

A Study of Employees' Perceptions of Leadership Styles and Work Engagement Levels in Ramallah Private schools: Palestine

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Abstract

Background: The exploration of leadership styles holds significance in overcoming challenges within various sectors, including education, where they play a crucial role in influencing work engagement. **Objective:** The central aim of this study is to dissect the perceived relationship between leadership styles exhibited by school managers and the levels of work engagement experienced by teachers in private schools situated in Ramallah, Palestine. **Method:** Employing a quantitative approach encompassing a descriptive, cross-sectional design, this study explicitly targets teachers within Ramallah private schools. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the study's participants, comprising 383 teachers working across private schools. Data collection involved the utilization of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and the Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire 5X short form. **Results:** The findings of this investigation highlight distinct trends. According to the perceptions of the teachers, the transformational leadership style (Mean \pm Standard Deviation: 2.34 ± 0.946) and the transactional leadership style (Mean \pm Standard Deviation: 2.03 ± 0.686) garnered the highest mean scores. In contrast, the laissez-faire leadership style (Mean \pm Standard Deviation: 1.4 ± 0.991) received the lowest mean score. Concerning work engagement levels, the dedication aspect scored the highest mean (Mean \pm SD: 4.80 ± 1.380), while vigor registered a slightly lower mean (Mean \pm SD: 4.02 ± 1.424).

Furthermore, substantial positive correlations were observed between the transformational and transactional leadership styles and the work engagement levels of the teachers ($r = 0.591$, $r = 0.517$, $P = 0.000$), respectively. However, while a negative correlation existed between the laissez-faire leadership style and work engagement levels of teachers ($r = -0.023$), this relationship did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.64$). **Conclusion:** This study accentuates the influential role of leadership styles in shaping work engagement within Ramallah private schools.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Work Engagement, Employee, Teachers, Ramallah, private schools, Palestine.

1. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced potential challenges across various sectors, including education. This situation has spurred concerns among school educators regarding their well-being and the implications of the pandemic, potentially affecting work engagement. These concerns echo findings from previous studies (Brammer & Clark, 2020; Ngwacho, 2020). Moreover, teacher leadership becomes increasingly complex against evolving educational reforms, regulatory requirements, technological advancements, possible workforce shortages, demographic shifts, and financial considerations (Audrain et al., 2022). In this landscape, the engagement of educational staff emerges as a critical factor. Notably, the research underscores the vital importance of work engagement, linked with organizational success, heightened commitment, increased satisfaction, and decreased turnover intentions (Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2023).

Within Ramallah private schools, teacher leaders are pivotal in shaping the educational environment by empowering and motivating their peers through their distinct leadership styles. Numerous studies highlight the substantial influence of school managers' leadership styles in fostering engagement among their teachers (Atik & Celik, 2020; Baptiste, 2019). Through their leadership approaches, school managers can guide the school's progress deliberately and effectively (Gurr et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that manager schools that use transformational leadership styles are more likely to foster engagement among their teachers (Ahmad & Jameel, 2020; Purwanto, 2022). Transformational leaders are inspiring and motivating, and they create a shared vision for their schools. They also empower their colleagues and encourage them to take risks. Transactional leaders, on the other hand, focus on setting goals and rewarding followers for their performance. While this can be effective in some cases, it is not as likely to foster engagement as transformational leadership (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Laissez-faire leaders give their followers much freedom and autonomy, which can lead to a lack of direction and purpose. This is not conducive to engagement (Lateef & Ameen, 2023). Thus, the central objective of this study is to uncover the nuanced relationship between teacher leaders' leadership styles and the levels of work engagement perceived by educational staff within Ramallah private schools.

2. Conceptual Framework

The researcher uses two previously developed conceptual frameworks, the work engagement conceptual framework and the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), to highlight nurse leaders' strategies to engage their employees to be productive and effective for the organizations (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). The FRLM was chosen as the study's guide because it illustrates three distinct leadership styles. School managers will study the impact of these styles on school teachers' work engagement.

The FRLM was developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). This model describes three leadership styles in a continuum from transformational to transactional to passive-avoidant (PA). Nine factors are divided into three leadership styles. There are five factors associated with transformational leadership style: idealized influence (behaviors), idealized influence (attributes), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The transactional leadership style has three factors: contingent reward,

management by exception (active), and management by exception (passive). This type of leader looks for faults and corrects them when they occur (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Passive-avoidant leadership is defined as a lack of leadership. The leader takes a hands-off method, deferring decisions, giving no feedback, and making no effort to meet their employee's demands (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

The second framework chosen to guide this study is the work engagement conceptual framework. This framework developed by Laschinger et al. (2009) consists of three subscales: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is defined by mental strength and energy in the workplace. Dedication is defined by solid participation in the work. Absorption is characterized by a full concentration on work, in which time will pass quickly, and it is difficult for a person to leave work (Laschinger et al., 2009).

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design

This study utilized a descriptive, cross-sectional, and correlational design.

3.2. Study Setting

This investigation was carried out within the context of Ramallah private schools. The selection of these schools was purposeful, considering factors such as their affiliation, status, and geographical proximity within the Ramallah area.

3.3. Sampling /Participants

Aligned with the focus on employees' perceptions of leadership styles and work engagement levels in Ramallah private schools, the researcher used the convenience sampling technique to gather samples from the pool of teachers actively employed within Ramallah's private schools. To ensure systematic selection, the inclusion criteria were meticulously established: (a) participants were required to demonstrate proficiency in understanding and reading Arabic; (b) a minimum of one year's teaching experience was necessary; and (c) individuals needed to operate under the direct supervision of school managers. In contrast, the exclusion criteria encompassed recently appointed teachers currently undergoing orientation programs within the school and those with less than one year of teaching experience. These exclusions were thoughtfully introduced due to the recognition that such individuals might have had limited opportunities for interactions with their school managers, which could impact their ability to evaluate leadership styles accurately.

Determining the optimal sample size followed a comprehensive approach involving electronic calculations facilitated by the Raosoft website (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>). Given the total teacher population in the region, numbering 2000, and a targeted confidence level of 95%, paired with a 5% margin of error, the derived sample size was validated as no fewer than $n=383$. This thorough methodology ensures that the study's conclusions stand on a statistically robust foundation, offering insights representative of the broader employee populace within Ramallah's private schools.

3.4. Study Instruments

3.4.1. Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire

The Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) was developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). It aims to measure three leadership styles and consists of 45 items under nine subscales used in the MLQ-5X. Five subscales measure items of Transformational Leadership (idealized influence–behavior, idealized influence – attributes, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration), three subscales measure items of

transactional leadership (management by exception- passive, and management by exception – active, contingent reward) and one subscale is used to measure items of Laissez-Faire (passive/avoidant leadership). Each subscale of leadership styles has four items, and every item measures one of the three leadership styles on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all) to (4 = frequently, if not always).

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) to measure teachers' level of work engagement. It includes 17 items extensively used in various countries and professions, including nursing. The questionnaire is rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The UWES consists of three subscales: vigor (six items), dedication (five items), and absorption (six items) (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The total scale ranges from 0 to 102, with higher scores indicating a more remarkable teacher's level of work engagement. Each work engagement subscale was averaged to get the total engagement score. The overall level of job satisfaction might range from very low to very high. A score of less than 1.93 indicates low work engagement. Scores ranging from 1.94 to 3.06 indicate low work engagement. Average work engagement is indicated by scores ranging from 3.07 to 4.66. High work engagement is indicated by scores ranging from 4.67 to 5.53. Work engagement is robust when the score is more than 5.54. (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The participants in this study had an average degree of work engagement, with a score of 4.08.

3.5. Psychometric proprieties of the instruments

The researchers from the study confirmed that the reliability of the questionnaires is excellent based on the Cronbach alpha analysis of MLQ 5X short form, which was 0.89 (Bass & Avolio, 2004), and UWES was 0.90 (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The current study's Cronbach alpha for the MLQ-5X short form and UWE were 0.94 and 0.93, respectively. This indicated that the questionnaires of the current were trustworthy.

This questionnaire was validated using content validity methods by a panel of five experts in the administration specialties field from the supporting University. The index of content validity in the current study was 0.92.

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher adopted a systematic approach to understand employees' perceptions of leadership styles and work engagement levels in Ramallah schools. The researcher contacted each school's manager, communicating the study's objectives and confirming the school's interest in participation. To facilitate data collection, online questionnaires were crafted using Google Forms. The role of distributing these questionnaires to teachers rested with the respective school managers, who employed the official email addresses of teachers for this purpose. Invitations to engage in the questionnaire exercise were emailed to all teachers at each school. Over six weeks, the online questionnaires remained accessible for responses. To sustain participation and engagement, reminders were dispatched by the school managers after the second and fourth weeks, urging teachers to contribute if they hadn't already. Following the initial invitation, the questionnaires were concluded after six weeks. Each email invitation included a Universal Resource Link (URL) leading to the questionnaires. This communication comprised an attached consent form and an informative letter to the teachers. Within the consent form, teachers were given the option to indicate their agreement and consent. By selecting the "I agree and do consent" option, teachers signified their willingness to participate. Teachers who agreed were granted access to the

questionnaires by clicking on the provided URL. It was estimated that completing the questionnaires would require approximately 15-20 minutes of their time.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the Windows Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), specifically the SPSS® -PC version 28. In all instances of statistical analysis, the predetermined significance level was set at ≤ 0.05 . Descriptive statistics were computed to provide insights into the factors derived from the MLQ 5X short form, which were measured in this study to identify school manager leadership styles as perceived by teachers. This computation also extended to assessing the levels of work engagement among teachers.

A Pearson-Product-Moment correlation analysis was then employed to investigate the relationship between variables. This analytical approach aimed to investigate the links between the independent variable, encompassing school manager leadership styles, and the dependent variable, which involved the work engagement levels exhibited among teachers. Through this analysis, the study aimed to uncover potential correlations and patterns within the data, thereby illuminating the dynamic interplay between leadership styles and work engagement levels in the context of Ramallah schools.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

This study has received official ethical approvals overseeing the participating schools. Necessary permissions were obtained to use the study tools. Teachers were assured that questionnaire completion would not affect their job status. They received an invitation and consent form emphasizing voluntary participation, privacy, and withdrawal options. After gathering and coding the data, it was securely stored on a password-protected computer. Teachers' questionnaire responses were collected through a dedicated link in an email, ensuring privacy. This approach maintained confidentiality and privacy for participating teachers.

4. Results

4.1. Sociodemographic Information

The survey was administered to 383 teachers in Ramallah's private schools, with all 383 participants providing complete responses, resulting in a 100% response rate. As depicted in Table 1, nearly half of the teachers (49.6%) fell within the age range of 20 to 29 years. Most (94.5%) of teachers in private schools were female, and a significant portion (58%) were married. Around two-thirds (69.5%) of teachers held a bachelor's degree. Regarding work experience, 41.5% reported over six years in their current role, while 19.6% had three to six years of experience.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Teachers (n= 383)

Variable	N	%
Age		
≥20-29	190	49.6
> 29-39	153	39.9
> 39 -49	28	7.3
> 49	12	3.1

Gender		
Male	21	5.5
Female	362	94.5
Marital status		
Married	222	58.0
Un-married	161	42.1
Education		
Diploma	108	28.2
Bachelor's degree	266	69.5
Master's degree	9	2.3
Experience		
≥1-3 years	149	38.9
> 3-6 years	75	19.6
> 6 and above	159	41.5

4.2. Leadership Styles

Teachers' perceptions of their school managers' leadership styles indicated a pronounced presence of transformative and transactional approaches, as evidenced by the scale means and standard deviations. Table 2 visually represents the MLQ leadership style factors alongside their respective mean (SD) scores. Specifically, the transformational leadership style factor of Idealized Influence (Behaviors) stood out with the highest mean ($2.46 \pm .96$) on a scale ranging from 0 to 4. In contrast, the passive avoidant leadership style garnered the lowest mean (1.49 ± 1.49).

Table 2. MLQ Leadership Factors Descriptive Statistics (n=383)

Leadership Styles	Mean	±SD
Transformational	2.34	±.94
Idealized Influence (Attributes)	2.38	±1.02
Idealized Influence (Behaviors)	2.46	±.96
Inspirational Motivation	2.42	±1.07
Intellectual Stimulation	2.26	±1.00
Individual Consideration	2.16	±1.04
Transactional	2.03	±.68
Contingent Reward	2.27	±1.00
Management by Exception (Active)	2.23	±.88
Management by Exception (Passive)	1.58	±.90
Laissez-Faire (passive avoidant)	1.49	±.99
Total Leadership Style Score	1.95	±.63

4.3. Teachers Work Engagement

Table 3 displays the classification of the 383 teachers based on their weighted mean for the Work Engagement Scale (WES) domains. The vigor score indicated the lowest proportion of teachers at 12.53%, with 34.20% falling within the average level and 13.57% achieving a very high level. Regarding dedication, the highest percentage of teachers, 36.81%, were categorized under a very high level. Conversely, the smallest portion of teachers, 4.43%, fell within a very low level, while an average level encompassed 30.02% of teachers.

Regarding absorption, the majority of teachers, 34.98%, fell within the average level. The distribution was further characterized by 4.43% at the lowest and 25.59% at the highest levels. The p-value of 0.000 (<0.01) reflects high significance. In summary, teachers' overall work engagement levels were predominantly distributed across the average level, encompassing 99.21% of teachers, with an additional 75.97% reaching a very high level.

Table 3. Levels of Teachers' Work Engagement

WES	Very low (%)	Low (%)	Average (%)	High (%)	Very high (%)	Total (%)
Weighted mean for WES domains	vigor (≤ 2.17); dedication (≤ 1.60); absorption (≤ 1.60); total score 1.93	Vigor (2.18-3.20); dedication (1.61-3.0); absorption (1.61-2.75); total score (1.94-3.06).	Vigor (3.21-4.80); dedication (3.01-4.90); absorption (2.76-4.40); total score (3.07-4.66).	Vigor (4.81-5.60); dedication (4.91-5.79); absorption (4.41-5.35); total score (4.67-5.53).	Vigor (≥ 5.61); dedication (≥ 5.80); absorption (≥ 5.36); total score (5.54).	
Vigor (VI)	48 (12.53%)	63 (16.44%)	131 (34.20%)	89 (23.23%)	52 (13.57%)	383 (100.00%)
Dedication (DE)	17 (4.43%)	28 (7.31%)	115 (30.02%)	82 (21.40%)	141 (36.81%)	383 (100.00%)
Absorption (AB)	17 (4.43%)	38 (9.92%)	134 (34.98%)	96 (25.06%)	98 (25.59%)	383 (100.00%)
Total	82 (21.40%)	129 (33.68%)	380 (99.21%)	267 (69.71%)	291 (75.97%)	1149 (100.00%)
Chi-Square = 82.149, degrees of freedom = 8, Level of significance = 5% and P-Value = 0.000 (Highly significant (<0.01))						

4.4. Leadership Styles and Work Engagement Levels

As shown in Table 4, the teacher work engagement subscales significantly correlated with the transformational leadership style factors. Specifically, each facet of transformational leadership (idealized influence behavior and attributes, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation) had a strong positive relationship with teacher work engagement (all $p < .001$).

CR	<i>r</i>	.775	1							
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000							
MBEA	<i>r</i>	.817	.548*	1						
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000						
MBEP	<i>r</i>	.610	.112*	.268*	1					
	<i>P</i>	.000	.028	.000	.000					
LF	<i>r</i>	.299	-.097	.130*	.662*	1				
	<i>P</i>	.000	.057	.011	.000	.000				
UWES	<i>r</i>	.546	.630*	.422*	.125*	-.023	1			
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	.014	.649	.000			
VI	<i>r</i>	.517	.610*	.387*	.117*	-.015	.945*	1		
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	.022	.773	.000	.000		
DE	<i>r</i>	.476	.583*	.383*	.058	-.080	.911*	.790*	1	
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	.259	.119	.000	.000	.000	
AB	<i>r</i>	.531	.574*	.412*	.165*	.018	.946*	.845*	.794*	1
	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	.001	.724	.000	.000	.000	.000

Transactional: TA, Contingent Reward: CR, Management by Exception (Active): MBEA, Management by Exception (Passive): MBEP. **Laissez-faire:** LF. **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale:** UWES, Vigor: VI, Dedication: DE, Absorption: AB

*Highly significant ($p < 0.001$) level (2-tailed), ** significant ($p < 0.05$) level (2-tailed); *r*: person correlation; (strength of association: weak positive 0.1 to 0.29 & Weak negative - 0.1 to - 0.29; medium positive 0.3 to 0.49 and medium negative -0.3 to -0.49; strong positive 0.5 to 1 and strong negative - 0.5 to -1).

Table 5. Association between Transactional Style and Work Engagement Levels (n= 383). A

5. Discussion

The study's findings highlighted the highest mean score for the transformational leadership style. In contrast, the lowest mean was attributed to the laissez-faire leadership style, as perceived by school teachers. These results are consistent with previous research outcomes and support existing studies. Notably, Baptiste (2019); Kareem et al. (2023); Mansor et al. (2021) all emphasized the positive correlation between transformational leadership and school teachers' work engagement. This alignment could be attributed to the supportive and collaborative behaviors inherently associated with transformational leadership styles, which could account for the positive relationship with teacher work engagement (O'Donovan et al., 2021). Such behaviors encompass role modeling, clear vision communication, modernization, creativity, and the cultivation of autonomy (Alkadash et al., 2020).

The study unveiled a robust positive correlation between features of the transactional leadership style and the variables under investigation. This alignment resonates with earlier research, which underscored how the incentives offered by transactional leaders can effectively motivate teachers (Eğriboyun, 2019; Jameel et al., 2021). Work engagement positively correlated with the transactional leadership style factors of contingent reward and management by exception (active). Notably, the management by exception (passive) aspect within the transactional leadership style also displayed a positive but weaker correlation with staff nursing work engagement. When school managers exhibit a passive transactional leadership style, the influence on job engagement remains limited. Passive managerial behaviors encompass traits such as deferring feedback and infrequent communication.

The study findings for passive avoidant leadership style in school managers revealed a negative but not statistically significant correlation with teacher work engagement. This is congruent with Ridwan et al. (2022) study findings, which revealed the detrimental impact of passive avoidant leaders, such as deferring decision-making and offering little to no feedback to employees.

The outcomes of this study underscore the vital importance of school managers engaging in effective communication with their teachers. It becomes evident that teacher engagement reaches higher levels when school managers consistently offer constructive feedback. Conversely, insufficient or ineffective communication and feedback from school managers correlate with diminished teacher engagement. Communication is at the core of the transformational leadership style, rendering it a potent tool for school managers to influence organizational performance through enhanced teacher work engagement. As a consequence, the transformational leadership style should be embraced as the cornerstone for upcoming leaders, as it empowers, ignites inspiration, and fosters motivation among employees, eventually culminating in heightened satisfaction and improved organizational performance (Jameel et al., 2021; Kareem et al., 2023; Ridwan et al., 2022)

6. Conclusion

The teachers' perceptions of school manager leadership styles revealed that transformational and transactional leadership styles garnered the highest mean scores. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership styles received the lowest mean score. Notably, significant positive correlations were observed between school managers' transformational and transactional leadership styles and the level of work engagement displayed by teachers. School managers who adopt transformational and transactional leadership styles to provide guidance and effective communication can positively influence teacher work engagement and job satisfaction and, subsequently, enhance student support and overall organizational outcomes. School

managers must embody transformational and transactional leadership behaviors to foster a conducive environment and cultivate collaborative relationships with teachers and teams that promote job engagement.

7. Limitations

The study presents certain limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, adopting a convenience sampling approach and relying on survey instruments introduces constraints to the generalizability of findings across the entire teacher population. The study evaluated teachers' viewpoints regarding school manager leadership style and teacher engagement. An inherent constraint within one-time surveys lies in the potential for participants to respond with bias or be influenced by their school manager's selective memory. Furthermore, this study was confined to a solitary data collection instance, potentially overlooking the potential fluctuations in engagement perceptions over time.

To fortify the robustness of future investigations, it is recommended that researchers embrace multiple settings encompassing diverse sample sizes to facilitate more extensive result generalization. Moreover, longitudinal and experimental inquiries should be undertaken to ascertain the directional course of causal relationships. A more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play can be achieved by delving into these avenues.

8. Implications for Education Practice

The study's outcomes hold immediate implications for advancing leadership within the education sector. It is imperative to direct efforts toward nurturing the leadership competencies of school managers, with a focal emphasis on cultivating transformational leadership and transactional management through active exception behaviors. Concurrently, efforts should mitigate passive avoidant behavior and passive management by exception.

The pivotal differentiators among these leadership styles lie in practices that foster support and elevate communication with school teachers. Effective communication encompasses both constructive and constructive feedback mechanisms. School managers should actively engage in comprehensive leadership development measures to fortify their leadership proficiencies, encompassing participation in leadership training programs, self-assessment, introspection, and coaching. These skill enhancements possess the potential to significantly bolster school outcomes, including amplified work performance, elevated job satisfaction, and heightened organizational commitment.

9. Competing interests

The author states that they do not have any conflicts of interest.

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