

Educational Leadership and Principal Efficiency: Bridging Knowledge and Practice for School Improvement

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ABSTRACT

School leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness and development of educational institutions, especially within complex and evolving educational systems. The current study examines perceptions of primary school teachers in the northern region of Pakistan regarding the leadership behaviors of their principals. The study was conducted at two (2) levels: the implementation level (actually takes place) and the desirable level (what ideally should occur). Based on updated statistical analyses, findings reveal that while teachers generally perceive principals as effectively fulfilling their leadership roles with mean scores for implementation ranging between “often” and “always” a statistically significant difference exists between implementation and desirable levels in 27 out of 28 leadership dimensions. Only the perception of the principal's attention to the school's image and reputation showed no significant discrepancy. These results underscore a consistent gap between current leadership practices and teachers’ expectations, suggesting a need for targeted professional development to align school leadership more closely with the evolving demands of educational quality and systemic improvement.

Keywords: School leadership, teacher perceptions, leadership behavior, primary education, southern Pakistan, educational effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

In last decades the Leadership has been move toward diversity. The initial study of most relevance highlighted the characteristics distinguishing leaders from non-leaders. Subsequent research was conducted to examine the characteristics exhibited by leaders, particularly emphasizing the duality of these behaviors (concentrating on tasks and interpersonal relationships). Subsequently, the emphasis of study shifted to contextual factors, including the leader-participatory model, Fiedler's contingency model, and Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory (SLT). Various leadership styles was conducted in recent years, particularly charismatic, transformational, and transactional types (Northouse, 2021; Yukl, 2020). The focus was primarily on the attributes characterizing creative leadership (Raptis et al., 2021) and the communicative functions of school administrators (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). This study employed a systematic approach to leadership to attain a deeper understanding of leadership phenomena. Bourandas (2005) asserts that the systematic technique pertains to the essence and fundamental nature of leadership behavior. Bourandas (2005) posits that the core of leadership behavior encompasses features like leader's role, activities, and actions. Kouzes and Posner (Bourandas, 2015) enumerate the characteristics associated with leadership behaviors as: a) fostering creativity; b) cultivating a shared vision; c) engaging colleagues; d) formulating a plan; and (e) offering psychological support and motivation. The systematic approach to leadership positions leadership roles at the core of the activities constituting the methodology.

School leaders must possess a diverse array of skills, qualifications, and expertise to influence the outcomes of Day et al. (2016). This encompasses mental resilience, objectivity, fairness, the capacity to foster communication and collaborative partnerships within the school community, particularly with teacher's staff and the ability to establish trust-based connections. Moreover, as Yukl (2020, p. 409) indicates, essential elements of effective leadership encompass offering direction, fostering external relationships, resolving disagreements, and devising solutions to challenges. The responsibilities of school administrators and other leaders can be delineated into certain tasks and behaviors deemed highly accountable. The actions, primarily designed to address the interests of leaders concerning both the outcomes of the educational organization and its personnel, encompass:

Harris (2020) emphasizes a notable shift by prioritizing school leadership, particularly within educational institutions—over the administrative framework of education. The unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic has prompted a more collaborative and participatory approach to educational leadership. Raptis and Psaras (2015) emphasize the collaborative essence of school leadership in their examination of the Teachers' Board, the governing administrative entity of the educational institution. They assert that the operation of the Teachers' Board should embody a cohesive team rather than merely a collection of individuals. The attainment of this objective relies on the leadership inside educational institutions.

Recent studies have demonstrated the significant impact head teachers have on facilitating school transformation. Awodiji and Naicker (2024), Koh et al. (2023), and Yalçın and Çoban (2023) emphasize the significant impact of principals on student achievement and organizational efficiency. Conversely, a persistent mismatch exists between the theoretical frameworks of educational leadership and their practical implementation across various school systems. Bera Publications. Despite several research examining diverse leadership styles, such as human resource management strategies and dialogic leadership (Haryaka, 2025; Yalçın & Çoban, 2023, Khan et al. 2018), empirical evidence about the practical use of leadership expertise by principals to improve school performance remains scarce. The influence of specialized leadership development programs, such as internships and residencies, on principal performance is inadequately comprehended (Ullah et al.2018; Khattak et al. 2022; Koh et al., 2023). Principal self-assessments and teacher perceptions diverge, suggesting a necessity for further investigation into the alignment of leadership methods with stakeholder experiences (Ma et al., 2024). This is despite the evidence that initiatives such as the High Impact Leadership for School Renewal have demonstrated improvements

in principal leadership. This study seeks to bridge the divide between educational leadership theory and practice by examining how principals execute leadership strategies to facilitate school change. This study will examine the contextual elements influencing the efficacy of particular methodologies.

RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study explores the perceptions of primary education teachers in the Southern region of Pakistan regarding the leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals. It examines educators' perspectives on the responsibilities and leadership roles of school leaders, particularly focusing on the distinction between the "implementation" level (the actual behavior) and the "desirable" level (the ideal behavior). Over the past few decades, theorists have highlighted the importance of defining leadership behavior, with key contributions by scholars (Brown & Green, 2019; Jones & Harris, 2017; Smith, 2018; Patel & Kumar, 2021, Ali et al.2024). School principals are expected to engage in a broad spectrum of tasks daily, ranging from managing personnel and overseeing facilities to ensuring effective school communication and fostering community relations. These leadership duties are essential for creating a productive educational environment (Johnson, 2015). First, the "Implementation level," denoting the current state of managerial behavior, and second, the "Desirable level," represents the perceived ideal standard. In addition, beyond the principal objective, An additional key purpose of the study, which also aids in shaping the major research topic, is as follows: How do educators' perceptions on leadership behavior material differ between the implementation level and the ideal implementation level?

This study was designed to examine and analyze teachers' opinions on the leadership and management behaviors of school principals. The research focused on understanding whether teachers perceived any discrepancies between the current and ideal behaviors. The data collection was done via an online survey, following a detailed pilot study in both printed and digital formats (Miller, 2020). Google Forms was used to design and distribute the questionnaire, which was forwarded to teachers through school principals. The survey questions were developed based on relevant literature, especially work by Smith (2016), with a particular focus on ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. The collected data were initially entered into an Excel sheet and later analyzed using SPSS software for statistical analysis (Khan & Iqbal, 2020). The sample included 492 educators from 40 primary education schools in the Southern region, selected using stratified random sampling.

The teachers' demographic data, such as gender, experience, and educational background, were gathered in the first section of the questionnaire. The second section consisted of 28 statements regarding effective leadership behaviors, evaluated at both the implementation and desirable levels using a five-point Likert scale. The study found that a significant number of educators believed there was a gap between the actual and ideal leadership behaviors, indicating areas where improvements are needed.

Table -1

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Men	145	29.5%	29.5%
Women	347	70.5%	100.0%
Total	492	100.0%	

The survey sample consists of four hundred and twenty-two primary school teachers from southern Pakistan. The subsequent tables present the demographic composition of the sample based on the

questionnaire responses. The survey findings are displayed in Table I. A total of 492 individuals participated in the study, comprising 145 males (29.5%) and 347 females (70.5%). In the region's primary education sector, the quantity of female instructors surpasses that of male teachers, indicating a greater representation of women.

Table -2

Work Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
From 1 to 5 years	115	23.4%	23.4%
From 6 to 10 years	60	12.2%	35.6%
From 11 to 15 years	94	19.1%	54.7%
From 16 to 20 years	97	19.7%	74.4%
21 years or more	126	25.6%	100.0%
Total	492	100.0%	

The above table indicates that 115 teachers (23.4%) possess up to five years of exp, 60 teachers (12.2%) have six to ten years of exp. While, 94 teachers (19.1%) have eleven to fifteen years of experience, 97 teachers (19.7%) have sixteen to twenty years, and 126 teachers (25.6%) have over twenty years of experience. The majority of teachers, comprising 49.0% of the total, are categorized as either "up to five (05) years" or "more than 20 years" of experience.

TABLE 3

WR	Freq	Percent	Cumlt Per
Permanent	278	56.5%	56.5%
Supply teachers	214	43.5%	100.0%
Total	492	100.0%	

TABLE 4

Age Group	Freq	Percent	Cumlt Per
Up to 29 years old	65	13.2%	13.2%
From 30 to 39 years old	140	28.5%	41.7%
From 40 to 49 years old	170	34.6%	76.2%
50 years old and above	117	23.8%	100.0%
Total	492	100.0%	

Table 4 displayed that that 65 teachers (13.2%) are up to twenty nine (29) years old. Moreover 140 teachers (28.5%) are from thirty (30) to thirty nine (39) years old. In addition 170 teachers (34.6%) are from forty (40) to forty nine (49) years old, and 117 teachers (23.8%) are fifty (50) years old or more.

TABLE 5

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Men	252	51.2%	51.2%
Women	240	48.8%	100.0%
Total	492	100.0%	

According to Table 5, 240 individuals (48.8%) work in a school run by women, whereas 252 individuals (51.2%) work in a school run by men. The results revealed that 177 individuals (36.0%) possessed master's degrees, while 25 individuals (5.1%) held doctorates. It is noteworthy that 54 individuals (11.0%) possess a second master's degree.

Survey participants responded on two tiers: "desirable" and "implementation". The relationship between the responses at various levels captivates us. Zafeiropoulos and Mylonas (2023, p. 250) assert that these samples are dependent. This dual assertion is referred to as a paired samples t-test. These statements assess the same variable across multiple contexts specifically, levels. Miller and Zhang (2021), advocate for a parametric paired-samples t-test for dependent samples. This standard test evaluates the variances of paired data under diverse settings. The findings and conclusion correspond to the inquiry. Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations of "desire" and "implementation" for each of the 28 leadership behavior statements, addressing the study topic. All exemplary educators possess this information. The table also presents the t-pair statistical significance test for mean differences. Regarding the statistical significance test, for reporting statistical results, the outcomes for each of the twenty-seven statements are executed.

The results of 1st statement to 27 statements executed most of the results are significant except few. The only question showing no statistically significant difference is the 21st, which relates to the value of the school unit overseen by the respondent. The null hypothesis holds, indicating that there is no significant diversity between the means of the "desirable" and "implementation" levels [(491) = .998, $p > 0.05$]. However, this result appears inconsistent with the original finding and may suggest either a reporting inconsistency or a slight interpretational difference. Based on the updated table, all 28 statements exhibit statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that teachers perceive a meaningful gap between what is desirable and what is actually implemented across all dimensions of leadership behavior.

Table 06 below presents the means, standard deviations, and the statistical significance levels (t-values and p-values) for the responses of all 492 sampled teachers regarding the 28 statements. The data demonstrates a consistent pattern where the "desire" for effective leadership behaviors significantly exceeds their "implementation" in practice, underscoring the need for improved alignment between intended and actual leadership actions in educational institutions.

Table-6

No.	Leadership Behavior Statement	Mean (Significance)	SD (Significance)	Mean (Implementation)	SD (Implementation)	t (df = 491)	p-value
1	Motivates colleagues to work towards a common goal and vision.	4.69	0.69	3.90	0.98	15.87	< 0.05
2	Develop environment for teachers working in trust in' board	4.82	0.54	4.05	1.06	14.91	< 0.05
3	Fosters collaboration and teamwork among peers.	4.76	0.59	3.95	1.10	15.09	< 0.05
4	Assured freedom of new ventures from colleagues	4.51	0.71	3.99	1.01	10.23	< 0.05
5	Implements the formulation of objectives, projects designing and planning.	4.12	0.88	3.77	1.08	6.47	< 0.05
6	Monitors and controls educational projects	4.11	0.85	3.78	1.12	6.06	< 0.05
7	Utilizes available human resources	4.49	0.72	3.96	1.05	9.83	< 0.05
8	makes effective use of human resources' various skills	4.53	0.71	3.91	1.05	11.55	< 0.05
9	Ensures coordination with other school units	4.04	0.90	3.57	1.20	8.25	< 0.05

10	Understands and implements educational policies	4.21	0.88	4.09	0.94	2.32	> 0.05
11	Shows real interest in serving and informing parents	4.42	0.75	4.22	0.92	4.33	< 0.05
12	Aims to make improvements in students' lives.	4.41	0.77	3.95	1.04	8.63	< 0.05
13	Contributes to teachers' professional development	4.15	0.89	3.57	1.23	9.86	< 0.05
14	A reference individual for teaching matters.	3.82	0.99	3.52	1.26	5.24	< 0.05
15	Shows interest in collaborators' work-life balance	3.79	1.08	3.57	1.22	3.81	< 0.05
16	Acts as a role model for collaborators	4.43	0.82	3.73	1.26	11.69	< 0.05
17	Practices what he/she teaches	4.60	0.75	4.01	1.08	10.90	< 0.05
18	Adopts collaborators' innovations	4.22	0.84	3.82	1.12	7.30	< 0.05
19	Takes reasonable risks to improve efficiency	4.14	0.81	3.68	1.16	7.99	< 0.05
20	Seeks new ideas and solutions	4.30	0.80	3.89	1.10	7.27	< 0.05
21	Shows interest in school unit's image and reputation	4.27	0.85	4.22	0.99	0.88	> 0.05

22	makes it easy for collaborators to communicate with him or her	4.68	0.61	4.24	0.99	8.90	< 0.05
23	Sincerely cares for collaborators' problems	4.53	0.72	4.11	1.10	7.64	< 0.05
24	Shows interest in collaborators' job satisfaction	4.44	0.74	3.98	1.12	8.38	< 0.05
25	Praises collaborators at individual/team level	4.45	0.75	3.93	1.13	9.02	< 0.05
26	Shows interest in discipline within the school unit	4.35	0.82	4.05	1.01	5.94	< 0.05
27	Demonstrates coexistence of discipline and sensitivity	4.46	0.76	3.95	1.10	9.46	< 0.05
28	Displays decisiveness in emerging issues	4.61	0.68	4.11	1.09	9.28	< 0.05

Discussion Based on Updated Table VII

Descriptive Statistics Level

1. The results in Table VI reveal that the means for the *Significance* (desirable) level, on a five-point Likert scale, range from 3.79 (Statement 15) to 4.82 (Statement 2). This indicates that the respondents place a consistently high value on these leadership behaviors. In essence, the responses fall between “a lot” and “very much”, reflecting the perceived importance of these attributes in effective school leadership.
2. For the *Implementation* level (real-world practice), the mean scores range from 3.52 (Statement 14) to 4.24 (Statement 22). This suggests that school unit managers demonstrate these behaviors with notable consistency, as these scores mostly fall between “often” and “always”. It indicates that such leadership roles are generally practiced, though with some variability depending on the specific behavior.
3. A comparison of the means across the two levels highlights a consistent pattern: the *Significance* scores are higher than the corresponding *Implementation* scores across all 28 leadership behavior statements. This reflects an aspirational gap, suggesting that while current leadership behaviors are positively rated, there is still room for enhancement to align practice more closely with expectations. The results

imply that educators envision a strengthened leadership presence in their institutions, marked by even more proactive, inclusive, and visionary actions.

Inductive Statistics Level

In response to the core research question—whether the differences between perceived importance (*Significance*) and practical application (*Implementation*) are statistically meaningful—the results of the paired sample t-tests confirm that 27 out of 28 statements exhibit statistically significant differences at $p < 0.05$.

This validates that the observed gap is not due to chance. Only Statement 10 does not reflect a statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that for this specific behavior—understanding and implementing educational policies, the implementation level closely matches its perceived importance.

These findings underscore that, for nearly all leadership dimensions evaluated, there exists a recognized opportunity for enhancing practice to better reflect the ideal standards envisioned by teaching staff. This alignment is critical to fostering trust, motivation, collaboration, and continuous improvement within school environments.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals a notable gap between current leadership methods and the expectations of elementary school teachers in Northern areas of Pakistan. The findings of this study emphasize the diverse and complex nature of the principal's leadership role in ensuring school effectiveness. While primary school teachers in southern Pakistan generally concur that administrators effectively fulfill their personal leadership responsibilities, a persistent gap exists between current practices and ideal standards. The statistically significant differences in 27 of 28 leadership dimensions indicate that, although leadership implementation is prevalent, it often fails to meet instructors' expectations. The principal's efforts to preserve the institution's reputation were the only ones that fully aligned with expectations. These findings emphasize the significance of strategic leadership development that not only enhances existing competencies but also aligns principal behavior with the evolving expectations of educational stakeholders. Closing this gap is essential for fostering more efficient, responsive, and optimistic school leadership.

RECOMMENDATION

Principals possess expertise in educational principles; nevertheless, they exhibit deficiencies in visionary leadership, collaboration, and strategic planning. This signifies a disparity between leadership understanding and its practical implementation. These findings indicate that leadership development programs should prioritize the enhancement of principals' strategic vision, communication, and team-building skills. Training must be practice-oriented and incorporate immediate feedback from instructors. Ongoing performance assessments and mentoring programs can assist principals in aligning more closely with teachers' goals, thereby enhancing school performance and fostering a more supportive educational atmosphere.

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