College Students' Perception of Teachers' Humble Leadership and its Impact on Creativity: The Mediating Role of Trust in Teachers

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	Purpose: Grounded in social exchange theory, this research endeavors to elucidate the mediating effect of trust in teachers within the nexus of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity. **Method:** Survey data were gathered from 556 college students in Jiangxi Province, China, utilizing PROCESS for data analysis. **Findings:** The results showed that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and significantly and positively predicted trust in teachers (B = 1.068, p < 0.001); while trust in teachers significantly and positively predicted creativity (B = 0.204, p < 0.001).

The results of the mediation test show that after including trust in teachers as a mediating variable, the direct relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity still exists and is significant (B = 0.254, p<0.001). However, the first step of the structural model analysis showed a significant positive effect of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership on creativity (B = 0.471, p<0.001). It can be seen that B decreased from 0.471 to 0.254, that is, trust in teachers played a partial mediating role in the significant positive effect of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership on creativity. **Implication to Research and Practice:** The study is unique in its scope and contribution, as it tries to develop an understanding of how college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership foster students' creativity. Therefore, the findings provide theoretical and practical implications into fostering creativity among college students.

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving landscape of science, technology, and global economics, creativity stands out as a pivotal catalyst for social advancement and economic prosperity (Pradhan et al., 2018). Defined as the capacity to generate novel and pertinent ideas or address challenges effectively (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Most countries now consider

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fostering students' creativity as an important educational goal (Zhang, Sun, et al., 2020). All research on excellence in education consistently points out that the key factor in successful education is the teacher, and the ability to successfully cultivate student creativity depends to a large extent on the teachers' leadership style (Guljakhon & Shakhodat, 2020; Ma et al., 2023; San-Martín et al., 2021). Enhancing creativity should start in schools, and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that education encourages and nurtures students' creativity (Shi et al., 2020).

University teachers also act as frontline leaders influencing college students' creativity, who are able to disseminate novel ideas to students and encourage them to think from multiple perspectives, thereby stimulating their creativity (Fan et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2022). Previous research has predominantly examined the impact of traditional "top-down" leadership styles on individual creativity (Gu et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2018). However, emerging studies suggest a departure from the conventional leadership paradigm, advocating for the abandonment of authoritative and heroic leadership ideals in favor of fostering genuine relationships with subordinates and embracing a "bottom-up" leadership approach that promotes mutual growth (Cheng et al., 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Ren et al., 2020).

Compared to traditional leadership styles that emphasize the role of the leader as a "guide", humble leadership emphasizes more the role of the leader as a "nurturer". The concept of humble leadership was first introduced by Owens et al. (2012), who defined humble leadership as the behavior of leaders who are willing to acknowledge their own limitations and mistakes, highlight the strengths and contributions of followers, and emulate the teachability of others, this concept comprises three components: a willingness to view oneself accurately, an appreciation for others' strengths and contributions, and teachability. This concept should be differentiated from other leadership-related concepts, particularly transformational leadership. Specifically, in terms of orientation, Chiu et al. (2022) pointed out that humble leadership emphasizes interpersonal functions and joint learning with followers.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, is characterized by a goal-oriented approach rather than a relationship-oriented one (Ali, Wang, et al., 2020). Regarding leadership style, transformational leaders are often overly narcissistic and self-centered, primarily conveying a clear vision and sense of mission to their followers, leading them to embrace challenges and change (Giampetro-Meyer et al., 1998). In contrast, humble leaders adopt a non-self-centered approach, encouraging role transformation with their followers (Zhang & Song, 2020). In terms of communication patterns, humble leaders encourage members to communicate through both formal and informal channels, whereas transformational leaders rely solely on formal communication channels (Al Hawamdeh, 2022). In summary, humble leadership values interpersonal interaction and team collaboration, emphasizing learning and development, whereas transformational leadership focuses on goal orientation and personal vision, driving innovation and transformation.

In the context of China's high power distance culture, teachers' leadership styles may inadvertently discourage students from exploring new ideas (Xia et al., 2021). Conversely, research has indicated that teachers with a humble leadership style can foster an environment of equal and open communication, are willing to listen to others' feedback and suggestions, and respect individuals' unique contributions, thereby granting students more academic freedom, this kind of environment is conducive to academic discussion and the development of innovative thinking (Ahmad et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2016). There

are also research which indicate that teachers exhibiting humility and adeptness in recognizing and valuing students' abilities and strengths to enhance their sense of self-worth are more likely to stimulate student creativity (Kwok et al., 2022; Owens et al., 2012).

However, in the field of education, research on humble leadership has traditionally focused on the influence of leadership in administrative positions such as school principals or department heads on teachers' behaviors (Oyer, 2015; Qu et al., 2022; Siswadi, 2023). There have been relatively fewer studies examining how teachers' humble leadership predict student performance and behavior, providing empirical support for this relationship. For instance, Kwok et al. (2022) found that teachers' humble leadership fosters positive teacher-student relationships, thereby enhancing college students' motivation to learn. Willis (2021) similarly demonstrated that teachers' humble leadership boosts students' confidence and participation in learning activities, ultimately enhancing their academic performance.

Furthermore, while humble leadership directly impacts individual creativity, there are additional mechanisms influencing creativity (Aboramadan, 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Madjar and Ortiz-Walters (2009) suggested that trust plays a crucial role in enhancing individual creativity. Trust refers to an individual's confidence in the words, actions, and decisions of others, as well as their willingness to act on the suggestions and ideas of others (Ganster et al., 1986). Educational studies have indicated that college students' trust in their teachers can effectively bolster their creativity (Gu et al., 2014). Additionally, Willis (2021) noted that teachers who exhibit humility are more inclined to listen to students' ideas and opinions, fostering a safe learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their views, thereby cultivating trust in teachers. According to social exchange theory, active behavior from one party in social interactions increases the trust of the other party, leading to reciprocal positive behavior (Blau, 1964).

There is a dearth of research on perceptions of teachers' humble leadership in fostering their own creativity (Chen, Lai, et al., 2022) nor much attention has been given to explore the underlying mechanisms of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity through the lens of trust in teachers (Ali, Zhang, et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2020). Hence, a need was felt to examine what factors influence college students' creativity, and how creativity in higher education in China can be better cultivated. This study, therefore, attempted to investigate the impact of Chinese college students' perceptions of teachers' humility on their creativity, particularly in cultural contexts and with practical significance in educational scenario. This study proposed that when teachers are perceived as humble and demonstrate affirmation and praise students' contributions in the learning process, students reciprocate by respecting, trusting, and feeling secure with their teachers, potentially encouraging them to explore new ideas, approaches, and creativity. In summary, this study hypothesizes that trust in teachers may also mediate the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity.

Literature Review and Hypothesis

The Concept of Teachers' Humble Leadership

Teachers' humble leadership is defined as a quality in teachers who can accurately assess their limitations, demonstrate self-awareness, appreciate students' strengths, and remain open to students' ideas and feedback (Kwok et al., 2022). Firstly, willingness to view oneself

accurately involves transparently disclosing personal limitations, acknowledging errors, and seeking realistic feedback. This approach is continuously highlighted in the field of teacher education because when students perceive teachers as upright, honest, and willing to admit mistakes, it fosters trust between them, making students more inclined to communicate with teachers, actively engage in learning (Chan, 2018). Secondly, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions entails an attitude of enhancing others rather than promoting oneself, shifting from a state of mutual comparison and competition when interacting with others to recognizing and admiring their strengths and contributions, displaying behaviors of having positive opinions about others. Examples of such behavior by teachers include recognizing and appreciating students' efforts and achievements, focusing on each student's strengths, and providing them with corresponding respect and support in teaching, thus encouraging them to participate more willingly in learning (Kwok et al., 2022).

Thirdly, teachability means having an open and receptive mindset towards learning, feedback, and new ideas from others. It makes us more willing to learn from others and open to accepting feedback, opinions, and suggestions from others. Additionally, Waseem et al. (2023) suggest that humble leaders possess a broad-mindedness to accept criticism. They can face and accept mistakes with a positive and constructive attitude, subsequently making corrections，they are willing to learn from others and exhibit good adaptability (Oc et al., 2015). A study on teachers and students showed that teachers with an open attitude towards students' opinions and views, willing to accept feedback and suggestions from students, and encouraging students to confidently express their ideas, can stimulate their interest and motivation in learning (Fan et al., 2019). As highlighted by Siswadi (2023), in the process of school education management, humble leaders prioritize maintaining positive relationships and eschew superiority, instead focusing on establishing equitable relationships with others. Humble leaders tend to foster equal and open relationships with teachers and students, promoting mutual respect and cooperation, facilitating student development (Ying et al., 2022). Thus, humble leadership aligns closely with the needs of teachers and students in college organizations, underscoring its significance in educational contexts.

Relationship Between College Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Humble Leadership and Creativity

Chen and Yuan (2021) suggest that teachers can inspire new ideas by encouraging students to explore diverse experiences with an open mindset and fostering creative thinking skills. Similarly, Fan et al. (2019) validates that college students perceive teachers who consider, listen to, and support their ideas and create a supportive environment that enhances psychological safety，thereby facilitating the expression and discussion of new ideas in creative activities and ultimately boosting students' creativity. Willis (2021) pointed out that listening is a behavior of teachers' attention and response to college students, and college students need teachers to listen to them to feel respected, to build their confidence in their studies, and to stimulate academic enthusiasm and motivation, thus achieving better academic performance. Numerous studies in the realm of leadership have demonstrated that humble leaders foster follower creativity (Chen, Liu, et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, drawing parallels with these leadership-related findings, we hypothesize that:

H1: *College students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership significantly and positively correlate with their creativity.*

The Mediating Role of Trust in Teachers

Trust is characterized by an individual's confidence in the words, actions, and decisions of others, coupled with a willingness to act upon their guidance and advice (McAllister, 1995). Rooted in the social exchange theory, trust is a fundamental norm of human behavior; it interacts as exchanges of interpersonal interests, where reciprocity forms the foundation for establishing and sustaining social trust (Blau, 1964). This theory posits that individuals' motivation to generate new ideas stems from the reciprocity they perceive within their social environment (Madrid & Patterson, 2016). From the perspective of social exchange, when students perceive that teachers prioritize their needs, offer support, and attentively listen to their ideas, it signals credibility to students, and the expectation of reciprocal between teachers and students further enhances students' trust in teachers (Bruney, 2012; Ransom, 2020).

As highlighted by Nielsen et al. (2010), humble leaders facilitate a reduction in uncertainty regarding leadership behaviors by embracing generous leadership practices and demonstrating teaching prowess, thereby enhancing followers' trust in leadership. Similarly, empirical research in the educational domain, such as that by Hagenauer and Volet (2014), indicates that when teachers acknowledge or support students during the learning process, students perceive them as approachable, fostering increased reliance on teachers. Additionally, when a teacher exhibits humility and enlightenment, they exhibit a willingness to relinquish authority, sovereignty, and control over students, thereby revealing genuine sentiments, which in turn bolsters students' trust in teachers (Hung, 2013). Following this rationale, it is plausible to posit a positive correlation between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their trust in teachers.

Furthermore, trust, being a psychological state, can exert a positive influence on creativity (Barczak et al., 2010). Madjar et al. (2009) note that trust relationships foster a sense of security in individuals. Pachler et al. (2019) highlight the significance of trust in teachers, emphasizing that when college students perceive a psychologically safe environment, it enhances their willingness to take risks and explore new cognitive approaches without fear of failure. Concurrently, Leighton et al. (2016) suggest that trust in teachers encourages students to be more adventurous and open in their studies, thereby enhancing their ability to express new ideas. Consequently, this study posits that college students' trust in teachers may positively impact their creativity.

In summary of the inferences, we have proposed above, it is suggested that college students' trust in teachers may serve as a mediator between their perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity. However, empirical evidence supporting this notion is currently lacking. In related empirical research within organizational behavior, trust frequently assumes a significant mediating role, particularly in the relationship between executive leadership and creativity (Javed et al., 2018; Jo et al., 2015). For instance, Jo et al. (2015) conducted a study involving 350 employees, confirming that employees' perceptions of leadership styles enhance their creativity through the establishment of trust. Similarly, Javed et al. (2018) surveyed 205 supervisors and discovered that supervisors' trust in leaders acted as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and their creativity. Our aim is to extend these findings to the context of higher education, exploring whether college students' trust in teachers similarly plays a mediating role. Consequently, this study proposes:

H2: *The trust in teachers mediates the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity.*

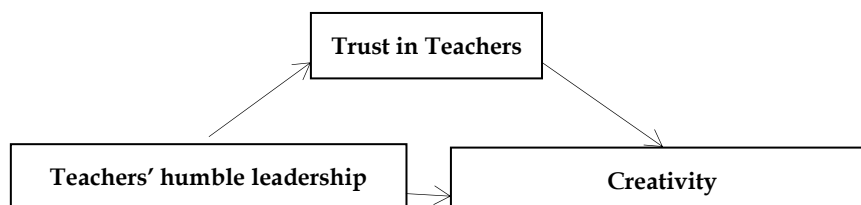In conclusion, the hypothesis model of this study is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: *Hypothetical Model.*

Methodology

Research Design

By making use of a quantitative research design, this study has attempted to shift attention to exploring the relationship between teacher leadership and student creativity (Mao et al., 2020; Sokol et al., 2015; Xia et al., 2021; Zacher & Johnson, 2015). Few studies have investigated the relationship between teachers' humble leadership and students' creativity (Moghimi & Abramishvili, 2022); hence, a study on the impact of educational leadership on student performance was designed with trust in teachers as the mediating factor (Pachler et al., 2019). The model proposed in this study suggests that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership influence their creativity through the mediating role of trust in teachers. This study also examines the possibility of both partial and full mediation models regarding the impact of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership on trust in teachers and creativity.

Participants and Procedures

Convenience sampling was employed to survey college students from two universities in Jiangxi Province, China, who were enrolled in innovative and entrepreneurship education courses. These universities were selected because they are among the first demonstration universities in China to deepen the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education, and their students have demonstrated notable creativity. The reason for selecting only two model universities for this study is that other model universities share homogeneity in terms of guidance, supervision, and financial support from local governments. Therefore, including participants from more model universities is unlikely to significantly affect the research results.

The participants from these two universities were all first-year students who had completed at least one semester of a mandatory course on innovation and entrepreneurship education. Prior to administering the questionnaire, teachers were professionally trained to explain the questionnaire items. Additionally, with the teacher's valuable assistance, we efficiently distributed and collected online questionnaires from college students who voluntarily opted to participate. Conducted through an online anonymous questionnaire platform known as Questionnaire Star (www.wjx.cn) , a total of 556 valid questionnaires were collected. The sample comprised 157 boys (28.2%) and 399 girls (71.8%). Regarding grade distribution, 335 participants (60.3%) were freshmen, 166 (29.9%) were sophomores, 28 (5%) were juniors, and 27 (4.9%) were seniors.

Measurements

College Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Humble Leadership

The humble leadership was assessed using the scale developed by Kwok et al. (2022). This scale comprised nine items across three dimensions: willingness to view oneself accurately, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and teachability. The items were adapted to suit the educational context. For instance, sample items include "when I possess more knowledge or stronger skills than my teacher, my teacher acknowledges this". Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree", with higher scores indicating a stronger perception of humble leadership by college students. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's α values for each dimension. The obtained values were 0.782, 0.915 and 0.881 respectively, for the three dimensions. Additionally, the overall scale yielded a Cronbach's α value of 0.934, which indicated good reliability.

Trust in Teachers

The scale developed by McAllister (1995) was used to measure trust in teachers. This scale comprised 11 items, categorized into two dimensions: affect-based trust and cognition-based trust. For instance, sample items include "I feel comfortable discussing my learning difficulties with my teacher, knowing they will listen attentively". Notably, one item involving cognitive trust was removed due to its reverse scoring nature, consistent with previous research recommendations (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Thus, this study also deleted this question item, resulting in a total of 10 items retained for analysis. Participants rated their agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Higher scores indicate greater trust in the teacher. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficients for affect-based trust and cognition-based trust were 0.924 and 0.933, respectively. Additionally, the overall scale yielded a Cronbach's α value of 0.953, this scale indicates good reliability.

Creativity

The creativity scale developed by Zhou and George (2001) was employed to assess college students' creativity. This scale comprised a single dimension consisting of 13 items. Sample items included "I am capable of suggesting novel approaches to enhance my academic performance." Participants rated their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating higher levels of creativity among college students. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient for the overall creativity scale was 0.939, which indicated strong reliability of the scale.

Data Analysis

The collected data underwent analysis using SPSS, encompassing descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and PROCESS analysis. Additionally, the mediation effects we were validated through 5000 bootstrap samples along with 95% confidence intervals (Hayes et al., 2017).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlation analysis for each variable's dimensions. Based on Pearson's correlation analysis, the correlation coefficients of the variables ranged from 0.575 to 0.787 and all of the correlation coefficients achieved significant level (p< 0.001). The notable high correlation coefficients between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and trust in teachers aligns with prior research demonstrating a similar high correlation between humble leadership and trust in supervisors (Son & Lee, 2023), supporting the rationality of the high correlation.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Variable	M	SD	Teachers' humble leadership	Trust in teachers	Creativity
Teachers' humble leadership	3.658	0.779	1		
Trust in teachers	5.343	1.057	0.787***	1	
Creativity	3.760	0.639	0.575***	0.581***	1

Note. ***p < 0.001

Hypotheses Test

Hayes' (2013) PROCESS model 4 was utilized to examine the mediating effect of trust in teachers on the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity. The results are summarized in Table 2. Firstly, in Model 1, college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership significantly and positively predicted creativity (B = 0.471, p < 0.001), thereby supporting hypothesis 1 of this study. Secondly, in Model 2, college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership significantly and positively predicted trust in teachers (B = 1.068, p < 0.001), and trust in teachers significantly and positively predicted creativity (B = 0.204, p < 0.001).

Table 2

Mediation Model Test

Variables	Model 1 Teachers' humble leadership		Model 2 Trust in teachers		Model 3 Creativity	
	B	t	B	t	B	t
Constants	2.036	19.088***	1.435	10.791***	1.744	15.350***
Teachers' humble leadership	0.471	16.527***	1.068	30.041***	0.254	5.668***
Trust in teachers					0.204	6.175***
R²	0.330		0.620		0.373	
F	273.132***		902.475***		164.782***	

Note: ***p<0.001

Subsequently, in Model 3, the mediation analysis revealed that even after including trust in teachers as the mediating variable, college students' perceptions of teachers' humble

leadership still had a significant positive impact on creativity (B = 0.254, p < 0.010), with coefficients decreasing from 0.471 to 0.254. These findings indicate that trust in teachers partially mediates the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity, thus providing support for hypothesis 2 of this study.

To further investigate this result, bias-corrected nonparametric percentile bootstrap method was conducted to test the mediating effect of trust in teachers. The results indicate that the indirect effect value is 0.218, with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of 0.132-0.298, which excludes 0. Similarly, the direct effect value is 0.254, with a 95% CI of 0.166-0.342, also excluding 0. This suggests that the mediation effect accounts for 46.285% of the total effect, providing further confirmation of the mediation effect of trust in teachers, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Mediation Effect with Bootstrapping

Path	Effect	S.E.	95% LLCI	95% ULCI
Direct effects HL→CR	0.254	0.045	0.166	0.342
Indirect effects HL→TR→CR	0.218	0.042	0.132	0.298
Total effects HL→CR	0.471	0.029	0.415	0.572

Note: Bootstrapping random sampling 5,000 times; LLCI= Lower limit of confidence interval; ULCI= Upper limit of confidence interval; HL=Humble leadership, TR=Trust, CR=Creativity.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership have a significant positive impact on creativity, which aligns with previous research results, indicating that the higher individuals perceive humble leadership style, the higher is their creativity (Aboramadan, 2021; Wang et al., 2019). We propose several potential explanations for these findings. Firstly, teachers employing a humble leadership style demonstrate a willingness to listen to students and support the implementation of new ideas, fostering students' self-awareness and imagination, thus stimulating innovative thinking and independent development among college students (Fan et al., 2019). Secondly, when students perceive teachers as receptive to new ideas and open to alternative perspectives, they take teachers as role models, actively exploring novel and unconventional ideas, thereby enhancing students' creativity (Sun et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the present study revealed that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership impact their creativity by means of the mediating function of trust in teachers. Prior research in organizational behavior has supported the significant positive influence of humble leadership on trust (Al Hawamdeh, 2023; Cho et al., 2021; Liu, 2016). Other studies have indicated a significant positive effect of trust on creativity (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Javed et al., 2018). However, few investigations have delved into the mediating role of trust between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity. The findings of this study contribute additional empirical evidence to existing literature. To elucidate these findings, the study infers that when students perceive that teachers are receptive to their ideas and attentive to their needs, they are more inclined to engage with teachers on an emotional level, thereby fostering trust in teachers (Ransom,

2020). When students trust their teachers, they are more likely to openly share ideas, facilitating effective information and knowledge exchange. This, in turn, enhances students' acquisition of knowledge and stimulates their critical thinking abilities, ultimately fostering creativity (Gu et al., 2014). Notably, the findings of this study diverge from previous research in organizational behavior due to the focus on college students in China. Moreover, the study identifies the partial mediating role of trust in teachers in the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity, thus extending the existing research findings.

The study posits that the social exchange theory offers a viable framework for understanding the underlying mechanisms in the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity. According to the social exchange theory, relationships evolve over time into ones characterized by trust, loyalty, interdependence, and reciprocal expectations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This theory suggests that individuals who receive social, emotional, and economic benefits are inclined to reciprocate with positive attitudes or behaviors (Lee et al., 2019). Applying this logic to the process of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership in fostering creativity, when teachers demonstrate behaviors associated with humble leadership, such as admitting mistakes and limitations, acknowledging students' strengths, and being open to students' ideas, students perceive respect and understanding, leading to reciprocal trust in teachers. Subsequently, trust in teachers serves to further catalyze students' creativity.

In summary, drawing upon the perspective of social exchange theory, the study demonstrates that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership can impact creativity by mediating through trust in teachers. These findings extend the applicability of social exchange theory to the realm of college student creativity and hold significant theoretical implications for future research endeavors. These findings also enhance our comprehension of the link between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity.

Conclusion

This study makes two main contributions. Firstly, it delves into the role of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership in fostering their own creativity. Secondly, it explores the underlying mechanisms of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity through the lens of trust in teachers, thereby making theoretical advancements. In conclusion, this study investigates not only the direct impact of college students perceiving teachers as exhibiting humble leadership but also its indirect influence within the context of higher education in China.

While this study confirms the impact of college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership on creativity and uncovers its underlying mechanisms, there are several limitations to consider. Firstly, the cross-sectional approach used in this study limits the ability to establish causality. Future research could employ longitudinal studies to further investigate the causal relationship. Secondly, the study sample was limited to college students from two universities in Jiangxi Province, China, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the geographical scope of sampling in China to enhance the applicability of the results. Thirdly, while trust in teachers was found to partially mediate the relationship between college students'

perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and creativity, there may be other mediating variables to explore. It is recommended that future researchers consider incorporating additional variables such as psychological safety (Wang et al., 2018b), student engagement (Rasheed et al., 2020), and cognitive flexibility (Chen, He, et al., 2022).

The study also proposed a few recommendations for college administrators and teachers. Firstly, university administrators should prioritize the cultivation of teachers' humble leadership behavior. Given that college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership significantly enhance their creativity, it is imperative to foster a culture of humble leadership among teachers. Administrators can organize seminars related to humble leadership, training sessions, and regular teaching feedback meetings focused on humble leadership to provide teachers with relevant information and strategies for implementation. Secondly, since trust in teachers partially mediates the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' humble leadership and their creativity, enhancing student trust in teachers is paramount. There are several approaches to building trust. Teachers can support students' wishes and be open to accepting their new ideas; Teachers can establish high-quality communication and cooperation with students and ensure fair treatment of students. Importantly, trust is also based on the professionalism of teachers, who should focus on enhancing their knowledge, skills, and reliability to garner respect and admiration from college students.

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