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The Nexus between Leadership, Teacher Personality, and Student Achievement: A South Punjab Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships among principals' leadership practices, teacher personality, school climate, and student academic achievement in secondary and higher secondary schools in Pakistan. The overall research adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the quantitative phase, survey data were collected from teachers and students to examine relationships among leadership styles, school climate, teacher characteristics, and academic outcomes. However, the present article draws exclusively on the qualitative phase of the study and focuses on principals' perspectives to provide deeper insight into leadership practices and school processes. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six principals from government boys' and girls' secondary and higher secondary schools located in the divisions of Bahawalpur, Multan, and Dera Ghazi Khan in South Punjab. The interview protocol was developed based on existing literature and validated by subject experts. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis following systematic coding and theme development procedures. The findings revealed several interconnected themes, including instructional leadership, collaboration and communication, teacher professionalism, school climate, and organizational culture. Principals emphasized the role of transformational leadership in fostering positive school climates, enhancing teacher morale, supporting professional learning, and improving student engagement. Teacher personality traits such as empathy, flexibility, and openness were perceived as critical for creating supportive classroom environments. The study also identified challenges faced by school leaders, including limited resources, resistance to change, and insufficient professional development opportunities. This article highlights the central role of school leadership in promoting academic success and contributes qualitative insights to educational leadership research in Pakistan.

Introduction

Research evidence consistently shows that school principals play a decisive role in driving school improvement through their leadership practices. In Pakistan, education is a fundamental instrument for social development; therefore, understanding the link between school leadership and educational outcomes is essential for improving the quality of the education system. School principals are responsible for creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment that promotes students' academic achievement. In the modern educational context, school leaders face significant challenges, including improving teaching quality and ensuring that learning processes respond effectively to students' diverse needs.

International research highlights that transformational leadership practices adopted by school principals positively influence teachers' performance and students' academic outcomes. For instance, Leithwood (2020), through a comprehensive meta-analysis, identified a strong positive relationship between principals' leadership behaviors, teachers' professional characteristics, and students' academic achievement. However, the education system in Pakistan faces several structural and contextual challenges, such as limited resources, teacher shortages, and cultural constraints. Within these conditions, school principals serve as key agents who mediate these challenges and foster an effective learning environment. By applying appropriate leadership styles, principals can motivate and support teachers and students, ultimately enhancing students' learning outcomes and overall academic success.

Principal Leadership Styles

High-quality leadership, particularly at the level of school principals, plays a crucial role in ensuring that competent teachers are effectively recruited, supported, and retained to deliver high-quality instruction. According to the National Council of State Legislatures (2011), effective principals contribute significantly to teacher quality and professional performance, which ultimately influences student learning outcomes. An important dimension of principal leadership highlighted in this research is the development and maintenance of a positive school climate. Evidence indicates that the internal climate of a school whether supportive or restrictive directly affects multiple aspects of school functioning. School climate has a measurable impact on students' academic performance, instructional improvement, and teacher morale. A positive climate enhances teaching effectiveness and encourages sustainable school improvement, while a negative climate can hinder progress and reduce staff motivation. Over the past three decades, researchers and educators worldwide have increasingly recognized school climate as a critical factor influencing students' academic success (Thapa et al., 2013; Riaz et al., 2024).

In contemporary education systems, the role of the school principal has evolved from that of an administrator to an instructional leader and facilitator. Modern principals are expected to support teachers by providing clear direction, professional guidance, and the resources necessary to achieve educational objectives effectively. Research findings indicate that principals' leadership styles are among the most influential factors affecting students' academic performance. An analysis of secondary school settings suggests that principals play a central role in motivating teachers and strengthening formal educational practices (Arshad, Mehmood & Ahmad, 2025; Riaz et al., 2025). Furthermore, the persistent challenges within educational systems are closely linked to the leadership behaviors of school principals. As noted by Alagheband (1997), principals' leadership practices significantly shape teachers' competence, productivity, and classroom effectiveness. Supporting this view, Avolio and Bass (2004) argue that leadership is one of the most critical predictors of institutional effectiveness in schools and higher education institutions.

This widespread recognition has led to sustained efforts worldwide to strengthen educational leadership development (Arshad, Ahmad & Rao, 2025).

Most educational leaders employ a combination of leadership styles rather than relying on a single, fixed approach. Transactional leadership often serves as a foundational framework that enables leaders to progress toward transformational leadership practices. Leadership styles are flexible and context-dependent; therefore, leaders typically operate within a "primary mode" of leadership rather than adhering strictly to one defined style (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). Research suggests that the integration of distributed and transformational leadership is particularly effective, as this combination has the potential to produce optimal outcomes in school settings (Golafshani, 2003; Iqbal et al., 2023).

Evidence consistently indicates that transformational leadership has a positive influence on schools and teachers. Studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between transformational leadership and teacher motivation. For example, Eyal and Roth (2011) reported a significant positive association between principals' transformational leadership behaviors and teachers' intrinsic motivation, a finding further supported by Hauserman and Stick (2013). Teachers who perceive their principals as transformational leaders tend to display higher levels of commitment, increased work effort, and greater professional satisfaction. Earlier research by Philbin (1997) similarly found that teachers working under transformational leadership not only exhibit higher motivation than those under transactional leadership but also hold more positive perceptions of their school leadership and overall school effectiveness (Arshad, Ahmad & Zafar, 2025; Shaheen et al., 2025)

The present study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between transformational leadership skills and humor orientation, a second-order positive psychological construct associated with leadership effectiveness. Humor orientation is a personality-based characteristic that reflects an individual's tendency to use humor in social and professional interactions. Existing research indicates that humor orientation contributes meaningfully to leadership effectiveness within educational contexts. Aylor and Opplinger (2003) found that leaders with a positive humor orientation are often more effective in communication, relationship building, and fostering supportive school environments. Accordingly, this study explores how the interaction between transformational leadership skills and humor orientation influences teachers' performance in secondary schools (Mobeena et al., 2024).

Leadership has been defined and interpreted in multiple ways across the literature, reflecting its complex and context-dependent nature. In this study, leadership is understood as a process through which individuals influence others to achieve shared educational goals. Organizational culture, which closely interacts with leadership practices, has also been conceptualized differently by scholars. Some researchers describe it in terms of observable behaviors and practices, while others view it as a system of shared beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions that guide actions within organizations (Northouse, 2010; Bibi et al., 2025). Foundational contributions to leadership research include the work of Rost (1996), who examined leadership as a relational and influence-based process, and the review by Waldman and Yammarino (1999), which synthesized earlier empirical findings on leadership effectiveness. Building on these perspectives, the present study aligns with international research examining principals' leadership behaviors and teachers' perceptions of instructional practices within the context of school climate at the secondary school level.

Transactional leadership, in contrast to transformational leadership, emphasizes clearly defined expectations, contingent rewards, and corrective actions. Transactional leaders focus on reinforcing performance through rewards for goal achievement and sanctions for inadequate performance. Research suggests that transactional leadership generally produces more moderate

and short-term effects on teacher performance and student achievement when compared to transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Studies examining the impact of transformational leadership on teachers' professional characteristics have reported mixed findings. While several studies indicate that transformational leadership can enhance teachers' motivation, commitment, and instructional performance, other research suggests that excessive demands for change and continuous improvement may generate stress, workload pressure, and uncertainty among teachers. These mixed outcomes highlight the importance of contextual factors and balanced leadership practices when applying transformational leadership in school settings.

Teacher Personality

Teachers play a vital mentoring role by encouraging students to achieve their full potential. Their professional performance reflected in instructional practices, classroom management, and student engagement has a direct and measurable impact on students' learning outcomes. Effective teaching is characterized by clear explanations, engaging learning activities, and the provision of individualized academic support, all of which contribute to improved student achievement.

Beyond instructional responsibilities, teachers also function as leaders within the classroom. A teacher demonstrates responsibility by ensuring that curricular objectives are met, learning activities are completed on time, and students are guided toward academic goals. Leadership in teaching involves initiative, the ability to recognize student potential, and the willingness to support learners in overcoming challenges. Wang (2010) describes teachers as multifaceted professionals who act as promoters, guides, planners, educators, listeners, motivators, and risk-takers in shaping students' futures.

Leadership style and administrative competence are critical factors in achieving educational effectiveness and maintaining well-organized schools. Zampetakis (2007) highlights the importance of understanding and applying appropriate leadership styles to ensure successful school implementation and improvement. Effective school leadership requires principals to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to select leadership approaches that align with specific institutional needs and contextual conditions. However, identifying a single leadership style that consistently improves school performance remains challenging, as leadership effectiveness is highly context-dependent. Avolio and Bass (2004) argue that leaders must demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in applying leadership styles based on situational demands.

Empirical research consistently recognizes principals' leadership styles as influential determinants of school effectiveness. Studies examining principal leadership practices suggest that leadership style directly affects teachers' performance, which in turn influences students' academic achievement (Waters, 2004; Riaz et al., 2018; Ahmad et al., 2025). Despite this growing body of international research, studies conducted in South Punjab indicate that the relationship between principals' leadership styles, teachers' performance, and students' academic success remains relatively underexplored. This research gap highlights the need for further empirical investigation within this regional context.

School Climate

A positive school climate, including the environment within individual classrooms, is a fundamental component of an effective school. Griffith (2000) emphasizes that a supportive and well-structured school climate contributes directly to students' academic success. Research consistently highlights the strong relationship between positive school climate and improved student outcomes. As early as 1977, the United States Senate's Committee on Equal Educational

Opportunity emphasized the critical role of school principals in shaping teaching environments, fostering professionalism, and maintaining high levels of teacher morale.

A supportive school climate strengthens overall school functioning, enhances staff morale, and increases student engagement, all of which contribute to sustained school improvement (Kwong & Davis, 2015). Principals play a central role in establishing and maintaining a positive school climate by guiding the school's mission, aligning leadership practices, and maintaining open communication with staff members (Qin, 2018). In addition, contemporary evaluation frameworks for school principals include multiple dimensions specifically designed to promote a comprehensive and dynamic school climate (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023).

Despite these frameworks, schools continue to face challenges arising from broader community and organizational factors, which can undermine efforts to maintain a positive school climate. While previous studies have examined school culture and teacher-related factors independently (Huck & Zhang, 2021), limited research has explored how these elements interact to influence overall school climate and educational outcomes.

The role of the school principal has become increasingly complex and demanding due to heightened accountability requirements and rising expectations for student performance. Principals are now expected not only to manage administrative responsibilities but also to serve as instructional leaders who foster supportive learning environments for both teachers and students. The ability of principals to cultivate such environments is essential for enhancing student academic achievement and promoting continuous school improvement (DuFour, 2002).

School climate is composed of multiple interconnected elements, including the psychological climate, which plays a central role in shaping the overall learning experience. School climate is often described as a collective and collaborative effort aimed at improving students' academic and social outcomes. Scholars widely agree that leadership is a critical factor in cultivating a positive school environment. Effective school leaders encourage self-directed learning and align leadership practices with organizational goals, thereby influencing overall school effectiveness (Collins, 2001).

Given the importance of a positive school climate, school principals must clearly understand the leadership behaviors and professional skills required to create and sustain such an environment. While teachers directly influence students through classroom instruction, principals exert a broader impact by shaping the entire school community, including teachers, students, and institutional practices (National Council of State Legislatures, 2014). Although research on principal leadership styles and behaviors that promote positive school climate has increased, empirical evidence remains limited, particularly concerning differences across elementary, middle, and secondary school levels (Leithwood & Riehl, 2008).

School climate is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing social relationships among students and teachers, the quality of the learning environment, and the emotional atmosphere within the school (Thapa et al., 2013). Improvements in school climate through the promotion of safety, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging positively influence both teachers' and students' overall performance. A favorable school climate has been identified as an independent predictor of reduced teacher attrition, increased student engagement, and improved academic achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2022; Ansari et al., 2025).

Within the present framework, principals' leadership styles are viewed as key determinants of school climate. Leadership approaches such as transformational and distributed leadership are associated with more supportive and collaborative school environments, which in turn enhance teachers' productivity and well-being. When teachers experience professional support and

meaningful involvement in decision-making, personality traits such as openness and conscientiousness are more likely to translate into effective teaching behaviors that positively influence student performance.

Students' Academic Performance

According to Cotton (2003), the influence of school principals on school climate emerges from a combination of their leadership behaviors, communication, and daily actions. Principals who demonstrate awareness of how specific behaviors affect teachers and students are more likely to foster a positive school climate. Research has consistently identified positive school climate as a defining characteristic of high-performing schools (Cotton, 2003; Jones & Schindler, 2016). The present study offers a useful contribution to the field of educational leadership by providing empirical insight and methodological guidance for future research. Its findings may be particularly valuable for researchers and graduate students seeking to understand leadership practices in school management across different educational contexts. The study also has relevance beyond national boundaries, as it addresses leadership challenges commonly faced by schools in developing countries such as Pakistan. By examining both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles, this research enhances understanding of how different leadership approaches influence teachers' performance and students' academic achievement.

School Climate and academic performance

Research indicates that the dimensions of school climate identified across different studies are largely consistent, despite variations in terminology. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013) identified five core dimensions of school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the institutional environment, and school improvement processes. Similarly, Stevens and Zvoch (2007) describe school climate as encompassing collaboration, shared decision-making, instructional practices, innovation, student-related factors, and the availability of resources. Although these frameworks differ slightly in structure, all identified dimensions contribute to the development of a positive school climate. The literature places strong emphasis on the relationship between school climate and student outcomes. Empirical evidence demonstrates that a positive school climate is significantly associated with favorable student characteristics, including improved academic achievement, emotional well-being, and physical health (Thapa et al., 2013). Schools that demonstrate respect for students and maintain high academic standards tend to foster higher levels of student motivation and engagement (Arends, 1998). Furthermore, Pepper and Hamilton (2002) found that a supportive school climate has a significant influence on both teacher efficacy and student learning, reinforcing the importance of school climate as a foundational element of educational effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the perceptions of principals, teachers and students concerning the impact' of the Leadership styles of principals on students 'academic performance in secondary and higher secondary schools.
- To identify perceptions of principals, teachers and students concerning the impact of teachers' personalities on students 'academic performance in secondary and higher secondary schools.
- To identify the perception of principals, teachers and concerning the impact' of school climate on students 'academic performance in secondary and higher secondary schools.

Literature Review

A literature review is a critical analysis, synthesis, and summary of existing research on a specific topic (Ahmad et al., 2023; Yousaf et al., 2025). It surveys scholarly articles, books, and,, to provide an overview of current knowledge. Its purpose is to evaluate, contextualize, and identify gaps in previous studies, rather than just listing sources. This part presents the major concepts of the study and explains the key variables examined in the analysis. The present research focuses on the leadership behaviors of school principals and teachers, as well as the relationship between school climate and academic achievement. Academic success in this study is reflected through several indicators, including students' achievement levels, students' and teachers' professional growth, staff morale, and teacher retention, all of which are influenced by the quality of the school climate. In addition, positive attitudes among both students and teachers are considered important indicators of academic effectiveness and overall school performance.

The scope of the study is limited to principals serving in secondary and higher secondary schools who have completed a minimum of two years in their current leadership position. This criterion was applied to ensure that participants had sufficient experience within their schools to meaningfully influence school climate and instructional practices.

The part reviews relevant empirical literature related to principals' leadership styles, teachers' personality characteristics, school climate, and students' academic achievement. In line with the assumptions of transformational leadership discussed in the literature, the chapter also presents a structured overview of the potential benefits and limitations associated with transformational leadership practices. Knowledge, within this context, is viewed as the process through which individuals acquire, apply, and transform information, attitudes, skills, and competencies to achieve organizational and educational goals.

Leadership has been widely recognized as a defining characteristic of human social organization. As noted by Northouse (2009), leadership is one of the most distinctive features of human interaction and is also observed in various forms across other social species. This perspective reinforces the importance of leadership as a central element in shaping school effectiveness, organizational culture, and educational outcomes.

Transformational leadership is widely associated with positive contributions to school climate. In turn, a supportive school climate positively influences teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and retention, all of which indirectly contribute to improved student academic achievement. Teachers are more likely to perform effectively and sustain professional commitment when they work in supportive environments guided by transformational leaders. However, despite the extensive literature on transformational leadership, a clear gap remains regarding the identification and prioritization of specific transformational leadership traits that most strongly contribute to the development and maintenance of a positive school climate.

Understanding the factors that promote an effective school climate is particularly important in the context of Pakistan, where schools often operate under financial constraints and leadership effectiveness varies considerably. These conditions can lead to uneven professional development opportunities and inconsistent instructional quality. Schools that successfully create environments in which teachers feel valued, motivated, and professionally engaged are more likely to retain skilled staff over extended periods. Furthermore, effective leadership and teaching practices foster positive teacher–student relationships, which serve as a foundation for sustained academic success and meaningful school improvement.

The remaining sections of this part present a comprehensive review of the key concepts, assumptions, and empirical findings relevant to this study. School climate, along with its associated components, has increasingly become a focus of educational research. The reviewed literature informed the development of the research instruments by identifying relevant constructs, measurement approaches, and conceptual frameworks. In addition, the review provided insight into how previous studies operationalized key variables, evaluated the effectiveness of research tools, and identified existing gaps in the literature. These insights guided the design and focus of the present study and supported the justification for further investigation in this area.

Definitions' of Leadership

In organizational and institutional settings, employees often require guidance and consultation from more experienced or senior personnel when facing challenges. Effective leadership plays a critical role in providing such support and ensuring organizational stability and progress. This study emphasizes the importance of leaders' visible actions, decision-making practices, and professional conduct in advancing organizational goals, regardless of individual personality differences. While individuals possess diverse personal characteristics, all leaders share the responsibility of upholding and enhancing institutional standards.

Leadership has been defined in numerous ways across the literature, reflecting its multifaceted nature. Commonly identified leadership qualities include motivation, integrity, trustworthiness, positive orientation, empathy, attentiveness, transparency, and a clear sense of purpose. These attributes are consistently associated with effective leadership and organizational success. In addition to personal qualities, leadership behaviors are reflected through specific practices, such as setting clear expectations, fostering collaboration, encouraging participation, maintaining discipline, promoting excellence, providing coaching for improvement, adhering to institutional rules, and inspiring commitment among followers.

Research also identifies multiple leadership approaches that leaders may adopt depending on organizational needs and contextual demands. These include directive leadership, which emphasizes clear guidance and structure; affiliative leadership, which focuses on building emotional connections and trust; participative leadership, which encourages shared decision-making; coaching-oriented leadership, which supports professional growth; and transactional leadership, which prioritizes performance standards and accountability. Regardless of the leadership style employed, effective leaders establish clear objectives and performance standards that guide organizational efforts toward shared goals.

Overall, leadership effectiveness depends not only on personal traits but also on the leader's ability to apply appropriate behaviors and strategies that align with organizational objectives. By setting standards, clarifying expectations, and supporting continuous improvement, leaders create conditions that enable individuals and institutions to achieve sustained success.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Transformational leadership theory emphasizes leaders' ability to motivate and inspire followers to exceed expected performance levels by fostering commitment, shared vision, and personal development (Bass & Avolio, 1990). In educational settings, transformational leadership encourages collaboration, innovation, and the development of a positive school climate, which in turn contributes to improved teacher performance and enhanced student academic outcomes.

Big Five Theory Traits Theory

The Big Five Personality Traits Theory focuses on five broad dimensions of personality openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—that influence individual behavior and interpersonal interactions (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Within educational contexts, traits such as openness and agreeableness are associated with higher levels of teacher effectiveness, improved student motivation, and positive learning experiences.

School Climate Theory

School Climate Theory posits that the social, emotional, and physical environment of a school has a direct impact on teacher performance and student achievement. Positive relationships, supportive leadership, and a safe learning environment contribute significantly to academic success and overall school effectiveness (Thapa et al., 2013).

Leadership Behavior Theories Underpinning the Study

The following leadership theories provide the conceptual foundation for understanding leadership behavior in this research:

Great Man Theory

The Great Man Theory suggests that leaders are born with inherent qualities that distinguish them as natural leaders. According to this perspective, leadership traits are innate and cannot be developed through training or experience. Although largely outdated, this theory laid the groundwork for later leadership research.

Trait Theory

Trait Theory builds on the Great Man perspective by proposing that effective leaders possess specific personal traits, such as intelligence, confidence, and integrity. Early trait theorists believed these characteristics were largely hereditary and stable across situations, although later research acknowledged the role of learning and context.

Contingency Theory

Contingency theories argue that leadership effectiveness depends on the alignment between leadership style and situational factors. This study draws on contingency theory by examining how leadership styles interact with school climate to influence organizational outcomes. Changes in school climate may require corresponding adjustments in leadership behavior.

Situational Leadership Theory

Situational leadership theory proposes that no single leadership style is universally effective. Instead, leaders must adapt their approach based on situational demands, task complexity, and the competence of followers. For example, more directive leadership may be appropriate in high-stakes or unfamiliar situations, while participative approaches may be more effective with experienced staff.

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral leadership theory emphasizes that leadership skills are learned rather than inherited. This theory focuses on leaders' actions and behaviors, such as task orientation and relationship orientation, rather than personal traits. It supports the view that effective leadership can be developed through training and experience.

Participative Leadership Theory

Participative leadership theory highlights the importance of shared decision-making and collaboration. Leaders involve group members in planning and problem-solving processes, which increases commitment, trust, and collective responsibility for achieving organizational goals.

Management Theories

Management theories provide structured frameworks for understanding organizational leadership, motivation, decision-making, and team dynamics. Within this category, transformational leadership theory emphasizes inspiring individuals through shared vision, trust, and professional growth to achieve meaningful organizational change. These theories collectively support effective leadership and management in complex and dynamic environments.

Leadership Skills:

Leadership Qualities and Abilities

Leadership effectiveness is shaped by a range of well-recognized qualities and abilities that guide leaders in achieving organizational goals. Although leadership attributes are numerous, certain core qualities are consistently emphasized in the literature.

Fixed Purpose Effective leaders demonstrate a clear and consistent sense of purpose. They guide employees toward the achievement of defined goals, vision, and strategic objectives, and their decisions reflect this clarity of direction. A well-articulated purpose strongly influences organizational goal formulation and performance, as it aligns individual efforts with institutional priorities (Yukl, 2013).

Well-Defined Tasks and Goal Focus

Successful organizations operate with clearly defined, coordinated, and coherent tasks that align with institutional goals. Leaders play a key role in outlining objectives and ensuring that capable individuals are selected and empowered to achieve them. When leaders place trust in their employees and delegate responsibilities effectively, they establish a strong foundation for organizational success (Northouse, 2018).

Closely related to task clarity is the ability to prioritize goals. Effective leaders focus attention on critical objectives and allocate resources accordingly. Through commitment, careful monitoring, and sustained involvement, leaders ensure that work processes remain aligned with strategic priorities.

Motivation and Inspiration

Motivation and inspiration are central to effective leadership. Leaders who inspire their teams foster enthusiasm, engagement, and a sense of purpose among employees. Such motivation encourages individuals to perform beyond minimum expectations and to find satisfaction in their work (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Trust and Confidence

Trust and self-confidence are essential leadership qualities. Effective leaders demonstrate confidence in their decisions while also trusting their employees' abilities. This mutual trust strengthens commitment, encourages innovation, and promotes accountability within organizations.

Optimism

Optimism contributes positively to organizational climate and performance. Leaders with a positive outlook help create an environment in which challenges are viewed as opportunities rather than obstacles. Research suggests that positive leadership attitudes enhance morale, resilience, and productivity, whereas negative attitudes can undermine organizational effectiveness (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

Solution-Focused Leadership

Organizations inevitably face complex problems and uncertain situations. Effective leaders adopt a solution-focused approach by addressing challenges constructively rather than assigning blame. This approach promotes collaboration and supports continuous improvement.

Responsible Behavior:

Leaders are expected to act responsibly, ethically, and respectfully. Responsible leadership involves acknowledging mistakes, preparing for potential setbacks, and responding to failure with learning-oriented strategies rather than punitive actions.

Openness to Feedback

Effective leaders encourage feedback from employees and create safe environments for sharing ideas and concerns. By valuing employee input, leaders strengthen participation, enhance decision-making, and foster a sense of ownership among team members.

Effective communication

Clear and consistent communication is fundamental to leadership success. Strong communication between leaders and employees promotes understanding, coordination, and trust, enabling organizations to achieve their objectives more efficiently (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

Willingness to Take Risk

Leadership also involves calculated risk-taking. Leaders who encourage experimentation and accept the possibility of failure create opportunities for innovation and growth. A culture that supports risk-taking allows individuals to explore new ideas and pursue meaningful organizational change.

Positive Reinforcement

Recognizing and praising employees for their efforts in public settings is an effective leadership practice that enhances motivation, confidence, and professional commitment. Public acknowledgment of performance, constructive feedback, and discussion of future growth opportunities signal appreciation and value, which in turn foster trust and positive leader–employee relationships (Yukl, 2013). Such recognition contributes to higher morale and sustained work engagement.

Encouraging open communication is another essential leadership behavior. Effective leaders actively listen to their staff and create opportunities for employees to express ideas, concerns, and suggestions. By valuing employee input and paying attention to shared information, leaders improve decision-making processes and strengthen organizational learning (Northouse, 2018).

Equitable participation is also critical for effective leadership. Leaders must ensure fair opportunities for involvement and clearly communicate performance expectations to all

employees. Equal engagement prevents marginalization, reduces workplace stress, and promotes a sense of inclusion and accountability among staff members (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Role modeling represents one of the most influential leadership practices. Leaders who consistently demonstrate ethical behavior, professionalism, and commitment set standards that employees are likely to emulate. By serving as positive examples, leaders inspire trust, encourage innovation, and contribute to a healthy and productive work environment (Bandura, 1986). Role modeling not only supports employee development but also strengthens organizational culture and overall effectiveness.

Research Methodology

"The research methodology is the procedure which is used by the researchers to gather data for resolving problems of investigation" (Ahmad et al., 2022). This study adopted a mixed-method research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The study examined the perceptions of principals, teachers, and students from secondary and higher secondary schools. The use of a mixed-method design is consistent with established practices in educational research, as it allows for a more nuanced interpretation of complex educational phenomena.

Through the mixed-method framework, the study aimed to explore stakeholders' perceptions regarding the influence of principals' leadership styles, teachers' personality characteristics, and school climate on students' academic performance in Pakistan. This chapter outlines the research instruments, sampling procedures, statistical techniques, data collection strategies, and methods of data analysis employed in the study.

Population

The population of the study comprised all principals, enrolled at the secondary and higher secondary levels in government secondary and higher secondary schools of South Punjab. Comprehensive population data were obtained from the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the Punjab Elementary and Secondary Education Department, which provided accurate and up-to-date information for sampling and analysis.

Sample

Mills and Gay (2019) describe a sample as a subset of individuals, items, or events that reflects the characteristics of a larger population from which it is drawn. Cohen and Morrison (2000), in their book *Research Methods in Education*, pointed out that sample size can be limited by various factors, including time, budget, stress, administrative support, available researchers, and resources. Borg and Gall (1979), as referenced by Cohen and Morrison (2000), explained that that study adopted a qualitative data for interviews.

Sample

A sample is defined as a subset of individuals, items, or events that represents the characteristics of a population from which it is drawn (Mills & Gay, 2019). Determining an appropriate sample size is often influenced by practical constraints such as time, budget, administrative support, availability of participants, and research resources (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Following established methodological guidance, the present study adopted a qualitative approach. First, qualitative data were gathered through interviews to enrich and explain the quantitative findings (Borg & Gall, 1979, as cited in Cohen, 2000).

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed in this study. In the first stage, six government secondary and higher secondary schools were selected from South Punjab. For the qualitative component of the study, principals were selected using simple random sampling. A total of six principals (three male and three female) from secondary and higher secondary schools participated in the interview phase to ensure balanced representation and depth of perspectives.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection, the researcher personally visited government secondary and higher secondary schools located in South Punjab. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school principals to gain deeper insights into leadership practices and school climate from an administrative perspective.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed a phenomenological approach to explore participants' lived experiences. According to Creswell (2012), phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon through rich and detailed descriptions. This approach requires in-depth data collection and careful interpretation of participants' subjective experiences (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015; Nicholls, 2009). Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes across interview transcripts, enabling a deeper understanding of leadership behaviors and school climate.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to government secondary and higher secondary schools located in the districts of Bahawalpur, Multan, and Khanewal in South Punjab, Pakistan. The participants included permanent, professionally qualified principals from the selected schools. Both male and female participants were included to ensure balanced representation. The study did not include private schools, primary-level institutions.

Objectives, Them and Interview Question

Table Objectives, Them and Interview Question

Objectives	Question	Sub-Themes	Focus
3	1	School Climate	Challenges of fostering positive school environment
	3		Teacher contributions to positive climate
	4		Actions leading to positive climate
	5		Supporting new teachers' involvement in school climate
	6		Strategies for handling conflict
1	8	Instructional Leadership	Strategies for impacting student achievement
	9		Strategies for monitoring teaching and learning
	10		Strategies for remediation of low achieving students
2	2	Collaboration and Communication	Responsibilities of a transformational leader
	7		Strategies for promoting teacher morale
	11		Opportunities for staff participation in decision making
	12		Challenges faced in school progress

Theme 1: School Climate

Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6: These questions all explore the principal's approach to generating a optimistic and supportive school climate. Look for how the candidate describes fostering positive teacher-student relationships, addressing conflict, and encouraging teacher involvement in shaping the school climate.

Theme 2: Instructional Leadership

Questions 8, 9, 10: These questions principal's leadership in promoting student achievement. Analyze how the candidate describes their strategies for monitoring teaching and learning, supporting struggling students, and impacting overall academic success.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Communication

Questions 2, 7, 11, 12: Such questions allow to evaluate the candidate's willingness to cooperate with the staff and his/her capacity to respond to problems. Search for evidence how the candidate sees herself/himself as a change agent who supports teachers, encourages staff to share ideas and strategies for solving challenges that they face.

This section presents the findings related to the purpose of the study, which sought to examine how leadership influences academic performance within the school environment. Analysis of interview data from the six participants revealed that leadership style plays a central role in overall school performance. The participants shared their perceptions and experiences, which were systematically analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. Based on this analysis, four recurring themes emerged: Partnerships, Professionalism, Teaching and Learning Leadership, and Organizational Frameworks and School Culture. In addition, teacher personality emerged as a prominent cross-cutting factor, highlighting how teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal skills contribute to the quality of the learning environment.

The integration of these themes underscores the critical role of leadership in creating school environments that support academic success and promote the professional growth of both teachers and students. Effective leadership was consistently linked to the development of positive instructional practices, collaborative cultures, and sustained professional learning.

Sub-theme 1: Instructional Leadership

Participants emphasized instructional leadership as a key mechanism through which principals influence student academic performance. Principals reported using a range of strategies focused on improving instruction, supporting professional growth, and fostering accountability. Monitoring teaching and learning was consistently highlighted through practices such as classroom observations, instructional walk-throughs, and the use of student performance data to inform decision-making.

To address academic underperformance, principals implemented targeted remediation strategies, including individualized learning plans, tutoring programs, early intervention initiatives, and increased parental involvement. These practices were viewed as essential for supporting low-achieving students and ensuring continuous academic improvement across the school.

Sub-theme 2: Sub-theme 2: School Climate

All principals identified the creation and maintenance of a positive school climate as a major leadership challenge. Despite this challenge, the principals unanimously agreed that teachers are key stakeholders in shaping and sustaining a supportive school environment. Analysis of the interview data indicated that several leadership actions were perceived as effective in improving

school climate. These actions included frequent and transparent communication, the establishment of structured mentorship programs, and the celebration of individual and collective achievements. Such practices were viewed as instrumental in strengthening relationships and fostering a sense of belonging within the school community.

However, principals also highlighted persistent challenges related to meeting the diverse needs of students, engaging parents effectively, and managing student behavior. Additional concerns included supporting newly appointed teachers and helping them adjust to the existing school culture. To address this issue, principals reported providing orientation, guidance, and professional support to assist newcomers in understanding and integrating into the school climate.

Sub-theme 3: Collaboration and Communication

The findings revealed that principals were highly aware of the importance of collaboration and communication in promoting effective school functioning. Principals emphasized strategies aimed at enhancing teacher morale, including recognition and reward systems, opportunities for professional development, and initiatives designed to support work–life balance. Many teachers perceived their involvement in decision-making processes as a shared responsibility that contributed positively to school improvement. Despite these efforts, principals identified several barriers to effective collaboration, such as limited financial resources, resistance to organizational change, and the challenge of maintaining high academic standards without placing excessive pressure on students. These constraints were viewed as ongoing obstacles to sustaining collaborative practices within schools.

Summary of Findings

Student Achievement:

The findings provided substantial evidence of targeted improvements in student academic outcomes aligned with principals' strategic goals and action plans. Principals reported using student performance data to inform instructional practices, guide professional learning activities, and implement targeted interventions for struggling students. These data-driven approaches were perceived as effective in promoting academic growth and supporting continuous school improvement. In several cases, schools demonstrated measurable progress as a result of systematic planning, instructional support, and focused intervention strategies.

Additional Findings

Principals reported deliberate efforts to maintain and enhance teacher morale through recognition, professional training opportunities, and supportive working conditions. Teachers were encouraged to take ownership of their classrooms and instructional practices, which many perceived as a sign of trust and professional respect. As a result, several teachers reported feeling valued, motivated, and more committed to their roles. All principals emphasized the importance of collaboration, open communication, and the involvement of teaching staff in key decisions related to school development and improvement. Teachers who participated in decision-making processes reported increased appreciation for collective responsibility and community engagement. This involvement contributed to stronger professional relationships and a shared sense of ownership over school goals. Principals highlighted the value of structured support systems for newly appointed teachers. Mentorship programs, peer guidance, and collaborative planning were identified as effective strategies for improving New Teacher Induction programs. These practices helped new teachers adapt more effectively to school expectations, instructional practices, and institutional culture.

Negative Outcomes

Despite efforts to establish positive school environments, principals identified ongoing challenges that hindered progress. These included issues related to student behavior, limited parental engagement, and increasing diversity among students and staff. In some cases, these factors constrained the development of an optimal school climate. Several principals reported resistance from staff members when implementing new initiatives or reforms. This resistance slowed the adoption of innovative programs and, at times, created tension within the school community, affecting overall progress. Limited financial resources emerged as a significant barrier to sustaining school improvement efforts. Principals cited insufficient funding as a constraint on initiating new programs, maintaining infrastructure, and providing continuous professional development. In some schools, shortages of trained personnel and inadequate facilities further compounded these challenges.

Discussion

This study examined the perceptions of six principals from secondary and higher secondary schools regarding the influence of leadership on school climate and student outcomes. Analysis of qualitative interview data revealed several recurring themes, including school environment, instructional leadership, and collaboration and communication. Principals described their roles in managing teachers, sustaining a positive organizational climate, and promoting students' academic achievement. The findings indicated that effective teaching–learning processes and a supportive school environment require transformational leadership, high teacher morale, active student engagement, and collaborative decision-making practices.

The study further provides evidence that students perceive teacher personality, collaborative teaching practices, and effective school management as significant factors influencing academic outcomes in secondary and higher secondary schools in Pakistan. The findings suggest that teachers who establish positive relationships with students, demonstrate flexibility in instructional approaches, and maintain supportive classroom interactions are more likely to foster increased student engagement and academic success. In addition, instructional strategies and professional teaching practices were found to directly influence students' motivation and interest in learning activities.

Overall, the evidence supports the conclusion that a positive school climate, reinforced by effective leadership and cooperative teaching practices, contributes significantly to improved academic achievement. Teachers were perceived as key contributors to creating safe, inclusive, and productive learning environments through personality traits such as empathy, openness, and responsiveness to student needs. However, the study also identified a lack of structured professional development programs aimed at strengthening teachers' classroom management skills and their capacity to develop culturally responsive learning environments. These findings highlight the need for schools to promote integrated leadership practices that enhance teachers' contributions to student learning and support sustained academic improvement.

Findings Interview of Principals' Leadership Style

Summary of Principal Perspectives on Leadership and School Climate

The findings revealed several interrelated themes concerning principals' leadership roles, challenges, and strategies for improving school climate and student achievement.

Principals identified multiple challenges associated with their leadership responsibilities, particularly maintaining student discipline while fostering a positive school climate. Participants

emphasized the importance of consistency among teachers and the need to balance students' emotional well-being with academic expectations. External pressures, including limited resources, accountability demands, staff and student diversity, and difficulties in engaging parents as active partners in education, were also identified as significant challenges.

All principals described transformational leadership as central to their role. They emphasized empowering staff, establishing a clear school vision, and encouraging innovation through inspiration rather than control. Strong interpersonal relationships, teamwork, collaboration, and leadership flexibility were viewed as essential for effective school management and sustained improvement.

Teachers were widely recognized as key contributors to school climate. Principals highlighted the importance of positive teacher–student relationships, collegial support among staff, and teachers' openness to feedback. Teachers who demonstrated flexibility, reflective practice, and strong classroom ownership were perceived as contributing positively to teaching effectiveness and student learning.

Leadership Actions Supporting a Positive School Climate Principals identified several leadership actions that supported a positive school climate, including regular staff meetings, shared decision-making, peer mentoring for new teachers, and recognition of student and teacher achievements. Advocacy for students and encouragement of professional conduct among teachers were also seen as vital leadership practices.

Participants emphasized structured support for newly appointed teachers through mentorship programs, frequent consultation, and professional development opportunities. Pairing novice teachers with experienced mentors and organizing social activities to promote inclusion were viewed as effective strategies for facilitating adjustment and professional growth.

All principals highlighted the importance of early and constructive conflict resolution. Strategies included open communication, mediation, collaborative problem-solving, and restorative practices aimed at rebuilding trust and maintaining healthy professional relationships.

Principals reported using a range of strategies to enhance student performance, such as setting measurable academic targets, strengthening teacher professional development, and promoting accountability. Collaboration among teachers and the development of positive teacher–student relationships were considered critical to improving academic outcomes.

Monitoring instructional practices was a key leadership responsibility. Principals reported using classroom observations, instructional walk-throughs, data analysis, peer reviews, and feedback sessions to evaluate teaching effectiveness and guide improvement efforts.

Remedial Support for Low-Achieving Students.

To support low-achieving students, principals implemented targeted interventions, including individualized learning plans, extended tutorial sessions, early intervention strategies, and additional instructional support. These measures were designed to close learning gaps and improve academic outcomes.

Enhancing teacher morale emerged as a major leadership priority. Principals described strategies such as recognition of effort, respect for professional autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and initiatives promoting work–life balance and staff well-being.

Teachers were actively involved in decision-making processes through staff meetings, working groups, and strategic planning initiatives. Principals viewed shared leadership and collaborative decision-making as essential for school improvement and professional commitment.

Despite these efforts, principals identified ongoing barriers to progress, including financial constraints, resistance to change, parental pressures, curriculum reforms, and the challenge of addressing diverse student needs. These factors were perceived as limiting the pace and sustainability of school improvement initiatives.

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