

Authentic and Transformational Leadership in Educational Management: A Comparative Review and Synthesis

Taleh Mirzayev

*Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Department of Public Relations and Marketing, Baku, Azerbaijan
taleh.mirzayev@adpu.edu.az*

Abstract

This study examines authentic and transformational leadership in educational settings by integrating systematic literature findings with large-scale trend analyses from Web of Science, Scopus, and Scopus AI. Drawing on conceptual foundations, empirical evidence, and AI-supported semantic mapping, the study analyzes the core dimensions, mechanisms, teacher-related outcomes, and cultural contexts associated with both leadership styles. Results indicate that authentic leadership primarily strengthens teachers' autonomy, well-being, trust, and ethical climate through mechanisms such as relational transparency, emotional support, and organizational justice. Transformational leadership, meanwhile, exerts a stronger influence on innovation, collective efficacy, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, driven by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and shared vision.

Database trends show that research on transformational leadership is substantially more extensive and historically rooted, whereas authentic leadership has emerged more recently and remains less represented, particularly in longitudinal designs. Scopus AI analysis reveals three dominant thematic clusters: authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and comparative or integrative studies. Both leadership styles exhibit significant conceptual overlap, yet they differ in their psychological pathways and contextual sensitivity. Cross-cultural variability highlights the moderating role of educational governance, collectivism, and policy structures.

The study identifies key gaps, including the scarcity of longitudinal and hybrid models, limited cross-cultural comparative work, and measurement challenges due to construct overlap. It concludes that integrating authentic and transformational leadership may offer a more comprehensive framework for fostering sustainable innovation, teacher well-being, and ethical school cultures.

Keywords: *Authentic leadership, Transformational leadership, Educational leadership, Scopus AI analysis, Comparative leadership studies.*

Introduction

Leadership research historically evolved from trait theories, behavioral approaches, and contingency models; however, since the 1980s, ethical scandals, increasing demands for organizational change, and the complexity of human interaction have shifted leadership studies from task-centered frameworks toward relational, ethical, and transformational paradigms (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cemaloğlu & Özdemir, 2019). Within this modern landscape, authentic leadership and transformational leadership have become central models positioned at the intersection of positive organizational behavior, ethics, and organizational psychology (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Çevik, 2024).

Both approaches conceptualize leadership as more than administrative task completion; leaders are framed as psychological, moral, and relational agents capable of shaping followers' identities, motivations, and organizational meaning systems (Anderson, 2017; Kareem et al., 2023). This is particularly salient in educational institutions, where human development is the core organizational mission.

Aim

The purpose of this study is to systematically examine the theoretical foundations, mechanisms, and educational implications of authentic leadership (AL) and transformational leadership (TL), and to compare their effects on teacher outcomes, organizational culture, and institutional innovation. Drawing on empirical evidence and conceptual developments from the past two decades, the study aims to synthesize findings from Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus-indexed publications, including trend analyses generated through Scopus AI. A further aim is to identify conceptual overlap, mediating mechanisms, contextual moderators, and methodological gaps—particularly the scarcity of longitudinal and integrated leadership models in educational research. By doing so, the study contributes to building a comprehensive and analytically differentiated understanding of how AL and TL shape educational environments and to illuminate future directions for research and practice.

Significance

The significance of this study lies in the growing recognition that leadership is among the most influential determinants of teacher well-being, professional growth, school climate, and student achievement (Anderson, 2017; Kareem et al., 2023). Although authentic and transformational leadership have emerged as two of the most prominent paradigms in contemporary educational leadership, the existing literature reveals substantial conceptual overlap and an uneven distribution of research emphasis (Çevik, 2024; Xie, Ahmad, & Lu, 2024a).

Transformational leadership is far more extensively studied, with publication volumes in WoS and Scopus up to seven times higher than those of authentic leadership. This imbalance reflects both historical precedence (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and methodological convenience, as TL outcomes are more readily measurable using validated instruments such as the MLQ-5X. In contrast, authentic leadership—despite its importance for psychological well-being, ethical climate, relational trust, and transparency—remains less empirically explored and is often investigated through cross-sectional designs (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Hsu et al., 2024).

This study is significant because it brings together fragmented scholarly insights through a comparative, mechanism-based, and context-sensitive synthesis, revealing:

- how AL and TL differentially influence teacher autonomy, innovation, organizational commitment, and psychological capital;
- the mediating roles of trust, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and organizational culture;
- the moderating effects of cultural norms, collectivism, and policy structures;
- the need for longitudinal and hybrid leadership models to reflect real-time school dynamics.

By integrating database trends, empirical findings, and conceptual frameworks, this study provides a more holistic understanding of leadership in education and identifies avenues for more precise, culturally responsive, and methodologically rigorous future research.

Method

This study adopts an integrated multi-stage research design combining systematic review procedures, database-driven trend analytics, and concept-level synthesis informed by Scopus AI. The methodology was updated to incorporate the analytical categories reflected in Table 8, including leadership dimensions, teacher impact, mediators, measurement tools, cultural contexts, and longitudinal research gaps.

1. Systematic Literature Review

A structured review of peer-reviewed research on authentic (AL) and transformational leadership (TL) in educational settings was conducted. The review included:

- conceptual and empirical studies on AL and TL,
- comparative and integrated leadership research,
- studies examining mechanisms such as self-efficacy, trust, and organizational culture,
- research addressing teacher outcomes (e.g., autonomy, well-being, innovation, job satisfaction).

The dataset included 13 core open-access studies plus additional seminal works across leadership theory.

2. Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus Trend Analysis

To capture broader scholarly patterns, targeted searches were conducted in WoS and Scopus using:

- *“authentic leadership” AND education*
- *“transformational leadership” AND education*

Inclusion criteria:

- peer-reviewed journal articles
- English language
- social sciences, education, management, psychology, and multidisciplinary fields
- publication years 1992–2026 (database-specific)

The extracted data were organized according to:

- annual publication distribution
- disciplinary distribution
- country contributions
- volume comparison of AL vs. TL studies

These results informed the comparative portions of Table 8.

3. Scopus AI–Supported Meta-Analytic Concept Mapping

A Scopus AI–driven semantic analysis was performed to identify:

- thematic clusters around AL, TL, and comparative/integrative models
- leadership dimensions (e.g., self-awareness, idealized influence)
- organizational and psychological mediators (e.g., autonomy, collective efficacy, emotional intelligence)
- measurement tools (ALQ, MLQ-5X, GTLS)
- cultural contextual moderators (e.g., collectivism, policy systems)
- gaps in longitudinal and integrated research

This analysis directly shaped the structure of Table 7 and Table 8.

4. Comparative Synthesis Based on Table 8 Categories

Using the dimensions of Table 8, the integrative analysis compared AL and TL along the following domains:

- Core dimensions (AL: self-awareness, transparency, moral perspective; TL: idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation)
- Impact on teachers (AL → well-being, autonomy, ethical climate; TL → innovation, self-efficacy, commitment)
- Mediators (e.g., trust, psychological safety, collective efficacy)
- Measurement instruments (ALQ vs. MLQ-5X/GTLS)
- Cultural contexts (collectivism, centralization, policy frameworks)
- Longitudinal/integrated research gaps

These dimensions were used to build cross-model comparisons and identify fine-grained construct overlap ($\rho \approx .72$) and differentiation needs.

5. Narrative Integration and Research Gap Identification

Given the heterogeneity of the sources (empirical, conceptual, AI-derived), a narrative synthesis was conducted to:

- integrate AL and TL contributions to teacher outcomes,
- analyze mediating organizational cultures,
- explore emotional intelligence as a cross-cutting moderator,
- compare cross-cultural findings across education systems,
- highlight methodological limitations (dominance of cross-sectional designs),
- identify research needs for hybrid models and longitudinal designs.

Ethical approval was not required, as the study used secondary data.

Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical Foundations of Authentic Leadership

Authenticity emphasizes congruence between a leader’s values, identity, and actions. The conceptual roots of authentic leadership stem from positive psychological development (Avolio & Luthans, 2003), ethical leadership, and self-regulation theories (Kernis, 2003). Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) influential four-dimensional model-self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and internalized moral perspective-frames authentic leadership as a value-driven and trust-oriented approach.

Authentic leaders foster alignment between inner values and outward behaviors, thereby enhancing perceptions of integrity, credibility, and psychological safety (Khanyile & De Bruin, 2022). Theoretically, authentic leadership intersects with positive organizational behavior (Luthans & Youssef, 2004), ethical leadership, and social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), all of which emphasize moral modeling and relational consistency.

The core assumption is that when leaders act in accordance with their genuine selves, followers internalize both the leader and the organizational mission more readily, strengthening psychological well-being, moral agency, and organizational commitment (Xie, Ahmad, & Lu, 2024a).

Empirical Findings in Educational Contexts

Recent educational studies provide robust support for the relational and psychological effects of authentic leadership.

- Fong (2016) found, in a study of 1,429 teachers, that all four dimensions of authentic leadership significantly enhance teachers’ psychological capital, especially hope, resilience, and optimism.

- Hsu et al. (2024) reported that self-awareness, relational transparency, and balanced processing substantially increase teachers' creativity and job performance.
- Systematic reviews confirm its positive association with trust, ethical climate, participatory decision-making, and reduced burnout (Çevik, 2024; Khanyile & De Bruin, 2022).

However, authentic leadership shows weaker effects on innovation and rapid change, suggesting a contextual limitation in dynamic reform environments.

Theoretical Foundations of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership originates from Burns' (1978) distinction between transactional and transformational leadership and is deeply informed by social change theory. Bass (1985) operationalized the model through four dimensions: (1) Idealized influence, (2) Inspirational motivation, (3) Intellectual stimulation, (4) Individualized consideration.

Bass and Avolio (1994) later integrated these in the Full Range Leadership Model, positioning transformational leadership alongside transactional and laissez-faire styles within a broader system.

Early contributors such as Downton (1973) and House (1977) emphasized charisma, value-driven influence, and visionary orientation, situating transformational leadership as a strategic, motivational, and future-oriented paradigm. This model has been widely supported across organizational contexts, particularly due to its capacity to mobilize followers toward collective goals, identity transformation, and innovation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Williams, 2016).

Empirical Findings in Educational Contexts

Transformational leadership is among the most widely researched models in education, consistently linked to:

- higher teacher motivation and organizational commitment (Kareem et al., 2023),
- enhanced school performance (Ramos, 2025),
- stronger institutional innovation (Elrehail et al., 2018),
- organizational learning and knowledge sharing (Anderson, 2017).

A notable finding from Elrehail et al. (2018) is that transformational leadership strongly predicts both process and product innovation, especially when knowledge-sharing norms are high. The same study reported that authentic leadership showed no significant relationship with innovation, highlighting a key divergence between the two models.

Comparison of Authentic and Transformational Leadership

1. Focus and Purpose

- Authentic leadership prioritizes moral grounding, self-awareness, ethical consistency, and relational transparency (Walumbwa et al., 2008).
- Transformational leadership centers on organizational vision, collective motivation, and change mobilization (Bass, 1985).

2. Theoretical Foundations

- Authentic leadership: positive psychology, ethical leadership, self-regulation, values-based leadership (Avolio & Luthans, 2003).
- Transformational leadership: social change theory, charismatic leadership, and the Full Range Leadership Model (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

3. Psychological and Organizational Outcomes

- Authentic leadership → trust, ethical climate, psychological capital, well-being, relational cohesion (Khanyile & De Bruin, 2022; Xie et al., 2024b).
- Transformational leadership → motivation, innovation, performance, organizational commitment, pedagogical change (Anderson, 2017; Ramos, 2025).

4. Innovation and Change

- Transformational leadership is strongly innovation-oriented (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Elrehail et al., 2018).
- Authentic leadership has limited or context-dependent effects on innovation.

5. Educational Context Implications

- Authentic leadership supports ethical climate, emotional well-being, and trust among teachers.
- Transformational leadership drives structural change, digitalization, school performance, and reform implementation.

Toward an Integrated Authentic–Transformational Leadership Synthesis

Contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes that the two models should not be viewed as mutually exclusive but as complementary (Çevik, 2024; Anderson, 2017).

Authentic leadership provides the ethical, relational, and psychological foundation necessary for sustainable leadership practices. Transformational leadership builds on this foundation to mobilize change, foster innovation, and produce measurable organizational outcomes.

Thus, the most effective educational leadership model is a hybrid authentic–transformational orientation, which combines:

- authenticity → trust, ethics, transparency, psychological safety;
- transformational capacity → vision, innovation, collective motivation, organizational learning.

This synthesis aligns with the dual nature of contemporary educational institutions, which require both ethical-relational stability and strategic-innovative dynamism.

Trends in Current Research on Authentic and Transformational Leadership in Education: A Web of Science and Scopus–Based Review

In addition to the primary literature reviewed above, a complementary database analysis was conducted using Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus to identify current trends in educational research on authentic and transformational leadership. Searches were performed using the keywords “authentic leadership” AND education and “transformational leadership” AND education, limited to peer-reviewed journal articles written in English within the social sciences, humanities, management sciences, and multidisciplinary fields.

Findings on Authentic Leadership in Educational Research

Based on the predefined inclusion criteria, the Web of Science database contains 167 peer-reviewed journal articles addressing authentic leadership in educational contexts. These studies are predominantly situated within Education (84 articles, 50.29%) and Management (50 articles, 29.94%). The earliest article indexed in WoS on this topic dates back to 2009.

Table 1. Fields of Publications on Authentic Leadership in Education in WoS (2009–2025)

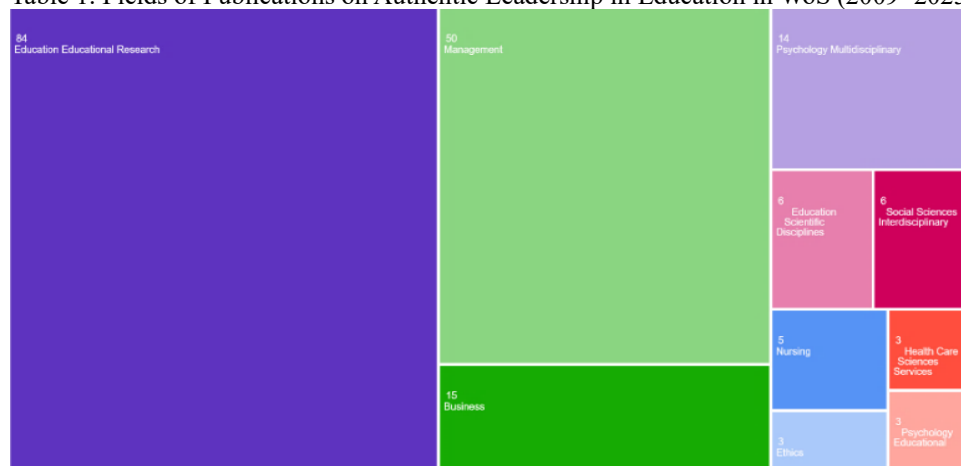
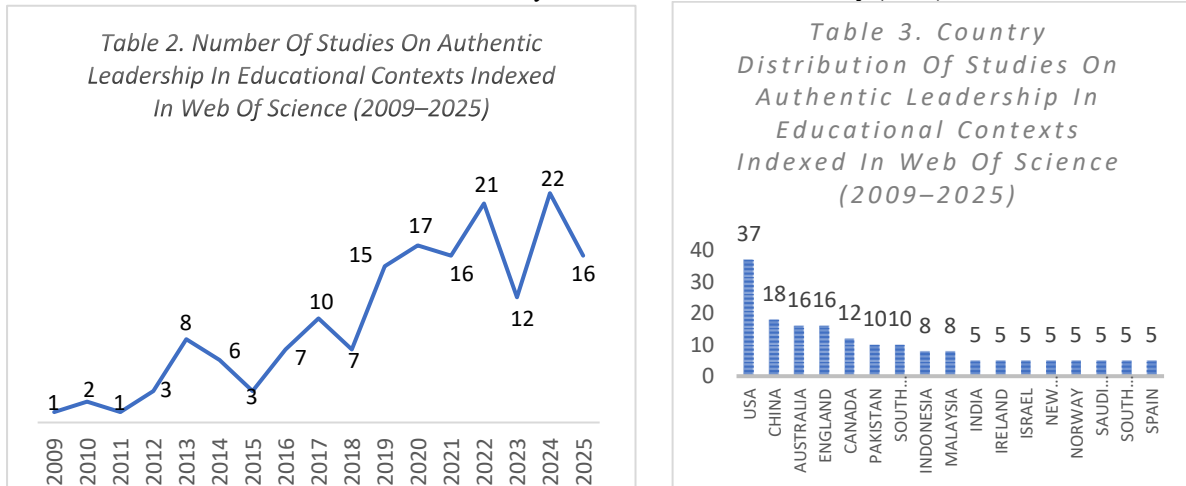


Table 2–3. Distribution by Publication Year and Country (WoS).

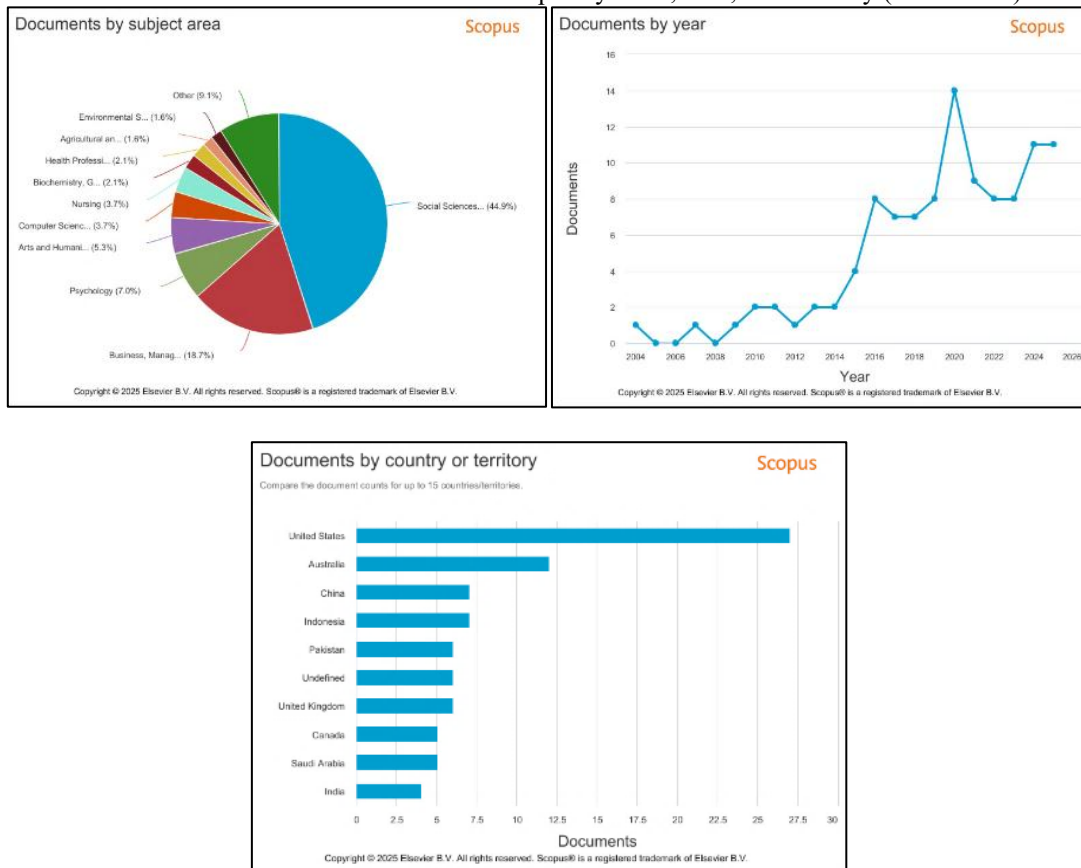


The tables indicate that the scholarly discourse around authentic leadership in education has emerged prominently over the past 15–20 years, with a significant growth in the last decade. Specifically, 119 of the 167 articles (71.26%) were published within the last seven years, demonstrating increasing academic attention.

In terms of geographic distribution, the majority of publications originate from the United States, China, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, with Türkiye ranked 12th with three publications.

Scopus Trends on Authentic Leadership in Education

Table 4. Distribution of Publications in Scopus by Field, Year, and Country (2004–2025)



As shown in Table 4, similar tendencies exist in Scopus. A total of 107 peer-reviewed English-language articles are indexed, spanning a broader time range (2004–2025). Most studies fall within:

- Social Sciences (44.9%) and Management and Business (18.7%), with the remaining percentage distributed across psychology, education, and cross-disciplinary fields.

Importantly, 91 of the 107 articles (85.05%) have been published within the last ten years, indicating accelerated interest. As in WoS, the United States leads the field, followed by Australia, China, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Notably, only one article in Scopus originates from a researcher affiliated with Türkiye.

Trends in Transformational Leadership Research in Education

To provide a comparative understanding, a parallel analysis was conducted for transformational leadership.

Table 5. Web of Science Publications on Transformational Leadership in Education (1992–2025)

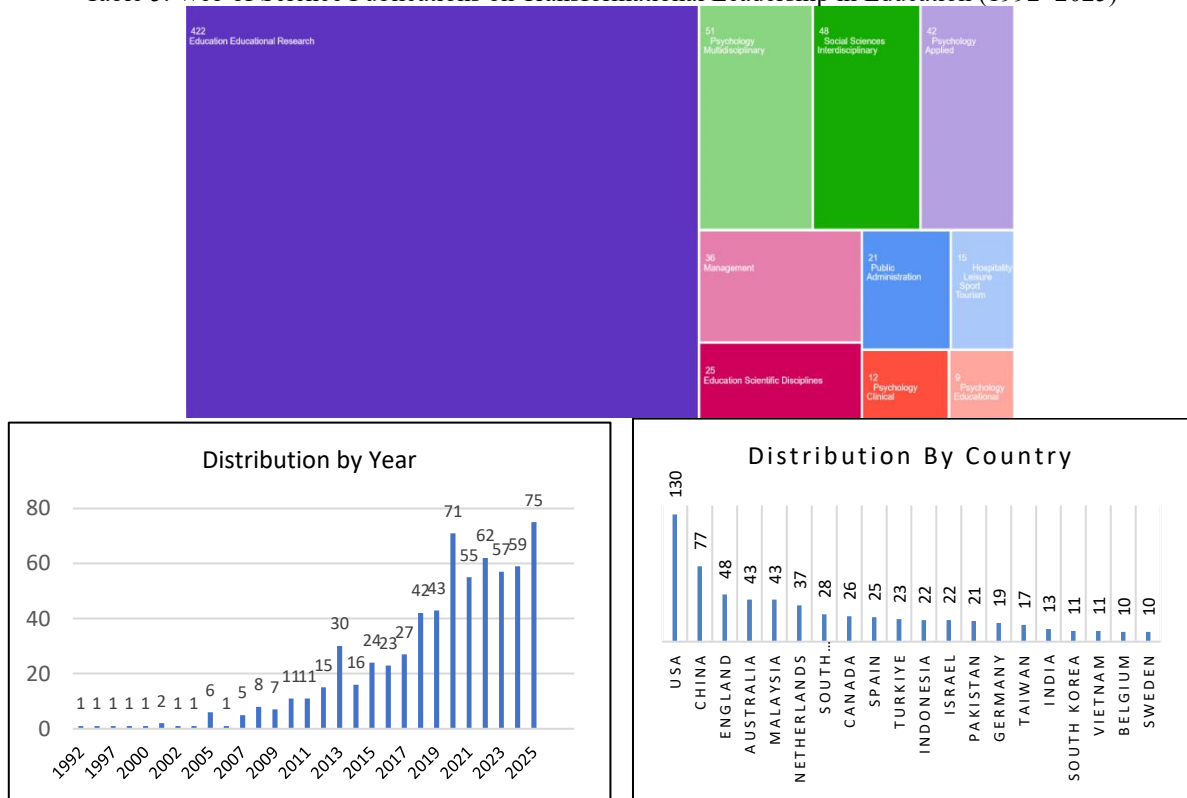
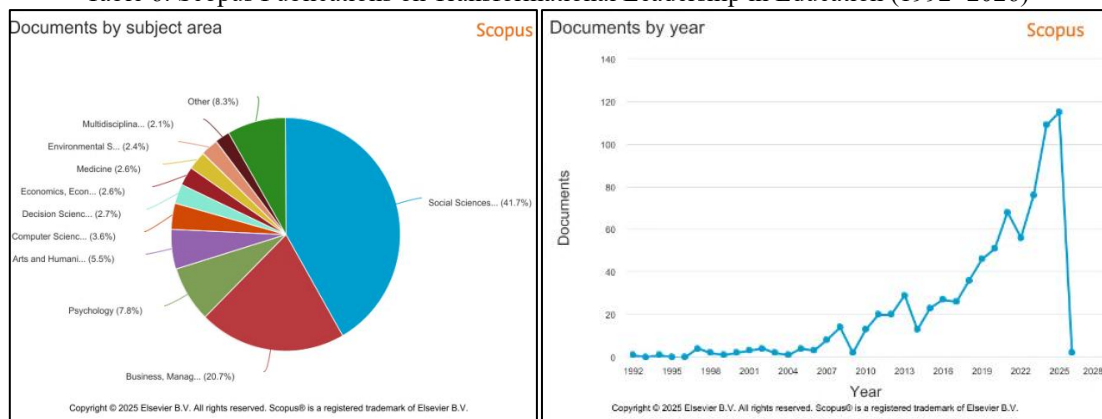
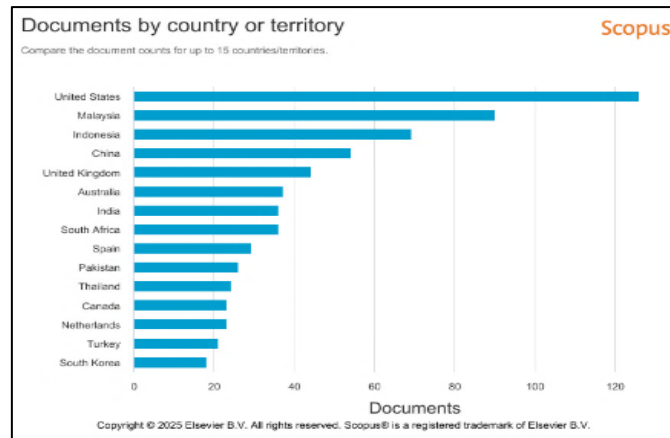


Table 6. Scopus Publications on Transformational Leadership in Education (1992–2026)





The findings reveal that transformational leadership has generated significantly more research attention compared to authentic leadership:

- 657 articles in Web of Science (≈ 4 times more than authentic leadership),
- 784 articles in Scopus (≈ 7 times more).

The earliest studies appear in 1992, indicating a much longer research tradition. Publication frequency increases sharply beginning in 2013, with the highest concentration of studies emerging in the last five years. This trend suggests that transformational leadership is more extensively theorized and empirically tested in educational settings.

Reasons for Greater Research Volume

Two primary explanations account for this difference:

1. Transformational leadership predates authentic leadership, allowing for a longer period of theoretical development and empirical exploration.
2. Transformational leadership outcomes are more easily measurable, making it more suitable for quantitative research designs. Authentic leadership, however, typically requires more nuanced, complex, and labor-intensive qualitative methodologies, limiting its volume of empirical work.

Field Distribution

The disciplinary distribution mirrors that of authentic leadership yet with higher density:

- In WoS, 64.23% of transformational leadership studies fall within education.
- In Scopus, 41.7% are in social sciences, and 20.7% are in management.

Geographical Trends

While the United States remains the leading contributor, subsequent positions are occupied by Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Türkiye, among others. Türkiye demonstrates notable scholarly engagement:

- 10th in WoS with 23 publications,
- 14th in Scopus with 21 publications.

This reflects both the increasing involvement of researchers in Eastern contexts and an expanding interest in the cultural relevance of leadership models.

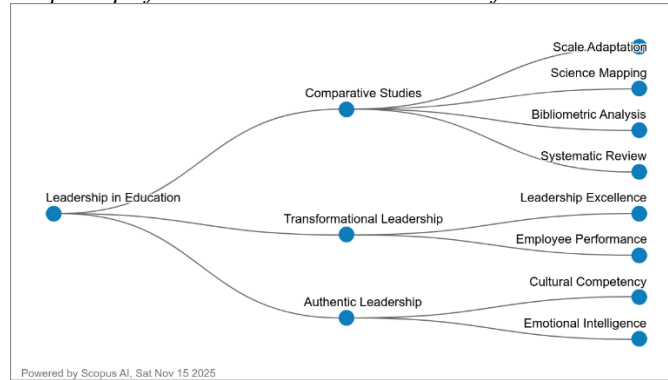
An additional observation based on Scopus’s AI topic analysis indicates that recent influential contributors (e.g., Mingyu Hou, Yi Zhao, Jamilah Binti Ahmad) predominantly examine the impact of transformational leadership on school-level outcomes, further reinforcing its contemporary relevance in global educational research agendas.

Scopus AI-Supported Field Analysis

Leadership in education is a critical determinant of teacher development, institutional culture, and student outcomes. Among various leadership paradigms, authentic and transformational leadership have received substantial attention due to their potential to foster innovation, well-being, and professional engagement among educators. The present analysis aims to summarize current research trends in Scopus pertaining to these leadership styles, their dimensions, mediating mechanisms, and comparative effects, and to identify key gaps and future research directions in the field of educational leadership.

The analysis is based on insights generated through Scopus AI, which provides an advanced meta-analytic synthesis of studies indexed in the Scopus database. Below is the concept map model illustrating the thematic structure of authentic and transformational leadership research within Scopus.

Table 7. Concept Map of Studies on Authentic and Transformational Leadership Indexed in Scopus



As illustrated in the concept map, research on these leadership styles in Scopus converges around three primary thematic areas:

1. Transformational leadership,
2. Authentic leadership,
3. Comparative or integrative studies.

The following section provides a closer summary of the research emerging within these themes.

Dimensions and Mechanisms of Authentic and Transformational Leadership in Education

Transformational leadership is grounded in cultivating a shared vision, supporting organizational change, and encouraging educators to transcend conventional boundaries. Empirical findings indicate that transformational leadership enhances teachers’ openness to pedagogical innovation, willingness to experiment with new instructional methods, and commitment to institutional goals. These effects typically emerge through mechanisms such as self-efficacy, psychological safety, positive organizational climate, and learning-oriented school cultures. Through these mediators, transformational leadership facilitates the institutionalization of innovative practices.

Authentic leadership, in contrast, is rooted in ethical behavior, transparent communication, self-awareness, and the establishment of trust-based relationships with followers. This leadership style strengthens teachers’ sense of autonomy, their perceptions of meaningful work, and their psychological well-being. The mechanisms involved include trust, emotional support, ethical climate, and perceptions of justice. Authentic leadership demonstrates a particularly protective function during periods of teacher burnout and professional uncertainty.

Across both leadership styles, emotional intelligence emerges as a significant moderating factor. Leaders with higher emotional awareness strengthen the motivational and innovative outcomes of transformational leadership, while reinforcing the trust-building and ethical sensitivity dimensions of authentic leadership. As such, leadership development programs increasingly integrate emotional and social–emotional competencies.

Comparative Insights and Future Directions

Although both authentic and transformational leadership are associated with positive organizational outcomes, conceptual overlap among measurement instruments complicates efforts to clearly distinguish these constructs. Component-level analyses show that transformational leadership is more closely tied to innovation, institutional engagement, and motivation for change; authentic leadership, however, more strongly influences teacher autonomy, well-being, and perceptions of ethical climate.

Organizational citizenship behaviors and creativity are supported by both leadership styles, yet through distinct pathways:

- In transformational leadership, these outcomes arise through shared vision and institutional identification.
- In authentic leadership, they emerge through trust, honest communication, and ethical norms.

Cultural context is a crucial factor in understanding differential impacts. Transformational leadership may exhibit stronger effects in centralized educational systems, whereas authentic leadership may be more effective in contexts with strong expectations for social support and justice. This aligns with existing findings highlighting culture as a key moderating variable.

Need for Longitudinal and Integrated Approaches

Longitudinal research examining the combined effects of authentic and transformational leadership remains limited. Yet variables such as teacher innovation, school culture, motivation, and well-being evolve over time, making time-sensitive models indispensable. Integrated frameworks evaluating the dynamic interplay between these two leadership styles are therefore essential.

Hybrid models that combine both approaches hold promise for advancing sustainable transformation in education. The visionary and motivational elements of transformational leadership, when merged with the ethical and relational foundations of authentic leadership, can simultaneously enhance innovation and teacher well-being. Cross-cultural studies would offer valuable insights into how these leadership styles are perceived in diverse governance systems and under varying socio-cultural norms. Research conducted outside Western contexts is especially needed to explain differential effects on teacher creativity, knowledge sharing, and perceived organizational support.

Research Gaps and Mentorship Perspectives

Significant research gaps include:

- Limited studies examining authentic and transformational leadership together,
- Insufficient exploration of mentoring and teacher leadership within leadership development frameworks,
- Measurement tools lacking sufficient discriminatory power to differentiate between the two constructs.

Challenges in mentoring—such as power asymmetries, time constraints, and lack of expertise—highlight the need for deeper investigation. Facilitating factors include collaborative cultures, high motivation, structured professional development, and systematic feedback mechanisms.

Social justice-oriented mentoring models emphasize empowering disadvantaged groups, recognizing diverse identities, and promoting inclusive practices. Emotional intelligence training, conflict management, reflective learning, and multimodal (online–face-to-face) mentoring formats are increasingly emphasized in mentor preparation.

Conclusion

Authentic and transformational leadership represent two influential yet distinct approaches in educational leadership research. Their mechanisms differ—transformational leadership primarily drives innovation and engagement, while authentic leadership strengthens autonomy, trust, and ethical climate—yet they remain complementary in practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Expansion of longitudinal, integrative studies addressing both leadership types together,
- Component-level comparative analyses,
- Cross-cultural comparisons in centralized vs. decentralized educational systems,
- Development of culturally sensitive and psychometrically robust measurement tools,
- Increased research on mentoring, teacher leadership, and social justice-centered leadership approaches.

Table 8. Examination of Authentic and Transformational Leadership Styles in Education: Dimensions, Mechanisms, Comparative Analysis, and Future Directions (Based on Relevant Studies Indexed in Scopus)

Theme	Authentic Leadership (AL)	Transformational Leadership (TL)	Integrated/Comparative Perspectives
Core Dimensions	Self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing	Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration	Substantial construct overlap; complementary in some contexts
Impact on Teachers	Supports well-being, autonomy, and organizational commitment	Enhances innovation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment	Both styles positively influence job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors; TL is generally stronger for innovation
Mediators	Autonomy, socio-emotional competence, organizational trust	Self-efficacy, collective efficacy, psychological safety, organizational culture	Organizational culture mediates both; emotional intelligence and self-efficacy interact more strongly with TL
Measurement	Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), contextually adapted	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), GTLS	High correlation ($\rho \approx .72$); requires detailed, component-level differentiation
Cultural Contexts	Influenced by collectivism, cultural norms, and education policy	Similar, but TL tends to be more robust across contexts	Cross-cultural effects vary; more comparative research is needed
Longitudinal/Integrated Studies	Rare; predominantly cross-sectional	Rare; predominantly cross-sectional	Significant gap in integrated, longitudinal studies

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