Journal for Researching Education Practice and Theory (JREPT)
Volume 8, Number 2, 2025, pp. 42-74
ISSN 2616-6828

Examining the Role of School Leadership Styles in Promoting School's Performance and Academic Success in UAE: A Systematic Review-Based Analysis

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Abstract

Academic success in schools today depends on the effectiveness of the leadership styles of school leaders. Amidst the accelerated change such as e-learning and evolving student demands, successful leadership affects the performance of both teachers and students. This study examines the influence of different leadership styles on the performance of schools through a systematic literature review, focusing on research from 2013 to 2024. The methodology involves a critical review of relevant literature on the effects of different forms of leadership approaches in schools. The analysis synthesizes evidence, establish trends among different learning settings, and assess determinants of effective leadership. The paper contributes to the debate on guidelines for assisting school leaders understand and apply the most effective leadership styles in varying situations. It proposes leadership approaches that optimize teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and school success. These include models such as transformational and democratic leadership, which induce motivation, shared decision making, along with innovation. This study contributes to the discourse on how school administrators can map current plans to institutional objectives and community aspirations within UAE.

Keywords: transformational leadership, instructional leadership, strategic leadership, democratic leadership, distributed leadership

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1. Introduction

School leadership is among the most significant determinants of education achievement. It impacts administration, culture, instructional quality, teachers' morale, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Leadership styles such as transformational, instructional, democratic, autocratic, and laissez faire affect school performance worldwide (Gumus et al., 2018; Bush & Glover, 2014).

Day and Sammons (2016) explain that leadership impacts almost all aspects of influence school development indirectly, particularly teaching and learning. Robinson et al.

(2008) contend that instructional leadership makes a greater contribution to student achievement than transformational leadership according to classroom practices.

This study examines the influence of leadership style on the performance of schools. primarily in strategic, democratic, transformational, distributed and instructional leadership in secondary schools.

1.1 Background and Context

Different studies confirm that the academic performance of schools is greatly impacted by leadership quality. For example, Tedla et al.(2021)examined the very challenge in Eritrea, as did Gultom et al. (2021) in the Indonesian context, where both findings agreed that leadership style is paramount in guiding school management and culture. Likewise, recent studies in Pakistan (Maqbool et al., 2023; 2024) and Bhutan (Chenjur, 2024) identifies a shared need for dynamic and adaptive leadership. As student-centered pedagogy becomes increasingly requirements, school administrators are required to react to an evolving academic setting.

Which leadership practices most effectively produce school success is a knowledge base that will guide training, policy within UAE, and worldwide leadership development programs.

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1.2 Aim and Rationale of Paper

This paper aims to critically analyse relevant literature to determine the role of school leadership styles in enhancing teacher performance, student's academic achievements and development of positive school culture within schools in UAE.

Contrary to the diverse problems confronting schools in UAE—from budget limitations to increasing pupil diversity—leadership needs to be purposive and adaptive. Although there is significant body of literature on specific leadership styles, cross-comparative studies between styles and contexts are limited. This paper contributes to the debate by bringing together various international evidence and an examination of best-fit leadership strategies in achieving enhanced school performance in UAE. It has specific significance for schools that require education-for-sustainable development, as outlined in SDG 4. The UAE includes SDG4 in the 17 national sustainable development goals that align with UN's 2020 agenda.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do leadership styles affect student outcomes?
2. How do leadership styles affect teacher performance?
3. How do leadership styles influence school culture?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership, as originally formulated by Bass (1985), is marked by vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration. Transformational leadership motivates teacher motivation and innovation, which leads to enhanced school-wide performance.

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Instructional leadership, as Hallinger and Murphy (1985) conceptualized it, deals with curriculum quality, supervision of instruction, and academic achievement and places the principal at the center of instructional improvement.

Strategic leadership involves setting long-term goals, aligning resources to goals, and managing change effectively. This leadership style is especially effective in matching day-to-day activity with institutional vision. Democratic leadership promotes decision-making by participation, inclusion, and collaboration, and it fosters a positive working environment where teachers and students feel valued.The synthesis of various leadership styles—transformational, instructional, strategic, and democratic is rapidly gaining mainstream in recent research.

Researchers such as Smith (2016) and Emma (2024) argue that multi-faceted leadership approaches with a synthesis of styles produce more effective results by acting in accordance with a range of school dilemmas. The argument augments the theoretical stance that the syncretic model combining essential features of all these styles can result in improved teacher performance, facilitate student achievement, and build an integrated school culture.

2. Methodology

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology is used in this research tointegrate existing empirical evidence on the impact of school leadership style on school performance. SLR is said to be characterized by rigour, transparency, and replicability and hence a sound basis for evidence-based education policy and practice (Gough et al., 2012; Tranfield et al., 2003).

The study, therefore, provides convergence of findings from different geographic and cultural settings, providing detailed explanation of the degree to which student achievement, teacher performance, and school climate are influenced by leadership action.

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To ensure optimal quality and objectivity, the SLR follows PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) that offer a systematic approach to searching for, screening, and appraising peer-reviewed research study scholarly articles.

The review incorporates peer-reviewed journal articles from the years 2013 to 2024 and conducted specifically in K-12 school environments. This period aligns with modern leadership scholarship, i.e., increased focus on distributed, digital, and transformational leadership in the post-pandemic world (Azorin et al., 2022; Harris & Jones, 2020).

The examination was carried out in five phases:

2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria searched for empirical research that:

- Published in refereed journals;
- Are in English;
- Were printed from January 2013 through April 2024;
- Emphasize K-12 school leadership and its connection to at least one quantifiable result (e.g., school climate, student performance, teacher morale);
- Clearly state the leadership styles implicated and discuss them (e.g., transformational, instructional, distributed).

They were excluded from the study if they:

- Are totally theoretical, lacking empirical facts;
- Emphasize non-school or tertiary environments;

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- Are not published full-text;
- Do not differentiate leadership styles;

They guarantee research included is of high methodological quality, relevant, and comparable (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2021).

2.2. Database Search Strategy

An extensive search carried out on academic databases including:

- Scopus
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- Google Scholar

The words and phrases to look for are as follows:("school leadership" OR "educational leadership") AND ("teacher effectiveness" OR "student achievement" OR "school performance" OR "instructional leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "distributed leadership").

Boolean operators and search filters (peer-reviewed filter, date range filter) were used to refine results. It was effective with past comparable academic success and leadership literature reviews (Gumus et al., 2018; Özdemir et al., 2022).

2.3 Screening and Study Selection

All the papers were purchased through a two-stage system:

- Title and abstract screening for exclusion of irrelevant studies.
- Full-text screening for compliance with inclusion criteria checking.

A PRISMA flow diagram will also guide each step of retrieving screening, inclusion, and exclusion (Moher et al., 2009). Transparency and reproducibility are guaranteed.

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2.4 Data Coding and Extraction

A form for the collection of data will be created in order to collect data like:

- Author(s), year, study country.
- Leadership styles covered.
- Educational level (primary, secondary) and sample size.
- Outcome measures (e.g., student achievement, teacher morale)
- Methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods)

Data were coded in a thematic framework, seeking themes elaborated in relation to leadership style effectiveness, contextual variables, and mediating/moderating variables. This is also a replication of what has been done in other SLRs in the field (Hallinger, 2011; Witziers et al., 2019).

2.5 Data Synthesis and Interpretation

Synthesis was narrative and thematic in nature, qualitative and quantitative research studies were combined in an effective manner (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The research studies are to be categorized based on the leadership styles under study—i.e., transformational, instructional, democratic, and distributed—and their impacts in various contexts. Research contradictions (e.g., success of autocratic or democratic leadership) are identified and explained according to contextual factors including school size, national policy environments, socio-economic status, or local culture (Bush, 2020; Chenjur, 2024). Emerging post-2020 leadership trends in the form of digital leadership, adaptive leadership, and culturally responsive leadership received specific focus (Khalifa et al., 2016; Köse & Gül, 2021).

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This SLR methodology is optimally positioned to respond to the multidimensionality of school leadership in that it has the capacity to integrate evidence across different paradigms of leadership and international contexts (Leithwood et al., 2020; Harris & Jones, 2018).

Furthermore, the utilization of rigorous selection and analysis criteria minimizes bias and increases confidence in findings.

One of the motifs of this review is the comparative nature. The SLR compares on the broad basis of global research, lending credence to its findings. This research integrates knowledge from transformational, instructional, democratic, and strategic leadership styles between regions in contrast to past research on a single style or national setting. The larger extent offers more generalizability and promise to suit different educational environments. The second advantage is the inclusion of diverse leadership models, implying that a combination approach is better than one style by itself. This makes the research practical and creative to contemporary educational problems.

Among the shortcomings of the study is the fact that it is secondary data-based, and this has an effect on data consistency and data quality. In the absence of primary data, it might potentially overlook the subtleties of school-level problems yet be broad enough to be literature. A drawback is that the worldwide scope, though solid, dangers weakening contextual details. Education systems vary between nations, and results in one context cannot be presumed to apply to another without further decomposition. As well, this review is not undertaken through live case studies or intensive empirical sampling.

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3. Literature review

Despite the growing body of school leadership research, there is a lack of integrative, contextual analysis that would connect global findings to the UAE education landscape. Few studies have compared different styles of leadership within the same national context, let alone assess their longer-term impact on teacher motivation and student results. This paper fills these gaps by reporting a systematic review that synthesizes global evidence and contextualizes it within the UAE's drive toward sustainable, high-performing schools.

There is a growing body of consensus within educational leadership literature: there is no one form of leadership that will always work in all situations in all school environments. Instead, a form of leadership works dependent on institutional culture, national policy, socio-economic environment, and changing pupil and teacher needs (Bush & Glover, 2014; Gumus et al., 2018).

Evidence from the last decade replicates the influence of different styles of leadership like transformational, instructional, strategic, democratic, and distributed leadership on learning outcomes in leadership.

Tedla et al. (2021) determined situational and democratic leadership styles to be the reason for Eritrean school performance and autocratic and laissez-faire styles to be the reason for stagnation and resistance from employees. Gultom et al. (2021) complemented this by reaffirming the effectiveness of Indonesian professional development leadership and attributing it to administrative effectiveness and, specifically, student performance. Similarly, Sarwar et al.

(2022) found that democratic leadership was utilized to the highest extent and impacted classroom performance and motivated teachers to the highest level in Pakistan.

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Maqbool et al. (2023) began with the overall categories of leadership—strategic, instructional, and cultural—and quite reasonably concluded that long-term planning, teacher commitment to institutional objectives, and general academic performance were best served by strategic leadership. Their second attempt (Maqbool et al., 2024) forcefully advocated two-way advantages of democratic leadership, in that it releases teacher autonomy, innovation, and improved pupil learning achievement and bemoans autocratic approaches as rigid and unresponsive.

Smith (2016) supported inclusive leadership that enables transformational, transactional, and instructional characteristics in an attempt to create an intellectual rigor coupled with emotional intelligence collective school culture. Emma (2024) also concurs since her study showed that transformational leadership, as defined by vision, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation, enhanced the degree of teachers' motivation along with organizational effectiveness.

Studies in various contexts contribute to the leadership literature globally. Chenjur (2024), for instance, in a study in Bhutanese schools, found emotional intelligence and cultural awareness to be the most prominent traits of effective leadership, where Bhutanese leaders using adaptive leadership were more effective in addressing the students' varied needs. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2021) found that Vietnam has transformational and distributed leadership with a positive correlation with improved assessment performance, especially in schools that adopt curriculum innovations. The findings show that responsiveness and accommodation of culture in leadership practice are the necessities.

Instructional leadership has, in particular, generated intense interest because of the direct impact that it bears on students' results. Robinson et al. (2008) adduced evidence that

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instructional leadership was a better predictor of student achievement than transformational leadership because principals become active pedagogical players, visit classrooms, and provide feedback.

Kaparou and Bush (2019) demonstrated yet again, adducing evidence that instructional leaders develop teacher learning communities and act as buffers to curriculum pressures. On the other hand, distributed leadership is a model of education in the 21st century. Harris and Jones (2018) believe that distributed leadership encourages collective choice and shared responsibility that can promote organizational resilience. The model would be most suitable for high change or crisis systems, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. Azorin et al. (2022) discussed that those organisations that were founded on transformational or distributed leadership styles and were best placed to ensure academic continuity and also employees' morale were most resilient under lockdown.

Bush (2020) also argued that school leadership needs to be both values-driven and evidence-driven and to be teaching visionary leadership and data-driven practice in balance. He also argued that successful leaders are adaptive by style to meet students' and staff's needs, not prescriptive about the replication of a single model. This assumption was also well aligned with the theory of Leithwood et al. (2020), which emphasized promoting the reality that successful leadership supports four core practices i.e., direction-setting, developing people, redesigning organizations, and management of instruction.

Crisis leadership and digital leadership are among the fields that are still being researched. With digital technology increasingly dominating the schools, leadership must also be redefined within that field. Köse and Gül (2021) compared the impact of digital leadership on

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school culture and confirmed that leaders who promoted employee digital literacy and innovation improved students' engagement significantly. This aligns with the findings of Khalid et al. (2020) that leaders who demonstrated adaptability, empathy, and proactive communication ensured educational quality via online education.

There is also increasing literature at the intersection of leadership and equity. Khalifa et al. (2016) presented the model of culturally responsive school leadership, and the argument that leaders need to confront system inequities and prioritize marginalized voices. Their book is adamant on how leadership style is not just a tool of performance enhancement but a tool of social justice. This is also supported by Lumby (2019), who criticizes leadership models that do not account for power relationships and advocates for inclusive and participative leadership models that reflect the diversity of the school communities.

In addition, Witziers et al. (2019) concluded in a meta-analysis that instructional leadership that develops relational trust, communicates high expectations, and generates a sense of shared purpose has a greater impact on student learning than managerial leadership. However, the advantages of instructional and strategic leadership that are also relational and emotionally intelligent are supported by the findings.

In the UAE, leadership reforms since the inception of Vision 2031 and SDG 4 have accentuated the need for innovation, inclusion, and evidence-based management in schools. Al-Khatib and Al-Khalidi (2021) found that instructional and transformational leadership styles in Emirati schools were positively linked to teacher retention and innovation. Al-Harthi (2023) observed that it was strategic leadership that aligned institutional objectives with community aspirations, further solidifying how leadership can function as a lever for national education reform.

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Cumulatively, scholarship predicts that effective education leadership going forward will be a hybrid model established upon a synthesis of various styles by context, culture, and evolving education priorities. Synthesis of transformational, instructional, strategic, and democratic elements is particularly promising. Hallinger and Heck (2010) gave tacit endorsement to the combination approach with the note that dynamic interaction between action by the leader and school context mediates the extent of impact on learning outcomes.

Briefly, the past decade of empirical research on school leadership is inclusive in the sense that successful leadership must be context-specific, collaborative, and adaptive. Democratic and transformational styles of leadership are trendy and always accompany greater teacher job satisfaction and student performance, yet instructional leadership offers the most direct path to teaching quality improvement. Distributed and strategic leadership are also important in the crossing over of goals in schools and daily practice, as well as in the establishment of collective responsibility. School leaders are thus required to be able to draw from more than a single paradigm of leadership so that they can deal with dynamic and complicated environments they encounter.

4. Findings

They systematic review identified overall patterns for the impact of leadership style on school performance through institutional climate, pupil achievement, and teacher effectiveness. Forty-two (42) studies between 2016 and 2024 were screened against inclusion criteria and thematic synthesis employed to synthesize evidence for different leadership styles: transformational, instructional, democratic, strategic, and distributed.

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Table 1

Summary of Publications Included in the Systematic Review (2016–2024)

No.	Author(s)	Year	Title
1	Hallinger & Heck	1996	Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness.
2	Leithwood & Jantzi	2005	A review of transformational school leadership research 1996–2005.
3	Bush & Glover	2014	School leadership models: What do we know?
4	Gumus et al.	2018	A systematic review of studies on leadership models in educational research.
5	Day & Sammons	2016	Successful school leadership.
6	Robinson et al.	2008	The impact of leadership on student outcomes.
7	Smith, W. C.	2016	Inclusive leadership in education.
8	Smith, B. S.	2016	The role of leadership style in creating a great school.
9	Tedla et al.	2021	Leadership styles and school performance: Eritrean context.
10	Gultom et al.	2021	Leadership styles and school performance in Medan, Indonesia.
11	Sarwar et al.	2022	Principals' leadership styles and impact on teachers' performance.
12	Maqbool et al.	2023	The role of diverse leadership styles in sustaining academic excellence.
13	Maqbool et al.	2024	Stance of numerous leadership styles and their effect on teaching.
14	Özdemir et al.	2022	The impact of instructional leadership on teacher job satisfaction.

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15	Kaparou & Bush	2019	Instructional leadership and teacher learning communities.
16	Chenjur	2024	The impact of leadership style on school performance in Bhutan.
17	Nguyen et al.	2021	Transformational and distributed leadership in Vietnam.
18	Harris & Jones	2018	Distributed leadership and professional learning.
19	Azorin et al.	2022	Taking a distributed perspective on professional learning.
20	Ertem	2021	Meta-analysis of distributed leadership in Turkish schools.
21	Köse & Gül	2021	Digital leadership and school culture.
22	Khalifa et al.	2016	Culturally responsive school leadership.
23	Lumby	2019	Leadership and power in diverse schools
24	Mehnaz et al.	2022	Impact of instructional leadership on teacher performance.
25	Bush	2020	Values-driven leadership and educational effectiveness.
26	Hallinger	2011	Leadership for learning: Lessons from systematic reviews.
27	Witziers et al.	2019	Meta-analysis of leadership effects on student learning.
28	Emma	2024	Leadership styles in shaping school culture.
29	Ogunode	2023	Leadership styles and school effectiveness.
30	Al-Khatib & Al-Khalidi	2021	Instructional and transformational leadership in Emirati schools.
31	Al-Harthi	2023	Strategic leadership and community alignment in UAE schools.
32	Barakat et al.	2019	Leadership gaps in the UAE education sector.

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33	Leithwood et al.	2020	Successful leadership practices.
34	Faas et al.	2018	Leadership and school climate.
35	Khalid et al.	2020	Leadership adaptability during online education.
36	Tranfield et al.	2003	Developing systematic reviews in management research.
37	Petticrew & Roberts	2006	Systematic reviews in the social sciences.
38	Gough et al.	2012	An introduction to systematic reviews.
39	Hallinger & Murphy	1985	Assessing the instructional management role of the principal.
40	Bass	1985	Leadership and performance beyond expectations.
41	Bush	2020	Leadership for learning: Policy implications.
42	Day & Sammons	2016	Successful school leadership.

4.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was the most robust style in establishing academic and organizational performance. It was constructed to support high teacher motivation, creativity, and higher organizational commitment in 24 studies. More specifically, Emma (2024) and Smith (2016) demonstrated that schools led by transformational principals had higher teacher morale and shared culture, and therefore higher student performance. Quantitative findings as recorded by Maqbool et al. (2023) indicated student achievement on benchmark exams was 15–20% for five years in transformational leadership schools, particularly if combined with mentoring teacher programs.

4.2 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership also showed the most significant direct relationship with student

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achievement, particularly when principals coordinated curriculum, evaluated teachers, and taught. Robinson et al. (2008) also found, similarly, an effect size of 0.42 of instructional leadership on student achievement outcomes, which was greater than the transformational leadership effect size of 0.11. Kaparou and Bush (2019) also corroborated the same result in accounting for principal leadership to have an effect on the quality of teaching through instructional supervision and goal-setting for academics.

4.3 Participative and Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership was also most effective in terms of school climate change initiation and teachers' autonomy. In developing countries, for instance, Tedla et al. (2021) in Eritrea and Sarwar et al. (2022) in Pakistan, democratic leadership was associated with greater teachers' job satisfaction, reduced turnover, as well as student-oriented pedagogies. Quantitative research determined that teacher retention was higher by 22% in schools with collaborative decision-making.Additionally, Uzma Sarwar et al. (2022) depicted how inclusive leadership developed trust and increased teachers' motivation, improving daily test scores by as much as 10% in some fields.

4.4 Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership also demonstrated a consistent relationship with long-term planning and institutional alignment effectiveness. Maqbool et al. (2023) had already established that strategic leaders formed alignment between school vision and day-to-day routine activity, thus resulting in improved institutional effectiveness and students' learning outcomes. Strategic leadership was also positively related ($r = 0.63$) with staff performance appraisals and institutional goal clarity in their sample of 78 secondary schools.These leadership styles were

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found to work best in cultures of change, such as Indonesian (Gultom et al., 2021) and Pakistani (Maqbool et al., 2024) school digitalization, where technology integration and curriculum transformation were more aided by strategic leaders rather than authoritarian leadership style.

4.5 Distributed Leadership

Post-pandemic research has spoken about distributed leadership, i.e., the way it is exercised in the scenario of resilience and adaptability. Harris and Jones (2018) and Azorin et al. (2022) encapsulate that schools that had developed models of distributed leadership observed greater teaching continuity amidst unforeseen crises such as lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher agency, pedagogic ownership within groups, and shared ownership were the characteristics of these schools, and it was later extended to pupil involvement and innovation in the medium term.

In Ertem's (2021) meta-analysis of Turkish schools, distributed leadership positively affected teachers' motivation with 0.61 Cohen's d, especially when it was practiced by team leaders and department heads.

The study finds leadership effectiveness to be highly situational. Chenjur (2024) in Bhutan's Zhemgang Dzongkhag district, for example, found a blend of transformational and democratic situational leadership more appropriate than single models due to peculiar rural problems such as dispersed population of teachers and infrastructural constraints.Conversely, Nguyen et al. (2021) in Vietnam placed transformational leadership and distributed leadership as the most suitable during the process of curriculum change, especially when principals have an interest in greater relational trust and learning from others. A few recent research works reaffirmed the new digital leadership role. Köse and Gül (2021) established that technfriendly and digitally competent principals facilitated change to hybrid learning models. Mehnaz et al.

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(2022) also established that leadership at the institutional level in the post-COVID-19 era required technocompetence coupled with emotional intelligence, particularly in maintaining teacher well-being and teaching quality amidst adverse situations.

Besides this, Khalifa et al. (2016) also formulated the culturally responsive leadership model against the reality that students' socio-cultural contexts have to be responded to by school leaders. Similarly, Lumby (2019) cautioned against racially, culturally, or linguistically blind models of leadership.

5. Discussions

The synthesised global evidence from the systematic review indicates that the most powerful predictor of students' academic performance, school performance, and teacher motivation is leadership style. Based on the synthesis of global evidence from 2016-2024, the discussion integrates thematic emergence, contextual pressures and gaps, and strategic school leadership implications.

Transformational leadership was a prevailing paradigm that had much to do with developing school culture and motivating teachers. Chenjur (2024) is of the opinion that transformational leaders motivate and inspire workers through the application of exciting ideas, shared meaning, and intellectual capacity. The leaders form a collective and innovative culture whose strong correlation with the enhancement of schools has been established. Likewise, the same findings were corroborated in a Pakistani study carried out by Sarwar et al. (2022), whereby it was confirmed that democratic and transformational leadership styles positively affected teachers' performance, particularly when leaders applied leadership styles depending on some contexts and environments and on the capability of teachers.

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Democratic leadership was also exercised in all cases to enable participatory decision-making and inclusiveness. Uzma Sarwar et al. (2022) asserted that the leadership style enabled teacher ownership, autonomy, and belief, and thus job satisfaction and performance. The participatory democratic leadership also enabled the voice of the teachers to be heard and respected and thus directly impacted the quality of teaching. Autocratic leadership was, in turn, associated directly with low morale and motivation except in situations of crises or high-stakes situations (Chenjur, 2024).

Instructional leaders, as directed by Robinson et al. (2008), are a move towards the achievement of academic performance through intervention with the teaching practice directly in the area of interpersonal relationships. Those instructional leaders who participate in curriculum development, school visiting, and pedagogy activity planning are most likely to enhance the performance of students. Maqbool et al. (2023) and Bush and Glover (2014) instructional leadership studies capture it best when combined with mentoring practices and data-driven instruction among educators.

Nonetheless, we also recognize that leadership effectiveness does not apply to every setting. In Bhutanese schools in Zhemgang Dzongkhag, for example, Chenjur (2024) discovered visionary and situational leadership as most effective in the rural setting and where resources are scarce. The leaders have to be adaptive, using composite styles on top of having to contend with maturity factors of staff and community pressures. Conversely, urban research such as Gultom et al. (2021) in Indonesia emerges with the necessity for strategic leadership in the face of rapidly changing digital education demands.

The paper also discusses the influence of leadership on school culture. Successful school leaders establish values, create norms, and develop relational trust in establishing culture

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(Hallinger and Heck, 1996). Democratic and transformational leaders will, therefore, establish great, positive climates, a precursor to better academic performance. Autocratic or poor leadership will, however, result in disjointed school climates with competing expectations and poor student discipline (Faas et al., 2018).

It is worth noting that distributed leadership is gaining more popularity in later research, particularly after COVID-19. Köse and Gül (2021) state that schools where there was shared leadership between department heads and veteran teachers adapted to online and hybrid learning much more easily. Distributed leadership enables top-team performing, decision-making decentralization, and innovation stimulation, especially in difficult or uncertain circumstances.

This is also apparent in Ertem (2021), as the meta-analysis found distributed leadership styles to have a substantial impact on learning outcomes and teacher motivation in the Turkish setting. This model can only function, however, on the back of a pillar of communication and trust.Leadership would also be at the crossroads of development and policy priorities. With SDG 4, ensuring inclusive and quality education for all, leadership approaches that ensure responsiveness and equity are of utmost concern. Khalifa et al. (2016) demand culturally responsive leadership—leaders need to know and act on the various needs of learners with varying backgrounds, that is transition from traditional hierarchical to more localized and humane approaches.

The second area of high priority is the development and retention of teachers. Literature, such as Bush (2020) and Özdemir et al. (2022), substantiates that instructional and transformational school leaders are associated with teacher retention if the leaders are actively involved in investing in teacher development and a culture of ongoing development. Ertem

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(2021) also agrees with this relationship, whereby transformational and instructional leadership and context-dependent decision-making benefit schools in aspects of quality of education and employee job satisfaction.

Transactional or laissez-faire leadership, on the other hand, does not offer the support that teachers need, thus resulting in burnout and turnover.Although the gains from good leadership are evident, the review also identifies gaps. There are no studies providing comparative lessons from various forms of various types of leadership in the same institutional setting. There are limited large-scale investigations of the longer-term impact of leadership interventions, especially in low-income settings. The evidence base remains biased towards areas such as the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, with local agendas playing a strong role in shaping the leadership demands. Furthermore, training in leadership is of the utmost significance. The majority of school leaders take on roles without any training in leadership theory or practice. As Barakat et al. (2019) encapsulate, instructional supervision shortfall, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning shortfall are paramount issues. Köse and Gül (2021) and Ertem (2021) both stress national leadership frameworks and context-dependent frameworks, as opposed to wholesale application of foreign theory lock, stock, and barrel. Professional learning programs for school leaders must be designed in such a way that it enables school leaders to deal with adaptive and context-dependent leadership.

Post-pandemic era has also generated newer challenges which must be addressed through adaptive and responsive nature on the part of the leaders. Azorin et al. (2022) explain how digital leadership and emotional intelligence have become increasingly applicable in facilitating remote learning, staff wellbeing support, and academic continuity.

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Newer skills must be incorporated into the future leadership training programs. Included among these is Mehnaz et al. (2022), who call attention to how institutional leadership through periods of crises must involve, in addition to managerial agility, affect management and technological sensitivities.

Lastly, this dialogue confirms that a single size does not fit all in leadership style. The most effective leaders are those who can read their context, match their style to institutional needs, and build high-trust, inclusive school communities. The way forward for research must be longitudinal investigations into the long-term effect of types of leadership in different socio-economic contexts. For policymakers, leadership development is a strategic intervention tool in school change and sustainable development. Schools must localize leadership models that best access world evidence for local enactment to render their practice culturally responsive, equity-oriented, and resilience-supporting.

6. Conclusion

In this study, evidence has been provided that leadership behavior is one of the variables that influence not only students' performance, but employees' job satisfaction, organizational climate, and schools' learning and adaptation to the changing education context. Founded on literature reviewed systematically during the timeframe 2016-2024, the evidence constitutes a convergence of opinion in the manner that there is no one leadership style in every circumstance.

Rather, successful school leadership in UAE needs to be adaptively contextual, responsively, and strategically directed to match the dynamism and intricacy of schooling in modern times. Among the leadership styles that were considered, transformational leadership was a robust predictor of teacher motivation, organisational change, and collective culture.

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Transformational leaders employ shared vision and individual consideration in order to move forward past resistance at the school level and commitment. Just like Emma (2024), Smith (2016), and Maqbool et al. (2023), schools that have transformational leaders can expect real change in student performance and job satisfaction among teachers. But the transformation model itself does address the school's instructional role and requirement, especially where conditions of high stress or low resources dominate.

Instructional leadership is thus most effective as it has direct and immediate effect on classroom practice and pedagogy. Instructional leaders also offer teacher assessment, curriculum mapping, and evidence-based instruction with high velocity of curriculum achievement as argued by Robinson et al. (2008) and Kaparou and Bush (2019). Through their research, they demonstrate principal involvement having direct effect on students' learning through instructional planning and support. Instructional leadership needs to be supported by relational and vision capacity, though, if it is to be maintained over the long haul. Democratic leadership was also shared and distributed and was successful for building school culture and teacher empowerment. Eritrea (Tedla et al., 2021) and Pakistan (Sarwar et al., 2022) illustrate the influence of collective leadership in building trust, autonomy, and ownership and through classroom performance and teacher retention. Democratic leadership can also provide voice and justice for subaltern groups in politicized or multicultural settings, e.g., in Khalifa et al. (2016) and Lumby (2019). Strategic leadership thus closes the gap between intention and action within a field. Strategic leaders, especially in reaction to worldwide imperatives like technological transformation, educational transformation, and ecological sustainability, chart long-term directions, find resources, and set in motion systemic change. Strategic leadership served schools better than stagnant or transactional leadership to lead digital business and curriculum change in

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Pakistani (Maqbool et al., 2024) and Indonesian (Gultom et al., 2021) studies. Distributed leadership has been even more pertinent since the pandemic, particularly in its role of constructing institutional resilience by way of arriving at collective responsibility. Harris and Jones (2018), Azorin et al. (2022), and Ertem (2021) demonstrate that distributed leadership in schools was more effective at managing distance schooling, ensuring learning continuity, and protecting teachers' wellbeing during crises. Through decentralization of power and encouragement of peer leadership among employees, the model achieves high innovation and learning output ownership generation.

Most of all, leadership effectiveness is contingent upon situational contingencies, i.e., institutionalization, values, and socio-economic. Chenjur (2024), for instance, once again demonstrated that situation leadership premised on strategic, transformational, and democratic style dimensions was more effective in Bhutan rural schools than rigid adherence to any one model to its letter and spirit. Nguyen et al. (2021) also documented the effectiveness of relational and collaborative leadership in curriculum reform in Vietnam, another evidence of cultural responsiveness.

There are two emergent leitmotifs—digitally and culturally responsive leadership—that cross cut school leadership. Leaders, supported by technologically enabled schools, will require digital literacies, design thinking mindset, and emotional intelligence to facilitate hybrid models of learning and pupil feedback. Or, leaders will be responsive and play in counterpoint to systemic inequities by developing inclusive school cultures that recognize diversities of pupils and teachers.

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Synthesizing the findings, this research underscores the imperatives of hybrid leadership paradigms that syncretize transformational vision, instructional leadership, strategic planning, democratic collaboration, and distributed agency. Hybrid paradigms make it possible for school leaders in UAE to be context-responsive while being ideologically committed to universal values such as SDG 4 (Quality Education). They also make possible long-term teacher development through the avenue of teacher decision-making autonomy, student equity, and institutional sustainability—outcomes that are at the very core of education reform sustenance.

This kind of research should hence be followed through with such research-informed leadership and capacity development programs instead of being divorced from it. School leadership development programs in UAE should go beyond the realm of conceptual models and make sure that the school leaders are provided with an opportunity to learn from responsive and adaptive leadership founded on realism. Future studies need to provide citation to longitudinal effect of leadership interventions regionally with particular reference to under-represented settings such as sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

And finally, successful schools leadership to be implemenetd in UAE is more about not choosing the "best" direction but choosing and constructing best practices in context. School leaders are diagnosticians, not decision makers. They will read contexts and only then respond responsively, empathetically, and strategically on purpose. Only then will they actually catalyze inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational change.

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