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Full Range of Leadership Styles on Competency Acquisition under the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Apprenticeship Training in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Apprenticeship being a practical-oriented training is one of the affected areas for the On-the-Job-Training in the COVID-19 pandemic era. Since apprenticeship training is time and competency-based, the lockdowns, stay at home and social distancing rules as pronounced by the Government due to COVID-19, temporarily suspended the continuation of the proficiency skills syllabi at colleges and competency acquisition in various companies. However, delay in the skills acquisition is unjust especially now as the industry faces collapse due to lack of appropriate skills and the skillfulness of personnel. Since competency acquisition is realized in terms of performance outcomes of trainees in industry, leadership plays a significant role in guiding, supporting, motivating and ensuring trainees acquire prerequisite competencies in such unprecedented situations. This paper presents the role of the Full Range Leadership style in competency acquisition for trainees doing apprenticeship training programs under the COVID-19 pandemic era in Zimbabwe. This is quantitative research which comprises a sample of 239 trainees which was established using an online survey that enabled rapid and effective distribution of an online questionnaire during the COVID-19 crisis. Then, data were analyzed using various statistical techniques. The results show distinctions among leadership styles in predicting competency acquisition by trainees and transformational leadership were found to be statistically significant to trainees' competency acquisition under the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper recommends the adoption of transformational leadership and intensifying transformational leadership training to capacitate staff members at the training institutions in Zimbabwe now and in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords

Full Range of Leadership Styles, Apprenticeship Training, Competency,

COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused significant disruptions in the workplace, and in the training and development ecosystem (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). Disruptions in the apprenticeship training programs are inevitable as organizations across the country are set to be stretched further with the increasing burden of the effects of COVID-19 and its variants. The impact of this pandemic on employees, managers and workers continues to be extensively covered by research and the media in general. However, investigations in trainees have been restricted in conventional closed settings and apprenticeship training which shows that skills acquisition by apprentices through the on-the-job-training is limited despite being significantly impacted in this pandemic (Magidi & Mahiya, 2021). Therefore, there is added pressure and increased urgency to ensure that managerial leadership is congruent to the arrangement and disposition that support competency acquisition to strengthen the skilled workforce reserve each year. Now, this paper examines the role of the Full Range of Leadership on competency acquisition by apprentices under the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The study is relevant to all organizations because, under the current COVID-19 pandemic, skills development and knowledge acquisition were not fully met. For example, the Polytechnic colleges postponed the theoretical apprenticeship classes which resulted in the increased length of the college terms that led to delay in the trainees' graduation. Similarly, in the organizations, there were social distancing and lockdowns as well as limited movement restrictions which led to apprentices losing training man-hours and delayed qualification. Therefore, these factors also reduced the skilled workforce complement in industry. Since the COVID-19 disease was not selective, it also caused deaths among apprentices, their mentors and members of staff which consequently further reduced the workforce complement in industry. Furthermore, the suspension by some organizations to recruit apprentices in the years 2020 and 2021 added the challenge of skillful manpower shortages. In that regard, the human resource departments are faced with manpower planning challenges for now and in the future.

However, skills development is not a fixed and an inflexible action, it is indeed an adaptive and flexible action which varies according to the demands of the situation and the environment. Put differently, it is an appropriate action in response to a situation. In the same vein, leadership influence may vary across the contexts of situations and cultures (Mathende & Yousefi, 2021). Therefore, this study examined the role of leadership practices on competency acquisition in apprenticeship training for trainees that have been training under the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. In which case, leadership practices should be appropriate to support

the skills development of trainees over and above their knowledge acquisition. Because organizations ride on various skills that employees would have acquired and used which consequently enable the organizations to achieve their goals. Now, this study was guided by the following specific objectives; to examine the influence of transformational leadership styles under the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe; to assess the influence of Transactional leadership on competency development under the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe, and to assess the influence of laissez-faire leadership on competency development under COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe.

2. Literature Review

Trainees across the globe are currently affected due to the closure of training and learning institutions in response to the COVID-19 which was declared a pandemic by World Health Organization (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). The majority of trainees found themselves out of polytechnics and work environment due to the COVID-19 variants outbreaks. These trainees include apprentices who were aspiring to complete their academic syllabi and practicum years of exposure. However, industrialists are making every effort to ensure that training is taking place for trainees to acquire the necessary competencies despite lockdowns occasioned by COVID-19 and its variants. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, the use of online, e-learning and distance learning platforms have remained a key option available for the continuation of training among other training techniques. Until the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the on-the-job-training, adoption of these training techniques have been limited and have faced resistance in some parts of Zimbabwe. With the closure of polytechnics, quarantines and social distancing, leaders out of necessity, may be required to change their leadership styles. Their traditional leadership styles may not fit the ongoing emergencies created by COVID variants, otherwise the potential gains in the competency acquisition may go to waste. Again, managers were forced to change dramatically and unexpectedly, although they do not have history from which to draw that experience. This kind of situation requires a new kind of leadership style that will ensure that all the stakeholders are on board in order to carry out normal training roles. Transformational leadership characteristics have been established through research that it puts the needs of employees first. Therefore, apprenticeship mentors and managers, if well equipped with the necessary leadership skills, will be able to address the desired change to ensure trainees' well-being and training needs are well catered for during emergency situations. This also challenges organizations to continually come up with innovative ways of skills acquisitions and meeting human resource needs in the country in order to fulfil the Vision 2030 of the country of becoming the medium income economy. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has taken on a sense of urgency as polytechnics and some companies adopted blended training system. Similarly, management of organizations are putting measures in place in terms of necessary infrastructure and capacity

building, which has not been taken up seriously until COVID-19 struck which called for a paradigm shift. Of which managers have been forced to embrace the new normal to ensure skills pipeline in their organizations is uninterrupted.

2.1. Concept of Full Range of Leadership

The concept of leadership is one of the most prominent fields of study in business for many decades. The world over, leadership in different organizations has drawn increased attention. However, there are many varieties of leadership styles that are depicted by the Full Range of Leadership Models (FRLM). The FRLM is Bass's leadership theory which is centered around the examination and analysis of the leader's behavior in response to different predicaments in the business domain. According to Bass & Avolio (2000) there are three distinct leadership styles enshrined in Full range of Leadership Model namely; transactional, laissez-faire, and transformational leadership.

However, among the three leadership styles, the extant literature show that transformational leadership style is the most appropriate for challenging situation (Mathende & Yousefi, 2021). This leadership style comprises of the manager's tendency to transform the values and norms of employees in order to motivate them to optimally succeed in their tasks. This is based on the interactions intended to achieving a collective purpose in a manner that motivates, enhances and transforms the actions and ethical inclination of the employees towards learning (Mohammed et al., 2020). It produces, in its ideal form, a valuable and beneficial change in the followers, with the ultimate purpose of turning followers into being good leaders. Furthermore, it is described as the key in getting more creative and empowered workers who can solve different kinds of challenges. Transformational leadership has five dimensions which are idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavioral, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Transactional leadership's style is also an essential and integral part of the full range leadership model and has three components which can motivate followers to achieve their assignments (You, 2021). These components include, contingent reward where the leader set performance requirements and reward individuals accordingly (Hilton et al., 2021). The other component is management by exception, which has two sub components namely active and passive styles of leadership. In this case, remuneration is by management exception and rewards depends on situations (Saad & Abbas, 2019). In the management by exception active system, it is based on continuous monitoring of the subordinates and the leader administers procedures and regulations to the employees to avoid expected errors, mistakes and deviances (Farmer, 2019), then in management by exception-passive, the leader avoids supervisory duties and responsibilities and confronts subordinates with their mistakes and registers his or her displeasures whenever mistakes are made and resultantly takes corrective actions when the mistakes are

significant (Valldeneu et al., 2021). Therefore, transactional leadership style is a relationship of employer and employee based on the reward and punishment system to get results in the organization (Wahyuni, Purwandari, & Syah, 2020).

It follows that, transactional leaders override the interests of their employees who seem to only receive instructions and are only required to comply. It further implies that the rigidity of such leaders makes it difficult for the leader to accept the viewpoints of others. When the emphasis is on reward and punishment, then for the leader to appreciate the job done well by the subordinates is far reaching. Therefore, employees who are under these conditions are most likely to be frustrated and only work for reward or to avoid punishment. Rahman (2017) attests that, although rewards and punishment systems force compliance as well as motivating followers, the motivation does not last for a long period. This is contrary to motivation created by transformational leaders that is expected to last for a long period (Adams, Shahrun, & Zainol, 2018). In light of the above, this style has some limitations because this kind of leadership style in an organization is based on reward and punishment, and it may not be applicable in the pandemic situations where employees are vulnerable to the harsh environment already.

Laissez-faire leadership style defines leaders who allow their employees to work on their own (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2020). To say, it is being without a leader. In that case, the leader seemingly subscribes to the "let the employee do it" type of management (Achhnani, 2020). This implies that such managers are not concerned about tasks and people. In that case, the manager's job is to simple transmitting information from superiors to employees. Now, when such is employed to trainees, then learning and development become difficult to take place. On the one hand, some scholars viewed laissez faire from a positive point of view; to say it supports autonomy and work flexibility which manifest in the freedom for the expression of employees' expertise in their field of work (Dapper, 2019). If that is the case, then it seemingly provides autonomy to trainees and allowing them to do their job using their own try and error methods which can result in job satisfaction and increased acquisition of skills (Chelimo et al., 2020). But if trainees cannot manage their time well and knowledge to effectively manage their own work, then it will indicate the lack of direction on the part of the managers (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Further, other scholars consider laisez-faire leadership style as a weaker leadership style in which the leader has little impact on the behaviour of the subordinates who lack guidance from the leader's expert power. Earlier research, Bass & Riggio (2005) describe the laissez-faire leadership as a destructive form of leadership which implies either a complete lack of control or the poor recognition and identification of trainees with the leader. However, in terms of skills acquisition, the position of this type of leadership under unprecedented situations is not fully settled.

2.2. Concept of Competency

According to Rampisela & Ayal (2021), competency is an underlying charac-

teristics of employees which they ride on to deliver superior performance in a given task, role or situation. MacIntyre & Ayers-Glassey (2020) further attest that competences are best looked at in terms of what the incumbent should be capable of doing. A gap is normally created between what employees should be able to do and what they can actually do. In that instance, areas for personal development, learning and training are identified (Goniewicz et al., 2021). Now to close the gap and continually fill the skills pipeline in an organization, managers need to redesign, develop and run training programs for their employees. Chelimo et al. (2020) asserts that the fundamental principle of competency development in the work place encompasses keeping trainees current, vibrant and versatile. This will make them to continuously perform their roles effectively regardless of COVID-19 pandemic and in the age of rapid socio-economic, technological changes and globalization. In polytechnics and tertiary institutions, apprentices acquire basic academic skills such as engineering language, workshop technology, science skills and calculations. This is buttressed with practical skills acquired through the On-the-Job-Training in industry. Consequently, the developed individuals would be in a better position to make contribution to the organization. Now, Apprenticeship Training in Zimbabwe is two pronged comprising of first the government generic trade skills proficiency guides and trade specific training syllabi conducted at the state Polytechnics which is a mandatory statutory requirement. Secondly, the trade specific on the job training component which is conducted at relevant particular organizations' premises. These two syllabi target to effectively close the gaps between the theoretical component of apprentices' training and the practical component of their training. Further, these syllabi dovetail and integrate each other to produce a highly proficient artisan at the end of the apprenticeship program. Again, apprenticeship training is a tripartite employment contract comprising of the government, the organization and the trainee. Therefore, the relationship is that of the employee-employer relationship and apprentices are defined as employees during the tenure of their contract.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework which will be used in this study and depicts the interrelationship between the study variables. The independent variables are transformational, Transactional and laissez faire leadership styles. The dependent variable is the competency development. Further to that, these variables and hypothetical causal paths and relationships are presented below. The study was guided by the hypotheses that there are positive and significant relationships between each leadership style and competency acquisition in Zimbabwe under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on previous research literature studies, the following hypotheses are obtained;

H1: Transformational leadership style has a significant effect on competency acquisition;
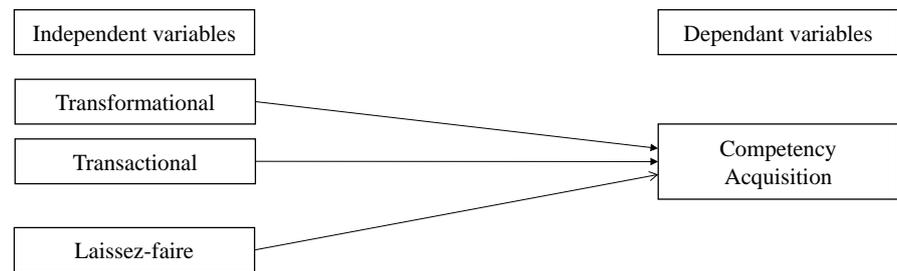
Figure 1. Conceptual frame work.

H2: Transactional leadership style has a significant effect on competency acquisition;

H3: laissez-faire leadership style has a significant effect on competency acquisition.

3. Research Methodology

In view of restrictions and distancing guidelines for controlling the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 239 participants participated on the online survey. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect categorical data on an ordinal scale. The survey instruments included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and Competency questionnaire. These questionnaires were combined into one continuous document and were made available for participants on the online survey. The independent variables were the leadership styles comprising of 52 items adopted from MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Each statement started with the phrase, "The person I am rating..." then followed by phrases such as, goes beyond self-interest; models ethical standards; emphasizes the collective mission; talks optimistically; arouses awareness about important issues. Then the questions for competency acquisition were adapted from the work of Granado-Alcón et al. (2020) and comprises of 10 items. For example, the questions started with the phrase "In the last two years" then it reads; I am capable of handling most day-to-day assignments involving my acquired skill, I improved my problem-solving ability in my trade of specialty, I have devised new ways of doing things related to my trade, I have deepened my understanding of the plant processes related to my trade. A five point Likert scale was used to measure the responses to the various indicators of the variables under investigation, whereby 5 meant a strong agreement with the statement while 1 meant a strong disagreement with the statement. Information gathered represented individuals' opinions and attitudes towards the research study questions. The method was useful in the interest of time, given the wider spread of the respondents. It is also ideal for gathering data over a large sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2016).

Pearson's correlation was used ahead of other techniques like spearman's rho correlation because although the data has ranked variables (ordinal data) which makes it a non-parametric statistic. Again the underlying assumptions of the data analysis model were first put to test to ascertain its appropriateness. In that regard normality test, multicollinearity test and test for linearity were conducted.

The study further used one-way ANOVA and post hoc comparisons of mean values using Tukey HSD in order to identify the extent to which each leadership style influences competency acquisition in trainees under the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Therefore, competency acquisition was the dependent variable while the leadership styles were the independent variables. Further, simple linear regression using SPSS was used to explore the predictive abilities of the leadership styles on competency acquisition because it provides a more detailed analysis to predicting, optimizing, or explaining a numeric response of competency acquisition from leadership styles than other methods like correlation.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Normality Test

The normality tests were done to ascertain whether the sample data has been drawn from a normally distributed population. In this case, Shapiro-Wilk test was considered because the sample size was within the range deemed appropriate for Shapiro-Wilk test to detect departure from normality. In this study the respondents were 239. The statistic ranges from zero (0) to one (1) and figures higher than 0.05 indicate the data is normally distributed (Hanusz & Tarasinska, 2014). The null hypothesis is that sample follows a Normal distribution and it is rejected when the p-value of the Shapiro-Wilk statistic is less than 0.05. Hence the results in Table 1 show the distribution of data on Transformational leadership (p-value 0.103 > 0.05), Transactional leadership (p-value 0.099 > 0.05), Laissez-faire leadership (p-value 0.751 > 0.05) and competency acquisition (p-value 0.418 > 0.05). Therefore, according to Shapiro-Wilk test we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the sample data was normally distributed.

4.2. Test for Multi-Collinearity

The values shown as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) from Table 2 determines the amount of the severity of multi-collinearity in a regression analysis. Values of VIF's that are greater than 10 depict multi-collinearity. This means that the higher the value of VIF's, the more severe the problem of multi-collinearity. In this case, the results in Table 2 shows that all the variables had values of VIF which are less than 10, to say, Transformational leadership (3.106), Transactional

Table 1. Normality test.

Variable	Shapiro-Wilks		
	Statistic	Df	Sig
Transformational leadership style	0.956	239	0.103
Transactional leadership style	0.892	239	0.099
Laissez-faire leadership style	0.942	239	0.751
Competency Acquisition	0.913	239	0.418

Table 2. Test for multi-collinearity.

Model	Collinearity	
	Tolerance	VIF
Transformational leadership style	0.287	3.106
Transactional leadership style	0.498	2.001
Laissez-faire leadership style	0.521	1.989

a. Dependent variable: competency acquisition.

leadership (2.001) and Laissez-faire Leadership (1.989). This implies that there was no severe collinearity with the variables thus all the variables were maintained in the regression model.

4.3. Test for Linearity

This test was done to establish the Linearity Assumption of linear estimation. It assumes that the dependent variable has a linear relationship with the independent variables. In his case, computation of ANOVA statistics was used to test for the linearity assumption and hypothesizes that; the dependent variable has no linear relationship with the independent variables. However, results in Table 3 indicate that the F statistic (2, 237 = 27.654, p-value < 0.05). The ANOVA results indicate that the model is significant and therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and conclude that the dependent variable has a linear relationship with the independent variables.

4.4. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 and Table 4 show that there is a statistical significance between the mean values of the group under study, F(2, 237) = 27.654, p = 0.002. In that regard, the most influential leadership style on competency acquisition is transformational leadership, followed by transactional leadership and the least rated is laissez-faire leadership style. However, further analysis is done using Post hoc using Tukey HSD as shown below in Table 5.

4.5. Multiple Comparisons of the Mean Values

Further, a post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test to compare the means of the three leadership styles was also done and the Multiple comparisons of the mean values show that the mean score for Transformational leadership style (M = 16.78, SD = 2.57) was statistically significantly different than the other two leadership styles, that is, transactional leadership (M = 13.75, SD = 1.98, p = 0.049) and laissez-faire leadership (M = 12.23, SD 1.87, p = 0.038). Similarly, Transactional leadership style is statistically significant than laissez-faire leadership.

4.6. Results for the Regression Analysis

Table 6 indicates regression analysis of full range of leadership styles on competency

Table 3. Test for linearity ANOVA statistics.

	Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
1	Regression	1412.040	2	706.020	27.654	0.002
	Residual	2786.960	237	11.7593		
	Total	4199.000	239			

a. Dependent variable: Y; b. Predictors: (Constant), X1, X2, X3.

Table 4. Results of the descriptive statistics.

	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI for mean		Min	Max
				Lower	Upper		
Transformational leadership	16.78	2.57	0.157	14.367	19.193	4.00	20.00
Transactional leadership	13.75	1.98	0.138	11.908	15.592	1.00	16.00
Laissez-faire leadership	12.23	1.87	0.141	10.501	13.959	1.00	16.00

Table 5. Post hoc test.

Turkey HSD		Mean difference	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Transformational	Transactional	3.03	0.472	0.001	1.14	5.62
	Laissez-Faire	4.55	0.471	0.038	2.99	7.47
Transactional	Transformational	−3.03	0.397	0.001	−5.62	−1.14
	Laissez-Faire	1.52	0.409	0.049	−0.14	4.34
Laissez-Faire	Transformational	−4.55	0.469	0.038	−7.47	−2.99
	Transactional	−1.52	0.413	0.049	−4.34	0.14

Dependent variable: competency acquisition.

Table 6. Regression equation coefficients for three leadership styles with competency acquisition.

Variables	R^2	F	B	SE	β	β	Sig.
Constant			17.084	3.291		11.81	0.001
Transformational	0.37	205.98	1.561	0.052	0.781	15.94	0.023
Constant			13.863	2.027		12.03	0.017
Transactional	0.23	153.43	1.115	0.038	0.499	17.28	0.061
Constant			11.396	2.913		13.12	0.034
Laissez-Faire	0.18	126.11	1.001	0.038	0.477	16.62	0.055

acquisition. That is, transformational leadership recorded $F(1, 237) = 205.982$, p-value = 0.023 with $R^2 = 0.37$ explains a variance of 37% and Beta value of 0.781 denoting a significant relationship that transformational leadership style predicts

competency Acquisition. Then, Transactional leadership style recorded $F(1, 237)$ = 153.431, p-value = 0.061 with R^2 = 0.23 explains a variance of 23%, and Beta value of 0.499 denoting an insignificant relationship that transactional leadership style does not support competency acquisition under COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Laissez-faire recorded $F(1, 237)$ =126.111, p-value = 0.055 with R^2 = 0.18 explains a variance of 18%, and Beta value of 0.477 denoting an insignificant relationship that under COVID-19 pandemic laissez-faire leadership style does not predict competency acquisition.

5. Discussion

This study sought to analyze a leadership style most suitable for competency acquisition in apprenticeship training in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The test results on the Full Range of Leadership Model found that three leadership styles proved to be significant in forming Full Range of Leadership variable. Based on the research results that have been presented, the following findings can now be summarized as follows: first, transformational leadership is the strength behind enhancing competency acquisition in apprentices in various trades in the Zimbabwean Apprenticeship Training Programs in terms of making appropriate strategic learning and training decisions during the pandemic. In that regard transformational leadership style occupies a very high position among all leadership styles. During the COVID-19 pandemic situation, there were unknowns and uncertainties and trainees need social-emotional care and awareness the most. Of which, without social emotional care, trainees suffer from anxiety, sadness and lack of discipline during training. However, transformational leadership style brings in the component of close closeness of all learning and development issues between the trainer and his/her trainees which spark trainee's self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and appropriate decision making. Consequently, trainees would acquire the necessary competency despite the harsh situation.

The pandemic situation posed serious threats to training and development. These pandemic induced restrictions including but not limited to work from home, limited human movement, lockdowns and salary cuts have retarded the competency acquisition drive. Further to that, although staff members could work from home, it was difficult for trainees to "train from home". However, transformational leaders swiftly intervened by intensifying communication links and utilizing online virtual platforms. These initiatives provided guidance, assurance and hope to a hopeless situation that engulfed the training ecosystem. The transformational leaders expressed themselves optimistically, enthusiastically, arousing awareness about important issues and sought different views and ways of navigating training in this unprecedented situation. Upon realizing the individualized attention and high ethical and moral standards of the leaders, trainees believed in these leaders and embraced the new process of acquiring skills. These characteristics that transformational leaders have, allowed the improvisation of the training process and it also

enhanced the adoption of digital technology and it has proven to help the competency acquisition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it has created innovative and creative new normal of learning and development for trainees. These results support previous research which found that transformational leadership practices enable organizations to innovate and adapt to changing environments (Nguyen, et al., 2019; Muchiri et al., 2020). Therefore, as this situation gets worse due to COVID-19 pandemic, the courage of the transformational leaders to bring the company out of this difficult situation is imminent.

Secondly, the findings also show that the two other remaining leadership styles: transactional leadership and laissez-faire, although they are necessary for the organizations, they continue to occupy very low positions in terms of predicting and influencing competency acquisition in apprenticeship training under the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, they are not sufficient to take competency acquisition to a higher level during pandemics because situations like these require teamwork. Since Laissez-faire leaders avoid making decisions and abdicate their responsibilities, it delay setting priorities and actions which may be crucial in a pandemic situation. Instead, such leaders prefer the employees to complete their work in a manner they prefer, which may be incongruent with the crisis at hand. Hence it tends to ignore followers. Such type of leadership may be appropriate to employees who are specialists in their respective fields. However, apprenticeship training is still a process of acquiring specialized skills in preferred trades and in that case, if laissez-faire leadership is adopted in the training ecosystem, it results in negative consequences and stresses among trainees because the leader has nothing to offer. Which in this case, is the opposite to the characteristics of the transformational and transactional leaders. This is supported by extant of literature which claim that a laissez-faire leader is similar to an absentee leader (Achhnani, 2020).

Similarly, in transactional leadership style, the organization leaves everything on the shoulders of the leader the same way leaders would leave everything to the employees. Again, this style of leadership is responsive and works within the organizational cultural context without also being proactive to working to change the organizational culture by implementing new ideas. This set up will not support competency acquisition in uncertain situations which require innovativeness, consideration and team work to get out of the doldrums caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Instead this situation requires transformational leaders who act as mentors and advisors, who pay attention to personal development, training and learning of trainees as well as meeting their needs. This is in line with previous research that transformational leaders provide challenges, broader perspectives, respect, trust, and act as role models for their employees (Breuer & Szillat, 2019; Chan et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Erden & Yaşlioğlu, 2020).

A "learn on the job" experience, like apprenticeship has been impacted and has changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic has sparked rapid developments of innovations and creativity in handling apprentice-

ship training and it is difficult to imagine that life will return to normalcy any time soon even when the pandemic resolves. Even though in-person learning will always remain to be an essential component of apprenticeship training, online learning may prove to be on one hand a highly effective and flexible supplement and on the other hand a better alternative.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

There are various drawbacks to this article. Firstly, in view of the restrictions imposed to control COVID-19, the study used online survey which has ethical and validity concerns. Therefore, the study recommends them to be addressed in future studies by adopting other methodology. Secondly, the study examines the role of full range of leadership on competency acquisition under the COVID-19 era, yet there may be, of course, several other variables that enhances competency acquisition. Therefore, it is recommended that these be found, explored and examined. Secondly, studies carried out in the apprenticeship programs cannot be prevalent in other on-the-job training programs like graduate training, upskilling and multiskilling programs, hence further studies on this subject is strongly recommended to cover other on-the-job training programmes in industry. Last, the study recommends organizational leaders to become technology literate and knowledgeable with many things including but not limited to Web-based training which can be delivered to learners live through a web supported by cloud based tools for access, administration, simulation, demonstrations, trouble shooting and assessments. It can also be delivered as part of blended training. These web based training systems can be used as a model for further and future on-the-job training system which should be supported by appropriate Information Computer Technology Infrastructure for both the organization and the trainee. For example, plant machinery and equipment can be linked to the remote trainer through the internet and trainees can be trained, instructed and assessed during their real work experience while in their work stations.

7. Conclusion

This study proves that the transformational leadership style is relevant in enhancing the continued competency acquisition process among trainees that changed drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These results indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, charismatic behavior of managers, innovativeness, consideration, intellectual stimulation and adaptive leadership role of managers are the main characteristics that gave impetus to enable managers to remain focused on training and development of their employees despite the challenging environment. During this pandemic, it is suggested that the leadership should broaden their perspectives in every problem solving, give more detailed attention to each individual employee and increase their accuracy on certain targets which suit the duties and competencies of trainees. Again, leaders need to spread senses of optimism and enthusiasm that every problem faced will certainly be resolved imme-

diately, specifically during pandemic pressure. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a learning opportunity for organizations to re-frame what they would expect from their organizational leaders in terms of providing leadership in the way they train and assess their trainees. In that regard, the adoption of transformational leadership style is fundamentally a clear and unavoidable responsibility for organizations to effectively cope in this new normal for competency acquisition and consequently organizational performance.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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