



The influence of principal leadership styles on teacher effectiveness

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Abstract

This research examines the direct relationship between principal leadership styles and teacher effectiveness within the context of Indian degree colleges. Utilising a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 60 principals and 240 students across 30 colleges in Central India. Leadership was assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), while teacher effectiveness was measured via the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ). Results from correlation and regression analyses revealed that transformational leadership had the strongest positive association with teacher effectiveness ($\beta=0.42, p<.001$), followed by transactional leadership ($\beta=0.24, p<.01$). Laissez-faire leadership exhibited a significant negative relationship with effectiveness ($\beta=-0.29, p<.001$). The study underscores the critical role of active and supportive leadership in enhancing teaching quality and offers practical recommendations for leadership development in Indian higher education.

Keywords: Leadership styles, teacher effectiveness, transformational leadership

Introduction

Teacher effectiveness is a cornerstone of educational quality and student success. In higher education, effective teaching not only facilitates academic achievement but also fosters critical thinking, engagement, and lifelong learning. While numerous factors contribute to teaching effectiveness—including teacher training, motivation, and institutional resources—the role of institutional leadership cannot be overlooked. Principals and heads of institutions shape the academic environment, influence teacher morale, and set the tone for pedagogical innovation.

In India, degree colleges form a significant part of the higher education landscape, catering to millions of students. Yet, these institutions often operate under constraints such as limited resources, bureaucratic oversight, and uneven faculty development opportunities. Within this context, the leadership approach adopted by college principals can either exacerbate these challenges or help overcome them.

This study focuses specifically on the relationship between principal leadership styles and teacher effectiveness, narrowing the scope from broader models that include intermediate variables like job satisfaction. By examining the direct linkage between how principals lead and how effectively teachers teach, this research provides targeted insights that can inform leadership training, policy formulation, and institutional practice.

Review of literature

Teacher effectiveness is commonly defined as the capacity of an educator to produce desired learning outcomes in students (Medley, 1979) [8]. It encompasses a range of competencies, including pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, communication skills, ability to inspire students, and adaptability to diverse learner needs (Brophy & Good, 1986) [4]. In higher education, effectiveness is often evaluated through student feedback, peer reviews, and self-assessment, with instruments like the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) providing multidimensional assessments of teaching performance (Marsh, 1982) [7].

Leadership in academic settings has evolved from an administrative role to a transformative one. Bass's (1985) [1] full-range leadership theory categorizes leadership into three primary styles

- **Transformational Leadership:** Characterized by the ability to inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually support followers. Transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, foster a culture of collaboration, and encourage innovation.
- **Transactional Leadership:** Based on exchange processes clear expectations, contingent rewards, and corrective actions. This style emphasizes structure, accountability, and performance monitoring.
- **Laissez-Faire Leadership:** Marked by a lack of involvement, avoidance of decision-making, and indifference to subordinates' needs. It is often described as the absence of leadership.

Globally, research supports a positive association between transformational leadership and teacher effectiveness (Leithwood & Sun, 2012) [6]. Such leaders create conditions that empower teachers, promote professional growth, and enhance instructional quality. Transactional leadership, while less impactful on motivation, can ensure baseline performance through clear systems of reward and accountability (Bass & Avolio, 1994) [2]. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership has been consistently linked to negative outcomes, including reduced teacher morale, role ambiguity, and diminished instructional quality (Skogstad *et al.*, 2007) [9].

In India, studies on leadership in higher education remain limited, with most research focusing on schools or university-level administration. The unique socio-cultural and administrative dynamics of Indian degree colleges—such as hierarchical structures, resource constraints, and dual governance by universities and state bodies—call for context-specific investigations (Kumar & Sharma, 2018) [5].

While prior studies have explored leadership in relation to job satisfaction or institutional climate, fewer have examined the direct pathway between principal leadership styles and teacher effectiveness in Indian degree colleges. This study aims to fill that gap by providing empirical evidence on how different leadership approaches influence teaching quality as perceived by students.

Methodology

1. Research Design

A quantitative, correlational research design with a cross-sectional survey approach was employed. This design is suitable for examining relationships between variables in naturalistic settings without manipulation.

2. Sample and Sampling

The study was conducted in 30-degree colleges across the Prayagraj region in India, selected through purposive sampling based on accessibility and willingness to participate.

- **Principals:** All 60 principals of the selected colleges were included (two principals from larger colleges with dual administrative heads).
- **Teachers and Students:** From each college, four teachers were randomly selected. Each selected teacher was evaluated by four different students, leading to a total of 240 student respondents. Students were eligible if they had been taught by the teacher for at least one full semester.

Instruments

1. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X)

A 45-item instrument measuring transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles on a 5-point Likert scale (Bass & Avolio, 1995) [3]. It has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in diverse cultural contexts.

2. Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ)

A 35-item questionnaire assessing teacher effectiveness across nine dimensions: Learning/Value, Enthusiasm, Organisation, Group Interaction, Individual Rapport, Breadth, Examinations, Assignments, and Workload (Marsh, 1982) [7]. Responses are recorded on a 5-point scale.

1. Data Collection

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Principals completed the MLQ, while students rated their teachers using the SEEQ. All participation was voluntary and anonymous.

2. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics summarised participant characteristics and variable scores. Pearson correlation coefficients assessed bivariate relationships. Multiple linear regression analysis examined the predictive power of leadership styles on teacher effectiveness.

Results

1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of participants. Principals were predominantly male (72%) and aged 41-50

years (55%). Students were evenly distributed across arts, science, and commerce streams.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Group	Variable	Category	Percentage
Principals	Gender	Male	72%
		Female	28%
	Age	41-50 years	55%
51+ years		35%	
31-40 years		10%	
Students	Gender	Male	52%
		Female	48%
	Stream	Arts	40%
		Science	38%
		Commerce	22%

Table 2 displays the mean scores and standard deviations for leadership styles and teacher effectiveness. Transformational leadership scored highest (M=4.18, SD=0.52), followed by transactional (M=3.60, SD=0.70). Laissez-faire leadership was rated lowest (M=2.05, SD=0.75). Teacher effectiveness was rated positively overall (M=4.10, SD=0.50).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Transformational Leadership	60	4.18	0.52
Transactional Leadership	60	3.60	0.70
Laissez-Faire Leadership	60	2.05	0.75
Teacher Effectiveness	240	4.10	0.50

2. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients (Table 3) indicated significant relationships among variables. Transformational leadership showed a strong positive correlation with teacher effectiveness (r=.56, p<.01). Transactional leadership correlated moderately (r=.32, p<.05), while laissez-faire leadership was negatively correlated (r=-.40, p<.01).

Table 3: Intercorrelations Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational	-			
2. Transactional	.44**	-		
3. Laissez-Faire	-.25*	.28*	-	
4. Teacher Effectiveness	.56**	.32*	-.40**	-

*Note: **p <.01, p <.05

3. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with teacher effectiveness as the dependent variable and the three leadership styles as predictors. The model was statistically significant, F (3,56)=27.45, p<.001, explaining 46% of the variance in teacher effectiveness (R²=.46).

Table 4: Regression of Teacher Effectiveness on Leadership Styles

Predictor	β	t	p
Transformational	.42	5.12	<.001
Transactional	.24	2.89	<.01
Laissez-Faire	-.29	-3.65	<.001

Note: R²=.46, F(3,56)=27.45, p<.001

Transformational leadership emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta=.42$), followed by transactional leadership ($\beta=.24$). Laissez-faire leadership was a significant negative predictor ($\beta=-.29$).

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that principal leadership styles have a direct and meaningful impact on teacher effectiveness in Indian degree colleges. The strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and teaching quality aligns with global evidence (Leithwood & Sun, 2012)^[6] and underscores the value of visionary, supportive leadership in educational settings.

Transformational principals likely enhance teacher effectiveness by fostering a culture of collaboration, encouraging pedagogical experimentation, and providing individualized support. In an environment often constrained by bureaucracy and limited resources, such leadership can empower teachers to innovate and engage students more deeply.

Transactional leadership also contributed positively, though to a lesser extent. This suggests that structured expectations, clear feedback, and performance-based rewards provide a foundational framework that supports consistent teaching standards.

The negative impact of laissez-faire leadership is particularly salient. In colleges where principals are disengaged or avoidant, teachers may feel unsupported, directionless, and demotivated—factors that directly undermine instructional quality. This finding serves as a caution against passive leadership, especially in institutions facing systemic challenges.

1. Implications for Practice

- **Leadership Development Programs:** Colleges and universities should invest in training programs that cultivate transformational leadership skills among current and aspiring principals.
- **Policy Support:** Regulatory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) could incorporate leadership competency frameworks into accreditation criteria.
- **Institutional Autonomy:** Empowering principals to make academic and administrative decisions can enable more responsive and effective leadership.

2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations, including its cross-sectional design, regional focus, and reliance on student perceptions for measuring effectiveness. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs, include objective measures of teaching outcomes, and explore moderating variables such as institutional type, teacher experience, and resource availability.

Conclusion

This research confirms that principal leadership is a powerful determinant of teacher effectiveness in Indian degree colleges. Transformational leadership, in particular, offers a pathway to enhancing instructional quality and, by extension, student learning outcomes. By prioritizing leadership development and supportive governance, Indian

higher education can strengthen its teaching workforce and improve educational standards at the grassroots level.

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