

SCHOOL HEADS' LEADERSHIP STYLES AND TEACHERS' ABILITY TO MANAGE STRESS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

The study examined the correlation between the leadership style of school heads and teachers stress manage at the secondary level. It employed two instruments including Leadership Styles Scale adapted using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X) and Teacher Stress Management Scale (TSMS) which were based on the use of five-point Likert scale. The secondary school teachers were surveyed to collect data. The results indicated that transactional leadership was a little more predominant than transformational leadership among school heads. Among the strategies teachers indicated using somewhat frequently in managing stress were stress management techniques. Findings revealed that leadership practices have strong positive relationships with stress coping mechanisms in teachers and that transactional leadership has an especially strong impact. The two leadership styles had an important influence in the prediction of training teacher capabilities in managing stress with transactional leadership being a better predictor. The conclusion of the study is that school leadership is key to increasing the stress management ability of teachers, and leadership development program should be designed to embrace both transactional and transformational style of leadership to enhance teacher well-being and a better educational outcome.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the most well-recognized stressful professions particularly in the secondary school, the teacher is faced with excessive pressure as well as workloads, administrative task, student discipline and accountability. Being excessively exposed to them in the long term leads to exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and poor performance in the classroom (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Aloe et al., 2014). So stress management among the educators has come out to as one of the educational research areas with particular reference to organizational conditions such as the leadership therein.

The best predictor of teacher wellness is school leadership. The organizational climate, the motivation of the teaching staff, and coping methods to manage stress and pressures are determined by the kind of leadership style embraced by school heads (Leithwood et al., 2020). Democratic and transformational leadership styles have been found to support teamwork, trust, and empowerment of the teachers, which relieves the pressure (Sun et al., 2023). Both laissez-faire leadership and autocratic leadership have, in their turn, been linked to teacher stress and burnout due to strict decision-making

process, lack of support, and absence of autonomy (Rao et al., 2025).

The pandemic COVID-19 once more underlined this factor. Autonomy-supportive leadership approach to leadership was also found to reduce the exposure of teachers to burnouts and controlling leadership or unsupportive leadership approach amplified emotional exhaustion (Scarzello & Prino, 2025). Similarly, researcher confirms the beneficial role that school leadership plays in supporting or benefiting the resiliency of teachers, as well as the way school leaders shape and influence school climates that result in positive stress management and professional performance (Zhou et al., 2022).

In South Asia, especially Pakistan, one can find similar tendencies of studies. Transformational leadership has been found to influence the teacher self-efficacy, job learning and track control in a positive way. The local data also demonstrate that the democratic leadership contributes to a high drive and stress coping mechanism in teachers, whereas an autocratic leadership to poor performance/well-being (Sahito et al., 2025). These results indicate that, indeed, there is a need to explore management/stress dynamics within the context of secondary schools in Pakistan where work load pressures, resource pressure and pressure within an institution are considerably high.

Statement of the Problem

The secondary school level of teaching is becoming among the most stressful jobs to teachers. The pressure to deliver quality education and meet accountability targets in large and mixed-ability classrooms, coupled with the requirement to meet administrative demands makes it hard to provide quality education even when the resources are limited. These stressors often contribute to the development of stress that can yield to burnout, lack of job enjoyment, absenteeism and even quitting of the profession. Excessive demands coupled with inadequate support do not only negatively impact the working life of teachers, but also adversely affect student learning and performance of schools.

School leadership has a core role to play in the creation of the work environment and in the ability to deal with stress of teachers. More supportive leadership approaches are more inclined to enable

the teachers, collaborate and become resilient reducing levels of stress. In comparison, stiff or inflexible leadership styles tend to increase mental stress and have a more hostile working environment to teachers.

The teachers in the secondary schools of Pakistan have an extra burden of classrooms packed to capacity, poor facilities, lack of opportunities on professional development and pressure of providing good academic results at any time. In spite of these facts not much systematic studies have been conducted on the relationship between leadership styles of school heads and the capability of teachers to handle stress at the secondary level.

The research problem is therefore the fact that there is no empirical evidence on the relationship between the leadership styles of schools' heads and stress management among teachers. The knowledge in this relation is crucial in promoting teacher well-being, classroom performance and in the general development of the education system.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the leadership styles that are mostly practiced at secondary school heads.
2. To evaluate the stress management skills adopted by the teachers of secondary school.
3. To analyze the correlation between the leadership styles applied by heads and the stress management of teachers.
4. To find out to which degree various leadership styles (e.g., transformational, Transactional) predict teachers to cope with stress.

Research Questions

1. What are the most dominant styles of leadership adopted by heads of secondary schools?
2. Which strategies of stress management do the secondary schools' teachers use?
3. Does it have any powerful association between the stress management of teachers and the leadership style of the heads?
4. In what measure do the various styles of leadership (transformational, Transactional) predict how well teachers will handle stress?

Literature Review

Leadership in school is a determining aspect of the organization climate, teacher and student success and well-being. The theory by Bass and Avolio (1995) of the full range leadership considers a distinction that exists between transformational leadership and transactional leadership that is highly inspirational, motivating, and supportive of teachers and transactional that is preordained and directive change, rewarding, and monitoring performance changes. Though these two styles can be observed even at school, they differ considerably in how they impact teachers and either help them or make them stressed.

Transformational leadership identifies the idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and the individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Such styled leaders are communicative and can set the teachers with visions, promote innovations and support them emotionally and professionally. Transformational leadership has also proven to be effective by alleviating stress, well-being of teachers and there is gradually growing literature on this topic.

Meta-wise, to elucidate our point, Sun et al., (2023) concludes that a positive effect on job satisfaction in teaching manifests great strength and that transformational leadership is a buffer against emotional exhaustion in teachers. Similarly, when the principals use transformational practices, a stellar school climate is created that is later seen to reduce teacher burnouts and build resilience. Recently, survey results found in special education teachers have also shown the close connection between transformational leadership and reduced level of stress and burn out thus making the case of transformational leadership in promoting the sustainability of teacher well-being (Lou et al., 2024). Management by exception and contingent rewarding are reinforced in transaction leadership (Bass and Avolio, 2000). This style is very organized, responsible and focused on results, but does not provide emotional support so badly needed to sustain resilience among teachers. It was identified that transactional leadership may work well when it comes to improving performance in the short term but may be less helpful in promoting the well-being of the teachers.

Reflectively, transactional practices place an increment to the pressure of the teachers especially when they are associated with rigid assessment systems. The positive correlation between transactional leadership and teacher burnout is supported by the fact that the former led to an increase in performance control without paying attention to the psychological needs of teachers. In that regard other individuals note that the restriction of transactional practice e.g., contingent rewards has the impact of promoting stress management along with balanced transformation behaviours (Collie, 2023).

The use of stress management is time management, peer support, problem solving, relaxation and building resilience on teachers who experience stress. The JD-WR model could also be considered beneficial: transformational leadership could be seen as an asset that would allow a teacher to adjust to the demands, the transactional leadership could be too constrictive to be realistically called a demand, in which case, an additional demand is created (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Recent study reveals that supportive leadership is a vital determinant of coping strategies and resilience of the teachers. The study by Zhou et.al (2022) indicates that teachers have been able to enhance their chances of managing stress because the principals provided professional development opportunities and support at individual levels. Alternatively, authoritarian/transactional styles also did not provide teachers with a chance at working autonomously, generating emotional pressure even more.

In Pakistan, where the teacher is forced to grapple with overcrowded classes, excessive workload of students and, in many cases, a lack of support of institutional framework, the leadership is critical. Mansour and Odeh, (2025) established that self-efficacy in education teachers and coping response were positively influenced by transformational leadership in heads of secondary schools. It was also revealed that there were more relevances between democratic and transformational leadership and teacher motivation and stress and transactional leadership was not so relevant to teacher well-being.

Research Methodology

The research used quantitative correlational research design since it aims at establishing the relationship between the leadership transformational and transactional style and the stress management levels among teachers at the secondary school level. This design was regarded as appropriate as it allows the researcher to examine the strength and orientation of the survival among the variables without making it happen (Creswell, 2012). The sample of researchers would be comprised of all the teachers in secondary schools within District Gujrat in the province of Punjab who work in the government schools in the area. The selection of the teachers was random, and a sample of 450 was taken.

Instrumentation

The researcher used two adapted scales, one of these was Leadership Styles Scale based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X) by Bass and Avolio (2000) and the second one was Teacher Stress management Scale (TSMS). Both the instruments were tailored around a 5-point Likert

scale with a Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) response point. The validity of the content was established by affixing experts to review the content to be used by the study tools and to align it to the goals of the study. Also, the internal reliability of instruments through Cronbach alpha reinforced that the instruments were appropriate in the collection of the data.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD; frequencies) was used to report trends in leadership styles and stress management strategies. Inferential statistics as Pearson correlation to provide evidence of the relationship between transformational/ transactional as leadership styles and stress management and Multiple regression analysis to provide evidence of the predictive ability of specific leadership styles transformational versus transactional in explaining the variance in stress management.

Table 1: Styles of Leadership Adopted by Heads of Secondary Schools

Leadership Style	Frequency	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
Transformational	187	47.2	3.10	.38
Transactional	209	52.8	3.20	.59
Total	396	100.0		

These findings show that the percentage of transactional leadership style (52.8%) is a little higher among heads of secondary schools than the transformational leadership style (47.2). Even the average scores correspond with this tendency, as the transactional leadership ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.59$) is rated higher in comparison to transformational leadership ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.38$).

Table 2: Level of Stress Management Strategies among Secondary Schools' Teachers

Level	Frequency	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
Low	3	.8	3.34	.50
Moderate	314	79.3		
High	79	19.9		
Total	396	100.0		

The results indicate that most secondary school teachers do moderate amounts of stress management tactics (79.3%). One-fifth of the teachers (19.9%) were using high degree of stress management strategies, whereas a very small number (0.8) were using a low level of such strategies. The calculated overall mean ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.50$) means that, on average, the population of teachers reflects tendencies to moderate-to-high use of stress management strategies.

Table 3: Relationship between the Stress Management of Teachers and the Leadership Style of the Heads

Variable	Pearson r	p-value	Mean	SD
1. Stress Management Strategies	—	—	3.3384	.50048
2. Transformational	.708**	.000	3.0980	.38311
3. Use of Technology	.953**	.000	3.2020	.59149

The findings report significant positive correlations between the leaders and school heads in terms of their styles and stress management strategies deployed by teachers. Transformational leadership was strongly related to stress management rate ($r = .708$, $p < .001$) and transactional leadership was most strongly related ($r = .953$, $p < .001$). These correlations consider large effect sizes according to the criteria adopted by Cohen (1988), which implies that the style chosen by leaders in secondary schools exerts a potent impact on the capacity of teacher to cope with stresses.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Teachers' Stress Management from Leadership Styles

Predictor	B	SE B	B	T	p
Transformational	0.179	0.025	.137	7.088	.000
Transactional	0.729	0.016	.862	44.693	.000

Model Summary: $R = .958$, $R^2 = .918$, Adjusted $R^2 = .918$, $F(2, 393) = 2202.754$, $p < .001$

The regression model explained by the leadership styles of heads and stress management strategies of teachers had a statistically significant outcome, $F(2, 393) = 2202.754$, $p < .001$, and explained 91.8 % of the variance of stress management ($R^2 = .918$). The two leadership styles were identified as important predictors Transactional leadership ($\beta = .862$, $p < .001$) proved to be the greatest contributor followed by transformational leadership ($\beta = .137$, $p < .001$). This implies that transactional leadership style has a stronger impact on the stress management of teachers than transformational style.

Conclusions

The results show that transactional leadership dominates in preference to transformational leadership amongst heads of secondary schools, whereas most of the teachers use their stress management strategies moderately. High associations

were identified between the leadership styles and teacher stress management with transactional style leadership as being very strongly associated. Regression analysis revealed that both of the leadership styles are strong predictors of how teachers deal with stress fully accounting for 91.8 percent of the variance with transactional leadership leading the way. Generally, the research finds that the leadership styles of school heads are critical in improving the capacity of teachers to cope with stress with transactional leadership having the most influence.

Discussion

The study indicates the important role that leadership styles can play in helping teachers deal with stress. The results indicated that, transactional leadership was marginally the prevailing leader behavior among secondary schools heads in-line with previous studies that indicated that transactional leadership behavior was instrumental to leaders to

ensure the efficiency of organizations (Avolio, 2004). Interviewees in this survey largely indicated moderate application of stress management techniques and this finding matches previous research on the subject matter that teachers often have to implement coping measures to manage the demands of their profession and at the same time realise a work life balance (Kyriacou, 2001). The high positive correlations between leadership approaches and stress management especially the significant role of transactional leadership styles identify the success of leadership practices reducing teacher stress levels since the practice enables teachers to be structured and rewarded (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). It is interesting to note that the high rating of transformational leadership is also due to its effectiveness in instilling motivation, emotional support, and resilience in teachers (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). The results of these studies indicate that transactional leadership is better in predicting how teachers manage stress than transformational leadership, whereas a combination of both might be most efficient in supporting teacher well-being and maintaining positive school environment.

Recommendations

Transactional leading practices like expectations clarity, adopting a prompt feedback, and providing rewards or recognition are ones that head teachers ought to utilize since they are the most influential in the transactional strategies as far as stress management among teachers is concerned. Leadership training programs must prompt heads on taking a transformational behavior i.e., to motivate, inspire, and emotionally support the teachers along with transactional practices to improve the teacher well-being. Teacher resilience programs could be carried out on a regular basis by educative authorities by conducting workshops and professional development sessions to impart teachers with pragmatic stress-mitigation strategies thus promoting resilience and maintenance of productivity.

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