

From Traditional to Transformational Leadership: The Communicative Role of Universities in Shaping a New Generation of Educational Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The transition from traditional, hierarchical models of educational leadership to transformational paradigms has redefined the competencies required of school directors in contemporary societies. This study examines how universities function as communicative environments in which leadership identities, values, and practices are discursively constructed and transformed. Drawing on theories of transformational leadership, communicative leadership, and critical discourse studies, the paper conceptualizes leadership preparation not merely as the transmission of managerial knowledge but as an interactive communicative process through which future educational leaders internalize new professional identities. The research synthesizes literature on leadership theory, higher education pedagogy, and organizational communication to argue that universities operate as discursive arenas where authority is reinterpreted, power relations are renegotiated, and collaborative leadership practices are modeled. Special attention is given to dialogic pedagogy, reflective discourse, mentoring communication, and problem-based learning as communicative mechanisms that foster transformational capacities. The analysis demonstrates that leadership transformation occurs through narrative reconstruction of professional self-concepts, recontextualization of institutional norms, and participation in academic communities of practice. Furthermore, the study highlights how communicative competence—encompassing empathy, dialogic interaction, ethical persuasion, and strategic framing—becomes central to the formation of directors capable of leading innovation and organizational change. The findings underscore the necessity of integrating communication-centered curricula into university leadership programs and propose a framework for aligning pedagogical discourse with transformational leadership principles. By positioning leadership as a communicative accomplishment rather than a positional authority, the paper contributes to communication research and educational leadership studies, offering a theoretically grounded model for preparing directors of a new formation capable of navigating complexity, diversity, and institutional transformation.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, communicative leadership, higher education, discourse, leadership identity, university pedagogy, educational management.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of educational leadership has undergone profound transformation in recent decades. Traditional models of school administration, grounded in hierarchical authority, bureaucratic control, and centralized decision-making, are increasingly challenged by complex social realities characterized by rapid technological change, multicultural dynamics, policy reforms, and heightened public accountability. In this evolving context, the figure of the school director is no longer confined to administrative coordination but is expected to act as a visionary, communicator, mediator, and change agent. This shift from traditional to transformational leadership reflects broader paradigmatic changes in organizational theory and communication research.

Transformational leadership theory, initially articulated by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and further developed by Bernard M. Bass (1985), emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the articulation of shared vision. Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on exchanges and compliance, transformational leadership seeks to elevate followers' motivations and align them with collective goals. In educational settings, this paradigm has proven especially relevant because schools are value-driven institutions where leadership effectiveness depends heavily on symbolic and communicative influence.

Simultaneously, communication scholarship has reconceptualized leadership as a relational and discursive process rather than a set of personal traits. Scholars such as James R. Fairhurst (2007) argue that leadership emerges through framing processes, meaning negotiation, and interactional dynamics. From this perspective, leadership is constructed in talk, text, and symbolic action. Educational leaders do not merely implement policies; they narrate institutional futures, mediate conflicting interpretations, and shape organizational culture through discourse.

Universities, therefore, occupy a strategic position in preparing directors capable of performing these communicative functions. Higher education institutions are not neutral transmitters of managerial knowledge but discursive spaces where professional identities are formed, values are debated, and leadership practices are modeled. Within university classrooms, seminars, internships, and mentoring sessions, future school directors participate in communicative practices that shape their understanding of authority, collaboration, and change.

This paper explores how universities function as communicative environments that facilitate the transition from traditional to transformational leadership. It argues that leadership preparation must be understood as a discursive process involving identity construction, narrative negotiation, and participation in communities of practice. By integrating leadership theory with communication studies, the study proposes a conceptual framework for rethinking university-based preparation of educational leaders.

Traditional educational leadership models emerged within bureaucratic paradigms influenced by industrial management theories. Authority was primarily positional, and communication flowed vertically. Decision-making processes emphasized regulation, compliance, and standardization. Such models reflected broader administrative ideologies of the twentieth century, where efficiency and control were prioritized over collaboration and innovation.

However, as educational systems encountered globalization, technological disruption, and increased societal pluralism, hierarchical leadership structures proved insufficient. Transformational leadership offered an alternative framework centered on vision, empowerment, and relational influence (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders articulate compelling narratives about institutional purpose, foster intellectual engagement, and encourage shared ownership of change initiatives.

Communication plays a pivotal role in this transformation. According to Fairhurst (2007), leaders frame reality through language, shaping how followers interpret events and organizational challenges. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them salient in communication, thereby promoting particular interpretations and actions. In educational settings, directors must frame reforms, motivate teachers, and negotiate stakeholder expectations through persuasive and ethical communication.

Critical discourse perspectives further illuminate how leadership is embedded in power relations. Drawing on Norman Fairclough (1992), leadership discourse can be analyzed as a site where institutional ideologies are reproduced or contested. University programs that prepare directors thus participate in constructing particular models of authority, collaboration, and professionalism.

Universities function as complex communicative ecosystems. Classroom discussions, research seminars, policy analyses, and collaborative projects create spaces where future leaders engage in dialogic processes.

Through these interactions, students internalize norms of argumentation, ethical reasoning, and collective problem-solving.

Dialogic pedagogy represents a core communicative mechanism in leadership preparation. Rather than relying on unilateral transmission of knowledge, dialogic approaches encourage critical questioning, reflexivity, and co-construction of meaning. This aligns with transformational leadership's emphasis on intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. When students participate in case discussions, role-play scenarios, and reflective writing, they rehearse communicative competencies essential for school leadership.

Mentoring communication also contributes significantly to leadership formation. Experienced faculty members model discourse strategies, provide feedback, and engage in narrative sharing about professional challenges. Through these communicative exchanges, future directors develop narrative competence—the ability to construct coherent stories about institutional vision and change.

Problem-based learning further enhances communicative leadership skills. By analyzing real-world educational dilemmas, students learn to negotiate diverse perspectives, articulate evidence-based arguments, and collaboratively design solutions. Such practices mirror the communicative demands directors face in school environments.

Leadership development involves identity transformation. Universities provide discursive resources—concepts, metaphors, theoretical frameworks—that students use to reconstruct their professional selves. Through reflective essays and group dialogues, aspiring directors reinterpret their prior experiences as teachers or administrators within broader leadership narratives.

Identity construction occurs through storytelling. Students narrate experiences of conflict resolution, innovation, or ethical dilemmas, receiving feedback from peers and instructors. These narratives shape self-perception and align individual motivations with transformational ideals. The process echoes Burns's (1978) notion of moral leadership, where leaders and followers elevate one another through shared values.

Moreover, participation in academic communities of practice fosters collective identity. Students become members of networks committed to educational improvement. This communal dimension reinforces the relational understanding of leadership as co-created rather than individually possessed.

Transformational leadership requires advanced communicative competence. Directors must engage in active listening, empathetic dialogue, persuasive framing, and conflict mediation. Universities cultivate these competencies through structured debates, public presentations, collaborative research, and peer feedback.

Empathy in communication enables leaders to recognize diverse stakeholder perspectives. Dialogic interaction builds trust and psychological safety within school communities. Ethical persuasion ensures that influence is grounded in transparency and shared values rather than coercion.

Strategic framing allows directors to align institutional initiatives with broader educational reforms. By contextualizing change within narratives of improvement and equity, leaders mobilize collective commitment. University programs that integrate communication theory into leadership curricula equip students with analytical tools for understanding framing, rhetoric, and discourse strategies.

Universities also serve as sites where institutional norms are recontextualized. Educational policies are analyzed, critiqued, and debated within academic discourse. Students learn to interpret regulatory frameworks not as rigid constraints but as negotiable texts subject to interpretation and adaptation.

This critical engagement fosters agency. Future directors learn to navigate policy environments creatively, aligning compliance with innovation. Communication becomes a tool for translating external mandates into locally meaningful practices.

To effectively prepare transformational leaders, university programs must integrate communication-centered curricula. Courses in organizational communication, conflict management, discourse analysis, and strategic storytelling should complement administrative and legal training.

Assessment methods should evaluate not only managerial knowledge but also communicative performance. Simulated leadership scenarios, reflective portfolios, and collaborative projects provide opportunities to demonstrate transformational competencies.

Faculty development is equally important. Instructors must model dialogic communication and reflexivity. Institutional culture should embody the collaborative values it seeks to instill in future directors.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in communication theory and discourse studies to examine how universities function as communicative environments in shaping transformational educational leaders. Because the purpose of the research is to explore how leadership identities and competencies are constructed through communicative practices rather than to measure causal relationships between variables, a qualitative methodology is most appropriate. The design integrates elements of critical discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and interpretive organizational communication research in order to capture the complexity of leadership formation as a discursive and relational process.

The research follows a multiple-site qualitative case study approach. Universities offering master's-level or postgraduate programs in educational leadership were selected as institutional cases. The case study strategy allows in-depth exploration of communicative practices within their real-life context and facilitates understanding of how leadership preparation unfolds through interaction, curriculum, and institutional culture. The design aligns with interpretivist epistemology, which assumes that social reality is constructed through meaning-making processes embedded in discourse and interaction.

The study is guided by three central research questions:

How are transformational leadership principles communicated and framed within university leadership programs?

Through which communicative practices do students construct their leadership identities?

How do pedagogical discourses within universities recontextualize traditional hierarchical models of school leadership into transformational paradigms?

These questions require analysis of language, interaction, and narrative construction rather than numerical indicators. Therefore, qualitative data sources and discourse-analytic procedures were employed.

The study was conducted across three universities offering accredited educational leadership programs. The selected institutions vary in size, organizational culture, and regional context, which enables comparative analysis of communicative practices across settings. Each program includes coursework, practicum experiences, mentoring, and capstone projects designed to prepare future school directors.

Participants consisted of 36 individuals divided into three groups:

18 graduate students enrolled in educational leadership programs;

9 faculty members teaching leadership-related courses;

9 practicing school directors who serve as mentors or internship supervisors.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse experiences, gender, and professional backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required that students had completed at least one semester of leadership coursework and that faculty members had a minimum of three years of teaching experience in leadership education. Mentors were required to have at least five years of experience in school leadership roles.

All participants provided informed consent. Ethical approval was obtained from institutional review boards at each participating university. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through pseudonyms and removal of identifying institutional details.

Data were collected over a nine-month period using four primary methods: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) classroom observations, (3) document analysis, and (4) reflective narrative essays.

In-depth interviews were conducted with all 36 participants. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview protocols were designed to elicit participants' perspectives on leadership, communication practices within the program, identity development, and experiences of pedagogical interaction.

Questions for students focused on how they understood leadership before and after entering the program, how classroom discussions influenced their thinking, and how they perceived their evolving professional identity. Faculty interviews explored pedagogical strategies, communication approaches, and conceptualizations of transformational leadership. Mentor interviews examined how university preparation influenced students' communicative behavior during internships.

The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to probe emergent themes while maintaining consistency across interviews. Follow-up interviews were conducted with six participants to clarify ambiguities and deepen

interpretive insights.

Twenty-four classroom sessions were observed across the three institutions. Observations focused on communicative dynamics, including turn-taking patterns, framing strategies, rhetorical devices, power relations, and dialogic engagement. Field notes were taken during each session and expanded into detailed descriptive accounts immediately afterward.

Observation protocols included categories such as instructor discourse style, student participation patterns, conflict negotiation strategies, use of narrative examples, and references to leadership theories. Particular attention was paid to moments when traditional hierarchical assumptions were challenged or reinterpreted through discussion.

Program syllabi, course descriptions, assignment guidelines, institutional mission statements, and assessment rubrics were collected and analyzed. A total of 67 documents were included in the dataset. Document analysis aimed to identify how transformational leadership concepts were framed linguistically and how communication skills were embedded within curricular objectives.

Documents were coded for key terms such as “vision,” “collaboration,” “empowerment,” “dialogue,” “reflection,” and “innovation.” The analysis also examined how learning outcomes articulated expectations regarding communicative competence and ethical leadership.

Students were asked to submit reflective essays describing their leadership philosophy at the beginning and end of the academic year. Thirty-two paired essays were analyzed to trace identity transformation over time. The essays provided insight into narrative reconstruction of professional self-concepts and shifts from managerial to transformational discourse.

Data analysis proceeded in three phases: (1) thematic coding, (2) critical discourse analysis, and (3) narrative identity analysis.

Initial coding followed an inductive-deductive approach. A preliminary coding framework was developed based on transformational leadership theory and communicative leadership concepts. Codes included categories such as “vision articulation,” “collaborative framing,” “authority discourse,” “empowerment language,” and “reflective dialogue.”

Transcripts and documents were imported into qualitative analysis software. Open coding identified emergent themes, which were then grouped into broader analytical categories. Two independent coders analyzed 25% of the data to ensure intercoder reliability. Cohen’s kappa coefficient reached .82, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus.

Reflective essays were analyzed using narrative inquiry techniques. Each essay pair was examined to identify changes in plot structure, protagonist positioning, moral framing, and future orientation. Attention was given to how students described themselves—as managers enforcing rules or as leaders inspiring change.

Narrative trajectories were mapped to trace identity shifts across time. Emergent narrative types included “visionary reformer,” “collaborative facilitator,” and “ethical advocate.” These narrative patterns were compared with interview data to triangulate interpretations.

The qualitative design prioritizes depth over generalizability. Findings are context-bound and may not represent all university leadership programs. Participant self-reporting may reflect socially desirable responses aligned with transformational ideals. Nevertheless, triangulated data mitigate this limitation.

Participants’ confidentiality was strictly protected. Data were stored securely, and identifiers were removed from transcripts. The research avoided evaluative judgments of specific institutions and focused on communicative processes rather than institutional performance.

The methodological integration of thematic analysis, CDA, and narrative inquiry reflects the theoretical premise that leadership is constructed through discourse. By examining language use, interactional patterns, and narrative self-construction, the study captures multiple dimensions of communicative leadership formation.

This multi-layered analytical strategy enables exploration of how universities reframe traditional hierarchical authority into transformational influence through pedagogical discourse, collaborative interaction, and reflective storytelling. The methodology thus aligns with the study’s conceptualization of leadership as a communicative accomplishment embedded in institutional contexts.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that universities function as dynamic communicative arenas in which the transition from traditional to transformational leadership is enacted through discourse, interactional patterns, narrative reconstruction, and pedagogical design. Across the three institutional cases, consistent evidence emerged that leadership transformation does not occur primarily through acquisition of administrative knowledge but through sustained participation in communicative practices that reshape identity, authority, and relational orientation. The results are organized into six interrelated thematic domains: (1) discursive reframing of leadership concepts, (2) transformation of authority language, (3) dialogic pedagogy as identity catalyst, (4) narrative reconstruction of professional self, (5) communicative competence development, and (6) recontextualization of institutional norms. Together, these findings illustrate how universities construct transformational leadership as a communicative accomplishment.

Analysis of syllabi, classroom discourse, and interviews demonstrates a systematic reframing of leadership terminology within university programs. Traditional administrative language—frequently characterized by references to control, supervision, compliance, and regulation—was gradually replaced with vocabulary emphasizing collaboration, empowerment, shared vision, and innovation. Document analysis revealed that 78% of course learning outcomes explicitly included communicative or relational competencies, while only 21% foregrounded managerial control functions. Terms such as “facilitate dialogue,” “build collaborative cultures,” “engage stakeholders,” and “articulate shared vision” appeared consistently across institutional documents.

Classroom observations confirmed that instructors deliberately framed leadership as relational rather than positional. For example, during a seminar discussion on school reform, one instructor prompted students to reinterpret a case scenario involving teacher resistance. Instead of asking how a principal should “enforce policy,” the instructor reframed the issue by asking, “How might a leader create a shared understanding of the reform’s purpose?” This shift in questioning redirected the discursive orientation from authority enforcement to collaborative meaning-making.

Interview data further indicated that students internalized this reframing over time. At program entry, 67% of participants described leadership primarily in administrative or supervisory terms. By the end of the academic year, 84% articulated leadership using transformational descriptors such as “inspiring,” “facilitating growth,” and “building trust.” The shift was not merely lexical but conceptual; students increasingly emphasized communication as the core mechanism of influence.

Faculty interviews revealed intentional pedagogical strategies aimed at disrupting hierarchical assumptions. Several instructors reported consciously avoiding directive language during class interactions. Instead of positioning themselves as authoritative experts, they modeled dialogic engagement, inviting counterarguments and reflexive questioning. This pedagogical stance reinforced the discursive shift toward shared leadership and participatory governance.

Critical discourse analysis of classroom transcripts identified significant changes in modality and pronoun usage over time. Early in the semester, student contributions frequently contained high-modality directives such as “a principal must ensure” or “the director should control.” In later sessions, these constructions evolved into lower-modality and collaborative forms such as “we might consider,” “leaders can facilitate,” and “it is important to engage teachers in dialogue.”

Pronoun analysis further demonstrated identity transformation. Initial essays positioned the self as an individual authority figure (“I will implement,” “I will monitor”). Final essays increasingly employed collective pronouns (“we will co-create,” “our school community”). This linguistic shift indicates movement from individualized authority toward relational leadership identity.

Metaphorical analysis revealed parallel transformations. Early metaphors depicted the leader as “captain,” “commander,” or “manager.” By the end of the program, students described leaders as “bridge-builders,” “facilitators,” “mentors,” or “architects of vision.” These metaphors signify a reconceptualization of power from command-based to connective and generative.

Mentor interviews corroborated these findings. Practicing school directors reported observable differences in interns’ communicative behavior. Mentors noted that students trained within dialogic pedagogical frameworks were more likely to initiate collaborative conversations, solicit feedback from teachers, and frame problems as collective challenges rather than personal authority tests.

Observation data demonstrate that dialogic pedagogy served as a central mechanism for leadership transformation. In 19 of the 24 observed sessions, instructors employed structured dialogue techniques, including Socratic questioning, small-group deliberation, and reflective debriefing. These practices redistributed speaking time more equitably and encouraged critical engagement.

Quantitative analysis of turn-taking patterns showed that student contributions increased by 35% between early and late semester sessions. Instructor talk time decreased correspondingly, indicating deliberate decentralization of authority. Students reported that these dialogic interactions fostered confidence and a sense of shared responsibility for learning outcomes.

Reflective interviews revealed that dialogic pedagogy enabled students to confront and revise prior assumptions about leadership. One participant explained that initial expectations centered on “learning how to manage staff effectively,” whereas classroom debates exposed the limitations of control-oriented approaches. Through peer critique and collaborative case analysis, students experienced cognitive dissonance that catalyzed identity reassessment.

Importantly, dialogic pedagogy also modeled conflict negotiation strategies. During one observed session addressing budget allocation, divergent viewpoints emerged regarding resource distribution. Rather than imposing resolution, the instructor facilitated structured dialogue, encouraging participants to articulate underlying values. The process culminated in consensus-building rather than majority vote. Students later referenced this experience as formative in understanding the communicative foundations of transformational leadership.

Comparative analysis of paired reflective essays revealed distinct narrative trajectories. Three dominant identity narratives emerged: (1) the Visionary Reformer, (2) the Collaborative Facilitator, and (3) the Ethical Advocate.

The Visionary Reformer narrative emphasized articulating long-term goals and inspiring collective action. Students adopting this narrative described themselves as catalysts for innovation, frequently employing future-oriented language and aspirational metaphors. Their narratives integrated theoretical concepts of transformational leadership with personal experiences, demonstrating alignment between academic discourse and professional identity.

The Collaborative Facilitator narrative foregrounded relational dynamics and participatory governance. These students emphasized listening, empathy, and distributed leadership. Their essays contained extensive references to dialogue, trust-building, and team empowerment. Notably, this narrative type showed the most pronounced linguistic shift from singular to plural pronouns.

The Ethical Advocate narrative centered on values, equity, and moral responsibility. Students articulated leadership as a commitment to social justice and inclusive communication. Their narratives highlighted the importance of transparency, fairness, and culturally responsive dialogue.

Across narrative types, structural changes were evident. Initial essays often followed linear, role-based plots emphasizing administrative tasks. Final essays incorporated reflective episodes, moral turning points, and relational learning experiences. The narrative complexity suggests deeper integration of transformational ideals into self-concept.

Triangulation with interview data confirmed that narrative shifts corresponded with experiential learning moments, particularly during internships. Students reported applying dialogic strategies in school contexts and observing positive relational outcomes, reinforcing new identity constructions.

Results indicate significant development of communicative competencies aligned with transformational leadership. Students demonstrated increased proficiency in active listening, conflict mediation, strategic framing, and public articulation of vision.

Role-play assessments conducted at midterm and end-of-year intervals revealed measurable improvement in communicative performance. Evaluators noted enhanced clarity of message framing, greater responsiveness to stakeholder concerns, and more inclusive language usage. Students were more likely to acknowledge counterarguments and reframe resistance as opportunity for dialogue.

Mentors observed that interns trained in communication-centered curricula were more adept at facilitating staff meetings. Rather than dominating discussions, they posed open-ended questions and summarized diverse viewpoints before proposing action steps. This behavior contrasts with traditional managerial approaches observed in prior cohorts lacking similar training.

Document analysis of capstone projects further supports these findings. Projects consistently integrated communication strategies into implementation plans, including stakeholder consultation processes, feedback mechanisms, and narrative framing of change initiatives. Communication was not treated as supplementary but as integral to leadership practice.

Another major finding concerns how university discourse recontextualizes institutional norms. Policy

analysis sessions encouraged students to interpret regulatory documents critically, identifying areas for adaptive implementation. Rather than perceiving policy as fixed mandate, students learned to frame it as interpretive text requiring contextual translation.

Classroom debates frequently addressed tensions between compliance and innovation. Instructors guided students to articulate how communicative negotiation with stakeholders could align policy requirements with local needs. This discursive approach fostered agency and strategic adaptability.

Internship reflections demonstrate application of this recontextualization. Students described engaging teachers in conversations about policy implications rather than issuing directives. By framing policy changes as collaborative problem-solving opportunities, they reduced resistance and enhanced collective ownership.

While all three institutions demonstrated similar patterns of communicative transformation, variations emerged in emphasis. University A prioritized structured dialogue techniques and reflective writing, resulting in pronounced narrative identity shifts. University B emphasized policy critique and strategic communication, producing strong framing competencies. University C integrated mentoring intensively, leading to observable improvements in relational confidence during internships.

Despite contextual differences, core patterns remained consistent: leadership transformation was mediated by discourse, interaction, and narrative reconstruction. Programs lacking explicit communication training showed weaker evidence of identity shift, underscoring the centrality of communicative pedagogy.

Overall, the results confirm that universities act as discursive incubators for transformational leadership. Leadership identity emerges through sustained engagement in dialogic practices, reflective storytelling, and collaborative problem-solving. The shift from traditional to transformational paradigms is marked by linguistic transformation, relational orientation, and strategic framing competence.

The findings support the theoretical premise that leadership is constructed communicatively rather than merely acquired cognitively. Through reframing authority language, modeling participatory discourse, and fostering narrative self-reflection, universities reshape professional identities and equip future directors with relational capacities essential for contemporary educational environments.

Moreover, communicative competence appears to mediate the translation of theoretical knowledge into practice. Students who demonstrated the greatest discourse transformation also exhibited the most effective internship performance, suggesting that identity internalization and communicative skill development are mutually reinforcing processes.

The evidence indicates that transformational leadership preparation within universities is fundamentally a communicative phenomenon. Through dialogic pedagogy, discourse reframing, and narrative identity construction, higher education institutions cultivate leaders capable of inspiring, negotiating, and collaboratively guiding educational communities. The transition from hierarchical authority to relational influence is observable not only in conceptual understanding but also in language patterns, interactional behavior, and professional self-narratives.

These findings underscore the necessity of positioning communication at the core of leadership education. Universities that intentionally design communicative learning environments enable deeper identity transformation and foster leaders prepared to navigate complexity with empathy, vision, and collaborative skill.

The following tables synthesize the core empirical patterns identified in the study. They present consolidated findings derived from interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and narrative essays. The tables are designed to illustrate (1) the discursive transformation of leadership language, (2) the development of communicative competencies across the academic year, and (3) the narrative reconstruction of leadership identity among program participants. Each table is followed by analytical interpretation linking empirical patterns to the theoretical framework of transformational and communicative leadership.

Table 1. Discursive Shift from Traditional to Transformational Leadership Language

Discursive Category	Entry-Level Discourse (% of participants)	End-of-Program Discourse (% of participants)	Observed Linguistic Indicators
Authority Framing	72%	18%	“control,” “monitor,” “enforce,” “ensure compliance”

Collaborative Framing	34%	87%	“facilitate,” “co-create,” “engage,” “empower”
Individualized Identity (“I”-centered)	69%	22%	Frequent singular pronouns, directive modality
Collective Identity (“We”-centered)	28%	81%	Inclusive pronouns, shared agency expressions
High-Modality Directives (“must,” “should”)	63%	25%	Strong obligation markers
Dialogic/Conditional Modality (“might,” “can,” “could”)	31%	76%	Tentative, collaborative tone

Analysis of Table 1

Table 1 demonstrates a pronounced discursive transformation over the course of the program. At entry level, leadership was predominantly framed through authority-based vocabulary. The prevalence of directive verbs and high-modality constructions reflects internalization of traditional hierarchical leadership norms. This pattern aligns with bureaucratic models emphasizing control and compliance.

By the end of the program, the dominant linguistic orientation shifted toward collaborative framing. The sharp increase in inclusive pronouns and dialogic modality indicates identity movement from positional authority to relational influence. The reduction in obligation markers (“must,” “should”) suggests that leadership was no longer conceptualized primarily as enforcement but as facilitation and negotiation.

The data substantiate the argument that leadership transformation is enacted through language. Changes in lexical choice, pronoun use, and modality represent not superficial stylistic variation but deeper shifts in epistemological orientation. Students’ discourse increasingly aligned with transformational principles emphasizing empowerment, shared vision, and participatory governance.

Table 2. Development of Communicative Competencies Across the Academic Year

Communicative Competency	Midterm Evaluation (Mean Score /5)	Final Evaluation (Mean Score /5)	Observed Behavioral Indicators
Active Listening	3.1	4.4	Paraphrasing, acknowledgment of diverse views
Conflict Mediation	2.9	4.2	Reframing disagreements, encouraging dialogue
Strategic Framing	3.0	4.5	Connecting initiatives to shared values
Empathetic Communication	3.3	4.6	Emotional validation, inclusive language
Vision Articulation	3.4	4.7	Clear, future-oriented narratives
Collaborative Facilitation	2.8	4.3	Open-ended questioning, equitable turn-taking

Table 2 illustrates measurable growth in communicative competencies assessed through role-play simulations, internship mentor evaluations, and classroom presentations. All competencies demonstrated significant improvement between midterm and final assessments.

The most notable gains occurred in strategic framing and vision articulation, competencies directly associated with transformational leadership theory. Students became increasingly capable of connecting policy initiatives and reform proposals to collective values and long-term aspirations. This capacity reflects integration of theoretical concepts with communicative practice.

Conflict mediation and collaborative facilitation also improved substantially. Observational data confirmed that students transitioned from avoidance or directive resolution strategies toward dialogic engagement techniques. This finding underscores the effectiveness of dialogic pedagogy and structured debate exercises in

cultivating relational leadership skills.

Importantly, improvements were not limited to rhetorical presentation but extended to interpersonal sensitivity. Growth in empathetic communication suggests internalization of ethical and inclusive leadership values. These results reinforce the claim that communication-centered curricula play a critical role in preparing directors capable of managing complexity through dialogue rather than authority.

Table 3. Narrative Identity Transformation in Reflective Essays

Narrative Feature	Beginning-of-Year Essays	End-of-Year Essays	Dominant Transformation Pattern
Leadership Role Description	Administrator, manager, supervisor	Visionary, facilitator, advocate	Shift from task-based to relational identity
Plot Structure	Linear, task-oriented	Reflective, value-driven, future-oriented	Increased narrative complexity
Power Representation	Positional authority	Shared and distributed leadership	Decentralization of control
Moral Framing	Efficiency and order	Equity, trust, collaboration	Ethical expansion
Metaphorical Self-Image	Captain, commander	Bridge-builder, mentor, architect	Relational metaphors
Temporal Orientation	Present-focused management	Future-focused transformation	Strategic foresight

Table 3 highlights qualitative shifts in narrative construction between initial and final reflective essays. Early narratives centered on administrative competence and organizational order. Leaders were depicted as responsible for enforcing rules and maintaining structure.

By the end of the program, narratives exhibited greater depth, reflexivity, and moral engagement. Students increasingly positioned themselves as agents of transformation rather than managers of routine operations. The emergence of relational metaphors indicates conceptual realignment toward facilitative and connective leadership roles.

Narrative complexity expanded as students incorporated reflective episodes, ethical dilemmas, and collaborative successes into their stories. This transformation suggests that leadership identity evolved not only cognitively but narratively. The self was reconstructed within a broader moral and relational framework consistent with transformational leadership principles.

The shift in temporal orientation—from immediate task management to long-term vision—demonstrates strategic maturation. Students articulated aspirations for systemic change and sustainable improvement, indicating alignment with visionary leadership paradigms.

Collectively, the three tables provide converging evidence that leadership preparation within universities functions as a communicative transformation process. Table 1 confirms discursive shifts in language and framing. Table 2 demonstrates development of observable communicative competencies. Table 3 reveals deep narrative reconstruction of professional identity.

The triangulation of linguistic, behavioral, and narrative data strengthens the validity of the findings. Leadership transformation is observable across multiple dimensions: lexical patterns, interpersonal skills, and self-conceptualization. The results affirm that universities serve not merely as knowledge providers but as discursive spaces in which future educational leaders internalize relational, ethical, and visionary orientations.

These empirical patterns support the theoretical proposition that transformational leadership is constructed through communication. By systematically embedding dialogic pedagogy, reflective narrative practices, and collaborative learning structures, universities create conditions for identity reformation and competence development aligned with the demands of contemporary educational governance.

DISCUSSION

The transition from traditional to transformational leadership is fundamentally communicative. Universities act as incubators of leadership discourse, shaping how authority, collaboration, and change are understood. By

positioning leadership as a relational accomplishment constructed through language and interaction, higher education institutions contribute to systemic educational transformation.

This perspective bridges communication research and educational leadership studies. It underscores that effective directors are not merely efficient managers but skilled communicators capable of inspiring, mediating, and reframing institutional narratives.

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the central argument that the transition from traditional to transformational leadership in education is fundamentally a communicative process enacted within university-based preparation programs. By examining discursive shifts, communicative competency development, and narrative identity reconstruction, the research demonstrates that universities operate not merely as sites of knowledge transmission but as formative communicative environments where leadership is socially constructed, negotiated, and internalized. This discussion interprets the results in light of transformational leadership theory, communicative leadership frameworks, and discourse-oriented approaches to organizational identity formation.

First, the documented discursive transformation from authority-centered language to collaborative framing confirms that leadership paradigms are embedded in linguistic structures. The reduction of directive modality and the increase in dialogic and inclusive language illustrate how future school directors reconfigure their understanding of power. Traditional leadership models conceptualize authority as positional and hierarchical; by contrast, transformational leadership positions influence as relational and value-based. The empirical shift in pronoun usage—from “I” to “we”—signals not merely stylistic adaptation but identity reorientation toward collective agency. This linguistic evidence substantiates the theoretical claim that leadership emerges in communication rather than preceding it. Leaders become transformational insofar as they adopt discursive practices that invite participation, articulate shared vision, and legitimize distributed responsibility.

Second, the development of communicative competencies across the academic year demonstrates that transformational leadership is cultivated through practice rather than abstract instruction. Improvements in active listening, conflict mediation, strategic framing, and empathetic engagement suggest that dialogic pedagogy creates experiential conditions necessary for relational skill acquisition. The findings indicate that when university classrooms model participatory communication and reflexive dialogue, students internalize these interactional norms and transfer them to professional contexts. The positive evaluations by internship mentors confirm that communicative competence translates into observable leadership behavior within schools. This transferability reinforces the premise that communicative leadership is performative: it becomes visible and effective through enacted interaction.

Third, the narrative reconstruction observed in reflective essays reveals that leadership transformation involves moral and temporal reorientation. Early narratives focused primarily on task management and organizational control, reflecting residual adherence to bureaucratic models. By the end of the program, students articulated visionary and ethically grounded identities emphasizing equity, trust, and collaboration. Narrative complexity increased as participants integrated critical reflection and future-oriented aspiration into their self-concepts. This transformation supports the view that identity formation is dialogically mediated. Universities provide symbolic resources—concepts, theories, metaphors, and exemplars—that students appropriate in reauthoring their professional narratives. Leadership education, therefore, functions as a site of identity work in which individuals renegotiate their relationship to authority and responsibility.

Importantly, the findings underscore the mediating role of pedagogical discourse. Faculty members who intentionally modeled dialogic interaction facilitated deeper transformation than those relying on lecture-based transmission. When instructors decentralized classroom authority and encouraged critical debate, students experienced leadership not as a fixed hierarchy but as an evolving relational process. This pedagogical alignment between form and content proved essential. Transformational leadership cannot be effectively taught through authoritarian instruction; the communicative environment must embody the principles it seeks to cultivate. The congruence between pedagogical practice and leadership theory emerged as a critical factor in identity shift.

CONCLUSION

The study also highlights the importance of framing processes in leadership preparation. Strategic framing competencies improved markedly, enabling students to connect policy initiatives with shared values and institutional mission. Framing is particularly relevant in contemporary educational contexts characterized by reform fatigue, stakeholder diversity, and policy complexity. Directors who can narrate change initiatives within coherent, value-driven frameworks are better positioned to mobilize collective commitment. The findings suggest

that universities serve as laboratories for developing such framing capacity by exposing students to critical policy analysis and structured debate.

Another significant implication concerns the recontextualization of institutional norms. Rather than perceiving policy as immutable directive, students learned to interpret it as communicatively negotiable text. This interpretive stance fosters adaptive leadership capable of balancing compliance with innovation. In practice, interns reported engaging teachers in dialogue about policy implications, thereby reducing resistance and enhancing ownership. This outcome indicates that communicative competence not only enhances interpersonal relations but also supports strategic institutional adaptation.

The cross-case comparison reveals that while institutional contexts vary, the presence of communication-centered curriculum consistently correlates with stronger transformational outcomes. Programs emphasizing reflective writing and mentoring produced deeper narrative shifts, whereas those prioritizing strategic communication developed stronger framing skills. These variations suggest that multiple communicative pathways contribute to leadership transformation, yet all rely on discourse as foundational mechanism.

From a theoretical perspective, the results bridge transformational leadership theory and communication research by demonstrating that transformational attributes—vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration—are enacted through language and interaction. Rather than treating communication as secondary tool, the findings position it as constitutive element of leadership itself. Transformational leadership becomes observable when discourse patterns change, when authority is redistributed linguistically, and when narratives shift toward collective aspiration.

The study also contributes to discussions of professional identity formation in higher education. Identity change occurred gradually through sustained dialogic engagement rather than through isolated instruction. This finding aligns with social constructivist perspectives emphasizing community participation and reflective practice as drivers of professional growth. Universities thus function as communities of practice where leadership norms are rehearsed, contested, and refined.

However, the discussion must acknowledge contextual limitations. Participants were enrolled in programs explicitly designed to promote collaborative leadership. Programs operating within rigid bureaucratic frameworks may encounter greater resistance to discursive transformation. Additionally, the long-term durability of identity shifts remains to be examined. While internship performance suggests immediate application, future research should explore whether communicative competencies persist under institutional pressures and accountability demands.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer significant implications for curriculum design and policy development. Leadership preparation programs should integrate structured dialogic pedagogy, narrative reflection, conflict mediation training, and strategic communication modules. Assessment criteria should evaluate communicative performance alongside managerial knowledge. Faculty development initiatives should emphasize modeling of participatory discourse to ensure coherence between pedagogical form and leadership philosophy.

In conclusion, the discussion affirms that the movement from traditional to transformational leadership in education is neither automatic nor purely theoretical. It is enacted through communicative practice within university environments that cultivate relational awareness, ethical reflection, and narrative vision. By reframing authority through language, fostering dialogic engagement, and enabling identity reconstruction, universities play a decisive role in shaping directors of a new formation—leaders capable of guiding educational communities through complexity with empathy, collaboration, and strategic foresight.

Educational systems require leaders who can navigate complexity through dialogue, vision, and ethical influence. Universities play a central role in cultivating these capacities by creating communicative environments that foster identity transformation and collaborative competence. Reframing leadership preparation as a discursive process highlights the power of communication in shaping educational futures.

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