



Transactional Leadership and Its Impact on Instructors' Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study focuses on identifying instructors' perspectives toward their rectors' transactional leadership and exploring its role in influencing instructors' job satisfaction in private higher education institutes in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and multiple linear regressions, the research involved 304 instructors selected through simple random sampling, with careful instructions provided to ensure accurate responses. Findings revealed that instructors hold positive views of their rectors' transactional leadership and job satisfaction levels, with a moderately high correlation between transactional leadership and job satisfaction ($R = 0.67$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.445$, $p = 0.000$). Specifically, rectors' transactional leadership significantly influences extrinsic job satisfaction but not intrinsic job satisfaction, indicating that while it plays a crucial role, it may not be sufficient on its own. These results align with previous studies and highlight the need to explore additional leadership styles and factors affecting intrinsic job satisfaction. Practically, the study suggests that institutional leaders should ensure fair salaries, conducive working conditions, strong interpersonal relationships, and performance-based rewards to enhance job satisfaction among instructors.

Keywords: Instructors' job satisfaction, Instructors' perspective, Rectors, Transactional leadership.

Introduction

Leadership refers to the capability, motivation, and self-confidence of each leader in leading subordinates to execute the tasks to achieve the set goal (Northouse, 2025). In educational settings, effective leadership from principals, directors, or rectors plays a crucial role in shaping instructors' performance and adaptability by instilling confidence in the institution's direction (Tep et al., 2025). Numerous studies have emphasized that different leadership styles can influence instructors' job satisfaction in distinct ways (Bogler & Berkovich, 2022; Sithy Safeena & Thowfeek Ahamed, 2020).

Among these styles, transactional leadership (TL) has been widely studied for its impact on subordinates' motivation and satisfaction (Ran et al., 2024). TL is grounded in the principle of structured exchanges, where leaders clarify roles and expectations in return for performance. It emphasizes values such as honesty, responsibility, and reciprocity (Nurlina, 2022). When implemented effectively by educational leaders, TL can significantly enhance instructors' job satisfaction, motivating them to perform their duties more diligently and align with institutional goals (Nazim, 2016; Worthy et al., 2020). It also helps establish a structured, goal-oriented environment conducive to performance and morale (Agwoje & Okeleke, 2023; Mefi-Hawkins, 2021).



Instructors' job satisfaction (IJS) remains a key concern in both academic and professional contexts. Satisfied instructors are generally more motivated, productive, and committed, while dissatisfaction can lead to reduced performance and disengagement (Lokaninda et al., 2024; Lubis, 2024). Recent research highlights widespread dissatisfaction among instructors, particularly due to low salaries, excessive workloads, limited career advancement, and insufficient administrative support (Ahmad et al., 2024; Otundo Richard, 2024; Tep & Rosli, 2025). Although leadership has been recognized as a critical factor in shaping job satisfaction (Som et al., 2024), there is still limited empirical evidence on how rectors' transactional leadership (RTL) specifically affects IJS within Cambodia's higher education sector.

To fill this gap, the current study aims to examine instructors' perceptions of RTL and assess the impact of RTL on IJS in private higher education institutions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Importantly, the research hypothesis is addressed (H_0): There is no impact of RTL on IJS in private higher education institutes in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. To achieve the stated objectives, the researcher applied descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard deviation) and multiple linear regression. This hypothesis is constructed based on evidences from previous literature review stating that TL has significant impact on job performance. Hence, the current study may pave the way for effective TL practices in shaping IJS to a high level.

Transactional Leadership Theory for Rectors

The researcher applied the TL theory as the independent variable in the study. TL, a component of full-range leadership, emphasizes structure, performance, and goal-oriented supervision. It relies on a system of rewards and penalties to promote follower compliance (Avolio et al., 1999), making it particularly effective in managing job satisfaction in the short term. The theory comprises three key dimensions: Contingent Reward (CR), which focuses on setting clear expectations and providing incentives for meeting goals (Bass, 1985); Active Management-by-Exception (AM), where leaders closely monitor performance and address issues proactively (Eğriboyun, 2019); and Passive Management-by-Exception (PM), where leaders intervene only after significant problems arise (Avolio et al., 1999).

In education institution context, TL theory is highly applicable to rectors, who must maintain institutional discipline, enforce policies, and uphold performance standards (Abie et al., 2024; Hieng et al., 2024). By implementing a structured system of expectations and reward mechanisms—such as promotions, salary increments, or formal recognition—rectors can enhance faculty motivation and accountability (Naing, 2022). This leadership style supports institutional efficiency by fostering adherence to academic guidelines and clearly defined roles. Additionally, TL helps address extrinsic job satisfaction (EJS) factors, such as salary, working conditions and interpersonal relations, thereby contributing to a professional and goal-oriented work culture (Fietkau, 2018). However, while TL effectively sustains performance, its short-term focus may hinder long-term development, innovation, and intrinsic motivation (Dong, 2023).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory for Instructors' Job Satisfaction

In this study, the researcher applies Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory for Job Satisfaction since it is the extent to which employees experience positive feelings toward their job and work settings (Joanna & Jerzy, 2020). In an educational context, instructors are satisfied with their job, they have a positive emotional response toward their work and workplace environment (Joanna & Jerzy, 2020; Judge et al., 2020). Additionally, it significantly impacts instructors' teaching effectiveness, creativity, and commitment to institutional goals (Nurjanah & Suherman, 2022). It consists of intrinsic factors, such as intellectual growth and autonomy, aligning with Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs, and extrinsic factors, including salary, job security, working condition (WC), and interpersonal relationship (IR) (James, 2020; Lee, 2017; Tep & Rosli, 2025). These extrinsic factors play significant roles in enhancing human's motivation, which can also lead to high performance and institutional success (Tep, 2022, 2025). These elements collectively enhance instructors' overall well-being and their ability to thrive professionally (Rahmadhanti & Gustomo, 2024).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding IJS within the educational context. According to Maslow, individuals have a series of hierarchical needs—physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—that must be met sequentially for optimal motivation and satisfaction (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Olcum & Titrek, 2015). Instructors' physiological needs are addressed through adequate compensation and manageable workloads, ensuring they have the basic resources necessary for daily living. Safety needs encompass job security and a stable working environment, which are crucial for instructors to feel secure in their roles. The need for love and belonging is fulfilled through positive relationships with colleagues and students, fostering a sense of community within the institution. Esteem needs are met when instructors receive recognition and respect for their professional contributions, enhancing their self-worth. Finally, opportunities for professional development and academic freedom allow instructors to achieve self-actualization by reaching their full potential in teaching and research. When these hierarchical needs are adequately satisfied, instructors are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and remain committed to their educational institutions (Abbas, 2020; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023).

The Previous Studies of Rectors' Transactional Leadership and Instructors' Job Satisfaction

There were numerous empirical studies have corroborated the positive link between RTL and IJS. For instance, Nazim (2016) studied the connection between RTL and IJS in a province in Pakistan. There were 215 teachers, who were selected from 43 colleges, who participated in this quantitative research, and Pearson correlation and t-test were used to analyze the data. Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) which was developed by Weiss et al. (1967), was used to measure the satisfaction of individuals having twenty aspects of the working environment. The result exhibited a positive relationship between RTL and IJS ($r = 0.259$, $p = 0.000$). Hence, the rectors need to understand instructors' needs to apply the correct

leadership to influence them to perform their tasks effectively. Nazim recommended future researchers use a larger sample size to generalize consequences.

Similarly, quantitative research by Angriani et al. (2020) consisting of 38 instructors at the economic faculty, UNITOMO, Surabaya, Indonesia applied Smart PLS to discover the effects of RTL on IJS. They also found that RTL influences IJS significantly ($p = 0.019$). The study also found that instructors lack research support which leads to dissatisfaction and low performance in the organization. The researchers suggested that leaders provide rewards to instructors based on their job performance, and this performance is affected by the high level of job satisfaction. IJS also fosters the success of the higher education institutions. Future research should focus more on the type of leadership that influences IJS since the study only consisted of 38 participants in one faculty. Moreover, research and development in higher education institutions should also be studied more in future studies since it can also foster IJS.

In addition, Azizaha et al. (2020) used SEM from Smart PLS software to research the effects of TL on Islamic university IJS. The 120 samples were collected through a questionnaire from instructors in Jakarta electronically. The results showed that TL has significant effects on IJS ($p = 0.000$). School rectors or leaders should lead the institution by providing rewards to instructors since rewards are significant catalysts to motivate instructors to perform their teaching tasks better. Furthermore, the researchers suggested future studies be conducted by discovering perspectives from instructors toward their rectors in more detail by focusing on different demographic information of instructors, and to enlarge the sample size in other areas.

However, Maheshwari (2022) explored the influence of directors' TL on teachers and their job satisfaction in Vietnam. This quantitative study consisted of 144 public school teachers, and the factor path analysis was used to analyze the result. The findings showed a negative relationship between the leaders and job satisfaction of teachers ($r = -0.51, -0.58, -0.04$). Maheshwari drew a recommendation that other studies should be conducted more in different school context levels and environments. Besides, other studies should focus on different gender of leaders and teachers since these factors might show different outcomes based on respondents' gender. In addition, Asbari (2024) discovered the link between principals' TL and job satisfaction of teachers. The researcher applied the Smart PLS tool with 856 samples randomly selected from the population in Jabodetabek. Surprisingly, the result showed that the principals' style did not have any influence on teachers' job satisfaction ($p = 0.402$). Hence, future research should be done more by focusing on different dimensions of job satisfaction such as salary factors or the work environment. Furthermore, other researchers should concentrate on teachers' perception of their principal's leadership based on different demographic information since it might affect the result generalization differently.

Based on the previous literature, the researcher found that previous studies did not mention in detail the effect of TL on IJS and IEJS. Furthermore, there were limited studies conducted in the Cambodian context to discover the influence of TL on job satisfaction, especially in

higher education institutions. Therefore, the researcher investigated the impact of RTL on IJS in private higher education institutes in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Methodology

Research Design

The simple random sampling, a part of quantitative design, is applied in this study since it is convenient and straightforward. Additionally, it provides the ability to test the research hypothesis objectively, ensuring the reliability of the findings (Yilmaz, 2013). Furthermore, this design reduces researcher unfairness since the interpretation of data is based on statistical analysis rather than subjective interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Research Population and Samples

The researcher selected four PHES in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. Among these universities, there were 388 population and 304 samples were selected from those four universities based on Krejcie & Morgan sampling technique (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Among these 388 populations, most of them are male lecturers. In addition, most of them hold the master degree. In this study, simple random sampling was employed to ensure that each lecturer within the target population had an equal and independent chance of being selected. A complete list of lecturers was obtained from each institution, and a random number generator was used to select 304 participants. This approach minimizes selection bias and enhances the likelihood that the sample accurately represents the larger population. As a result, the findings of this study can be more confidently generalized to the broader lecturer population within the selected universities.

Table 1. Sampling selection

N	Higher education institution (Pseudonym)	Population	Sample
1	A	95	76
2	B	86	70
3	C	126	92
4	D	81	66
Total		388	304

Research Instruments Reliability and Validity

There are two main research instruments implemented in this study. The first instrument is "RTL" which consists of three sub-dimensions such as CR, AM, and PM (Bass, 1985). There are 5 items per dimension and 15 items for the whole independent variable. The second instrument is "job satisfaction", which is captured using 20 items adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1958), focusing on intrinsic job satisfaction (5 items) and extrinsic job satisfaction (15 items) which includes adequate salary, WC, and IR between the rector and instructors. Hence, the questionnaire contains 35 items.

To test the reliability of the research instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot test with 40 participants, and the Cronbach alpha value of each variable falls in the "good" category (α of IV = 0.872, α of DV = 0.819). To be considered reliable, a coefficient of 0.70 or higher is required (Sharma, 2016). Hence, this result shows the high internal consistency reliability of research instruments which will show a reliable result.

Table 2. Construct validity

X²	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
7964	557	< 0.001	0.357	0.313	0.209

Table 2 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted to assess construct validity. The model yielded a chi-square value (χ^2) of 7964 with 557 degrees of freedom, and the associated p-value was less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference between the model and the observed data. While this result and the high chi-square/df ratio suggest poor model fit, it is important to note that the chi-square statistic is highly sensitive to sample size. Additionally, key fit indices—CFI (0.357), TLI (0.313), and RMSEA (0.209)—fall outside the generally accepted thresholds, indicating limited construct validity of the model. However, despite these limitations, the questionnaire items demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 across all constructs, reflecting acceptable reliability. These findings highlight the need for future refinement and validation of the measurement model in subsequent studies.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire comprises three segments (demographic characteristics, IP toward their RTL, and RTL and IJS), and it was distributed to instructors who are teaching at selected universities, academic year 2024-2025. The researcher cautiously gave the questionnaire to instructors, clearly instructed, and facilitated the process. Additionally, the surveys were gathered, and the data was inserted into SPSS (version 26) for analyzing the outcomes. Furthermore, the researcher also applied descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) to outline IP toward RTL, and multiple linear regression to explore the influence of RTL on IJS in private higher education institutes in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Findings

After undergoing a thorough process of data insertion and analysis, the researcher discovered fruitful findings which are exhibited in the following points. Firstly, the researcher shows the respondents' demographic information, and descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation). Then, the researcher displays the inferential statistic (Multiple Linear Regression).

Respondents' Demographic Information**Table 3.** Demographic information

Description (N = 304)		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	211	69.40
	Female	93	30.60
Age	Below 30 years	23	7.60
	30 - 40 years	188	61.80
	41 - 50 years	89	29.30
	More than 50 years	4	1.30
Educational level	Bachelor's Degree	1	0.30
	Master's Degree	252	81.90
	PhD's Degree	49	16.10
	Post-Doctoral Degree	2	0.70

Based on Table 3, the demographic profile of the 304 respondents reveals that the majority were male, accounting for 69.40% (n = 211), while females made up 30.60% (n = 93). This number shows that there are fewer female instructors who are teaching in higher education in Cambodia. In terms of age distribution, most participants were between 30 and 40 years old (61.80%, n = 188), followed by those aged 41 to 50 years (29.30%, n = 89). A smaller proportion were below 30 years (7.60%, n = 23), and only 1.30% (n = 4) were older than 50 years. Regarding educational qualifications, the vast majority held a Master's degree (81.90%, n = 252), while 16.10% (n = 49) had obtained a PhD. A very small number of respondents held a Bachelor's degree (0.30%, n = 1) or a post-Doctoral degree (0.70%, n = 2). These findings indicate that the sample predominantly consisted of highly educated individuals, primarily in their early to mid-career stages, with a notable male majority.

Descriptive Statistics of Rectors' Transactional Leadership and Instructors' Job Satisfaction**Table 4.** Mean and S.D. of RTL and IJS

Variable	Dimension	M	S.D.	Meaning
RTL	CR	4.38	0.48	High
	AM	4.68	0.50	Highest
	PM	3.25	0.63	Moderate
Overall RTL		4.10	0.37	High
IJS	IIJS	4.11	0.16	High
	IEJS	4.11	0.28	High
	Salary	4.15	0.29	High
	WC	4.10	0.32	High
	IR	4.08	0.33	High
Overall IJS		4.11	0.18	High

Table 4 shows the overall mean of IP toward their transactional leaders in a high category (M = 4.10). The subdimension with the highest mean is "AM" (M = 4.68), which shows that instructors prefer their leaders to take action immediately when a problem arises. CR is also an important factor for leaders to consider since it is at a high mean level (M = 4.38). PM is

the lowest mean in a moderate mean level ($M = 3.25$), which expresses instructors do not prefer the absence of problem-solving from their rectors.

Furthermore, the overall mean of all dimensions of job satisfaction falls in the high value. Overall, the results show that IP toward their job satisfaction is high and positive. When considering each dimension of job satisfaction, the result shows that "salary" is the highest mean ($M = 4.15$), which explains that instructors are more satisfied with their jobs when they receive a suitable salary. The dimension with the lowest mean is "IR" ($M = 4.08$). This result reveals that, among the three dimensions of extrinsic job satisfaction, the relationship within the institution influences IJS the least compared to the other dimensions.

(H₀): There is no influence of Rectors' Transactional Leadership and Instructors' Job Satisfaction in Cambodian Private Higher Educational Sector in Phnom Penh.

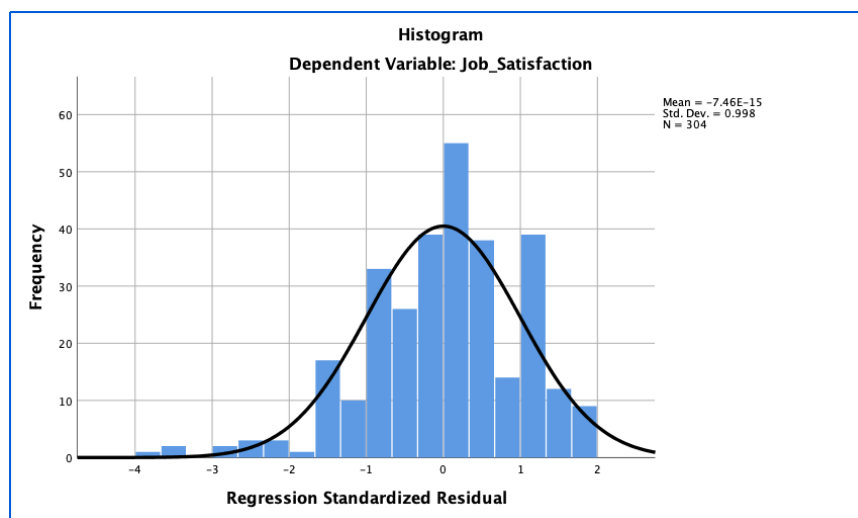


Figure 1. Histogram

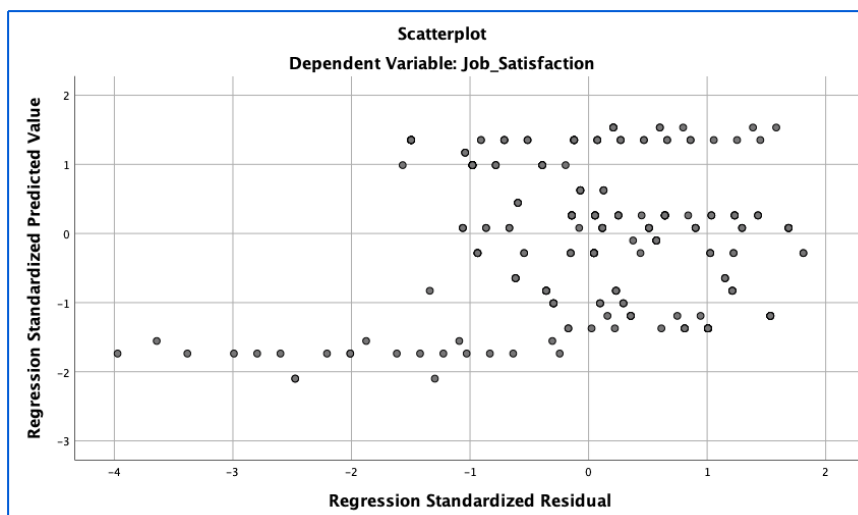


Figure 2. Scatterplot

Before conducting regression analysis, the key assumptions of linear regression were assessed (as shown in figure 1 and figure 2). The histogram of standardized residuals showed a bell-shaped, approximately symmetrical distribution centered around zero, indicating that the assumption of normality of residuals was satisfied. The scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values displayed a fairly random and dispersed pattern without any clear curvature or funnel shape, suggesting that the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity (equal variance) were met. These results confirm that the residuals are normally distributed, and the variance is consistent across levels of the predicted values. Therefore, the data met the required conditions for conducting reliable linear regression analysis.

Furthermore, all key assumptions of linear regression were tested before conducting the analysis. The histogram of standardized residuals indicated that residuals were approximately normally distributed. The scatterplot of standardized residuals against predicted values showed no clear pattern, supporting linearity and homoscedasticity. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 3, and tolerance values were above 0.3. Therefore, all assumptions of the regression model were adequately met.

Table 5. Regression analysis of RTL and IJS (N = 304)

Dimension	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p-value
H ₀ : RTL and IJS	0.324	0.105	0.102	0.000***
RTL and IIJS	0.107	0.011	0.008	0.063
RTL and IEJS	0.474	0.225	0.223	0.000***
RTL and Salary	0.429	0.184	0.181	0.000***
RTL and WC	0.460	0.211	0.209	0.000***
RTL and IR	0.392	0.154	0.151	0.000***

Table 5 expressed a significant relationship between RTL and IJS since $p = 0.000$. The value of $R = 0.324$ shows a slightly high correlation between RTL and IJS. Also, the adjusted $R^2 = 0.102$ shows that IJS is affected by RTL 10.20 %. There might be other external factors (89.80 %) that were not included in the study that also affected IJS. This limitation raises problems that should be mentioned in future studies to include other factors such as different leadership or organizational culture which might have effects on IJS. Furthermore, there is not a significant relationship between RTL and IIJS since $p > 0.05$. Hence, there is no correlation between RTL and IIJS, and RTL does not affect IIJS. This result explains that lecturers may value autonomy over transactional rewards, or they may intrinsically motivated in their career. In addition, this insignificant result may cause by other factors besides TL.

Furthermore, based on Table 2 above, all variables have significant connection with each other since $p = 0.000$. Firstly, the value of $R = 0.474$ shows a positive moderate correlation between RTL and IEJS. Also, the adjusted $R^2 = 0.223$ shows that IEJS is affected by RTL 22.30 %. In addition, there are three subdimension of IEJS. Based on the table, RTL has a moderate positive correlation with all subdimensions of IEJS. Salary is predicted by RTL 18.10 %, WC is predicted by RTL 20.90%, and IR is predicted by RTL 15.10 %.

Additionally, the research found other details results between each subdimension of RTL and IJS which are described below.

Table 6. Regression analysis of CR, AM, PM and IJS and IEJS

Dimension	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p-value
CR and IJS	0.552	0.304	0.302	0.000***
CR and IIJS	0.033	0.001	-0.002	0.567
CR and IEJS	0.682	0.466	0.464	0.000***
AM and IJS	0.603	0.364	0.362	0.000***
AM and IIJS	0.159	0.025	0.022	0.005**
AM and IEJS	0.674	0.454	0.452	0.000***
PM and IJS	0.339	0.115	0.112	0.000***
PM and IIJS	0.339	0.115	0.112	0.000***
PM and IEJS	0.234	0.055	0.052	0.000***

The evidence from Table 6 shows a moderate positive correlation between CR (the first dimension of TL) and IJS and IEJS. Furthermore, IJS is affected by CR 30.20 %, and IEJS is influenced by CR 46.40 %; while CR does not have any influence on IIJS. Furthermore, the results also demonstrate a moderate positive relationship between AM (the second dimension of TL) and IJS, and IJS is predicted by AM at 36.20 %. Also, there is a slight correlation between AM and IIJS, and IIJS is predicted by AM only 2.20 %. Moreover, AM has a moderate positive correlation with IEJS, and IEJS is predicted by AM at 45.20 %. Moreover, Table 3 displays that PM (the third dimension of TL) has a slightly high correlation with IJS and its subdimensions, IIJS and IEJS. The statistic indicates that IJS is predicted by PM 11.20 %, IIJS is predicted by PM 11.20 %, and IEJS is predicted by PM only 5.20 %.

Discussion

The findings are categorized into two main sections, descriptive and regression analysis. Based on the descriptive statistics, instructors have positive perspectives toward their RTL, and RTL influences IJS positively. To clarify this descriptive result, the researcher also found statistically significant outcomes between RTL and IJS based on the multiple linear regression analysis. The findings maintained the evidences from previous research that RTL implements vital roles in enhancing IJS (Angriani et al., 2020; Azizaha et al., 2020; Nazim, 2016). Evidences from previous literature revealed that TL is significant for school principals, rectors, or directors to foster job satisfaction within educators and academic staff. Furthermore, the current result found a moderate positive relationship between RTL and IJS, while a study by Maheshwari (2022) found negative relationship between RTL and IJS, and Asbari (2024) found no significant influence at all. Hence, this study has filled the gap which was not mentioned in the literature review.

This result aligns with prior studies, which consistently emphasize the positive influence of transactional leadership on job satisfaction in educational contexts (Angriani et al., 2020; Azizaha et al., 2020; Nazim, 2016). Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a more detailed view of how different subdimensions of RTL—Contingent

Reward (CR), Active Management-by-Exception (AM), and Passive Management-by-Exception (PM)—relate to instructors' job satisfaction (IJS), particularly extrinsic job satisfaction (IEJS). Notably, RTL was found to significantly influence IEJS but had no significant relationship with intrinsic job satisfaction (IIJS). This finding partially supports Bass and Avolio's Full-Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which characterizes transactional leadership as a leadership approach focused on short-term, performance-based rewards rather than fulfilling intrinsic developmental needs. In this study, CR—represented by behaviors such as clarifying expectations, discussing rewards in advance, and offering praise and recognition—had a strong positive effect on IEJS. Similarly, AM, which involves proactively monitoring performance, addressing irregularities, and ensuring tasks are completed according to standards, was also significantly associated with higher IEJS. Although PM showed a weaker influence, it still contributed positively, indicating that even reactive oversight—such as intervening only when problems escalate—can play a role in shaping satisfaction linked to institutional structure and expectations. These insights emphasize that structured feedback, reward systems, and timely intervention are key drivers of extrinsic motivation and satisfaction among instructors.

The significant relationship between RTL and IEJS can be interpreted through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, particularly at the lower levels of physiological and safety needs. Instructors' job satisfaction increases when their fundamental needs—such as adequate salary, fair working conditions, and supportive relationships—are met. Transactional leadership, through its structured and reward-based approach, directly addresses these needs. Rectors who ensure salary increments, fair policy implementation, and organized work environments foster a sense of stability and recognition, contributing to higher levels of extrinsic satisfaction.

In contrast, the lack of a significant relationship between RTL and IIJS reveals a theoretical limitation of transactional leadership. IIJS is closely linked with higher-order psychological needs—such as self-actualization, professional autonomy, and a sense of purpose—that are typically fulfilled by more empowering leadership styles like transformational leadership. Instructors driven by intrinsic motivation often find satisfaction in their love of teaching, personal growth, and intellectual engagement, regardless of their leaders' transactional behaviors. Moreover, such instructors may be less responsive to performance-based incentives or oversight and more influenced by opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and academic freedom—factors that RTL does not directly address.

The Cambodian context adds further nuance to these findings. In Cambodia's higher education system, leadership is often hierarchical and compliance-focused. Instructors frequently prioritize job security and basic compensation due to broader socioeconomic conditions, which explains the strong effect of RTL on IEJS. However, intrinsic motivators such as autonomy and professional development may not be institutionally supported or emphasized, reducing the likelihood that RTL can impact IIJS. This is consistent with

cultural-contextual theories suggesting that the effectiveness of leadership styles varies across cultural settings (House et al., 2004)

Compared to previous studies, the current research offers more nuanced insights. For instance, while Maheshwari (2022) reported a negative relationship and Asbari (2024) found no relationship between RTL and IJS, our study shows a moderate, positive association. This difference may arise from contextual and methodological variations, such as the type of educational institutions studied, national culture, or the specific leadership practices of rectors. Unlike prior research, this study also examined the influence of RTL on individual dimensions of job satisfaction, filling a critical gap in the literature.

Furthermore, the study reveals that Contingent Reward (CR) and Active Management-by-Exception (AM) are the most effective RTL components in improving IEJS. Rectors who establish clear expectations and provide rewards for meeting institutional goals can enhance instructors' sense of fairness and motivation. Likewise, AM proves valuable when rectors address challenges proactively, fostering a stable and responsive work environment. However, Passive Management-by-Exception (PM), though slightly effective, should be used cautiously, as it may signal indifference or lack of engagement from leadership.

In contrast, none of the RTL dimensions significantly influenced IIJS. This suggests that to improve intrinsic satisfaction, rectors may need to integrate elements of transformational leadership—such as individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation—into their practices. Future research might explore the effects of hybrid leadership models in higher education, particularly in settings like Cambodia where both structural clarity and emotional engagement are necessary.

This study confirms that transactional leadership has a limited but important role in influencing instructors' job satisfaction in private higher education institutions in Cambodia. While RTL significantly enhances EJS through structured incentives and oversight, it falls short in addressing intrinsic needs, which are more closely tied to autonomy, purpose, and personal growth. These findings suggest that rectors should adopt a balanced leadership approach, combining transactional clarity with transformational inspiration, to promote holistic instructor satisfaction and institutional commitment.

Conclusions

This study examined the impact of RTL on IJS in higher education. Findings revealed a moderate positive relationship between RTL and IJS, and RTL significantly influenced IEJS but not IIJS. Consequently, RTL plays a vital role in fostering IJS, particularly through addressing extrinsic factors such as WC, salary, and IR. Based on the perception of instructors mentioned in the questionnaire, rectors are advised to adopt proactive leadership practices to enhance satisfaction and institutional commitment. Therefore, the rector, principal, director, or leader who runs the educational business institutions, should provide instructors and academic staff with proper salaries, good working conditions, and good

interpersonal relationships in the institution. Furthermore, providing rewards based on staff performance also contributes to a high level of job satisfaction. The current study's target place is in Phnom Penh, the capital city, which found that there might be other factors (about 55.50%) that might influence IJS, the researcher would like to suggest future research to discover other factors such as different leaderships, in other educational business institutions in other parts of Cambodia besides Phnom Penh city. The study should also be done in other higher institutions in other provinces across the country. Furthermore, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size to generalize the results more effectively and accurately.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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