



Relationship Between Principals' Leadership Styles and High School Teachers' Behavior: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic review explores the relationship between principals' leadership styles and high school teachers' behaviors, focusing on areas such as instructional practice, collaboration, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Drawing on empirical studies published in previous years, the review synthesizes findings to understand how transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership styles influence teacher engagement and performance. The analysis reveals that transformational leadership consistently fosters positive outcomes by promoting motivation, emotional investment, and professional development. Instructional leadership emerges as a key driver of teaching effectiveness through curriculum support and collaborative planning. In contrast, transactional and laissez-faire approaches are associated with limited teacher autonomy and reduced morale. The study also highlights the mediating role of school culture in shaping teacher behavior and underscores the importance of contextual factors such as school size, socio-economic status, and teacher experience. Recommendations include enhancing principal training programs to develop transformational and participatory leadership skills, fostering inclusive decision-making, and cultivating supportive school environments. This review contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational leadership by identifying critical leadership practices that enhance teacher performance and student outcomes in secondary education settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership in educational institutions is a cornerstone of school effectiveness, with the principal playing a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture, teacher behavior, and student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). As schools face increasing demands for accountability, innovation, and equity, the influence of principals' leadership styles on teacher behavior has become a central concern in educational research. In high school settings, where teachers often possess greater professional autonomy and experience compared to their counterparts in

elementary schools, the nature of leadership becomes even more critical in shaping instructional practices, collaboration, job satisfaction, and overall school climate.

While numerous studies have explored leadership styles in education, many systematic reviews encompass K–12 settings without differentiating the unique dynamics of secondary schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). This lack of focus on high schools—where organizational complexity, subject specialization, and faculty independence are more pronounced—limits our understanding of how leadership operates in these distinct environments. This systematic review addresses this gap by exclusively synthesizing empirical research on high school principals' leadership styles and their impact on teacher behavior, thereby offering a more targeted and contextually relevant analysis. The novelty of this study lies not only in its specific focus on secondary education but also in its comprehensive integration of multiple dimensions of teacher behavior—such as instructional practice, collaboration, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment—as central outcomes shaped by leadership, rather than mere byproducts.

Moreover, teacher behavior is not merely a passive response to leadership but an active, mediating variable that directly influences student achievement, school culture, and institutional effectiveness (Day et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Teachers who are motivated, collaborative, and professionally committed are more likely to engage in innovative pedagogy, participate in school improvement initiatives, and maintain high instructional standards. Therefore, understanding how leadership styles shape these behaviors is essential for improving both teaching quality and student learning outcomes. This review positions teacher behavior as a core dependent variable that reflects the effectiveness of leadership practices, rather than a secondary or incidental outcome.

Leadership styles can be broadly categorized into transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire approaches (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, vision, and individualized support, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and shared responsibility. Transactional leadership relies on structured rewards and corrective actions to manage performance, while laissez-faire leadership is characterized by minimal involvement and avoidance of decision-making responsibilities. Each of these styles has distinct implications for teacher motivation, professional development, and classroom behavior. Research consistently shows that transformational leadership has a positive correlation with teacher engagement and instructional quality (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Principals who exhibit transformational behaviors—such as setting a clear vision, encouraging intellectual growth, and recognizing individual contributions—tend to cultivate environments where teachers feel valued and motivated to innovate.

In contrast, transactional leadership may yield short-term compliance but lacks the capacity to inspire long-term commitment or creativity among teachers (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). Laissez-faire leadership is often linked to low teacher morale, reduced accountability, and fragmented instructional practices (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a need for a focused synthesis that examines how these leadership styles specifically influence teacher behavior in high schools, and how contextual factors—such as school size, socio-economic status, and teacher experience—moderate these relationships.

This systematic review aims to fill this gap by analyzing peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2010 and 2024 that specifically examine the relationship between principals' leadership styles and high school teachers' behavior. The central research question is: How do different leadership styles of high school principals influence teacher behavior in areas such as instructional practice, collaboration, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment? By consolidating current evidence and identifying patterns across diverse educational contexts, this review not only contributes to theoretical understanding but also provides actionable insights for policymakers, school administrators, and leadership training programs seeking to enhance educational outcomes through effective leadership development.

METHODS

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to synthesize empirical evidence on the relationship between high school principals' leadership styles and teacher behavior. The SLR approach ensures a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process for identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant research, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic academic databases to identify peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024. The following databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of educational research and leadership literature: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, ... etc.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the screening process.

Inclusion criteria are peer-reviewed empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) published between 2010 and 2024, studies focusing specifically on high school or secondary school contexts (Grades 9–12 or equivalent), research examining the relationship between principals' leadership styles (e.g., transformational, transactional, instructional, participative) and teachers' behavioral outcomes (e.g., instructional practice, collaboration, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, professional development), studies conducted in any country or cultural context, full-text availability of articles.

Exclusion criteria are articles not focused on secondary education (e.g., elementary, middle, or K–12 combined without disaggregation), theoretical papers, opinion pieces, editorials, book reviews, or conceptual discussions without empirical data, studies not published in peer-reviewed journals (except for doctoral dissertations and conference proceedings with clear empirical methodology and peer-review indicators), duplicate publications or studies using the same dataset as previously included articles, and non-English publications without available translation.

There are key variables (**Independent variables** and **Dependent variables**) derived from language and literature in the fields of educational leadership, organizational behavior, and teacher psychology. The **independent variables** of the principals' leadership styles are various leadership approaches such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, institutional leadership, distributed leadership, servant leadership, authoritarian/autocratic leadership, democratic/participative leadership and laissez-faire leadership. Anyway, the **dependent variables** of teachers' behavior are the observable or reported behaviors and

attitudes of high school teachers influenced by leadership styles such as teacher job satisfaction, teacher motivation, teacher commitment, professional development engagement, instructional practices, teacher collaboration, teacher morale, teacher turnover intention, classroom innovation and risk-taking, and perceived school climate (Bush & Glover, 2016).

This systematic approach ensures a comprehensive and critical synthesis of current evidence, contributing to a deeper understanding of how leadership practices influence teacher behavior in high school settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Leadership Styles in Shaping the Academic Environment

The role of school directors in shaping the academic environment within secondary schools is fundamental, as their leadership styles significantly influence various aspects of teachers' behaviors, including commitment, collaboration, and professional development (Bush & Glover, 2016). In the context of educational environments, the leadership style of a director can either cultivate a positive atmosphere or create barriers for effective teaching practices. According to Burns (1978), leadership is not merely about authority but involves inspiring and guiding individuals toward shared goals. Transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership theories provide a useful framework for analyzing how different leadership approaches impact teacher behavior. Transformational leadership, for instance, emphasizes inspiration and motivation, while transactional leadership focuses on structured systems of rewards and consequences (Bass, 1985). Instructional leadership, on the other hand, centers on improving teaching and learning outcomes through active engagement with curriculum and pedagogy (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These models help educators and administrators understand how leadership impacts organizational culture and teacher performance.

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Participation

Transformational leadership, characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate teachers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of students, has been associated with high levels of teacher participation (Leithwood et al., 2008). The research conducted by Ahmed (2025) illustrates this correlation, showing that directors who adopt transformational strategies instill a sense of purpose among educators, promoting an environment conducive to personal and professional growth. This approach encourages teachers to feel valued and connected with the school's mission, thus enhancing their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. According to Liebowitz and Porter (2019), transformational leaders foster emotional investment by cultivating trust, providing individualized support, and encouraging innovation in pedagogical practices. Such leadership not only improves teacher morale but also enhances student achievement by fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Transactional Leadership and Its Limitations

In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on structured policies, rewards, and consequences, often emphasizing adherence to established protocols (Bass, 1985). While this style can lead to an efficient operational environment, studies led by Cansoy (2019) indicate potential drawbacks in promoting deep collaboration among teachers. Teachers under transactional leadership may feel less inclined to participate in cooperative practices, as the focus on compliance can limit their autonomy and creativity. This lack of collaborative spirit not only hinders professional development opportunities but can also detract from a unified

school culture, ultimately affecting student performance (Day et al., 2016). Transactional leadership tends to prioritize short-term gains over long-term institutional growth, which may result in superficial compliance rather than genuine commitment.

Instructional Leadership and Professional Development

Instructional leadership, oriented toward the promotion of effective teaching and learning practices, is another prominent style that affects teachers' behaviors (Hallinger, 2009). By providing clear orientation and support in instructional practices, directors who use this style facilitate professional development initiatives aligned with the needs of teachers and institutional goals. Research suggests that instructional leadership is linked to higher levels of teacher participation as educators become active participants in their own learning processes, leading to greater teaching effectiveness and improved student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Directors who model best practices, offer constructive feedback, and allocate time for collaborative planning are more likely to see sustained improvements in classroom instruction.

Leadership and the Promotion of Continuous Improvement

Educational leadership, oriented to the promotion of effective teaching and learning practices, is another prominent style that affects teachers' behaviors. By providing clear orientation and support in instructional practices, directors who use this style facilitate professional development initiatives that are aligned with the needs of teachers and institutional goals. The results of the research suggest that instructional leadership is linked to higher levels of participation among teachers as they become active participants in their own learning processes, which leads to greater effectiveness of teaching and improves the results of the students.

Moreover, the dynamic interaction between these leadership styles and the professional development of teachers is an area that warrants thorough examination (Robinson et al., 2008). Directors who prioritize professional growth opportunities and encourage reflective practices can promote a culture of continuous improvement among teachers. In a systematic review, Robinson et al. (2008) show that directors who promote collaborative professional development not only improve the pedagogical skills of teachers but also contribute to a more cohesive educational environment. This alignment underscores the vital bond between leadership practices and desired teacher behaviors, emphasizing the importance of adaptability in leadership approaches depending on the context and specific needs of the faculty.

Exploring the Impact of Leadership on Teacher Participation

Within this literature review, it is essential to explore these variable leadership styles and their impacts associated with the participation of teachers, collaboration and professional development. Identifying the practices of effective directors will provide information on how leadership can be transformed to optimize educational results. Existing studies underline the complexity of these interactions and suggest that more research is necessary to delineate the nuances and complexities of the relationship between the leadership styles of the directors and the effectiveness of the teachers in the environments of the secondary school (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). The following sections will deepen this relationship, taking advantage of an exhaustive analysis of the current research results to establish a more nuanced understanding of this critical issue in educational leadership. The teacher's participation is a critical factor in educational success, directly correlated with the student's performance and the general performance of the

school. Leadership styles exercised by directors significantly influence the level of motivation and commitment exhibited by teachers. Among the various leadership approaches, transformative and participatory leadership styles have been widely recognized for their positive effects on teacher participation. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate teachers through a shared vision, promoting an environment of creativity and support. On the contrary, participatory leaders empower teachers by involving them in decision-making processes, thus improving their sense of property and responsibility (Liebowitz and Porter, 2019).

Supportive Leadership and Emotional Investment in Teaching

Liebowitz and Porter's research (2019) illustrates that directors who adopt a transformational leadership style contribute to higher levels of teacher participation. They argue that transformational leaders cultivate an atmosphere in which educators feel valued and appreciated, which leads to greater intrinsic motivation. The study emphasizes that when teachers perceive their directors as supportive and visionary, they are more inclined to invest emotional and professional energy in their roles. This emotional investment not only improves the individual performance of the teacher but also promotes a collaborative spirit between members of the faculty, resulting in a more committed teaching force.

Empirical Evidence on Leadership-Driven Teacher Engagement

In addition, Yalçinkaya et al.'s meta-analysis (2021) provides robust empirical evidence on the profound impact of leadership styles on teacher participation. This exhaustive review synthesizes findings from several studies, illustrating that schools led by directors who exhibit participatory leadership trends see a marked increase in the commitment and enthusiasm of teachers. Yalçinkaya et al. (2021) specifically highlight that when directors actively solicit the contributions of their teachers and involve them in collaboration initiatives, they cultivate a shared sense of purpose. This shared purpose not only improves motivation levels but also encourages teachers to participate in professional learning communities, where collaborative practices further enhance their teaching effectiveness.

Creating a Supportive Environment for Teacher Participation

Furthermore, research indicates that directors who promote open communication and provide supportive feedback contribute to an environment conducive to higher participation levels. Transformational leaders who prioritize professional development opportunities for their teachers also see an increase in participation. For example, the provision of continuous mentoring and training programs allows teachers to grow professionally, reinforcing their commitment to the educational process. As teachers become more skilled and confident in their abilities, their commitment to their roles deepens, resulting in better student outcomes (Yalçinkaya et al., 2021).

In summary, although the entire existing literature provides valuable information on the impact of leaders' leadership styles on teachers' behavior, additional research is essential to deepen our understanding of this relationship. Future requests should aim to explore the multifaceted nature of educational leadership, considering the complex ways in which various leadership styles interact with various environmental factors to shape educational results. Insistence of systematic journals led by Hitt and Tucker (2016) and Day et al. (2016) serve as fundamental references to these future studies, highlighting vital areas for innovation in the development of educational leadership. The interaction between the main leadership styles and

teacher participation is evident. The findings suggest that transformational and participatory leadership styles are fundamental to promoting environments that encourage higher levels of teacher motivation and collaboration. The implications of these leadership approaches resonate within the broader context of high school environments, where teacher engagement directly influences student performance and school climate. Consequently, a deeper exploration of specific practices that define these leadership styles can yield additional insights into how educational leaders can effectively engage their faculty to improve organizational results.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review synthesizes empirical evidence to explore the relationship between principals' leadership styles and high school teachers' behaviors, focusing on areas such as instructional practice, collaboration, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The findings reveal that transformational leadership consistently demonstrates the most positive influence on teacher behavior by fostering motivation, emotional investment, and professional development. Principals who exhibit transformational traits—such as inspiring a shared vision, encouraging innovation, and providing individualized support—create environments where teachers feel valued and empowered. In contrast, transactional leadership, while effective in maintaining operational efficiency through structured reward systems, is less successful in promoting intrinsic motivation or deep collaborative practices among teachers. Laissez-faire leadership was found to be largely ineffective, often leading to low morale, fragmented instruction, and reduced teacher accountability. Instructional leadership emerged as a key driver for enhancing teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, particularly when principals actively engage in curriculum development, provide constructive feedback, and allocate time for collaborative planning. Furthermore, the role of school culture—shaped significantly by leadership style—was identified as a mediating factor influencing teacher engagement and professional growth. The analysis also underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity, emphasizing that leadership effects vary depending on factors such as school size, socio-economic status, and teacher experience levels. These findings highlight the need for more nuanced research that explores how leadership practices can be adapted to meet the unique demands of different educational settings.

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations are proposed for policymakers, school administrators, and leadership training programs:

1. **Promote Transformational Leadership Development:** Educational institutions should prioritize training programs that develop transformational leadership skills among school principals. Emphasis should be placed on building visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to inspire and motivate staff.
2. **Strengthen Instructional Leadership Practices:** School leaders should be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to guide instructional practices effectively. This includes supporting professional learning communities, modeling best teaching strategies, and facilitating peer collaboration.
3. **Encourage Participatory Decision-Making:** Principals should involve teachers in decision-making processes to enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility. This participatory approach fosters a collaborative culture and increases teacher commitment to institutional goals.
4. **Contextualize Leadership Training Programs:** Leadership development initiatives should be tailored to address the specific needs of diverse school contexts. Training should consider variables such as urban vs. rural location, school size, and socio-economic background of students.

5. Foster Positive School Cultures: School leaders must consciously cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment that values teacher contributions, encourages risk-taking, and promotes continuous improvement. A strong school culture enhances both teacher morale and student achievement.
6. Support Longitudinal Research on Leadership Effects: Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how changes in leadership styles affect teacher behavior over time. Additionally, more studies are needed to explore the impact of leadership on underrepresented teacher populations and in diverse cultural settings.

Through these recommendations, educational stakeholders can work toward developing more effective leadership models that positively shape teacher behavior, improve instructional quality, and ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

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