ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 5, Issue 3, 2026 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

Strategic Leadership of Secondary School Head Teachers and School Effectiveness in Punjab, Pakistan: Evidence from Public Schools

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Received: 23-02-2026 **Revised:** 08-03-2026 **Accepted**: 20-03-2026 **Published:** 30-03-2026

ABSTRACT

School leadership has become an important area of educational research because leadership practices can shape teaching, teacher capacity, school climate, and the conditions in which students learn. Accordingly, this study examines strategic leadership practices of head teachers and their relationship with school effectiveness in public secondary schools in Punjab, Pakistan. Specifically, the article is drawn from a mixed-method doctoral study and reports its quantitative component, which involved 542 teachers from 116 public secondary schools across 12 districts in five divisions of Punjab. Data were collected using a structured 58-item questionnaire administered to male and female teachers. The instrument demonstrated internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. To examine teachers' perceptions, descriptive statistics were used across five strategic-leadership domains: instructional leadership, school climate, teacher evaluation, organizational management, and communication and community relations. Overall, the findings indicate generally high teacher perceptions of head teachers' vision-setting, participatory planning, instructional supervision, school-climate development, teacher monitoring, and stakeholder communication. For instance, 94.7% of respondents agreed that head teachers shared a common school vision, 94.8% reported staff involvement in developing the school vision, and 95.8% reported a positive, caring, and supportive school climate. In addition, teacher-evaluation practices were frequently reported, including classroom visits, monitoring of teacher punctuality, classroom observation, feedback, and attention to student performance. Nevertheless, the results also reveal resource and administrative constraints, including inadequate instructional resources, limited financial resources, insufficient facilities, weak parental involvement, and political interference. Moreover, the thesis reports a significant and strong relationship between strategic leadership practices and school effectiveness. These findings are discussed in relation to recent international research on instructional leadership and student outcomes, as well as research on school leadership in Pakistan. Overall, the study contributes context-specific evidence from public secondary schools in Punjab and underscores the importance of leadership development, organizational support, resource autonomy, and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: *Strategic leadership; school effectiveness; head teachers; instructional leadership; school climate; teacher evaluation; Punjab; Pakistan; secondary education.*

INTRODUCTION

School leadership is increasingly understood as an organizational process through which leaders establish direction, coordinate people and resources, support teaching, and create conditions for school improvement. In contemporary educational settings, leadership is therefore not confined to administrative control; rather, it also encompasses instructional guidance, teacher development, collaborative decision-making, organizational learning, and relationships with families and communities. In support of this broader understanding, a recent systematic review of 144 studies found

instructional leadership to be the most frequently examined school-leadership model in research linking leadership with student achievement. The review also emphasized the importance of interpreting leadership effects in relation to different educational systems (Özdemir et al., 2024).

Similarly, evidence from international meta-analytic research suggests that school-leadership practices are associated with student outcomes, although the magnitude of these associations is generally modest and varies according to practice and context. For example, Tan et al. (2024), drawing on 493 independent effects from 108 studies, reported a mean association of r = .14 and identified instructional management, teacher-capacity development, and engagement with external stakeholders as practices connected with student outcomes. Extending this line of inquiry, more recent cross-national research examined the relationship between instructional leadership and achievement across 75 countries and more than 1.5 million students. These findings further highlight the importance of cultural and system-level context when interpreting leadership effects (Pietsch et al., 2025).

Against this international background, the Pakistani context warrants particular attention because school leaders often work within resource constraints and administrative structures that shape their decision-making. Recent research in Pakistan has documented the wide-ranging academic and administrative responsibilities of government-school headteachers, alongside the practical challenges they encounter. For instance, a 2024 study of government secondary schools in Sindh found that headteachers performed extensive academic and administrative roles, although their work was often more administrative than academic. The study also identified shortages of basic facilities and other constraints (Khan et al., 2024).

In response to this context, the present study examines the strategic leadership of head teachers in public secondary schools in Punjab. The doctoral study conceptualized strategic leadership through five dimensions: instructional leadership, school climate, teacher evaluation, organizational management, and communication and community relations. In parallel, school effectiveness was represented through student learning achievement, teacher work performance, parent and community participation, and the learning environment. Accordingly, the research questions addressed leadership challenges, gender-related differences, leadership indicators, and the relationship among leadership, challenges, and school effectiveness.

The contribution of this article is both empirical and contextual. Drawing on data from 542 teachers across 116 public secondary schools, it examines a multidimensional conception of strategic leadership rather than focusing on a single leadership style. This broader approach is important because recent reviews indicate that leadership may operate through several pathways, including teaching practice, teacher collaboration, professional learning, and organizational conditions (Hallinger et al., 2024).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To analyze the strategic leadership practices used by head teachers to address administrative challenges.
- To identify the administrative challenges encountered by head teachers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study conceptualizes strategic leadership through five dimensions derived from the doctoral thesis framework: instructional leadership, school climate, teacher evaluation, organizational management, and communication and community relations. Correspondingly, school effectiveness is represented

through four outcomes: student learning achievement, satisfaction with teachers' work performance, participation of parents and the community, and a positive learning environment.

Within this framework, head teachers are treated as organizational actors whose practices may influence school effectiveness through instructional, relational, managerial, and community-oriented processes. This multidimensional perspective is consistent with contemporary research suggesting that school-leadership effects are not limited to direct relationships with student achievement; instead, they may also operate through teacher practice, professional capacity, school climate, and organizational conditions (Özdemir et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Research design and participants

The parent study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design; however, the present article focuses specifically on its quantitative component. The survey involved 542 teachers from 116 public secondary schools located in 12 districts across five divisions of Punjab: Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Sahiwal, and Sargodha. Of the participants, 292 were male teachers (53.9%) and 250 were female teachers (46.1%). Regarding academic qualifications, 54.4% held a master's degree, 42.6% held an MPhil, and 3.0% held a PhD. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents (52.6%) had over 10 years of teaching experience.

Instrument and reliability

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising 58 items organized around the study's strategic-leadership and school-effectiveness domains. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale. To assess the instrument's internal consistency, the thesis reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70, which indicates an acceptable level of reliability.

Data analysis

The thesis used SPSS to analyze the quantitative data. Specifically, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe teachers' perceptions, while inferential procedures were applied to compare groups and examine relationships. Importantly, the present article reports the relationships documented in the thesis and does not introduce statistical coefficients that were not reported in the supplied chapters.

RESULTS

Instructional leadership

Teachers generally reported strong instructional-leadership practices. Specifically, 94.7% agreed that head teachers shared a common school vision with stakeholders ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.687$), while 94.8% reported that head teachers consulted staff when developing the school vision ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.679$). Similarly, 94.3% reported that head teachers made personal efforts to organize co-curricular activities ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.709$), and 93.0% agreed that head teachers provided clear expectations concerning teaching and learning ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.743$). Taken together, these responses suggest that vision-setting, staff consultation, instructional direction, and the communication of school priorities were prominent aspects of head-teacher practice.

Nevertheless, responses to two items were comparatively less positive. Only 56.8% of respondents agreed that head teachers resolved discipline-related issues in ways that maximized instructional time ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.434$), while 62.7% reported that head teachers showed respect for subordinates and

staff (M = 3.16, SD = 1.560). Thus, although teachers expressed strong perceptions of strategic direction, their views were more mixed regarding certain interpersonal and disciplinary practices.

School climate

Overall, responses concerning school climate were consistently positive. For example, 95.8% of respondents reported that head teachers developed a positive, caring, and supportive school climate (M = 4.47, SD = 0.616). Likewise, 94.1% reported collaborative structures for working with staff and students (M = 4.30, SD = 0.660), while 94.3% indicated that head teachers fostered confidence, respect, trust, and encouragement among students (M = 4.31, SD = 0.637). In addition, 95.9% reported a good learning environment (M = 4.36, SD = 0.609). Taken together, these findings point to positive perceptions of organized discipline, respectful relationships, teamwork, trust, and recognition of staff contributions.

Teacher evaluation

Teacher-evaluation practices were also frequently reported. Specifically, 91.7% of respondents indicated that head teachers made frequent classroom visits (M = 4.28, SD = 0.786), and 95.1% reported that head teachers monitored teachers' regularity and punctuality (M = 4.39, SD = 0.673). Furthermore, 88.2% reported formal classroom observation for quality education (M = 4.14, SD = 0.829). Following these observations, 89.5% reported receiving feedback (M = 4.17, SD = 0.815), while 90.0% indicated that student learning achievement was monitored regularly (M = 4.17, SD = 0.795). Overall, these findings suggest that instructional monitoring and accountability were visible components of head-teacher practice.

Administrative management challenges

The findings present a more complex picture of organizational management. On the one hand, head teachers were perceived as capable of handling several administrative problems, including student discipline (93.7%, M = 4.32, SD = 0.709), bullying and harassment incidents (93.8%, M = 4.26, SD = 0.618), and student misbehavior (88.9%, M = 4.15, SD = 0.787). On the other hand, resource-related constraints remained evident. Only 42.8% of respondents reported sufficient outdoor space for co-curricular activities (M = 2.79, SD = 1.355), whereas 79.0% reported inadequate instructional resources (M = 3.93, SD = 0.852), and 83.7% identified insufficient parental involvement (M = 3.99, SD = 0.805). In addition, library facilities, audiovisual aids, and physical space emerged as areas of concern.

Communication and community relations

Teachers also reported strong communication and community engagement. For instance, 92.6% indicated that head teachers developed positive links with parents and the community (M = 4.25, SD = 0.728), while 92.5% reported that head teachers encouraged parent and community participation in school improvement (M = 4.24, SD = 0.721). Moreover, 95.2% agreed that head teachers showed patience when listening to parents' and community members' concerns (M = 4.31, SD = 0.675). Similarly, 89.2% reported routine communication with parents about children's progress (M = 4.15, SD = 0.791). Collectively, these responses indicate that communication and stakeholder engagement were perceived as important aspects of head-teacher practice.

Overall relationship with school effectiveness

The thesis reports a significant and strong relationship between strategic leadership practices and school effectiveness. In addition, qualitative findings from the parent study supported this overall pattern by identifying teacher performance, school climate, student engagement, parental satisfaction, and academic performance as important indicators of school effectiveness. However, the supplied chapters do not provide the complete correlation matrix in a form suitable for reproducing every coefficient.

Therefore, this article reports only the direction and significance documented in the thesis and does not introduce unreported coefficients.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the findings indicate that strategic leadership in the participating secondary schools in Punjab was expressed through vision-setting, instructional supervision, school-climate development, teacher monitoring, organizational problem-solving, and community communication. This multidimensional pattern is consistent with recent reviews cautioning against treating school leadership as a single practice or isolated style. For example, Özdemir et al. (2024) identified instructional leadership as particularly prominent in the empirical literature, while also highlighting organizational and mediating pathways that may connect leadership with learning.

Furthermore, the strong instructional-leadership responses in the present study are consistent with international evidence. Pietsch et al. (2025), for instance, examined instructional leadership and student achievement across 75 countries and emphasized the role of contextual variation in this relationship. Building on this contextual perspective, the present study provides evidence from public secondary schools in Punjab, where head teachers are reported or perceived to perform instructional and managerial roles simultaneously.

The findings concerning teacher evaluation are also important because leadership may influence learning indirectly through teaching practice. In this regard, a 2024 systematic review of indirect effects identified teacher collaboration, professional learning, and teacher self-efficacy among the pathways most frequently examined between school leadership and teaching practice (Hallinger et al., 2024). Consistent with this broader evidence, the present study found frequent classroom monitoring, teacher evaluation, feedback, and supervision related to professional development.

Moreover, the school-climate findings suggest that strategic leadership is relational as well as instructional. High reported levels of trust, teamwork, respect, collaboration, and support indicate that teachers associated effective leadership with the social organization of the school. This interpretation is consistent with meta-analytic evidence that leadership practices related to teacher capacity and stakeholder engagement are associated with student outcomes (Tan et al., 2024).

At the same time, the resource-related findings indicate that leadership capacity is shaped by organizational conditions. In particular, inadequate instructional resources, limited facilities, weak parental involvement, and financial constraints may reduce head teachers' ability to translate leadership intentions into institutional change. Similarly, recent research from Pakistan reports that government-school headteachers face substantial material and administrative challenges and may spend more time on management than on instructional leadership (Khan et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the significant relationship between strategic leadership and school effectiveness reported in the thesis should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence of causation. This caution is important because the study is cross-sectional and relies substantially on self-reported perceptions. Consequently, the findings demonstrate an empirical relationship within the study context, but they do not establish that leadership practices alone caused improvements in school effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS

In light of these findings, leadership development should extend beyond generic management training. More specifically, preparation for head teachers should address instructional leadership, teacher feedback, data-informed decision-making, conflict and discipline management, stakeholder communication, resource planning, and community engagement.

In addition to professional development, the findings highlight the importance of organizational support. Leadership training alone is unlikely to be sufficient when head teachers lack adequate resources, authority, infrastructure, and staffing. Therefore, school systems may need to combine professional-development programs with clearer leadership roles, appropriate resource autonomy, ICT support, and mechanisms that strengthen community participation.

Finally, the findings point to the value of longitudinal and multilevel designs for future research. Such studies could examine how leadership practices operate across schools, districts, and school types and whether changes in leadership practice precede changes in teacher and student outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was restricted to public secondary schools in five divisions and 12 districts of Punjab; consequently, the findings should not automatically be generalized to private schools or other provinces. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. Third, the quantitative component relies on teacher perceptions, which may be affected by response tendencies. Finally, the comparatively smaller number of female head teachers in the qualitative component limits detailed gender-based interpretation. These limitations are consistent with those acknowledged in the thesis.

CONCLUSION

This study examined strategic leadership and school effectiveness in public secondary schools in Punjab, Pakistan. Overall, the findings indicate strong teacher perceptions of head teachers' vision-setting, instructional direction, school-climate development, teacher evaluation, communication, and community engagement. Nevertheless, head teachers continue to work within substantial resource and administrative constraints.

In conclusion, the study contributes context-specific evidence to the growing international literature on school leadership by demonstrating how strategic leadership is enacted across instructional, relational, managerial, and community domains in Pakistani public secondary schools. Moreover, the significant relationship between strategic leadership and school effectiveness documented in the thesis supports continued attention to leadership preparation and organizational support. However, this relationship should be interpreted cautiously because the study design does not establish causality.

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Thesis Source Note

The empirical data reported in this article are drawn from the supplied doctoral thesis. The parent study included 542 teacher respondents and 23 head-teacher interviews. Accordingly, this article does not introduce new participants, measurements, or fabricated statistical results. Where the supplied thesis chapters report a significant relationship without providing the complete coefficient in the available material, the article retains that level of reporting.