

Pushed by Pain or Pulled by Vision: Transformational Leadership and Its Implications on Curriculum Reform within Higher Education Institutions in the Khmer Context

Sarom Mok^{a,*}, Neavea Tep^b, Satya Yen^b, Mengheang Hor^c, Pisith Hok^d, Chamnab Voecun^e,

^aRoyal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

^bNEAVEA OBROM Training Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

^cMinistry of Planning, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

^dACLEDA University of Business, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

^ePreah Sihanoniraja Buddhist University, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are under growing pressure to change their curricula in order to promote sustainability, creativity, and equity in an educational environment that is changing quickly due to new trends and labor demands. The issue is that the Khmer HEI faculty members continue to struggle to undertake meaningful curricular change. Studies on the impact of transformational leadership on curriculum reform in HEIs are scarce in the literature, despite the expanding corpus of research on curriculum implementation. This fundamental qualitative study aims to investigate the effects of transformational leadership on curricular reform among faculty members in the Khmer HEIs. The theoretical frameworks employed in this study were: (i) change leadership theory; and (ii) reconceptualist curriculum theory. The purpose of this study was to investigate how transformational leadership behaviors and methods affect curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. Twenty-five people were chosen to make up the sample from the target demographic of the Khmer HEI faculty members using purposeful sampling. Each participant had to meet three requirements for inclusion: they had to be employed at the research location for at least three years, be knowledgeable about curriculum reform, and have a theoretical grasp of transformational leadership. Semi-structured interview techniques were used to gather the data, and the NVivo was used to analyze it using Braun and Clarke's (2019) theme analysis methodology. This study illustrated the beneficial effects of transformational leadership behaviors and techniques on curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. The results demonstrated that through enhancing engagement and communication, boosting support, promoting diversity, and facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration, transformational leadership behaviors and techniques helped the Khmer HEIs alter their curricula. The findings of this study may help policymakers and educational leaders implement successful leadership models to assist curriculum reform by leading to better academic results and institutional change in higher education.

Keywords: Pushed by Pain, Pulled by Vision, Transformational Leadership, Implications, Curriculum Reform, Higher Education Institutions

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1. Introduction

Leadership is crucial for maintaining moral behavior, efficient change management, and well-informed decision-making as educational institutions work to adapt to this evolving era and dynamic global education landscape (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Sharma & Kaur, 2024). Relatively, higher education institutions (HEIs) have extensively used transformational leadership, one of the many leadership philosophies in educational settings, to enhance culture, faculty performance, commitment, student outcomes, curriculum reform, and stakeholder involvement (Doer, 2025; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Curriculum restrictions, university governance, research, new trends and technology, and student engagement in higher education are major issues in today's educational settings, especially in HEIs (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2022). According to Bohari et al. (2024) and Hang-Chuon et al. (2019), these educational settings call for leaders with particular abilities and characteristics in innovation and creativity, as

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: moksaromddg@gmail.com

well as the capacity to inspire, motivate, support, and bring about cultural change. These qualities are all in line with transformational leadership and essential elements for bringing about change in HEIs.

Taking into account of numerous factors, global shifts, labor demands, technology breakthroughs, and societal changes have put HEIs under pressure to make major improvements in curriculum and instruction practices, including reforms to guarantee relevance and responsiveness to these needs (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Pritchard et al., 2021). In Khmer HEIs, curriculum reform has been a methodical process that aims to provide equity for all student groups, mitigate current educational quality restrictions, and fit with contemporary trends and workforce demands (Bou, 2024; Doeur, 2025; Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). Curriculum reform at HEIs is in line with both national priorities and worker demands (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019). This approach to curriculum reform in HEIs is a strong attempt to improve and update teaching methods while giving aspiring professionals the tools they need to contribute significantly to the global community (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). In order to guarantee informed decision-making and best practices, the iterative and methodical nature of curriculum reform in HEIs depends on crucial elements like teamwork and, above all, leadership (Doeur, 2025; Hab, 2024).

Cambodia's higher education sector provides a distinctive context for examining transformational leadership during curriculum reform. Unlike many higher education systems where curriculum decisions are largely decentralized, Cambodian HEIs operate within a reform environment strongly influenced by national educational priorities established by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). Ongoing efforts to improve educational quality, strengthen workforce alignment, and respond to regional and global developments have increased expectations for institutional leaders to facilitate effective curriculum transformation. Consequently, understanding how transformational leadership supports curriculum reform within the Cambodian context is particularly important, as leadership practices may be shaped by unique institutional, cultural, and policy-related factors that differ from those reported in other higher education settings.

Guided by these perspectives, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) of Cambodia is highlighted in case studies of curricular reform in Cambodia, which is curriculum in crucial areas including resources, infrastructure, implementation, and instruction, but provide little investigation of the impact of leadership during curriculum reform (Doeur, 2025; Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). Research on leadership influence, especially transformational leadership in curriculum change, from the viewpoints of academics and educators is scarce in the setting of HEIs both nationally and internationally. Although transformational leadership has been widely investigated in Western and developed educational contexts, empirical evidence from Cambodian higher education institutions remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on curriculum reform implementation and educational policy development, leaving insufficient understanding of how transformational leadership influences faculty engagement and curriculum transformation within the Khmer higher education context. The transformational leadership method is well known for its charismatic and visionary leaders who encourage others to reach their greatest potential (Agbaje, 2023; Em et al., 2024; Rooffe & Baldwin, 2020). In order to highlight effective leadership practices in curriculum change, outline best practices and strategies for effective curriculum reform, emphasize the benefits, and provide details on specific behaviors that shape curriculum decisions and change processes, it is essential to investigate the implications of transformational leadership on curriculum reform in HEIs from the perspectives and experiences of faculty in the Khmer context (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). The investigation of transformational leadership techniques for creative and sustainable curriculum reform at HEIs will be guided by this study.

To illustrate, HEIs have undergone extensive change as a result of growing pressures to become more effective, modern, efficient, competitive, and accountable (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Tiron-Tudor et al., 2022). In order to assure alignment with government efforts, current trends, workforce demands, and other worldwide transformations, public and private colleges are changing to display business-like characteristics (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Tiron-Tudor et al., 2022). An era of change has been brought about by global shifts in patterns, significant technology advancements, research, and other reasons. As a result, HEIs must become more innovative and knowledgeable in their decision-making regarding educational practices (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Tiron-Tudor et al., 2022). The Cambodian Higher Education Association (CHEA) in Cambodia established a task force to investigate curriculum reform in higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe. The task force's findings reinforced curriculum reform as a key driver for teaching and learning change, workforce and societal alignment, and being seen as a crucial cog in the development of both established and emerging societies due to robust educational practices (Bou, 2024; Doeur, 2025; Em et al., 2024; Hab, 2024; Ngoun et al., 2025).

In order to alleviate inequality, adapt to new trends, and give aspiring professionals in the Khmer HEIs the greatest possible educational experience, education reform has been a continuous endeavor (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al.,

2019). The fundamental idea driving these modifications has been to enable access, equity, and excellence in educational practices. The formal curriculum and programs serve as the organizing framework and cornerstone of education in HEIs, emphasizing a method for offering emerging professionals a fair and high-quality education (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Palmer, 2007; UNESCO, 2015). The curriculum, which directs all HEI students' learning experiences, is at the core of educational reform. Although HEIs acknowledge the importance of curricula for educational transformation, awareness of curriculum reform is still inconsistent throughout higher education. While there is data and research on curriculum reform and the implementation experiences of educators at HEIs, there is a growing body of study on the leadership practices that impact curriculum reform and changes in HEIs (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Roofe & Baldwin, 2020). Curriculum reform is a methodical, iterative process that calls for strong preparation, execution, and leadership (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Roofe & Baldwin, 2020). This highlights the need to investigate and offer comprehensive insights into how transformational leadership affects curriculum reform in higher education institutions, pinpointing certain behaviors, attitudes, actions, and practices that either facilitate or impede curricular reforms.

Research on curricular reform and the MoEYS implementation in the Khmer setting is encouraging (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). Hab (2024) and Hang-Chuon et al. (2019) assert that there is a crucial knowledge vacuum regarding the ways in which leadership styles, like transformational leadership, influence curriculum reform and educational outcomes in the Khmer HEIs. The lack of context-specific information makes it challenging to identify best practices and appropriate strategies for successful curricular change, modification, and adoption in higher education environments, even though the research that is currently available offers general information about curriculum reform in HEIs (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025; Roofe & Baldwin, 2020). It is important and crucial to fill this gap in the literature, especially in the context of Cambodia, where government agencies have pushed HEIs to match their programs and curriculum to the needs of the labor market and other new social trends. In order to provide reliable scholarly discourse on long-lasting and successful curricular change, this study investigates faculty perspectives and experiences on the implications of transformational leadership on curriculum reform in HEIs.

This basic qualitative study aims to investigate how faculty members at higher education institutions in the Khmer environment are affected by transformational leadership in terms of curricular reform. The main focus of this study was highlighted by examining the effects of transformational leadership on curriculum change among the Khmer HEI faculties, which also influenced the development of the research questions. It is intended to fill the gap by addressing three primary questions in this study: (1) examining how transformational leadership practices impact curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs; (2) emphasizing how transformational leadership promotes collaboration during curriculum reform; and (3) determining the advantages and disadvantages of transformational leadership during curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. The investigation of transformational leadership in curriculum change in the Khmer HEIs was made possible by each of the three study topics, which produced rich, in-depth insights from faculty viewpoints and experiences.

By examining topics that can help higher education leaders, curriculum developers, faculty members, educational researchers, and educational policymakers in Cambodia create creative, sustainable, and responsive curricula under the direction of transformational leaders, the study's findings may add to the body of research. The results of this study may add to the scholarly conversation on transformational leadership in higher education settings and provide firsthand insights into the role of leadership in supporting sustainable curricular reform. According to the findings of a study on curriculum reform in higher education in Khmer institutions, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in creating curricula that emphasize an indigenous knowledge system while addressing societal issues and meeting emerging needs (Em et al., 2024; Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). Growing awareness and understanding of the impact of transformational leadership on curriculum reform offered reliable, comprehensive information on unique leadership practices, abilities, and skills that either support or obstruct successful curriculum reform and the expansion and development of higher education (Hab, 2024; Bohari et al., 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Ngoun et al., 2025). Furthermore, the results may be viewed, used, and beneficial to higher education administrators, policymakers, researchers, and faculty. Effective application of the research findings may direct strategies used during curriculum reform at the corresponding institutions, opening the door to best practices and well-informed choices during curriculum adoption and modification. Also, the findings will help overcome opposition and increase institutional support for curriculum initiatives by offering context-specific insights into transformational leadership approaches to curriculum change at HEIs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Understanding the Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework offers a prism through which to evaluate research and comprehend how the literature for the study connects to the issue and goal. In this research, the theoretical framework mainly guided two main theories: (1) The Change Leadership Theory (CLT) (Kotter, 1996); and (2) The Reconceptualist Curriculum Theory (RCT) (Pinar, 1975). The basis and conceptual lens for comprehending and evaluating the research literature were supplied by these theories. Details of these theories are explained as follows:

2.1.1. An Overview of Change Leadership Theory Perspectives

One of the two theoretical models that provided the context for this review was Kotter's CLT, which was created in 1996 and expanded in 2012 (Kotter, 1996, 2012). A methodical strategy to leading and maintaining change in the public and corporate sectors, including educational institutions, is offered by change leadership theory (Carreno, 2024). Eight steps that outline a methodical approach for transformational change in businesses are etched in CLT, giving leaders a framework to direct planning and decision-making (Carreno, 2024). Establishing a sense of urgency, building a strong guiding coalition, developing and communicating a clear vision, empowering others to act on the vision, planning for and producing short-term wins, consolidating improvements and making change, and anchoring change within an organizational environment are the steps that form the basis of Kotter's CLT (Kotter, 2012). In order to promote institutional and organizational change, Kotter's CLT highlights the importance of strong leadership and a methodical process that starts with a feeling of urgency and purpose and ends with institutionalizing new methods (Kotter, 2012).

Many ideas in change leadership theory emphasize organizational or institutional transformation (Carreno, 2024). The main tenet of CLT is that, by vision-setting, teamwork, empowerment, planning, and organized, methodical procedures, leadership is essential to initiating and maintaining organizational transformation (Carreno, 2024). According to research by Rynearson et al. (2024), change leadership theory maintains that change is an ongoing, changing process in institutional or organizational settings that necessitates adaptability, preparation, teamwork, moral and consistent leadership, and well-informed decision-making. Fundamentally, the CLT stresses a linear process of change, giving executives a roadmap to motivate expansion and advancement in contemporary organizations (Kotter, 2012). According to Rynearson et al. (2024), the CLT practitioners in organizations and education foster a collaborative and shared decision-making environment where team members propel transformative change.

One of the CLT's main tenets is that significant change in contemporary organizations and institutional settings necessitates behavioral and structural changes (Kotter, 2012). Organizational leaders can approach and execute change using the linear framework provided by Kotter's (2012) model. The foundation of change leadership theory is the idea that in order to successfully lead change, organizational leaders must empower team members and develop capacity, deal with organizational issues like resource constraints and stakeholder resistance, and express and convey a common vision (Carreno, 2024). Transformational leaders in higher education can support a more inclusive and long-lasting approach to institutional change and educational reform by incorporating this viewpoint into curricular reform. Based on these presumptions, this study investigates faculty perspectives and experiences about the role of transformational leadership in curriculum reform, providing in-depth understanding of how organized change affects instructional practices and academic creativity.

The problem and goal of this study are in line with the CLT. The issue is the ongoing difficulty faculty members at Khmer higher education institutions have implementing successful curricular reform. A perspective through which to examine leadership-driven change processes that impact curriculum reform and change in higher education is provided by key CLT concepts. This fundamental qualitative study aims to investigate the effects of transformational leadership on curricular change among faculty members in Khmer universities. This goal is supported by change leadership theory, which emphasizes leadership as a crucial component of institutional change and transformation (Kotter, 2012). In fact, the CLT's core values emphasize the importance of shared decision-making, vision creation and communication, empowerment, support for strategic planning, and collaboration—all of which are critical to HEI curricular reform procedures (Carreno, 2024). Within the Khmer higher education system, these CLT tenets are particularly salient given the centralized policy direction set by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), where curricular reform initiatives at public HEIs must align with national education strategies while still requiring faculty buy-in at the institutional level (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019). Additionally, the CLT helps frame the study's investigation of how educational leaders manage these changes in the context of curriculum reform in the dynamic, ever-evolving landscape of higher education, which is shaped by new trends, policies, resource limitations, and other constraints like resistance (Rynearson et al., 2024). The study offered insights into the efficacy of transformational leadership in

promoting long-lasting, significant curriculum changes inside Khmer higher education institutions by incorporating CLT into its theoretical framework.

Put differently, the CLT has been a framework for driving organizational change, growth, and transformation in both public and commercial sector organizations since it was developed in 1996 (Carreno, 2024). Prior studies have shown that it can be applied in educational institutions. For example, it can be used to modernize curricula and teaching methods in high schools, like those in Hanoi; in higher education, it can be used to redesign departmental recruitment procedures for Graduate Medical Education (GME) (Ha & Thanh, 2024; Miles et al., 2023). According to empirical research, the CLT has been used in a variety of businesses as a road map for directing and overseeing change activities, from building urgency to institutionalizing new methods in the workplace (Carreno, 2024). Successful organizational transformation has been guided by the application of change leadership theory, which has expanded knowledge of the role of leadership in overcoming certain obstacles and promoting change (Kotter, 2012). Studies in the CLT highlight how leadership affects organizational practices by promoting better communication, motivating team members, and enabling them to adopt new behaviors, from creating a feeling of urgency to institutionalizing new techniques (Rynearson et al., 2024).

2.1.2. An Overview of Reconceptualist Curricular Theory Perspectives

In an educational environment, the Pinar's reconceptualist curricular theory (RCT), which was created in 1975, is the basis for this study. As a critical reaction to earlier theoretical models of curriculum design, including technical, conservative, and behaviorist models, conceptualist curriculum theory arose in the 20th century (Pinar, 1975). The idea that curriculum is influenced by a variety of elements, including cultural, social, leadership, and lived experiences, rather than being restricted to a set of objectives and predetermined frameworks, is deeply ingrained in RCT (Pinar, 2013). Other techniques, like the Tyler Rationale, emphasize a more conventional approach, whereas the RCT concentrates on sociocultural influences, inclusivity, subjectivity, flexibility, leadership, and political influences in curriculum design (Pinar, 2013). The idea that curricula should be contextually sensitive to the needs of students, new trends, workforce demands, and societal impacts is based on the RCT (Sharifian, 2022). According to RCT, courses adopt a more modern and transformational design since they are less prescriptive in their structure (Sharifian, 2022). Curriculum changes in HEIs are relevant to fundamental RCT principles, such as considering curricula as a lived experience, adopting modern techniques, and stressing subjectivity (Sharifian, 2022).

Curriculum design, a fundamental tenet of the RCT, is an interactive process that calls for strong leadership, creativity, and teamwork and is consistent with transformational leadership techniques (Ropo, 2024). In order to investigate and comprehend how transformational leaders in HEIs support inclusive and participatory curriculum reform, motivate stakeholders to become co-creators of knowledge, create diverse courses that take into account a variety of contextual factors, and implement curricular changes that are responsive and sustainable, the study used RCT as a guiding framework. With such a rich data, the RCT is supported by a number of theoretical claims that are consistent with the goal, issue, research questions, and other fundamental components of the study. The notion that curriculum-related activities, including reform, are a socio-historical construct is one of the main tenets of the RCT (Ropo, 2024). According to this theory, rather than being prescriptive in design, a variety of elements, such as sociocultural practices, leadership, social values, historical contexts, rising trends, technology advancement, and political influences, impact curriculum modifications (Ropo, 2024). Curricula should be transformative when implemented in educational settings, necessitating close collaboration between leaders and faculty and members of the curriculum committee in order to make well-informed decisions, reflect on those decisions, and participate in discussions regarding curriculum design and implementation (Sharifian, 2022). Curriculum innovation and modification are essential components in fulfilling the demands of HEIs as they adapt to contemporary trends and practices. Curriculum innovation and transformation depend heavily on leadership practices, which are seen as another essential RCT tenet (Pinar, 2013).

By offering assistance to improve curriculum practices, fostering interdepartmental cooperation, providing training and development, and advancing a common vision for curriculum reform, leaders in HEIs and educational institutions contribute to curriculum design (Khan et al., 2021). Curriculum reform is expanding to include a variety of ideologies and subject areas that address fairness, contemporary and societal values, history, and pedagogical transformation as education shifts due to political influences (Khan et al., 2021). The investigation of how transformational leadership promotes curriculum change that is institutionally sustainable and contextually relevant is guided by the RCT's critical propositions, which include political and leadership influences, sociocultural and emerging trends, and contextual factors. In the Cambodian context, this contextual sensitivity is especially relevant, as public HEIs operate within a hierarchical governance structure under MoEYS oversight, where curricular decisions are shaped not only by national policy directives but also by institution-specific resource constraints and faculty capacity (Doeur, 2025).

Transformational leaders bring about significant institutional change in research, faculty participation, curriculum design, and stakeholder involvement. This fundamental qualitative study aims to investigate the effects of transformational leadership on curricular change among faculty members in Khmer higher education institutions. By highlighting curriculum modifications as a dynamic, participatory process rather than a prescriptive structure, the RCT, as part of the theoretical framework, offered a lens for examining these concerns in light of the study's problem and aim.

A methodological foundation for examining the unique transformational leadership behaviors that impact curriculum reform in HEIs is provided by conceptualist curriculum theory, emphasizing the necessity of creative, dynamic, and contextually aware practices (Pinar, 2013). According to Maisyura et al. (2022), transformational leaders in HEIs empower stakeholders, foster intellectual stimulation and capacity building, give the support required to maximize everyone's potential, and provide plenty of possibilities for collaboration. These fundamental characteristics are in line with the main principles of the RCT, which stipulate that curricula should adopt a participatory approach, be inclusive, flexible in structure, sustainable and responsive, and appropriate for a variety of contextual elements (Ropo, 2024). As a component of the methodological framework, the reconceptualist curriculum theory guided the study's examination of how transformational leadership behaviors affect faculty involvement and stakeholder collaboration in program development. In order to ensure that creativity and innovation are responsive to the requirements of all stakeholders, this theoretical model directs leaders at HEIs to use modern curriculum techniques rather than traditional ideas. The study's analysis was driven by these RCT principles, which strengthened the investigation of the function of transformational leadership in navigating many contextual elements that either facilitate or impede curricular reform in HEIs.

In the same vein, the RCT has been used in HEIs to direct curriculum activities, including transformational and incremental changes to a range of courses and programs (Ropo, 2024). Universities employ the concepts to comprehend changes in education by using the RCT as a framework (Ropo, 2024). Because of this, the RCT is a suitable paradigm for investigating curriculum reform initiatives headed by transformational leaders in higher education institutions. A comprehensive investigation of the impact of transformational leadership practices on curriculum reform at HEIs as a dynamic, inventive, participatory, and contextually driven process was made possible by the study's use of the RCT as part of its methodological framework. Traditional, prescriptive, and objective-centric methods are challenged by the fundamental principles, beliefs, and propositions of the RCT, which emphasize leadership as a crucial supporter of institutional development and innovation, especially in curricular adjustments (Ropo, 2024). The study contributed to theoretical discourse and practical applications in higher education reform by providing a thorough knowledge of the leadership-driven curriculum change in HEIs through the lens of the RCT.

2.2. Understanding the Curriculum Reform: Strategic Planning and Vision Setting

The capacity to develop a clear vision for curricular reform and to carry out strategic decision-making to support the accomplishment of both immediate and long-term goals is a fundamental aspect of transformational leadership at HEIs (Bonfield et al., 2020). Transformational leaders are visionaries who are motivated to accomplish goals while taking into account the institution's goals, constraints, human resources, and other important aspects (Howell et al., 2022). A visionary leader at HEIs creates a framework that synchronizes curriculum modifications with the institution's overall objectives, new trends and practices, and national educational policies (Bonfield et al., 2020). Visionary leaders foster a positive environment for individuals engaged in curriculum activities by communicating openly and honestly. This ensures that deadlines are fulfilled, procedures are followed, and implementation goes smoothly (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021). Strategic planning is essential before curricular reform at HEIs. To evaluate the applicability of current approaches and concepts in courses and to gauge how well programs are fulfilling the needs of all stakeholders, a needs analysis is required (Agbaje, 2023). In curriculum reform, strategic planning also involves developing a timetable to direct reform initiatives and putting in place a methodical assessment to monitor the success of curriculum modifications (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021).

Key stakeholders and faculty members are given a sense of direction and purpose by transformational leaders who communicate a clear, shared vision. This leads to enhanced contact, participation, and collaboration in incremental or transformative improvements to programs or courses (Maaz et al., 2018). When this leadership approach is used in curriculum reform projects, it fosters a sense of ownership among all parties involved and gives curriculum decision-making a semblance of inclusion (Oliver & Hyun, 2011). According to Maaz et al. (2018), there are numerous other crucial components of strategic planning for curriculum reform in HEIs, such as ongoing monitoring and revision, making sure curriculum changes are feasible and actionable, and reacting to educational initiatives, student needs, and new trends and practices in the contemporary world.

When implementing curriculum changes, innovation and originality are essential components of transformational leadership, allowing schools and institutions to create courses and programs that are current and in line with new trends (Agbaje, 2023). By fostering a collaborative institutional environment, transformational leadership in higher education enables stakeholders to engage creatively and innovatively while supporting the institution's expansion (Bohari et al., 2024). Transformational leaders encourage faculty members and stakeholders to experiment with new teaching approaches, take part in continuous professional development, and participate in curriculum design procedures, such as review sessions and weekly discussions (Bonfield et al., 2020). Critical thinking, experiential learning, competency-based learning, student-centered learning, and technology-enhanced instructional design are only a few of the creative and extensive curricular innovations implemented by higher education institutions in the twenty-first century (Oliver & Hyun, 2011).

2.3. Understanding the Results of Curriculum Reform under Transformational Leadership

Administrators in HEIs have used transformational leadership behaviors and practices to promote long-lasting and beneficial effects in academic activities, including curriculum (Admiraal et al., 2021; Billingsley et al., 2020; Hartiwi et al., 2020; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022; Özdemir et al., 2020). Transformational leaders collaborate closely with stakeholders during HEIS curriculum reform to guarantee a thorough understanding of roles and responsibilities, enhance collaboration and engagement, and offer resources and support while adapting curricula to the demands of the twenty-first century (Abu-Rumman, 2021). According to Bohari et al. (2024), transformational leaders establish institutional frameworks that allow faculty and stakeholders to continuously develop and participate in change activities. Although HEIs have many levels, curriculum design is the foundation of educational advancement (Roofe & Baldwin, 2020). By promoting cross-departmental collaborations, supporting research, and incorporating cutting-edge approaches to improve pedagogical practice, leaders who embrace the transformational approach can support institutional and academic advancement (Abu-Rumman, 2021).

When implemented smoothly, transformational leadership practices in higher education can provide a number of advantages (Bohari et al., 2024). Developing a common vision and giving stakeholders the knowledge and insight necessary to overcome different obstacles are two important benefits (Özdemir et al., 2020). When applied in higher education institutions, transformational leadership fosters faculty autonomy and professional growth, guaranteeing support for new projects and a dedication to curriculum modifications and execution (Tight, 2022). Faculty members are encouraged by transformational leaders to welcome change and use it as a tool to develop, innovate, and improve academic results (Al-Husseini et al., 2021).

Through strategic planning and well-informed decision-making, HEIs can flourish thanks to the visionary mindset of transformational leaders, which makes it possible to create curricula that are both responsive and actionable (Oliver & Hyun, 2011). Faculty members are encouraged to accept curricular changes through intellectual stimulation, a fundamental component of transformational leadership, which fosters an innovative and adaptable institutional culture (Al-Husseini et al., 2021; Sciarelli et al., 2020). In order to ensure thorough curriculum adjustments that are sensitive to a variety of viewpoints and requirements, transformational leadership is an inclusive strategy that encourages active stakeholder participation (Tight, 2022). In higher education, faculty members who engage in transformational leadership practice acquire critical abilities that allow the institution to adjust to curriculum changes (Oliver & Hyun, 2011).

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

In accordance with the goals and purpose of the study, a basic qualitative design was employed to guide the research processes and investigate faculty perspectives and experiences on the implications of transformational leadership on curriculum reform at HEIs. In order to raise awareness and understanding in this field, basic qualitative design is a study process that entails investigating a person's opinions, experiences, and perceptions regarding a certain event (Im et al., 2023). Meaning is prioritized in a basic qualitative design together with adaptable research techniques to support contextual knowledge (Mays & Pope, 2020). For this study, a basic qualitative design was appropriate because it made it easier to gather in-depth information about people's real-world experiences and contexts, offering reliable, rich content to investigate the effects of transformational leadership on curriculum reform in HEIs (Bordens & Abbott, 2021).

By virtue of its importance, there are a number of potential advantages to using a basic qualitative design, such as allowing flexibility in the data collection process, obtaining rich and descriptive information from an individual's

experience, investigating themes to produce new knowledge, and offering contextual insights into a problem (Eldh et al., 2020). For this study, participants were able to express their perspectives, experiences, and ideas into the topic under investigation by using a simple qualitative approach, which produced rich, substantial data for thematic analysis and conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

3.2. *Research Participants*

The target population for this study consisted of faculty members of the public HEIs in Cambodia. The institution employed 250 people on a permanent basis as faculty, providing a wide range of possible study participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to choose 25 faculty members for the sample. The sample size was enough, allowing for a thorough examination of participants' viewpoints and experiences and supporting the study's goal of gathering rich, comprehensive, and complete data (Rogo, 2024). This sample size was appropriate since it made it easier to gather a variety of perspectives and offered descriptive information on the effects of transformational leadership on curriculum reform in higher education institutions (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021). In order to ensure the robustness and comprehensiveness of the study's findings, more people were recruited and interviewed until no new themes or insights arose if data saturation was not reached with the 25 participants. To find appropriate participants for this study, the purposeful sampling methodology was employed. Purposive sampling is an approach used in qualitative research that entails the intentional selection of participants or data sources based on their significance to the study, as opposed to random or statistical selection (Campbell et al., 2020).

3.3. *Research Tool and Data Collection*

Theoretically and practically, open-ended instruments are frequently used in qualitative data gathering, providing comprehensive and in-depth insights from participants' viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Prominent tools for collecting qualitative data, such semi-structured interview protocols, make it possible to obtain precise, trustworthy, and dependable information about a phenomenon (Kouzes & Posner, 2021).

Consequently, open-ended questions that delve into interviewees' opinions and perspectives on a particular subject are employed in semi-structured interview protocols to gather qualitative data (Olorunfemi, 2024). In order to investigate faculty members' experiences with transformational leadership and its consequences for curriculum change in HEIs, a semi-structured interview methodology was created. Finding key themes, creating open-ended questions, and adding probing questions to obtain thorough insights were the first steps in the meticulous process of creating the semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview technique was reviewed and improved in cooperation with subject matter experts to guarantee uniformity and clarity throughout the core areas of the study. Credible data collection was assured by mapping instrument items to the research questions in order to establish alignment between the semi-structured interview methodology and the research questions. In order to obtain a thorough grasp of the subject, participants were asked insightful questions in a semi-structured interview format. A key element of research studies is making sure the semi-structured interview technique closely corresponds with the research objectives since this ensures that the data gathered is precise, reliable, and comprehensive (Smith, 2024).

As a result, the study was best served by a semi-structured interview approach, which guaranteed consistency in answering important research questions while allowing for flexibility in examining participants' experiences (Bhakuni et al., 2024). Given its exploratory nature, encouraging a conversational tone and eliciting a variety of perspectives from participants were important reasons for creating and utilizing the semi-structured interview methodology (Frøiland et al., 2023). The opening script was used to explain the goal of the study, build rapport, get permission to record the interview, and set the tone for the interview before the main questions of the semi-structured interview protocol were asked. In addition, open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview methodology made it possible to find rich data and fresh topics that might not have been found using other data gathering techniques (Olorunfemi, 2024). The interview's conclusion was led by the closing script, which included thanking participants for their participation, answering any last questions, collecting closing remarks, notifying participants of their future involvement through member checks, and finishing the recording.

For research tool validation, in order to guarantee research correctness, reliability, and impartiality, field testing entails reviewing instruments with specialists in a particular field (Mosete et al., 2024). Expert input is used to refine and appropriately phrase questions or items on an instrument through field tests (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021). Field testing ensures that the data are thorough and useful in qualitative research by facilitating content validity, relevance, and alignment with the study's goal (Mosete et al., 2024). To guarantee that study components are in line to improve the rigor, reliability, and validity of findings, data gathering tools must be validated (Eldh et al., 2020). In the field of

education, three subject matter experts with expertise in transformative leadership and curriculum reform in higher education institutions contributed to this study's field testing.

Along the same line, data from the study participants was gathered using a semi-structured interview approach. The interviews took place in person and lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, however Zoom was used to accommodate those who couldn't make it. Interviews were recorded with informed consent utilizing the Zoom recording tool for online interviews and a smartphone device for in-person interviews. Because in-person interviews took place in a designated conference room and online interviews used a secure Zoom link, privacy and confidentiality were upheld throughout the process. Therefore, each participant was able to provide rich, detailed information about transformational leadership and curriculum reform in higher education institutions because to the open-ended, probing questions in the semi-structured interview technique.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was driven by the six processes of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019): (a) familiarization with the data, creation of initial codes; (b) identification/search for themes; (c) reviewing themes, naming and defining themes; and (d) report production. The organized, evidence-based theme analysis paradigm developed by Braun and Clarke for data analysis results in the organization, analysis, and presentation of thorough findings (Xu & Zammit, 2020). To become more familiar with the subject and the data, the transcripts were reviewed. To improve familiarization, preliminary concepts, themes, and patterns related to the goal of the study were found throughout the transcript review process. In order to find patterns that could be utilized to create codes and themes, transcripts were examined several times. In order to facilitate effective information organization, processing, storage, and retrieval, the NVivo qualitative software was utilized to direct exploration and familiarization. To make transcripts more succinct and easily analysed, data familiarization is essential (Xu & Zammit, 2020).

In order to make the data easier to comprehend, classify, and analyse, codes were created from the data using the NVivo software to capture important phrases, trends, or emergent words (Naeem, 2021). To help with the creation of appropriate themes, data was manually and in NVivo coded. Codes emerged that highlighted important aspects of how transformational leadership affects curriculum reform in higher education institutions based on participant experiences. Finding themes was the next step in the data analysis process once codes were created. Additionally, the NVivo software was used to analyse, contrast, merge, and organize codes into themes that reflected the opinions of the participants. In order to identify useful patterns that addressed the study objectives and purpose, similar codes were combined and compressed to generate broad groups and themes.

Given its importance, the data analysis procedure concluded with a comprehensive assessment of themes, their identification and definition, and the preparation of the final report that summarized the key discoveries. To appropriately represent the opinions of the participants, each theme that was found, defined, and developed was improved. Additionally, the NVivo was used to evaluate themes for coherence, consistency, correctness, and clarity. Each topic was succinctly described with a wealth of details that encapsulated the patterns found in the data. Tables and figures were used to present emergent themes and relevant quotes. A thorough narrative or report that provided reliable, in-depth information on the effects of transformational leadership on curriculum change at HEIs was the product of the theme analysis.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

To safeguard participants while maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, personal information was substituted with pseudonyms during transcribing (Barbour, 2021). Following successful preparation, each transcript was arranged using a variety of identifiers to get the data ready for analysis and interpretation. Among the ethical precepts upheld during data preparation and analysis to guarantee the morality of research methods were confidentiality and data security. Transcripts and audio files were stored on a personal computer with secure folders and a strong password. By limiting external parties' access to the computer, participants were protected by the confidentiality and safety of the data. Data was securely backed up on an encrypted storage device. After three years, data collection tools and records will be safely erased in accordance with data retention guidelines, participant confidentiality, and ethical research requirements (Davies, 2020). Following these moral guidelines made sure that each participant's interests were safeguarded during the processing, use, and storage of the data.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Results

In line with the purposes of this study, data from faculty members at HEIs in Cambodia provide crucial insights into the transformative leadership behaviours, tactics, and methods that impact and shape curriculum reform. Participant answers were thorough and captured real-world experiences with curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. Emergent themes found during coding, participant quotes, and relevant tables and figures to illustrate key aspects were used to convey the findings of this basic qualitative study. All names appearing in quotations are pseudonym. The research topics related to this study are covered in the part that follows, guaranteeing correctness and coherence in data presentation.

The results revealed a number of themes that provide a thorough understanding of the effects of transformational leadership on curriculum reform at the Khmer HEIs as represented in the opinions and experiences of faculty members. The goal of the study was achieved because these themes matched the research questions. The emergent themes in this study, their correspondence with the three primary research questions, and the number of faculty members who cited them, as indicated by the data, are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Alignment of Emergent Themes and Research Questions

Research Questions	Emergent Themes
1. What impact does transformational leadership have on curriculum reform efforts in the Khmer HEIs based on faculty members?	The following emergent themes correspond with the research question: (a) vision-driven change; (b) increased faculty engagement; (c) shift from compliance to commitment; and (d) collaborative environment.
2. Which particular transformational leadership techniques are faculty members identifying as supporting curricular reform in the Khmer HEIs?	The following emergent themes correspond with the research question: (a) empowerment and shared decision-making; (b) mentorship and coaching; (c) open communication and transparency; and (d) data-informed visioning.
3. Which transformational leadership practices do academics believe have the most impact on curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs?	The following emergent themes correspond with the research question: (a) vision casting and goal alignment; (b) inspirational motivation; (c) individualized consideration; and (d) modelling desired behaviours.

4.1.1. Emergent Theme of Visioning-driven Change

The importance of a strong, compelling vision for curriculum modifications in Cambodian higher education institutions was discussed by faculty members. Developing and sharing a clear vision with all members is a crucial part of transformative leadership, according to the participants. Institutional leaders may inspire faculty to accept and take part in curricular change and adaptation by creating clear visions. This will ultimately result in curriculum reform that is both relevant and sustainable. According to participants, a compelling vision allows curriculum reforms in HEIs to be connected to overarching goals from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), as well as to contemporary trends and needs and institutional and strategic plans. It also keeps members informed about educational targets.

Participants mentioned the creation and expression of a clear vision as a transformative leadership trait that affects curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. The value of creating a compelling vision and its function in influencing curriculum change in the Khmer HEIs was amply demonstrated by the participants. According to Dr. Ratha, he articulated his perspective,

In Khmer universities, transformational leaders typically establish and convey a compelling vision that results in significant curriculum reform from conception to development and execution.

Transformational leaders influence and direct future curricular change by creating a culture of creativity, cooperation, and participation inside the institutional setting and during curriculum reform procedures. *“The Head of Department was a transformational leader who inspired faculty members to embrace change and participate in curriculum activities*

during the most recent significant curriculum reform I worked on,” proposed Dr. Socheat. The research indicates that transformational leaders are creative thinkers who inspire a common vision and direct participants in curriculum reform to create and participate in procedures that take into account the demands of the institution, industry standards, and 21st-century competencies. Through a common vision, transformational leaders enhance communication and inspire faculty to welcome change, resulting in long-lasting and successful curriculum modifications.

One factor that promotes successful curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs, according to faculty, is transformational leaders’ inspirational shared vision. Faculty recognized transformational leadership’s beneficial effects on curriculum design, development, and implementation as essential components of curriculum reform, but they also pointed out that institutional resistance to the vision and its misalignment with the institution’s realities could be problems. These opinions were supported by information shared by participants, which emphasized the significance of stakeholder support and goal coherence. According to Dr. Dara, he pointed out,

Even if a transformational leader inspires a common vision to direct curriculum reform and related activities, those involved in this change process may choose not to actively participate since it would result in ineffective reform.

Dr. Sopheak added as follows:

The majority of transformative leaders I have collaborated with on curriculum reform initiatives typically have an exciting vision, but reforms won’t be optimal if they don’t take stakeholder demands and school culture into account.

According to faculty, even with a compelling goal, curriculum change may be hampered by obstacles like misalignment and opposition, thus it is crucial for transformational leaders to remove them. In curriculum reform processes, a compelling vision expressed by transformational leaders is ineffectual in the face of misalignment and institutional resistance stemming from resources and culture.

4.1.2. Emergent Theme of Increasing Faculty Engagement

According to the participants, transformational leadership techniques boost faculty members’ involvement in curriculum reform initiatives in the Khmer HEIs. According to information shared by faculty members, universities and colleges led by transformational leaders empower faculty members and provide them with more assistance, which makes it simpler for them to take part in curriculum changes and adaptations. Faculty members reported greater emotional support from transformational leaders rather than opposition to curriculum reform initiatives. This fostered an atmosphere where faculty members could network, work together, and look for the knowledge and tools required to support successful curriculum reform.

Faculty members who spoke favourably about transformational leadership’s impact on curricular reform—which raises faculty engagement—confirmed the need for more emotional support. According to Dr. Sovanna, he accounted,

Instead of seeing the process as a forced initiative by the university’s leadership, faculty members who are actively involved in curriculum reform projects by transformational leaders typically acquire a commitment to curriculum changes.

When transformational leaders lead institutions, participants typically reported behavioural, commitment, and engagement changes related to curriculum reform. “I’ve worked on curriculum reform in a number of university and college settings, and I’ve come to the conclusion that transformational leaders have the power to inspire and encourage team members, which makes them more committed to reform initiatives,” as Dr. Chantha added. According to the statistics, transformational leaders can foster a supportive climate for faculty, which will boost their participation in curriculum reform in higher education institutions. Additionally, faculty members disclosed that transformational leadership can foster emotional and intellectual commitment, allowing for long-lasting, significant curriculum changes.

According to faculty, when resistance or insufficient institutional mechanisms exist, transformational leadership may have an impact on the Khmer HEI curricular change engagement. As Dr. Seila stressed,

Stakeholder resistance and low involvement may emerge from transformative leaders who are overly demanding without adequate cooperation and poor planning for curricular improvement.

Additionally, Dr. Soveacha stated that “curriculum reform and participation are severely hampered in institutions when transformational leaders do not set up the systems, structures, and procedures that enable and permit faculty to be

meaningfully involved in curricular change processes.” Two obstacles to curriculum reform under transformational leadership, according to faculty members, are opposition and a lack of attention to institutional structures. Participants emphasized that transformational leadership, which is frequently motivated by a vision, can have a good effect on curriculum reform participation, particularly in situations when processes, institutions, and resources are lacking.

4.1.3. Emergent Theme of Shifting from Compliance to Commitment

A transition from compliance to greater engagement and commitment to curriculum reform projects in the Khmer HEIs is facilitated by transformational leadership in universities and colleges, according to faculty members, because of enhanced support, incentive, and intellectual stimulation. Participants observed that faculty members are inspired to share a common vision by transformational leaders, which encourages a sense of ownership in curriculum reform without giving the process a leadership-driven appearance. Participants indicated a greater motivation to collaborate with colleagues and relevant experts to participate in curriculum reform procedures and activities when necessary as faculty members became more involved. The statements made by faculty members emphasized the importance of transformational leadership in boosting dedication to curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. As Dr. Setha, he reasoned,

As a team member and leader in curriculum reform projects, I have personally witnessed how transformational leaders can create structures and procedures that facilitate change and boost individual commitment and engagement.

According to faculty members’ data and results, transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs can encourage faculty ownership of curriculum reform, leading to significant curricular changes. Increased faculty ownership and dedication to curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs can encourage innovation and creativity, ensuring that modifications meet the needs of students and are in line with market demands, developing trends, and the government’s national goal.

Compliance continued throughout the curriculum change process in higher education, according to participants who successfully implemented curriculum reform in a variety of settings. *“I feel obligated to follow the guidelines, objectives, and plans set forth by the leader during curricular reform, whether they are transformational or not, especially when there is confidence,”* proposed by Dr. Lisa. However, Dr. Leakana stated that *“Some academics follow leadership guidelines when it comes to curriculum reform.”* According to participant reports, compliance can still support long-term and successful reform when frameworks and procedures are established to empower individuals engaged in the planning, creation, and execution of curricula in HEIs.

4.1.4. Emergent Theme of Getting Collaborative Environment

According to faculty members included in this study, transformational leadership fosters a collaborative climate in higher education institutions, especially when it comes to curriculum reform. The Khmer HEIs with transformational leaders in charge can foster an atmosphere where faculty members can collaborate closely with colleagues both within and outside of their departments while developing curricula, according to the participants. According to participant reports, transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs set aside time, develop flexible schedules, promote teamwork, organize committees, and offer incentives for collaboration, which facilitates faculty members’ cooperation with team members during curriculum change.

The study’s participants provided a variety of perspectives that reaffirmed the impact of transformational leadership in fostering a cooperative atmosphere that supported curricular reform. Dr. Vika pointed out as follows:

Transformational leaders frequently promote cooperation and provide mechanisms that enable individuals from various faculties to collaborate during curriculum change, according to my prior experiences in curriculum reform at the university level.

According to participants, transformational leaders in higher education institutions have the ability to dismantle faculty silos, which greatly facilitates collaboration with colleagues on curriculum reform projects and activities. Additionally, according to Dr. Vicheat, he uttered, *“A hands-on transformational leader created committees, curriculum groups, and goals to direct curriculum changes to specific programs and courses offered in the first significant curriculum reform I participated in at a university.”* Transformational leadership in the Khmer HEIs fosters a collaborative environment through curriculum workshops and conferences, curriculum committees, and the inclusion of task forces, making it easier for faculty members to engage in sustainable and innovative curricular changes, according to findings and key points shared by faculty members involved in this study.

According to one participant, collaborating during curriculum change in the Khmer HEIs was challenging due to transformational leadership. As stated by Dr. Vichey, he pinpointed,

Faculty may feel overburdened, distracted, and unmotivated as a result of transformational leaders who are motivated by vision but neglect to address systemic challenges impeding curriculum reform, which could result in poor collaboration.

As Dr. Bopha pointed out, there may be little cooperation in curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs if transformational leaders prioritize and actively pursue a vision related to curriculum reform without first creating the systems, structures, opportunities, and procedures that facilitate cooperation. When there is a gap between transformational leadership approaches and faculty needs during curriculum change, faculty members tend to retreat and make few attempts at collaboration as they become more alienated and demotivated.

4.1.5. Emergent Theme of Empowering and Sharing Decision-Making

According to faculty members, empowering team members was a crucial aspect of transformative leadership in the Khmer HEIs throughout curricular change. The training, tools, encouragement, and support required to persuade faculty members to actively participate in curriculum modifications are provided by transformational leaders, according to the participants. The opinions and viewpoints of the participants also showed that transformational leaders at the Khmer HEIs gave faculty members plenty of chances to work autonomously within larger teams while implementing curricular change. Faculty participation in curricular reform was facilitated by staff empowerment, which directly contributed to continued involvement.

The idea that transformational leadership promotes staff empowerment and has a favourable impact on curriculum reform was mostly confirmed by participant insights. According to Dr. Tina, he accounted,

I felt encouraged to participate and be actively involved in curriculum reform, review, development, and implementation activities after participating in planned curriculum workshops and establishing collaborative partnerships with subject matter and curriculum experts.

According to participant responses, transformational leadership supports curriculum reform by putting educators' and students' needs first, empowering staff through training, development, and inspirational motivation, and facilitating shared decision-making to ensure that reforms are inclusive and responsive to real-world challenges. According to participants, transformational leadership places a strong emphasis on inclusivity, empowerment, and shared decision-making—all of which are crucial for promoting effective and long-lasting curricular reform.

According to faculty members, transformational leadership promotes faculty empowerment and shared decision-making in higher education settings, which benefits curriculum-related practices and reform. According to Dr. Chantrea, he explicated, “*I was empowered to lead a curriculum committee during my experience at the higher education level with transformational leaders at the helm, and this strengthened my confidence and allowed me to participate effectively in curriculum reform.*” Participants disclosed that individual voices were heard through shared decision-making, which was made possible by transformational leaders at the Khmer HEIs. This eliminated resistance and made it possible for curricular reform procedures and activities to be sustained. According to participants, shared decision-making was essential to curriculum change at the Khmer HEIs because it gave faculty members a sense of ownership and ensured that the requirements of facilitators and students were met.

Additionally, the results showed that faculty empowerment in curriculum reform procedures in Khmer HEIs may be impacted by transformational leadership. Dr. Davin offered the following argument in favour of this theory: “*There are a number of significant obstacles when implementing curricular reform under transformational leadership.*” Because of the guidelines' applicability and practicality, faculty members may feel overburdened and demotivated by the demands of the planned curricular change. The data shows that when transformational leaders implement unworkable changes and when there are insufficient resources and support systems to encourage engagement, training, development, and collaboration, faculty members are frequently demotivated and lack the authority to take part in curriculum reform processes.

4.1.6. Emergent Theme of Perceiving Mentorship and Coaching

Among the transformational leadership techniques mentioned by faculty as having contributed to curriculum improvement in the Khmer HEIs were mentoring and coaching. Participants stated that their skills, abilities, and competencies increased after being paired with a coach or mentor. As stated by Dr. Kunthea, she articulated,

Working with a mentor boosted my confidence and gave me the assistance I needed to successfully complete curriculum reform initiatives at the university level.

Additionally, faculty members said that their ability and confidence to review, develop, and implement curricula—all crucial components of the reform process—were enhanced by working closely with a coach or mentor with experience in curriculum reform. According to Dr. Chenda, she explained, “*I think curricular change would greatly benefit from transformative leadership.*” In order to guarantee that curriculum modifications are more realistic and successful, educators would feel more emboldened to speak out about issues that are frequently disregarded if they were properly mentored. Participants observed that during the onboarding process for new members engaged in curriculum change, transformational leaders support assigning mentors and coaching. When used by transformational leaders, mentoring and coaching support best practices and offer a valuable human resource, guaranteeing that curriculum reform is realistic, long-lasting, and in line with the demands of important stakeholders.

Participants mentioned transformational leaders’ ability to use tactics like coaching and mentoring to establish institutional conditions that enable curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. As professional development exercises, mentoring and coaching complement customized attention, which is essential to transformative leadership. According to faculty, mentoring and coaching are in line with personalized attention and have an impact on successful curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs.

When used improperly, mentoring and coaching—which are acknowledged as transformative leadership techniques that support curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs—become less successful. “*I have witnessed failed attempts by transformational leaders to implement mentorship programs during curriculum reform processes,*” stated Dr. Dara. Effective curriculum reform is impacted by poor preparation, a lack of time and resources, and a lack of cooperation. According to participant perspectives, mentoring is an unsuccessful method used by transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs, especially when paired with poor preparation and a lack of resources and tools. According to Dr. Chestha, she added, “*without adequate planning, mentorship programs run by transformational leaders won’t produce the intended curriculum reform outcomes.*” Strengthening mentorship programs as a transformational leadership technique must be smoothly implemented for curriculum change at the Khmer HEIs to be long-lasting and successful.

4.1.7. Emergent Theme of Opening Communication and Transparency

Participants cited open communication and openness as techniques that have supported projects and activities related to curriculum reform in higher education. In order to keep members informed about plans, activities, schedules, and deadlines during significant curriculum modifications, participants reported that transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs promote transparency, offer suitable routes for input, and rapidly communicate updates. Additionally, faculty members stated that leadership was available as a human resource, giving members a way to obtain resources and support to successfully participate in curriculum reform initiatives.

The importance of open communication and transparency as transformational leadership techniques that impact curriculum reform at the Khmer HEIs was reaffirmed by the participants’ insights. According to Dr. Sideth, he reported,

Working alongside a transformational leader created a system where information was frequently communicated in a major curriculum reform I was engaged in. My dedication to the reform process grew as a result of enhanced communication, which made me feel valued.

Transformational leaders place a high value on open communication and transparency, fostering an atmosphere where faculty members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and worries and participating in curriculum improvement. Dr. Thida added,

During a curriculum reform endeavor, I worked with a department head who demonstrated transformational leadership and open communication. This reminded me of desired impact and gave me the confidence to actively participate in curriculum reform.

As tactics that impacted curriculum reform and enhanced trust and respect in the institutional setting, participants cited idealized influence, a fundamental aspect of transformational leadership, as well as open communication and openness. Faculty members said that engaging in open communication and transparency fostered a culture where plans, resources, and timeframes for the curriculum were easily shared, contributing to the success of curriculum reform in higher education.

4.1.8. Emergent Theme of Getting Data-Informed Visioning

According to the participants, transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs used visioning and data-driven decision-making as crucial tactics to direct curricular reform. Faculty members highlighted the importance of data analytics and reports, emerging trends, and benchmarking as tactics employed by transformational leaders in higher education institutions to guarantee that curricula are responsive to societal demands. For instance, Dr. Ousa illustrated the point:

I have witnessed transformative leaders using data that highlights the national agenda and new trends to direct curriculum reform in higher education institutions. This procedure is crucial because it removes opposition and enables the satisfaction of societal demands.

This procedure is crucial because it eliminates opposition and enables the satisfaction of societal demands. Participants saw that the use of data boosted the validity and relevance of these modifications and increased faculty commitment to participate in curriculum development. Additionally, Dr. Nimol proposed that “*HEIs can engage in sustainable and meaningful curriculum reform that is focused and concentrated on the critical needs of society by using data from university and ACC.*” In the same vein, participants affirmed that data-informed visioning is a transformative leadership approach that makes curriculum reform smoother by removing opposition and fostering support among stakeholders.

According to a faculty member, transformational leaders may find it ineffective to employ data-driven visioning as a tactic in curricular reform procedures. Dr. Rathana stated, “*aligning the diverse values and goals of stakeholders and using data to drive certain curriculum reform processes is another challenge with transformational leadership in curriculum reform.*” The information also highlights problems with employing data-driven visioning as a successful transformational leadership tactic to promote curricular reform in higher education institutions. According to the participants, curriculum design, development, and implementation may be impacted by misalignment between concepts, principles, and data used in curriculum review procedures.

4.1.9. Emergent Theme of Having Vision Casting and Goal Alignment

Vision casting and goal alignment are examples of transformational leadership activities that faculty members identified as essential to successful curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. Participants’ insights validated the importance of a compelling vision and goal congruence in curriculum improvement in the Khmer HEIs. According to Dr. Samnang, he illustrated below:

Vision casting and goal alignment are examples of transformational leadership activities that faculty members identified as essential to successful curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs.

According to participants, the institution is better positioned to gain support from important stakeholders and those engaged in change processes if it has a clear vision and aligns curriculum reform with specific goals from a national or institutional standpoint. “*Curriculum reform at HEIs can be guided by aligning it with national interests and goals,*” as Dr. Akara added. Participants observed that a compelling vision and goal alignment are fundamental traits of transformational leaders, allowing HEIs in Cambodia to implement long-term curricular reform that satisfies the demands of society and students. Participants noted that curriculum reform has a feeling of purpose, direction, coherence, focus, and sustainability when transformational leaders in the Khmer HEIs articulate a compelling vision.

Dr. Theara expressed a number of problems, including the fact that visions were unrealistic and failed to take into account the changing demands of the institutional setting. He continued to explain as follows:

Curriculum reform stakeholders may become resistant and less creative if the focus is solely on the goal without teamwork and the development of an appropriate framework that facilitates curriculum reform. Curriculum improvements are not supported by visions that are impractical.

Curriculum improvements are not supported by unrealistic visions. Curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs is supported by transformational leaders’ vision and goal-setting behaviors; yet, unrealistic visions and goals cause opposition,

undermining curriculum reform. The effectiveness and sustainability of curriculum reforms in the Khmer HEIs can be severely hampered by a disconnection from the demands of stakeholders, which can also lead to opposition.

4.1.10. Emergent Theme of Having Inspirational Motivation

In the context of curricular reform initiatives and the institutional setting, participants defined inspired motivation as a behaviour displayed by transformational leaders. Inspirational motivation, according to faculty members, empowers staff to embrace curriculum reform, including the design, development, implementation, and review of courses and programs. This is demonstrated by the articulation of a clear vision, the demonstration of enthusiasm for curriculum activities, and the creation of a sense of purpose among staff. Participants also mentioned other behaviours that transformational leaders use to support staff during curricular changes, like encouragement, optimism, and clear communication.

The notion that pieces of inspiring motivation, as a component of transformational leadership, encouraged staff to become more invested and dedicated to curriculum reform in HEIs in Cambodia was widely endorsed by participants. Dr. Setha said that “*during a curriculum reform project, I collaborated with a transformational leader, and the team and I was motivated to support the endeavor by the leader’s constant communication and positivity,*” which was in a discussion on transformational behaviors that either help or hinder curriculum reform in HEIs in Cambodia.

Inspirational motivation and other transformational leadership characteristics were described by participants as a workable strategy for gaining staff support, guaranteeing acceptance, and cultivating a shared commitment to curriculum reform and other initiatives. Additionally, according to Dr. Rathana, he uttered,

A transformational leader's passion and belief in a curriculum reform project can inspire and motivate staff to invest the time, effort, and energy needed to engage and participate in successful curriculum reforms

Participants point out that inspirational motivation is a fundamental aspect of transformational leadership and that it is essential to the implementation of key curriculum activities like design, review, development, and implementation—all of which are separate aspects of curriculum reform and change. Inspirational motivation was seen by participants as a beneficial behavior in curriculum reform that boosts support and engagement for curriculum initiatives and gives faculty members the ability to actively participate in the process.

4.1.11. Emergent Theme of Pertaining Individualized Consideration

Participants cited individualized attention as a crucial element in curriculum improvement in the Khmer HEIs as a fundamental aspect of transformative leadership. According to the participants, transformational leaders empowered people to serve as curriculum designers and change agents in reform by offering focused professional development, feedback, mentoring, coaching, and leadership support, as well as time for cooperation. Faculty members also pointed out that giving staff members the tools they needed to meet their unique demands helped enable them to actively participate in curriculum reform without encountering any obstacles.

Participants’ varied perspectives emphasized the impact of personalized consideration on curriculum improvement in the Khmer HEIs. Dr. Akara indicated,

Throughout my time at a university, the leader of the institution would offer members of the curriculum committee important support and a flexible schedule that gave us the chance to commit to change and reform activities throughout a thorough program reform.

Transformational leaders also built a structure that enabled individuals to benefit from involvement in curriculum reform, so increasing staff participation in comprehensive change initiatives. Dr. Theara commented,

I have worked with transformational leaders in colleges and universities who provided time and space for reflection, criticism, and leadership support. This improved curriculum practices and made changes more successful.

Participants mentioned customized consideration in the form of assistance, flexibility, feedback, professional development, and creating an environment of collaboration as behaviours that encouraged curriculum improvements in HEIs in Cambodia. Faculty reported higher morale and a greater motivation to engage in curriculum reform when transformational leaders develop trust among staff through continuing mentorship and coaching.

Successful curriculum modifications can also be hampered by individualized consideration, a transformational leadership behaviour used in the Khmer HEIs and curriculum reform procedures. *“Individualized attention can occasionally result in a gradual implementation of curricular modifications and a shift in focus from group standards to individual needs in curriculum reform initiatives that I have participated in,”* said by Dr. Setha, one of the faculty members interviewed. According to a participant’s thoughts, this fundamental aspect of transformational leadership might result in reforms that miss important deadlines, which can have an impact on implementation. Collaboration and participation in curriculum reform procedures may be limited if stakeholders’ and participants’ demands are not given individual attention.

4.1.12. Emergent Theme of Modelling Desired Behaviours

The modelling of desired behaviours by transformational leaders was described by participants as an appropriate strategy to inspire, collaborate with, and mentor staff during curriculum reform initiatives in Khmer higher education institutions. According to a number of participant interviews, role modelling has a beneficial impact on curriculum reform initiatives in the Khmer HEIs because transformational leaders encourage participation, boost contact, and exert peer influence, which enables people to get fully involved in the process. Dr. Sovanarith said in response to transformational leadership behaviours that support curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. He pointed out,

I felt more at ease and encouraged to contribute to ensuring that the courses and programs were altered after witnessing transformational leaders actively involved in the curriculum reform process.

According to faculty, transformational leaders who actively participated in curriculum reform processes were able to support staff, give individual feedback, encourage openness and collaborative decision-making, and positively persuade team members to dedicate themselves to the design, review, development, and implementation of curricula as essential elements of reform.

Additionally, Dr. Veasnaa stated that *“effective and long-lasting curriculum reform depends on team members’ buy-in and support, which may be obtained by an involved leader in the process who sets an example of positive behaviour and takes the time to interact with colleagues.”* When desirable behaviours are successfully modelled, transformational leaders foster trust and resilience within school communities, which is essential for overcoming the unavoidable obstacles of implementing change. Dr. Ratha continued to mention as his explanation:

The capacity of a transformational leader to serve as an example throughout curriculum reform initiatives gave me the chance to adapt and become comfortable during my first experience with curriculum reform.

Participants mentioned how transformational leaders at the Khmer HEIs empower, assist, and mentor participants throughout curriculum reform activities by modelling desired behaviour.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Positive Results from Transformational Leadership in the Khmer HEI Curriculum Reform

As demonstrated by the emergent themes of vision-driven change, increased faculty engagement, a shift from compliance to commitment, and fostering the development of a collaborative environment, the study’s findings demonstrated that transformational leadership produced favourable results in curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. Throughout the ideation, development, and implementation stages of curriculum reform, participants said that a clear, compelling vision, as a transformational strategy, inspired important stakeholders to support curricular change processes and contributed to long-lasting, successful curriculum reform. Transformational leaders are visionary thinkers who can inspire and motivate staff, communicate ideas clearly, plan strategically, cultivate an environment of innovation and engagement, and articulate a clear vision that drives curricular change and results in effective curriculum reform, according to their interview responses. These results were consistent with those of Bonfield et al. (2020) and Khan et al. (2021), who proposed that a key component of transformational leadership is creating a compelling vision that is in line with motivating inspiration and personalized attention. According to Bonfield et al. (2020), Lim et al. (2020), and Men et al. (2021), transformational leaders inspire a shared vision that develops appropriate structures and systems for curriculum change that guarantees smooth progress, encourages open communication that builds a strong support system and serves as a source of motivation, empowers faculty, and fosters innovation that results in sustainable, all-encompassing, and useful curriculum reform. Participants in the current study proposed that when favourable conditions, systems, and structures are established to engage, support, inspire, and lead important stakeholders involved

in curricular reform processes, vision-driven change—a dimension of transformational leadership—improved curriculum reform in HEIs (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019).

4.2.2. Reforming the Curriculum and Involving Faculty in the Khmer HEIs

The study's findings demonstrated that transformational leadership boosts faculty involvement in curriculum reform by facilitating teamwork, idea sharing, support-seeking, and participation in curricular change procedures. According to the participants, higher levels of faculty engagement were linked to the Khmer HEIs' intellectual and emotional commitment to curricular reform. Rather from seeing curricular reform as a leadership mandate, they found that transformational leadership promoted involvement and engagement. These results are consistent with Asbari's (2020) conclusion that key players in curriculum reform become more engaged and collaborative when transformational leadership is implemented successfully in HEIs. The findings are in line with those of Al-Husseini et al. (2021), who found that faculty engagement increases when transformational leadership is used in colleges and universities to review, design, develop, and implement curriculum changes, making the process more responsive, feasible, seamless, and effective. The findings demonstrated that transformational leadership created an atmosphere that influenced all-encompassing curriculum reform (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019).

4.2.3. The Khmer HEIs' Enhanced Dedication and Working Together and Reforming the Curriculum

The results of this study showed that the characteristics of transformational leadership—inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, inspiring a common vision, and improved support—fostered a transition from compliance to commitment to curricular reform at the Khmer HEIs. According to the participants, transformational leadership promoted a feeling of responsibility and heightened participation in curricular reform. They observed that transformational leadership fostered an environment within the institution where faculty members felt a sense of belonging and were highly motivated to take an active role in curriculum improvement. These results were consistent with those of Bohari et al. (2024), who found that the transformational leadership strategy boosts commitment from both internal and external HEI stakeholders. The findings are consistent with those of Ahmad and Rochimah (2021), who proposed that transformational leadership approaches foster a culture of support, creativity, and cooperation, increasing faculty commitment to investigate novel approaches in curriculum design, incorporate current technologies into programs, and embrace curriculum reform processes from conception to development. According to the study's participants, transformational leadership had an impact on curricular change (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019), particularly by boosting dedication to the crucial phases—needs assessment, goal-setting, design, development, and implementation.

The results of this study demonstrated that transformational leadership produced favourable results in the Khmer HEI curriculum change, mostly as a result of the establishment of a cooperative institutional environment. According to the participants, transformational leaders established curriculum committees, flexible schedules, cross-departmental engagement systems, and training opportunities. These actions helped to create a collaborative environment that supported creative and long-lasting curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. These findings are consistent with those of Admiraal et al. (2021), Billingsley et al. (2020), Hartiwi et al. (2020), Karlberg & Bezzina (2022), and Özdemir et al. (2020), who observed that transformational leadership promotes staff support and motivation, collaboration, networking opportunities, resource sharing, and iterative feedback, all of which support curriculum reform. The results of this study showed that transformational leadership at HEIs breaks down departmental barriers, facilitating a smooth and useful process of collaboration in curriculum development (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019).

4.2.4. Inclusion, Involvement, Reforming the Curriculum and Developing Capabilities in the Khmer HEIs

According to this study, curricular reform at the Khmer HEIs was positively impacted by transformational leadership techniques. Participants observed that faculty empowerment and shared decision-making were essential elements of transformational leadership, as demonstrated during curriculum reform. These elements frequently resulted in sustained engagement, inspirational motivation, and inclusivity, which in turn facilitated responsive curricular design and implementation. These results are related to those of Alessa (2021), who proposed that shared decision-making and empowerment align with the dimensions of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, resulting in enhanced stakeholder awareness, increased support and encouragement, and the innovative discovery of ways to improve curriculum reform from conception to development. The results of this study demonstrated that by creating a supportive and encouraging environment for faculty, empowerment and collaborative decision-making helped the Khmer HEIs implement curriculum reform (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019).

Mentoring and coaching were recognized by participants as transformative leadership techniques that helped the Khmer HEIs implement useful and long-lasting curriculum reform. They showed that mentoring and coaching enhanced faculty

ability and competence, fostered crucial skills among stakeholders, and offered a support network, better positioning them to create, develop, and implement a variety of curriculum. These findings are related to those of Al Madhahaji (2017) and Al Rashidi (2017), who found that transformational leadership in Saudi Arabian universities promotes knowledge exchange, helps develop best practices for ideas and planning, and guarantees team members' support, all of which improve academic performance, curriculum change, and organizational growth. The results are in line with those of Al Regeb (2017), Al Saleh (2019), and Al Ubiri (2016), who pointed out that mentoring and coaching are in line with intellectual stimulation and personalized attention, which enhances people's capacity and helps to facilitate knowledge sharing in public universities and change initiatives related to instruction, student welfare, curriculum design, and faculty engagement.

4.2.5. Communication, Transparency and Data-Informed Decision Making in Curriculum Reform

The results of this study showed that open communication and transparency, as transformational leadership strategies, are essential for developing efficient feedback loops, quickly disseminating information, encouraging inclusivity and engagement, and encouraging openness—all of which support successful curriculum reform that is in line with the demands of the institution and society. The findings were consistent with the findings of Al-Mansoori and Koç (2019), who suggested that transformational leadership techniques, such honest and open communication, foster an institutional climate that encourages curriculum innovation. The current study's participants indicated that open and transparent communication improved stakeholders' involvement in curriculum reform by keeping them aware, informed, and involved in decision-making.

The findings of this study demonstrated that using data to inform and empower staff to commit to the various stages of curriculum change, data-informed visioning, as a transformational leadership method, enhanced outcomes in curriculum reform. These results were consistent with those of Alessa (2021) and Maaz et al. (2018), who suggested that data-informed visioning can persuade followers to support curriculum projects through impact and vision. The findings are consistent with Alessa's (2021) observation that transformative leaders in higher education institutions can mobilize support for curriculum reform and use this platform to enable faculty to realize their full potential (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019). According to participants in the current study, a compelling vision made it simpler to engage stakeholders during curricular reform processes by encouraging faculty to commit to a common purpose and facilitating alignment with developing trends and needs.

4.2.6. Curriculum Reform: Goal Alignment, Vision, Faculty and Stakeholders' Empowerment

Vision casting and goal alignment were recognized by participants as crucial transformative leadership practices that impacted curriculum reform in Khmer higher education institutions. They showed that as transformational leadership behaviours, vision casting and goal alignment boosted support and buy-in for curriculum reform and gave those involved in curricular change processes a feeling of purpose and direction. The findings align with those of Şen and Koramaz (2024), who came to the conclusion that a compelling vision promotes equality in curriculum reform, allowing curriculum modifications to suit critical needs and so reducing gaps in education and society (Şen & Koramaz, 2024). These results were consistent with those of Alsayyed et al. (2020), who found that transformational leadership encourages the creation of vision-driven settings, which makes it easier for stakeholders to be motivated, guided, and encouraged to commit to curricular reform initiatives. The findings demonstrated that goal alignment and vision casting helped foster a feeling of purpose by giving curricular reform processes direction and clarity (Hab, 2024; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019).

The results of the study demonstrated that inspirational motivation created a feeling of purpose and optimism for curriculum reform by boosting support, inspiring stakeholders, and igniting passion for initiatives. Inspirational motivation boosted optimism and involvement, according to study participants, which helped curriculum reform processes including review, design, development, and implementation proceed more smoothly. These results are in line with those of Alsayyed et al. (2020), who found that inspirational motivation, one of the core tenets of transformational leadership, fosters an institutional environment that fosters support, direction, cooperation, and engagement—all of which are conducive to curriculum reform. The results demonstrated that inspiring motivation enhanced stakeholder motivation to operate effectively and efficiently during these procedures, boosted institutional commitment to curriculum reform in HEIs, and raised optimism about curricular change processes.

4.2.7. Implications for the Cambodian Higher Education Context

Beyond confirming the positive influence of transformational leadership on curriculum reform, the findings provide important context-specific insights for Cambodian higher education institutions. Curriculum reform in Cambodia occurs within a higher education system that is strongly influenced by national educational priorities and quality improvement

initiatives led by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). In this context, transformational leadership serves not only as a mechanism for motivating faculty members but also as a critical bridge between national reform expectations and institutional implementation. The findings suggest that leaders who communicate a shared vision, encourage participation, and provide continuous support are better positioned to facilitate curriculum reform in environments where institutional change must align with broader national development goals.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that successful curriculum reform in the Khmer context relies heavily on collaborative relationships, trust-building, and faculty empowerment. These factors may be particularly important in developing higher education systems where curriculum transformation often requires balancing limited institutional resources, evolving workforce demands, and increasing expectations for educational quality. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of relational and participatory leadership practices as essential components of sustainable curriculum reform in Cambodian higher education institutions.

4.2.8. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The findings also extend the existing literature on transformational leadership by demonstrating its application within a developing Southeast Asian higher education context. While previous studies have frequently examined transformational leadership in relation to organizational performance, employee commitment, and educational effectiveness, this study provides evidence that transformational leadership also plays a significant role in facilitating curriculum reform through faculty engagement, collaborative decision-making, mentoring, coaching, and vision-driven change. These findings contribute to a growing understanding of how transformational leadership operates during educational transformation processes in contexts that remain underrepresented in the international literature.

From a practical perspective, the study offers valuable insights for university leaders, policymakers, and curriculum developers in Cambodia. Leadership development initiatives should emphasize communication, faculty empowerment, collaborative governance, mentoring, and data-informed decision-making to strengthen curriculum reform efforts. By adopting transformational leadership practices, higher education institutions may enhance stakeholder commitment, reduce resistance to change, and improve the sustainability of curriculum reform initiatives.

5. Conclusion

This study illustrated the beneficial effects of transformational leadership behaviors and techniques on curriculum reform in higher education institutions. The results demonstrated that through enhancing engagement and communication, boosting support, promoting diversity, and facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration, transformational leadership behaviors and techniques helped HEIs alter their curricula. The findings of this study provided a distinctive viewpoint and fresh insights into the aspects of transformational leadership—inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration—and how each contributes to long-lasting, adaptable, and useful curriculum reform. The study's conclusions demonstrated that these factors support curriculum reform processes from conception to execution by fostering a common vision, enhancing faculty capabilities, boosting buy-in, and empowering faculty.

The study's findings have leadership ramifications and may help bring about constructive organizational and social transformation. The results of this study support the idea that effective curriculum change in the Khmer HEIs requires leaders to adopt inclusive, supportive, and transformational leadership models, use data, foster open communication and transparency, and articulate a compelling vision. These ramifications boost faculty dedication and enhance involvement in curricular reform and change initiatives. The Khmer HEIs can empower faculty, promote inclusive environments, and develop learning opportunities that build human capital to address workforce demands, governmental priorities, and societal needs by successfully implementing transformational leadership to drive curriculum reform. Overall, the findings of this basic qualitative study demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters an institutional environment of engagement, clear communication, increased commitment, and a shared vision and innovation that propels institutional change and growth. This helps HEIs in Cambodia implement sustainable, practical curriculum reform. Additionally, the results of this study could lead to constructive social change at the institutional and societal levels. These ramifications could enable the development of the Khmer HEIs that are inclusive, cooperative, stimulating, and supportive, creating strong settings that promote transformation. Curriculum reform and institutional development can be advanced in HEIs through the effective practice and application of transformational leadership, which can boost followers' dedication, increase participation and engagement, improve communication, enable shared decision-making, and remove resistance. The results of this investigation have broad ramifications. A successful curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs will satisfy future workforce demands, build human capital in line with society's evolving needs, encourage critical 21st-century skills, and produce students who can make significant contributions to society and evolve into global citizens.

This study also contributes to the limited body of research on transformational leadership within Cambodian higher education institutions. While transformational leadership has been widely examined in educational settings across different regions, evidence from the Khmer context remains relatively scarce. The findings extend existing understanding by demonstrating how transformational leadership supports curriculum reform through faculty empowerment, collaborative engagement, mentoring, and vision-driven change within a higher education system influenced by national reform priorities. Consequently, the study provides context-specific insights that enrich the broader transformational leadership literature while offering practical guidance for curriculum reform initiatives in Cambodian higher education institutions.

This simple qualitative study illustrated the beneficial effects of transformational leadership behaviors and techniques on curriculum reform in the Khmer HEIs. Using extra data collection techniques, such as focus group procedures, document analysis, and observation checklists, to obtain information from participants is one recommendation for upcoming qualitative investigations. Diversifying data gathering techniques may improve the generalizability of results, enable data triangulation in subsequent research, and give thorough data on a phenomenon from several sources. When a variety of data gathering techniques are available, there is also the chance to draw a wide range of participants to a study, resulting in thorough, in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or subject. In addition, more study should compare it with other leadership models through qualitative case studies or cross-cultural studies. In-depth observations and findings regarding particular characteristics, behaviors, or principles that propel responsive, realistic, and long-lasting curriculum improvement will be obtained by extending future study to investigate alternative leadership models. Globally speaking, this contributes to the expanding body of research on leadership models and suggests and documents many leadership philosophies that can be used to promote curricular reform in higher education institutions.

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