



Leadership Styles as Drivers of Teacher Performance and Job Satisfaction: Evidence from K–12 Public Schools in China

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the relationships among leadership style, teacher performance, and job satisfaction in K–12 education, with teacher performance operationalized in terms of instructional quality, classroom management, and engagement in professional development. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed with 150 teachers from public primary and secondary schools in Shanxi Province, China, selected through stratified random sampling based on school level and school location. Data were collected using validated five-point Likert-scale questionnaires measuring leadership style, instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and teacher job satisfaction. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between leadership style and instructional quality ($r = .150$, $p < .001$), classroom management ($r = .089$, $p < .001$), professional development engagement ($r = .097$, $p < .001$), and teacher job satisfaction ($r = .113$, $p = .036$), indicating that leadership style was positively associated with teacher performance and job satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis further indicated that leadership style was a significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction ($\beta = .131$, $p = .001$), while professional development engagement also made a significant positive contribution ($\beta = .080$, $p = .002$). The regression model explained 51.9% of the variance in teacher job satisfaction ($R^2 = .519$, $p < .001$). Overall, the findings demonstrate significant associations among leadership practices, teachers' professional performance, and job satisfaction. The findings underscore the importance of supportive and participatory school leadership and continuous professional development in strengthening teachers' instructional practices, professional engagement, and workplace satisfaction and in supporting sustainable improvement across K–12 educational settings.

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Introduction

Leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping the quality and effectiveness of educational organizations, making leadership style one of the most influential factors affecting teachers' professional practices and workplace experiences in K–12 education. As educational systems continue to face increasing demands for instructional innovation, accountability, teacher professionalism, and organizational improvement, school leaders are expected to create supportive environments that foster high-quality teaching and sustainable professional growth. Different leadership styles influence how teachers perceive organizational support, participate in decision making, engage in professional development, manage classroom instruction, and maintain commitment to their profession. Effective leadership can strengthen teachers' instructional performance, motivation, and job



satisfaction by promoting collaboration, trust, recognition, and continuous improvement, whereas ineffective leadership may contribute to occupational stress, reduced morale, and declining instructional quality (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Metaferia et al., 2023; Wiens & Pan, 2025). Consequently, understanding the influence of leadership styles on teachers' performance and job satisfaction has become increasingly important for improving school effectiveness, enhancing educational quality, and supporting sustainable development in K–12 education (Zhang & Huang, 2022).

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated that leadership style is a significant determinant of teachers' professional performance and job satisfaction across diverse educational contexts. School leaders who adopt transformational and democratic leadership approaches are more likely to foster collaborative school cultures, strengthen teachers' professional commitment, and encourage continuous instructional improvement through shared vision, supportive supervision, and participative decision making. These leadership practices enhance teachers' instructional quality, classroom management, and engagement in professional development while simultaneously improving psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and overall job satisfaction (Abid et al., 2025; Ortiz & Jesus, 2024). Conversely, authoritarian, transactional, or laissez faire leadership approaches may reduce teachers' motivation, professional autonomy, and sense of organizational support, leading to lower instructional effectiveness, increased occupational stress, and diminished workplace satisfaction. Contemporary educational leadership research further indicates that effective leadership contributes to creating positive organizational climates characterized by trust, open communication, professional collaboration, and continuous feedback, all of which are essential for sustaining teacher effectiveness and improving school performance. Moreover, supportive leadership enables school administrators to facilitate educational innovation, manage organizational change, allocate instructional resources effectively, and strengthen teachers' readiness to respond to emerging educational challenges (Afifah Nur Fadhilah, 2022; Agustin et al., 2022). These leadership functions have become increasingly important as schools navigate curriculum reforms, technological integration, and growing expectations for educational quality and accountability. Consequently, educational policymakers, school administrators, and leadership development programs have increasingly emphasized strengthening leadership competencies as a strategic priority for enhancing teacher performance, improving job satisfaction, supporting teacher retention, and ultimately promoting sustainable school improvement and high-quality K–12 education (Berhanu, 2025; Cahyani & Sary, 2025; Lopez et al., 2025).

Despite the growing recognition of leadership as a critical determinant of school effectiveness, empirical evidence regarding the influence of different leadership styles on teachers' performance and job satisfaction remains inconsistent across educational contexts. Previous studies have frequently examined teacher performance and job satisfaction as separate constructs or focused on a single leadership approach, such as transformational or transactional leadership, without comprehensively comparing multiple leadership styles within a unified analytical framework. Moreover, many investigations have emphasized direct relationships while providing limited attention to the contextual and demographic factors that may shape teachers' responses to leadership practices. Differences in school level, school location, organizational culture, teaching experience, and institutional resources may substantially influence how leadership behaviors are perceived and how they affect teachers' instructional practices, professional engagement, and workplace satisfaction (Fan, 2025; Ortan et al., 2021; Shqipe Haxhihyseni, Jonida Tirana, 2023). These contextual



variations make it difficult to generalize previous findings and limit a comprehensive understanding of leadership effectiveness across diverse K–12 educational settings. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of contemporary education, characterized by curriculum reform, technological integration, accountability demands, and continuous professional learning, requires leadership approaches that simultaneously support instructional excellence and teachers' psychological well-being. Although existing research has acknowledged the importance of leadership for educational improvement, limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining the relationships between multiple leadership styles, teacher performance, and job satisfaction while considering the moderating roles of demographic and contextual variables within a single conceptual model (Panagopoulos et al., 2024; States, 2024). Therefore, a comprehensive investigation is necessary to generate robust empirical evidence regarding how leadership styles are associated with teachers' professional outcomes and to provide practical recommendations for strengthening school leadership, improving teacher effectiveness, enhancing job satisfaction, and supporting sustainable educational development in K–12 education (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021; Parveen et al., 2022; Sarwar et al., 2020).

The geographical context of this study is Shanxi Province, China, where the participating teachers were drawn from public primary and secondary schools across different school levels and locations. Shanxi provides a relevant setting for examining school leadership because its K–12 educational institutions encompass diverse organizational and contextual environments, including primary, middle, and high schools situated in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Such contextual variation provides an important basis for investigating whether teachers' perceptions of leadership practices are associated with differences in instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and job satisfaction. Examining these relationships within a specific provincial context is also important because leadership practices operate within institutional and local conditions that may shape teachers' professional experiences and responses to school management. Therefore, focusing on Shanxi Province enables this study to generate context-sensitive empirical evidence on the relationships between school leadership, teacher performance, and job satisfaction while accounting for variations in school level and location.

Addressing these research gaps, the present study examines the relationships among leadership style, teacher performance, and teacher job satisfaction within the context of K–12 education. Leadership style is treated as a composite variable representing teachers' overall perceptions of leadership practices, while teacher performance is reflected through instructional quality, classroom management, and professional development engagement. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which leadership style is associated with these dimensions of teacher performance and with teacher job satisfaction. By examining these variables within a unified analytical framework, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how school leadership relates to teachers' professional practices and workplace experiences. The study contributes to the educational leadership literature by providing empirical evidence from K–12 schools in Shanxi Province, China, regarding the relationships between leadership practices and teachers' professional outcomes. The findings are expected to inform school leadership development, professional support for teachers, and school management practices. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between leadership style, teacher performance, and teacher job satisfaction to provide evidence that can support teacher professionalism, workplace well-being, and sustainable improvement in K–12 education.



Research Method

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the influence of leadership styles on teachers' performance and job satisfaction within K–12 education. The research was guided by an integrated conceptual framework encompassing four leadership styles transformational, transactional, democratic, and laissez-faire and their relationships with teacher performance, represented by instructional quality, classroom management, and professional development engagement, as well as teacher job satisfaction. In addition, the study incorporated demographic variables, including gender and years of teaching experience, together with contextual variables, such as school level and school location, to investigate their moderating roles in these relationships. The cross-sectional design enabled the collection of empirical data from teachers at a single point in time, providing a comprehensive representation of leadership perceptions and professional outcomes across diverse K–12 educational settings without manipulating the school environment (Ahmed, 2024; Anshori et al., 2023). Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires containing validated five-point Likert-scale items adapted from established leadership, teacher performance, and job satisfaction instruments. The correlational approach allowed the study to examine the strength and direction of the relationships among the research variables while avoiding causal interpretations. Consequently, this methodological design provides robust empirical evidence regarding how different leadership styles are associated with teachers' professional effectiveness and workplace well-being, thereby offering an evidence-based foundation for educational leadership development, school management improvement, and policy formulation in K–12 education (Ahmad, 2025; Yuni Lutfiah, Arjulayana, Imtihan Hanim, 2025).

The participants in this study consisted of teachers working in public primary and secondary schools in Shanxi Province, China, who had been employed at their respective schools for at least one academic semester to ensure sufficient experience with school leadership practices. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with targeted strata based on school level (primary, middle, and high school) and school location (urban, suburban, and rural areas) to ensure representation across different educational contexts. Following approval from the participating school districts and school principals, questionnaires were distributed during regular faculty meetings, and participation was voluntary. A total of 150 valid teacher responses were included in the final analysis, providing an adequate sample for the statistical analyses employed in the study. The study examined three principal constructs: leadership style, teacher performance, and teacher job satisfaction. Leadership style was treated as a composite variable representing teachers' overall perceptions of school leadership practices, while teacher performance was operationalized through instructional quality, classroom management, and professional development engagement. Quantitative data were collected using validated five-point Likert-scale questionnaires adapted from established measures of leadership, teacher performance, and job satisfaction. Prior to data collection, the measurement instruments were assessed for content validity, construct validity, and reliability to ensure measurement accuracy and internal consistency. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression to examine the relationships among leadership style, teacher performance dimensions, and teacher job satisfaction.

Data were analyzed using a series of quantitative statistical procedures to examine the relationships among leadership style, teacher performance, and teacher job satisfaction within



K–12 education. Prior to statistical analysis, the collected data were screened for incomplete responses, coding errors, missing values, and potential outliers to ensure data quality and analytical accuracy. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participants' characteristics and describe the distributions of leadership style, teacher performance dimensions, and teacher job satisfaction. Prior to regression analysis, relevant statistical assumptions, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity, were assessed. Pearson correlation analysis was subsequently employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between leadership style and instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and teacher job satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted to examine the predictive relationships between the study variables, particularly the contribution of leadership style and teacher performance dimensions to teacher job satisfaction. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$, and all analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28.0. Together, the descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses provided empirical evidence regarding the relationships among leadership practices, teachers' professional performance, and job satisfaction within the K–12 educational context.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate significant relationships among leadership style, teacher performance dimensions, and teacher job satisfaction in K–12 education. Descriptive analysis showed that perceived leadership style had a mean score of 1.98 (SD = 0.769), while instructional quality ($M = 67.72$, $SD = 13.711$), classroom management ($M = 64.50$, $SD = 14.131$), and professional development engagement ($M = 67.32$, $SD = 12.084$) represented the measured dimensions of teacher performance. Teacher job satisfaction had a mean score of 4.878 (SD = 0.889). Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between leadership style and instructional quality ($r = .150$, $p < .001$), classroom management ($r = .089$, $p < .001$), professional development engagement ($r = .097$, $p < .001$), and teacher job satisfaction ($r = .113$, $p = .036$). Multiple linear regression analysis further showed that leadership style was a significant positive predictor of teacher job satisfaction ($\beta = .131$, $p = .001$), while professional development engagement also contributed positively to job satisfaction ($\beta = .080$, $p = .002$). In contrast, instructional quality ($\beta = -.073$, $p < .001$) and classroom management ($\beta = -.174$, $p < .001$) exhibited negative regression coefficients after controlling for the other predictors in the model. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 145) = 39.11$, $p < .001$, and explained 51.9% of the variance in teacher job satisfaction ($R^2 = .519$). These findings indicate that leadership style and teacher performance dimensions collectively accounted for a substantial proportion of the variation in teacher job satisfaction among the participating K–12 teachers.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Style, Teacher Performance, and Job Satisfaction Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership_Style	150	1	3	1.98	0.769
Instructional_Quality	150	34	98	67.72	13.711
ClassroomManagement	150	7	98	64.5	14.131
Professional_Development_Engagement	150	40	89	67.32	12.084
Teacher_Job_Satisfaction	150	3	6.6	4.878	0.8892
Valid N (listwise)	150				



Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables based on responses from 150 K–12 teachers. Leadership style had a mean score of 1.98 (SD = 0.769), with scores ranging from 1 to 3. Regarding the dimensions of teacher performance, instructional quality had a mean score of 67.72 (SD = 13.711; range = 34–98), classroom management had a mean score of 64.50 (SD = 14.131; range = 7–98), and professional development engagement had a mean score of 67.32 (SD = 12.084; range = 40–89). Teacher job satisfaction had a mean score of 4.878 (SD = 0.889), with scores ranging from 3.0 to 6.6. These descriptive statistics provide a concise overview of the distribution and variability of the study variables and serve as the basis for the subsequent correlational and regression analyses.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that leadership style and dimensions of teacher performance are significantly associated with teacher job satisfaction in K–12 education. Multiple regression analysis showed that leadership style was a significant positive predictor of teacher job satisfaction ($\beta = .131$, $p = .001$), while professional development engagement also demonstrated a significant positive predictive relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = .080$, $p = .002$). These results indicate that teachers who perceive more supportive leadership practices and demonstrate greater engagement in professional development tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction. At the bivariate level, leadership style was also positively associated with instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and teacher job satisfaction. Collectively, these findings address the main research problem by demonstrating that school leadership and teachers' professional engagement are meaningfully related to teachers' workplace experiences, particularly their job satisfaction.

The positive predictive relationship between leadership style and teacher job satisfaction can be interpreted primarily through Transformational Leadership Theory. Leadership practices characterized by clear communication, professional support, constructive feedback, shared decision-making, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation can strengthen teachers' motivation and perceptions of organizational support, thereby contributing to greater job satisfaction. This theoretical explanation is consistent with previous studies reporting that supportive and transformational leadership practices are positively associated with teacher motivation, professional commitment, performance, and job satisfaction (Akhtar, 2024; Li & Liu, 2022; Mulyani et al., 2025; Nadeem et al., 2026). The significant positive contribution of professional development engagement further suggests that opportunities for continuous learning, professional interaction, and competency development constitute important aspects of teachers' professional experiences. This finding is also compatible with Self-Determination Theory, particularly the importance of supporting competence, autonomy, and relatedness in the workplace. Within the present study, leadership support and professional development engagement may therefore function as complementary professional resources that strengthen teachers' positive perceptions of their work and school environment.

An important finding requiring further interpretation is the emergence of negative regression coefficients for instructional quality ($\beta = -.073$, $p < .001$) and classroom management ($\beta = -.174$, $p < .001$) after the other predictors were statistically controlled. These coefficients should not be interpreted as evidence that stronger instructional quality or classroom management directly reduces teacher job satisfaction. The direction of the coefficients differs from the positive bivariate relationships observed among the study variables, indicating the possibility of a suppression effect or shared variance among



correlated predictors in the regression model. When conceptually related dimensions of teacher performance are entered simultaneously, overlap among instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and leadership style may alter the unique regression coefficient associated with each predictor. Consequently, the negative coefficients may represent the predictors' unique statistical contributions after shared variance has been controlled rather than direct negative educational relationships. This unexpected pattern should therefore be interpreted cautiously and warrants further investigation using larger samples and additional analyses designed specifically to examine suppression or multicollinearity among teacher-performance dimensions.

The findings have practical implications for school leaders, teachers, and educational policymakers in K–12 education. School leaders should strengthen leadership practices that emphasize effective communication, constructive feedback, teacher participation in decision-making, professional recognition, and sustained instructional support. Schools should also provide accessible and relevant professional development opportunities because teachers' engagement in continuous professional learning was positively associated with job satisfaction. For teachers, active participation in professional learning communities, training programs, collaborative reflection, and other professional development activities may support both professional growth and positive workplace experiences. At the policy level, educational authorities should incorporate teacher-supportive leadership competencies and professional development provision into school leadership standards, principal preparation programs, and school improvement policies. These initiatives should be supported by systematic evaluation of teacher job satisfaction and professional development participation so that schools can identify areas requiring organizational support. Such evidence-informed leadership and professional development policies can provide a stronger organizational environment for supporting teacher professionalism and workplace well-being across K–12 schools.

Conclusion

Based on the overall findings of this study, it can be concluded that leadership style constitutes a significant organizational factor associated with teachers' performance and job satisfaction in K–12 education. The study provides empirical evidence that supportive leadership practices are positively associated with instructional quality, classroom management, professional development engagement, and teacher job satisfaction, indicating that effective school leadership contributes to creating favorable professional environments for teachers. The findings further demonstrate that professional development engagement positively predicts teacher job satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning opportunities in strengthening teachers' professional competence, motivation, and workplace commitment. Although instructional quality and classroom management exhibited negative regression coefficients after controlling for other predictors, these relationships should be interpreted cautiously as statistical associations rather than direct educational effects, reflecting the complexity of interactions among teacher performance dimensions. The results support the integrated theoretical framework combining Transformational Leadership Theory, Self-Determination Theory, the Job Demands Resources Model, and Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that leadership functions as an essential organizational resource influencing teachers' professional experiences and workplace well-being. Consequently, improving educational quality requires leadership development initiatives that encourage transformational and participative leadership behaviors, provide continuous instructional support, and facilitate meaningful professional development opportunities.



Educational institutions should also establish collaborative school cultures that strengthen teachers' autonomy, competence, and professional engagement while promoting supportive organizational climates. The proposed research framework contributes to the existing literature by offering a comprehensive explanation of the relationships among leadership style, teacher performance dimensions, and job satisfaction within a unified analytical model. Therefore, this study provides valuable theoretical and practical implications for school leaders, educators, and policymakers seeking to enhance teacher effectiveness, improve job satisfaction, and promote sustainable organizational development across K–12 educational settings.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, educational institutions are encouraged to strengthen leadership development programs by promoting transformational and participative leadership practices that foster supportive, collaborative, and teacher-centered school environments. School leaders should provide continuous instructional guidance, constructive feedback, and professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' instructional quality, classroom management, and job satisfaction. Policymakers are also encouraged to establish organizational policies that support teacher autonomy, professional growth, and equitable access to educational resources. Future research should investigate additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational climate, teacher self-efficacy, organizational commitment, and technology leadership, while employing longitudinal and multi-regional research designs to provide stronger evidence regarding the long-term relationships between leadership styles, teacher performance, and job satisfaction across diverse K–12 educational contexts.

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