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A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP STYLES OF HEADTEACHERS AT ELEMENATRY SCHOOL LEVEL IN DISTRICT PESHAWAR

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the leadership styles of head-teachers at the elementary school level in district Peshawar, focusing on the perceptions of autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership. The objectives were to determine the preferred leadership styles among head-teachers, to examine gender and location-based differences, and to assess whether significant variations exist across these factors. Three hypotheses were tested: (H₁) The head-teachers' have different leadership styles at the elementary school level in district Peshawar; (H₀₂) there is no significant difference between male and female head-teachers' leadership styles; and (H₀₃) there is no significant difference in leadership styles based on location (rural vs. urban). The results confirmed that head-teachers exhibited distinct preferences for leadership styles, with democratic and transformational styles receiving the most positive responses, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles were viewed negatively. Significant differences were found in gender-based leadership styles, with male head-teachers showing a preference for autocratic and transformational leadership, while females favored democratic leadership. Additionally, rural head-teachers displayed a stronger inclination towards autocratic and laissez-faire leadership compared to urban head-teachers, who favored more democratic styles. The findings suggest that leadership preferences are influenced by gender and location, reflecting the diverse challenges and resources available in different school contexts. This study contributes to the understanding of leadership in educational settings, highlighting the importance of context in shaping leadership practices. Future research could explore the impact of these leadership styles on student outcomes and expand the sample to include different regions for a more comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: *Autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, transactional leadership, transformation leadership,*

Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes, influencing various aspects of school effectiveness, including student performance, teacher motivation, and overall school climate. Recent studies consistently indicate that leadership quality significantly affects academic achievement, with transformational leadership—characterized by inspiring and motivating staff and students—leading to improved student outcomes (Tatlah & Iqbal, 2012). Furthermore, leadership that fosters a positive school culture has been linked to higher teacher job satisfaction and better academic performance (Khan & Shaheen, 2016; Ansari & Asad, 2023). In Pakistan, several studies have highlighted the critical role of school leadership in managing educational institutions, emphasizing the need for contextually relevant leadership styles that adapt to specific school environments (Torlak & Kuzey, 2019; Dahar et al., 2010). Additionally, studies have shown that effective leadership directly impacts the overall success of schools, with leadership quality associated with improvements in academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, and student behavior (Alhammedi, 2019). The ability of headteachers to adapt their leadership style in response to both internal and external school needs can significantly enhance the learning environment, particularly in challenging contexts (Taleb, 2019). Recent literature highlights that headteachers' ability to foster a shared vision and collaborate with teachers contributes to long-term success in schools (Eboka, 2016).

The impact of different leadership styles on school performance is well-documented, with styles such as autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational each leaving a distinct imprint on school operations. Autocratic leadership, where the leader exerts significant control over decisions, often leads to efficiency but can suppress staff initiative and morale (Tatlah & Iqbal, 2012). On the other hand, democratic leadership, which encourages collaboration and shared decision-making, tends to foster a positive school environment, especially when teachers feel included in the decision-making process (Ansari & Asad, 2023). Research from Pakistan indicates that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of teacher job satisfaction and improved school performance, particularly in private educational institutions (Torlak & Kuzey, 2019). However, laissez-faire leadership, while offering autonomy, may lead to a lack of direction and accountability if not

carefully managed (Bashir & Khalil, 2017). Transactional leadership, focused on rewards and punishments to maintain order, is effective in ensuring compliance but may not inspire long-term growth or innovation (Kremen & Kremen, 2020). Meanwhile, transformational leadership, which aims to inspire and motivate, is increasingly recognized as essential for driving sustained improvements in school culture and performance (Gray et al., 1987; Taleb et al., 2023).

Gender and geographical context also significantly influence leadership styles in education. Studies indicate that female school leaders in Pakistan tend to adopt more transformational and collaborative leadership approaches, while male leaders are often perceived to be more directive and transactional (Amin et al., 2013; Khalil et al., 2016). Additionally, the urban-rural divide plays a crucial role in shaping leadership practices. Rural school leaders often face greater resource constraints and are therefore more likely to adopt hands-on, adaptive leadership styles that emphasize community involvement and problem-solving (Faisal et al., 2012). In contrast, urban school leaders, benefiting from better resources, may be more inclined to adopt participative and transformational leadership approaches that focus on long-term vision and growth (Dahar et al., 2010; Tatlah & Iqbal, 2012). Studies also show that rural schools may require different leadership strategies compared to urban schools, which are better resourced and may allow for more participatory leadership styles (Eboka, 2021). Gender differences in leadership have been particularly pronounced in contexts where traditional expectations of authority and decision-making are emphasized (Anastasiou & Oikonomou, 2020). These factors combined highlight the need for a nuanced approach to leadership training and development that accounts for both gender and geographic differences.

This study aims to fill gaps in existing research by examining how leadership styles at the elementary school level in Peshawar are influenced by gender and geographical location. By investigating the interplay of these factors, the research will offer valuable insights into how leadership in schools can be optimized, particularly in diverse contexts like those found in urban and rural areas. The findings will inform leadership training programs and educational policies, contributing to improved educational practices and outcomes for both teachers and students in the region. By considering both gender and context, this study will provide a comprehensive view of how leadership in schools can be optimized for diverse settings.

Objectives

Objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the leadership styles of school head teachers at the elementary level in district Peshawar?
2. To compare leadership styles of male and female school head teachers at the elementary level in district Peshawar?
3. To compare leadership styles of urban and rural school head teachers at the elementary level in district Peshawar?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested were:

H₁: The head-teachers' have different leadership styles at the elementary school level in district Peshawar.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in male and female school head-teachers' leadership styles at the elementary level in district Peshawar.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in male and female school head-teachers' leadership styles at the elementary level in district Peshawar.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was used in this study.

Setting

The setting of the data was being the capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

Population & Sampling

Population of the study was all male and female head-teachers of Elementary schools in district Peshawar. Two hundred (200) schools head teachers through stratified random sampling technique from middle schools were selected as sample of the study with equal number of male and female, rural and urban from the government elementary schools in the Peshawar district.

INSTRUMENT

To conduct this study, a questionnaire was developed to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire included 50 closed-ended items, which include 5-types of leadership styles i.e., autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional and transformational styles. The responses from the head teachers were categorized based on a six-point Likert

scale, which included the following options: A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, VSA = Very Strongly Agree, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly Disagree, and VSDA = Very Strongly Disagree. The effectiveness of the tool was ensured through judgmental validation, which involved consulting professionals and professors in the relevant field. Additionally, the instrument underwent a pilot test with 100 head teachers from various elementary schools at Peshawar, who were not part of the main sample, and was subsequently refined based on their feedback. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.90.

Procedure

The study, conducted in Peshawar, targeted head-teachers from government elementary schools, using a cross-sectional design. A random sample of 200 head-teachers was selected, with equal male and female, rural and urban representation. Data were collected using leadership questionnaires to assess autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership styles. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from participants, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Data were analyzed using SPSS-26, with descriptive statistics for leadership styles, and independent sample t-test to analyze gender and rural differences on leadership styles.

Results

The results of this study indicated the leadership styles of head-teachers in district Peshawar at the elementary school level. By examining various leadership styles, including autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational, this research provides insights into how head-teachers perceive and apply these leadership approaches in their schools. The results are presented below:

Table 1

Comparison of perception of Head-teachers of all types of Leaderships

S No	Types	Frequency and Percentages of Perceptions					
		VSA	SA	A	D	SD	VSD
1	Autocratic Leadership	1 0.50%	1 0.50%	0 0.00%	65 32.50%	65.9 32.95%	67.8 33.90%
2	Democratic Leadership	35 17.50%	68.4 34.20%	64.3 32.15%	32.1 16.05%	0.2 0.10%	0 0.00%
3	Laissez-Faire Leadership	0	0	1.7	36.4	116.5	45.4

		0.00%	0.00%	0.85%	18.20%	58.25%	22.70%
4	Transactional Leadership	33.7	67.2	64.7	34	0.4	3.8
		16.85%	33.60%	32.35%	17.00%	0.25%	1.90%
5	Transformational Leadership	34.6	67.5	65.8	31.7	0.4	0

Table 1 presented the perceptions of head-teachers across various leadership styles. Autocratic leadership was viewed mostly negatively, with 65.9% rating it as disagreeable. Democratic leadership received the most positive responses, with 68.4% agreeing with it. Laissez-faire leadership had a negative perception, with 58.25% strongly disagreeing. Transactional leadership showed a mixed but slightly negative response, with 33.6% agreeing. Transformational leadership generally received positive ratings, with 67.5% of head-teachers viewing it favorably.

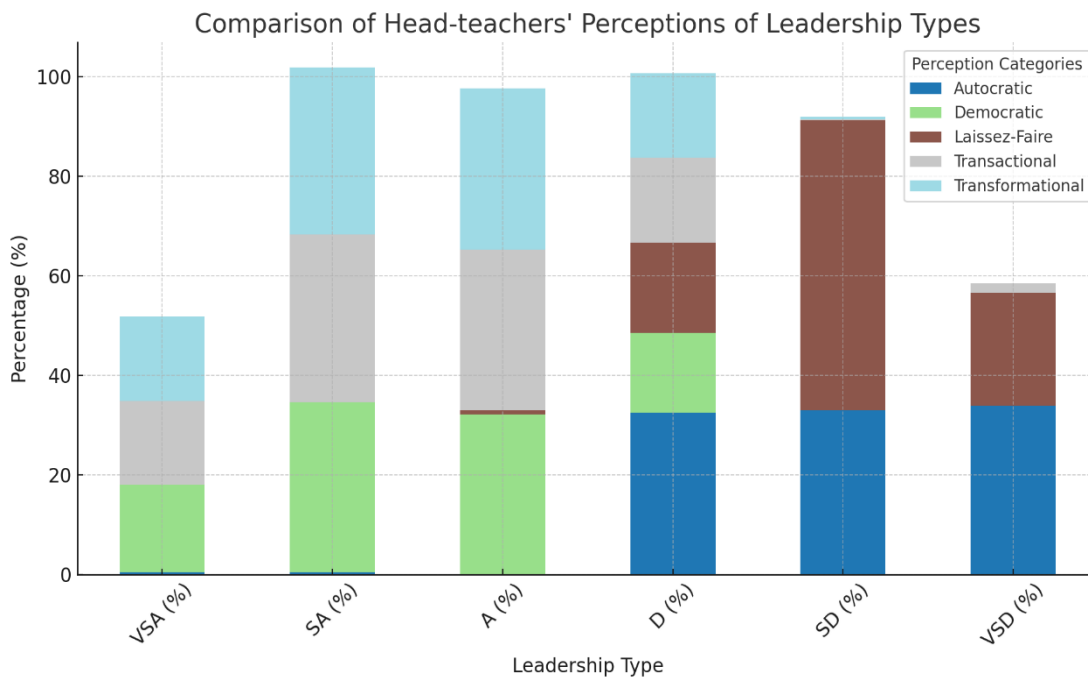


Figure 1 Head teachers' leadership styles

Table 2

Comparison of Perception of male and female Head-Teachers regarding types of Leadership (n=200)

S. No	Types	Male (100)		Female (100)		t	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
1	Autocratic Leadership	22.9	2.57	20.18	2.84	-0.73	0.043
2	Democratic Leadership	45.43	3.24	45.16	3.63	0.56	0.579

3	Laissez-Faire Leadership	20.6	5.54	19.84	6.19	-0.29	0.011
4	Transactional Leadership	44.85	2.96	45.13	3	-0.66	0.507
5	Transformational Leadership	48.24	2.92	45.18	2.97	0.14	0.02

Table 2 showed significant differences in perceptions between male and female head-teachers for autocratic leadership (males: 22.9, females: 20.18, $p = 0.043$) and transformational leadership (males: 48.24, females: 45.18, $p = 0.02$), with males having higher mean scores. There were no significant differences for democratic leadership (males: 45.43, females: 45.16, $p = 0.579$), laissez-faire leadership (males: 20.6, females: 19.84, $p = 0.011$), and transactional leadership (males: 44.85, females: 45.13, $p = 0.507$).

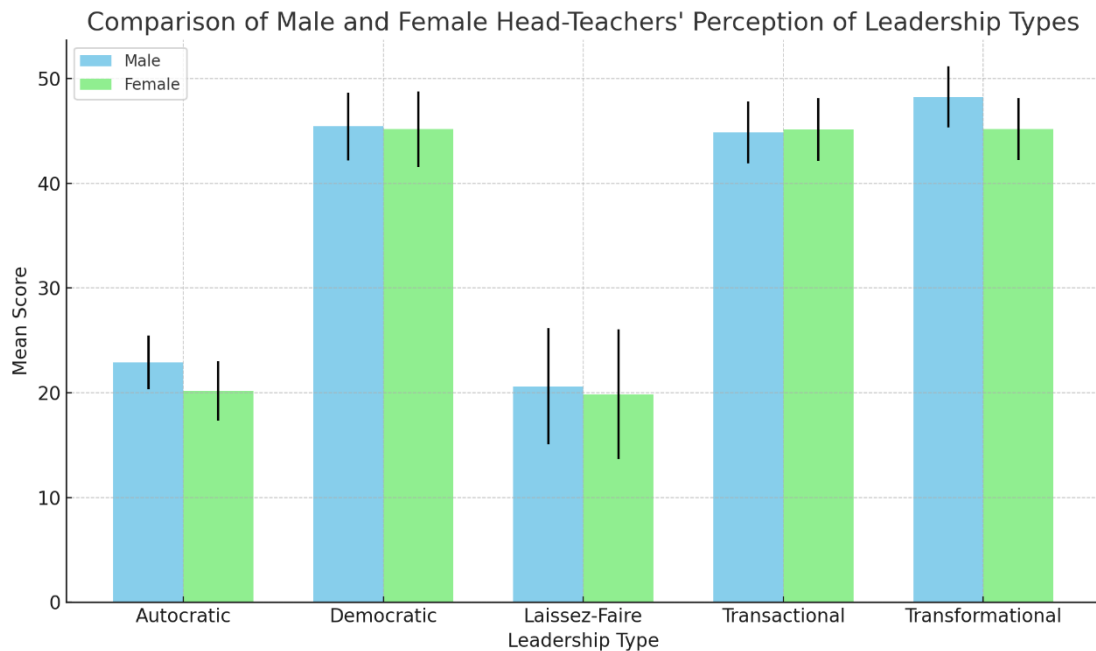


Figure 2. Gender comparison of head teacher leadership styles

Table 3

Location wise comparison of head-teachers' perceptions regarding their types of leadership (n=200)

S. No	Types	Rural (100)		Urban (100)		t	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
1	Autocratic Leadership	21.85	2.71	19.23	2.7	-0.99	0.031
2	Democratic Leadership	46.43	3.49	45.16	3.39	0.56	0.019
3	Laissez-Faire Leadership	19.66	5.93	21.78	5.82	-0.14	0.044
4	Transactional Leadership	45.16	2.95	44.82	3.01	0.81	0.421
5	Transformational Leadership	45.32	2.89	45.1	3.00	0.53	0.598

Table 3 showed significant differences in perceptions of head-teachers based on location for autocratic leadership (rural: 21.85, urban: 19.23, $p = 0.031$) and democratic leadership (rural: 46.43, urban: 45.16, $p = 0.019$), with rural head-teachers having higher mean scores. There was also a significant difference for laissez-faire leadership (rural: 19.66, urban: 21.78, $p = 0.044$), with urban head-teachers having a higher mean score. No significant differences were found for transactional leadership (rural: 45.16, urban: 44.82, $p = 0.421$) and transformational leadership (rural: 45.32, urban: 45.1, $p = 0.598$).

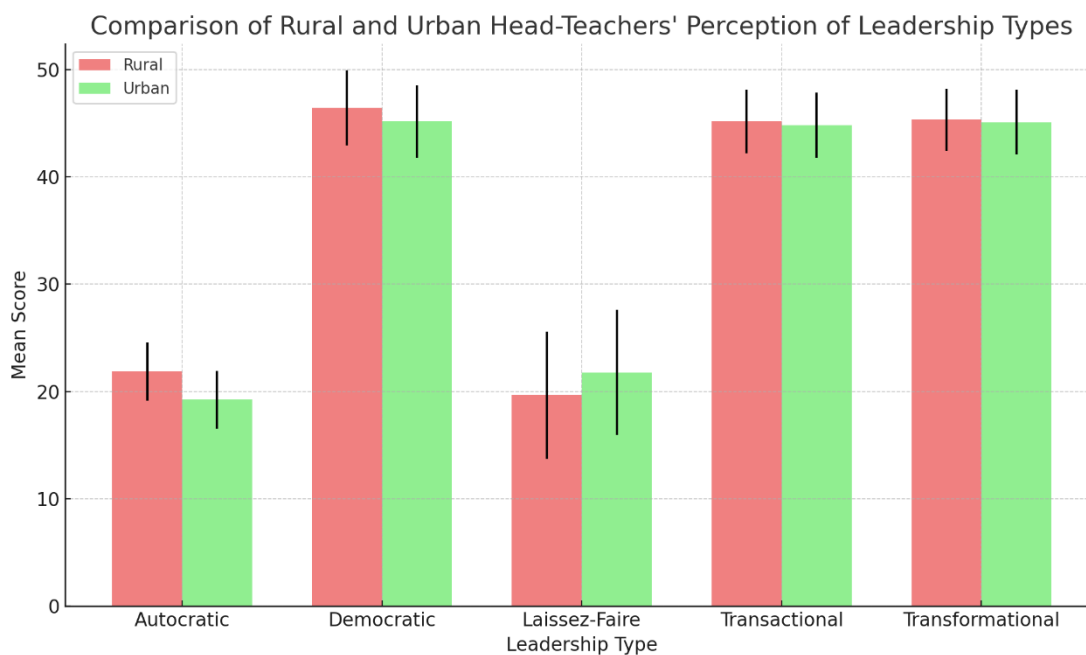


Figure 3. Area wise comparison of head-teacher leadership styles

Discussion

The discussion interprets the results of the study in light of existing literature on leadership styles in education. The findings suggest that head-teachers in district Peshawar tend to favor democratic and transformational leadership styles, while more directive approaches such as autocratic leadership were met with significant resistance. By comparing these results to global trends and previous studies, the discussion explores the reasons behind these preferences, the implications for school leadership, and the complexities of applying different leadership styles in diverse educational settings.

The hypothesis (H_1) suggested that head-teachers in district Peshawar would demonstrate different leadership styles, and the results confirmed this, with varied perceptions of leadership styles. Democratic leadership was viewed positively by 68.4% of head-teachers, while autocratic leadership received the highest negative responses (65.9%),

which aligns with global trends where participative and inclusive leadership is often preferred over authoritative styles (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Similarly, transformational leadership was positively perceived by 67.5% of head-teachers, reinforcing the notion that visionary and motivating leadership is valued in modern educational settings (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership received strong negative feedback (58.25% strongly disagreeing), which concurs with studies highlighting the drawbacks of a passive leadership approach in schools (Northouse, 2014). However, the mixed response to transactional leadership, with 33.6% agreeing, somewhat contradicts the widespread support for transformational and democratic leadership, as some studies suggest that transactional leadership still has relevance, particularly in structured environments (Bass, 1997). These findings reflect the complex and context-dependent nature of leadership preferences in education, where both collaborative and more directive approaches can have their place depending on the situation and the individuals involved.

The hypothesis (H_{02}) suggested no significant difference in the leadership styles of male and female head-teachers at the elementary level in district Peshawar. The results from Table 2 indicated significant differences in autocratic leadership ($p = 0.043$) and transformational leadership ($p = 0.02$), with males showing higher mean scores. However, no significant differences were found for democratic ($p = 0.579$), laissez-faire ($p = 0.011$), and transactional leadership ($p = 0.507$). These findings align with studies suggesting that men often prefer more directive, autocratic styles, while women tend to adopt more democratic and participatory leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Furthermore, Ayman and Korabik (2010) highlighted that women generally exhibit more collaborative leadership behaviors. However, other studies contradict these findings, suggesting that gender does not significantly impact leadership style. Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) argued that both male and female leaders are equally effective, regardless of their style, and that leadership effectiveness is shaped by situational factors rather than gender. Similarly, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) found that the differences in leadership styles between genders were minimal and often overstated. The mixed results in this study may stem from the context-specific nature of leadership styles, where individual experiences, cultural expectations, and school environments play a significant role in shaping leadership preferences, regardless of gender.

The hypothesis (H_{03}) suggested no significant difference in the leadership styles of head-teachers in rural and urban areas at the elementary level in district Peshawar. The results indicated significant differences in autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles, with rural head-teachers showing higher mean scores in these areas. However, no significant differences were found for transactional and transformational leadership. These findings align with studies that suggest location influences leadership styles. Loius (2004) found that rural school leaders tend to adopt more autocratic styles due to limited resources and fewer collaborative opportunities. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) highlighted that rural schools face challenges that often lead to more directive leadership. In contrast, urban schools, with more resources, tend to foster democratic and transformational styles, as found by Walker and Dimmock (2000). However, Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) argue that urban schools may still exhibit hierarchical leadership depending on performance pressures. The differences observed in this study may reflect the unique challenges faced in both rural and urban settings, where leadership styles are shaped by contextual factors rather than location alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that head-teachers in district Peshawar prefer democratic and transformational leadership styles, with less favor for autocratic and laissez-faire approaches. Significant differences were observed between male and female head-teachers, with males showing a preference for autocratic and transformational styles, while females leaned more towards democratic leadership. Additionally, rural head-teachers demonstrated a stronger inclination towards autocratic and laissez-faire leadership compared to their urban counterparts, who favored more democratic approaches. These findings align with global trends toward inclusive and visionary leadership, highlighting the importance of gender and location in shaping leadership preferences. Effective leadership is context-dependent, influenced by the school environment and the challenges faced by head-teachers.

Limitations and Suggestion

This study has some limitations, including its focus on head-teachers in district Peshawar at the elementary level, which may not fully reflect leadership trends in other regions. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces potential biases, and while the sample size of 200 head-teachers is substantial, it may not capture all the nuances of leadership styles in diverse settings. Future research could address these limitations by

expanding the sample to include head-teachers from other districts or regions and using qualitative methods, such as interviews or case studies, to gain a more in-depth understanding of leadership preferences. Additionally, examining the impact of different leadership styles on student outcomes could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of various approaches.

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