



Comparative Analysis of Leadership Practices in Public vs. Private Schools: A Phenomenological Study on Teacher Motivation and Student Achievement in Pakistan.

Areesh Sultana

MPhil Scholar, Iqra University
areesh.hasnain@yahoo.com

Saba Qureshi

MPhil Scholar, Iqra University
sabaqureshi85@gmail.com

Sakeena Sahar

MPhil Scholar, Iqra University
saharsakeena40@gmail.com

Dr. Irfan Sheikh,

Associate Professor, Department of Education, Iqra University
dr.irfan@iqra.edu.pk

Abstract

With an emphasis on their effects on teacher motivation and student achievement, this qualitative study compares and critically analyzes leadership practices in Karachi, Pakistan's public and private secondary schools. based on semi-structured interviews with eight participants, including two public principals, two private principals, two public teachers, and two private teachers from two schools. Purposive sampling was used for the selection of participant based on specific characteristics. This study is based on phenomenological qualitative research type because participants have experience regarding study. From transactional and hierarchical leadership in public institutions to participative and transformational leadership in private schools, the study highlights significant disparities in leadership styles. According to thematic analysis through the semi structured interview, student learning outcomes, performance evaluation procedures, and teacher morale are all strongly impacted by leadership style. While their counterparts in public schools faced bureaucratic constraints, lack of acknowledgment, and little participation in decision-making, private school teachers reported greater engagement, decision-making participation, and professional growth opportunities. These results highlight the necessity of institutionally specific leadership development. The study ends by suggesting changes to enhance leadership quality, particularly in public education, through cross-sector learning, decentralization, and training.

Key Words: Teacher Motivation, Student Achievement, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership



Introduction

Due to its significant impact on teaching quality, school organizational culture, and ultimately student academic achievement, leadership in education has grown in importance as a field of study and practice worldwide. A school leader's responsibilities go beyond administrative management; they usually include the principal or head teacher. It includes creating a vision, supervising instruction, encouraging teachers, and influencing the school environment. Numerous leadership theories, including transformational, transactional, instructional, and distributed models, have surfaced in recent decades. These theories provide frameworks for comprehending the various ways that school leaders impact educational outcomes and processes (Bush, 2020; Northouse, 2021).

Leadership practices differ greatly in developing nations like Pakistan, where the public and private sectors of the educational system are marked by glaring differences. Public schools function within strict bureaucratic frameworks and are overseen by provincial education departments. According to Shah (2014), these schools frequently deal with chronic underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, delayed salaries, and dilapidated infrastructure. On the other hand, despite their differences in quality, private schools typically have more discretion over hiring, resource management, and decision-making. With a focus on academic achievement and customer satisfaction, they are frequently motivated by market dynamics (Khan & Iqbal, 2019).

The practice and perception of leadership in schools are directly impacted by these systemic and structural variations. For instance, because of administrative control and policy limitations, leaders in public schools might take on a more transactional or authoritarian leadership style. Due to their increased freedom, private school principals might favor transformational or participatory leadership styles, which have been connected to higher student achievement and teacher morale (Leith Wood & Jantzi, 2006).

Leadership dynamics are further complicated by Pakistan's educational system because of sociocultural, gendered, and political factors. Principals in many public schools are largely responsible for carrying out government policy and have little discretion. Teachers in these kinds of schools frequently express feelings discouraged and left out of decision-making procedures. However, teachers at private schools, especially those in upscale institutions.

Even though the amount of research on educational leadership in Pakistan is increasing, the majority of it is quantitative in nature and views public and private schools as distinct systems rather than as comparable ones. Furthermore, these studies frequently ignore the lived experiences of educators working within these systems in favor of quantifiable outcomes like exam scores or management effectiveness. By using a qualitative, comparative methodology to examine leadership practices in Karachi, Pakistan's public and private secondary schools, this study aims to close this gap.

The study intends to reveal the complex ways in which leadership styles affect teacher motivation and student achievement through in-depth interviews with principals and educators. This study aims to provide deep, contextual insights into how leadership is experienced and exercised in



diverse institutional contexts by gathering perspectives from both sectors. By doing this, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on educational leadership and provides useful advice for legislators, school officials, and teacher preparation programs. Enhancing leadership techniques in Pakistani public and private schools is essential to guaranteeing fair, efficient, and long-lasting education.

Problem Statement

Despite extensive research on leadership in education, there is still a glaring knowledge gap regarding the relative dynamics of leadership styles in Pakistani public and private schools. Existing research frequently treats these schools independently, ignoring the ways in which systematic, cultural, and resource-based differences affect the actions and outcomes of leaders. By offering suggestions that could direct both policy and practice in educational leadership, this study aims to bridge that gap.

Objectives

1. Looking into the most popular leadership theories in both public and private secondary schools.
2. To understand how these leadership philosophies impact teacher motivation and student involvement.
3. To recognize industry-specific leadership problems and provide fixes for improved practices.

Literature Review

The most potent factor influencing student progress, teacher incentives, and school effectiveness today is instructional leadership. The impact of different leadership styles on organizational behavior, teaching quality, and learning attainment has been the focus of a significant amount of research on educational leadership frameworks over the past few decades (Leith wood & Jantzi, 2006; Bush, 2020). Given that each system in Pakistan has distinct administrative, cultural, and economic foundations, the public-private division adds another layer of complexity. This review critically examines existing theories, practices, and empirical studies on educational leadership within Pakistan, while also drawing on international frameworks, including those by OECD, UNESCO, and national bodies like PTA and ASER Pakistan, to highlight current knowledge and gaps in the literature. review.

Theoretical Foundations of Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is commonly conceptualized using a variety of theoretical frameworks, each of which offers a distinct explanation of how leadership functions in educational settings. Among the most often mentioned are the ideas of distributed, instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership. The idea of transformational leadership was created by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), and it stresses visionary leadership that inspires followers by intellectual stimulation, individualized attention, and motivation. Transformational leadership is particularly well-suited for educational settings because it fosters innovation, teacher empowerment, and a shared vision,



claim Leith Wood and Jantzi (2006). Private schools frequently use this paradigm, where principals act more as facilitators than controllers, to promote staff cooperation and individual development.

Transactional leadership, on the other hand, is more compliance-based and hierarchical. It focusses on trade relationships, in which educators fulfil their duties in return for rewards or penalties. According to Northouse (2021), transactional leaders maintain the status quo and are less concerned with innovation and long-term change. In bureaucratic institutions, public school principals usually use this strategy, which places an emphasis on following procedures and enforcing rules (Shah, 2014)

In instructional leadership, the principal's control over curriculum and pedagogy is accorded paramount importance. Hallinger (2005) states that instructional leaders priorities setting clear learning goals, monitoring the quality of instruction, and promoting professional development. However, the effectiveness of this paradigm depends on contextual assistance, it has been associated with higher student achievement.

Finally, distributed leadership recognizes the value of collaborative decision-making and leadership across all school stakeholders. Spillane (2006) argues this model can enhance innovation and staff morale. Private schools with flatter hierarchies tend to support distributed leadership more effectively than public institutions with layered bureaucracies (ASER Pakistan, 2023).

Leadership Practices in Public vs. Private Schools

Globally speaking, research shows that private school directors are more creative, put a greater emphasis on performance, and have greater autonomy. On the other hand, bureaucratic red tape frequently places restrictions on public school administrators (Fullan, 2014). Private school principals, for instance, are more active in strategy planning and staff mentorship than their public-school counterparts, who are sometimes overburdened with administrative duties, according to UK study (Day et al., 2009).

The public and private sectors of Pakistan's educational system are severely separated. Provincial education departments are in charge of public schools, and leadership in these institutions typically focusses more on administration than on teaching (Shah, 2014). Because policies are pushed from the top down and are typically rather inflexible, principals frequently find themselves with little decision-making authority. Private schools, on the other hand, have more freedom. School owners and boards typically give principals considerable authority over staffing, budgeting, and curriculum decisions (Khan & Iqbal, 2019). Principals can adopt more adaptable and transformative leadership philosophies thanks to this decentralization.

However, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) (2022) and UNESCO (2021) have noted that even private institutions, despite their relative autonomy, often face leadership challenges related to digital adaptation and equitable access, especially in rural provinces like Balochistan and Sindh. These challenges are magnified in public schools due to outdated infrastructure and policy rigidity.



Impact of Leadership on Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation is a significant determinant of educational success. Motivated teachers are more engaged, innovative, and committed to their students' achievement, claim Leith Wood et al. (2006). Leadership style has a significant impact on motivation.

Schools with administrators who appreciate teachers' work and provide constructive criticism have better levels of motivation (Bush, 2020). Private school teachers in Pakistan say they have greater access to professional development opportunities and performance reviews because principals actively participate in staff development (Khan & Iqbal, 2019).

In contrast, public school teachers often feel underappreciated and disregarded. Lack of acknowledgement, delayed compensation, and inadequate supervision all contribute to demotivation and burnout. More than 70% of Sindhi public school teachers felt their efforts were not valued by their school administration, per a study by Malik and Qureshi (2018).

Increased work satisfaction and retention are also associated with teachers participating in decision-making (Ingersoll, 2003). Private school administrators frequently want teachers to participate in curriculum development and school policy, which entails a sense of empowerment and ownership.

Due to its centralization, public schools rarely provide these kinds of participatory settings. More often than not, teachers are seen as implementers rather than contributors. Creativity is suppressed and intrinsic drive is diminished in this hierarchical setting.

Leadership and Student Achievement

By influencing the teaching-learning environment, promoting teacher professional development, and creating a positive school culture, school leadership indirectly influences student accomplishment.

Studies show that when principals are seen as instructional leaders, student performance significantly improves (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Leaders in private schools devote more time to classroom observations, academic planning, and student intervention differentiation, all of which boost academic achievement. It is difficult for administrators to put instructional quality first in public schools due to a lack of funding and higher student-teacher ratios. Furthermore, contextual innovation is sometimes constrained by standardized policies.

The management of private schools frequently provides funding for extracurricular activities and student leadership opportunities in an effort to support holistic development. This is often absent in public schools, as institutional neglect and resource limitations restrict such opportunities.

Gender, Leadership, and School Type

The gender of school administrators can also affect leadership dynamics, particularly in conservative nations like Pakistan. Female principals in private girls' schools are often seen as cooperative and compassionate, employing participatory leadership strategies (Rehman and Qayyum, 2017). However, in public schools, male principals usually maintain strict hierarchical



control.

This gender gap in leadership affects teachers' motivation and communication. Andrabi et al. (2018) found that female-led schools, particularly those in the private sector, have higher levels of teacher and student satisfaction.

Public schools, particularly those in conservative or tribal regions, often have male-dominated leadership structures that emphasize control over collaboration. This gendered divide can suppress teacher input and affect the overall school climate.

UNESCO (2021) notes that while female participation in education management is increasing globally, Pakistan's provincial education departments have yet to implement structured efforts to promote gender-inclusive leadership.

Cultural Constraints and Organizational Climate

Leadership effectiveness does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by institutional culture and systemic norms. In Pakistani public schools, a culture of conformity, job security without performance incentives, and hierarchical control undermines innovation (Shah, 2014). Teachers and principals alike are limited in their capacity to experiment or adapt to changing student needs.

Private schools, though more dynamic, are subject to market-driven pressures that can lead to exploitative workloads and precarious job security (UNESCO, 2021). Thus, while private leadership models foster innovation, they may also foster teacher burnout.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA, 2022) identifies digital leadership as a new domain requiring urgent development. Despite the growth of online education, especially post-COVID, both public and private institutions lack adequately trained leaders to manage digital transitions—an issue more pronounced at the provincial level.

Conceptual Framework

This research evaluates the leadership behaviors observed in both public and private educational institutions using the transformational and transactional leadership theories as a basis. Motivational theories like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory are also incorporated to understand how leadership impacts student progress and teacher satisfaction. Both structural and cultural and psychological comparisons are necessary to understand how leadership "feels" to those who are a part of the system.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand and describe individuals lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. The goal is to uncover the essence of a phenomenon experienced by those directly involved. Data is typically gathered through in-depth, open-ended semi structured interviews and then analyzed to identify common themes or shared meanings. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, "Phenomenology is a design of inquiry coming



from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants”. A qualitative comparative study methodology was used in this investigation. This design made it possible to examine the real-life experiences of principals and teachers in Karachi's various school types. In this investigation, qualitative comparative study and methodology was used.

Sampling and Participants

Eight participants were picked for the purpose of sampling; the purposive sampling is that sampling where participants were chosen for the some purpose they must have experienced any knowledge regarding the study. The participants were four teachers and four principals (two principals and two teachers from each school), and there were two public school principals (One male and one female) and two private school principals (one male and one female) and two public school teachers and two private school teachers means one male and one female teacher were chosen. The participants' experience spanned more than three years.

Table 1

Name	Role	School Type	Location	Experience	Gender
M H1	Principal	Public	Central	14 yrs	Male
Ms.S1	Principal	Public	Central	12 yrs	Female
Mr. H2	Teacher	Public	Central	16 yrs	Male
Mrs. S2	Principal	Private	Central	11 yrs	Female
Ms. S3	Teacher	Public	Gulshan	8 yrs	Female
Mr. H3	Principal	Private	Gulshan	10 yrs	Male
Ms. S4	Teacher	Private	Gulshan	6 yrs	Female
Mr.H4	Teacher	Private	Gulshan	9 yrs	Male

The diversity and depth of the data were enhanced by the participants' representation of institutional roles, experiences, and range of genders.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Working in Secondary level School establishments is a must for the responded.
- Minimum Criteria for the Participant’s working experience is three years at their current institution.
- To have gender diversity, men and women both are used as a responded.

Data Collection Tool: Semi-Structured Interviews

For the data collection Semi-structured interviews methods were constructed, which allows flexibility while maintaining consistency through all interviews. For the development of interviews literature review themes were used for the interview development guide for teachers and principals. In addition to prompts to extract examples from participants' everyday experiences, the



open-ended questions encouraged detailed, descriptive answers.

The following topics were covered in the principal interview guide: leadership style; decision-making procedures; staff motivation tactics; assessment and feedback systems; impact on student achievement; institutional challenges; assistance for professional development; The following topics were covered in the teacher interview guide: perceptions of leadership style; participation in decision-making; factors that motivate or demotivate; evaluation and feedback; and recommendations for improvement.

Interview Guide for Principals and Teachers (see Section 12)

Data Collection Procedure

To guarantee anonymity and comfort, interviews were conducted in-person in a quiet, private environment at participants' colleges. Participants received a Consent Form (Appendix B) and verbal permission was re-confirmed prior to interviews starting. Depending on participant choice, interviews in English and Urdu ran between forty and sixty minutes.

By taking permission of every participant, every interview audio was recorded with, then transcribed. The transcripts were also scrutinized against the recordings to authenticate accuracy, and mostly conversation is in English or translated were necessary. To keep privacy & secrecy, every participant receives a pseudonym.

Additionally kept were field notes to record nonverbal signals and contextual observations enhancing the data interpretation.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's 2006 theme analysis used a six-phase approach. Transcript manual coding produced themes based on conceptual similarities and recurring patterns

Table 2

Theme	Public Schools	Private Schools
Leadership Style	Hierarchical, rule-bound	Participative, transformational
Teacher Involvement	Minimal	High
Motivation Level	Low (due to neglect and rigid control)	High (due to recognition and inclusion)
Academic Support	Weak (due to overcrowding/resources)	Strong (due to regular monitoring and support)
Structural Environmen	Bureaucratic, underfunded	Flexible but commercially driven

The main themes that surfaced from the semi-structured interviews of eight participants—four principals and four teachers chosen from two public and two private secondary schools in Karachi, Pakistan—are presented and explored in this part. Four main themes help to arrange the results:



Leadership Styles; Teacher Motivation; Effects on Student Achievement; Structural and Cultural Restraints. Participant comments and combined with pertinent literature help each theme to be supported for a critical interpretation.

Theme 1: Leadership Styles while Making Decision

Private School Principals: Participative and Vision-Oriented

Principals of private schools, like Mr. H3 and Ms. S2, stated that they firmly believed in collaborative leadership. They placed strong emphasis on developing a common vision and included their teachers in decision-making procedures.

Ms. S2 stated

"We believe in shared planning," said Ms. S2. Lesson reviews, student assessments, and academic scheduling are all handled by our teachers. Their opinions are important."

In line with Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), who emphasize that collaborative decision-making promotes creativity and career advancement, such leadership exemplifies transformational and distributed leadership styles.

Public School Principals: Hierarchical and Rule-Bound

Due to bureaucratic oversight, public school principals Mr. H1 and Ms. S1 disclosed that their autonomy was restricted. Higher authorities usually made the decisions, leaving little opportunity for school-level discretion.

Mr. H1 commented

"We adhere to the education department's instructions. Our job is to carry out, not to start."

A compliance-oriented school culture is frequently the outcome of this leadership style, which is consistent with transactional leadership theory, in which leaders function more as supervisors than as visionaries (Northouse, 2021).

Teacher Perspectives on Leadership Style

Mr. H4, a private school teacher, said he was regularly consulted on academic decisions and characterized his principal as "supportive and open to ideas." On the other hand, Ms. S3, a public-school teacher, stated: "We are never asked. Every planning process is top-down. Small suggestions are disregarded as well.

This stark contrast highlights the distinction between leadership environments that are directive and those that are empowering.

Theme 2: Teacher Motivation

Private School Teachers: Recognition and Engagement

Teachers at several private schools, especially Mr. H4 and Ms. S4, reported feeling both valued and motivated. School leaders regularly shared positive feedback, offered modest performance



bonuses, and invited them to off-campus workshops.

Ms. S4 shared

“Even a small win gets noticed. That little nod keeps us moving.”. Her comment lines up with Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory, which claims recognition and room to grow are powerful inner drivers.

Public School Teachers: Demoralization and Fatigue

In sharp contrast, public-school staff like Ms. S3 and Mr. H2 said their spirits are low. They pointed to late paychecks, packed rooms, and silence from top officials when credit is due.

Mr. H2 stated:

“Such pressures breed burnout, backing Khan and Iqbal (2019) warning that ignoring teachers’ chips away at morale and weakens classrooms.

Theme 3: Impact on Student Achievement

Private Schools: Strong Academic Monitoring

Principals of private schools, like Mrs. S2, credited proactive academic monitoring, frequent evaluations, and cooperative planning for high student achievement.

She shared: “We assess student performance once a week. Teachers receive support, and weak areas are addressed right away.”

Mr. H4, a private school teacher, added that their institution provided remedial instruction and additional coaching, particularly for students who were performing poorly. Hallinger (2005) links better learning outcomes to instructional leadership, which is reflected in these practices.

Public Schools: Systemic Constraints Overpower Leadership

Teachers and public-school administrators reported that structural constraints caused a gap between intent and result despite their best efforts: “We want to help students succeed, but the lack of resources, parental involvement, and large student numbers limit us,” Mr. H2 said.

Teacher Ms. S3 noted:

“We do our best, but students don’t perform without assistance and resources.”

This demonstrates that systemic reforms, as suggested by Shah (2014), are necessary to support leadership initiatives alone in raising achievement in public schools.

Theme 4: Structural and Cultural Constraints

Public Schools: Bureaucracy and Lack of Autonomy

The principals of both public schools are not satisfied with the bureaucratic red tape that they are not independent from making decisions. Approval of requests for supplies or improvements frequently took months.



"We write to the department if a light bulb needs to be replaced," Mr. H1 shared. Weeks may pass. Teachers also expressed helplessness, highlighting how students and themselves were impacted by a lack of support.

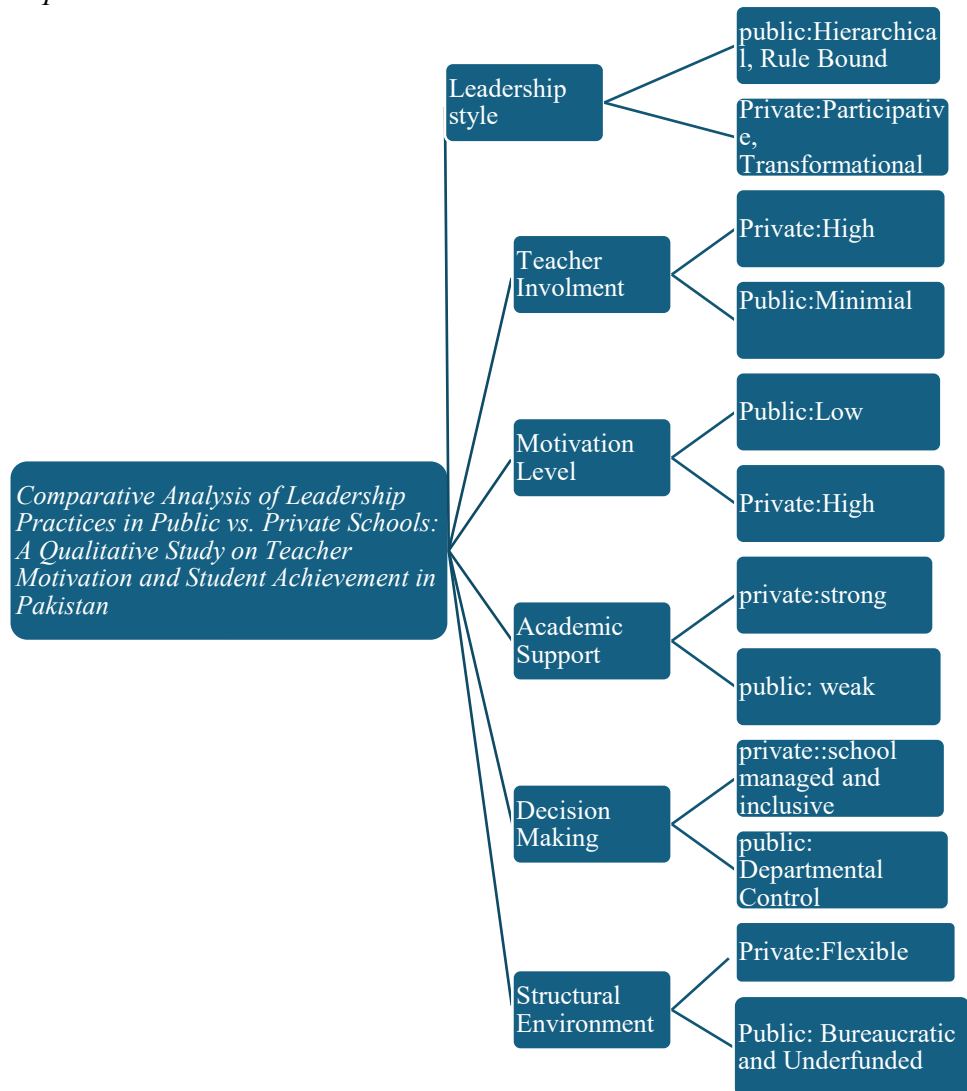
Private Schools: Autonomy with Commercial Pressure

Unlike public schools like private schools Principals like Ms. S2 acknowledged that they had liberty and decision-making power over budgets, staffing, and curricula, but there also shortfall in there like school owners were exerting pressure.

Ms. S2 said:

"We can make changes quickly, but expectations are high," Ms. S2 stated. Parents will complain right away if results decline. This dichotomy implies that while private schools enjoy flexibility, they also must strike a balance between business objectives and academic integrity.

Figure 1
Thematic Map





This figure is showing comparison between leadership practices in public and private schools in karachi.it indicates that public schools follow hierarchical leadership have minimum teachers' involvement, weak support and order from the bureaucratic systems and have low teachers' motivation. While private schools have participative leadership style, encouraging teachers' involvement and have strong academic support and decision-making and flexibility in environment.

Conclusion

The leadership styles of the public and private secondary schools in Karachi, Pakistan, differ significantly, according to this study. Private schools are more likely to use transformational and participatory leadership, which raises student achievement and teacher motivation.

Because of administrative procedures requirements, transactional leadership is observed in public schools, which may halt creativity and morale. Authority to some extent for decision-making, systematic reforms and professional development, are the key factors to enhance leadership in public schools. Programs for developing hybrid leaders that are tailored to the needs of each industry should be taken into consideration by policymakers.

Ideas for hybrid leadership training that are tailored to the situational realities of each industry should be considered by policymakers. A more equitable and effective educational system will increase teacher satisfaction and student performance if the differences in leadership between public and private schools are recognized and addressed.

Recommendations

Leadership Training for Public School Heads: Teachers' empowerment, communication, and transformational leadership should all be covered in organized seminars for public school heads.

Collaborative Leadership Models: Teachers should be involved in planning and assessment processes as part of shared leadership models that schools promote.

Performance-Based Incentives: To increase teacher involvement, public schools should formally implement performance-based incentives, such as awards and recognition.

Policy Reforms: To give school heads greater managerial autonomy, education officials should divide authority.

Promote Cross-Sectoral Learning: Team from public schools and private schools should visit each other facility to observe and learn from each other approaches and style of leading and managing the schools

Restrictions: Due to some factors, we cannot guarantee that this data summarize and represents the whole country, a small sample of school was taken from only Karachi city. For Future project the research may be conducted with a larger sample size and must involve schools from all parts of country specially from rural schools which may result findings that are more applicable.



References

- ASER Pakistan. (2023). Annual Status of Education Report: 2022 National Findings. Lahore: Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. Free Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bush, T. (2020). Theories of Educational Leadership and Management (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(3), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760500244793>
- Herzberg, F. (1968). One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 46(1), 53–62.
- Khan, A., & Iqbal, M. (2019). Comparative study of leadership styles in public and private secondary schools of Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research*, 22(1), 56–68.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large-scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(2), 201–227.
- Northouse, P. G. (2021). Leadership: Theory and Practice (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Niqab, M., Sharma, S., Wei, L. M., & Maulod, S. B. A. (2014). Instructional Leadership Potential among School Principals in Pakistan. *International Education Studies*, 7(6), 74–88.
- PTA. (2022). Annual report: ICT in education in Pakistan. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.
- Shah, D. (2014). Bureaucracy and school leadership: Case of public sector schools in Pakistan. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 3(1), 23–35.
- Spillane, J. P. (2006). Distributed leadership. Jossey-Bass.
- UNESCO. (2021). Global education monitoring report: Non-state actors in education. Paris: UNESCO.