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Principals' Leadership Styles and Teacher Job Satisfaction in Secondary Schools: Identifying Patterns and Levels in Kombolcha City

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Research Article

Keywords: laissez-faire leadership, leadership styles, principal leadership, job satisfaction, transactional leadership, transformational leadership

Posted Date: September 11th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10927349/v1

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Additional Declarations: The authors declare no competing interests.

Abstract

This article aims to identify the leadership styles of principals in secondary school and to assess the levels of job satisfaction among teachers. Survey research design was employed and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was utilized to measure the leadership styles of principals and teachers, and 23 item Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale has been used to measure the teachers' job satisfaction. The results of descriptive statistic show that out of three leadership styles, the majority of principals showed the Laissez-faire leadership style and felt deficient in it, less involved in Transformational leadership style. In each style of leadership, teachers rated principals' behaviors significantly ($p < .01$) lower than principals' self-ratings. These results also indicate that teachers reported the greatest job satisfaction when the perceived level of laissez-faire behavior was the lowest of all the leadership styles. To some extent, teachers and dissatisfied with their jobs in spite of principals engaging in lasses-faire leadership style. These findings have implications for transformational school leadership training that is essential for the professional satisfaction and retention. Analysis of variance indicates that teachers grouped under transformational leadership reported significantly higher job satisfaction than those grouped under laissez-faire leadership, and satisfaction was highest on the dimensions of supervisor support and school culture but lowest on income adequacy and professional advancement. It is evident from the results that the most popular type of school leadership is the least efficient one and that the image principals have of themselves differs strikingly from that of their subordinates.

1. Introduction

The term teacher job satisfaction is very complex and includes such elements as job security, wages, work environment, workload, professional development possibilities and interpersonal relationships with colleagues, students and educational administrators (Ingersoll et al., 2021; Riggio, 2016). This phenomenon is not only important for teachers as individuals; moreover, teachers who are satisfied with their jobs are more committed, offer better quality teaching services, have lower rates of stress and absenteeism, and consequently, are better for the educational process and the school environment (ibid). Among the many determinants of teacher job satisfaction, principal's style of leadership is one of the most significant and changeable ones (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Ralebese et al., 2025).

The Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), developed by Bass (1985) and refined by Avolio and Bass (1994, 2004), and the specific method of transactional leadership rely on the conceptualization of a continuum of leadership behavior from the passive and largely ineffective to the actively engaging and effective. The poles of this continuum are defined by laissez-faire leadership and transformational leadership respectively. Transformational leadership, which are built around idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are proposed to increase teacher job satisfaction as they help to empower teachers, foster their personal development, and create a positive organizational climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactional leadership, particularly contingent reward and management by exception, can actually provide the much-needed predictability

about the rewards through a mechanism whereby the work environment is reduced to a simple scheme of extrinsic reward and punishment. None of the studies addressing laissez-faire leadership that we know of find evidence of engagement, but rather consistently find that laissez-faire leaders are associated with isolation, uncertainty, resistance, and dissatisfaction among teachers (Ralebese et al., 2025; Yukl, 2010).

There is, however, quite a lot of literature on leadership satisfaction coming from studies conducted in the field of banking, healthcare, and education (Hui et al., 2021; ALrousan & ALrousan, 2014). Nevertheless, even though there is new literature on the subject from Ethiopia where it is found that laissez-faire leadership style is common in some areas, the studies conducted have used small sample size (Yohannes & Wasonga, 2023). This article draws on a census-sampled study of secondary schools in Kombolcha City Administration to address two of that broader study's four specific objectives: first, to identify the leadership styles principals in the study area actually exhibit, as reported both by principals themselves and by their teachers; and second, to examine the level of job satisfaction secondary school teachers in the study area report, and how that level varies with the leadership style under which they work.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Job Satisfaction: Concept and Relevance to Teaching

Defining job satisfaction involves the general agreement that it is essentially a subjective and affective evaluation of one's job and the experience thereof rather than a pure state of affairs. George (2025) states that job satisfaction is the combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental factors which would help satisfy a person about his/her job. Judge et al. (2017) also states that it ss the affective attitude of employee towards their jobs. Job satisfaction is usually seen to include three parts, namely, cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Judge et al., 2017), as well as the extent of congruence between what employees expect from their jobs and what they get from them (Wright & Kim, 2004). With teachers, job satisfaction is associated with retention, commitment, and instructional effectiveness (Toropova et al., 2020).

2.2 Leadership and the Full Range Leadership Model

Northouse (2013) describes leadership as a process through which one person influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. Educational leadership, however, entails bringing together the effort of teachers, students, and parents to work toward common educational objectives and to create a positive school climate (Ralebese et al., 2025). The Full Range Leadership Model (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994, 2004) narrows down this construct into three distinct styles of leadership that can be distinguished by empirical evidence. Transformational leadership consists of idealized influence (charisma and role-modeling that earns followers’ respect and admiration), inspirational motivation (vision that inspires and motivates), intellectual stimulation (promotion of creative problem-solving without publicly berating those who make mistakes), and individualized consideration (attentiveness to

the development needs of the followers) (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007). The transactional leadership style is based on contingent reward and management by exception wherein the leader is supposed to set clear goals for each worker and reward good performance while correcting poor performance (Dzakpasu et al., 2022). Laissez-faire leadership is basically lack of leadership where there is no action when required (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

2.3 Empirical Evidence Linking Leadership Style to Teacher Job Satisfaction

A substantial body of empirical work finds transformational leadership positively associated with employee and teacher job satisfaction across sectors and countries: bank employees in Lahore (ALrousan & ALrousan, 2024), public-sector executives in Pakistan (Zafar, 2023), and private-school teachers in the UAE, where inspirational motivation and individualized consideration in particular predicted satisfaction (Al-Attar, 2023). Results in relation to transactional leadership are somewhat inconsistent as while Lumbantoruan et al. (2020) found that there exists a positive relationship between transactional leadership and the job satisfaction of workers in the banks of Pakistan, but other researchers have found that transactional leadership's effects on worker satisfaction may be minimal or conditional on transactional leadership against transformational leadership (Dzakpasu et al., 2022). Ralebese et al. (2025) and Yukl (2010) also state that laissez-faire leadership is moderately related to dissatisfaction, isolation and high turnover intention.

Such a gap is more prominent in Ethiopia. Yohannes and Wasonga (2023) have established that the leadership style characterized by the lack of any interference with subordinates is popular among some Ethiopian school principals and negatively affects teacher satisfaction; however, this study was conducted on a small sample; the same was reported by Metaferia et al. (2023), who found that transformational leadership was associated with teacher satisfaction more often than transactional leadership. In this study, census sampling of 293 teachers from three schools is supposed to fill this gap in the case of Kombolcha.

3. Methodology

The positivist research philosophy together with a quantitative non-experimental correlational research design was used to investigate an already developed leadership theory and to measure association between naturally occurring variables that cannot be manipulated for ethical and practical reasons (Bryman, 2016). The study population comprised all teaching and school-leadership staff in three secondary schools in Kombolcha City Administration (N = 299): 293 teachers, 3 principals, and 3 vice principals. Considering the fact that general description was the aim of the study, the whole population of teachers was sampled using census technique while convenience sampling was done for principals and vice principals due to their small numbers.

The leadership style of the principals was assessed by means Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Avolio & Bass, 2004), consisting of 24 questions, which were distributed into three subscales of

the Full Range Leadership Model: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, and were provided to both the teachers (as evaluation of their principal) and the principals and vice principals (as self-rating). Previous studies have shown high internal consistency reliability of the MLQ measure (overall α = 0.834; subscale αs of 0.934, 0.841, and 0.719 for transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire respectively; Popli & Rizvi, 2015). This trend was seen in the reliability test conducted in this current study (MLQ overall α = 0.834). Teacher job satisfaction was measured through a questionnaire comprising of 23 items which was formulated following the questionnaires prepared by Weiss et al. (1967) and Toropova et al. (2021), which included such aspects as autonomy, professional development, remuneration, job security, recognition, administration policies, supervision support, organization culture, and working conditions; reliability α = 0.795 in the current sample. Content validity was confirmed by means of and supervisor review, while construct validity of the MLQ-based scales – by confirmatory factor analysis, with all standardized factor loadings statistically significant (λ = 0.58–0.82 for leadership items; λ = 0.53–0.79 for satisfaction items) and acceptable model fit (CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05).

Collection of the data was done through self-administration of questionnaire during school hours after explaining the objectives of the study, participants' rights and the importance of confidentiality. Identification numbers were used instead of names of the participants. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were used to address the first two objectives reported in this article — describing the status of principals' leadership styles and the level of teacher job satisfaction — while one-way ANOVA and Tukey HSD post hoc tests were used to compare mean satisfaction scores across teachers grouped by their dominant perceived leadership style.

4. Results

4.1 Leadership Styles Exhibited by Principals

4.1.1 Overall Frequency of Each Style

With regard to the entire sample of teachers (N = 293), the leadership style most often displayed is laissez-faire (M = 3.06, SD = 1.21) followed by transactional leadership style (M = 2.57, SD = 0.89) and then transformational leadership style (M = 2.50, SD = 1.17) (Table 1).

Table 1
Overall frequency of leadership styles as reported by teachers (N = 293)

Leadership style	N	Mean	SD
Transformational	293	2.50	1.17
Transactional	293	2.57	0.89
Laissez-faire	293	3.05	1.20

The relatively low standard deviation of transactional leadership (0.89) suggests a high level of agreement between teachers on its moderate presence, whereas the relatively high standard deviations of transformational (1.17) and laissez-faire (1.20) leadership point to greater variety of teachers' experience of these styles, which could very well be a true reflection of differing leadership climates at the three schools and departments in them.

4.1.2 Behavioral Profile of Each Style

The analysis at the item level identifies the specific behavior that is mostly associated with the principal and that which the least associated among teachers. With respect to the transformational style of leadership, the score attained is high since the leaders try to transcend themselves in order to help all the group members (M = 4.33, SD = 0.52), his self-confidence (M = 4.33, SD = 0.82), as well as guidance on how to undertake the activities (M = 4.33, SD = 0.82). The lowest rating on the other hand was for the individualized behaviors, specifically treating the staff as an individual (M = 3.67, SD = 1.37) and developing staff potential (M = 3.67, SD = 1.37), which happened to be the two items having the highest standard deviations in the transformational subscale; therefore, personal attention appears to be the least consistently provided transformational behavior. In the case of the transactional leadership, the principals had high ratings for the clear communication about the performance-reward expectations (M = 4.33, SD = 0.52) but lowest on allowing problems to become chronic before intervening (M = 2.67, SD = 1.63), which suggests that principals are reactive, a focus on exceptions rather than a proactive stance. On laissez-faire leadership, principals were higher on the free delegation of responsibility (M = 4.33, SD = 0.52) and leaving teachers alone (M = 4.33, SD = 1.21), and lower, nevertheless fairly high, on requiring staying out of teachers' way (M = 3.50, SD = 1.22).

4.1.3 Principal Self-Report versus Teacher Perception

One common and consistent finding across the three styles of leadership is that the ratings that principals gave about their practice of each style were much higher than those that teachers gave regarding the same, the correlations between the two measures being either negative or very weak and non-significant (Table 2).

Table 2
Principal self-report versus teacher perception, by leadership style

Leadership style	Teacher-perceived M (SD)	Principal self-report M (SD)	Correlation (r)	p
Transformational	3.11 (0.62)	4.06 (0.28)	− .791	.019
Transactional	2.91 (0.31)	3.69 (0.52)	− .564	.146
Laissez-faire	2.74 (0.29)	4.02 (0.27)	− .032	.940

The difference between the ratings made by the principals about themselves and by teachers was the greatest in laissez-faire leadership (mean difference = 1.28) and the smallest but still large in transactional leadership (mean difference = 0.78). the results of one-sample t-tests showed that the

ratings of both teachers and principals for all three styles were significantly different from zero ($p < .001$), implying that teachers did not give low ratings to their principals as a whole; hence, there was a difference in self-perception of practicing a style of leadership on the part of principals compared to how that style is experienced by teachers, and the difference was greater in the case of laissez-faire leadership.

4.2 Level of Teacher Job Satisfaction

4.2.1 Job Satisfaction by Leadership Style Group

After classification of the teachers according to the kind of leadership style that they have, variance analysis was performed and revealed a statistical mean difference in the degree of job satisfaction between the groups, $F(2, 18) = 4.39$, $p < .028$, $\eta^2 = .32$, which suggests that approximately 32% of the variance is attributable to the leader (Table 3).

Table 3
Teacher job satisfaction by dominant perceived leadership style

Leadership style group	Mean satisfaction	SD
Transformational	3.15	0.35
Transactional	2.92	0.25
Laissez-faire	2.56–2.85*	0.28–0.31*

**Two overlapping analyses of the laissez-faire group appear in the underlying data (M = 2.85, SD = 0.31 in one comparison and M = 2.56, SD = 0.28 in a related post hoc comparison); both place laissez-faire consistently at the bottom of the three groups.*

Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed that teachers reporting transformational leadership behavior had significantly higher mean satisfaction score that those reporting laissez-faire leadership (marginal mean difference, 0.59; 95% confidence interval [0.04, 1.15], $p = .037$), although the difference between transformational leadership and transactional leadership and between transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership did not prove statistically significant ($p = .109$ and $p = .493$, respectively, in one analysis; $p = .226$ and $p = .493$ in another closely related one). The above finding has been captured in the cross tabulation between leadership style and satisfaction level where 43.8% of the teachers working under transformational style had medium and high levels of satisfaction while the same was 31.3% and 6.3% for transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership. It also reveals that the teachers working under laissez-faire had the highest percentage in low levels of satisfaction (25.0%).

From all the above-mentioned findings – ANOVA, Tukey's post hoc test and crosstabulation it may be said that the highest levels of satisfaction are recorded for transformational leadership followed by

transactional leadership while the lowest level of satisfaction is observed with regard to laissez-faire leadership.

4.2.2 Satisfaction by Dimension

Besides the comparison of the leadership styles, the 23-question satisfaction survey is useful in pinpointing which particular aspects of their work teachers are satisfied with and which they are not irrespective of their leadership style. The highest satisfaction was obtained in terms of the relational and cultural aspects, namely supervision and school culture, and the lowest in the structural and material aspects, such as income adequacy and career advancement. In other words, the fact that positive experiences of leadership behavior are observed does not mean that it replaces the system of working conditions.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this case, the obtained outcomes give the necessary data on the relationship between school leaders' behavior and the teachers' job satisfaction in the context of secondary school education in Kombolcha. There are three important findings that should be mentioned about this study. Each of then supports or refutes the recent educational leadership literature.

To start with, one will be able to notice that the most prevalent type of leadership in the field under investigation, which is laissez-faire leadership, turns out to be the one that is least associated with teachers' satisfaction, and vice versa. It is one of the key findings which demonstrates that there is an inverse connection between the frequency of use and efficiency of this leadership style when it comes to job satisfaction. Thus, the least prevalent leadership approach is the most correlated with job satisfaction. The discrepancy between the frequency of use and effectiveness of leadership approaches is very similar to that pointed out by Yohannes and Wasonga (2023) in their study carried out in Ethiopian settings about the frequency of laissez-faire leadership among Ethiopian principles. This is supplemented here by the census-level evidence from a specific Ethiopian secondary school context. This means that whatever the determinants that affect the behavior of the principals in those schools could be – whether it is overload, training inadequacy, lack of sufficient resources, or accountability system – they are certainly not in line with what suits teachers best.

Transformational leadership seems to have been mentioned least of all in relation to other leadership styles despite having the highest rates of job satisfaction. This finding, however, is in agreement with Kidane and Botoro's (2025) findings in the case of secondary education in Ethiopia. Transformational leadership has been found by yet another study to be a predictor of teachers' satisfaction, while laissez-faire causes dissatisfaction. The same tendencies described by Dzakpasu (2023) in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa also proved that the absence of direct intervention of a principal leads to role ambiguity and dissatisfaction among teachers. Nonetheless the high frequency of laissez-faire leadership found in Kombolcha contradicts the findings of Metaferia et al. (2023) in the context of Addis Ababa government secondary schools, where transformational leadership appeared to be more evident.

Another important finding is that there is a clear difference in the behavior, irrespective of the style of leadership, especially in the case of laissez-faire leadership style. This clearly indicates that there is some kind of misperception and miscommunication between the administrators and the teachers that may further exaggerate any direct effect of the leadership style on their job satisfaction. There seems little hope that a principal who sees himself as practicing supportive delegation but is perceived by teachers as being non-supportive can ever bridge the gap unless something is done to bring about the realization of this discrepancy. The study also showed a large perceptual discrepancy between self-ratings and teacher ratings for all three leadership styles. The greatest discrepancy is seen in the case of laissez-faire leadership. This affirms a recent study conducted by Ralebese (2025) who found that there are systematic perception discrepancies in the cases of leaders where principals always tend to overrate themselves in terms of supportive and instructional leadership as compared to the ratings of their subordinates.

Thirdly, the fact that the level of satisfaction is quite high in relation to the relational dimensions (supervisor support, school environment) and quite low concerning the structural dimensions (sufficient income, career progression) becomes an appropriate indicator. In this manner, irrespective of the importance of the leadership style itself, there are certain constraints imposed upon it owing to resourcing considerations and career structure issues which are outside of the control of any particular principal. This implies that teachers perceived satisfaction more in relational dimensions and in climate dimensions, but not in structural and economic dimensions. This finding is consistent with the recent studies done by Toropova et al. (2020) and George (2025), where it is obvious that although supportive leadership and organizational culture promote relational well-being, there are defined boundaries up to which such support can be provided. It is clear that leadership training could well increase teacher satisfaction, in line with the findings of this study, but would not solve issues of income and career progression on its own. On the basis of these findings, secondary school administrations and regional education authorities in Kombolcha, and plausibly in comparable Ethiopian settings, have a clear and specific target for professional development: closing the gap between principals' self-perception and teachers' lived experience of leadership, and shifting principal practice away from the currently dominant laissez-faire pattern toward the transformational behaviors – individualized consideration and inspirational motivation chief among them – that this study's own teachers rate as least consistently delivered even by principals who otherwise score well on transformational leadership.

To sum up, it has been proven that school leadership in Kombolcha at the moment is based on the least efficient style of leadership known as laissez-faire and is distinguished by significant self-other perception gap between principals and teachers. In order to increase teacher satisfaction and retain more of them in schools, it is crucial to organize training programs for principals. Such programs should be aimed at changing their behavioral model from non-interventive to transformational (especially concerning individualized consideration and inspirational motivation) and creation of feedback mechanism that would ensure coincidence of self-perception and perception by teachers.

Declarations

Research ethics and participant well-being were strictly prioritized throughout the design and execution of this study. Formal institutional review board approval was not required under the institutional policy of Kalu District for non-invasive observational and interview data in the academic setting. In addition, our institution, Wollo University, is yet to approve Senate Legislation which insights that “A college/Institution/solo schools may have” Institutional Ethical Review Board (Senate Legislation Article 46.3.4). However, the study adhered to national and international research ethics guidelines for humanities and social sciences. Informal verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to audio recording and interviews. All data were anonymized, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

FUNDING

The authors declare that this study received no specific financial support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who contributed ideas in this article, particularly the research participants.

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