

Why teachers stay: the influence of faculty transformational leadership on job embeddedness

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness among faculty members in private universities in Sichuan Province, China. Using a stratified random sampling method, data were collected from 368 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics revealed that both transformational leadership and job embeddedness were perceived at relatively low levels, with only certain dimensions such as individualized consideration and sacrifice rated at moderate levels. Correlation analyses indicated significant positive associations between transformational leadership and job embeddedness. Simple regression results demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly predicted job embeddedness, while multiple regression analysis showed that inspirational motivation and individualized consideration were the most influential dimensions. Moreover, SPSS process moderation analyses revealed that no key demographic variable significantly moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from China's private higher education sector and offers practical implications for strengthening leadership practices and organizational strategies aimed at enhancing faculty retention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, teacher retention has become a global concern in the field of higher education, particularly in private universities where high turnover rates and organizational instability are especially prominent [1]. In China, with the rapid expansion of private higher education, the issue of faculty stability has gradually emerged, exerting profound impacts on teaching quality, student development, and institutional reputation [2]. Frequent teacher turnover not only increases recruitment and training costs but also disrupts the accumulation and transmission of organizational knowledge, thereby weakening teaching continuity and educational effectiveness [3]. Consequently, exploring “why teachers stay” is of greater practical value than solely understanding “why they leave” [4].

Much of the existing research has explained teacher retention through factors such as salary and benefits, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction [5]. However, these traditional variables often fail to fully capture the complex and deeper psychological ties between teachers and their institutions. More and more researchers are now turning to the idea of job embeddedness. They find it works much better than older

methods to explain why people choose to stay in their jobs. Introduced by Mitchell *et al.* [6], three dimensions built up job embeddedness, which are links, fit, and sacrifice. It highlights that employees remain in organizations not only because of job satisfaction but also due to strong connections with the organization and broader social networks, emotional identification, and accumulated costs of leaving. Unlike traditional measures of job satisfaction, job embeddedness provides a superior framework for predicting who will stay and who will leave [7].

Beyond employees' psychological and social connections, leadership behavior plays a pivotal role in shaping retention decisions. Research consistently highlights the value of transformational leadership in generating intrinsic motivation. It serves as a key mechanism for enhancing both group identity and organizational stability [8]. In educational contexts, transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, attend to teachers' individual development, and foster a supportive climate [9]. Recent studies further suggest that transformational leadership influences retention indirectly by enhancing employees' job embeddedness and psychological empowerment [10]. However, in the context of Chinese private universities, whether transformational leadership can strengthen faculty retention through job embeddedness remains underexplored.

The institutional environment of private universities in China is distinct. Compared with their public counterparts, faculty members in private universities often face unstable contracts, limited research resources, and uncertain career advancement [11]. Despite these challenges, a considerable proportion of teachers continue to remain in private institutions, suggesting that, beyond material incentives, psychological and social factors also play a critical role. Within such contexts, academic leaders (e.g., department chairs and deans) often serve as crucial mediators between institutional structures and faculty members. Their leadership style, interaction patterns, and degree of support may directly shape teachers' sense of belonging and embeddedness.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine whether and how transformational leadership behaviors of academic leaders in private universities influence faculty job embeddedness, thereby explaining why teachers choose to stay. By introducing job embeddedness as a mediating variable, this research moves beyond traditional satisfaction-commitment frameworks and aims to uncover more complex psychological mechanisms and organizational dynamics.

The contributions of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it integrates transformational leadership and job embeddedness into the context of faculty retention in Chinese private universities, thereby enriching the cross-cultural application of organizational behavior theories in educational management. Practically, the findings may offer valuable insights for leadership development, faculty engagement, and retention strategies in private higher education. In summary, this paper addresses a central question: why do teachers choose to stay in uncertain private educational environments, and what role does leadership play in this decision?

In the field of higher education management and organizational behavior, leadership and employee retention have long been central research topics. In recent decades, as one of the most effective leadership styles, transformational leadership has emphasized inspiring vision, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation to enhance employee motivation. At the same time, job embeddedness has emerged as a critical construct for explaining why individuals remain in their organizations, capturing the fit, links, and sacrifices associated with work and organizational contexts. Reviewing the literature on transformational leadership and job embeddedness is therefore essential for deepening the understanding of these two constructs and for exploring their potential linkages, particularly in relation to faculty retention and stability. Accordingly, this literature review will proceed in three parts: an overview of transformational leadership, a discussion of job embeddedness, and an examination of their relationship.

Transformational leadership is a kind of leadership style that promotes both individual and organizational growth by enhancing followers' intrinsic motivation, value identification, and self-development. This style operates through four distinct channels: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [8]. In educational contexts, transformational leadership has been shown to significantly influence teacher retention related outcomes by fostering positive work experiences and high-quality social exchange relationships.

Existing literature has already mapped out the link between leadership and metrics like organizational commitment, employee engagement, and turnover intentions [12], [13]. These variables largely reflect attitudinal states and are insufficient to fully explain why teachers remain in their organizations over the long term. In contrast, job embeddedness offers a more integrative framework for understanding the deeper mechanisms underlying employee retention [14]. Job embeddedness emphasizes individuals' "links", "fit", and the "sacrifice" associated with leaving, across both organizational and community domains [15]. By doing so, it moves beyond single attitudinal constructs and systematically captures the structural forces that embed employees within their current work contexts [14].

Large empirical evidence confirms that transformational leaders play a critical role in deepening job embeddedness. For instance, Xiong *et al.* [16] highlighted that person-organization fit is the key link for Chinese knowledge workers. Their study showed that leadership boosts this fit, thereby strengthening job embeddedness and ultimately curbing the desire to resign. Similarly, Amankwaa *et al.* [17] demonstrated in the Ghanaian hotel industry. They identified organizational embeddedness as the crucial link that explains how transformational leadership successfully puts a stop to employee turnover. Other scholars have observed the exact same dynamic, aligning with these results, such as research conducted in Pakistan [18], Saudi Arabia [19], and China's service sector [16], collectively indicating that transformational leadership promotes employee retention by strengthening organizational connections, role alignment, and long-term commitment.

Within the education sector, although empirical evidence remains relatively limited, existing studies suggest that leadership behavior constitutes an important antecedent of teachers' job embeddedness. Supportive and development-oriented leadership styles have been found to enhance teachers' organizational embeddedness by improving their work experiences, social relationships, and professional identification, thereby reducing turnover risk. However, most existing studies focus on public universities or non-Chinese contexts, with limited attention to China's private higher education institutions an organizational setting characterized by high faculty mobility and intense competitive pressure.

In summary, the extant literature clearly indicates that transformational leadership can significantly enhance teachers' job embeddedness by strengthening organizational links, value congruence, and raising the perceived cost of walking away. Nevertheless, the applicability of this mechanism within the context of China's private higher education sector has yet to be systematically examined.

Based on the literature review, transformational leadership is expected to positively influence teachers' job embeddedness, reflecting their organizational fit, social links, and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving. Figure 1 maps out the straightforward connection between transformational leadership and job embeddedness. We use this baseline model to confirm the primary impact of the leadership style.

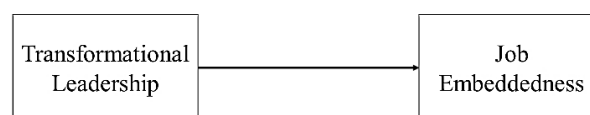


Figure 1. transformational leadership-job embeddedness model

Building on this baseline, the study further proposes that demographic factors, specifically gender, academic qualification, and length of service, may moderate the transformational leadership-job embeddedness relationship. Prior research suggests that employees' responses to transformational leadership can be contingent on individual characteristics and contextual factors [20]. For instance, gender differences may influence how teachers perceive and respond to inspirational and individualized leadership behaviors [21]. Similarly, academic qualification may shape teachers' professional attitudes and expectations, potentially altering the impact of transformational leadership on job embeddedness [22]. Length of service is also considered an important factor, as tenure can affect familiarity with organizational practices and sensitivity to leadership approaches [23]. Figure 2 shows the full moderation model, illustrating the hypothesized moderate effects of these demographic variables on the transformational leadership-job embeddedness relationship.

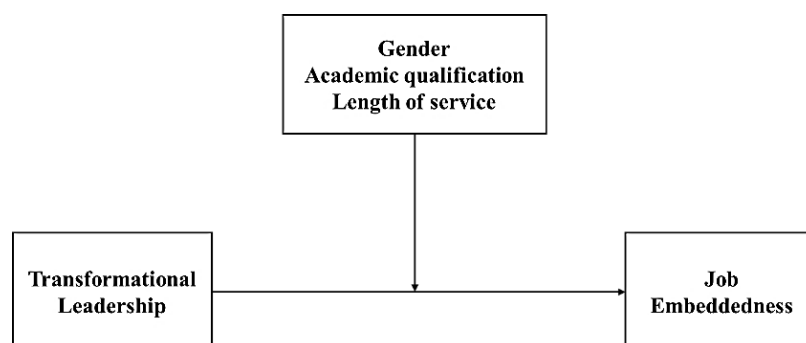


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed as i) Ha1: there is a significant relationship between faculty deans' transformational leadership and teachers' job embeddedness in private universities of Sichuan, China and ii) Ha2: demographic factors (gender, academic qualification and length of service) moderate the relationship between faculty deans' transformational leadership and teachers' job embeddedness. The research questions are as i) RQ1: does faculty deans' transformational leadership have a significant effect on teachers' job embeddedness in Chinese private universities? ii) RQ2: do the different dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) exert differential effects on teachers' job embeddedness? and iii) RQ3: do demographic factors (gender, academic qualification, and length of service) moderate the relationship between faculty deans' transformational leadership and teachers' job embeddedness?

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire survey to investigate the relationships among transformational leadership and job embeddedness. The target population consisted of teachers in private universities in Sichuan Province, China. A stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure representativeness of the target population. Data were collected by an online questionnaire distributed on the Wenjuanxing platform. The process was conducted in two rounds over a period of two weeks. The first round lasted for 10 days, followed by a reminder sent after three days, and a second reminder sent on the seventh day. At last, 368 valid questionnaires were returned for the final dataset.

Two well-established scales were used to measure the core constructs. The transformational leadership subscale of the multifactor leadership questionnaire [8] was adopted to assess teachers' perceptions of their faculty dean's transformational leadership. The 16 items were selected and slightly adapted for contextual appropriateness. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Job embeddedness was evaluated using the 18-item scale developed by Holtom *et al.* [24], with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The scale has been widely used and validated in prior research.

All data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Before hypothesis testing, preliminary diagnostic procedures were performed to confirm that the data met the assumptions for parametric analyses. Normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis indices, along with visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots, with all variables falling within acceptable thresholds ($|\text{skewness}| < 2$, $|\text{kurtosis}| < 7$). Multicollinearity was evaluated using tolerance values and (variance inflation factor (VIF) < 5), indicating no serious multicollinearity. Outliers were identified through boxplots and standardized residuals, and no influential cases were detected.

To test the hypothesized moderation effects, the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 4.1) was employed [25]. Model 1 of PROCESS was used to examine whether gender, academic qualification, and length of service moderated the relationship of transformational leadership-job embeddedness. All predictors were mean-centered before analysis to reduce multicollinearity and facilitate the interpretation of interaction terms. Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations was applied to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals for the interaction effects. The moderation analysis allowed for the estimation of conditional effects of transformational leadership on job embeddedness at different levels of the demographic variables, providing a rigorous test of whether these factors influence the strength of the transformational leadership-job embeddedness relationship.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of analyses examining the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness, as well as the moderating role of demographic factors. The analyses begin with descriptive statistics for key variables and their dimensions, followed by correlation analyses to assess the strength and direction of relationships, then regression analyses testing the predictive effects of transformational leadership and its dimensions on job embeddedness, and finally, moderation analyses using PROCESS to evaluate whether demographic factors influence the strength of these relationships.

3.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

This section provides descriptive information on respondents' gender, academic qualification, and length of service. Reporting these demographic distributions not only offers background context for the subsequent correlation and regression analyses but also allows readers to assess the representativeness and diversity of the sample.

The sample consisted of 368 respondents. As shown in Table 1, 175 participants were male (48%), and 193 were female (52%). Regarding academic qualification, most of the respondents held a master's

degree (239 participants, 65%), followed by a Bachelor's degree (70 participants, 19%) and a Doctoral degree (59 participants, 16%). In terms of length of service, 170 participants (46%) had less than three years of work experience, 139 participants (38%) had three to five years, 55 participants (15%) had six to ten years, and 4 participants (1%) had more than ten years of service.

Overall, the demographic profile indicates a relatively balanced distribution in terms of gender, with a predominance of respondents holding higher education qualifications, and the majority having less than five years of organizational tenure. This diversity provides a suitable basis for examining the relationships between transformational leadership and job embeddedness.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=368)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	175	48%
	Female	193	52%
Academic qualification	Bachelor's degree	70	19%
	Master's degree	239	65%
	Ph.D.	59	16%
Length of service	Less than 3 years	170	46%
	3-5 years	139	38%
	6-10 years	55	15%
	10 years above	4	1%

3.2. Descriptive statistics

To provide an overview of the research sample and establish a foundation for subsequent analyses, descriptive statistics were presented, specifically means and standard deviations. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for transformational leadership and its four dimensions. The overall level of transformational leadership among respondents was relatively low, with a mean score of 2.467 (SD=0.729). Among the four dimensions, idealized influence and individualized consideration were rated at moderate levels, with mean scores of 2.680 (SD=0.899) and 2.767 (SD=0.996), respectively. In contrast, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation were relatively low, with mean scores of 2.234 (SD=0.908) and 2.187 (SD=0.933), respectively.

This pattern may be explained by sample characteristics: most respondents held a master's degree or higher (81%) and had less than five years of tenure (84%), suggesting that early-career employees prioritized career development and immediate rewards, and thus perceived leaders' motivational and cognitive behaviors as less evident [23]. Recent studies supported this interpretation, showing that younger or early-career employees often perceived transformational leadership differently, particularly in terms of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation [19], [26]. In summary, respondents perceived moderate levels of individualized attention and role-modeling behaviors from their leaders, whereas motivational and cognitive stimulation behaviors were less evident. These findings provide a foundational understanding of transformational leadership distribution within the sample and inform subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for transformational leadership and dimensions

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Transformational leadership	2.467	0.729	Low
Dimensions:			
Idealized influence	2.680	0.899	Moderate
Inspirational motivation	2.234	0.908	Low
Intellectual stimulation	2.187	0.933	Low
Individualized consideration	2.767	0.996	Moderate

As shown in Table 3, the overall level of job embeddedness among respondents was relatively low, with a mean score of 2.508 (SD=0.753). Regarding the dimensions, fit to the organization (M=2.547, SD=1.156) and link to the organization (M=2.046, SD=0.842) were perceived as low, while sacrifice to the organization was moderate (M=2.637, SD=1.051). For the community-related dimensions, fit to community (M=2.654, SD=1.146) and sacrifice to community (M=2.844, SD=1.115) were rated at moderate levels, whereas link to community was low (M=2.318, SD=0.933).

This pattern is consistent with prior research, which indicates that weaker organizational connections reduce employee embeddedness and retention. Overall, respondents perceived moderate levels of fit and sacrifice across both organizational and community contexts, whereas their perceived links to the

organization and community were relatively weaker. These findings, together with the relatively low levels of transformational leadership observed in the sample, align with recent empirical evidence and may reflect interactions among employee demographics, career stage, educational background, and organizational culture. Collectively, the results underscore the importance of enhancing leaders' inspirational and intellectual stimulation behaviors, as well as strengthening employees' organizational and community links, to improve engagement and retention [27], [28].

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for job embeddedness and dimensions

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Job embeddedness	2.508	0.753	Low
Dimensions:			
Fit to organization	2.547	1.156	Low
Sacrifice to organization	2.637	1.051	Moderate
Link to organization	2.046	0.842	Low
Fit to community	2.654	1.146	Moderate
Sacrifice to community	2.844	1.115	Moderate
Link to community	2.318	0.933	Low

3.2.1. Correlation analysis

Before conducting multiple regression analyses, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the linear relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness. Correlation analysis provides a preliminary understanding of the direction and strength of associations between variables, offering both theoretical and empirical support for subsequent regression models, and helps to identify potential multicollinearity issues. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients and significance levels for the key variables.

As shown in Table 4, transformational leadership is positively and significantly correlated with job embeddedness ($r=0.421$, $p<0.01$). This suggests that, among faculty in private universities, higher levels of transformational leadership are associated with greater job embeddedness, suggesting a potential positive linkage between leadership behavior and faculty retention. These findings provide a theoretical and empirical basis for subsequent regression analyses. Next, correlations between transformational leadership dimensions and job embeddedness dimensions were examined.

As shown in Table 5, all dimensions of transformational leadership were positively and significantly correlated with the overall score of job embeddedness. Inspirational motivation ($r=0.372$, $p<0.01$) and individualized consideration ($r=0.331$, $p<0.01$) exhibited relatively stronger correlations, suggesting that leadership behaviors that foster motivation and support individual development are particularly important for enhancing job embeddedness.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of transformational leadership and job embeddedness

Variable	TL	JE
TL	1	
JE	.421**	1

Note: TL is transformational leadership; JE is job embeddedness; and **=correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Correlation matrix of dimensions

Variable	TL	JE	II	IM	IS	IC	FO	SO	LO	FC	SC	LC
TL	1											
JE	.421**	1										
II	.760**	.296**	1									
IM	.780**	.372**	.402**	1								
IS	.794**	.316**	.456**	.586**	1							
IC	.790**	.331**	.529**	.462**	.442**	1						
FO	.366**	.823**	.233**	.313**	.286**	.307**	1					
SO	.355**	.688**	.290**	.293**	.254**	.272**	.491**	1				
LO	.250**	.767**	.179**	.238**	.181**	.185**	.597**	.521**	1			
FC	.330**	.724**	.243**	.268**	.211**	.306**	.538**	.300**	.483**	1		
SC	.327**	.724**	.230**	.310**	.248**	.237**	.501**	.413**	.464**	.401**	1	
LC	.164**	.600**	0.085	.168**	.170**	0.091	.394**	.267**	.336**	.359**	.311**	1

Note: TL=transformational leadership; II=idealized influence; IM=inspirational motivation; IS=intellectual stimulation; IC=individualized consideration; JE=job embeddedness; FO=fit to organization; LO=links to organization; SO=sacrifice to organization; FC=fit to community; LC=links to community; SC=sacrifice to community, and **=correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Meanwhile, all dimensions of job embeddedness were positively correlated with the total score of transformational leadership, with fit to organization ($r=0.366$, $p<0.01$) and sacrifice to organization ($r=0.355$, $p<0.01$) exhibiting the highest correlations, indicating that these embeddedness dimensions are especially critical in shaping overall job embeddedness. Further correlation analyses between the individual dimensions of transformational leadership and job embeddedness revealed that most pairs exhibited moderate and significant positive correlations. These results provide support for the feasibility of subsequent multiple regression analyses and potential mediation testing.

3.2.2. Regression analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether higher levels of transformational leadership are associated with greater job embeddedness.

As shown in Table 6, the model summary indicated a moderate positive correlation between transformational leadership and job embeddedness ($R=0.421$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.177, indicating that transformational leadership accounted for 17.7% of the variance in job embeddedness. The Adjusted R^2 was 0.175, suggesting that the explanatory power remained stable after adjusting for the number of predictors. The standard error of the estimate was 0.684, and the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.936, indicating no significant autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 6. Model summary of transformational leadership predicting job embeddedness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.421	0.177	0.175	0.684	1.936

As shown in Table 7, the analysis of variance showed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F=78.890$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that transformational leadership significantly predicts job embeddedness.

Table 7. ANOVA of transformational leadership predicting job embeddedness

	Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.893	1	36.893	78.890	.000
	Residual	171.162	366	0.468		
	Total	208.055	367			

As shown in Table 8, examination of the regression coefficients showed that the constant term was 1.435 ($t=11.403$, $p<0.001$), and the regression coefficient for transformational leadership was 0.435 (Beta=0.421, $t=8.882$, $p<0.001$). The results indicate that a one-unit increase in transformational leadership is associated with a 0.435-unit increase in job embeddedness. Multicollinearity diagnostics revealed a tolerance of 1.000 and a VIF of 1.000, indicating no multicollinearity among the predictors.

Table 8. Coefficients of transformational leadership predicting job embeddedness

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.435	.126		11.403	.000		
Transformational leadership	.435	.049	.421	8.882	.000	1.000	1.000

Therefore, the single regression equation can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Job embeddedness} = 1.435 + 0.435 \times \text{transformational leadership} \quad (1)$$

In summary, these findings provide empirical support for the hypothesis that transformational leadership positively predicts job embeddedness. This result not only confirms the theoretical expectation but also provides a foundation for subsequent analyses incorporating additional predictors or control variables in a multiple regression framework.

After confirming the overall effect, multiple regression analysis was conducted in which the four dimensions of transformational leadership were entered simultaneously to compare their relative contributions to job embeddedness.

As shown in Table 9, the regression model yielded a moderate correlation coefficient ($R=0.428$). The predictors jointly explained 18.3% of the variance in job embeddedness ($R^2=0.183$, adjusted $R^2=0.174$). The standard error of the estimate was 0.684, indicating an acceptable average deviation between predicted and observed values. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.926, suggesting that the residuals were independent and not affected by autocorrelation.

As shown in Table 10, the overall regression model was significant, $F(4,363)=20.324$, $p<0.001$, indicating that the four predictors jointly explained a significant proportion of the variance in job embeddedness.

Table 9. Model summary of dimension on job embeddedness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.428	0.183	0.174	0.68431	1.926

Table 1. ANOVA of dimension on job embeddedness

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	38.069	4	9.517	20.324	.000
Residual	169.986	363	0.468		
Total	208.055	367			

Table 11 presents the regression coefficients for the predictors of job embeddedness. The constant term ($B=1.444$, $p<0.001$) represents the baseline level of job embeddedness when all predictors are held constant. Among the four motivational dimensions, inspirational motivation showed a significant positive association with job embeddedness ($B=0.183$, $\beta=0.220$, $t=3.600$, $p<0.001$), indicating that higher intrinsic motivation is strongly associated with higher levels of job embeddedness. Similarly, individualized consideration showed a significant positive influence ($B=0.109$, $\beta=0.144$, $t=2.412$, $p=0.016$), suggesting that employees with a stronger integration of work values into their self-identity also report higher engagement. In contrast, idealized influence ($B=0.080$, $\beta=0.096$, $t=1.629$, $p=0.104$) and intellectual stimulation ($B=0.064$, $\beta=0.080$, $t=1.288$, $p=0.198$) were not statistically significant predictors of job embeddedness. This result implies that these two motivational forms, while positively associated with job embeddedness at the descriptive level, do not make a unique contribution once the effects of other motivational factors are controlled.

Table 11. Coefficients of dimension on job embeddedness

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	Beta	Std. error	Beta				Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.444	0.129			11.226	0.000		
1 II	0.080	0.049	0.096		1.629	0.104	0.654	1.529
IM	0.183	0.051	0.220		3.600	0.000	0.601	1.663
IS	0.064	0.050	0.080		1.288	0.198	0.588	1.700
IC	0.109	0.045	0.144		2.412	0.016	0.635	1.576

Note: II=idealized influence; IM=inspirational motivation; IS=intellectual stimulation; and IC=individualized consideration.

VIF values ranged from 1.529 to 1.700, well below the recommended threshold of 10, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. Accordingly, the regression estimates can be regarded as stable. Overall, the results indicate that intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation are significant predictors of job embeddedness, whereas identified and introjected regulation do not show independent predictive effects.

The results indicate that autonomous forms of motivation, including intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation, significantly predict job embeddedness. Specifically, inspirational motivation (intrinsic motivation) and individualized consideration (integrated regulation) were positively associated with higher levels of embeddedness, consistent with self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that autonomous motivation fosters positive work experiences and sustained engagement. Prior empirical studies similarly demonstrate that intrinsic motivation and highly internalized forms of regulation enhance employees' work engagement and organizational commitment Ryan and Deci [29] suggesting that employees who derive

enjoyment from their work or integrate work values into their self-identity tend to exhibit stronger job embeddedness.

In contrast, controlled forms of motivation, namely identified regulation and introjected regulation, did not significantly predict job embeddedness in this study. This may be attributed to the nature of these motivational forms and their reliance on contextual support: identified regulation reflects acceptance of work goals, but its translation into sustained engagement often requires alignment with organizational values and environmental support. Introjected regulation, driven by external pressure or internal obligation, may maintain effort in the short term but does not promote deeper psychological involvement. These findings are consistent with prior literature indicating that controlled motivation has limited predictive power for positive work outcomes.

3.3. Moderate effect of demographic factors

Moderation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1) to examine whether the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness differed by teachers' gender, academic qualification, and length of service.

3.3.1. Gender as moderator

As shown in Table 12, transformational leadership significantly predicted job embeddedness ($B=0.4343$, $p<0.001$). Both gender and the interaction term (transformational leadership $\times$ gender) were not significant ($B=0.0121$, $p=0.866$; $B=0.0075$, $p=0.940$), indicating that the effect of transformational leadership on job embeddedness is consistent across genders. The model explained 17.7% of the variance in job embeddedness ($R^2=0.1774$), $F(3,364)=26.17$, $p<0.001$. Gender does not moderate the transformational leadership- job embeddedness relationship, suggesting that transformational leadership interventions are likely effective for both male and female participants.

Table 2. Moderation analysis of gender

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI (LLCI, ULCI)
Constant	2.5076	0.0357	70.15	<.001	[2.4373, 2.5779]
TL	0.4343	0.0492	8.82	<.001	[0.3375, 0.5312]
Gender	0.0121	0.0716	0.17	0.866	[-0.1287, 0.1528]
TL $\times$ gender	0.0075	0.0990	0.075	0.940	[-0.1873, 0.2022]

Note: TL=transformational leadership; SE=standard error; 95% CI=95% confidence interval; LLCI=lower limit of confidence interval; and ULCI=upper limit of confidence interval.

3.3.2. Academic qualification as moderator

As shown in Table 13, transformational leadership significantly predicted job embeddedness ($B=0.6360$, $p<0.001$). Neither the academic qualification nor the interaction term (transformational leadership $\times$ academic qualification) was significant ($B=0.2263$, $p=0.301$; $B=-0.1013$, $p=0.235$), indicating that academic qualification does not moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness. Simple slopes analysis revealed minor variations in transformational leadership's effect across low, mean, and high academic qualification levels, but these differences were not statistically meaningful. The model explained 18.1% of the variance in job embeddedness ($R^2=0.1809$), $F(3,364)=26.79$, $p<0.001$. Overall, transformational leadership's positive effect on job embeddedness is robust and consistent across individuals with varying academic qualification levels.

Table 13. Moderation analysis of academic qualification

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI (LLCI, ULCI)
Constant	0.9823	0.4585	2.14	0.033	[0.0806, 1.8840]
TL	0.6360	0.1772	3.59	<.001	[0.2876, 0.9845]
AQ	0.2263	0.2185	1.04	0.301	[-0.2034, 0.6561]
TL $\times$ AQ	-0.1013	0.0851	-1.19	0.235	[-0.2688, 0.0661]

Note: TL=transformational leadership; AQ=academic qualification; SE=standard error; 95% CI=95% confidence interval; LLCI=lower limit of confidence interval; and ULCI=upper limit of confidence interval.

3.3.3. Length of service as moderator

As shown in Table 14, transformational leadership significantly predicted job embeddedness ($B=0.4392$, $p<0.001$). Both length of service and the interaction term (TL $\times$ LoS) were not significant ($B=-0.0532$, $p=0.260$; $B=0.0874$, $p=0.199$), indicating that length of service does not moderate the

relationship of transformational leadership-job embeddedness. Simple slopes analysis showed minor variations across low, mean, and high levels of length of service, but these differences were not statistically significant. The model explained 18.4% of the variance in job embeddedness ($R^2=0.1839$), $F(3,364)=27.35$, $p<0.001$. Overall, transformational leadership's positive effect on job embeddedness is robust and consistent across different levels of length of service.

Table 14. Moderation analysis of length of service

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI (LLCI, ULCI)
Constant	2.5080	0.0356	70.44	<.001	[2.4380, 2.5780]
TL	0.4392	0.0490	8.96	<.001	[0.3428, 0.5356]
LoS	-0.0532	0.0471	-1.13	0.260	[-0.1459, 0.0395]
TL×LoS	0.0874	0.0679	1.29	0.199	[-0.0461, 0.2209]

Note: TL=transformational leadership; LoS=length of service; SE=standard error; 95% CI=95% confidence interval; LLCI=lower limit of confidence interval; and ULCI=upper limit of confidence interval.

3.4. Summary

Overall, the findings from the descriptive, correlation, regression, and moderation analyses collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how transformational leadership relates to teachers' job embeddedness in private higher education institutions. Descriptive results revealed generally low levels of both transformational leadership and job embeddedness, although certain dimensions such as individualized consideration and sacrifice were perceived at moderate levels. Initial correlation tests revealed a strong link between the two variables. Going a step further, the regression model confirmed that transformational leadership actively drives job embeddedness. Among the leadership dimensions, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration emerged as the strongest predictors. It highlights the importance of motivational influence and personal care in fostering faculty members' attachment to their institutions. Moderation analyses further revealed that this positive transformational leadership-job embeddedness relationship remains consistent regardless of gender, academic qualification, or length of service. The absence of significant moderation suggests that the beneficial effects of transformational leadership operate similarly across demographic groups and are not contingent on individual characteristics. This robustness aligns with existing research emphasizing the stable influence of transformational leadership on employee outcomes. Practically, these findings indicate that leadership development strategies centered on strengthening transformational behaviors are likely to enhance job embeddedness broadly and effectively, without the need for differentiated interventions. Future research may explore additional moderators or mediating mechanisms to deepen understanding of the conditions under which transformational leadership most effectively promotes employee embeddedness.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between transformational leadership and job embeddedness among faculty members in private universities in Sichuan Province, China. The results confirm that faculty leaders' transformational leadership positively effect on teachers' job embeddedness, with inspirational motivation and individualized consideration emerging as the most influential leadership dimensions. Although overall levels of transformational leadership and job embeddedness were relatively low, these findings highlight the importance of key leadership behaviors in fostering teachers' organizational fit, social links, and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving. Moderation analyses revealed that demographic factors gender, academic qualification, and length of service did not significantly alter the transformational leadership-job embeddedness relationship, indicating that the positive effects of transformational leadership are robust across diverse groups. The study extends the examination of transformational leadership to job embeddedness in the higher education context and reinforces the applicability of transformational leadership principles across demographic variations. Practically, the findings suggest that leadership development initiatives aimed at strengthening transformational leadership behaviors are likely to enhance faculty retention, providing actionable guidance for administrators. Future research could explore additional contextual or psychological moderators to further clarify the mechanisms among transformational leadership and job embeddedness.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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- C : Conceptualization
- M : Methodology
- So : Software
- Va : Validation
- Fo : Formal analysis
- I : Investigation
- R : Resources
- D : Data Curation
- O : Writing - Original Draft
- E : Writing - Review & Editing
- Vi : Visualization
- Su : Supervision
- P : Project administration
- Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to animal use has complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies for the care and use of animals.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [SA] on request.

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