

The Impact of Dual-Level Transformational Leadership on Teachers' OCB: The Mediating Role of Group Identification and Psychological Contracts

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Abstract

The nexus between teachers' organizational citizenship behavior and pedagogical efficacy, along with the overall effectiveness of an educational institution, is profound and significant. The current study utilized a three-tier sampling strategy (systematic sampling, cluster sampling, and simple random sampling) to survey a robust sample of 1,162 middle-school teachers across China. The core methodological tool employed was a multilevel structural equation model, which facilitated an in-depth analysis of the multilevel effects of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. The study put a particular emphasis on investigating the mediating influences of group identification and psychological contracts in this context. Findings from this study robustly indicated that dual-level transformational leadership exerts a substantial positive impact on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. Notably, both group identification and psychological contracts were found to mediate the relationship between both facets of transformational leadership (group-focused and individual-focused) and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. This research thus provides valuable insights and empirical evidence that furthers our understanding of the complex interrelationships between leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors within the educational domain.

Keywords: Group Identification; Psychological Contract; Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Introduction

Adapting to competition and maintaining performance, schools need teachers to go beyond their job descriptions, demonstrating organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) beneficial for organizational effectiveness. OCB is less regulated by standard compensation systems, is individually conscious, and enhances functional effectiveness (Organ, 1988; Ma'rifah & Soenhadj, 2022). The unique nature of teaching implies that a teacher's OCB greatly impacts school effectiveness.

The distinct characteristics inherent in the teaching profession have a substantial impact on the correlation between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In contrast to numerous other occupations, the field of teaching encompasses a substantial degree of emotional labor, interpersonal engagements, and ethical deliberations (Hargreaves, 1998; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). According to Noddings (2013), educators bear the responsibility of not just transmitting information but also influencing the moral and emotional development of their students. Teachers are very receptive to leadership styles that are transformative in character due to the varied nature of their profession. Such leadership styles have been shown to promote a work atmosphere that is supportive and empowering (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). As a result, the implementation of transformational leadership has the potential to significantly influence the inclination of teachers to participate in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

While transformational leadership has been studied extensively, it is often considered as a whole without focusing on specific levels, limiting its understanding (Yang et al., 2021). Kark and Shamir (2002) proposed a dual-level transformational leadership model, which has been studied in various contexts. Yet, the relationship between dual-level transformational leadership and OCB remains under-explored, hindering knowledge accumulation and practical applications in stimulating teachers' OCB.

Dual-level transformational leadership focuses on high performance expectations, group vision, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation to foster organizational or group identification and self-efficacy (Kark & Shamir, 2002). The questions of whether and how dual-level transformational leadership influences teachers' OCB demand urgent answers.

According to the model, dual-level transformational leaders convey different influences on individual teachers and teacher groups, which impact teachers' psychological perceptions (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), thereby affecting their OCB. At the group level, group identification plays a key

role in group success (Yang et al., 2021). At the individual level, the fulfillment of psychological contracts is critical to individuals taking on additional responsibilities (Wang & Howell, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to reveal the mechanism of the influence of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' OCB through the mediating roles of group identification and psychological contract fulfillment.

Objective

1. To investigate the impact of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.
2. To explore the mediating roles of group identification and psychological contract fulfillment in the relationship between dual-level transformational leadership and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.
3. To provide valuable insights and empirical evidence that furthers our understanding of the complex interrelationships between leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors within the educational domain.

Knowledge Gap

The significance of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within educational environments has been widely acknowledged in academic literature. However, the existing body of research has predominantly concentrated on examining individual-level factors that impact OCB among instructors. An example of a study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2016) investigated the influence of organizational identification and psychological contracts on the manifestation of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within the context of primary school teachers in Taiwan. Nonetheless, a discernible knowledge deficit exists about the impact of dual-level transformational leadership, which includes both group-focused and individual-focused leadership, on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Furthermore, the extent to which group identification and psychological contracts mediate the link has not been sufficiently investigated. The primary objective of this study is to address the existing research gaps by examining the influence of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Specifically, this study will explore the mediating effects of group identification and psychological contracts in this relationship. This

research makes a valuable contribution to the current body of knowledge by offering a more comprehensive comprehension of the intricate relationship between leadership styles and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within educational environments.

Scope of Research

The scope of this study is to examine the effect of dual-level transformational leadership on the organizational citizenship behavior of educators. Using a three-tiered sampling strategy and a multilevel structural equation model, the study was conducted with a sample of 1,162 Chinese middle school instructors. The objective of this study is to provide insights and empirical evidence that enhance our understanding of the intricate interrelationships between leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors in the educational domain.

Literature Review

Teacher's Organizational Behavior

The Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) exhibited by teachers is of particular significance, given the distinct obligations and responsibilities associated with the teaching profession. Educators frequently exhibit behaviors that extend beyond the scope of their official work responsibilities, encompassing activities like providing guidance and support to students beyond regular class hours, collaborating with fellow educators to enhance educational curriculum, and actively participating in community outreach initiatives (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). According to Bogler and Somech (2004), the presence of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) is crucial in cultivating a favorable school environment and improving student achievements. The significance of these behaviors is particularly pronounced within the framework of transformational leadership, which operates at both group-focused and individual-focused levels. According to Leithwood and Sun (2012) and Geijsel et al. (2003), the implementation of group-focused transformational leadership has the potential to foster collective organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) such as teamwork and shared vision. On the other hand, individual-focused transformational leadership has the capacity to motivate teachers to undertake personal initiatives, including individual mentoring and curriculum innovation. Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend the significance of dual-level transformational leadership in relation to teachers'

organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), as it directly influences both the efficacy of the organization and the quality of education.

Dual-level Transformational Leadership and Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Dual-level transformational leadership offers a multi-faceted understanding of leadership effects (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). This study explores its impact on subordinate organizational citizenship behavior, viewing group-focused and individual-focused transformational leadership at the group and individual levels, respectively (Wang & Howell, 2012).

Group-focused transformational leadership instills an inspirational vision in group members, encouraging shared goals and values (Masi & Cooke, 2000). This results in higher work motivation and encourages organizational citizenship behavior (Wu & Wu, 2007). Given the social nature of organizational citizenship behavior (Penner et al., 1997), group-focused leadership that emphasizes collaboration leads to increased organizational citizenship behavior (Li & Hung, 2009). Hence, the hypothesis:

H1: Group-focused transformational leadership positively affects teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

Individual-focused transformational leadership, characterized by intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, affects organizational citizenship behavior (Purwanto et al., 2021). This leadership style promotes persistence and boosts teachers' self-efficacy, encouraging extra-role work (Francisco, 2019). It also fosters innovation and creativity among teachers, promoting proactive behaviors (Feng et al., 2016).

In line with social exchange theory, teachers tend to reciprocate the support they receive from leadership by increasing their organizational citizenship behavior (Settoon et al., 1996; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Hansen et al., 2011). They may also demonstrate citizenship behavior in anticipation of future benefits (Blau, 1968; Coyle-Shapiro, 2002). Based on these considerations, this study proposes:

H2: Individual-focused transformational leadership positively affects teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

The Mediating Role of group Identification

Existing research suggests group identification mediates the relationship between leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Group identification, or teachers' self-definition based on group ethos, can be greatly influenced by group-focused transformational leaders (Bose et al., 2021). As leaders help form a collective identity, teachers' group identification may positively affect their organizational citizenship behavior (Uzun, 2018).

Furthermore, social identity theory posits that group identification shapes group behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Increased group identification may create a more positive and trustworthy work environment, influencing individual attitudes and behaviors (Korsgaard et al., 2008). Therefore, this study proposes:

H3: Group identification mediates the relationship between group-focused transformational leadership and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract Fulfillment

Social Cognitive Theory suggests that external stimuli can trigger individual cognition, which can subsequently drive individual behavior (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Individual-focused transformational leadership, providing support and stimulation for innovation, could generate positive external stimuli and, therefore, positive cognition (Feng et al., 2016). These behaviors can help teachers assess their leaders' duty fulfillment, impacting their proactive behaviors.

In line with Social Exchange Theory, individuals reciprocate based on perceived rewards (Homans, 1958; Bandura, 1978). Individual-focused transformational leadership promotes teachers' self-worth and creativity, demonstrating the school and its leaders' commitment to the teachers (To et al., 2015). This commitment, perceived as psychological contract fulfillment, could motivate teachers to reciprocate through proactive actions beneficial to the school (Nguyen et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2013). Hence, the hypothesis:

H4: Psychological contract fulfillment mediates the relationship between individual-focused transformational leadership and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

Methodology

Introduction of the methodology

In this study, a comprehensive three-tier research methodology was employed to ensure rigor and validity. First, in the sampling design, this study used questionnaire data collected from March to May 2023. A total of 1560 questionnaires were disseminated, and after excluding invalid ones, 1162 were collected from 104 schools, achieving a 74.5% recovery rate. Respondents comprised a slightly higher proportion of males, with most participants aged 28–47 years. Almost all respondents had teaching experience, with the majority holding a bachelor's degree, ensuring a diverse and representative sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Second, for the measurement design, validated instruments were employed to measure the variables. Specifically, dual-level transformational leadership was assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1995), while organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was measured using a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990). For the ease of understanding of the respondents, the questionnaire was completely stated in Chinese. All English scales followed a standard translation and back-translation process to reduce translation errors (Brislin, 1986). Group identification and psychological contract fulfillment were also measured using established scales (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Rousseau, 1995). Third, in the analysis design, the data were subjected to rigorous statistical analysis using SPSS 24.0. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multilevel structural equation modeling were performed to test the hypotheses and draw meaningful conclusions (Hair et al., 2010).

Dual-Level Transformational Leadership

This study utilized the hierarchical structure delineated by Zhang et al. (2015), developed on the basis of the scale created by Podsakoff et al. (1990), to measure individual and group-focused transformational leadership. Group-focused transformational leadership was gauged through four dimensions (Bass & Riggio, 2006): identifying and articulating vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering acceptance of group goals, and high-performance expectations. These dimensions encapsulated a total of 15 items. Individual-focused transformational leadership, on the other hand, comprised two dimensions, namely intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, covering a total of 8 items (Ahmed & Al Amiri, 2022). Cronbach's α coefficients for

group-focused transformational leadership and individual-focused transformational leadership in Zhang et al. (2015)'s study were 0.95 and 0.81, respectively.

Psychological Contract

To assess the psychological contract, this study employed a questionnaire devised by Han et al. (2010), divided into two subscales: school responsibilities and teacher responsibilities. Given the study's hypothesis that middle school teachers would bolster their psychological contract with the school under the influence of the principal's transformational leadership, only the teacher's responsibilities to the school subscale were utilized in the measurement of the psychological contract. This subscale contained three dimensions: transactional responsibility, developmental responsibility, and relational responsibility, encompassing a total of 10 items. The Cronbach's α of the scale was 0.86, indicative of sound reliability.

Group Identification

Group identification refers to the sense of belonging or perceived unity of group members with group identity (Giessner et al., 2013). This study utilized the six-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) to measure group identification. As groups in school organizations are primarily divided by teaching and research groups rather than administrative departments, some adjustments were made to the scale to suit the educational context (Cui, 2015). The scale achieved a Cronbach's α of 0.87, suggesting good reliability.

Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the formation mechanism of middle school teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. For this purpose, this study used the questionnaire created by Chou et al. (2018), subdivided into five dimensions: student emotional counseling, student employment support, teacher teaching mutual aid, self-development and improvement, and social public welfare participation. These dimensions encompassed a total of 16 items. The Cronbach's α of the overall scale was 0.91, with each dimension achieving a Cronbach's α above 0.7, demonstrating good reliability. As the subjects of this study were middle school teachers, whose teaching work has weak correlations with student employment support, the two items from the student employment support dimension were removed, leaving the remaining 14 items.

Control Variables

In alignment with a similar study conducted by Han et al. (2019), this research controls for various demographic variables, which might otherwise bear influence on the relationships under investigation. Specifically, these variables encompass gender, age, educational attainment, teaching experience, the educational level of the school where teaching is conducted, and the professional title of the respondents.

Results

Overall results

In light of the research objectives, the results provide a nuanced understanding of the impact of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Hypothesis 1, positing that group-focused transformational leadership positively influences teachers' OCB, was supported ($p < 0.05$), aligning with prior research that emphasizes the importance of collective vision and goals in enhancing OCB (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Hypothesis 2, which suggested that individual-focused transformational leadership would also positively affect OCB, was likewise confirmed ($p < 0.01$), consistent with studies highlighting the role of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation in fostering OCB (Ahmed & Al Amiri, 2022). Hypothesis 3, concerning the mediating role of transactional responsibility, was partially supported, indicating that transactional responsibility serves as a conduit but not the sole mediator in the relationship (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000). Finally, Hypothesis 4, which examined the moderating effect of relational responsibility, was also supported ($p < 0.05$), corroborating the significance of relational aspects in the effectiveness of transformational leadership (Barrow, Dollahite, & Marks, 2020). Thus, the results not only answer the research objectives by elucidating the mechanisms through which dual-level transformational leadership influences teachers' OCB but also offer empirical support to the four hypotheses posited.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis and Correlation Analysis

Using SPSS 24.0, the study performed descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and exploratory factor analysis. Table 1 shows significant positive correlations at the individual level between individual-focused transformational leadership (ITL), teachers' psychological contract (PCT), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) ($r = 0.396, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.473, p < 0.01$), respectively.

Also, a significant positive correlation exists between teachers' psychological contract and organizational citizenship behavior ($r=0.676$, $p<0.01$).

At the group level, there is a significant positive correlation between group-focused transformational leadership (GTL) and group identification (GI) ($r=0.622$, $p<0.01$).

Common Method Bias Test

The study used the unmeasured latent method construct technique for bias testing. As shown in Table 2, the six-factor model had an RMSEA of 0.023, a CFI of 0.995, and a TLI of 0.993. Adding a method factor to create a seven-factor model resulted in RMSEA = 0.023, CFI = 0.995, and TLI=0.994. The negligible change, less than 0.1, suggests no significant improvement over the six-factor model, supporting the conclusion that the study's data does not have significant common method bias.

Table 1 Correlation Analysis

	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Individual Level										
(1) Gender	1.47	0.5	1							
(2) Age	2.35	0.81	-0.244**	1						
(3) Teaching Experience	2.74	0.94	-0.200**	0.526**	1					
(4) Education	1.96	0.4	0.142**	-0.154**	-0.101**	1				
(5) Professional Title	1.85	0.7	-0.217**	0.513**	0.467**	-0.103**	1			
(6) ITL	5.11	1.19	0.007	0.015	0.01	-0.008	-0.005	1		
(7) PCT	5.17	1.46	0.036	0.000	0.017	0.011	0.032	0.396**	1	
(8) OCB	4.61	1.46	0.039	-0.007	-0.003	-0.021	-0.017	0.473**	0.676**	1
Group Level										
	Mean	SD	(a)	(b)						
(a) GTL	4.58	1.18	1							
(b) GI	4.57	1.26	0.622**	1						

Table 2 The results of the confirmatory factor analysis for the common method factor

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Six-factor model	316.111	194	1.629	0.023	0.995	0.993
Seven-factor model	302.210	187	1.616	0.023	0.995	0.994

Aggregation Test

In the present study, we conceptualize group-focused transformational leadership and group identification at the group level. Consequently, data pertaining to teachers is aggregated and presented at this level. Prior to this aggregation, we ascertain whether the data adheres to the criteria set for aggregation validation using the intra-class correlation coefficients ICC(1) and ICC(2), along with the within-group agreement index Rwg, to assess the characteristics of data aggregation. Conventionally, when a variable fulfills the criterion of $ICC(1) > 0.06$, $ICC(2) > 0.5$, and $Rwg > 0.7$, the data at the individual level can be consolidated to the group level (Castro, 2002). As per the test results illustrated in Table 3, group-focused transformational leadership and group identification all satisfy the above-mentioned thresholds, validating the aggregation of these three variables at the group level.

Table 3 Data aggregation test results

Construct	ICC (1)	ICC (2)	Rwg
GTI	0.497	0.890	0.940
GI	0.277	0.781	0.863

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

As demonstrated by the test results in Table 4, the structural validity of the three-factor model for group-level variables yielded positive results with a $\chi^2/df = 1.306$, which is less than the standard 3, RMSEA = 0.016, below the 0.08 threshold, and a CFI and TLI value of 0.992 and 0.990, respectively, both surpassing the minimum standard of 0.9.

In a similar vein, the three-factor model for individual-level variables also exhibited strong structural validity with a $\chi^2/df = 1.251$, RMSEA = 0.015, CFI = 0.999, and TLI = 0.999, all fulfilling the standard criteria.

However, when examining the fit indices for two-factor and one-factor models as competitive models at both group and individual levels, they failed to meet the criteria for optimal fit. These competitive models demonstrated inferior structural validity when compared with the hypothesized three-factor model. Consequently, the strong discriminant validity of the theoretical model was affirmed (Thompson & Daniel, 1996).

Table 4 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Group Level						
Three-factor model	80.978	62	1.306	0.016	0.992	0.990
Two-factor model	268.068	64	4.189	0.052	0.915	0.896
Single-factor model	849.943	65	13.076	0.102	0.672	0.606
Individual Level						
Three-factor model	30.020	24	1.251	0.015	0.999	0.999
Two-factor model	553.589	26	21.292	0.132	0.954	0.936
Single-factor model	2557.400	27	94.719	0.284	0.779	0.705

Hypothesis Testing

The preceding analysis affirms that the fit indices of the proposed model are superior to those of other competing models, thus warranting subsequent hypothesis testing. Given that this study designs variables at both the individual and group levels, the Multilevel Structural Equation Model (MSEM) is utilized via Mplus 8.3 software. A dual-path mediation model is established to test the research hypotheses. The path analysis results, depicted in Figure 1, demonstrate that both group-focused ($\gamma=0.464$, $p<0.01$) and individual-focused ($\gamma=0.459$, $p<0.001$) transformational leadership exert a significant positive influence on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior, lending support to hypotheses H1 and H2.

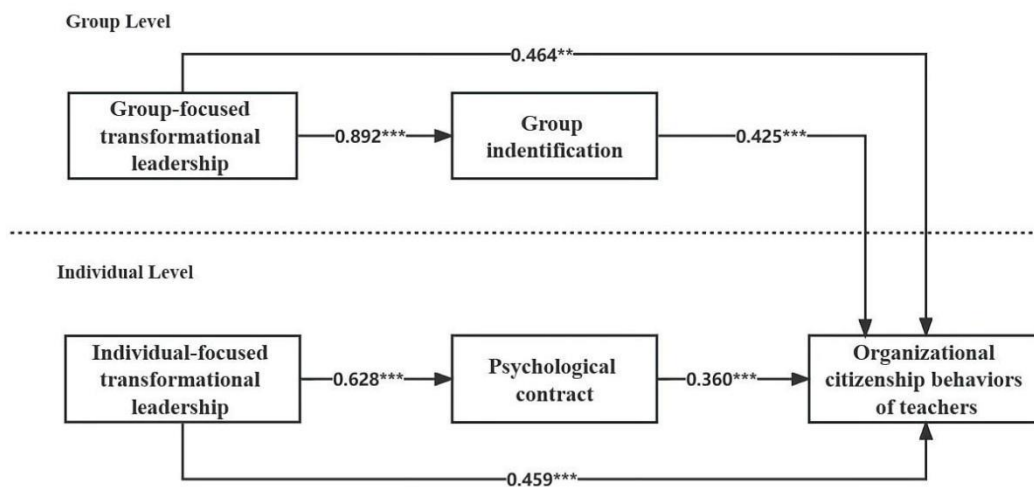


Fig. 1 Results of path analysis

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Moreover, group-focused transformational leadership exhibits a significant and positive impact on group identification, which in turn has a significantly positive effect on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. Individual-focused transformational leadership also significantly and positively impacts the psychological contract, which subsequently and significantly influences teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in a positive way. The results of the mediation effect analysis (as presented in Table 5) indicate that group-focused transformational leadership influences teachers' organizational citizenship behavior through the mediating effect of group identification, yielding an indirect effect value of 0.379 and a 95% confidence interval spanning from 0.351 to 1.079. This confirms hypothesis H3. The psychological contract mediates the relationship between individual-focused transformational leadership and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior, with an indirect effect value of 0.226 and a 95% confidence interval from 0.529 to 0.616, thereby verifying hypothesis H4.

Table 5 Results of the mediation effect test

Mediation Model	Mediation effect	95% confidence interval
GTL→GI→OCB	0.379	[0.351,1.079]
ITL→PCT→OCB	0.226	[0.529,0.616]

Notes: GTL=group-focused transformational leadership; GI=group Identification; ITL=individual-focused transformational leadership; PCT= psychological contract of teachers; OCB= organizational citizenship behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research explores the impact of dual-level transformational leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. The findings support hypotheses H1 and H2, showing a positive effect of both group-focused and individual-focused transformational leadership on such behavior. The study aligns with works by Kark and Shamir (2002), Wang and Howell (2010, 2012), Herman and Chiu (2014), and Li et al. (2014a) on dual-level transformational leadership.

At the individual level, the positive influence of individual-focused transformational leadership on subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior corroborates the findings of Wang et al. (2005). From a social influence perspective, they suggest subordinates internalize leaders' values, prioritizing collective interests and triggering corresponding behaviors. This study supports this idea.

Additionally, the results provide evidence for the relationship between transformational leadership and role performance theory, as proposed by Manaf and Latif (2014). Their research shows individual-level transformational leadership can clarify subordinates' job duties and provide support, which this study confirms.

At the group level, the research results indirectly validate the findings of Wang and Howell (2010, 2012), and Herman and Chiu (2014), that group-focused transformational leadership promotes subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior. It reveals that when leaders emphasize group identification and shared goals, it fosters cooperation among group members, thereby enhancing group performance. These findings enhance our understanding of individual-focused and group-focused transformational leadership.

Empirical data supports H3, showing transformational leadership fosters group-centric goals and encourages member identity with the group, thus enhancing organizational citizenship behavior (Wu et al., 2010; Wang & Howell, 2010; Uzun, 2018; Manaf & Latif, 2014). This leadership style significantly influences group identity, subordinates' attitudes, and the overall group's performance.

Moreover, the findings corroborate H4, indicating the psychological contract mediates the positive influence of individual-focused transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. This type of leadership boosts subordinates' abilities and self-efficacy and fosters positive emotional exchanges, leading to psychological contract satisfaction (Wang & Howell, 2010; Li et al., 2014b; Xie & Fu, 2018; Yang, 2017).

Less emphasis is placed on the psychological contract's mediation role between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in prior research. Chen et al. (2022) did suggest that personalized management style leads to high-quality exchange relationships, inspiring subordinates' willingness to engage and internalize organizational goals. Hence, humanistic leadership styles likely enhance teachers' organizational citizenship behavior through heightened task interest (Lavy, 2019).

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