

Influence of School Leadership Styles on Teacher Performance in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

School leadership is an important school-level factor influencing teacher performance and the quality of teaching. This paper examines the influence of major school leadership styles, namely instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership, on teacher performance in secondary schools. The paper is based on a review of the literature presented in the source material, with particular attention to evidence from 2010 to 2025 and the Indian school context. The discussion focuses on the ways in which leadership style affects teacher motivation, instructional quality, professional development, collaboration, trust, communication, and accountability. Instructional leadership is associated with a direct focus on curriculum, classroom practice, observation, feedback, and professional learning. Transformational leadership influences teachers through vision, motivation, individual consideration, and professional commitment. Distributed leadership promotes shared responsibility among principals, heads of departments, senior teachers, and subject coordinators. The reviewed evidence suggests that no leadership style operates effectively in isolation. Teacher performance is more likely to improve when leaders combine instructional focus with supportive relationships, meaningful professional development, clear expectations, and opportunities for shared leadership. In Indian secondary schools, structural constraints such as limited principal authority, administrative workload, teacher transfers, and resource limitations also influence the effectiveness of leadership practices. The paper concludes that leadership development under NEP 2020 should prepare school leaders to use appropriate leadership styles according to school needs while strengthening trust, collaboration, feedback, and instructional support.

Keywords: *school leadership styles, teacher performance, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, secondary schools, NEP 2020.*

Introduction

Teacher performance is central to the quality of schooling and to students' learning experiences. However, teacher performance is not determined only by individual teacher characteristics. The school environment, professional relationships, opportunities for development, communication, accountability, and leadership practices also shape how teachers work. School

leaders, particularly principals, influence these conditions through the leadership styles and practices they adopt.

The literature reviewed in the source paper identifies three major approaches to school leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership. Each approach emphasizes a different route through which school leaders can influence teachers. Instructional leadership focuses directly on teaching and learning. Transformational leadership emphasizes motivation, vision, commitment, and individual consideration. Distributed leadership emphasizes the sharing of leadership responsibilities across the school.

The present paper examines these leadership styles in relation to teacher performance in secondary schools. It considers teacher performance in terms of instructional quality, classroom preparedness, professional engagement, collaboration, willingness to adopt improved practices, and alignment with school learning priorities. Particular attention is given to the Indian context, where leadership effectiveness may be affected by administrative and structural constraints.

Objectives of the Paper

1. To examine the major school leadership styles relevant to teacher performance in secondary schools.
2. To examine the influence of instructional leadership on teacher performance.
3. To examine the influence of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and professional performance.
4. To examine the contribution of distributed leadership to teacher collaboration and instructional coherence.
5. To identify contextual factors that may strengthen or limit the influence of leadership styles on teacher performance in Indian secondary schools.

Conceptual Understanding of School Leadership Styles

School leadership style refers to the characteristic pattern through which a school leader establishes priorities, communicates expectations, supports teachers, makes decisions, distributes responsibilities, and influences professional practice. The source material identifies three dominant frameworks that can be understood as leadership styles for the purpose of examining their influence on teacher performance.

Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the centre of school leadership. The principal monitors teaching, establishes learning goals, provides structured feedback, supports curriculum implementation, and participates in professional development. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, inspiration, individual consideration, and organisational commitment. Distributed leadership moves beyond the principal as the sole leader and involves heads of departments, senior teachers, subject coordinators, and other staff in leadership functions.

These styles should not necessarily be viewed as mutually exclusive. A school leader may provide instructional direction while simultaneously motivating teachers and distributing responsibilities. Therefore, the effectiveness of leadership may depend on how different styles and practices are combined with the needs and circumstances of the school.

Instructional Leadership and Teacher Performance

Instructional leadership has a particularly direct relationship with teacher performance because it concentrates on classroom teaching, curriculum, assessment, and professional learning. Effective instructional leaders establish clear learning goals, monitor classroom practice, provide feedback, and connect professional development with observed instructional needs.

Hallinger and Heck (2010), as cited in the source material, found that principals exert measurable indirect effects on student achievement primarily through school conditions such as teacher collaboration, curriculum coherence, and assessment practices. This indicates that the influence of instructional leadership extends beyond classroom observation. Leaders shape the organisational environment in which teachers perform.

Classroom observation becomes more useful when it is followed by timely and constructive discussion. The source material notes that high-performing schools commonly involve frequent classroom visits, discussions of observations, and professional development linked to identified gaps. Such practices can help teachers understand specific areas for improvement and connect professional learning with actual classroom needs.

In the Indian context, the source material reports evidence from government secondary schools indicating that principals who regularly conducted classroom observations and structured post-observation conversations supported stronger retention of practices introduced through NISHTHA professional development. This suggests that instructional leadership can strengthen the transfer of training into classroom practice.

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Performance

Transformational leadership influences teacher performance through motivation, vision, inspiration, and individual consideration. Teachers who perceive their principals as fair, supportive, and genuinely interested in their professional growth are more likely to report greater job satisfaction, stronger commitment, and willingness to adopt new instructional approaches.

Individualised consideration is particularly relevant to teacher performance. Teachers have different subject specialisations, professional strengths, development needs, and career concerns. A transformational leader recognizes these differences and attempts to align professional responsibilities with teachers' capabilities and developmental needs.

The source material refers to evidence from rural primary schools in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh showing that teachers in schools where principals knew teachers' subject specialisations and assigned responsibilities accordingly demonstrated higher classroom preparedness. Although the cited evidence concerns primary schools, the leadership

mechanism is relevant to understanding how transformational practices can support teacher performance more broadly.

Transformational leadership therefore contributes to teacher performance not simply by encouraging teachers verbally but by creating an emotional and professional climate in which teachers feel respected, supported, and willing to improve their practice.

Distributed Leadership and Teacher Performance

Distributed leadership is based on the principle that leadership responsibilities should be shared across members of the school rather than concentrated entirely in the principal. In secondary schools, heads of departments, senior teachers, subject coordinators, mentors, and peer groups can contribute to instructional leadership.

The source material indicates that distributed leadership is associated with stronger professional communities, collective efficacy, and instructional coherence when leadership roles are clearly defined and authority is genuinely shared. This is particularly important in secondary schools because different subjects require specialised knowledge and coordinated planning.

Evidence cited from secondary schools in Punjab and Haryana suggests that functioning subject leadership structures, including opportunities for peer observation and curriculum planning, can contribute to greater consistency in assessment practices. Such structures may also strengthen teachers' sense of professional responsibility and create opportunities for sharing effective practices.

However, distributed leadership is not simply delegation of routine administrative tasks. It requires meaningful participation, role clarity, time for collaboration, and a supportive organisational culture. Frequent teacher transfers and heavy administrative responsibilities can make stable collaborative relationships difficult to maintain.

Leadership Style, Trust, and Feedback

The relationship between leadership style and teacher performance is strongly influenced by trust. Feedback from a principal is more likely to improve teaching when teachers perceive it as developmental rather than punitive. Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized relational trust based on respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity as an important condition for school improvement.

Teachers who trust their leaders are more likely to accept feedback and use it to improve their practice. In contrast, when teachers perceive leadership decisions as inconsistent or arbitrary, feedback may be treated as an administrative requirement rather than professional guidance.

This finding has implications for all three leadership styles. Instructional leadership requires teachers to accept classroom observation and feedback. Transformational leadership requires a trusting relationship through which motivation and individual consideration can operate. Distributed leadership requires trust among members who share responsibility and decision-making. Therefore, trust acts as an important condition through which leadership style can influence teacher performance.

Professional Development as a Link Between Leadership and Performance

Professional development is an important mechanism connecting leadership style with teacher performance. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2019) concluded that effective professional development is content-focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, and includes coaching and follow-up.

School leaders determine whether teachers have the time, resources, collaborative opportunities, and follow-up needed to apply professional learning. Instructional leaders identify professional needs through classroom observation. Transformational leaders encourage teachers to engage with professional growth. Distributed leaders can create peer-learning structures through subject departments and mentoring systems.

The source material discusses NISHTHA as an example of large-scale teacher training in India and notes that completion of training modules does not automatically ensure sustained changes in classroom practice. Leadership is important because principals can create conditions for teachers to discuss, practise, and implement what they learn. Thus, the effectiveness of a leadership style may be reflected in how successfully it converts professional development into sustained classroom improvement.

Communication and Teacher Performance

Communication is another important mechanism through which leadership styles affect teacher performance. Effective leaders communicate a limited number of clear priorities and reinforce them consistently. When expectations are unclear or constantly changing, teachers may experience ambiguity and find it difficult to align their efforts with school goals.

Fullan (2014) emphasizes the importance of focusing on a small number of clearly stated learning priorities. Regular staff meetings can be used not only for administrative announcements but also for reviewing student attendance, assessment results, dropout patterns, and other indicators of learning.

The source material reports that secondary schools using structured data-review protocols demonstrated stronger teacher engagement with student progress monitoring than schools where meetings were largely unstructured. This indicates that communication becomes a leadership tool when it connects teachers' daily work with evidence about student learning.

Structural Factors Affecting Leadership Styles in Indian Secondary Schools

Leadership styles do not operate independently of organisational conditions. In Indian government schools, principals may have limited control over staffing, teacher transfers, timetabling, and financial resources. At the same time, they remain accountable for school functioning and educational outcomes.

The source material indicates that successful principals in constrained contexts may rely more heavily on relational skills, available administrative flexibility, and sustained instructional focus. This means that leadership effectiveness cannot be assessed only by formal authority. A principal with limited structural power can still influence teacher performance by building

commitment, supporting professional relationships, organizing collaboration, and maintaining a clear focus on instruction.

For secondary schools, the challenge is particularly significant because teachers often work across different subject areas and require opportunities for specialised collaboration. School leadership styles must therefore be adapted to the size of the school, teacher expertise, administrative demands, available resources, and local educational context.

Comparative Influence of Major Leadership Styles

The three leadership styles have different primary mechanisms of influence. Instructional leadership has the most direct focus on teaching practice through observation, feedback, curriculum alignment, and professional development. Transformational leadership primarily influences teacher motivation, commitment, professional identity, and willingness to improve. Distributed leadership influences performance by strengthening collaboration, shared responsibility, collective efficacy, and instructional coherence.

However, the evidence reviewed does not support treating one style as universally superior. The strongest approach appears to involve complementary practices. A principal may establish clear instructional priorities, motivate teachers through supportive relationships, and distribute leadership responsibilities among subject leaders. Such a combination can address both the technical and interpersonal dimensions of teacher performance.

The effectiveness of leadership style is also dependent on trust and organisational conditions. A highly structured instructional approach may become counterproductive if teachers experience it as punitive. Transformational motivation may have limited impact if leaders cannot provide practical opportunities for professional growth. Distributed leadership may fail if responsibilities are delegated without authority or time. Effective leadership therefore requires alignment between leadership style, school needs, and available organisational support.

Implications for Secondary Schools

The reviewed evidence suggests several implications for secondary school leadership. First, principals should maintain a clear instructional focus and regularly connect leadership decisions to teaching and learning. Second, classroom observation should be used primarily as a developmental process supported by constructive feedback. Third, school leaders should identify teachers' strengths and professional needs and use this information when assigning responsibilities.

Fourth, secondary schools should strengthen subject-based leadership structures. Heads of departments and senior teachers can support peer observation, curriculum planning, assessment consistency, and professional learning. Fifth, schools should create regular opportunities for teachers to discuss student learning data and instructional challenges. Finally, leadership development programmes should prepare principals to operate effectively under real organisational constraints rather than assuming unlimited authority and resources.

Implications for NEP 2020

The objectives of NEP 2020 require improvement in teaching quality and school capacity. Leadership development should therefore be an important component of educational reform. The source material indicates that NISHTHA has contributed to teacher training, but sustained implementation requires school-level leadership support.

Principal preparation programmes should include practical training in instructional supervision, feedback, professional development, communication, data use, trust-building, and distributed leadership. Leadership development should be continuous and supported by mentoring and reflective practice rather than limited to short-term workshops.

Strengthening leadership capacity can help schools translate national educational policies into classroom-level practice. However, leadership development should be accompanied by appropriate administrative support, realistic workloads, adequate resources, and sufficient authority for principals to act on identified needs.

Conclusion

School leadership styles have an important influence on teacher performance in secondary schools. Instructional leadership contributes to performance by focusing directly on teaching, curriculum, classroom observation, feedback, and professional development. Transformational leadership strengthens teacher motivation, commitment, professional growth, and willingness to adopt improved practices. Distributed leadership promotes collaboration, shared responsibility, and instructional coherence.

The reviewed evidence suggests that leadership styles are most effective when they are combined rather than applied rigidly. Teacher performance improves when leaders provide clear instructional direction while also building trust, supporting professional development, communicating effectively, and creating opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership.

In Indian secondary schools, structural limitations can restrict the formal authority of principals. Consequently, relational and instructional leadership skills become particularly important. Under NEP 2020, school leadership development should focus on practical competencies and sustained mentoring so that principals can create the conditions in which teachers are able to improve. Effective leadership is therefore not simply a matter of choosing one leadership style; it is the ability to apply appropriate leadership practices in response to teachers, students, and the organisational context of the school.

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