

Transformational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, and Lecturers' Self-Efficacy in Vocational Colleges: A Systematic Review

Norsafura Shamsuri*, Suhaizal Hashim

Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, University of Tun Hussein Onn, Batu Pahat, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping educators' professional experiences, particularly within complex and emotionally demanding educational environments. Among various leadership approaches, transformational leadership has been consistently associated with positive educator outcomes, while emotional intelligence has gained recognition as an essential leadership capability that supports effective interpersonal interactions and organisational functioning. Educators' self-efficacy is a key psychological construct influencing motivation, engagement, and professional performance. Despite increasing empirical attention to these constructs, prior studies have frequently examined transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy in isolation, with limited systematic integration, especially within vocational education contexts. This study aims to systematically review empirical research examining the relationships between transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators' self-efficacy, with particular relevance to vocational and technical education settings. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, a systematic search was conducted using the Scopus database. Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, resulting in the selection of 23 peer-reviewed, open-access empirical studies published between 2014 and 2025. The included studies were analysed thematically to identify key patterns, methodological characteristics, and research gaps across diverse educational contexts. The findings indicate a consistent positive relationship between transformational leadership and educators' self-efficacy, as well as related outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, work engagement, and organisational commitment. Emotional intelligence emerged as a significant complementary factor that enhances transformational leadership behaviours and indirectly supports educators' self-efficacy. However, the review also reveals methodological limitations, including a predominance of cross-sectional quantitative designs and a limited focus on vocational education settings. Overall, this systematic literature review consolidates empirical evidence on the interconnected roles of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence in shaping educators' self-efficacy. The findings highlight the need for more context-sensitive and longitudinal research, particularly within vocational education, to inform leadership development practices and educational policy initiatives.

Keywords: transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, vocational colleges, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Educational systems worldwide are undergoing continuous transformation driven by globalisation, digitalisation, accountability pressures, and evolving labour-market demands. These changes have significantly expanded the roles and responsibilities of educators, who are now expected to deliver high-quality instruction, integrate technology, support diverse learner needs, and contribute to institutional improvement. In technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, these demands are further intensified by strong industry linkages, competency-based curricula, and expectations related to graduate employability. Consequently, educators in vocational colleges operate within highly complex and demanding professional environments.

Educators' self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organise and execute the actions required to manage prospective teaching tasks and challenges. This construct is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that self-efficacy beliefs shape individuals' motivation, persistence, and

performance through reciprocal interactions between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. Within educational settings, teachers with higher self-efficacy demonstrate greater resilience, instructional innovation, and commitment to student learning. Consequently, leadership practices and leaders' emotional competencies are likely to influence educators' self-efficacy by shaping both their social environment and perceptions of professional capability.

Leadership is widely acknowledged as a central organisational factor influencing educators' professional experiences. Among various leadership frameworks, transformational leadership has received substantial attention in educational research. Transformational leaders articulate a clear vision, inspire and motivate followers, provide individualised support, and stimulate intellectual growth. Numerous studies have demonstrated that transformational leadership positively influences educators' motivation, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance. By fostering trust, empowerment, and shared purpose, transformational leaders create environments that support educators' confidence and professional growth.

In addition to leadership style, emotional intelligence has increasingly been recognised as a crucial leadership capability. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilise emotions effectively in oneself and others. In educational leadership contexts, emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to manage interpersonal relationships, respond empathetically to staff needs, and navigate emotionally demanding situations. Emotional intelligence has been linked to leadership effectiveness, positive organisational climate, and reduced workplace stress. Importantly, emotional intelligence may enhance leaders' ability to enact transformational leadership behaviours, thereby indirectly influencing educators' self-efficacy.

Despite a growing body of research on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators' self-efficacy, existing studies often examine these constructs in isolation or within limited contexts. There remains a lack of systematic synthesis integrating these constructs and examining their interrelationships in a coherent manner. Furthermore, vocational education contexts remain underrepresented in leadership and psychological research, even though educators in these settings face unique organisational and instructional challenges. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review empirical research on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators' self-efficacy, and to interpret the findings with particular relevance to vocational colleges.

Moreover, the existing literature reflects considerable variation in research designs, measurement instruments, and contextual settings, which makes it difficult to draw consolidated conclusions regarding the strength and nature of the relationships among these constructs. Studies have employed diverse leadership frameworks, emotional intelligence models, and self-efficacy measures, resulting in fragmented evidence and limited comparability across findings. A systematic literature review offers a rigorous approach to synthesising this diverse body of evidence by applying transparent inclusion criteria, structured analysis, and thematic integration. By consolidating empirical findings across educational contexts and methodological approaches, this review seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how transformational leadership and emotional intelligence interact to influence educators' self-efficacy, as well as to identify dominant trends, methodological gaps, and directions for future research.

In vocational education and training (TVET) settings, lecturers face distinct professional challenges that extend beyond those encountered in general academic contexts. These challenges include the need to continuously balance pedagogical competencies with rapidly evolving industry standards, technologies, and workplace practices, as well as the pressure to ensure curriculum relevance to labour market demands. Additionally, vocational lecturers are required to manage diverse student preparedness levels while maintaining strong links with industry partners, which places substantial cognitive and emotional demands on their professional roles. Such contextual complexities make leadership support and educators' self-efficacy particularly critical in vocational colleges.

This review adopts a mediational perspective, conceptualising emotional intelligence as a mechanism through which transformational leadership influences educators' self-efficacy. Specifically, transformational leadership is expected to foster emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours, which in turn enhance educators' confidence in managing instructional and organisational demands. By clarifying emotional intelligence as a mediator rather

than a moderator, this review seeks to provide a more theoretically coherent synthesis of existing empirical evidence.

Accordingly, this systematic review addresses the following research question: How does transformational leadership influence educators' self-efficacy in vocational education contexts, and what is the mediating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) design guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process for synthesising empirical evidence. A systematic literature review was deemed appropriate for this study as it enables a structured and comprehensive examination of existing research on the relationships between transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators' self-efficacy across diverse educational contexts.

Unlike traditional narrative reviews, the SLR approach follows predefined procedures for searching, screening, and selecting studies, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing methodological transparency. The PRISMA framework provides explicit guidance for documenting each stage of the review process, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies. This structured approach allows readers to clearly trace how the final body of evidence was derived and facilitates the reproducibility of the review.

The SLR design was particularly suitable for this study for three reasons. First, research on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy is conceptually fragmented, with studies often examining these constructs separately or within different educational levels. A systematic review enables the integration of findings across studies to identify dominant patterns, relationships, and theoretical linkages. Second, empirical studies in this area employ diverse research designs, instruments, and outcome measures, necessitating a methodical synthesis to draw coherent conclusions. Third, vocational education contexts remain underrepresented in leadership research; therefore, an SLR allows insights from broader educational settings to be systematically interpreted and contextualised for vocational colleges.

In line with the objectives of this review, the SLR focused exclusively on empirical studies to ensure that conclusions were grounded in observed data rather than theoretical speculation. The review employed a qualitative thematic synthesis approach to analyse and organise findings from the included studies. This approach enabled the identification of recurring themes, relationships, and explanatory mechanisms, particularly regarding the role of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence in shaping educators' self-efficacy.

Overall, the adoption of a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review design strengthened the methodological robustness of this study by ensuring clarity, consistency, and credibility in the synthesis of evidence. The design also provides a solid foundation for identifying research gaps and informing future empirical investigations, particularly within vocational education and training contexts.

Search Strategy

A tiered search strategy was employed using three predefined Boolean search strings, applied to the TITLE-ABS-KEY fields in Scopus. The search strings were designed to progressively capture studies addressing the core constructs of emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and self-efficacy, as well as leadership measurement instruments. The literature search was guided by three predefined Boolean search strings, as presented in Table 1.

To ensure the relevance, quality, and consistency of the retrieved literature, several filters were applied consistently across all database searches. The search was limited to journal articles to include only peer-reviewed empirical studies, thereby excluding conference papers, book chapters, and non-refereed sources. To enhance transparency and enable full-text screening and verification, only Open Access publications were considered.

The search was further restricted to articles published in English, ensuring clarity and consistency in analysis and interpretation. In terms of disciplinary focus, only studies classified under the Education, Social Sciences, and Psychology subject areas were included, as these domains most closely align with the theoretical and empirical foundations of leadership, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy research. Finally, only articles with a final publication status were retained to ensure that all included studies represented complete and validated research outputs.

Table 1: Search Strings Used for Literature Retrieval in Scopus

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("emotional intelligence" AND "transformational leadership" AND "self-efficacy")
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("emotional intelligence" AND ("transformational leadership" OR "instructional leadership") AND ("self-efficacy" OR "teacher self-efficacy"))
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("transformational leadership" AND (instrument* OR questionnaire* OR scale*) AND (MLQ OR LPI))

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in this systematic literature review based on several predefined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and methodological rigour. Only empirical journal articles published in peer-reviewed outlets were considered, as this review aimed to synthesise evidence grounded in systematically collected data. To guarantee accessibility and transparency in the review process, included studies were required to be Open Access and indexed in the Scopus database. Furthermore, studies had to be conducted within educational contexts, encompassing various levels such as early childhood education, schools, higher education institutions, and vocational or TVET-related settings. In terms of participants, only studies involving teachers or lecturers as the primary respondents were included, ensuring that findings reflected educators' professional experiences rather than student or managerial perspectives. Finally, studies were required to examine transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and/or self-efficacy as key constructs, either independently or in combination, to align with the central focus and objectives of this review.

Studies were excluded from this systematic literature review based on clearly defined exclusion criteria to maintain conceptual focus and methodological consistency. Specifically, systematic literature reviews, conceptual papers, and theoretical essays were excluded, as the review aimed to synthesise empirical evidence derived from original data. Studies involving student-only samples were also excluded to ensure that findings reflected educators' professional and psychological experiences rather than learner perspectives. In addition, studies that included participants from multiple non-educational sectors (such as business, public administration, or industry) were excluded due to potential contextual heterogeneity that could obscure education-specific leadership dynamics. Finally, studies focusing exclusively on university management, executive leadership, or institutional governance without examining outcomes related to teachers' or lecturers' professional practices or psychological constructs were excluded, as they fell outside the scope of this review's emphasis on leadership influences at the educator level.

Study Selection Process (PRISMA)

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework and is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram. An initial search of the Scopus database yielded 324 records, all of which were subjected to duplicate screening, resulting in the removal of 11 duplicate records. The remaining 313 records were screened based on titles and abstracts, during which 38 records were excluded for not meeting the language and publication scope criteria. Consequently, 275 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. At this stage, 252 articles were excluded due to being out of scope, lacking relevance to the study objectives, or having inaccessible full texts under the

Open Access criterion. Following this systematic screening and eligibility assessment process, a total of 23 empirical studies met all predefined inclusion criteria and were included in the final systematic literature review. Figure 1 illustrates the study selection process based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, detailing the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Selection

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Languages other than English
Publication Period	2014 – 2025	Published before 2014
Type of Literature	Peer-reviewed journal articles (empirical studies)	Conference papers, books, book chapters, review articles
Publication Status	Final publications	In press / articles in progress
Research Context	Educational settings (schools, higher education, TVET)	Non-educational or multi-sector contexts
Participants	Teachers or lecturers	Students only, administrators or managers without educator outcomes

Identification

At the identification stage, a total of 324 records were retrieved from the primary database using predefined search strings and filters. This initial search aimed to capture a comprehensive pool of potentially relevant studies related to transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators’ self-efficacy within educational contexts. No records from additional sources were included at this stage.

Screening

During the screening stage, duplicate records were removed (n = 11) to ensure that each study was counted only once. The remaining records were then screened based on publication type and language criteria, leading to the exclusion of non-journal publications (n = 15) and articles not published in English (n = 23). Following this process, 275 records proceeded to title and abstract screening.

Eligibility

In the eligibility stage, the full texts of 275 articles were assessed against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles were excluded if they were outside the scope of the review (n = 53), had titles not relevant to the study objectives (n = 21), abstracts not aligned with the review focus (n = 6), or full texts that were not accessible under the open-access criterion (n = 172). This rigorous assessment ensured that only methodologically and conceptually relevant studies were retained.

Inclusion

At the final inclusion stage, 23 empirical studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the systematic literature review. These studies formed the final corpus for data extraction, thematic synthesis, and interpretation of findings, providing the empirical basis for addressing the research questions of this review.

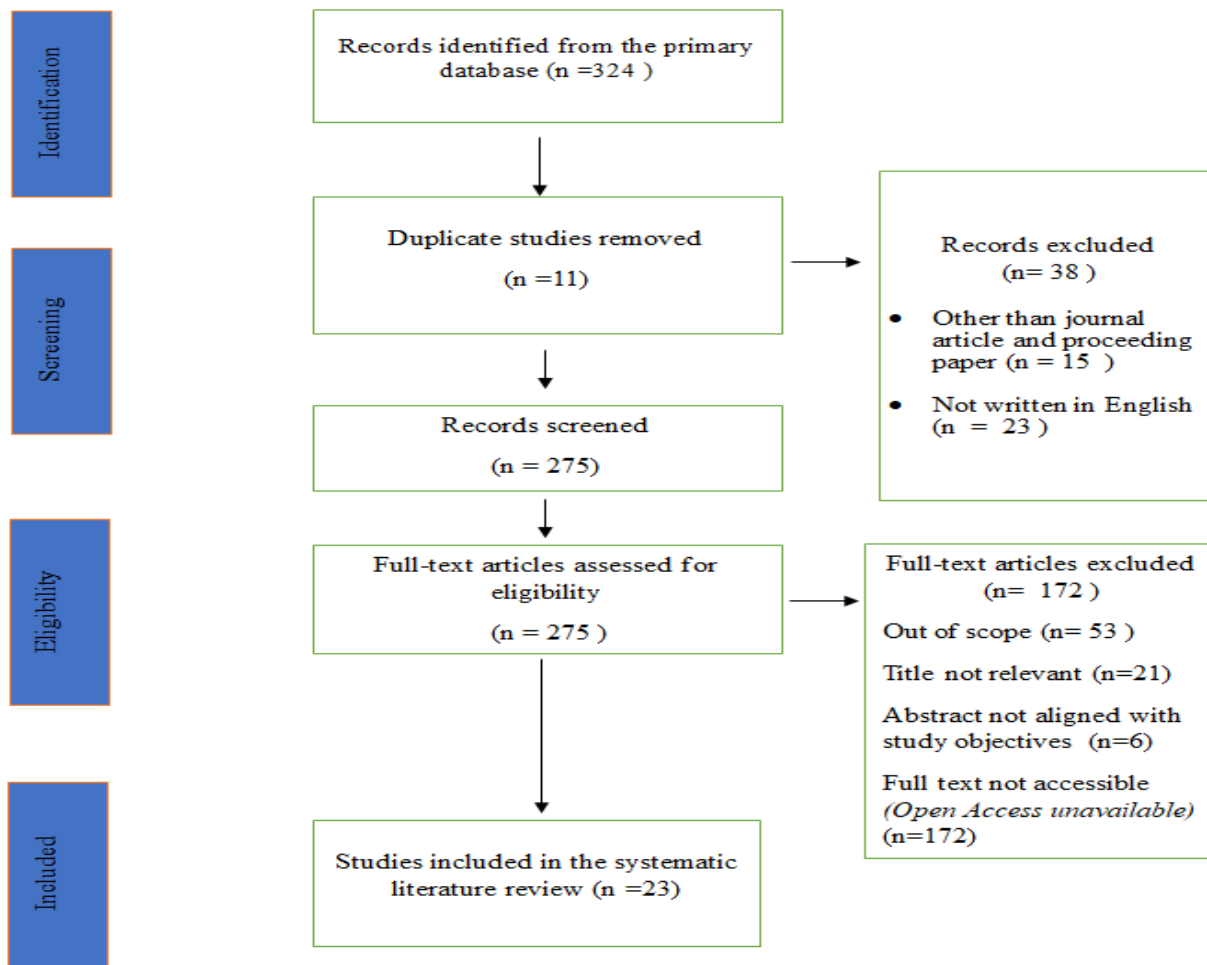


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies for the systematic literature review.

RESULTS

Overview of Included Studies

The 23 empirical studies included in this systematic literature review were conducted across diverse educational contexts and institutional levels, reflecting a broad yet coherent body of evidence on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators’ self-efficacy. The studies spanned early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and selected technical and vocational education and training (TVET) settings across multiple countries, including Malaysia, China, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Peru, South Africa, Cambodia, Slovakia, and several European contexts. While a small number of studies explicitly focused on TVET teachers or vocational-related institutions—such as Malaysian TVET schools and professional colleges—the majority were situated in general school or higher education environments. Nevertheless, these studies consistently examined educators as the primary respondents and investigated leadership practices and psychological outcomes relevant to teaching professionals. As such, although vocational colleges were not uniformly represented as the direct research setting, the collective evidence provides a robust empirical foundation for interpreting transformational leadership and emotional intelligence as influential factors shaping educators’ self-efficacy, with vocational colleges serving as an interpretive lens rather than an exclusive institutional focus.

Methodological Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

Across the 23 empirical studies reviewed, the dominant research design was quantitative cross-sectional survey research, employing correlational analysis, regression techniques, and structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine relationships among transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and related

educator outcomes. A smaller number of studies adopted mixed-methods designs, particularly those focusing on leadership development models or exploring job satisfaction through complementary qualitative insights. In addition, several studies were dedicated to the validation and adaptation of leadership measurement instruments, utilising exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA/CFA) and, in some cases, testing measurement invariance across contexts. While this concentration of quantitative cross-sectional designs provides strong and consistent evidence regarding the associations among key constructs, it also limits the ability to establish causal relationships, highlighting the need for longitudinal and intervention-based research in future studies.

Sample Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

there was considerable variation in sample size and unit of analysis, reflecting differences in research scope, institutional context, and analytical approach. Several studies conducted in specific colleges or universities employed relatively small samples (fewer than 100 respondents), particularly those focusing on single institutions or exploratory analyses. A larger proportion of studies utilised moderate sample sizes ranging from approximately 200 to 400 educators, which is common in survey-based educational leadership research and adequate for correlational and regression analyses. In contrast, a small number of studies reported large-scale samples exceeding 900 or even 1,500 participants, particularly those employing structural equation modelling (SEM) or focusing on instrument validation and factor structure testing. These larger samples generally provided more stable parameter estimates and stronger statistical power; however, most remained cross-sectional in nature. For the purposes of synthesis in this review, greater interpretive weight was therefore given to findings derived from larger-sample and SEM-based studies, while still acknowledging that consistency across studies of varying sample sizes strengthens the overall robustness of the evidence.

Distribution of Included Studies by Country

Figure 2 illustrates the geographical distribution of the empirical studies included in this systematic literature review. The findings indicate that the majority of studies were conducted in Malaysia and South Africa, followed by a smaller number of studies from countries such as the United States, Slovakia, and Vietnam. This distribution suggests a concentration of research on transformational leadership and educators’ outcomes within selected national contexts, highlighting the need for further empirical investigation in underrepresented regions.

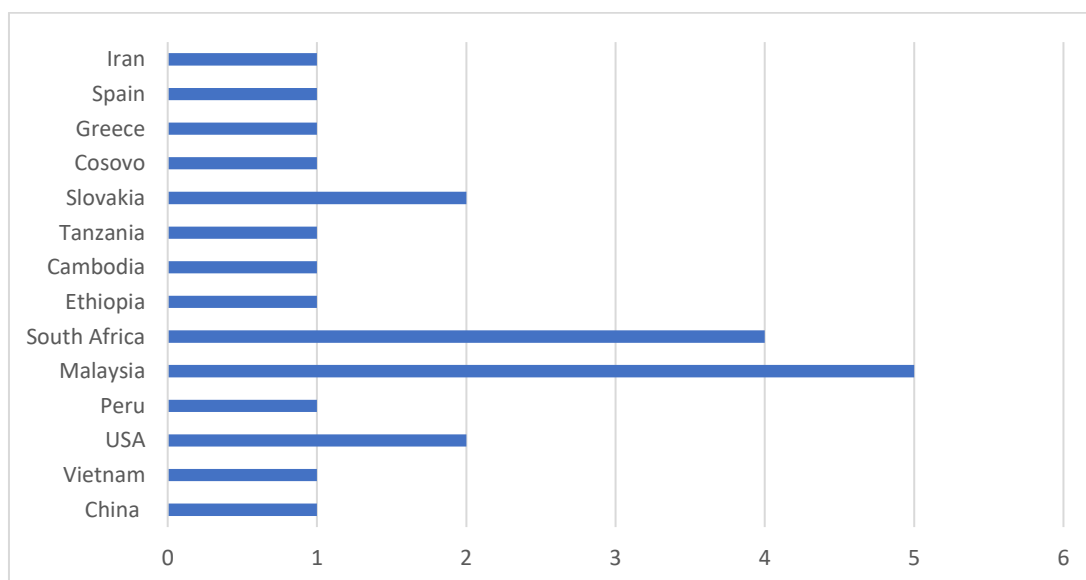


Figure 2: Geographical Distribution of Included Studies

Collectively, the studies presented in Table 2 demonstrate a consistent emphasis on transformational leadership as a critical predictor of positive educator outcomes across multiple educational contexts. Most of the empirical evidence is derived from quantitative research designs, frequently employing validated instruments such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and teacher self-efficacy scales, which enhances the reliability and comparability of findings. At the same time, the table reveals notable variations in contextual focus, outcome

variables, and analytical approaches, reflecting both the breadth and fragmentation of the existing literature. These variations underscore the need for a systematic thematic synthesis to identify dominant patterns, clarify the role of mediating and moderating factors such as emotional intelligence and organisational climate, and highlight underexplored contexts—particularly within vocational and technical education settings.

Table 3: Evidence Mapping Across Studies

Article No.	Author (Year)	Context	Design	Key Variables	Key Findings
1.	Li & Sutunarak (2025)	Kindergarten, Jiangsu Province, China (Early Childhood Education)	Quantitative, Survey, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	Principals' Transformational Leadership (TL), Organizational Climate (OC), Teachers' Self-Efficacy, Teachers' Work Engagement	TL and OC are positively associated with Work Engagement. Self-Efficacy partially mediates the positive associations between (a) TL and Work Engagement, and (b) OC and Work Engagement.
2.	Tran et al. (2025)	High schools, Vietnam (An Giang Province)	Quantitative (EFA, CFA)	Transformational Leadership (Ia, Ib, IM, IS, IC)	The five-factor structure of the 20-item MLQ was confirmed as suitable and reliable for Vietnamese high school teachers.
3.	Henkel & Ade (2025)	Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) facing turbulence	Quantitative (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire - MLQ 5X)	Transformational Leadership (Ia, Ib, IM, IS, IC) and HEI Success/Performance.	TL components show significant positive correlations with HEI outcomes and are crucial for HEI success, development, and positive effects on the organization and employees.
4.	Madrid et al. (Current Study)	Peruvian university teachers during COVID-19.	Predictive cross-sectional (SEM).	Digital Competencies, Transformational Leadership, Job Performance.	Digital competencies ($\beta=.28$) and transformational leadership ($\beta=.76$) significantly and positively predict job performance.
5.	Ishak et al. (2024)	Six CSE primary schools, Kota Setar, Kedah, Malaysia	Mixed-methods (Quantitative survey & Qualitative interviews)	Headteachers' Transformational Leadership (TL) and Teacher Job Satisfaction (JS)	TL dimensions (charisma, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspirational motivation) significantly correlate with teacher JS; TL is crucial for achieving CSE status.
6.	Samodien, M., Du Plessis, M., & Van Vuuren, C.J. (2024)	South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	Quantitative, correlational design	Transactional leadership, Transformational leadership, Agile leadership,	All three leadership styles positively and significantly influenced institutional performance. Transformational and agile leadership showed the

				Institutional performance	strongest ability to explain the variance in performance, with transformational leadership explaining the most variance.
7.	Asmamaw & Semela (2023)	Higher Education (Ethiopia)	Correlational	Emotional Intelligence (EI), Gender, Leadership Style (Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-faire)	Female leaders scored significantly higher in overall EI than male leaders. EI showed a strong positive relationship with Transformational Leadership. EI showed a significant negative relationship with Laissez-faire Leadership.
8.	Chheang et al. (2023)	Public high schools in Phnom Penh city, Cambodia	Mixed Methods (Quantitative survey using MLQ; Qualitative in-depth interviews)	Transformational Leadership Attributes (Individualized Consideration, Idealized Attributes, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Idealized Influence)	High priority need for developing Transformational Leadership; Individualized Consideration has the highest priority need (PNI Modified = 0.25) and a significant impact on teacher performance; a 5-dimension model was developed for principals' TL development
9.	Mohd Siraj et al. (2023)	TVET schools, Malaysia	Correlational survey	Transformational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, TVET Teachers' Motivation in Implementing ICT	Both transformational and instructional leadership significantly correlate with and influence TVET teachers' motivation in implementing ICT.
10.	Goh, L. H. (2023)	Teachers in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (shift to online learning).	Survey Research (Quantitative)	Preferred Leadership (Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-Faire), Perceived Leadership, Leadership Involvement.	Significant difference between preferred and perceived leadership; Preferred style was transformational leadership; Perceived leadership was lower than preferred leadership involvement.
11.	Mgaiwa, S. J., (2023)	Higher Education institutions (4 universities: public and	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey. Hierarchical	Transformational Leadership (TL), Transactional Leadership (TXL) (Independent), Job	Both TL and TXL significantly and positively predict academics' JS. TL's predictive magnitude on JS

		private) in Tanzania.	Multiple Regression.	Satisfaction (JS) (Dependent).	was relatively higher than TXL's.
12.	Đuricová & Gurgová (2022)	Slovak secondary school teachers vs. Slovak managers (manufacturing sector)	Quantitative (Comparative, Nonparametric)	Transformational Leadership Practices (LPI: MOD, INSP, CHALL, ENAB, ENCO)	Teachers scored significantly higher than managers on all LPI dimensions except 'Enable others to act'.
13.	Mohd Siraj, M. A. M., et al. (2022)	Primary schools in Sabah, Malaysia	Descriptive Quantitative Survey; Pearson Correlation	Transformational Leadership (IV), Structural Leadership (IV), Teachers' Teaching Motivation (DV)	Significant positive relationship found between both Transformational and Structural leadership styles and Teachers' Teaching Motivation. Structural leadership was the most commonly perceived style
14.	Heinzová & Bindová (2022)	Slovak educational field	Validation (Reliability & Construct Validity)	Transformational Leadership; LPI and CLQ factors	Both LPI and CLQ (Slovak forms) show satisfactory reliability and construct validity for identifying transformational leaders in Slovak education.
15.	Mahzan & Nordin (2021)	MARA Professional College, Malaysia (Higher Education)	Quantitative Survey (Descriptive and Inferential)	Independent: Transformational Leadership (TL); Dependent: Job Satisfaction (JS)	TL practice by director was Low; Lecturers' JS was High; Found a weak, positive, and significant relationship between TL and JS (r=0.268).
16.	Hyseni Duraku & Hoxha (2021)	Kosovar public middle school teachers (Kosovo)	Quantitative (Surveys: WTMST, MLQ); Data Analysis: Pearson's correlation, Multiple regression analysis.	Transformational Leadership (TL) Transactional Leadership (TCL) ,Teachers' Motivation	TL attributes (Idealised influence, inspirational motivation) predict autonomous motivation. Individual consideration predicts motivation for complementary tasks. Contingent reward (TCL) significantly predicts motivation for student evaluations.
17.	Hamilton (2021)	Higher education faculty (SUNY, USA)	Quantitative (Correlational, Descriptive)	Transformational Leadership Factors (e.g., Individualized Consideration, Inspirational Motivation), Leadership Outcomes (Extra Effort,	Faculty perceive themselves as highly Transformational; Inspirational Motivation showed the strongest positive correlation with

				Effectiveness, Satisfaction)	Extra Effort (r=.683) and Effectiveness (r=.625)
18.	Antonopoulou, H. et al. (2020)	University of Patras, Greece (Higher Education)	Quantitative; Questionnaire (MLQ); Statistical analysis (SPSS, Pearson correlation, Regression)	Transformational Leadership (TL), Transactional Leadership (TCL), Passive-Avoid Leadership, Digital Leadership (DL), Leadership Outcome (LO), Gender, Digital Skills	TL strongly correlates with LO and DL. LO significantly correlates with DL. Males exhibit higher TL, TCL, and DL than females. TCL negatively correlates with the number of digital skills
19.	Zurita-Ortega et al. (2019)	Spanish teachers (universities and other educational institutions), 137 schools	Descriptive and Cross-sectional (SEM, Multi-group analysis)	Leadership (Transformational, Transactional, Passive), Emotional Intelligence (Perception, Understanding, Regulation), Educational Level (University vs. Non-University)	Transformational leadership linked to Intellectual Stimulation (university) vs. Intrinsic Motivation (non-university). Contingency Reward key for Transactional Leadership (non-university). EI positively linked to Transformational Leadership in non-university teachers.
20.	Pourmahmoud Hesar et al. (2019)	State universities of West Azerbaijan Province, Iran	Descriptive and correlational	Transformational Leadership Style (TL) and Organizational Identity (OI)	TL had a positive and meaningful relationship with OI (r=0.26, p<0.01). TL had a direct, positive effect on OI. Intellectual stimulation (a component of TL) had the strongest effect on OI.
21.	Naile & Selesho (2014)	13 high schools in South Africa (schools underperforming provincial benchmark).	Quantitative (Survey method, Likert-type approach, descriptive statistics, Cronbach-alpha).	Transformational Leadership; Autocratic Leadership; Organizational Commitment (Affective, Continuance, Normative); Employee Motivation; Job Satisfaction; School Academic Performance.	Strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and commitment. Transformational leadership raises organizational commitment and performance, but <i>not</i> job satisfaction directly. Commitment raises job satisfaction and academic performance

22.	Dreyer & Hermans (2014)	Private and religiously affiliated schools, South Africa	Web-based survey (Quantitative), using CFA, correlation, and regression analysis	Leadership Styles (Transformational, Corrective, Passive-Avoidant); Spiritual Character Traits (Self-Directedness, Self-Transcendence)	Leaders favour Transformational leadership. Higher Self-Transcendence and Self-Directedness are strong predictors of Transformational leadership. Spiritual traits are stronger predictors of leadership style than traditional religious variables
23.	Munyeka, W., & Ngirande, H. (2014)	Higher Learning Institutions, South Africa	Quantitative (Self-administered surveys, Spearman correlation)	Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Organizational Commitment (Affective, Continuance, Normative)	Transformational leadership positively relates to Affective and Continuance commitment. Transactional leadership positively relates to only Normative commitment.

Evidence Mapping of Key Constructs Across Included Studies

Table 4 presents evidence mapping of key constructs examined across the 23 included studies, illustrating the prevalence of transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy as core variables in the reviewed literature. The frequency analysis shows that transformational leadership was examined in all included studies (100%), followed by performance-related outcomes (34.8%) and motivation (21.7%). In contrast, emotional intelligence, organisational climate, self-efficacy, and engagement were examined in fewer than 10% of the reviewed studies, indicating potential gaps for future research.

Table 4: Evidence Mapping of Key Constructs Across Included Studies

N o.	Article (Author, Year)	T L	E I	Org. Climate	Self-Efficacy	Engagement	Job Satisfaction	Motivation	Commitment	Performance / Outcomes	Digit al / ICT	Instructio nal Leadersh ip
1	Li & Sutunyarak, (2025)	X		X	X	X				X		
2	Tran et al., (2025)	X										
3	Henkel & Ade, (2025)	X								X		
4	Madrid et al., (2024)	X								X	X	
5	Ishak et al., (2021)	X					X					

6	Samodien et al., (2024)	X								X		
7	Asmamaw & Semela, (2023)	X	X									
8	Chheang et al., (2023)	X						X		X		
9	M Mohd Siraj et al., (2023)	X						X			X	X
10	Goh, (2023)	X										
11	Mgaiwa, (2023)	X					X					
12	Đuricová & Gurgová, (2022)	X										
13	Siraj et al., (2022)	X						X				X
14	Heinzová & Bindová, (2022)	X										
15	Mahzan & Nordin, (2021)	X					X					
16	Hyseni Duraku & Hoxha, (2021)	X						X				
17	Hamilton, (2021)	X								X		
18	Antonopolou et al., (2020)	X								X	X	
19	Zurita-Ortega et al., (2020)	X	X									
20	Hesar et al., (2019)	X							X			
21	Naile & Selesho, (2014)	X					X	X	X	X		

22	Dreyer & Hermans, (2014)	X										
23	Wiza & Hlanganipai, (2014)	X						X				
Frequency	23	2	1	1	1	4	5	3	8	3	2	
Percentage (%)	100	8.7	4.3	4.3	4.3	17.4	21.7	13	34.8	13	8.7	

Transformational Leadership and Educator Outcomes.

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrated that transformational leadership is positively associated with educators’ professional attitudes and psychological outcomes. Leadership practices such as articulating a shared vision, providing individualised support, and encouraging professional growth were found to enhance educators’ motivation and sense of competence. Transformational leadership was particularly effective in fostering supportive environments that promote trust and collaboration, which are essential for sustaining educators’ self-efficacy. Transformational leadership was consistently associated with a wide range of positive professional outcomes among educators, regardless of educational level or national context. Several studies demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly enhances work engagement, often through psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy, as evidenced in early childhood education settings in China where teachers’ self-efficacy partially mediated the leadership–engagement relationship (Li & Sutunyarak, 2025). Similarly, transformational leadership was strongly linked to job satisfaction among teachers and lecturers in diverse contexts, including Malaysian primary schools (Ishak et al., 2024), higher education institutions in Tanzania (Mgaiwa, 2023), and professional colleges in Malaysia (Mahzan & Nordin, 2021). Beyond attitudinal outcomes, transformational leadership also emerged as a significant predictor of job performance and institutional performance, particularly in higher education contexts in Peru and South Africa, where leadership practices explained substantial variance in performance indicators (Madrid et al., 2024; Samodien et al., 2024), as well as in studies highlighting the role of transformational leadership in navigating organisational turbulence in higher education (Henkel & Ade, 2025). In addition, strong associations were observed between transformational leadership and teacher motivation, including motivation to implement ICT in Malaysian TVET institutions (Mohd Siraj et al., 2023), intrinsic and extrinsic teaching motivation in Sabah primary schools (Mohd Siraj et al., 2022), and autonomous motivation among teachers in Kosovo (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021). Evidence also indicated that transformational leadership contributes to organisational commitment in both school and higher learning institution contexts in South Africa (Naile & Selesho, 2014; Munyeka & Ngirande, 2014), as well as to broader organisational constructs such as organisational identity and university management effectiveness in Iran and Colombia (Pourmahmoud Hesar et al., 2019; Pérez-Ortega & Moreno-Freites, 2019). Collectively, these findings demonstrate a robust and consistent pattern in which transformational leadership functions as a key organisational resource that supports educators’ professional effectiveness, motivation, and psychological engagement, thereby providing a strong empirical foundation for its relevance in vocational college contexts.

Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership

Emotional intelligence emerged as a critical factor influencing leadership effectiveness and organisational climate. Studies indicated that leaders with high emotional intelligence were more capable of managing interpersonal relationships, addressing emotional challenges, and creating psychologically safe environments. Emotional intelligence was found to strengthen leaders’ capacity to enact transformational behaviours, thereby indirectly supporting educators’ confidence and professional wellbeing. Emotional intelligence (EI) emerged consistently in the reviewed studies as a critical capacity that strengthens the enactment and effectiveness of transformational leadership in educational contexts. Empirical evidence from higher education leadership in Ethiopia demonstrated that EI was a significant predictor of transformational leadership, with specific EI components—particularly relationship management and social awareness—strongly associated with multiple transformational leadership dimensions (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023). This finding indicates that leaders who

are more emotionally attuned and capable of managing interpersonal dynamics are better positioned to inspire, motivate, and support educators. Complementary evidence from a large-scale structural equation modelling study in Spain further revealed that the relationship between EI and transformational leadership is context-sensitive, with stronger and more direct associations observed in non-university educational settings compared to university contexts (Zurita-Ortega et al., 2020). In this study, transformational leadership was positively linked to emotional understanding and emotional regulation among teachers outside the university sector, suggesting that EI plays a more pronounced role in leadership effectiveness where interpersonal and instructional interactions are more immediate. Collectively, these findings suggest that emotional intelligence should not be viewed merely as a supplementary “soft skill,” but rather as a foundational leadership capacity that enhances the quality and impact of transformational leadership, albeit with varying strength across institutional contexts.

Self-efficacy acts as a psychological mechanism

Self-efficacy was identified as a key outcome influenced by both leadership practices and emotional factors. Studies highlighted that educators’ beliefs in their professional capabilities were shaped by leadership support, recognition, and emotional understanding. Higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with increased resilience, instructional effectiveness, and professional engagement. Across the reviewed studies, self-efficacy emerged as a crucial psychological mechanism that explains how transformational leadership translates into positive professional outcomes among educators. Empirical evidence from China demonstrated that teachers’ self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between principals’ transformational leadership and teachers’ work engagement, indicating that leadership influence operates not only directly but also through educators’ beliefs in their own capabilities (Li & Sutunyarak, 2025). This mediating role highlights self-efficacy as an internal resource that enables educators to respond more positively to leadership support, organisational climate, and professional demands. Although not all studies explicitly measured self-efficacy as a mediator, a substantial body of evidence linked transformational leadership to outcomes closely associated with self-efficacy, such as job satisfaction, work engagement, motivation, and organisational commitment (Ishak et al., 2024; Mgaiwa, 2023; Mohd Siraj et al., 2023). These outcomes reflect educators’ confidence in managing instructional tasks, adapting to change, and sustaining professional effort. Collectively, the findings suggest that self-efficacy functions as an “internal engine” that amplifies the effects of transformational leadership by shaping educators’ motivation, resilience, and engagement, thereby reinforcing its central role in understanding leadership effectiveness across educational contexts.

Integrated Relationships among the Constructs

The synthesis revealed a consistent pattern in which transformational leadership and emotional intelligence jointly contributed to educators’ self-efficacy. Emotional intelligence enhanced leaders’ ability to provide meaningful support and motivation, while transformational leadership practices translated these emotional capacities into tangible organisational behaviours that reinforced educators’ professional confidence.

Measurement/instrumentation is dominated by MLQ and supported by LPI

Across the reviewed studies, the measurement of transformational leadership was dominated by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was consistently employed across diverse educational contexts, including early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and TVET-related settings (Li & Sutunyarak, 2025; Ishak et al., 2024; Mohd Siraj et al., 2023; Mgaiwa, 2023). The widespread use of the MLQ reflects its strong theoretical grounding and empirical robustness, further supported by multiple validation and adaptation studies across national contexts. For instance, the factorial validity of the MLQ was confirmed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses in Vietnam and Spain, with satisfactory model fit indices and evidence of measurement invariance across gender and educational levels (Tran et al., 2025; Moreno-Casado et al., 2021). In addition to the MLQ, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) emerged as a complementary and conceptually coherent alternative, particularly in studies emphasising leadership behaviours and practices rather than leadership styles (Đuricová & Gurgová, 2022; Heinzová & Bindová, 2022). Psychometric examinations of the LPI further demonstrated acceptable reliability and construct validity, including evidence of distinct interpersonal and organisational dimensions of transformational behaviours (Đuricová & Gurgová, 2022). Collectively, these findings indicate a high degree of convergence in

leadership measurement within the literature, providing a solid methodological foundation for instrument selection and comparison in future studies, including those situated in vocational college contexts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate several notable trends in the literature. First, transformational leadership remains the dominant leadership framework examined in educational research, with consistent evidence supporting its positive impact on educators' psychological outcomes. Second, emotional intelligence is increasingly recognised as a foundational capability that enhances leadership effectiveness. Third, self-efficacy continues to be a critical construct linking leadership practices to professional sustainability.

Despite these strengths, the review identified several gaps. Integrative studies that examine emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and self-efficacy within a single framework remain limited. Additionally, vocational education contexts are underrepresented, with most studies focusing on primary, secondary, or general higher education settings. Methodologically, there is a need for more longitudinal and mixed-methods research to better understand causal relationships and contextual influences.

The implications of these findings are significant. Theoretically, the review supports an integrated perspective that positions emotional intelligence as an enabler of transformational leadership and a contributor to educators' self-efficacy. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of leadership development programmes that emphasise both transformational competencies and emotional intelligence. From a policy perspective, educational systems should prioritise leadership practices that support educators' psychological wellbeing, particularly in demanding vocational education environments.

Gaps and Future Research

Despite the growing body of empirical research on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educators' self-efficacy, a clear gap remains in the form of integrative studies that simultaneously examine these three constructs within a single analytical framework, particularly in educational settings. Existing studies tend to focus on emotional intelligence as a predictor of transformational leadership (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023; Zurita-Ortega et al., 2020) or on transformational leadership as a predictor of educator outcomes, with self-efficacy examined either as a direct outcome or as a partial mediator (Li & Sutunyarak, 2025; Ishak et al., 2024). However, very few empirical investigations have modelled emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and self-efficacy together to explain how leaders' emotional capabilities translate into leadership practices that ultimately strengthen educators' psychological beliefs. This fragmentation in the literature limits a holistic understanding of leadership influence mechanisms, especially in complex teaching environments. The gap is further pronounced in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) contexts, where educators face distinctive instructional, industrial, and organisational demands, yet remain underrepresented in integrative leadership research (Mohd Siraj et al., 2023; Mahzan & Nordin, 2021). Addressing this gap is therefore essential to advancing leadership theory and practice by clarifying the combined and interactive roles of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in shaping educators' self-efficacy, with particular relevance to vocational colleges.

In response to the identified gaps, this review proposes the need for an integrated conceptual model that positions emotional intelligence as a foundational leadership capability, transformational leadership as the behavioural expression of that capability, and educators' self-efficacy as the key psychological outcome shaped by leadership influence. Rather than examining these constructs in isolation, the proposed model conceptualises emotional intelligence as an antecedent that enhances leaders' capacity to enact transformational leadership behaviours, which in turn foster educators' beliefs in their professional competence and effectiveness. Such a framework aligns with existing empirical evidence indicating strong associations between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, as well as between transformational leadership and self-efficacy, yet addresses the lack of studies that explicitly connect these relationships within a single explanatory structure. By integrating these constructs, the model offers a more holistic understanding of how leadership operates through emotional

and behavioural mechanisms to shape educators' psychological resources. This integrative perspective is particularly relevant for vocational college contexts, where lecturers operate under high instructional, technical, and organisational demands, and where strengthening self-efficacy through emotionally intelligent transformational leadership may be critical for sustaining professional resilience and performance.

Although a growing number of studies have examined transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and educator outcomes within schools and higher education institutions, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector—particularly vocational colleges—remains underrepresented in the existing literature. While several studies have involved TVET teachers, professional colleges, or vocationally oriented institutions, relatively few have focused explicitly on vocational colleges as distinct organisational entities with unique instructional, technical, and industry-linked demands. Moreover, the leadership role examined in most studies tends to centre on principals, headteachers, or general academic leaders, with limited attention given to directors or institutional heads of vocational colleges, who operate at a more strategic and system-oriented level. This gap is significant because vocational college directors are required to balance educational leadership with industry alignment, competency-based curricula, and workforce development expectations—responsibilities that differ substantially from those in general schooling or traditional university contexts. Consequently, the limited empirical attention to leadership dynamics within vocational colleges constrains a nuanced understanding of how emotionally intelligent transformational leadership influences lecturers' self-efficacy in these settings, thereby justifying the need to position vocational colleges as a focused and theoretically meaningful context for further investigation.

Finally, many studies rely heavily on self-report survey data collected from single sources, raising concerns regarding common method bias, which is not consistently tested or addressed across studies. Collectively, these conceptual, contextual, and methodological limitations underscore the need for integrative, context-sensitive, and methodologically robust research to advance understanding of emotionally intelligent transformational leadership and its role in strengthening educators' self-efficacy, particularly within vocational college contexts.

Implications of the Review

The findings of this systematic literature review carry important implications for leadership development in vocational colleges, particularly in strengthening the role of directors and senior leaders as emotionally intelligent transformational leaders. Given the consistent evidence that emotional intelligence enhances transformational leadership behaviours, leadership development programmes in vocational colleges should move beyond technical and administrative competencies to explicitly incorporate emotional intelligence training, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship management. Such competencies are essential for vocational college leaders who must navigate complex instructional demands, industry partnerships, and diverse lecturer profiles while maintaining staff motivation and confidence. Furthermore, leadership training initiatives should emphasise transformational practices such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, as these behaviours have been shown to strengthen lecturers' self-efficacy—a critical psychological resource for sustaining teaching effectiveness, adaptability, and professional resilience. By integrating emotional intelligence and transformational leadership development into structured leadership programmes, vocational colleges can foster leadership practices that not only support organisational goals but also enhance lecturers' confidence and long-term commitment in demanding TVET environments.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed studies, several practical recommendations can be proposed to enhance leadership practices in vocational colleges. First, leadership selection and development processes should explicitly incorporate emotional intelligence as a core competency, alongside managerial and technical expertise, to ensure that directors and senior leaders are equipped to lead in emotionally demanding educational environments. Second, professional development programmes for vocational college leaders should be designed to systematically cultivate transformational leadership behaviours, particularly inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, as these practices have been consistently linked to positive educator outcomes. Third, institutional initiatives aimed at improving lecturers' performance and retention should prioritise strategies that strengthen lecturers' self-efficacy, such as mentoring, coaching,

constructive feedback, and participative decision-making, all of which are aligned with transformational leadership principles. Finally, vocational colleges should embed leadership development within a continuous and context-sensitive framework that acknowledges the unique instructional, industrial, and organisational challenges of TVET institutions, thereby ensuring that leadership practices are not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant and sustainable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic literature review synthesised recent empirical evidence on the relationships between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and educators' self-efficacy, highlighting their interconnected roles in shaping positive professional outcomes across educational contexts. The review demonstrates that emotionally intelligent transformational leadership consistently supports educators' confidence, motivation, and engagement, with self-efficacy emerging as a key psychological mechanism through which leadership influence is realised. Despite this growing body of evidence, the literature remains fragmented, contextually uneven, and methodologically constrained, particularly with respect to integrative models and vocational college settings. By positioning vocational colleges as a theoretically meaningful and practically significant context, this review underscores the need for leadership approaches that attend not only to organisational performance but also to the emotional and psychological resources of lecturers operating in complex TVET environments. Future research should therefore adopt integrative, longitudinal, and context-sensitive designs to further elucidate leadership influence processes and inform leadership development practices that are capable of sustaining educator effectiveness and institutional resilience in vocational education.

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