

# The Crucial Impact of Leadership Style Towards Academic Achievement in China

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## ABSTRACT

With the emergence of the knowledge economy society, education has gained high prestige in China since the majority of Chinese citizens believe that education is the key to a country's future progress. It is essential for every school administrator to exercise effective management of the organisation through strong leadership. The leadership styles of principals have an effect on the climate of the school; the attitudes that teachers have toward leadership; the turnover rate of instructors; and the academic achievements of students. Therefore, this conceptual article investigated the various clusters of leadership styles and the relationship between the principal's leadership style and student academic achievement in China. Two main clusters of leadership, which are transactional leadership and transformational leadership, will be measured as significant measurements for student academic achievement. Contingency or situational theory has been proposed to support the whole body of study. The suggested framework on principal leadership style and its relationship with student achievement in China's schools was to understand where each leadership style was applied and how leadership styles are linked to student achievement. It is critical for subsequent analysis to confirm that different principal leadership practices and their philosophies were strongly related to the contingency of principals' positions and that differences in leadership philosophies can affect student progress. Taking into account the methodological implications for academics and policymakers, this study also made two suggestions for future research on executive leadership and leadership styles.

*Keywords: leadership style, academic achievement, China, transactional leadership, transformational leadership*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1987, when the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasised the importance of education to a nation's long-term growth, education has played an increasingly important role in China. In this new period, with the emergence of the knowledge-economy society, education has a high prestige in China since the majority of Chinese citizens believe that education is the key to a country's future progress (Gu, Ma, & Teng, 2017). Exam-oriented academic culture is popular in Chinese society as a significant means of assessing educational outcomes and selecting qualified personnel (Yan, 2015). This accomplishment is appropriately referred to as "the one exam that determines one's life" (Li, 2016). As a result, it is essential for every school administrator to exercise effective management of the organisation through strong leadership (Rengiah & Sentosa, 2016).

Over the course of the past two decades, an increasing number of studies have concentrated on the impact that school leadership has on the academic performance of students (Sun et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008). Previous

research has shown that the leadership styles of principals have an effect on the climate of the school, the attitudes that teachers have toward leadership, the turnover rate of instructors, and the academic achievements of children (Urlick, 2016). On the other hand, research have also highlighted the fact that the leadership style increases the effect of principal leadership styles on student accomplishment with particular responsibilities and under certain situations (Aldhaheri, 2017). Several studies have been conducted to study the connection between strong instructional leadership and high student accomplishment. These studies have revealed that there is a beneficial connection between the two in terms of student results (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). A significant number of these research demonstrated that strong educational leadership has a tendency to have an effect on student performance as well as on the effectiveness of schools and the improvement of schools. It is not known, however, whether sorts or forms of school leadership contribute the most to students' academic success, nor is it understood how the links between these factors vary from country to country.

Additionally, additional scholars have investigated the connections between transformative leadership, school environment, school culture, and student academic accomplishment (Kwan, 2020). Principals frequently assumed the position of "innovator" with the support of transformational leadership. Multiple studies have demonstrated that distributed leadership positively influences school structure, teacher belief, and student accomplishment (Harris et al., 2020). By utilising distributed leadership, principals assume the role of "distributor." All of these studies on leadership styles in schools added to our comprehension of leadership and its function in certain school settings. However, the majority of studies have focused on only one or two leadership types and the relationship between leadership and student accomplishment; the relationship between several leadership styles and student achievement remains unclear (Chen, Ning & Bos, 2022). For the vast majority of Chinese high school students, a college education remains the sole possible path to a better life. In addition, principals' career advancement and teachers' bonuses remained significantly impacted by their students' achievement, which is viewed as a measure of school performance. Consequently, senior high schools view enhancing student achievement as their primary objective (Li, 2020).

In a number of studies on school growth and principal leadership, the global impact of international large-scale assessments has prompted academics to investigate the significance of principal leadership in student improvement. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) claimed that leadership has a negligible but detectable impact on student achievement. This article seeks to address these topics by examining the relationships between diverse leadership styles and student achievement. This method may compensate for the limitations of prior research that focused solely on the impact of a single type of leadership. For a better understanding of the study, which strives to explain the concept of leadership and its behaviour in order to acquire effectiveness in the education system and indirectly contribute to the growth of knowledge, the following objectives are described.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Leadership Style

Leadership is a phenomenon of the group. According to Knezevich (1984), the most effective leader may be the one who supports in creating and clarifying goals and motivates the group to achieve them. Stogdill (1948) concluded that qualities alone do not produce a leader, but that the individual's behaviours in connection to the nature of the group to be led are crucial. According to Knezevich (1984), leadership conduct tends to change based on the problems that need to be handled, the individuals involved, and other circumstances. Leadership positions tend to be characterised by a dominant behavioural pattern, despite the fact that leadership styles can fluctuate. This article discussed both transactional leadership and transformational leadership styles (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016).

#### 1) *Transactional Leadership Style*

According to the research, the transactional style inhibits innovation and might negatively impact employee job satisfaction. Management by exception explains leaders' behaviour in terms of the accurate detection of departures from the expected behaviour of followers. A transactional leader adheres to the scheme of dependent rewards to communicate performance expectations to their followers and values high performance. Transactional leaders view contractual agreements as the primary motivators (Bass & Avolio, 1997), and employ extrinsic rewards to motivate followers. The application of both types varies according on circumstance and context. In situations requiring a high degree of precision, technical expertise, and time-constraints, especially in technologically intensive environments, we will prefer transactional leadership. However, in human-intensive environments, where the emphasis is on influencing followers through motivation and respecting their emotions on the basis of shared goals, beliefs, and values, transformational leadership will be the preferred option (McGregor, 2003). Transactional leadership style comprises three components: contingent reward, management-by-exception (active) and management-by-exception (passive).

##### *a) Contingent Reward*

Leadership based on contingent rewards focuses on accomplishing results. As a result of the fact that humans value tangible, material rewards for their labour, this behaviour has emerged. "Where transformational leadership recognises individual skills and fosters enthusiasm through emotional appeals, values, and belief systems, transactional leadership generates compliance by appealing to the desires and requirements of individuals" (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Managers that use contingent rewards are supposed to provide employees with direction so that the job is completed. Key signs of contingent compensation include performance-based material rewards, direction-setting, complementarity, and team confidence building (Sharin, Sentosa & Perumal, 2022).

##### *b) Management by Exception (Active)*

Management by exception (active) is not the renunciation of leadership, exemplified by a laissez-faire approach to management. Leaders that practise management by exception (active) have an innate belief in their employees'

ability to complete tasks to a satisfactory standard and avoid upsetting the status quo. This form of leadership does not motivate employees to exceed expected results; however, if the objective is met, the system has worked, everyone is pleased, and business proceeds as usual (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In management by exception leaders, there is minimal feeling of adventure or risk-taking, new perspectives, or white-water strategies. It corresponds to a culture of need-driven transformation. Management by exception (active) is characterised by confidence in employees, inadequate communication, continuation of the status quo, and lack of confidence.

*c) Management by Exception (Passive)*

It is the kind of transactional leadership in which executives avoid stipulating agreements and fail to present personnel with goals and criteria to attain. Occasionally, a leader waits until something goes wrong before taking action (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

**2) Transformational leadership style**

Transformational leaders place a strong priority on their relationships with followers and display individualised concern in satisfying their requirements for empowerment, achievement, increased self-efficacy, and personal development. However, leadership styles do not account for every aspect that influences innovation. Transformational leadership is associated with beneficial individual and organisational outcomes. Transformational leaders motivate followers toward self-sacrifice and attainment of corporate goals over personal interests (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Transformational leadership consists of the following four components:

*a) Idealized Influence.*

In the context of idealised behaviour, the role of transformational leaders in mentoring followers and educating them on crucial tasks of leaders is mentorship. These leaders are also learners. In short, the primary indicators of idealised influence are providing followers with a feeling of purpose, meaning, self-esteem, self-determination, emotional control, and confidence through role modelling, articulation, and values construction. It is the characteristic of a leader that motivates followers to view him or her as a role model. The other term for desired influence is charisma. Idealized influence generates values that inspire, establish meaning, and instil in individuals a feeling of purpose. The nature of idealised impact is motivational. It cultivates perspectives on what is significant in life. The relationship between idealised influence and charismatic leadership (Yukl, 2002).

Leaders with charisma instil confidence in others. It is their trust in a follower's willingness to make self-sacrifices and ability to pursue exceptional goals that is a powerful motivating force of idealised influence and role-modelling behaviour (Crawford, 2005). Leaders that have faith in their team members can achieve remarkable success. A constructive sense of self-determination is possessed by leaders with idealised influence. Maintaining self-esteem is a powerful and pervasive social demand. These leaders have a high level of conviction, transform their followers through consistent communication, position themselves as role models, and inspire them to achieve the company's objective and goals. They possess the necessary level of emotional stability and self-control (Hossin, Ali, & Sentosa., 2020).

*b) Inspirational Motivation.*

Successful administrators are constantly engaged with their employees by motivating, rewarding, and correcting them, as well as replacing them if they fail, so generating possibilities for others. A significant aspect of the transformational leadership style of inspirational motivation is developing the awareness of followers, connecting them with the organisational goal and vision, and inspiring others to comprehend and commit to the vision. Inspirational motivation focuses on organisational existence rather than the personality of the leader (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Instead of smothering personnel, a leader with this approach encourages them to contribute their best to company goals. This leadership style encourages employees by granting them greater liberty to make decisions without supervision and providing them with the tools to do so. In addition to clearly conveying their vision and pushing followers to develop beyond the norm for their personal and the organization's growth, leaders that exhibit this behaviour set high standards for their followers (House & Shamir, 1993). In conclusion, leaders with motivational behaviours that inspire develop vision, establish communication, and manage difficult employees by encouraging, working with, and empowering them (Samad, 2012).

*c) Intellectual Stimulation.*

There are many levels of intelligence and active work encouragement. It is the capacity to intellectually motivate employees and the propensity to be actively interested in the work. Intellectual stimulation leaders are those who intellectually excite their followers, foster creativity, and accept obstacles as part of their job (Akthar, 2022). The leaders who are able to retain their emotional equilibrium and approach complex challenges logically. They also nurture the same talents in their employees. They teach their followers complicated decision-making problem-solving skills, reflecting a consensus between leaders and staff. Individualized consideration's mentoring, coaching, and morale-building strengths are prominently displayed through the intellectual stimulation leadership strategy (Rivelino, 2022). Both leadership approaches develop organisational skills and character, similar to coaching and challenging leadership behaviours that demonstrate care (House & Shamir, 1993). In other words, leaders utilising this leadership technique must first decipher the nuances of the task and generate a sense of direction regarding what it means for them and their employees before pushing worker participation in the challenge. In summary, the primary markers of intellectual stimulation include rationality, creativity, consensual decision-making, coaching, supporting, challenging, and participation.

*d) Individualized Consideration.*

Individualized consideration refers to the core transformational leadership behaviour of viewing individuals as key workplace contributors (Fuller et al, 1996). These leaders demonstrate concern for their employees' needs and are qualified to encourage and guide the growth of desirable workplace behaviour. Their participation ranges from participative to authoritarian. Individualized consideration is comprised of reassurance, care for and coaching of individuals, as well as an open and collaborative attitude.

## **B. Principal Leadership Style and Student Achievement**

Globally, leadership styles have been extensively examined. Principal duties serve as the foundation for a deeper examination of principal leadership, given their significance in maintaining school success and ongoing improvement. Previous research has demonstrated that leadership style influences student achievement either directly or indirectly (Dimopoulos, 2020). For instance, the prior study found that the behaviour of the principal, specifically the leadership influence on a supportive, collegial, and not overly restrictive school climate, enables the impact of leadership on school climate and thus on his or her teaching members to positively affect student achievement. Consequently, principals' behaviours should have a strong correlation with their leadership styles (Pinkas & Buli, 2017). In various studies addressing the connection between leadership style and student achievement, the instructional, transformational, distributed/shared, and integrated leadership styles are commonly investigated.

According to Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2011), who approached leadership from a holistic perspective, a survey of 203 German principals revealed that the instructional, structuring, participative, entrepreneurial, and personnel development styles were influenced by a number of system-level variables, such as the political system's pattern of centralization or decentralization (Wutoy, Waruwu, Ndraha, & Al Hadad, 2022). In contrast, according to Fend (2008), the political system, which stands in for the interests of the community, is a two-way street where societal structures and the educational or school system are traded for one another. According to researchers on transformational leadership, student achievement is a measure of how important school efficiency and improvement are. Additionally, the culture and atmosphere of the school that the principals want to establish are strongly related to the duties they play (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). Similar findings were made by Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins (2020) and Sun et al. (2020), who discovered that transformational leadership is positively related to four different sets of outcomes, including teachers' attitudes and practises, school circumstances, teacher conditions, and student success.

Moreover, researchers have suggested that if principals support a school environment with immediate suggestions and feedback, effective instruction, corporation, supportive working climate for the teaching staff, and professional development opportunities available, teaching and student achievement tend to improve. Other than that, Wetzstein, Suchanek and Paul (2009) claimed that the job and responsibilities of principals have moved from that of an educator to that of an entrepreneurial manager with certain qualification criteria, the foremost of which is to improve the school's overall performance. According to Lee and Chiu (2017), integrated leadership, which encompasses several dimensions of leading behaviours, has become a pervasive perspective in leadership studies as the notion of school leadership continues to expand. Van Wart (2005) advocated the integrated leadership of transactional and transformational leadership, incorporating the variables of the linear chain that were only tangentially related. In addition, De Maeyer et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between integrated leadership and student accomplishment in mathematics and mother tongue through the indirect effect of organisational culture.

Depending on the conceptual models chosen by researchers, they found that integrated leadership affects student accomplishment. Recent research by Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) examined the direct and indirect effects of serial mediation models of integrated transformational leadership on student success. These scholars discovered that integrated transformational leadership affected student achievement through instructors' behaviour and students' motivation to learn. Furthermore, with the requirement of school quality assurance and effective teaching, numerous research have indicated that the national political context and political acumen (Wutoy et al., 2022) have a favourable influence on school effectiveness. In this regard, research suggested that leadership effectiveness should be measured in terms of the effectiveness of the team as a whole, which represents the key qualities of effectiveness in the form of an ideally integrated set of several intangibles (Li, 2020). Based on the descriptive literature and arguments, the researcher formulates two hypotheses for the present article, which are:

**Hypothesis 1:** Transactional leadership is confirmed as a significant measurement of a school's student achievement.

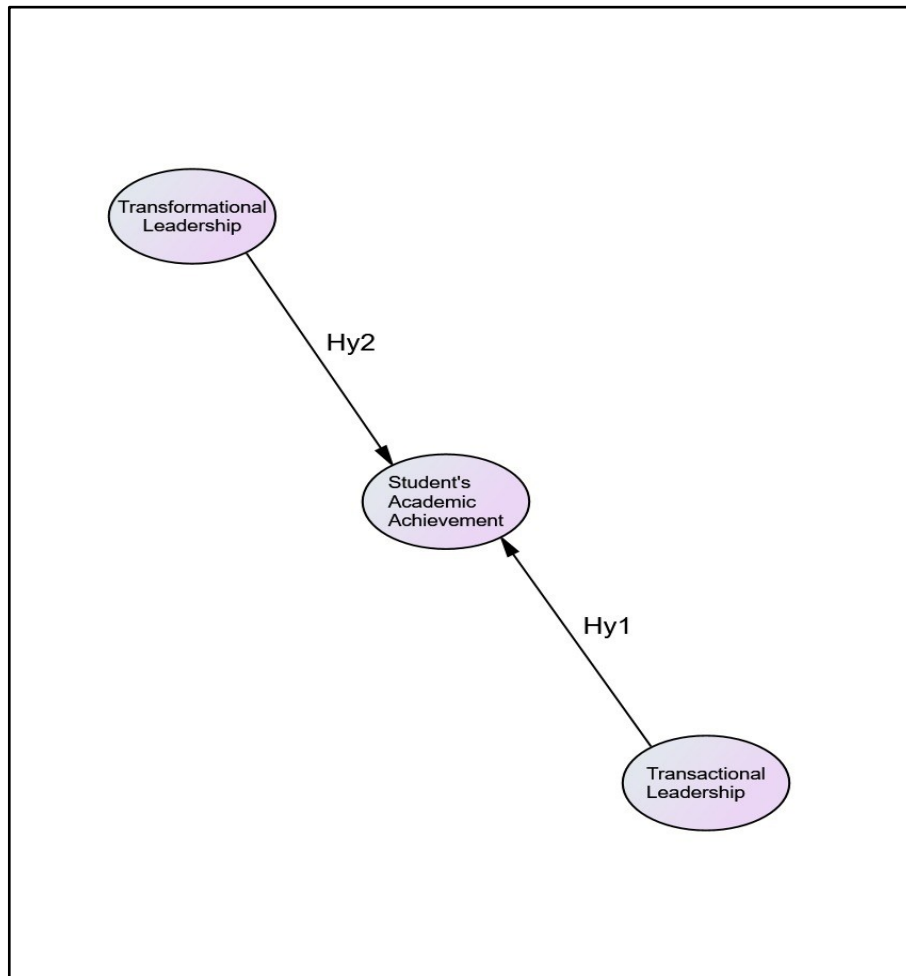
**Hypothesis 2:** Transformational leadership is confirmed as a significant measurement of a school's student achievement.

### **III. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT**

The researcher selects the Contingency Theory or Situational Theory in order to strengthen and support the entire body of study. Historically, the theory of situational leadership implies that the style of leadership should correspond to the subordinates' level of development (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016). The situational leadership paradigm, which was introduced for the first time in 1969, postulated that there is no single best method to lead, and that effective leaders must be able to adapt to the environment and alter their leadership style from task-oriented to relationship-oriented. Then, in 1997, Greenleaf refines this situational theory from an alternative perspective. According to the theory of contingency, no leadership style is accurate as a stand-alone, as the leadership style employed is dependent on elements such as the quality, scenario, and number of variables of the followers. "According to this idea, there is no one right way to lead, as the internal and external characteristics of the environment necessitate the leader to adapt to the specific scenario." In most instances, leaders do not alter simply the organization's dynamics and surroundings, but also its members. Theories of contingency are, in a general sense, a category of behavioural theory that challenges the notion that there is no best way of leading/organizing and that the style of leadership that is beneficial in certain situations may not be effective in others (Greenleaf, 1977).

Contingency theorists believed that employees played a key role in defining the leader-subordinate relationship, but contingency theorists believed that the leader was the focal point of the leader-subordinate interaction. Though contingency approach remains primarily focused on the leader, it creates the significance of group dynamics. These investigations of the relationships between groups and their leaders have contributed to the development of some of

our contemporary ideas of group dynamics and leadership. The notion of situational leadership states that the style of leadership should be proportional to the subordinates' level of development (Bass & Avolio, 1997).



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 illustrates how this research sets the groundwork for developing a theory of emotional intelligence and its consequential link to leadership effectiveness. The researcher proposed a second-order construct approach in order to measure the relationship of exogenous factors (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills) (emotional intelligence components by Galomen's notion (2004) to the endogenous variable (leadership effectiveness). The method of the study also takes into account ways in which educational institutions, especially secondary schools in China, can be involved in order to improve the quality of their service delivery and their efficiency as an institution.

The ability to understand and explain complex and well-organized events, in which all parts have meaningful connections to one another and make substantial contributions to the whole, is made possible by adopting a holistic perspective. In this study, the population of interest is Chinese school principals; therefore, data will be collected from them to serve as a sample. This framework works well with any type of management system and can be easily adapted to new systems, and there is a clear delineation between the various parts in terms of their ability to manage



resources and accomplish the organization's goals. The fields of psychology and human resource management can make extensive use of this framework.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this article development and suggested framework on principal leadership style and its relationship with student achievement in China's schools was to understand where each leadership style was applied and how leadership styles linked to student achievement. The proposed study design is critical for subsequent analysis to confirm that different principal leadership practises (transactional leadership and transformational leadership) and their philosophies were strongly related to the contingency of principals positioned and that differences in leadership philosophies can affect student progress. Particularly, the leadership style and work goals of a school principal can be somewhat predicted by the interaction of several contextual or situational elements. Student performance as a predictor of leadership effectiveness might be helped or hampered by distinct leadership styles. Apart from that, the findings will provide a deeper understanding of the contingency and situational theories for future study phases. Principals generate conditions that pave the way for enhanced student achievement by employing diverse leadership styles through these specific behaviours (Sergiovanni, 2015).

This study made two suggestions for future research on executive leadership and leadership styles, taking into account the methodological implications for academics and policymakers. The majority of prior studies assessed the influence of a certain principal leadership style on student achievement in specific settings, since the specific leadership style is a predictor of the effect. Importantly, additional system-related background information on national politics is explored within the framework of the relationship between principal leadership styles and student academic accomplishment. Principal leadership behaviours connected with leadership for learning with instructional, transformational, and distributed or shared leadership styles were highly influenced by the competitive environment between schools, which was supported by educational policy and the national system. It is essential to continue the conversation about this issue and how it relates to service recovery efforts (Al-Bazaiyah, 2022), particularly in light of the Pandemic COVID-19 concern.

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