



THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN MANAGING STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN PAKISTAN: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW (2015–2025)

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Abstract

Student discipline remains a persistent challenge in Pakistani schools, with significant implications for teaching quality, school climate, and student outcomes. While school leadership is widely recognized as a key factor in managing discipline, existing research in Pakistan is fragmented and lacks systematic synthesis. This study presents a systematic literature review of empirical and policy studies published between 2015 and 2025 to examine how school leaders in Pakistan influence, manage, and improve student discipline, identify key challenges and research gaps, and highlight effective leadership interventions. Guided by Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis framework, the review analyzed peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and policy-oriented studies. Five major themes emerged: leadership practices shaping student discipline; the role of school culture, relationships, and moral climate; structural, policy, and contextual constraints; disciplinary strategies and leadership interventions; and policy design and leadership capacity gaps. The findings reveal that leadership styles particularly instructional, collaborative, democratic, and relational approaches indirectly influence student discipline by shaping teaching quality, school climate, and teacher engagement, whereas authoritarian leadership undermines disciplinary effectiveness. Discipline was found to be closely linked to ethical leadership, interpersonal relationships, and teacher support. However, centralized governance, limited leader autonomy, resource constraints, and misalignment between policy design and leadership capacity significantly restrict effective discipline management. The review identifies positive and preventive discipline, professional development, student participation, parental engagement, and digital leadership as promising interventions, contingent on systemic support and policy alignment. The study concludes that sustainable improvements in student discipline in Pakistan require leadership-driven, relational, and contextually responsive approaches supported by coherent policy frameworks and capacity building.

Keywords: School leadership, student discipline, school climate, instructional leadership, Pakistan, systematic literature review

Introduction

School discipline remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges confronting educational institutions worldwide (Ispas & Ispas, 2023; Olasunkanmi et al., 2024), as it directly influences teaching–learning processes, school climate, student achievement, and institutional stability. Effective discipline is no longer viewed solely as the enforcement of rules, but as a dynamic process shaped by leadership practices, school culture, teacher capacity, and broader socio-contextual forces (Pushkina, 2025; Twisdale, 2024). International research increasingly highlights school leadership as a pivotal factor in creating orderly learning environments, establishing fair disciplinary systems, and supporting teachers in managing student behaviour.

In Pakistan, student discipline has emerged as a persistent concern within both public and private school systems, shaped by complex interactions between leadership practices, systemic constraints, and socio-cultural realities. Empirical studies suggest that school leaders influence



discipline primarily through their leadership orientations, school climate management, and relationships with teachers and students (Nawab & Noor, 2025; Riaz et al., 2024). Instructional leadership, when effectively enacted, has been found to indirectly support discipline by improving classroom organization, teacher accountability, and academic focus (Noor & Nawab, 2022). However, evidence also indicates that many school leaders possess only partial understanding of instructional leadership roles, limiting its effectiveness in addressing behavioural challenges. Recent years have witnessed growing scholarly attention toward school leadership in Pakistan, particularly in relation to instructional leadership, school climate, teacher motivation, and organizational effectiveness. However, despite the centrality of discipline to school functioning, empirical evidence examining how Pakistani school leaders specifically influence, manage, and resolve student discipline problems remains scattered across studies, uneven in quality, and limited in integrated synthesis. Existing studies often address discipline only as a secondary variable, without deeply examining leadership practices, implementation mechanisms, or contextual constraints.

The period following 2020 has been especially critical for school discipline in Pakistan due to the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged school closures, the transition to digital and hybrid learning, weakened school routines, and increased psychosocial stress among students and teachers. These shifts have placed unprecedented demands on school leaders to re-establish behavioural norms, rebuild institutional order, and support teachers in managing post-pandemic classroom challenges. Yet, there remains no comprehensive synthesis of recent empirical and policy literature that consolidates how school leadership has responded to these evolving disciplinary demands within the Pakistani context.

At the same time, emerging evidence points to promising leadership initiatives and interventions. Positive and preventive disciplinary approaches, teacher professional development, ethical leadership, and relationship-based practices have demonstrated potential for improving student behaviour and school climate (Mughal et al., 2023; Dar et al., 2024). More recently, digital leadership strategies, such as online attendance systems and parent–teacher communication platforms have been used to enhance transparency and parental involvement, particularly in private schools, although their implementation remains uneven due to capacity and infrastructure gaps (Amin et al., 2024). Therefore, this study undertakes a systematic qualitative review of empirical and policy-oriented literature to explore the role of school leadership in Pakistan in addressing school discipline. By synthesising findings from studies conducted in recent years, this review seeks to identify what leadership practices are reported to be effective, what contextual constraints limit leaders’ capacity to manage discipline, and what critical gaps remain in the national research landscape. The outcomes of this review aim to inform future research, leadership training programmes, and evidence-based policy development to strengthen school discipline systems in Pakistan.

Research Objective

To synthesize empirical and policy literature published between 2015 and 2025 on how school leaders in Pakistan influence, manage, and improve student discipline, identify challenges and gaps, and highlight effective interventions and leadership initiatives.



Research Questions

The study aimed to explore the following research questions:

1. How do school leaders in Pakistan influence, manage, and address student discipline within their schools?
2. What are the common challenges, gaps, or constraints that prevent school leaders from effectively managing discipline?
3. What interventions or leadership initiatives have been shown to improve discipline in Pakistani schools?
4. How do school leaders design and implement disciplinary policies in their schools?

Literature Review

School Leadership and Student Discipline

The management of student discipline has increasingly been recognized as a leadership-driven process rather than a function of rule enforcement alone. Contemporary literature emphasizes that school leaders play a pivotal role in shaping disciplinary climates through their leadership styles, relational practices, and institutional frameworks. Across diverse contexts, effective leadership has been associated with improved student behaviour, positive school climate, and enhanced academic engagement. Studies from East Africa provide early empirical evidence of the influence of leadership practices on discipline management. Katolo (2016), in a study of public secondary schools in Kenya, found that democratic leadership practices, such as open-door policies, timely communication, and student participation through school councils were strongly associated with improved student discipline. Principals who encouraged dialogue, transparency, and shared responsibility fostered greater student compliance with school rules and reduced instances of indiscipline. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory, suggesting that autonomy, relatedness, and participation enhance behavioural regulation.

Similarly, Kennedy (2018) examined the role of student leadership in managing discipline in Kenyan secondary schools and found that student leaders function as a critical bridge between school administration and the wider student body. The study revealed that student involvement in formulating school rules and resolving peer conflicts contributed to more sustainable and accepted disciplinary practices. However, the delegation of punitive authority to student leaders was viewed with caution, highlighting the need for clear administrative oversight and leadership training in peer mediation and counselling.

Leadership Styles and Disciplinary Approaches

Leadership style has emerged as a central determinant of how discipline is conceptualized and enacted within schools. Transformational and democratic leadership approaches consistently demonstrate positive associations with student behaviour and school climate. Lumadi (2025), in a qualitative study conducted in South African secondary schools, reported that proactive leadership strategies, such as restorative discipline, positive reinforcement, and stakeholder collaboration significantly reduced disruptive behaviour and improved academic engagement. Schools that emphasized inclusivity, respect, and shared accountability cultivated stronger social cohesion and learner responsibility.

Conversely, authoritarian and punitive disciplinary approaches have been increasingly critiqued. Yaakob et al. (2023), in a Malaysian context, found that only supportive disciplinary management styles positively influenced teacher leadership competency. Enforcement-based or coercive styles



showed no significant impact and were associated with continued reliance on forceful discipline. These findings reinforce the argument that supportive and relational leadership enhances educators' capacity to manage discipline effectively, whereas punitive approaches undermine professional growth and classroom stability. Welsh (2023) further highlighted how leadership philosophies shape disciplinary outcomes through interactions among school leaders and teachers. His study revealed that disciplinary decisions are not merely procedural but are negotiated through relational dynamics and discretionary practices within schools. Inconsistent leadership philosophies and weak accountability structures contributed to tensions in discipline management, underscoring the importance of coherent leadership vision and professional capacity-building.

Role of Teachers and Student Leadership in Discipline Management

Teacher leadership and student participation have been identified as critical extensions of school leadership in discipline management. Katolo (2016) and Kennedy (2018) both emphasized that when teachers and student leaders are empowered through participatory structures, discipline becomes more preventive and self-regulated. Student councils, peer mediation, and consultative decision-making foster a sense of ownership and accountability among learners. Lumadi (2025) similarly found that collaboration among teachers, school management teams, parents, and student leaders strengthened discipline outcomes. Teacher training in emotional intelligence, classroom management, and restorative practices enabled educators to address behavioural challenges more constructively. These findings suggest that discipline is most effective when leadership is distributed and aligned across multiple school actors.

Despite evidence supporting positive and participatory leadership approaches, several studies highlight systemic and contextual constraints that limit effective discipline management. Welsh (2023) noted that ambiguity in disciplinary policies and inconsistent enforcement practices create accountability gaps and exacerbate inequities. Similarly, Kennedy (2018) cautioned that without clear policy guidelines, delegating disciplinary responsibilities to student leaders can result in excesses or inconsistencies. Studies beyond Africa reinforce these concerns. Nasution et al. (2025), examining a private middle school context, found that while strict enforcement of rules contributed to orderly environments, excessive rigidity generated student stress and resistance. The study emphasized the need for balanced, personalized disciplinary approaches that combine structure with emotional support. Likewise, Nurlaili (2025) demonstrated that transformational leadership improves school climate and academic outcomes only when supported by professional development, technological resources, and institutional alignment.

Emerging Trends: Restorative and Digital Approaches

Recent literature points to emerging trends in discipline management, including restorative justice and digital leadership. Lumadi (2025) and Welsh (2023) both advocated for restorative approaches that prioritize conflict resolution, accountability, and relationship repair over exclusionary punishments. These approaches were found to reduce repeat misbehaviour and strengthen student-teacher relationships. Additionally, Nasution et al. (2025) highlighted the growing influence of digital tools in monitoring student behaviour and facilitating communication. While digital platforms improved efficiency and transparency, they also introduced challenges such as student distraction and dependency, indicating the need for careful integration and leadership oversight.

Collectively, the literature underscores that effective discipline management is deeply embedded in leadership practices, school culture, and relational dynamics. Supportive, democratic, and



transformational leadership styles consistently promote positive disciplinary outcomes, while punitive and authoritarian approaches yield limited and often counterproductive effects. However, the review also reveals notable gaps, including limited comparative research across regions, insufficient focus on student perspectives, and a lack of longitudinal studies examining the sustainability of leadership-led disciplinary interventions.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesize empirical evidence on the role of school leadership in addressing student discipline in Pakistan. A systematic review enables the transparent, comprehensive, and replicable synthesis of existing research, thereby strengthening the validity of conclusions drawn (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). To ensure methodological rigor and reporting transparency, the review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA approach supported the structured identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies relevant to the research questions.

Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and the Pakistan Education Research Network, to identify relevant studies published between 2015 and 2025. The search strategy employed Boolean operators and keyword combinations related to school leadership and discipline, such as:

- “school leadership and Pakistan”
- “principal and student discipline and Pakistan”
- “instructional leadership and classroom management and Pakistan”
- “positive discipline and schools and Pakistan”

These keywords were selected to capture studies addressing leadership practices, disciplinary approaches, policy implementation, and contextual constraints within Pakistani schools.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in this review if they met the following criteria: they were conducted in Pakistan, published between 2015 and 2025, and were peer-reviewed empirical studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Additionally, included studies specifically examined school leadership roles, practices, or interventions related to student discipline or behavior management.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they focused on contexts outside of Pakistan, did not address school leadership or student discipline, or were opinion pieces without empirical data. This ensured that the review considered only relevant, evidence-based research pertinent to the Pakistani educational context.

Study Selection Process

The selection process followed PRISMA (2020) guidelines. Initially, database searches produced a pool of potentially relevant studies. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. Full-text articles were then assessed against the inclusion criteria. This process



resulted in 12 studies being retained for final synthesis. A PRISMA-style flow diagram was used to document the selection process, enhancing transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021).

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed to systematically collect and organize key information from each of the included studies. This approach ensured consistency and accuracy in capturing relevant details across the reviewed literature. The extracted data encompassed several important aspects of each study. These included the author(s) and year of publication, the research context and location, and the study design and methodology employed. Additionally, information on participant characteristics was recorded to understand the population under study. Specific attention was given to the leadership practices and styles examined in each study, as well as the disciplinary approaches and interventions implemented. Contextual challenges and constraints reported by the studies were also documented to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing school leadership and student discipline. Finally, key findings relevant to the research questions were extracted to inform the synthesis and discussion of the review

Data Analysis Approach

To achieve the research objective, a thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze the extracted qualitative and qualitative-dominant data, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with familiarization with the data through repeated reading to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. This was followed by the initial coding of key elements, including leadership practices, disciplinary strategies, challenges, and interventions. The codes were then organized into broader themes aligned with the research questions, which were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, clarity, and relevance. Finally, findings were synthesized across studies to identify recurring patterns, research gaps, and implications for educational practice and policy. Thematic analysis was particularly suitable for this review as it enabled the integration of diverse methodological approaches and supported a nuanced understanding of leadership and discipline within Pakistan's varied educational contexts.

Findings of the study

This section presents the findings of the systematic literature review examining the role of school leadership in addressing student discipline in Pakistan. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, five major themes were identified through a rigorous process of familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and refinement. These themes synthesize patterns across the reviewed studies and are organized in alignment with the study's research questions.

Leadership Practices Shaping Student Discipline

The literature consistently indicates that school leaders in Pakistan influence student discipline primarily through their leadership practices and orientations rather than through direct disciplinary actions alone. Leadership styles including instructional, collaborative, relational, and authoritarian approaches shape the disciplinary climate of schools in distinct ways. Several studies highlight that instructional leadership, when effectively enacted, indirectly supports student discipline by enhancing teaching quality, clarifying academic expectations, and fostering structured learning environments (Nawab & Noor, 2025; Noor & Nawab, 2022). However, the literature also reveals that many school leaders demonstrate only a partial understanding of instructional leadership



responsibilities, which limits its potential effectiveness in addressing discipline-related challenges. As a result, instructional leadership often remains underutilized as a strategic tool for promoting positive student behaviour.

Collaborative and participatory leadership practices such as shared decision-making, delegation of responsibilities, and teacher empowerment were found to contribute positively to orderly school environments (Salfi, 2011; Rani et al., 2025). These approaches foster collective responsibility and strengthen teachers' commitment to maintaining discipline. In contrast, authoritarian leadership styles, typically characterized by rigid control and an emphasis on compliance, were associated with teacher disengagement and reduced morale, which indirectly undermined effective disciplinary practices (Ansari & Asad, 2023). Across the reviewed studies, leadership style emerged as a central factor influencing the disciplinary environment of schools. Hussain and Hayat (2022) reported that democratic and transformational leadership styles were strongly associated with a positive school culture characterized by trust, mutual respect, and cooperative student behaviour. Conversely, autocratic leadership was linked to teacher dissatisfaction, student resistance, and heightened disciplinary tensions.

Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2023) found that head teachers perceived instructional leadership as a mechanism through which both academic discipline and student behaviour could be regulated. School leaders emphasized classroom supervision, moral guidance, and teacher accountability as key leadership strategies for maintaining discipline. However, their findings also indicated that disciplinary issues were frequently managed through informal practices rather than through clearly defined institutional frameworks. Furthermore, Riaz et al. (2024) demonstrated that school climate mediates the relationship between leadership and discipline. Their findings revealed that schools characterized by supportive leadership practices developed orderly environments in which behavioural problems were minimized through peer regulation, positive classroom interactions, and shared norms. In contrast, weak or inconsistent leadership contributed to fragmented school climates and frequent disciplinary breakdowns.

School Culture, Relationships, and Moral Climate

A strong and recurring finding across the literature is the central role of school culture and interpersonal relationships in shaping student discipline. Discipline is frequently conceptualized not merely as the enforcement of rules, but as an outcome of trust, mutual respect, and shared moral values within the school community. Studies indicate that school leaders who cultivate a shared vision, promote ethical conduct, and model respectful behaviour contribute significantly to positive disciplinary outcomes (Ali, 2017; Salfi, 2011). Leaders' relational engagement with teachers and students demonstrated through empathy, emotional intelligence, and moral authority was shown to enhance students' sense of belonging, responsibility, and accountability (Hasan, 2021).

Conversely, weak relationships between school leaders and teachers, limited emotional intelligence, and ineffective communication were found to undermine disciplinary practices by fostering environments characterized by mistrust, resistance, and disengagement (Ansari & Asad, 2023; Nawab & Noor, 2025). These findings suggest that discipline in Pakistani schools is deeply intertwined with the moral and relational climate established and sustained by school leadership. Teacher support emerged as a critical leadership mechanism for addressing student discipline. Saleem (2023) found that participation in leadership development programmes enhanced



headteachers' capacities to manage conflict, supervise instruction, and mentor teachers effectively. Participants reported noticeable improvements in student discipline when teachers felt supported and guided rather than controlled. This shift reflected a broader movement away from punitive disciplinary systems toward preventive and developmental approaches grounded in professional support and ethical leadership.

Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2023) emphasized that school heads relied heavily on teachers to manage discipline at the classroom level. However, the effectiveness of this approach was contingent upon consistent supervision, clear expectations, and the moral authority exercised by school leadership. The study further revealed that many schools lacked formalized disciplinary policies, compelling leaders to rely on personal judgment and informal practices rather than structured institutional systems.

Structural, Policy, and Contextual Constraints

A prominent theme emerging across the reviewed studies concerns the structural and contextual constraints that limit school leaders' capacity to manage student discipline effectively. These constraints operate at multiple levels, including policy frameworks, institutional structures, and broader socio-cultural contexts. Several studies identify the limited authority and autonomy of school leaders as a significant barrier, particularly in public and semi-government schools where disciplinary decision-making is highly centralized (Shah et al., 2024; Noor & Nawab, 2022). In addition, inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, and the burden of excessive non-academic responsibilities further restrict leaders' ability to focus on proactive and strategic disciplinary leadership (Dar et al., 2024).

Moreover, socio-economic challenges such as parental disengagement, poverty, and unstable home environments were frequently cited as external factors contributing to student misbehavior (Rani et al., 2025; Dar et al., 2024). These findings underscore that disciplinary leadership in Pakistan cannot be understood in isolation but is deeply embedded within broader systemic, institutional, and socio-cultural realities that shape student behaviour and school functioning.

Across the reviewed literature, there was strong consensus that leadership effectiveness in discipline management is constrained by multiple, interrelated systemic factors. These constraints include:

- Lack of continuous and context-specific leadership training (Saleem, 2023)
- Absence of standardized and clearly articulated discipline policies (Iqbal et al., 2023)
- Persistent resource shortages and infrastructural deficiencies (Amin et al., 2024)
- Weak or fragmented school climates resulting from inconsistent leadership practices (Riaz et al., 2024)

Collectively, these limitations restrict school leaders' capacity to implement structured, fair, and sustainable disciplinary systems. As a result, leaders often resort to ad hoc, reactive, or personality-driven approaches to discipline, which may provide short-term control but fail to address underlying behavioural issues or contribute to long-term improvements in school discipline.

The reviewed literature identifies several leadership initiatives and interventions that demonstrate potential for improving student discipline in Pakistani schools. Notably, there is growing empirical support for positive and preventive disciplinary approaches as alternatives to punitive or corporal punishment-based methods. Mughal et al., (2023) quasi-experimental study provides evidence that positive discipline training enhances teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and psychological well-



being, thereby contributing to more supportive and orderly classroom environments. Similarly, Dar et al. (2024) report that strategies such as student participation in rule-making, positive reinforcement, and strengthened parent–school communication are increasingly adopted and perceived as effective in promoting positive student behaviour.

In addition, professional development initiatives focusing on classroom management, emotional regulation, and ethical leadership were consistently identified as critical interventions for strengthening disciplinary practices (Salfi, 2011; Rani et al., 2025). These initiatives enable school leaders and teachers to adopt proactive, reflective, and relationship-based approaches to discipline. However, the literature emphasizes that the long-term sustainability of such interventions is contingent upon strong institutional support, continuous professional development, and alignment with broader educational policies. Amin et al. (2024) further highlight the emerging role of digital leadership in discipline management, particularly within the private school sector. School principals reported using digital monitoring tools, online attendance systems, and parent–teacher communication platforms to track student behaviour and support disciplinary decision-making. These digital strategies were found to enhance parental involvement, improve transparency, and facilitate timely behavioural interventions.

Despite these benefits, several limitations were identified. These include insufficient digital training for school leaders and teachers, resistance to technology adoption, and unequal access to digital infrastructure. Such challenges significantly constrain the wider implementation of technology-based disciplinary systems, particularly in public and under-resourced schools. Overall, the findings suggest that while innovative and positive disciplinary interventions hold considerable promise, their effectiveness depends on leadership capacity, technological readiness, and systemic support.

Policy Design, Implementation, and Leadership Capacity Gaps

The final theme focuses on how school leaders design and implement disciplinary policies, as well as the capacity gaps that hinder effective policy enactment. The findings reveal a substantial disconnect between policy expectations and school leaders' preparedness to implement disciplinary frameworks in practice. Several studies indicate that disciplinary policies are frequently imposed through top-down mechanisms, with minimal involvement of school leaders in the policy formulation process (Nawab & Noor, 2025; Shah et al., 2024). Consequently, school leaders often lack clarity, a sense of ownership, and the necessary training to interpret and adapt these policies to their specific institutional contexts.

Furthermore, insufficient professional preparation in key areas such as policy interpretation, monitoring, and evaluation was consistently identified as a persistent capacity gap (Noor & Nawab, 2022). In the absence of targeted leadership development and contextualized policy support, disciplinary policies tend to be implemented superficially or inconsistently. These findings suggest that, without strengthening school leaders' policy-related competencies, disciplinary reforms are unlikely to achieve meaningful or sustainable impact in Pakistani schools. In addition to these thematic insights, the literature review revealed several significant research gaps that warrant further scholarly attention. These include:

- A scarcity of discipline-specific qualitative studies focusing explicitly on student behaviour within the Pakistani context



- A predominant emphasis on leadership–performance relationships, with comparatively limited exploration of leadership–discipline dynamics
- Insufficient attention to student perspectives on discipline and school climate
- Minimal empirical research examining school discipline in the post-pandemic period
- A lack of comparative studies across provinces, regions, and school sectors

Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for more contextually grounded, multi-perspective, and methodologically diverse research to deepen understanding of disciplinary leadership and inform evidence-based policy and practice in Pakistan’s education system.

Summary

Overall, the findings demonstrate that school leadership plays a critical but constrained role in addressing student discipline in Pakistan. While effective leadership practices, positive school culture, and evidence-based interventions show promise, systemic barriers, capacity gaps, and contextual challenges continue to inhibit disciplinary leadership. These findings provide a strong foundation for the subsequent discussion and recommendations.

Discussion

This systematic literature review sought to synthesize empirical and policy research published between 2015 and 2025 on how school leaders in Pakistan influence, manage, and improve student discipline, identify challenges and gaps, and highlight effective interventions and leadership initiatives. The findings reveal that student discipline in Pakistani schools is primarily shaped by leadership practices, relational dynamics, institutional constraints, and policy enactment processes rather than by direct disciplinary control alone. When interpreted in light of international literature, these findings both align with and extend global understandings of disciplinary leadership while highlighting context-specific challenges. Consistent with international research, this review confirms that leadership style is a critical determinant of school disciplinary climate. Studies from Pakistan demonstrate that instructional, collaborative, democratic, and transformational leadership approaches promote positive student behaviour by strengthening teaching quality, clarifying expectations, and fostering orderly learning environments. These findings align with evidence from Kenya (Katolo, 2016; Kennedy, 2018), South Africa (Lumadi, 2025), Malaysia (Yaakob et al., 2023), and the United States (Welsh, 2023), where supportive and participatory leadership styles were similarly associated with improved discipline and school climate.

However, the Pakistani literature reveals a distinctive challenge: while instructional leadership is widely recognized as influential, it is often only partially understood or inconsistently enacted. This mirrors findings in other developing contexts, where leadership capacity gaps limit the translation of leadership theory into practice (Nurlaili, 2025). In contrast, studies from high-income contexts emphasize structured leadership preparation and ongoing mentoring as mechanisms that enable leaders to use instructional leadership effectively for discipline management (Welsh, 2023). This comparison highlights a critical need for context-sensitive leadership development in Pakistan. Conversely, the negative effects of authoritarian leadership identified in this review are consistent with international critiques of punitive and compliance-driven approaches. Similar patterns of teacher disengagement, student resistance, and disciplinary tensions have been documented in Kenyan and Malaysian schools (Katolo, 2016; Yaakob et al., 2023), reinforcing the argument that authoritarian leadership undermines both professional capacity and student self-regulation. The centrality of school culture and interpersonal relationships in shaping discipline is



a key convergence between Pakistani and international literature. Across contexts, discipline is increasingly conceptualized as a moral and relational construct rather than a technical enforcement mechanism. The findings of this review align with international evidence that leaders who model ethical behaviour, empathy, and emotional intelligence cultivate trust, belonging, and shared responsibility among students and teachers (Lumadi, 2025; Nasution et al., 2025).

The Pakistani literature, however, places particularly strong emphasis on moral authority and relational engagement, reflecting the socio-cultural context in which leadership legitimacy is closely tied to personal conduct and ethical standing. Similar observations have been made in African and Southeast Asian contexts, where leaders' moral credibility significantly influences student compliance and peer regulation (Kennedy, 2018; Nasution et al., 2025). This suggests that relational and moral leadership may be especially salient in collectivist societies, including Pakistan. At the same time, the review highlights that weak leader–teacher relationships, limited emotional intelligence, and poor communication undermine discipline by creating climates of mistrust and resistance. These findings echo Welsh's (2023) analysis of how fractured adult relationships within schools distort disciplinary decision-making and accountability. Across contexts, therefore, discipline emerges as a function of adult relational coherence rather than student control alone.

While international literature acknowledges structural barriers to effective discipline management, the Pakistani context is marked by particularly pronounced systemic constraints. Centralized governance structures, limited principal autonomy, resource shortages, and overcrowded classrooms significantly restrict leaders' capacity to implement proactive disciplinary strategies. Similar constraints have been documented in Kenyan public schools (Katolo, 2016), yet the Pakistani literature reveals deeper policy-level rigidity and weaker institutional support mechanisms. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental disengagement, and unstable home environments further complicate discipline management, reinforcing international evidence that school leadership alone cannot offset broader structural inequities (Lumadi, 2025). However, unlike studies from the United States and South Africa, which highlight district-level support and restorative policy frameworks, Pakistani studies reveal limited systemic alignment between policy intent and school-level realities. This disconnect intensifies leaders' reliance on informal and ad hoc disciplinary practices.

The findings related to positive and preventive disciplinary interventions align strongly with international shifts away from punitive discipline. Evidence from Pakistan supports the effectiveness of positive discipline training, teacher professional development, student participation, and parental engagement—interventions that have also demonstrated success in Kenya, Malaysia, and South Africa (Kennedy, 2018; Yaakob et al., 2023; Lumadi, 2025). Digital leadership emerged as an emerging but unevenly implemented strategy. Similar to international findings, technology enhanced transparency and parent–school communication but was constrained by infrastructure gaps and limited training. This mirrors concerns raised in global literature that digital solutions can exacerbate inequalities when introduced without adequate systemic support (Nurlaili, 2025). Importantly, both Pakistani and international studies emphasize that the sustainability of disciplinary interventions depends on institutionalization, policy coherence, and continuous leadership development rather than isolated programmes. Without these supports, reforms remain fragmented and short-lived.



A key contribution of this review lies in highlighting the persistent gap between disciplinary policy design and leadership capacity in Pakistan. While international studies increasingly emphasize school leader involvement in policy formulation and contextual adaptation (Welsh, 2023; Lumadi, 2025), Pakistani leaders are often positioned as implementers rather than co-creators of disciplinary frameworks. This limits policy ownership, fidelity, and contextual relevance. The identified research gaps further reinforce the need for a more nuanced research agenda. Compared to international literature, Pakistani studies remain heavily focused on leadership–performance outcomes, with limited qualitative exploration of discipline processes, student perspectives, and post-pandemic challenges. International research increasingly adopts multi-stakeholder and longitudinal approaches, suggesting methodological directions for future research in Pakistan. In relation to the study’s research objective, this review demonstrates that school leaders in Pakistan influence discipline primarily through leadership style, relational practices, and school climate management rather than direct control. It identifies significant challenges structural constraints, policy disconnects, and capacity gaps that limit effective discipline management. At the same time, it highlights promising interventions aligned with international best practices, including positive discipline, teacher empowerment, ethical leadership, and digital tools, while emphasizing the need for systemic and contextual support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This systematic literature review synthesized empirical and policy studies published between 2015 and 2025 to examine the role of school leadership in managing student discipline in Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that student discipline is shaped primarily by leadership practices, school culture, and institutional conditions rather than by direct disciplinary control alone. Instructional, collaborative, democratic, and relational leadership approaches were consistently associated with positive disciplinary climates characterized by trust, mutual respect, and cooperative student behaviour. In contrast, authoritarian leadership styles were linked to teacher disengagement, weakened school climate, and increased disciplinary tensions.

The review further highlights that discipline in Pakistani schools is deeply embedded in the moral and relational climate established by school leaders. Ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, and supportive leader–teacher relationships emerged as critical factors in promoting preventive and developmental approaches to discipline. Teacher empowerment and professional support were identified as key mechanisms through which leadership influences classroom-level discipline. However, the effectiveness of leadership practices is significantly constrained by structural and contextual factors, including centralized governance, limited principal autonomy, resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and socio-economic challenges faced by students and families. A persistent disconnect between disciplinary policy design and school-level leadership capacity was also evident. Disciplinary policies are often imposed through top-down mechanisms, limiting leaders’ ownership, clarity, and ability to adapt policies to local contexts. As a result, discipline is frequently managed through informal or ad hoc practices rather than structured and sustainable systems. Despite these challenges, promising interventions such as positive and preventive discipline, professional development, student participation, parental engagement, and emerging digital leadership practices show potential, provided they are supported by coherent policies and institutional capacity.



Recommendations

At the policy level, education authorities should decentralize disciplinary decision-making, develop standardized yet flexible discipline frameworks, and institutionalize leadership development focused on discipline management, ethical leadership, and policy enactment. At the school level, leaders should strengthen instructional and relational leadership practices, support teacher professional development, foster positive school culture, and promote student and parental involvement. Equitable integration of digital tools should be accompanied by adequate training and infrastructure support.

Future research should prioritize discipline-specific qualitative studies, incorporate student perspectives, examine post-pandemic disciplinary challenges, and conduct comparative analyses across provinces and school sectors. Strengthening alignment between policy, leadership capacity, and school-level practice is essential for achieving sustainable improvements in student discipline in Pakistan.

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