



Leadership Styles as Predictors of Academic Performance: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This study aimed to compare the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on students' academic performance. The main objective of the study was to compare the influence of transformational and transactional leadership on students' academic performance. Quantitative research approach with survey technique methods was used for data collection in the study. A quantitative survey research design was employed. Data were collected from 171 secondary school teachers and 513 students in Tehsil Sargodha using a multistage sampling method. A total of 190 schools were randomly selected, and from each school, three actively teaching staff members were chosen. Each teacher then rated three randomly selected students from their Grade 9 or 10 classes. Findings indicated that both leadership styles positively contributed to students' academic performance, with transformational leadership showing a slightly stronger impact. Teachers' experience levels showed significant differences across all study variables. Gender of the teacher and age showed no statistically significant impact on either leadership behaviors or student academic performance. Students taught by teachers with 11–15 years of experience showed the highest academic performance. These findings suggest that factors such as professional experience play a more prominent role than demographic variables in shaping effective classroom leadership and student outcomes. This research reinforces the importance of fostering teacher leadership as a central component of educational reform efforts. It was recommended that leadership be provided through targeted training and mentoring programs that emphasize inspiration, collaboration, and innovation.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership, Student Academic Performance



Introduction

Leaders are individuals who possess a significant ability to make decisions that impact the futures of others, as well as those who establish the objectives of their companies or organizations. Leadership encompasses a blend of responsibility and obligation, aimed at safeguarding followers and organizations while striving to achieve specific objectives (Torlak et al., 2021). Leadership encompasses multiple elements, starting with individual factors like self-awareness, identity, self-worth, and one's relationship with oneself. This is complemented by connections with loved ones and interactions with colleagues and the wider community. Leadership entails making informed choices in various aspects of life, including decisions from both detailed and broad viewpoints, prompt reactions in particular situations, and the evaluation of social, political, economic, and cultural issues (Mazurkiewicz, 2021).

Leadership within the realm of education emerges from the intricate interactions that occur within the classroom environment. Within educational institutions, for considerable period, principals and other administrative personnel have been recognized as leaders (Nadeem, 2024; Muhammad et al, 2022). This stems from the realization that although principals and other administrators are considered the formal 'school leaders,' teachers are the primary catalysts for educational change, particularly in the classroom. There is a strong consensus among education stakeholders globally that if all teachers presented themselves more as leaders in their capacity (not necessarily as school administrators), they would have a tremendous impact on academic excellence (Warren, 2021).

Recent developments highlight the importance of recognizing teachers as leaders within their roles (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). The achievement of students is intricately connected to the individual occupying the role of educator within the educational environment (Warren, 2021). The scholarly success of students is intrinsically linked to the role of the educator. To enhance this achievement, the educator must continually refine their approach to foster success (Du et al., 2020). The satisfaction of employees' job achievement was highly affected by the leadership styles. Similarly impact of leadership styles can be observed in the process of teaching and learning by improving teacher leadership styles to achieve students' academic goals (Qiang et al., 2023). The various leadership styles employed by educators hold significant promise for cultivating an exceptional school environment, thereby enhancing students' ability to reach their academic objectives more efficiently (Ibrahim, 2021). While there are different leadership styles, the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on student academic performance is an important area of inquiry. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire students, while transactional leaders rely primarily on rewards and punishments. However, empirical evidence on the differential effects of these leadership styles on student learning is inconclusive and often contradictory (Ozdemir, 2024). Keeping this fact in mind, this study was conducted to compare the effect of transformational and transactional leadership styles on students' academic performance.

Literature Review

Leadership in Education

Education leadership embodies a distinctive approach that is collectively influenced by a cohort within each initiative or organization. Effective educational leaders are characterized by their focus on learning and development, enabling them to navigate the



intricacies of diverse responsibilities. This focus contributes to the development of educational communities and organizations. Learning organizations establish well-defined objectives that are widely acknowledged, thereby fostering engagement among learners within productive educational settings (Müller et al., 2022).

Educational leadership in practice involves the art of directing individuals within educational environments towards the attainment of objectives, requiring precise and impactful actions. Exerting influence over individuals requires a certain degree of authority, which may arise from established hierarchical relationships or other forms of legitimacy (Karakose et al., 2024). The endeavors executed by those responsible for the operation of an educational framework will impact others, consequently transforming into leadership endeavors. While educational leadership is ideally executed with a sense of accountability, it does not intrinsically include the obligation for the functioning of the educational system within which influence is exerted (Connolly et al., 2017).

Teachers as Leaders

Teachers play a crucial role as leaders in the classroom, within the school, and throughout the broader educational landscape. Educators exemplify leadership through their actions, communication, and overall presence. They hold the responsibility of guiding students through demanding academic pursuits and facilitating their success. This sense of responsibility establishes them as leaders, irrespective of any formal or authoritative role (Warren, 2021). Effective teaching goes beyond simply imparting knowledge to students. It requires a significant degree of proficiency in teaching methods, strong communication abilities, and skilled management capabilities (Bolkan et al., 2011). Teachers need to understand the most effective methods for delivering instructional content to students. It is crucial to foster an environment that optimizes student engagement and improves their educational experience. They must exhibit the ability to deliver their classes effectively (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) assert that leadership is a critical resource for enhancing teacher effectiveness. Research demonstrates that the notion of teacher leadership has evolved. Pounder delineates the comprehension of teacher leadership through three distinct phases. Initially, teacher leadership was limited to the legal authority established within organizational frameworks. A teacher was considered a leader only when holding formal positions, such as school administrators or departmental heads. The second wave highlighted the instructional aspect of teaching (Öqvist & Malmström, 2016). Power remained concentrated within formal positions. Teacher leaders included roles such as curriculum developers and team leaders. The second wave distinguished teacher leaders from traditional organizational roles (Forlenza, 2020).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was introduced by James McGregor Burns in his 1978 publication and later expanded upon by Bernard Bass. It represents a shift in which leaders can encourage and uplift their subordinates to improve their work performance through the promotion of innovation, a collective vision, and principled behaviour. (Sultana et al., 2024). In educational institutions, transformational leadership profoundly impacts a school's overall environment by cultivating teacher collaboration and inspiring innovative teaching methodologies, thereby augmenting the value of each student. Research literature indicates that this form of leadership encourages collaboration among educators and enhances professional development. This further fosters an educational atmosphere



that increases the likelihood of children's full engagement and achievement in the classroom. In contrast, institutions lacking effective leadership are likely to experience student disengagement, increased staff attrition, and lowered morale, all of which would negatively impact the overall educational atmosphere (Berkovich, 2016). Research shows that the transformational leadership exhibited by educators plays a crucial role in the school environment, significantly influencing student progress. Oqvist and Malmstrom highlighted that the extent of instructors' developmental leadership significantly influences student motivation and performance. Oqvist and Malmstrom (2016) assert that a significant level of teacher leadership in the classroom creates a supportive learning environment that enhances educational motivation and improves student achievement. Conversely, a restricted level of teacher leadership resulted in a negative learning environment marked by disengaged students and reduced performance.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership was first introduced by Burn in 1978, characterized by the interactions between leaders and followers, which include two primary behaviours: contingent reward and management by exception (Munir et al., 2021). Transactional leadership is characterized by leaders who utilise incentives or penalties to influence the behaviour of their subordinates (Alblooshi et al., 2021). Furthermore, these incentives or penalties are contingent upon the requirements of the followers and are intricately linked to their job satisfaction and accomplishments (Fakhri et al., 2021). The efficacy of the transactional leader is contingent upon accurately discerning the needs of their followers. Studies suggest that the influence of school leadership on student achievement is indirect; rather, it enhances the dedication, efficiency, and inspiration of educators (Bergeron, 2024). Transactional leaders are acknowledged for their proficiency in enhancing educators' competencies and capabilities, along with providing contingent rewards to attain the desired performance standards (Farahnak et al., 2020). The efficacy of diverse leadership styles concerning teacher and student performance merits thorough examination, given that leadership practices and their ramifications can differ markedly across various cultural and national landscapes.

Student's Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals. It is commonly measured through indicators such as grades, test scores, coursework completion, and other forms of assessment. Academic performance reflects a complex interplay of factors, including cognitive abilities, motivation, learning strategies, study habits, access to resources, quality of instruction, and the overall learning environment. While academic performance is often used as a metric for evaluating educational success, it is important to recognize that it represents only one aspect of a student's overall development and potential. Other crucial factors, such as social-emotional skills, creativity, resilience, and personal growth, also contribute significantly to a well-rounded education (Ariastuti & Wahyudin, 2022).

Method

A survey research method based on a quantitative research design was employed. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample of secondary school teachers and students in Tehsil Sargodha. Initially, Tehsil Sargodha was purposively selected from all tehsils in District Sargodha due to its large number of male and female secondary schools. At the second stage, 30% of the total 190 secondary schools



in the tehsil were selected using simple random sampling, resulting in a sample of 57 secondary schools. From each selected school, three teachers who were actively involved in classroom teaching were chosen using cluster sampling, making a total of 171 teachers. Head teachers were deliberately excluded from the sample because the study focused specifically on classroom-level leadership, which is more directly demonstrated by subordinate teachers through their day-to-day instructional practices and interactions with students. All the scales were developed by the researcher and validated by the experts in the field of education. Before administering the instruments for the main study, a pilot study was conducted to establish the reliability and validity of the instruments.

Results

The sample comprised 40% male and 60% female teachers. In terms of age, 57% of the participants were between 26 and 32 years old, while 43% were between 33 and 40 years old. Regarding educational qualifications, 28% of the teachers held a 14-year Bachelor's degree, 38% had a 16-year Master's degree, and 21% held an 18-year MPhil or equivalent qualification. In terms of professional experience, 28% of the teachers had between 1 to 5 years of service, 38% had 6 to 10 years, and 33% had 11 to 15 years. These demographics provide a diverse representation of secondary school teachers in terms of gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience, which supports the generalizability of the findings within the context of Tehsil Sargodha.

Table 1: *Multilinear Regression Coefficient of Transformational and Transactional Leadership on Students' Academic Performance (N=171)*

Variables	B	β	SE	t	p
Constant	27.03***		3.37	8.12	.001
Transformational Leadership	.460**	.356**	.119	3.85	.001
Transactional Leadership	.215	.296	.062	3.46	.001
R ²	.208				
ΔR^2	.201				
F	28.70				
ΔF	.000				

Note: ***p < .001, **p < .01

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the combined and individual contributions of transformational and transactional leadership in predicting students' academic performance. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 168) = 28.70$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 20% of the variance in students' academic performance ($R^2 = .208$). Transformational leadership emerged as a significant positive predictor of students' academic performance, $\beta = .356$, $t = 3.85$, $p .001$, with an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.460. This indicates that higher levels of transformational leadership were associated with increased academic performance among



students. Transactional leadership also significantly predicted students' academic performance, $\beta = .296$, $t = 3.46$, $p = .001$, with an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.215. Although both leadership styles significantly contributed to the model, transformational leadership demonstrated a slightly stronger influence on academic outcomes.

Table 2: *Differences in the Basis of Gender in the Study Variables (N=171)*

Variables	Male (n= 68)		Female (n= 103)		t (169)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Transformational Leadership	32.39	7.54	33.02	7.09	-1.04	.028	.08
Transactional Leadership	43.98	9.86	42.90	8.59	1.00	.310	.11
Student's Academic Performance	49.31	6.09	48.29	7.58	-1.83	.061	.14

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The results of an independent samples t-test assessing gender-based differences in transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and students' academic performance. No significant gender differences were observed.

Discussion

The findings highlight the significant role that leadership style plays within the classroom environment. Transformational leadership marked by motivation, inspiration, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation emerges as particularly influential in fostering positive academic outcomes. This supports earlier research suggesting that transformational leaders are more effective at promoting student engagement, trust, and higher-order thinking skills (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). When students perceive their teachers as visionary and invested in their growth, they are more likely to show enhanced motivation and performance. In contrast, transactional leadership, with its focus on reward, discipline, and clear expectations, has relevance in more structured or performance-driven contexts. While it ensures accountability, its lack of emphasis on emotional and cognitive engagement may limit deeper learning.

The impact of leadership on academic outcomes is, notably, neither instantaneous nor confined to a singular context. According to Day et al. (2016), the degree to which influence is recognized, experienced, and assessed about students' academic progress can only be evaluated over an extended period. This influence is frequently manifested in the "conditions, structures, traditions, relationships, expectations, and norms" that define the culture of a school. Their research revealed that in schools characterized by effectiveness and growth, principals demonstrated both transformational and transactional leadership concretely, suggesting that enduring academic enhancement is fundamentally anchored in dynamic, long-term leadership methodologies.

These findings also speak to a broader conversation in the literature about the evolving role of teachers as leaders. Wenner and Campbell (2017) cautioned that without robust empirical links between teacher leadership and student outcomes, the concept may remain superficial. However, the current study, consistent with the meta-analyses by Muijs & Harris (2003) and York-Barr & Duke (2004), offers clear evidence of a positive relationship between teacher leadership and academic performance. Moreover, while much of the traditional research in educational leadership has centered around principals, scholars now advocate for a more integrated model of school leadership, recognizing that



leadership influence is distributed across principals and teachers alike (Shen et al., 2019). The present findings support this integrated approach by demonstrating that teachers' leadership styles significantly shape students' academic experiences and outcomes.

Furthermore, the study investigated the difference based on the teacher's gender, as there was a paucity of literature from the perspective of Pakistan. The findings of the current study suggest that gender-based nuances in leadership expression point toward the influence of social and cultural norms on teaching and leadership styles. Female teachers may be more inclined toward relational and nurturing leadership behaviors, while male teachers may exhibit directive or structured styles. However, the effectiveness of leadership transcends gender; rather, it depends on the teacher's ability to adapt their style to meet the developmental needs of students. Importantly, the study reaffirms the classroom teacher as a central figure in students' academic journeys, not merely as content deliverers but as change agents capable of shaping learning climates through their leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of teacher leadership in shaping students' academic performance. The evidence highlights that transformational leadership practices, those that inspire, motivate, and support students, are more closely aligned with improved academic outcomes than transactional approaches alone. As educators become more experienced and professionally developed, their leadership behaviors appear to mature, influencing their effectiveness in the classroom. Ultimately, teacher leadership is not a supplementary skill but a fundamental component of effective teaching and student achievement.

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