

Emerging Leadership Styles in Education: A Shift Towards Innovation and Collaboration

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Abstract

This study focused on the applicability of new forms of leadership in the education field: transformational leadership, distributed leadership, servant leadership, agile leadership, data-driven leadership, and human-centered leadership. This study was conducted in Multan city, Pakistan. It employed a mixed methods approach of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to capture the opinions of school leaders, teachers, and staff. The findings indicated that transformational and distributed leadership had the most significant impact in supporting the school culture, teacher satisfaction, and pupil engagement, and data-driven leadership was the least effective. These findings are relevant for Pakistani schools, which seek to adopt contemporary pedagogical leadership theories for creating their learning outcomes. The research findings suggest that the leadership development programs in Multan should be centered on transformational and distributed leadership models. However, they should also combine servant- and human-oriented leadership to help staff flourish.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Distributed Leadership, Servant Leadership, Agile Leadership, Data-Driven Leadership, Human-Centered Leadership, Educational Leadership, School Culture, Teacher Satisfaction, Student Engagement.

Introduction

Educational leadership has been recognized as a pillar of school achievement, affecting teacher performance, student achievement and the learning climate in general (Hussain et al., 2023; Dutta & Sahney, 2022; Puspitadani et al., 2022). The increasingly centralized and hierarchical traditional models of leadership in education have been subject to growing

criticisms as schools experience the growing complexity in their operations (Mincu, 2022; Lizier et al., 2022). As globalization, swift technological development, and increased attention to individuals needs of students have emerged, new trends related to leadership models have shifted towards models that focus on collaboration, adaptability, and responsiveness to change (Kezar, 2023; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). In this way, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, servant leadership, agile leadership, data-driven leadership, human-centered leadership, and other leadership styles have become increasingly popular in educational institutions across the globe (Richardson, 2024; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Though these models have been well studied in the western sense, there is quite a gap in the research as far as the application of the same in developing countries especially in such an area as Pakistan. Multan city, as an urban area with a high rate of development offers some special educational issues such as combination of public and private schools, differences in the access to available resources and a multistage student population. How these new models of leadership are operating in Multan schools and affecting the school culture, teacher performance and student performance is important in informing future educational reforms in Pakistan. This paper set out to address this knowledge gap, by examining perceptions of school leaders, teachers and staff in Multan concerning the effectiveness of these leadership styles.

Statement of the Problem

Although a significant body of research has been conducted to examine the relationship between leadership styles and educational outcomes, there is a lack of empirical research on how new models of leadership can be applied and used effectively in Pakistan. Specifically, the role of transformational, distributed, servant, agile, data-driven, and human-centered leadership in the school culture, teacher satisfaction, and student engagement of Pakistani schools is not well understood. As education in Multan has a resource-based nature, there is a diverse student population, and there are discrepancies between the state and non-state educational institutions, there is a need for carrying out a systematic analysis of how the exemplary leadership models can be used to improve educational outcomes. In this paper, an attempt has been made to fill these gaps by assessing the perception and application of these styles of leadership in the educational context of Multan.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study were:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of transformational, distributed, servant, agile, data-driven, and human-centered leadership in improving academic outcomes in schools in Multan city.
 2. To assess the perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and staff regarding the implementation and benefits of these leadership styles.
 3. To examine the impact of these leadership styles on school culture, teacher satisfaction, and student engagement in Multan.
 4. To provide actionable recommendations for educational institutions in Multan on how to integrate these leadership models to enhance educational outcomes.
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Literature Review***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership has been one of the most researched and applied leadership styles in schools (Riswanti Rini, 2022). It is marked by leaders that inspire and motivate their followers to do more than is expected of them in an environment of innovation and constant improvement (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders are concerned with the communication of a common vision, intellectual stimulation, and customized assistance to their employees (Bass & Avolio, 1994). It has been established that transformational leadership positively correlates with school effectiveness, higher teacher morale and better student achievement (Li & Karanxha, 2024; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership does not follow the old top-down model, but rather promotes shared decision-making and shared responsibility. Distributed leadership models provide various levels of decentralization of leadership in the organization, where teachers and staff actively participate in the decision-making processes (Spillane et al., 2004). It has been found that distributed leadership improves teacher involvement, professional growth and organizational collaboration in schools (Nadeem, 2024; Harris, 2004).

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) proposed so-called servant leadership where the leader is viewed as a servant to his followers. In this type, the leaders are more focused on the needs of others, such as teachers, and students, and aim to establish trust, empathy, and a supportive workplace. Servant leadership has been associated with increased teacher satisfaction, school culture, and relationship among members of staff (Laub, 1999). This model is specifically useful in enhancing the positive climate in the school and the overall health of the organization (Spears, 2004).

Agile Leadership

Agile leadership is a business-based leadership approach based on flexibility, fast decisions, and quick adaptation to change. This type of leadership style can work best in a school institution that is constantly changing, like technological changes or curriculum change. Agile leaders are receptive and welcoming to innovation to respond to the evolving requirements of students and teachers (Denning, 2018). Research has proposed that agile leadership may enhance the capacity of a school to adjust to external pressures and to develop a culture of continuous improvement.

Data-Driven Leadership

Data-driven leadership is the process of making decisions and instructional choices based on data. Leaders who exercise data-driven leadership routinely review student performance data and respond to such data by making changes to teaching strategies. According to this model, accountability is a key component where evidenced-based strategies are implemented to improve effectiveness and student achievement at the school (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013). However in the literature it is also reported that over-use of data can lead to the neglect of the qualitative measures of learning such as emotional intelligence and social learning (Fullan, 2007).

Human-Centered Leadership

Human-centered leadership is concerned with the emotional/psychological well-being of

staff and students. It also is concerned about empathy, social and emotional learning, all stakeholders in schools and the provision of a positive environment (Johnson, 2024; Boyatzis et al., 2006). The leaders who embrace this style value relationships, mental health and integrated approach to student and teacher development. It has been shown that human-oriented leadership results in greater teacher retention, enhanced student interaction and a better school climate (Goleman, 1995).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which included quantitative survey and qualitative interview to gather in-depth information about the effectiveness of new forms of leadership in Multan schools. The quantitative aspect was a survey aimed to evaluate the perception of school leaders, teachers, and staff on the effectiveness of various leadership models, whereas the qualitative aspect was semi-structured interviews with school leaders to better understand how these leadership models work in real practice.

Sampling Method

The stratified random sampling technique was applied to randomly select the participants from a variety of education institutes in Multan city that included public and private schools. The sample was stratified for the type of school (public/private), level of education (primary/secondary), and the job of the participant (school leader, teacher, staff member).

Sampling Table:

| Participant Group | Number of Participants | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| School Leaders | 50 | 25% |
| Teachers | 100 | 50% |
| Staff Members | 50 | 25% |
| Total | 200 | 100% |

Cochran, W. G. (1977). Sampling techniques (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Data Collection

1. **Quantitative Data:** A survey instrument was created from Likert scale items and used to measure leadership effectiveness, school culture, teacher satisfaction, and student involvement.
2. **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 school leaders to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and benefits of taking on new forms of leadership.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to present the answers. Inferential statistics using t-test were used to check if there was any difference in the perceptions of leadership effectiveness among different groups.
 - **Qualitative Analysis:** Key themes in the data in the interview were identified through thematic analysis. NVivo application helped code and sort out the answers.
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Results

Quantitative Findings

Inferential Statistics Table:

| Leadership Style | Mean Rating (1-5) | Standard Deviation | T-Value | P-Value |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Transformational | 4.50 | 0.65 | 3.21 | 0.001 |
| Distributed | 4.30 | 0.70 | 2.15 | 0.032 |
| Servant Leadership | 4.20 | 0.80 | 1.75 | 0.089 |
| Agile Leadership | 4.10 | 0.75 | 1.50 | 0.139 |
| Data-Driven Leadership | 3.90 | 0.85 | 2.05 | 0.042 |
| Human-Centered Leadership | 4.15 | 0.60 | 2.45 | 0.015 |

- Significance:** The t-tests showed that transformational leadership was statistically significantly more effective than the data-driven and agile ways of working ($p < 0.05$). The findings from the survey indicate that the most highly rated leadership styles are transformational leadership ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.65$) and distributed leadership ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.70$) mainly on the basis of leadership influence on teacher satisfaction and student engagement. Servant leadership ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.80$) was also helpful in improving the culture of the school, while data-driven leadership ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.85$) was the least helpful in school-wide improvement.

Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis revealed several key themes, including:

- Visionary Leadership:** Principals indicated the need for transformational leadership to provide a vision.
- Collaboration and Shared Responsibility:** Distributed leadership was viewed as playing a critical role in creating a collegial school culture.
- Support for Teacher Well-being: Servant and Human Centered Leadership:** Leaders whose school used a servant and human-centered leadership model were more likely to report that school culture changed for the better and that teacher satisfaction increased.

Discussion

The results of the current study show that transformational and distributed leadership were the most successful in promoting positive school cultures and enhancing academic performance. Such findings are in line with the currently available literature that highlights the role of vision, collaboration, and support in successful school leadership (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004). Despite its effectiveness in the decision-making process, data-driven leadership was not as effective as it should have been, which is likely due to the fact that only quantitative data is used, and the comprehensive needs of students and teachers cannot be fulfilled.

Conclusion

This study highlights that transformational and distributed leadership can be crucial in establishing a favorable school climate and enhancing learning outcomes. Servant and human-centered leadership is also effective in facilitating teacher satisfaction and well-being. Multan leaders should consider these leadership styles and apply agile and data-driven leadership to address the changing school needs.

Recommendations

1. Leadership Training: Schools in Multan need to invest in leadership development programs in transformational and distributed leadership.
2. Promote Collaboration: Schools must encourage distributed leadership to improve decision-making and provide for collective ownership.
3. Prioritize Teacher Well-Being: Humans and servants must practice servant leadership when working with students, and the human-centered leadership practices must be embedded within the servant leadership to provide safe spaces for humans and servants.

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