openness explains **52% of the variance in transformational leadership** and the strongest predictor is aspects of **openness is intellect**. The leaders who value critical inquiry and intellectual engagement are more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership behaviors (e.g., intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation). This shows a **strong relationship** of openness traits with leadership practices in Pakistan's in educational context. **In Afghanistan (under Taliban governance), the Educational openness explains only 19% of the variance in transformational leadership** and the strongest predictor is **openness to values/liberalism**, but the effect is modest. This reflects the restrictive environment: openness traits have limited influence on leadership behaviors, as leaders operate

under authoritarian constraints. The difference in explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.52$ vs 0.19) shows a **significant difference in interaction strength**. In Pakistan, openness is a **powerful driver** of transformational leadership. In Afghanistan, openness has a **weak and constrained effect**, highlighting the impact of governance structures on educational leadership.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between transformational leadership practices and educational openness in Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban governance. By comparing the two contexts, the results highlight both the strength of leadership-openness interactions in Pakistan and the limitations imposed on educational leaders in Afghanistan.

Differences in Mean Scores

The comparison of mean scores (Graph 1; Table 4) revealed that Pakistan's educational leaders scored significantly higher in both transformational leadership ($M = 3.87$) and educational openness ($M = 3.75$) compared to Afghanistan ($M = 2.94$ and $M = 2.68$, respectively). This suggests that Pakistan's educational environment is more conducive to leadership practices that foster openness, inclusivity, and innovation. In contrast, Afghanistan's lower scores reflect the restrictive policies under Taliban governance, where educational leaders face structural and ideological barriers to promoting openness.

This difference underscores the contextual dependency of leadership effectiveness. Transformational leadership thrives in environments where openness is valued and supported by institutional frameworks. Conversely, in authoritarian or restrictive contexts, even leaders with transformational tendencies may struggle to enact change.

Pearson's Correlation Patterns

The correlation analyses (Tables 2 and 3) further reinforce these differences. In Pakistan, all four aspects of transformational leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration showed moderate to strong positive correlations with all six aspects of openness (intellect, adventurousness, emotion, artistic, values/liberalism, imagination). This indicates that transformational leadership is deeply intertwined with openness traits, suggesting that leaders who inspire, stimulate, and consider individual needs are more likely to foster intellectual curiosity, creativity, and liberal values among their institutions.

In Afghanistan, however, the correlations were weak and only marginally significant. While inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation showed slight positive associations with openness dimensions, the overall pattern suggests that transformational leadership has limited influence in this context. This reflects the constraints imposed by Taliban governance, where openness, particularly in values, imagination, and liberal thought is discouraged or suppressed.

Regression Analysis

The regression results (Table 5) provide a deeper understanding of the predictive power of openness on leadership. In Pakistan, educational openness explained 52% of the variance in transformational leadership, with openness to intellect emerging as the strongest predictor. This finding highlights the critical role of intellectual curiosity and critical inquiry in driving

transformational leadership behaviors. Leaders who value intellect are more likely to engage in intellectual stimulation, encourage innovation, and promote adaptive change.

In Afghanistan, openness explained only 19% of the variance, with openness to imagination/values as the modest predictor. This suggests that while some leaders attempt to inspire through imagination and values, their influence is constrained by the broader sociopolitical environment. The weak explanatory power reflects the limited space for intellectual and liberal openness under Taliban governance, where educational leaders operate within rigid ideological boundaries.

Cross-Border Comparative Insights

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a significant difference in interaction strength between the two countries. In Pakistan, transformational leadership and openness are mutually reinforcing, creating a virtuous cycle that fosters inclusivity, adaptability, and innovation in education. In Afghanistan, however, the relationship is weak and constrained, reflecting the challenges faced by leaders in promoting progressive values within a restrictive governance framework.

This comparative analysis highlights the importance of contextual governance structures in shaping the effectiveness of leadership. Transformational leadership is not universally effective; its impact depends on the openness of the educational environment. Where openness is encouraged, leadership flourishes. Where openness is suppressed, leadership influence diminishes.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, these findings support the argument that transformational leadership is closely linked to openness traits (Bass & Riggio, 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Intellectual stimulation, in particular, aligns with openness to intellect, while inspirational motivation resonates with openness to values and imagination. The study extends this literature by demonstrating how these relationships vary across different governance contexts.

Practically, the results suggest that policy frameworks matter. In Pakistan, educational reforms that encourage openness can further strengthen leadership practices, leading to improved educational outcomes. In Afghanistan, however, unless governance structures change to allow greater openness, the potential of transformational leadership will remain limited. This has implications for international organizations and policymakers seeking to support education in conflict-affected regions: leadership development must be accompanied by structural reforms that promote openness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that transformational leadership and educational openness are strongly related in Pakistan but weakly related in Afghanistan under Taliban governance. The difference in explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.52$ vs. 0.19) highlights the critical role of openness in enabling leadership effectiveness. These findings emphasize that leadership cannot be understood in isolation; it must be examined within the broader sociopolitical and cultural context.

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