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**FACE-SAVING** **FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

The research is dedicated to figure out the application of face-saving by transformational leadership in the world of education and to know the strategies of face-saving used by transformational leadership in the world of education in Indonesia. This is important to do because a transformational leader is required to set an example and motivate his subordinates so that he always needs to maintain his honor and dignity. Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this research collected around 200 articles and included 10 of them in the research to answer the questions and figure out the answers. The results of this research showed that there is little to none of research in education in Indonesia discussed about the topic. This will lead to a wide opportunity for future researchers to conduct research on this topic. It is also found that face-saving will benefit the transformational leader by increasing the creativity of the followers but also showing that the transformational leader is not an anti-critic person. Meanwhile, the strategies that are applicable for the leader when he/she gets critique are contradicting, withdrawing, repairing, and emphasizing.

*Keywords: face-saving, transformational leader, education*

**INTRODUCTION**

Leadership in an organization has various forms. This research will focus on Bass and Avolio's research on leadership theory which is expected to increase subordinate commitment. In this theory there are at least three general forms of leadership, namely transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. This research focuses on discussing forms of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership itself is described as leadership that has at least five dimensions, namely 1) Idealized Influence - Attribute, where this reflects followers' perceptions of the leader's strength, self-confidence and noble ideals. 2) Idealized Influence – Behaviors, related to the values ​​held by the leader, beliefs, vision and ethical orientation of the leader's behavior. 3) Inspirational Motivation, encouraging subordinates to achieve goals by continuing to believe that they are able to achieve them. 4) Intellectual Stimulation, the leader encourages subordinates to question assumptions and try to find creative solutions, and 5) Individualized Consideration, the leader considers that subordinates are different from each other so they consider fulfilling these needs (Serrat, 2021).

The implementation of leadership by these leaders is greatly influenced by culture, especially for Asian people, including in the world of education and in Indonesia itself. Culture itself is a complex construct that has been defined in various ways. House et al., (2002) defined culture as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations." House et al., (2002) also stated that culture and leadership have a very close relationship where both influence each other.

In their recent review of cross-cultural organizational research, the results from the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) project Resick et al., (2006) showed that duality as followers, across all cultures studied, preferred charismatic/inspirational and ethical leadership behaviors. Yet some cultures also expressed unique preferences for certain styles of leadership. For example, Southern Asian cultures find face-saving leadership (i.e., being self-centered, status conscious, conflict inducing) as neutral, whereas Nordic countries view it as quite negative/ ineffective.

The face is the most relevant concept in the study of politeness as argued by many linguistics researchers, the face is defined as ‘the public self-image’ that deals with self or social ‘identity’ or ‘reputation’. Everybody wants to save his face to build a good self-image. Brown & Levinson (1987) in Alabdali, (2019) argued that a face can be maintained, it can get lost, it may be fascinating, and it needs to be present all the time in the interaction. Therefore, a speaker needs to maximize the saving face acts by referring to one of these politeness levels (do the face-threatening act (FTA) by softening or strengthening the speeches, off record, representing the positive politeness to embrace the public with perlocutionary act, referring the negative politeness to be free from imposition, or don’t do FTA at all). The U. S President adopted these theories by delivering his speeches with caution and precision. He applied hedging as a politeness strategy to create a positive self-image in accomplishing his political goals. U. S Presidents needed to persuade, convince and get public approval when they aimed to pass a new policy or other political intention.

This form of transformational leadership is also widely used in the world of education (Jackson et al., 2013; Shin & Zhou, 2007). In many studies it has been found that many school principals use this transformational leadership. As with other fields, transformational leadership is also liked by subordinates in the world of education because it is very suitable for it, such as leader who motivate, set an example, etc. This is in accordance with the character of a teacher who teaches something to his/her students. Furthermore, transformational leadership is also very suitable to be applied in Indonesia, where in fact the people really uphold eastern customs (Maris et al., 2017; Muhammad Hamzah Al Faruq Supriyanto, 2021; Windasari et al., 2022). In terms of implementing transformational leadership in the world of education, it is appropriate for the leader to also implement face-saving as an effort to maintain the leader's dignity and honor. So that in the future leaders will also be more respected by subordinates or teachers and other educational staff.

Elaborated by these findings, the present study was designed to explore face-saving for transformational leadership in education. The research questions are as follows: (1) How is the application of face-saving by a transformational leader in education? (2) What are the strategies of face-saving used by a transformational leader in education?

**METHOD**

This research uses a literature review that uses specific methods Systematic Literature Review (SLR). In this SLR method, researchers systematically review articles with certain relevant keywords. In this research the keywords used are face-saving and transformational leadership. In its implementation, so that this research could run systematically, the PRISMA 2000 step guide or flowchart was used by the researcher. The literature search process was carried out on June 24 2024 from Google Scholar. Researchers limited the number of articles searched to approximately 200 articles. After analysis, there were 10 articles that were deemed relevant to the research topic.

**Identification of studies via Google Scholar**

Records removed *before screening*:

Duplicate records removed

(n =2)

Records identified (n =200)

**Identification**

Records excluded:

Not education, face-saving and transformational leadership (n = 111)

Records screened and retrieved

(n = 118)

Reports excluded:

Articles do not focus on face-saving (n=7)

Reports assessed for eligibility

(n = 17)

**Screening**

Studies included in review

(n =10)

**Included**

**Figure 1. Flowchart PRISMA 2000**

The selected articles are then analyzed by following the steps, namely (1) sorting data using Microsoft Excel to facilitate selection and focus on important points relevant to the research topic, (2) displaying data in tabular form, which has been previously determined, (3) drawing conclusions aimed at answering previously formulated research questions.

**FINDINGS**

The collection process resulted in 10 articles deemed appropriate to the research topic. These results are then analyzed based on country distribution, methods, and results or findings in the research.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Researcher(s)** | **Title** | **Method** | **Country** | **Finding(s)** |
| (Resick et al., 2006) | A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Endorsement of Ethical Leadership | Quantitative | Global  | “Character/Integrity was endorsed to a lesser extent among Middle Eastern societies. A possible explanation for this finding is the importance of saving face in Middle Eastern societies. To gain the respect of peers and subordinates, as well as to maintain one’s own self-respect, it is particularly important for leaders to maintain their image or status. While Character/Integrity was viewed as important, per- haps they take on different meaning and have a different emphasis due to the importance of saving face in these societies.” |
| (Robinson, 2016) | Age difference and face-saving in an inter- generational problem-based learning groupLeslie | Qualitative | England | “There were several occasions where younger students were overruled by mature students and the data suggests that symbolic power, associated with age, persists in the learning environment. However, there were also many occasions when students from all age-groups failed to engage in a more critical discourse with their colleagues. It is suggested that this is also due to intergenerational diversity resulting from persistence of social distance between group members, a situation in which FTAs are more acutely experienced.” |
| (Stephan & Pathak, 2016) | Beyond cultural values? Cultural leadership ideals and entrepreneurship | Quantitative | Global  | “We find strong and consistent effects of CLTs on individual entrepreneurship. These highlight that entrepreneurs thrive in cultures that do not merely strongly endorse desirable charismatic leaders, but are also able to tolerate at least some of the less desirable self-protective leadership behaviors. Self-protective leadership blends attributes considered typical for individualistic cultures (self- centric, competitive) with collectivistic aspects (status-conscious, face-saving).” |
| (Ye & Pang, 2011) | Examining the Chinese Approach to Crisis Management: Cover-Ups, Saving Face, and Taking the ‘‘Upper Level Line’’ | Qualitative | China | “This study found that face saving in the Chinese culture precluded Sanlu’s accommodative stance toward the media at the very beginning. Made anxious by knowledge of the Chinese aphorism that ‘‘admitting guilt is losing face,’’ Sanlu might have viewed the media as an enemy that probes into its dishonor to boost viewership or readership; therefore, Sanlu tried to cover up the truth. This study found that culture could also be regarded as a significant situational factor, reflected in Sanlu’s silence after making an apology. Sanlu kept silent because it thought it had been thoroughly discredited by apologizing; hence, there was no effective means to save its ‘‘face.’’ After that, given the Chinese cultural influence of uncertainty avoidance, Sanlu probably felt that more communication merely added insult to injury.”  |
| (Song, 2017) | How to Handle Face-Saving in the Chinese Church Through Servant-Leadership | Qualitative | China | “I proposed a holistic process of handling face-saving and demonstrated it through my own experience. Face-saving is out of fear and shame and a mindset of a lack of options. In order to handle face-saving, leaders have to develop sharp awareness and promote healing of themselves and others. This is not a once-for-all process, but an ongoing process with the will to love and the will to meaning. Through the model of servant-leadership and this ongoing process, we may be able to alleviate face-saving`s negative impact on church leadership, and we may become great.” |
| (Jackson et al., 2013) | Leadership, Commitment, and Culture: A Meta-Analysis | Quantitative  | - | “Transformational/charismatic leadership(face-saving) correlated substantially with one form of commitment (affective commitment (AC), and its influence on other forms of commitment normative commitment (NC), and continuance commitment (CC) appeared susceptible to cultural moderation. One form of transactional leadership, contingent reward, also related more strongly to follower AC in more hierarchical societies.” |
| (Schalkwyk, 2011) | Saving face: Hierarchical positioning in family-school relationships in MacaoGertina | Qualitative  | China | “Parents in this study adhere to Chinese culture, and are particularly aware of their actions, attitudes and positioning. This results in deliberately ambiguous communication in order to preserve the relationship. Criticizing teachers, or evenasking them for more information about one’s child, could be considered an insult to the dignity of the teacher in the eyes of his or her peers (Chan, n.d.). Thus, parents in this shame-inducing culture feel apprehensive when discussing issues that might make them or the teacher seem inadequate or inefficient. This cultural macro-discourse informs the positioning of parents and teachers, and poses a major obstacle to a better parent-school relationship and greater parental involvement in the schooling of their children.” |
| (Robinson et al., 2015) | Saving face: Managing rapport in a Problem-Based Learning group | Qualitative  | England  | “The findings suggest that educators need to understand the complex interactional demands students have to face in undertaking Problem-Based Learning and support students to overcome these difficulties considering the three bases of rapport management.” |
| (Bjørndal, 2020) | Student teachers’ responses to critical mentor feedback: A study of face-saving strategies in teaching placements | Qualitative | Norwegia | “Critical feedback sequences are analyzed by face-work theory (Goffman, 1967). Findings suggest that student teachers are deeply concerned about saving face when receiving critical feedback. Their strategies include “contradicting”, “withdrawing”, and “repairing” face, in addition to “emphasizing a self-reflective and progressive face”. This article offers insights that may be helpful for communicating critical mentor feedback.” |
| (Shin & Zhou, 2007) | When Is Educational Specialization Heterogeneity Related to Creativity in Research and Development Teams? Transformational Leadership as a Moderator | Quantitative  | Korea | “Transformational leadership and educational specialization heterogeneity interacted to affect team creativity in such a way that when transformational leadership was high, teams with greater educational specialization heterogeneity exhibited greater team creativity. In addition, teams’ creative efficacy mediated this moderated relationship among educational specialization heterogeneity, transformational leadership, and team creativity. Face-saving tendencies may affect team creative efficacy and team creativity because teams with high levels of face saving may be less likely to reveal their different perspectives and opinions for fear of being embarrassed.” |

**Graph 1. Research by country**

**Graph 2. Research based on approach/method**

There were 10 studies used, none came from Indonesia. Researchers have difficulty finding face-saving topics in Indonesian language research. Research was conducted globally covering many countries (n = 2), England (n = 2), China (n = 3), Korea (n = 1), Norway (n = 1) and one study was considered unknown/no country. Furthermore, of these ten studies, six of them were qualitative methods, four studies were quantitative methods, and there were no studies with *mix method*.

**DISCUSSION**

**Application of Face-Saving by Transformational Leader in Education**

As a result of the search, researchers did not find the application of face-saving in the world of education in Indonesia. This is a bless when viewed from the novelty of the research. It is very wide open to introduce the term face saving and examine its application directly in the world of education. Basically, face-saving is very useful for leaders in schools. Shin & Zhou, (2007) explained in their research that transformational leadership and educational specialization heterogeneity interacted to affect team creativity in such a way that when transformational leadership was high, teams with greater educational specialization heterogeneity exhibited greater team creativity. Where in this research at the beginning there was fear that there would be a negative effect of face-saving, where more specifically, previous cross-cultural research has suggested that face saving or the desire to maintain interpersonal harmony in East Asian countries may explain the low creativity scores on some creativity tests found in some Asian samples. Thus, face-saving tendencies may affect team creative efficacy and team creativity because teams with high levels of face saving may be less likely to reveal their different perspectives and opinions for fear of being embarrassed. Face-saving which is feared to hamper creativity here actually occurs among group members, so it should actually be something positive if done by the leader because the leader will maintain his authority and honor better so that subordinates or teachers can be more obedient in following the orders and instructions given.

Furthermore, implementing face-saving does not mean that school leaders are immune to criticism or even unwilling to hear input from parents, teachers and education staff. This happened in Schalkwyk`s, (2011) research, where this research examined the relationship between parents and schools in Macao. In the context of this research, the families studied adhere to Chinese culture and in general they are aware of their actions, attitudes and positions. In this Chinese cultural context, criticizing teachers, principals or even asking for more in-depth information about their children can be considered an insult or demean the teacher or principal in the eyes of other teachers or other school principals. In implementing face-saving, more emphasis is placed on how to maintain dignity or honor, this does not mean that teachers or transformational leaders are anti-criticism, but how to respond to this criticism so that people continue to trust the leader and can adapt it further to the local culture where the leader lives. . If this is applied in Indonesia, it can be adapted to the cultural context in Indonesia.

**Strategies of Face-Saving Used by Transformational Leader in Education**

The daily life of a leader (school principal) is not free from criticism. This criticism can come from fellow leaders, education supervisors, deputy principals, teachers and even students' parents. The following strategies for implementing face-saving in the world of education can be used when a transformational leader receives criticism. Some of them are contradicting critical feedback, withdrawing from critical feedback, repairing competence face while accepting critical feedback and emphasizing a competent self-reflective and progressive face while accepting critical feedback. All four are based on research results from Bjørndal, (2020).

The first strategy is contradicting critical feedback, where this strategy is carried out by trying to refute and question the validity of the criticism given. As an example:

Critic: … I think you need to earn the respect of your subordinates so that they will follow and obey.

Leader: ... I think my subordinates have respected me by saying that they are happy when I am here and they think I am good. From here I feel they respect me.

From the example above, it can be seen that the leader tried to ward off the criticism by denying it. Indirectly stating that he/she has actually earned the respect of his/her subordinates and distorting the critic's statement.

The second strategy is withdrawing from critical feedback. This strategy has two ways, namely withdrawing by shifting focus and also responding passively to criticism. Shifting focus can be done by using a long story so that the critic's focus will be shifted. As an example:

Critic: … The learning activities at your school are not that bad, but what I want you to think about is how you evaluate your subordinates. Do you have certain criteria?

Leader: ...Mr A is not very quick to understand my explanation, but I know he has tried, for example he told me that ... (tells Mr A's story).

From Mr. A's long story, the critic will be distracted from his question and be able to save the leader's face.

The next way is to respond to criticism passively. This method can be done by providing short responses and minimal dialogue contributions in conversations that involve criticism.

Critic: … are you sure your subordinates will get real benefits?

Leader: … maybe not all, but I'm sure some do.

Critic: …sure, their needs are different from each other. Right?

Leader: … right, their needs are different.

Critic: So?

Leader: yes, of course there must be adaptation in the implementation process.

From the conversation above, the leader tried to answer as briefly as possible to avoid mistakes that resulted in sharp criticism, so as to save face.

The next strategy is repairing competence face while accepting critical feedback. This strategy allows the leader to accept criticism and indirectly maintain face. In this strategy, there are at least three methods that can be used, one of which is repairing competence face by balancing critical feedback. In this strategy, transformational leader can mention positive things (skills, achievements, actions, or personality) as a balance when receiving criticism.

Critic: …the school is in decline. Teachers are not disciplined, many students have grades below standard, etc.

Leader: ... the facts you convey may be correct, but schools experiencing decline may be a little inaccurate. You can see from our school buildings that in recent years they are getting better. All this is nothing but proof that we are getting better in several things.

The final strategy is emphasizing a competent self-reflective and progressive face while accepting critical feedback. This strategy prioritizes a self-reflective, progressive competence face which involves the ability to observe, reflect, evaluate past practice and the desire to improve oneself.

Leader: The more I realize, that I still have many shortcomings in giving instructions. I'm still rambling and perhaps speaking too fast. But from here I finally learned that I have to be more self-controlled, control myself to remain calm in all conditions and think practically. This is solely for the sake of providing the best for our beloved school.

**CONCLUSION**

Research on the application of face-saving in the world of education in Indonesia is still very rare. This is a very wide opportunity for further research. In this research, it was found that the application of face-saving has both positive and negative impacts, especially for transformational leaders. This is because a transformational leader has the dimension of doing something good so that subordinates are inspired. Apart from that, in practice, leaders can be assumed to be immune to criticism because leaders always try to dismiss or accept it but don't seem graceful. The strategies that a transformational leader can use when receiving criticism are contradicting, withdrawing, repairing, and emphasizing as explained above.

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