

The Leadership Style of Principals in Teacher Effectiveness: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This is exploratory research analyzing the role of leadership styles of principals in teacher effectiveness in schools. Leadership effectiveness plays a critical role in shaping school culture, the motivation of teachers, as well as general quality of instruction. The research focuses on various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire and their impact on teachers' performance, job satisfaction, and professional development. Using a mixed-methods design, the study gathers data from surveys and interviews of 316 teachers in secondary schools with different bandings. Findings show that transformational leadership characterized by setting vision, mentorship, and inspirational motivation has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness through collaboration, and commitment. However, overly rigid or passive leadership styles may be counterproductive to teacher morale and productivity. The study highlights the necessity for adaptive leadership practices that are particular to school needs, emphasizing the development of trust, communication, and shared decision-making. Recommendations extend from professional development for principals to strengthening their leadership abilities to policy support for cultivating administrative practices. By bridging the gap between leadership theory and classroom performance, this research contributes to the formation of more effective school leadership models and, in turn, student performance.

Keywords

Leadership Styles, Teacher Effectiveness, Transformational Leadership, School Administration, Principal Influence

1. Introduction

School leadership is a critical driver for development, modernization, and innovation in education and directly influences teaching quality and student performance [1]. Principals and teachers are central drivers of academic outcomes, yet debate continues the extent of influence that they can provide. While teachers are responsible for developing students, schooling success and effective teaching practices must be formulated by school leadership to sustain educational success and teacher efficiency [2].

There is substantial evidence of a close relationship between teachers' performance and leadership approaches, with ensuing effects on student outcomes [3]. Effective leadership supports teachers in areas of mentorship, coaching, and professional development, leading to improved instructional as well as non-instructional results [4]. Poor leadership discourages teachers, hence high levels of teacher turnover in addition to reduced educational quality. Untrained teachers and poor leadership negatively affect school effectiveness [5].

Teacher shortages, professional status, and declining job satisfaction make things even more challenging for educational reforms. Teachers are often deprived of autonomy and respect under national policies of the country outlining teachers' roles, which leads to inefficiencies in the system. All these must be tackled by sustained endeavors at developing leadership [6] and promoting teachers to make sustained efforts towards bettering education.

Therefore, successful school leadership is essential in leading teacher performance and pupil attainment, while poor-quality leadership hinders improvement. Policymakers must prioritize leadership development and enabling teachers to enhance learning outcomes.

1.1 Problem Statement

The principal's leadership is critical to school performance and academic achievement of the students. Being the primary accountable person, the principal has the duty of implementing winning strategies to ensure the school is successful. This involves monitoring the overall performance of the institution and maximizing its potential. Having the know-how of various leadership philosophies and styles is essential in influencing the effectiveness of educators and, consequently, organizational success.

Current research echoes the limited number of hypotheses connecting different leadership styles and teacher effectiveness, and it is challenging to create these relationships. The absence of these theories makes understanding the impacts of different types of leadership on educational effectiveness challenging.

Despite the urgency for such studies on these relationships within various school environments, a serious gap exists in the current literature. This reality highlights the necessity to intervene in these matters, since efficient management of the dynamics in schools becomes progressively challenging under these conditions. Thus, an explicit effort to seek and investigate the link between leadership styles and student learning is needed to inform future practice and policy. Bridging this gap is critical in establishing an environment conducive to both student learning and overall school growth.

1.2 Research Objectives

- (a) To investigate the various leadership functions that school principals will play in their respective positions.
- (b) To examine the factors that shape the leadership position taken by principals toward student achievement.
- (c) To explore how the leadership philosophies of principals impact the motivation levels and job satisfaction of teachers.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research aims to examine the relationship between the principal's leadership styles and the success of teachers in education. With an examination of various styles used by principals, the study attempts to identify those dimensions influencing the styles and their implications on teacher satisfaction and motivation at work. These are key relationships to understand for the achievement of educational success. Principals play a crucial role to fulfill in teachers' enjoyment and motivation, which has a direct reflection on instruction quality and students' achievement. Successful leadership styles can help create a healthy and productive learning environment, promote teaching and learning.

The study will bridge existing research gaps by presenting understandings of how different ideologies of leadership influence the performance of teachers, highlighting positive and negative effects. With greater awareness of these dynamics, the study will contribute to the development of strategies that enhance the quality of education and learning achievements at large. These understandings are crucial in informing supportive learning environments within classrooms, leading to increased student accomplishments.

2. Literature Review

The research by Akhtar and Akhtar [7] emphasizes the critical role of effective communication as a leadership skill for school principals. They argue that the efficiency of teachers is significantly influenced by their leaders' communication abilities, particularly in primary education, where strong leadership can enhance resource management and overall performance. The study explored various leadership styles in Karachi's private primary schools, aiming to improve teacher-leader interactions and the learning process. Qualitative interviews with ten teachers revealed that transformational and transactional leadership positively impacted teacher performance, while authoritative leadership had adverse effects.

Moore, Landa and Azad [8] investigated the impact of organizational environments on implementing evidence-based practices in special education. Their study found that school leaders rated special education environments more favorably than general education ones, with positive correlations between effective leadership and implementation climate.

Scholtz [9] contributed to leadership development literature by exploring the humanistic philosophy of adult learning (HPAL) in leadership training. This study reviewed over a thousand publications to assess HPAL's effectiveness in leadership development, updating relevant concepts and suggesting future research directions.

Saini and Goswami [10] highlighted the potential of transformational leadership in enhancing professional responsibilities of school administrators, though they noted challenges in implementing such leadership within current educational frameworks. The importance of teachers as vital resources in achieving educational goals, underscoring the need for well-qualified kindergarten teachers.

Lastly, Lubin [11] adopted a follower-centric approach to leadership, analyzing high school teachers' followership styles and motivations. The study identified key motivators, revealing that exemplary followers exhibited a strong desire for achievement and autonomy, providing insights for principals on effective leadership strategies. Together, these studies underscore the complex interplay between leadership styles, teacher effectiveness, and organizational environments in educational settings.

2.1 Different Leadership Styles

Leadership is significant in organizational performance, dictating employee performance, work culture, and long-term strategic performance. Different leadership styles (e.g., transformational, transactional, servant, autocratic, and laissez-faire) have different impacts depending on the organization. This essay examines the usability of these leadership styles and their strengths, weaknesses, and best applications.

(a) Transformational leadership -- It motivates and excites employees through vision, emotions, and intellectual stimulation. It fosters innovation, personal growth, and deep organizational commitment. It elevates worker morale and motivation through shared vision, fosters creativity and flexibility, making it applicable to rapidly changing industries, and enhances long-term performance by building future leaders. But it relies on the leader's charisma, which may not be sustainable in their absence. It can be lacking in formal accountability, leading to inefficiencies in highly regulated environments. Ideal for avant-garde companies (e.g., tech start-ups, design studios).

(b) Transactional leadership -- Formal rewards and punishments are its foundation [12]. Leaders delineate precisely what is expected and rewards performance and punish failure. Provides short-term efficiency with clear goals and accountability, best fits high-compliance industries (e.g., manufacturing, military), and reduces ambiguity through well-defined KPIs. But it can repress creativity because of strict frameworks. It can disengage employees if taken too far, causing them to become disconnected. It works best for formalized process-oriented organizations (e.g., factories, government bureaucracies).

(c) Servant leadership -- Servant leaders value employee welfare [13] empowerment, and morally sound decision-making. They are more concerned with serving their team members than with ordering them around. It creates high levels of trust and loyalty among employees, enhances collaboration and teamwork, and reduces turnover by fostering supportive culture. It can function poorly in fast-paced, competitive environments where quick decision-making is critical. It can be equated with poor leadership in formal organizations. It functions best for nonprofits, healthcare, and education.

(d) Autocratic leadership -- Autocratic leaders make decisions by themselves with least input from the subordinates. It is directive and control oriented. It allows rapid decision-making in crises and maximum discipline in dangerous situations. But it reduces employees' morale and innovation. It can lead to turnover at high levels if the employees are felt to be underestimated. It is best suited for emergency response units and military operations.

(e) Laissez-faire leadership -- The laissez-faire leaders practice a hands-off approach [14] and give their workers full autonomy. It encourages autonomy and creativity and works effectively in extremely capable, self-motivated groups. But it leads to a lack of direction and accountability. It is not for formal teams. It is appropriate for research & development teams, creative business.

(f) Situational leadership -- Situational leaders are adaptable, responding to team requirements by varying their style, moving between directive and supportive styles. It is highly flexible and responsive to changing needs. It balances control with empowerment effectively. It requires high emotional intelligence and adaptability. It can be confusing to staff if changes are abrupt. It is best applied to project teams and consultancy companies.

There is no single style that suits everyone, effectiveness will differ with organizational goals, business, and team dynamics. Effective leaders use a combination of several styles, applying situational needs. Transformational and servant leadership top the list in eliciting participation, while transactional and autocratic facilitate efficiency in managed environments. Laissez-faire is ideal for independent teams, and situational leadership allows greatest flexibility. Organizations need to cultivate leaders who can sense context and apply the best technique for optimal performance.

2.2 Empirical Evidence on Leadership and Teacher Effectiveness

Extensive literature confirms strong correlation between teacher effectiveness and principal leadership. A landmark meta-analysis by Wu and Shen [15] revealed that leadership can explain variation in student achievement, with teacher effectiveness as the primary mediator. This evidence supports the idea that principals impact learning outcomes indirectly by facilitating high-quality teaching. Additional research further finds that some leadership behaviors strengthen teacher performance. Principals that provide emotional support such as acknowledging effort and stress management in the workplace, significantly reduce teacher burnout [16]. Availability of resources such as professional development or classroom resources is associated with enhanced teacher self-efficacy. Instructional feedback by principals leads to better teaching practice, particularly in the subject area of STEM [17]. Such evidence demonstrates that high-quality leadership combines relational support with instruction in order to capitalize on teacher potential.

Effectiveness of leadership varies across cultural and institutional environments. East Asian schools (China, Singapore) are more inclined to embrace hierarchical leadership [18], whereby principals provide top-down directives aligned with state education goals. Teachers in such frameworks tend to embrace authority and obey. Western schools (U.S., U.K.) embrace participatory types, such as distributed leadership, where teachers co-decide [19]. This style is congruent with individualistic cultural norms [20]. Success for a principal relies on fitting into local customs. International schools can combine hierarchical and participative styles. Largely in defiance of proof supporting the contribution of leadership, various obstacles inhibit its effect.

Principals are not well-trained in pedagogical leadership [21], where they develop teachers rather than merely executing operations. Regimes of standard testing pressures principals to prioritize test scores over holistic teacher development. Finance-deprived schools cannot provide mentoring programs or reduced teaching loads for instructional leaders [22]. Principals who applied rigid accountability policies in a U.S. study resorted to transactional leadership (e.g., test-prep drills), which cramped teacher creativity.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology is a scientific, structured process of investigation. It begins with the choice of the topic and finishes with the reporting of the findings, forming what is known as the research process. The chosen methodology relies on three key components: the nature of the research problem, purpose for study, and form of data required for effective analysis. A good methodological framework is required to ensure valid and reliable findings. Without strict compliance with research procedures, even those that have been well-planned cannot provide meaningful results. The method dictates the entire research process that includes systematic procedures along with proper statistical ways of scrutinizing data. The method must be scientifically sound yet tolerant to the specific needs of the study. Critical things to consider are making sure the selected methods are clearly related to the phenomena being observed, such that everything significant is fully explored.

3.1 Sampling and Sample Size

Through the use of a multistage sampling technique, it was able to pick a sample size of teachers that was representative of the whole population. It utilized stratified sampling to get a sample that was representative of the schools in Hong Kong. 316 teachers who were employed as local schools took part in the study. They are selected from different bandings (Band 1, 2, and 3) based on students' admission and academic performance. It can reduce sampling bias and allows comparison among different school bandings.

3.2 Research Instrument

The study will utilize a quantitative internet survey comprising three general sections.

(a) Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire (PGLQ) -- PGLQ [23] is a standard tool for identifying school administrators' leadership styles. It categorizes leadership into four distinct approaches: authoritative, encouraging, engaged, and goal-oriented, with each approach containing its own set of characteristics. It helps analyze leadership philosophies from different dimensions, providing the potential for ascertaining, in a systematic way, the impact principals have on school climates.

(b) Multi-Dimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS) -- MWMS [24] is a work motivation assessment that is a standardized self-report measure. It measures teachers' levels of motivation on six fundamental dimensions, including amotivation (lack of motivation) and extrinsic regulation (behaviour driven by rewards or punishment). It helps in assessing what motivates teachers into their workplace, providing insights about workplace environments.

(c) Job Performance Appraisal Scale (JPAS) -- JPAS [25] is a standardized self-report measure used to measure teaching effectiveness. JPAS assesses teachers' performance in their professional tasks, reflecting the extent to which educators perform their responsibilities.

(d) Demographic Information -- Gathers background information such as age, gender, teaching experience, and school banding.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Collection of data will be conducted through online questionnaires that are distributed through WhatsApp and email to a well-screened group of participants. Not only is the method cost-effective and time-efficient, but it also enables participants to respond quickly, so that researchers are able to collect useful findings within a reasonable time. The study purpose will be clearly communicated to participants, in a concise manner, so that they understand the significance of their inputs. Moreover, assurances of confidentiality and voluntary nature will be emphasized to create trust and encourage candor in feedback. Response rates will further be improved by follow-up reminders that will gently remind participants to complete the survey when they have not yet done so.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study aimed at identifying how the secondary school principals' leadership styles influence staff performance and motivation. Using descriptive analysis, frequency distribution, and statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation, the study examined the relationship between the variables among 316 teachers. Correlation analysis investigated if there existed a relationship between job effectiveness and motivation among teachers based on the style of leadership imposed by principals. Regression analysis identified the strongest predictors of job performance and motivation and that they were major indicators of teachers' effectiveness. Stepwise regression was employed in the research to analyze the role of leadership styles toward teachers' motivation and performance, attempting to reveal the character of such connections.

4. Results

(a) Of 73 teachers (23.1%) gave ratings to their principals as directive with a mean of 23.93, which reflects a moderate level of perception for the leadership style. The median of 24.13 indicates that many teachers rated their principals more highly. A standard deviation of 5.36 reflects a high level of variation in opinion, while a skewness of -0.112 reflects a low level of left skew. The kurtosis value of 0.263 reflects flat impression distributions. Similarly, 79 principals (25.0%) were defined as participative by 25.0% of the teachers with a mean rating of 23.28 and a median of 24.23. The standard

deviation of 5.69 also reflects varied perceptions. Lastly, 106 teachers (32.3%) saw their principals as achievement-oriented with a mean rating of 23.30 and a median of 23.50, showing consistent perceptions in these leadership styles.

(b) The data indicate that very few teachers are of lower levels of motivation, and these are 25 teachers (7.9%) in the 75-84 scores, 22 teachers (7.0%) in the 55-64 scores, and 50 teachers (15.8%) in the 45-54 scores. The average job motivation score is 70.40, which represents medium levels of motivation, as validated by a median of 70.25 and a mode of 76. The standard deviation of 10.90 indicates moderate variability in motivation. The measure of skewness of -0.05 indicates a very symmetrical distribution, while a kurtosis of 0.512 indicates a medium concentration of scores around the mean.

(c) 98 teachers (31.0%), with scores of 160-179, which are relatively high-performance levels. In addition, 75 teachers (23.7%) with scores of 140-159, and 63 (19.9%) with scores of 180-199, which shows many teachers perform well. However, 37 teachers (11.7%) are in scores of 120-139, and only 27 (8.5%) are in the scores of 100-119, which shows fewer teachers who have less performance. The mean is 151.52, the median is 152.30, and the mode is 174. Moderate variability is measured by a standard deviation of 16.90, and the distribution is nearly symmetrical with a kurtosis of 0.802.

(d) Achievement-oriented, directive, and participative leadership styles of principals only were found to accurately forecast the teachers' job performance. Between the directive leadership style of principals and teachers' level of job motivation, there was no relationship found. It has also been found that there is a weak relationship between teachers' work motivation and job performance. On the basis of the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the only leadership styles that proved to be consistent predictors of teacher work motivation and job performance were the participative style of leadership and achievement-oriented style of leadership of principals.

5. Discussion

Directive leadership provides teaching roles with clear expectations and structured guidance [26], thus reducing teaching role ambiguity. It is particularly helpful for new or underperforming teachers who need clear guidance to develop their skills. It also encourages consistency in instructional practice within the school. However, this type of leadership style can suppress creativity and professional autonomy, which may frustrate teachers. Excessive use of directive leadership can also undermine intrinsic motivation, as teachers might feel micromanaged. While useful for short-term performance improvement, particularly in times of crisis or in schools that need strict compliance, it can be a barrier to long-term professional development if used singularly.

Supportive leadership focuses on building trust and emotional safety, which reduces teacher burnout and enhances overall well-being [27]. By fostering a positive school culture, this leadership style encourages teamwork and makes teachers feel valued, thereby enhancing job satisfaction. However, the lack of pressure on performance in supportive leadership may lead to slackness among workers. High-performing teachers might find this style too relaxed. Despite these limitations, supportive leadership is highly correlated with teacher retention [28] and is especially effective in high-stress environments where morale is crucial to preserve.

Participative leadership enfranchises teachers by engaging them in decision-making, thereby improving professional autonomy and stimulating innovative pedagogy. It reinforces teamwork and collective responsibility, forging a more cooperative learning culture in schools. Egitim [29] averred that participative leadership "proved to be effective in creating an open, democratic, and participatory classroom environment" (p.32). However, participative decision-making can sometimes slow down the process, and not every teacher is likely to feel at ease with shared leadership responsibilities. It is most effective with experienced teachers who thrive in collaborative settings because it leads to higher levels of engagement [30] and commitment.

Achievement-oriented leadership motivates teachers to excel by setting challenging goals and fostering continuous teacher professional development. This leadership style aligns the performance of individual teachers with school objectives, fostering collective improvement, and increases work motivation [31]. Excessive pressure from achievement-oriented leadership can also lead to stress and burnout, particularly for those teachers who prefer a more comfortable working environment. This approach is most identified with high achievement and student success and therefore is optimally used in high-achieving schools where personnel are already motivated.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations for Principals

(a) Vary leadership style based on teacher needs -- Principals must vary their leadership style to meet the different needs of their teachers. For instance, first-year teachers tend to respond to directive leadership, with its explicit directions and formal expectations, as they learn the job. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, tend to respond to participative leadership, which honors their professionalism by involving them in decision-making and fostering professional autonomy.

(b) Balance support and challenge -- Both support and challenge need to be balanced. Supportive leadership enables a positive work environment by meeting teachers' emotional and professional needs, whereas achievement-oriented

leadership challenges the educationalists to work at their optimum by setting high standards and encouraging continuous improvement. Such a two-pronged approach maintains morale while performance is maximized.

(c) Promote teacher voice -- Principals must actively encourage teacher voice by creating cooperative forums where educators can exchange ideas and influence school policies. Such participative leadership boosts engagement levels and cultivates a sense of shared ownership in school success.

(d) Avoid over-reliance in any single style -- Over-reliance on any single leadership style can be a constraint to effectiveness [32]. Principals must diagnose situational demands and alter their approach, accordingly, providing clear guidance during times of crisis or empowering workers during times of innovation. Through flexibility, school leaders can optimize teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student learning.

6.2 Conclusion

The study proves that teachers perceive their principals' leadership behavior (directive, supportive, participatory, and achievement-oriented) as greater than average, which means that these principals motivate teacher performance satisfactorily. Also, teachers perceive their principals as possessing greater than average emotional intelligence, and this fosters a humane and good school leader-employee relationship. Teachers' job motivation is highly significant, indicating commitment to excellence, and job performance is greater than average, and it reflects satisfactory teaching processes.

There exists a positive correlation between teachers' work motivation and perceived participatory and achievement-oriented leadership styles. Conversely, however, no correlation existed between directive and supportive leadership styles and teacher motivation. Emotional intelligence was a primary determinant of teacher motivation, with leadership style participative as well but to a lower extent.

Furthermore, a positive and strong correlation was found between participative, achievement-oriented, and emotional intelligence principal leadership styles and teacher job performance. There was no significant relationship found with directive and supportive styles by the study. The conclusion drawn from the study is that achievement-oriented, participative, and directive leadership styles are good predictors of teacher performance, while supportive style and emotional intelligence are not important factors that affect performance outcomes.

Therefore, principals' emotional intelligence positively influenced teacher motivation but not job performance. The various leadership styles had differential influence on teacher motivation and performance, which reflects the role of emotional intelligence in school leadership.

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