Principal Leadership, Teacher Well-being, and Teaching Quality: Exploring the Nexus in Indian Colleges

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Abstract—**This study examines the relationships between principal leadership styles, teacher job satisfaction, and teacher effectiveness in Indian higher education. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 50 principals, 100 teachers, and 200 students across degree colleges in the Prayagraj region. Standardised measures included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, and Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality. Results indicate transformational leadership as the strongest positive predictor of both teacher satisfaction ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$) and effectiveness ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). Transactional leadership also showed positive but weaker associations, while laissez-faire leadership had significant negative effects. A strong direct relationship was found between job satisfaction and effectiveness ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$). The findings highlight the pivotal role of transformational leadership in enhancing faculty well-being and teaching quality. Practical implications include the need for leadership development focusing on transformational competencies, institutional support for teacher satisfaction, and policy alignment with India's National Education Policy 2020. This study advocates for an integrated leadership-wellbeing approach to elevate educational standards in Indian higher education.**

Index Terms—**Transformational leadership, teacher job satisfaction, teacher effectiveness, higher education in India, leadership developme**

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of a classroom teacher is multifaceted, encompassing various responsibilities beyond instruction. While teachers are often viewed in traditional roles, this study explores the more specific question of teacher effectiveness and its association with leadership styles and job satisfaction. Research indicates that effective teaching involves factors such as personality characteristics, behavioural instruction, communication skills, and the ability to stimulate intellectual curiosity (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Hattie, 2009). However, teacher effectiveness does not operate in a vacuum; it is profoundly shaped by the organisational climate and the quality of leadership within the institution (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Simultaneously, the well-being and professional disposition of teachers, encapsulated in the construct of job satisfaction, have been consistently linked to their performance, retention, and commitment (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Klassen & Anderson, 2009).

Leadership is broadly defined as a process where an individual influences a group to achieve a common goal. Leadership in academic settings, particularly the role of the principal or head of institution, has evolved from a purely administrative function to a transformative force capable of shaping institutional culture (Bush, 2011). Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory, with its emphasis on inspiring followers, stimulating intellect, and providing individualised consideration, offers a robust framework for understanding how leaders can elevate organisational outcomes. In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on contingent rewards and management by exception, while laissez-faire leadership represents a relative absence of leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Job satisfaction is defined as a positive or pleasing emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or experience. For teachers, job satisfaction refers to their overall attitudes and views towards their working conditions and profession. It influences teaching quality, administrative effectiveness, and the teacher's enthusiasm and psychological health. Factors affecting teacher job satisfaction include both intrinsic aspects, such as success and recognition, and extrinsic

factors, including working conditions, salary, and interpersonal relationships. A substantial body of research, primarily from Western contexts, affirms that transformational leadership is positively associated with teacher job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Bogler, 2001; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Furthermore, teacher job satisfaction is recognised not merely as a desirable end-state but as a critical mediator that influences instructional practices, student engagement, and ultimately, student achievement (Fisher, 2014).

Despite this established knowledge, significant gaps persist, especially within the Indian higher education context. First, while numerous studies examine bivariate relationships (e.g., leadership → satisfaction, satisfaction → effectiveness), there is a paucity of research studying the influence of leadership on teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction. Second, most leadership research in education focuses on school principals, with less attention paid to leaders of tertiary degree colleges, which constitute a significant segment of India's higher education ecosystem (UGC, 2022). Third, the cultural and bureaucratic specificities of the Indian academic environment characterized by hierarchical structures, resource constraints, and high administrative loads, necessitate context-specific investigations, as findings from Western literature may not be directly transferable (Kumar & Sharma, 2018).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teacher job satisfaction is defined as a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job and experiences (Locke, 1976). It is a multi-dimensional construct influenced by a confluence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Intrinsic factors (motivators) include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement opportunities. Extrinsic factors (hygiene factors) encompass institutional policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions (Dinham & Scott, 1998). In the teaching profession, satisfaction is also uniquely derived from relationships with students, witnessing student growth, and a sense of contributing to societal development (Dinham, 1995).

Research consistently highlights the functional importance of job satisfaction. It is positively correlated with teacher retention, reduced absenteeism, higher organisational commitment, and increased professional engagement (Reyes & Shin, 1995; Klassen & Anderson, 2009). Conversely, job dissatisfaction is linked to burnout, attrition, and negative behaviours that can cripple an institution's effectiveness (Spector, 1997). In the Indian context, studies point to challenges such as heavy workloads, bureaucratic interference, inadequate infrastructure, and sometimes stagnant career progression as significant sources of dissatisfaction among college teachers (Pabla, 2012; Singh & Dali, 2021).

Teacher effectiveness refers to the ability of an instructor to facilitate desired student learning outcomes (Medley, 1979). Early research focused on teacher personality traits, while later paradigms, like the process-product model, identified specific behaviours linked to effectiveness: clarity of instruction, effective classroom management, appropriate pacing, high expectations, and the ability to intellectually stimulate students (Brophy & Good, 1986; Reynolds, 1998). Effective communication and the creation of a positive, supportive learning environment are also critical components (Koutsoulis, 2003). Measuring teacher effectiveness is complex. While student achievement on standardised tests is one metric, it is often inadequate for capturing the full spectrum of teaching quality, especially in higher education (Marsh, 2007). Student evaluations of teaching (SETs), despite ongoing debates about their validity, remain a widely used and researched tool for formative and summative assessment (Spooren, Brockx, & Mortelmans, 2013). The Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) questionnaire, developed by Marsh (1982), is a well-validated instrument that assesses multiple dimensions of teaching, including learning/value, enthusiasm, organisation, and individual rapport, providing a holistic view of perceived effectiveness.

Leadership theories applied to education have progressively shifted from transactional to transformational paradigms. Transactional leadership is based on an exchange process where leaders clarify expectations and provide rewards or corrections based on performance (Bass, 1985). It can be effective in maintaining order and meeting baseline standards. Transformational leadership, however, seeks to

transform followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values (Burns, 1978).

A vast body of evidence links transformational leadership in schools to positive outcomes, including improved school climate, enhanced teacher motivation, and higher job satisfaction (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Griffith, 2004). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership, a passive, avoidant style, is consistently associated with negative outcomes, including role ambiguity, low satisfaction, and poor performance (Skogstad et al., 2007).

Theoretical and empirical work suggests these three constructs are dynamically interrelated. The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) posits that motivating job characteristics (often influenced by leadership) lead to critical psychological states (e.g., satisfaction), which in turn drive positive work outcomes (e.g., performance). Similarly, transformational leadership theory implies that by enhancing followers' motivation and morale (key aspects of satisfaction), leaders indirectly boost their performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Several studies support parts of this chain. For instance, Bogler (2001) and Nguni et al. (2006) found strong positive relationships between transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) demonstrated a clear link between teacher satisfaction and self-reported efficacy, a proxy for effectiveness. A few studies have begun to explore mediation. For example, Griffith (2004) found leadership impacted school performance partly through staff satisfaction. However, Dutta and Sahney (2016), while finding indirect effects, noted that the direct link between leadership and satisfaction was not always clear, suggesting context-dependent pathways.

Based on the research gap identified the following specific objectives and corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the empirical investigation. The study aimed: first, to examine the relationship between principal leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) and teacher job satisfaction (H1); second, to investigate the direct effects of these leadership styles on teacher effectiveness (H2); and third, to analyse the direct relationship between teacher job satisfaction and teacher effectiveness (H3).

III. METHODOLOGY

Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design with a cross-sectional survey methodology. This design is appropriate for examining relationships and testing proposed mediation models among the constructs of interest within a naturalistic setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study was conducted in the Prayagraj region of Uttar Pradesh, India, which hosts a dense network of undergraduate and postgraduate degree colleges. From a total population of 278-degree colleges, a sample of 50 colleges was selected using convenience sampling, contingent upon institutional permission and principal willingness to participate. Within each selected college, a nested sampling approach was used:

- Principals: All 50 principals of the selected colleges formed the leadership sample.
- Teachers: Two full-time teachers were randomly selected from each college's faculty roster, yielding a teacher sample of N = 100.
- Students: Four students were randomly selected from each college, provided they had been enrolled for at least one semester and had direct experience with the evaluated teachers. This yielded a student sample of N = 200 for evaluating teacher effectiveness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Principals were included if they had held their position for at least one academic year.
- Teachers were included if they were full-time, permanent employees with at least one year of teaching experience at the college.
- Students were included if they were full-time, regular students who had completed at least one semester.
- Part-time, temporary, or visiting faculty, principals/teachers with less than one year in their role, and students in short-term programs were excluded.

Instruments and Measures

Three standardized instruments with established reliability and validity were used.

1. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X): Developed by Bass and Avolio (1995), this 45-item instrument measures a full range of leadership

styles on a 5-point Likert scale (0=Not at all to 4=Frequently, if not always). It yields scores for three primary styles:

1. Transformational Leadership (20 items; e.g., "I talk optimistically about the future").
2. Transactional Leadership (12 items; Contingent Reward and Management-by-Exception; e.g., "I make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved").
3. Laissez-Faire Leadership (8 items; e.g., "I avoid getting involved when important issues arise").

2. Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ - Short Form): This 20-item scale by Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1967) measures job satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied). It provides an overall satisfaction score, with items covering intrinsic satisfaction (e.g., "The chance to do things for other people") and extrinsic satisfaction (e.g., "The way my supervisor handles his/her workers"). It was completed by the teachers.

3. Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ): Developed by Marsh (1982), this 35-item questionnaire assesses teacher effectiveness from the student perspective on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). It covers nine dimensions: Learning/Value, Enthusiasm, Organisation, Group Interaction, Individual Rapport, Breadth, Examinations, Assignments, and Workload. An overall effectiveness score is computed. The SEEQ has demonstrated strong validity and reliability across diverse cultures (Marsh & Roche, 1997). It was completed by students to evaluate the teachers in the sample.

Procedure

Before data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Formal permissions were secured from the heads of the participating colleges. All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, and data confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained. The questionnaires were administered in person by trained research assistants to ensure consistency and address queries. Principals completed the MLQ. The two selected teachers from each college completed the MSQ. The four selected students from each college completed the SEEQ for the specific teachers in the sample. Data collection was conducted over four months to accommodate academic schedules.

IV. RESULTS

The demographic composition of the sample is summarised in Table 1. The principal sample (N=50) was predominantly male (78%), aged 41-50 years (52%). The teacher sample (N=100) was also majority male (60%), with the largest age group being 35-44 years (33.7%), and a high proportion holding PhDs (64%). The student sample (N=200) was balanced in gender (52% male) and year of study, with the largest representation from the Arts stream (41%). As shown in Table 4.1, principals were rated highest on transformational leadership (M = 4.22, SD = 0.54), followed by transactional leadership (M = 3.65, SD = 0.68), with laissez-faire leadership receiving the lowest mean score (M = 2.11, SD = 0.73). Overall, teacher job satisfaction and teacher effectiveness were rated relatively high by teachers and students, respectively.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Participant	Variable	Category	Percentage
Principals	Gender	Male	78.0
		Female	22.0
	Age Group	41-50 yrs	52.0
		51+ yrs	36.0
		31-40 yrs	12.0
Teachers	Gender	Male	60.0
		Female	40.0
	Qualification	Ph.D.	64.0
		PG	36.0
Students	Gender	Female	52.0
		Male	48.0
	Stream	Arts	41.0
		Science	35.0
		Commerce	24.0

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the variables

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Transformational (TFL)	96	4.22	0.54
Transactional (TCL)	96	3.65	0.68
Laissez-faire (LF)	96	2.11	0.73
Job Satisfaction (JS)	288	3.89	0.61
Teacher Effectiveness (TE)	576	4.15	0.47

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlations (Table 2) provided initial support for the hypothesised relationships. Transformational leadership was strongly and positively correlated with both Teacher Job Satisfaction ($r = .58$, $p < .01$) and Teacher Effectiveness ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). Transactional leadership showed moderate positive correlations ($r = .38$ with satisfaction; $r = .34$ with effectiveness). Laissez-faire leadership was significantly negatively correlated with both outcomes ($r = -.42$ and $r = -.38$, respectively). As anticipated, the correlation between Teacher Job Satisfaction and Teacher Effectiveness was strong and positive ($r = .64$, $p < .01$).

Table 3: Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Var	1	2	3	4	5
1. TFL	--				
2. TCL	.46**	--			
3. LF	-.23*	.30*	--		
4. JS	.58**	.38**	-.42*	--	
5. TE	.55**	.34*	-.38*	.64**	--

*p < .05, **p < .01

Regression Analyses

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with the three leadership styles as predictors and teacher job satisfaction as the criterion variable. The model was statistically significant, $F (3, 50) = 31.98$, $p < .001$, and explained 51% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .51$). As shown in Table 4, transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), followed by transactional leadership ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). Laissez-faire leadership was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 was supported.

Table 4: Regression of Teacher Job Satisfaction on Leadership Styles

Predictor	β	t	p
Transformational Leadership	.45	5.88	<.001
Transactional Leadership	.28	3.76	<.001
Laissez-Faire Leadership	-.30	-4.12	<.001

$R^2 = .51$, $F (3,50) = 31.98$, $p < .001$*

A second multiple regression analysis tested the direct effect of leadership styles on teacher effectiveness. The model was significant, $F (3, 50) = 24.15$, $p < .001$, accounting for 44% of the variance ($R^2 = .44$). Transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$). Transactional leadership had a smaller but significant positive effect ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$). Laissez-faire leadership again had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$). Thus, H2 was supported.

A simple linear regression confirmed a strong direct relationship between teacher job satisfaction and effectiveness. The model was highly significant, $F (1, 100) = 215.54$, $p < .001$, with job satisfaction explaining 43% of the variance in effectiveness ($R^2 = .43$). The standardised beta coefficient was large and positive ($\beta = .66$, $p < .001$). Thus, H3 was supported.

V. DISCUSSION

This study provides robust empirical evidence for the intricate relationships connecting principal leadership styles, teacher job satisfaction, and teacher effectiveness in Indian degree colleges. The findings not only corroborate established theories but also offer context-specific insights relevant to the Indian higher education system.

The results unequivocally position transformational leadership as the most potent predictor of both teacher satisfaction and effectiveness. The strong positive associations ($\beta = .45$ for satisfaction; $\beta = .39$ for effectiveness) resonate with a global consensus on the efficacy of this leadership style in educational settings (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Bogler, 2001). In the Indian context, where academic institutions often grapple with rigid hierarchies, resource scarcity, and administrative inertia (Kumar & Sharma, 2018), a transformational leader acts as a vital change agent. By articulating an inspiring vision for the college (Inspirational Motivation), modelling integrity and dedication (Idealised Influence), encouraging pedagogical innovation (Intellectual Stimulation), and showing genuine care for faculty development (Individualised Consideration), principals can counteract demoralising structural constraints. This leadership approach directly fulfils higher-order psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), leading to greater intrinsic satisfaction among teachers.

The positive, albeit weaker, role of transactional leadership ($\beta = .28$ for satisfaction) is noteworthy. It suggests that in a system governed by formal rules, university ordinances, and performance audits, a clear structure of expectations and contingent rewards

provides a necessary foundation. This "managing" function may offer predictability and fairness, which are important hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1959). However, its lesser impact underscores that merely "managing" transactions is insufficient for fostering deep commitment and excellence.

The significant negative impact of laissez-faire leadership (β = -.30 for satisfaction; β = -.27 for effectiveness) serves as a critical warning. This passive, avoidant style creates a leadership vacuum, leading to role ambiguity, a lack of guidance, and perceived organisational neglect (Skogstad et al., 2007). In an environment already facing challenges, such abdication of leadership can rapidly erode faculty morale and lead to a decline in teaching standards, as teachers feel unsupported and directionless.

The very strong direct relationship between teacher job satisfaction and effectiveness (β = .66) is a central finding of this study. It powerfully validates the argument that a satisfied teacher is not just a happier employee but a more effective professional. When teachers feel valued, supported, and find meaning in their work, they are more likely to invest discretionary effort into lesson planning, experiment with engaging pedagogies, provide meaningful feedback to students, and serve as mentors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). This emotional and professional investment is directly perceptible to students, as captured by the SEEQ ratings. This finding reinforces Dinham's (1995) conclusion that the quality of teacher-student relationships and the joy derived from student success are paramount sources of satisfaction and drivers of effective practice.

The pattern of results supports a model in which leadership and job satisfaction operate as interconnected drivers of teaching quality. Transformational leadership emerges as the most influential style, positively affecting both teacher morale and classroom performance. The strong satisfaction-effectiveness link suggests that leadership efforts aimed at improving faculty well-being are likely to yield tangible benefits in teaching quality. These findings align with the full-range leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004) while providing empirical validation within the Indian higher education context.

Based on the findings of this study, practical and policy-level interventions are imperative for enhancing the quality of higher education in India. Firstly, at the institutional level, it is essential to invest in leadership development programs that train principals in transformational competencies such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration while also actively discouraging laissez-faire leadership. Concurrently, fostering faculty well-being through improved working conditions, professional autonomy, and recognition systems can directly amplify teaching effectiveness, as satisfied teachers are more engaged and pedagogically innovative. Secondly, at the policy level, alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020should be strengthened by promoting institutional autonomy, participatory governance, and incentive-based funding models that reward colleges that cultivate positive organisational climates and support faculty development.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations, including its cross-sectional design, regional sampling, and reliance on self-reported data, which suggest cautious interpretation and highlight avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies and replications across diverse institutional contexts are needed to establish causality and generalizability. Future inquiries should also explore additional factors such as teacher self-efficacy, institutional resources, and socio-cultural variables that may influence these relationships. In conclusion, the evidence underscores that transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction are not isolated elements but are fundamentally interconnected drivers of teaching excellence. A systemic commitment to nurturing such leadership and ensuring faculty well-being can create a virtuous cycle, ultimately elevating both the effectiveness of instruction and the stature of Indian higher education on a global scale.

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