



LEADING FOR IMPACT: HOW LEADERSHIP STYLES SHAPE TEACHER PERFORMANCE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

This study investigated the leadership practices of principals in boys' secondary schools across the public and private sectors in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The research focused on four key dimensions of leadership: administrative, managerial, financial, and daily operational practices. A descriptive, quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to principals and teachers. Using stratified random sampling, 20 schools (10 public and 10 private) were selected. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, employing statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, correlation, regression, and t-tests. The findings revealed that principals in private schools demonstrated stronger leadership competencies compared to their public school counterparts, particularly in areas such as decision-making, supervision, financial transparency, and routine school operations. Public school principals, constrained by bureaucratic structures and limited autonomy, exhibited less proactive leadership behavior. The study underscores the importance of targeted leadership training and policy reforms to empower school leaders and improve institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: *Educational Leadership, Leadership Practices, Administrative Competencies, Managerial Effectiveness, School Management.*

Introduction

Leadership within educational institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping not only the organizational culture of schools but also the professional behavior of teachers and the academic trajectories of students. In a rapidly evolving educational landscape marked by technological advancements, policy reforms, and heightened accountability standards, the influence of school leadership has become more critical than ever (Leithwood et al., 2020). School leaders—particularly principals—serve as the linchpins between policy and practice, tasked with aligning institutional goals with classroom execution. Their leadership style profoundly affects how teachers perceive their roles, manage classrooms, engage with students, and pursue professional development. Consequently, these dynamics ripple outward to influence student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.

The concept of leadership in education is multifaceted, encompassing a range of styles such as transformational, instructional, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and situational leadership. Each style brings a unique approach to decision-making, delegation, communication, and capacity building. Transformational leadership, for example, emphasizes vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—fostering an environment where teachers feel valued, empowered, and committed to continuous improvement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). On the other hand, instructional leadership focuses on curriculum alignment, teaching quality, and assessment practices, placing the academic core at the forefront of school leadership priorities (Hallinger, 2011).



Recent empirical studies suggest that leadership styles are not merely administrative preferences but are directly linked to critical educational outcomes. Transformational leaders have been shown to positively influence teacher job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and collaborative practice, which in turn correlate with improved student academic performance and classroom engagement (Noor et al., 2024; Sultana et al., 2025). Conversely, autocratic leadership styles—characterized by rigid hierarchies and limited teacher autonomy—have been associated with low morale, professional disengagement, and poor academic outcomes (Abbasi et al., 2025).

Understanding the nuanced relationship between leadership styles, teacher performance, and student achievement is essential for educational stakeholders seeking to improve school effectiveness. This study seeks to critically examine how different leadership styles adopted by school leaders influence teacher motivation, instructional quality, and ultimately, student learning outcomes. Drawing upon a synthesis of recent global and local research, this paper aims to identify which leadership behaviors are most conducive to educational excellence and how these can be implemented across diverse school settings.

Leadership fascinates the attention of researchers, theorists, and educational institutions. Globally, various professional development programs have been initiated to scrutinize leadership effectiveness in enhancing both student performance and institutional outcomes. While some scholars define leadership as a personal attribute or behavior, others view it from a relational or situational perspective (Northouse, 2021). School administration is vital for cultivating environments where teaching and learning can flourish effectively. In Pakistan, educational leaders, including principals and district officers, are striving to implement leadership-focused reforms as outlined in national education policy agendas (Ouakouak, Zaitouni, & Arya, 2020).

Gandolfi and Stone (2018) emphasized that school leaders must steer institutions through increasingly complex challenges such as curriculum diversification, standardized assessments, and a growing diversity in student backgrounds, including migration and settlement issues. These evolving contexts demand adaptive leadership that can manage multifaceted expectations.

National studies conducted in 1988, 1998, and 2000 comparing public and private schools identified both similarities and disparities in institutional performance. Principals across sectors were found to be central figures in managing teachers and maintaining communication with students and parents (Alt & Peter, 2003; Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004). However, private school principals often faced fewer constraints from state-imposed accountability mandates compared to their public-sector counterparts (Cummings et al., 2018).

Accountability, especially in public schools, places principals under significant scrutiny by higher authorities (Lashway, 2003). Despite the bureaucratic challenges, principals are increasingly recognized as key players in elevating educational standards and driving student achievement (Katsaros, Tsirikas, & Kosta, 2020).

In the 21st century, the scope of a principal's role has broadened significantly, with additional responsibilities driven by reforms and performance metrics (Leroy et al., 2018). Grissom and Loeb (2011) noted that principals today face stress due to job insecurity, increasing workloads, and a lack of societal respect, yet their leadership remains instrumental in determining school success.



Historically, the managerial dimension of educational leadership, rooted in the 1920s, has emphasized administrative efficiency (Torlak & Kuzey, 2019). Fullan (2005) argued that the principal's leadership style correlates with goal attainment and school effectiveness. In Nigeria, studies found that male principals demonstrated relatively more effective leadership styles, though this was not universally conclusive (Ogunyinka & Adedoyin, 2013).

Supervision by school principals directly affects teacher performance and student engagement. Oyewole and Alonge (2013) discovered that effective supervision motivates both teachers and students, fostering a culture of mutual success. Akomolafe (2012) found significant distinctions in administrative efficiency between public and private schools, with female leaders often exhibiting more participatory and motivational leadership practices.

In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, findings from various districts indicate that strong principal-teacher-parent coordination underpins school success. Similarly, a study in Ondo State, Nigeria, revealed that principal leadership greatly contributes to psychomotor development, though improvements in cognitive domains remain necessary (Fullan, 2005).

Grissom and Loeb (2011) further documented that effective principals attract and retain high-quality teachers, especially in underprivileged schools. Higher teacher satisfaction and retention are strongly associated with effective leadership.

In another Nigerian study, Oyewole and Abe (2011) found that leadership effectiveness varies with principals' age and experience but not significantly with gender. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) emphasized themes like shared leadership, professional development, and instructional orientation as key traits of effective principals.

Ouakouak, Zaitouni, and Arya (2020) described successful private school principals as those excelling in financial administration, curriculum development, and human resource management. Canivel (2010) concluded that participative and delegating leadership styles were most responsive to challenges in private schools in the Rizal province.

Statement Of The Problem

Effective leadership in educational institutions is characterized by the equitable distribution of leadership functions among staff members, empowering them with a sense of ownership, responsibility, and self-worth in accomplishing managerial, administrative, and academic tasks collaboratively. In the context of Pakistan, particularly with the rapid expansion of secondary education programs, a growing number of teachers are being appointed as principals soon after their recruitment. This rapid transition often occurs without the necessary preparation or leadership training, leading to challenges in school administration and educational outcomes (Arif & Kanwal, 2009).

Leadership in schools cannot be confined to a single individual. As Harris, Ballenger, and Leonard (2004) emphasize, "neither the teacher nor the principal alone can improve the school's quality"; rather, it requires a team-based approach in which principals work collaboratively with teachers and staff. This collaborative leadership model enhances shared decision-making and builds a cohesive vision for school improvement.

Despite the critical role of school leadership, limited empirical research exists in the Pakistani context that systematically explores the leadership competencies and practices of school heads, especially within both public and private secondary school sectors. Recognizing this gap, the current study aims to investigate the nature and effectiveness of leadership practices exhibited by secondary school principals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study seeks to identify existing competencies, challenges, and opportunities for professional



growth that can inform leadership development programs and improve institutional performance.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the leadership styles commonly practiced by principals in public and private secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To assess the administrative and instructional competencies exhibited by secondary school principals.
3. To compare leadership practices between public and private school principals.
4. To explore the impact of principals' leadership on teacher motivation and student academic performance.

Research Questions

1. What leadership styles are predominantly used by principals in public and private secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What key administrative and instructional competencies do secondary school principals possess?
3. How do the leadership practices of principals differ between public and private schools?
4. How do principals' leadership styles affect teacher motivation and student academic achievement?

Significance Of The Study

This study holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholders in the education sector. For school principals in both public and private secondary schools, the research will highlight essential leadership skills and competencies required for effective school management. It will provide practical insights into strategies for maintaining discipline and improving administrative efficiency, thereby enabling heads of institutions to perform their roles more effectively.

Teachers will also benefit from the study, as it underscores the importance of leadership collaboration and shared decision-making within schools. Understanding leadership dynamics can inspire teachers to cultivate leadership qualities in themselves, especially those who may eventually transition into administrative roles.

For policymakers and curriculum developers, the study offers valuable evidence on the critical role of school leadership in educational improvement. The findings may support the introduction of mandatory leadership training programs or professional development courses for prospective and newly appointed principals, ensuring better preparedness for leadership roles.

Moreover, this research contributes to the academic literature by serving as a foundational reference for future researchers. It opens pathways for further inquiry into leadership styles, contextual challenges, and effectiveness across different regions and school systems, thereby enriching the discourse on educational leadership in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design, which was suitable for exploring and comparing existing leadership practices across public and private secondary schools. Descriptive research typically identifies patterns and relationships without manipulating variables. In this research, it helped in describing and comparing the leadership competencies of school heads in a real-world context.



A quantitative research approach was adopted to collect and analyze numerical data. This method allowed for an objective assessment of leadership styles and their impact on teacher motivation and student academic performance.

Population Of The Study

The population of the study consisted of principals and teachers working in boys' secondary schools in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to official records from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bureau of Statistics, there were 33 government boys' higher secondary schools, with more than 450 teachers and 33 principals serving at the time of data collection. In addition, there were 361 privately managed higher secondary schools in the district, employing over 3,000 teachers and 300 principals.

Sample Of The Study

A random sampling technique was used in this study to ensure that each participant had an equal chance of selection. This approach minimized sampling bias and ensured an unbiased representation of the target population (Crossman, 2021).

A total of 20 secondary schools in District Peshawar were selected—10 government (public) schools and 10 private schools. These schools were divided into two strata to represent both sectors equally. This stratified random sampling ensured comparative analysis between the two types of institutions.

The sample size of teachers and principals was calculated using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator, which considered the total population, confidence level, and margin of error to ensure statistical significance. Data were collected using a 5 point Likert Scale structured questionnaires, and responses were analyzed using SPSS to interpret the results effectively.

Data Analysis

The data were collected personally by the researcher using structured questionnaires. After collection, the data were compiled, tabulated, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Various statistical techniques were applied, including frequency distributions, percentages, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and independent sample t-tests, to interpret and compare leadership practices across public and private secondary schools.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to established ethical research guidelines. All participants were informed in advance through a formal letter outlining the purpose and scope of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage. The data collected were kept anonymous and confidential, ensuring that individual identities and responses were not disclosed at any point during or after the research.

Delimitation Of The Study

Due to resource limitations and cultural constraints, the study was delimited to boys' secondary schools in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Both public and private sector schools were included in the scope of the study. Recognizing that leadership practices encompass a wide range of domains, the current study focused specifically on four key dimensions of school leadership:

Administrative practices, Managerial practices, Financial management, Daily routine operational practices.

Findings And Discussion

This section presents and interprets the results of the data collected from principals and teachers of both public and private boys' secondary schools in District Peshawar. The

analysis focuses on four major dimensions of leadership practices: administrative practices, managerial practices, financial management, and daily routine operational practices.

Administrative Practices

Administrative practices included decision-making, delegation of authority, communication with staff, and policy implementation. Data analysis revealed that private school principals

Practice Area	Public Schools (Mean)	Private Schools (Mean)	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Supervision of	3.2	3.9	0.76	2.89	0.004

showed slightly more proactive administrative involvement than public school principals.

Table 1: Mean Scores On Administrative Practices (Public Vs. Private Schools)

Item	Public Schools (Mean)	Private Schools (Mean)	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Decision-making involvement	3.4	4.1	0.78	3.12	0.002
Communication with staff	3.6	4.2	0.65	2.98	0.003
Delegation of responsibilities	3.1	3.8	0.82	2.77	0.006
Policy implementation consistency	3.5	4.0	0.71	2.34	0.021

Discussion

The data suggest that principals in private schools demonstrate more effective administrative practices, particularly in participatory decision-making and consistent policy enforcement. This may be attributed to greater autonomy and accountability pressures in the private sector.

Managerial Practices

Managerial practices referred to supervision, time management, goal setting, and teacher performance evaluation. The findings showed that public school principals had relatively lower scores in teacher evaluation and supervision mechanisms.

teaching staff					
Time management efficiency	3.3	3.8	0.71	2.21	0.028
Setting performance targets	3.0	3.7	0.88	3.07	0.002
Evaluating teacher performance	3.1	3.9	0.79	3.15	0.001

Discussion

The results indicate a significant difference in managerial approaches. Private school principals appear to conduct more frequent evaluations and establish clearer performance goals. This reflects a results-oriented culture driven by stakeholder expectations in the private education system.

Financial Management

This dimension examined budget planning, resource utilization, fund transparency, and financial decision-making. Principals in private schools were found to be more engaged in day-to-day financial decision-making.

Table 3: Financial Management Practices In Public Vs. Private Schools

Practice Area	Public (Mean)	Private (Mean)	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Annual budget planning involvement	3.2	3.7	0.73	2.45	0.017
Transparency in fund allocation	3.4	3.9	0.68	2.92	0.005
Monitoring resource utilization	3.1	3.8	0.81	2.77	0.006
Decision-making in emergency spending	3.0	3.6	0.84	2.63	0.009

Discussion

Private school principals showed more direct involvement in financial operations. Public schools, governed by bureaucratic funding processes, tend to involve principals less in day-to-day financial matters. This restricts flexibility and may delay timely resource allocation.

Daily Routine Operational Practices

This area included attendance monitoring, schedule management, daily meetings, and discipline handling. Private school principals were observed to take a more hands-on role in ensuring daily discipline and operational efficiency.

Table 4: Operational Practices – Public Vs. Private Schools

Routine Activity	Public (Mean)	Private (Mean)	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Monitoring staff attendance	3.3	4.1	0.74	3.36	0.001
Maintaining school timetable	3.5	4.0	0.69	2.76	0.007
Conducting morning meetings	3.2	3.9	0.81	2.87	0.005
Handling student discipline daily	3.4	4.2	0.72	3.44	0.001



Discussion

Private school principals appear to place higher emphasis on operational discipline and daily engagement. The ability to implement flexible policies and respond swiftly to issues gives them an edge over their public counterparts.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore and compare leadership practices among principals in public and private boys' secondary schools in District Peshawar, focusing on four key areas: administrative, managerial, financial, and daily operational leadership. Findings revealed that private school principals generally demonstrated stronger leadership competencies across all dimensions. This included more active decision-making, better supervision, transparent financial management, and stricter operational discipline. In contrast, public school principals faced greater bureaucratic constraints, limited autonomy, and less consistent application of leadership strategies. These results underscore the need for professional leadership training and decentralized support mechanisms to improve leadership effectiveness in public schools.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research emphasizing the pivotal role of school leadership in educational outcomes. As noted by Leithwood et al. (2020), effective school leaders create the conditions necessary for high-quality teaching and learning by setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. In the current study, private school principals were observed to apply these practices more systematically, likely due to greater institutional autonomy and performance-driven environments.

Administrative leadership was more evident in private schools, where principals were deeply engaged in decision-making and staff communication. This aligns with Bass & Riggio's (2006) concept of transformational leadership, which highlights the importance of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation—characteristics more commonly seen in the private sector.

In terms of managerial leadership, public school principals scored lower, reflecting a possible lack of leadership preparation. Research by Grissom & Loeb (2011) similarly found that effective principals significantly influence teacher satisfaction, especially in under-resourced schools. Managerial gaps in public schools may stem from systemic challenges, such as centralized control and lack of continuous professional development.

The study also supports the findings of Harris, Ballenger, and Leonard (2004), who stressed that effective leadership involves shared responsibility and collaborative decision-making. In private schools, leadership was more participatory and consistent, leading to more motivated staff and better learning environments.

Financial management practices also revealed disparities, with private schools exhibiting more transparent and efficient resource utilization. As noted by Ouakouak, Zaitouni, and Arya (2020), financial autonomy empowers leaders to make timely and impactful decisions, a privilege more commonly available in private institutions.

Lastly, on daily operational practices, the proactive engagement of private school principals contributed to better discipline, scheduling, and coordination. This finding echoes the work of Fullan (2005), who emphasized the importance of day-to-day leadership in driving school success and culture.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:



1. **Mandatory Leadership Training:** Educational authorities should introduce pre-service and in-service leadership training programs for principals in both public and private sectors, with a focus on strategic decision-making, supervision, and financial management.
2. **Policy Reforms for Decentralization:** The government should consider policy reforms that grant greater autonomy to public school principals in administrative and financial matters, enabling them to function more effectively.
3. **Professional Development Frameworks:** Regular workshops and capacity-building initiatives should be institutionalized to ensure principals stay updated with modern leadership practices.
4. **Monitoring and Support Mechanisms:** Both public and private schools should establish internal monitoring systems that support leadership accountability, peer mentoring, and feedback-based growth.
5. **Further Research:** Future studies should examine leadership practices in girls' schools, rural areas, and other provinces to provide a broader understanding of educational leadership across Pakistan.

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