



Research Article

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Received: 11 March 2024 / Accepted: 29 October 2024 / Published: 05 November 2024

Investigating Blended Leadership Dynamics: Analysing Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-Faire, and Instructional Approaches in High and Low Achieving Secondary Schools in Ethiopia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2024-0180>

Abstract

This study delves into the leadership practices within secondary schools in the Gedeo Zone, with a specific focus on those achieving high performance. Employing an embedded mixed research design, the study selected four high-performing and eight low-performing schools. Data collection methods encompassed surveys, document analysis, focus group discussions, and interviews, engaging 48 principals, 311 teachers, 6 senior teachers, and 7 supervisors, totaling 372 participants. Statistical analyses including regression, correlation, and independent t-tests, coupled with thematic analysis, were utilized. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate notable differences in leadership practices between high-performing and low-performing schools, with principals in high-performing schools demonstrating a blended approach of instructional and transformational leadership styles. Positive correlations emerged between principal effectiveness, employee effort, and satisfaction, linked to the adoption of instructional and transformational leadership styles. Regression analysis suggested that blended leadership styles positively impact academic achievement in high-performing schools but may have adverse effects in low-performing schools due to insufficient implementation of such leadership styles. The study proposes that principals in Gedeo Zone's secondary schools adopt a blended leadership approach, incorporating full-range and instructional models to enhance school performance. Additionally, the education department in the zone is encouraged to arrange workshops integrating full-range and instructional leadership practices.

Keywords: *Leadership practice, school performance, full range leadership, instructional leadership, principal's blended leadership styles, school principals and school Supervisors*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of blended leadership, specifically focusing on transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional approaches, within high and low

achieving secondary schools in Ethiopia. Scholars have highlighted the significance of school leadership in fostering student achievement and creating supportive learning environments (Choi, Lee, & Oh, 2022). Principals contribute significantly to school success through practices like enhancing teacher development and fostering community participation (Jacobson et al., 2014). Policymakers are urged to prioritize instructional leadership to meet the demands for transformational leadership (Harverson & Kelley, 2014). Indigenous leadership practices also play a crucial role in instilling moral values conducive to students' attitudinal changes post-schooling (Msila, 2014). Blended leadership styles, incorporating transformational and instructional practices, are pivotal in the success of top-performing secondary schools in Ethiopia (Kebede, 2020; Tadesse, 2021; Gebremariam, 2022). Gebre (2023) explores the impact of blended leadership styles on student outcomes, affirming its contribution to school success. Asrat (2024) delves into the influence of principals' blended leadership styles on school climate and student achievement, reaffirming the significance of a balanced leadership approach.

Despite efforts like the Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V), challenges persist in ensuring effective leadership in Ethiopian secondary schools (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2015; Ahmed, 2015; Tefera, 2019). There is a notable research gap in understanding the specific influence of principals' blended leadership styles on school climate and student achievement in top-performing secondary schools, necessitating comprehensive investigations into its impact (Asrat, 2024; Gebre, 2023; Gebremariam, 2022; Kebede, 2020; Tadesse, 2021). Understanding contextual factors affecting the effectiveness of blended leadership styles among principals can optimize leadership interventions and improve education quality and student outcomes (Asrat, 2024; Gebre, 2023; Gebremariam, 2022; Kebede, 2020; Tadesse, 2021).

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of blended leadership, specifically focusing on transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional approaches, within high and low achieving secondary schools in Ethiopia.

1.2 Research Questions

How do blended leadership dynamics, encompassing transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional approaches, vary between high and low achieving secondary schools in Ethiopia?

1.3 Objectives

To analyse the dynamics of blended leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional approaches, in high and low achieving secondary schools in Ethiopia.

2. Literature Review

Effective principals significantly impact school success by enhancing teacher development, instructional activities, and community participation (Jacobson et al., 2014). Positive correlations exist between school leadership and performance, suggesting a significant influence on school efficiency (Khumalo, 2015). Effective principals foster learning cultures, collaboration, and student activity, influencing academic performance and social development positively (Merugu, 2021).

Grounded in the Full-Range Leadership Model (FRLM), the study analyzes transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles, allowing for detailed behavioral analysis (Avolio & Bass, 2004). While widely used, the FRLM has limitations, prompting exploration of additional leadership styles (Barnett, 2019). The research assesses principals' and teachers' perspectives on leadership using the FRLM as the primary framework (John & Don, 2010).

Emphasizing transformational leadership, the study highlights a shared vision and collaborative learning environment, prioritizing followers' growth, and motivation (Emmanuel & Valley, 2022). Transformative leaders adapt styles based on situational needs, challenging conventions for organizational success (Yukl, 2002). Transactional leadership, with its focus on contingent rewards and management-by-exception, promotes compliance but may lack commitment (Ugwu, Onyanha & Fombard, 2020). Integrating both styles is vital for organizational success (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by minimal involvement, allows followers independent determination (Northouse, 2010). While not always effective, it can yield results with committed followers (Nowak et al., 2019), remaining valuable in contexts with dedicated staff. The study adopts the instructional leadership model, focusing on principals' roles in education shaping (Townsend, 2019), as outlined by Hallinger and Murphy (2013). Liebowitz and Porter (2019), and Agirdag and Muijs (2023) link principled behaviours to academic achievement. Shen et al. (2021) stress principal leadership's role in enhancing parent involvement and student performance. Instructional leadership emphasizes clear objectives, effective strategies, and teaching evaluation for improved student outcomes (Day & Sammons, 2016), integrated here with the Full-Range Leadership model for a comprehensive understanding. School effectiveness theory posits a significant impact on students' achievement and well-being, with research indicating its role in fostering positive outcomes reflective of the school's socio demographic composition (Zamir, 2020). Various models and theories of school effectiveness have been identified in literature, each aiming to enhance school efficacy by incorporating diverse elements (Zamir, 2020). These include Rutter et al.'s (1979) theory, Marzano's (2005) Model, the K-12 SEF framework (2011), and theories by Scheerens (2015) and Fullan (2013). While six theories are the focus of this study, Creemers' (2010) Comprehensive Model was excluded due to its lack of emphasis on leadership components (Zamir, 2020).

Recent research indicates a lack of emphasis on diverse leadership models to maintain supportive environments (Perera, 2015). Challenges like inadequate curriculum development culture and context-specific instructional leadership methods hinder school performance improvement (Gedefaw, 2020). Despite increased enrolment, issues such as teacher turnover, classroom overcrowding, and inadequate leadership persist, necessitating system-based interventions, including diverse leadership styles (Wondemagegn, 2016). Further investigation into leadership practices, especially instructional leadership, is crucial for enhancing school performance in Ethiopia. Similarly, literature on leadership practices in top-performing secondary schools in Ethiopia underscores the significance of principals' blended leadership styles and their impact on school climate and student achievement. Asrat (2024), Gebre (2023), Gebremariam (2022), Kebede (2020), and Tadesse (2021) collectively emphasize how these leadership styles influence school climate, academic achievement, and overall effectiveness. Their studies highlight the correlation between leadership practices and student outcomes, offering insights for enhancing educational leadership practices and improving student outcomes in top-performing secondary schools in Ethiopia.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Research Model for School Performance Enhancement

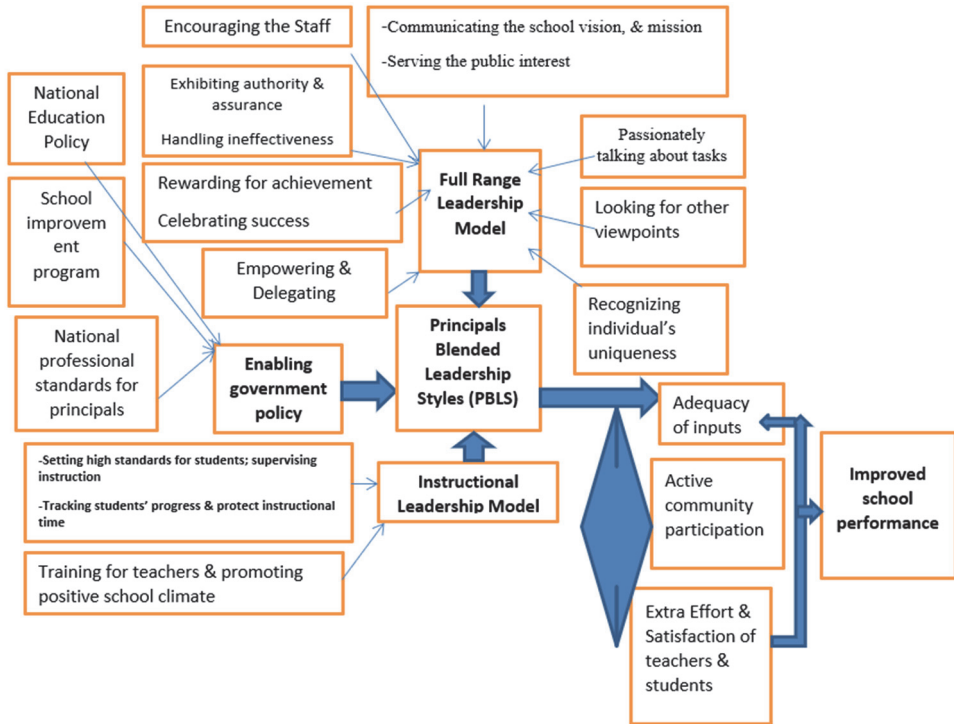


Figure 1: Model for Principals Blended Leadership Styles to Improve School Performances

The conceptual framework for enhancing school performance integrates governing policies, school leadership practices, influence indicators, and desired outcomes. Governing policies shape the operational environment, while leadership practices include instructional leadership, collaborative decision-making, resource management, and fostering a positive school culture. Influence indicators involve stakeholder engagement, professional development, community involvement, and socio-economic context. Desired outcomes comprise improved academic achievement, enhanced school climate, increased stakeholder satisfaction, and overall performance enhancement. This framework emphasizes the crucial role of effective leadership in driving school performance

4. Methods

The study draws upon a comprehensive foundation of educational research methodologies, as outlined by Cohen et al. (2020), Creswell and Creswell (2021), Fraenkel et al. (2021), Gall et al. (2021), Leedy and Ormrod (2020), Merriam and Tisdell (2020), Mills (2020), Punch (2020), Salkind (2020), and Thomas (2021). By utilizing a mixed research methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, the study categorizes variables and explores associations, aiming for a holistic understanding (Jacobs, Ary, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2012). Adopting pragmatism as its paradigm, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches, offering flexibility, effectiveness, and a

practical orientation for real-world problem-solving (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2020; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021). This approach allows for diverse methodologies and employs both deductive and inductive methods to understand leadership practices' impact on school performance (Johnson & Gray, 2010; Cooksey & McDonald, 2011; Shah, 2021).

Employing a concurrent embedded mixed methods design, the study gathers qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring a comprehensive approach (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Principled integration maximizes strengths, emphasizing robust interpretation and exploring complex research questions (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2023; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2020; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021). The investigation focuses on school principals' leadership styles in the Gedeo Zone, using various sampling methods to ensure representation across secondary schools, resulting in a sample size of 386 individuals. Quantitative data collected through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5x Short) and qualitative data gathered through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis are analyzed using SPSS version 28 and ATLAS ti software, respectively. Regression and correlation analyses examine the impact of leadership practices on student academic performance.

5. Results

The findings are presented below:

5.1 Leadership practices of secondary schools' principals in the Gedeo Zone, as rated by level 2 and level 3 school teachers

The study compared the practiced leadership styles of principals in two categories of sampled schools. Descriptive analysis, including mean values and standard deviations, was conducted and compared between the schools. An independent t-test was performed to assess differences. See table below for details.

As indicated above, the eight low-achiever and the four top performing schools of the zone were selected deliberately, based school performance evaluation report of Zone education department in 2022. To make the analysis easy and to ensure the anonymity of the participants, a code name was given to each sampled school, as well as to the two groups of schools. The code name for top performing schools were given to the category of the four high achievers (level 3 schools);, whereas the code name level 2 schools were given to the category of the eight lowachiever schools of the zone. Likewise, the code name of Level 3 SS-1, Level 3 SS-2, Level 3 SS-3, and Level 3 SS-4 was given for relatively top performing schools. On other side, Level 2 SS-11, Level 2 SS-12, Level 2 SS-13, Level 2 SS-14, Level 2 SS-17, and Level 2 SS-16 have been assigned to eight low performing schools of the Zone respectively.

Table 1: Teachers view on Leadership Styles Practiced by secondary School principals

Group Statistics							
	Respondents of the Study	N	Mean	X	SD	T	p.
Transformational Leadership style	level 3 schools' teachers	127	3.05	2.29	.761	71.573	.000
	level 2 schoolteachers	184	1.53				
Transactional Style of the Leaderships	level 3 schoolteachers	127	1.72	1.60	.472	-25.852	.000
	level 2 schoolteachers	184	1.52				
Laissez-faire Leadership Style	level 3 schoolteachers	127	.838	2.49	1.349	42.671	.000
	level 2 schoolteachers	184	3.36				
Instructional Leadership model	level 3 schoolteachers	127	2.36	1.67	.539	25.950	.000
	level 2 schoolteachers	184	1.44				

Note: mean score 0.00 to < 0.80 not at all, 0.80 to < 1.60 once in a while, 1.60 to < 2.40 sometimes, 2.40 to < 3.20 fairly often, & 3.20 to < 4.00 frequently; * p < .05.

Table 1 illustrates existing perception difference between top-performing and low-performing teachers' assessments of the leadership style of their principals. Therefore, generated mean of level 3 school teachers releases $M = 3.05, 1.72, .838, \text{ and } 2.36$ respectively for leadership styles that are transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional. These assure that transformational leadership behaviour exhibited often, transactional leadership behaviour sometimes, laissez-faire leadership behaviour once in a while, and instructional leadership behaviour sometimes. In contrast, mean results of level 2 schoolteachers indicate $M = 1.53, 1.60, 3.36, \text{ and } 1.44$ respectively for stated leadership styles. Therefore, it reveals that transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership behaviour are exhibited once in a while. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership behaviour is demonstrated frequently in the school. Computed independent t-test for equality of means confirms $p = .000 < 0.05$ for all leadership styles, authenticating that there are statistically significance differences between top, and low-performing schoolteachers. Also, independent samples effect size for occurred significance difference showed that Cohen's $d = 8.257, -2.982, -4.923, \text{ and } 2.994$ point of estimate authorising existing effect size is large since it is greater than 0.8 points, except laissez-faire and transactional leadership style. Therefore, based on this result, it is rationale to summarise that there are significant statistical differences of the views between top-performing and low-performing schoolteachers concerning principals leadership styles practised in their school. The differences explain that top-performing schools principals are likely demonstrate transformational and instructional leadership behaviour than low-performing school principals did. In contrast, low-performing school principals more exhibit laissez-faire leadership style behaviour than top-performing school principals.

5.2 Leadership practices of secondary schools' principals in the Gedeo Zone, as rated by level 2 and level 3 school principals

Table 2: Principals view on Leadership Styles Practiced by secondary School principals

Group Statistics						
	Respondents of the Study	N=48	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Transformational Leadership style	level 3 school principals	16	3.1156	0.124	40.374	.000
	level 2 school principals	32	1.5844			
Transactional Style of the Leadership s	level 3 school principals	16	1.7656	0.238	-11.097	.000
	level 2 school principals	32	2.5729			
Laissez-faire Leadership style	level 3 school principals	16	.6406	0.401	-20.338	.000
	level 2 school principals	32	3.4219			
Instructional Leadership style	level 3 school principals	16	2.2692	0.319	8.556	.000
	level 2 school principals	32	1.4712			

Note: mean score 0.00 to < 0.80 not at all, 0.80 to < 1.60 once in a while, 1.60 to < 2.40 sometimes, 2.40 to < 3.20 fairly often, & 3.20 to < 4.00 frequently; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 2 illustrates perception variation between level 3 and level 2 institutional leaders' survey self-evaluation of their leadership approaches. Therefore, generated mean of level 3 school principals indicates $M = 3.11, 1.76, .640, \text{ and } 2.26$ respectively for transactional, transformative, laissez-faire, and instructional styles of leadership. These confirm that transformational leadership behaviour exhibited often, transactional leadership behaviour sometimes, laissez-faire leadership behaviour not at all, and instructional leadership behaviour sometimes. In contrast, revealed mean results of level 2 school principals indicate $M = 1.58, 2.57, 3.421, \text{ and } 1.47$ respectively for stated leadership styles. Therefore, it comprehends that transformational and instructional leadership behaviour exhibited occasionally transactional leadership behaviour exhibited sometimes. But laissez-faire leadership behaviour was practised frequently in the school. Computed independent t-test for equality of means confirms $p = .000 < 0.05$ respectively consolidate existences of statistically significance differences between top and low-performing school principal's perceptions.

Likewise, independent samples effect size for occurred significance difference showed that

Cohen's $d = 12.362, -3.398, 6.227,$ and 2.620 point of estimate confirming effect size is large since it is >0.8 points, except laissez-faire leadership, and transactional style of leadership. Therefore, based on this result, it is rationale to summarise that there are significant statistical differences of the views between top-performing and low-performing school principals concerning principals' leadership styles exhibited in their school. Existing perception difference validates top-performing schools principals are more demonstrate transformational and instructional leadership behaviour than low-performing school principals did. In contrast, low-performing school principals exhibit laissez-faire leadership style behaviour than its country part. On other side, transactional leadership behaviour demonstrated fairly in both high- and low-performing educational institutions.

5.3 To analyse existing perception difference between secondary schools' principals' self-rating and ratings made by teachers at their respective schools.

Table 3: Existing difference between level 3 schoolteacher's ratings and principals' self-ratings

Group Statistics							
	Respondents of the Study	N	Mean	X	SD	t	P
Transformational Leadership style	level 3 schoolteachers	127	3.05	3.05	.168	-1.475	.071
	level 3 school principals	16	3.11				
Transactional Style of the Leadership	level 3 schoolteachers	127	1.72	1.729	.227	-.671	.252
	level 3 school principals	16	1.76				
Laissez-faire Leadership style	level 3 schoolteachers	127	.83	.8164	.454	1.651	.051
	level 3 school principals	16	.64				
Instructional Leadership model	level 3 schoolteachers	127	2.36	2.35	.377	.953	.171
	level 3 school principals	16	2.26				

Note: mean score 0.00 to < 0.80 not at all, 0.80 to < 1.60 once in a while, 1.60 to < 2.40 sometimes, 2.40 to < 3.20 fairly often, & 3.20 to < 4.00 frequently; * $p < .05$.

Table 5.42 illustrates perception disparities between teachers and principals regarding leadership practices in top-performing schools. The mean ratings from teachers indicate frequent exhibition of transformational leadership ($M=3.05$), occasional transactional ($M=1.72$) and instructional ($M=0.830$) behaviours, and no instances of laissez-faire leadership ($M=2.36$). Conversely, principals show frequent adoption of transformational leadership ($M=3.11$), occasional transactional ($M=1.76$) and instructional ($M=0.64$) practices, and no laissez-faire behavior ($M=2.26$). Independent t-tests reveal no statistically significant differences between principals and teachers except for laissez-faire leadership ($p=.051$). Cohen's d of $.438$ suggests a small effect size, indicating minimal differences. Thus, it is inferred that perceptions on leadership styles between principals and teachers in top-performing schools align, with transformational and instructional leadership being prevalent, while laissez-faire leadership is lacking.

Table 4: Existing significant difference between level 2 schoolteachers' and principals' self-ratings for principal's leadership style

	Respondents of the Study	N	Mean	\bar{X}	SD	t-test	Sig.
Transformational Leadership	level 2 schoolteachers	184	1.53	1.545	.182	4.418	.027
	level 2 school principals	32	1.58				
Transactional Style of the Leadership	level 2 schoolteachers	184	2.52	2.529	.284	1.049	.307
	level 2 school principals	32	2.57				
Instructional Leadership Model	level 2 schoolteachers	184	1.44	1.447	.535	.044	.834
	level 2 school principals	32	1.47				
Laissez-fare Leadership style	level 2 schoolteachers	184	3.36	3.370	.250	.706	.402
	level 2 school principals	32	3.42				

Note: mean score 0.00 to < 0.80 not at all, 0.80 to < 1.60 once in a while, 1.60 to < 2.40 sometimes, 2.40 to < 3.20 fairly often, & 3.20 to < 4.00 frequently; * $p < .05$

Table 4 compares teachers' and principals' ratings in low-performing secondary schools. Mean scores for transformational, transactional, instructional, and laissez-faire leadership styles indicate frequent practice of laissez-faire and occasional transactional leadership, while both transformational and transactional leadership are less common. An independent t-test reveals no significant differences, except for transformational leadership, where $p=.027 < 0.05$. However, the effect size (Cohen's $d = -.250$) suggests a minimal impact. Overall, there's little statistical variance between teachers' and principals' views on leadership styles in low-performing schools.

5.4 Principals blended leadership styles contribution for School effectiveness.

Table 5: Effect of leadership style on efficacy, employee extra effort, and satisfactions at top-performing secondary schools

Coefficients ^a							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	3.299	.459		7.18	<.001		
Style of transformational Leadership	.022	.130	.014	.166	.868	.993	1.007
Style of transactional Leadership	.001	.098	.001	.013	.990	.964	1.038
Style of Laissez-faire Leadership	-.048	.049	-.084	-.975	.331	.960	1.042
Instructional Leadership model	.034	.058	.049	-.580	.563	.992	1.008

a. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness, Employee Extra effort, and Satisfaction.

Analysis of regression was conducted under Table 5 to assess the impact of practiced leadership styles on principals' effectiveness, employee extra effort, and satisfaction as outcomes in top-performing secondary schools. Regression coefficient results for transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional leadership [$R=.022, .001, -.048, \text{ and } .034, p=.868, .990, .331, \text{ and } .563$] suggest that only transformational and instructional leadership styles positively affect principals' effectiveness, employee extra effort, and satisfaction. Each scale decrease in leadership style corresponds to a decline in extra effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction by an average of $C=.459$ units' scale. However, none of the leadership style measures significantly contributed to the outcomes ($p>.05$). Thus, secondary schools with relatively top-performing status exhibit weak practices regarding the full leadership model, with transformational and instructional leadership showing promise, while laissez-faire and transactional styles are rarely used.

Table 6: Model summary for effect of leadership style on efficacy, extra effort of employees, and satisfaction at top-performing secondary schools

Model Summary								
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					R Square Change	F Change	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.009 ^a	.000	-.007	.25861	.000	.011	141	.915
2	.011 ^a	.000	-.007	.25861	.000	.016	141	.898
3	.085 ^a	.007	.000	.25769	.007	1.031	141	.312
4	.054 ^a	.003	-.004	.25825	.003	.405	141	.526

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Style of the Leadership, Laissez-faire Leadership style, Transformational Leadership style & Instructional Management model respectively
b. Dependent variables: Effectiveness, employee extra effort, and Satisfaction

As can be observed in Table 6, the multiple regression model with all four predictors generated [$R^2 = .000, .007, .003$ F (.011, .016, 1.031, and .405) $p = .915, .898, .312, \text{ and } .526 > .05$] respectively validated less predictive ability of estimated variables were observed, and not significant. According to the illustration, transformational and instructional leadership styles have relatively larger predicted R^2 values which is $R^2 = .007, \text{ and } .003$; it consolidates transformational and instructional leadership have 7 and 3% contribution respectively being other variables are constant in raising school effectiveness. But, they had no significant positive regression weights for effectiveness, employee extra effort and satisfaction at top-performing secondary schools of Gedeo Zone. These realised that FRLM and instructional leadership had no significant contribution for relatively top-performing secondary schools effectiveness owing to their little practices.

Table 7: Correlations between styles of leadership and principals' efficacy, additional work, and satisfaction of top-performing secondary schools

Correlations		Lazes-faire Style of the Leadership	Instructional Leadership model	Transformational Leadership style	Transactional Style of the Leadership
Effectiveness, additional effort, and Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.085	.054	.009	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.312	.526	.915	.898
	N	143	143	143	143
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Table 7 presents Pearson correlation analysis results examining the relationships among school principal effectiveness, staff extra effort, and student satisfaction, based on leadership styles. There is a strong, positive correlation between worker satisfaction, extra effort, and effectiveness scores among those practicing instructional and transformational leadership styles ($C = .009, .054, P = .915, \text{ \& } .526 > 0.05$), suggesting higher scores on these variables are associated with greater likelihood of practicing these leadership styles. However, despite the positive connection between transformational and instructional leadership practices, it is not significant. Conversely, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership styles show negative correlations with principal effectiveness, staff extra effort, and employee satisfaction ($C = -.085, \text{ \& } -.011, \text{ Sig (2-tailed) } = .312, \text{ \& } .898 > 0.05$), indicating their less frequent use. This confirms a positive and significant correlation between principal effectiveness, employee extra effort, and satisfaction with instructional and transformational leadership styles, while laissez-faire and transactional styles exhibit weaker associations.

Table 8: Principals' Blended Leadership Style (PBL) for effectiveness, extra effort, and satisfaction at top-performing secondary schools

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	df2	F	Sig.	
1	.211 ^a	.450	.026	.26747	.450	211	3.49	.046	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-faire, & Instructional leadership (PBL).									
b. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness, Extra effort, and Satisfaction.									

Table 8 illustrates the impact of Principals' Blended Leadership Style (PBL) on effectiveness, employee extra effort, and satisfaction in top-performing secondary schools. The R^2 value indicates the proportion of variance in outcomes explained by PBL, with an effect size of 45% ($R^2 = .450, F p =$

.046 < .05), suggesting that PBLs significantly contributes to raising principals' effectiveness, employee extra effort, and satisfaction. This implies that top-performing school principals' use of transformational and instructional leadership is promising. The PBLs demonstrates better predictive power and model fit to enhance these outcomes, emphasizing the importance of employing a blended leadership style. By incorporating transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and instructional leadership, secondary schools can significantly improve effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and effort, contributing to sustained performance in top-performing schools and enhancing effectiveness in low-performing ones. This approach allows leaders to effectively manage change and inspire followers, fostering adaptability to diverse circumstances (Gardner, 2021).

Table 9: Analysis of Students' academic achievement and leadership practices of principals at top and low-performing secondary schools (Level 3 and 2 schools)

R.N	Elements of PBLs	Results	Level 3 schools					Level 2 schools				
1	Transformational Leadership	\bar{X}	3.77	3.83	3.48	3.33	3.61	1.47	1.48	1.62	1.56	1.53
		SD	.138	.181	.187	.168	.168	.212	.172	.209	.170	.190
2	Transactional Leadership	\bar{X}	1.97	1.87	1.93	1.91	1.92	1.52	1.64	1.54	1.47	1.54
		SD	.218	.223	.257	.220	.229	.291	.188	.293	.210	.245
3	Laissez-faire Leadership	\bar{X}	.892	.653	.641	.810	.749	3.38	3.70	3.56	3.31	3.48
		SD	.810	.381	.479	.405	.518	.222	.253	.357	.582	.353
4	Instructional Leadership	\bar{X}	3.94	3.82	2.92	2.88	3.39	1.04	1.38	1.38	1.44	1.31
		SD	.346	.372	.394	.379	.372	.198	.270	.250	.269	.246
5	Grand mean of PBLs	\bar{X}	2.64	2.54	2.24	2.23	2.42	1.85	2.05	2.02	1.94	1.96
		SD	.378	.289	.329	.293	.322	.230	.220	.277	.307	.258
6	Percentages of Grade 12 students' promotion for ten academic years (2008-2018)		79.2	71.9	61.8	58.7	67.9	37	29	31.6	30.6	32.

Note: mean score 0.00 to < 0.80 not at all, 0.80 to < 1.60 once in a while, 1.60 to < 2.40 sometimes, 2.40 to < 3.20 fairly often, & 3.20 to < 4.00 frequently; * p < .05

On the base of opinions of the principals and instructors of both high-performing and low-performing schools, Table 9 presents information concerning the components of blended leadership styles, which comprise laissez-faire, instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership styles. Additionally, to descriptive statistics derived from survey data, the promotion rate for Grade 12 students over the course of 10 academic years (2012–2021) was calculated using document record data collected from the Gedeo Zone education department. The components of principals blended leadership styles, incorporating transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, instructional, and indigenous leadership, have been described thus far in sections 2.4, 3.5, 4.3, 5.1, and 5.3 of this study. Since just four types of leadership are supported by quantitative data, four of them were reviewed in this section. Transformational leadership inspires followers, while transactional leadership utilizes rewards. Instructional leadership enhances commitment and diligence through monitoring. Indigenous leadership fosters collaboration, trust, and patriotism. Principals' execution was evaluated using this theoretical framework.

Table 9, items illustrate PBLs at secondary schools. Therefore, the results of Level 3 schools revealed for transformational style of leadership \bar{X} = 3.61, SD = .1688, transactional style of leadership \bar{X} = 1.92, SD = .229, laissez-faire leadership style \bar{X} = .749, SD = .518 and instructional leadership model \bar{X} = 3.39, SD = .372 confirming that the instructional and transformational leadership styles are among those that are frequently used. On other side, transactional style of leadership practised sometimes, and laissez-faire leadership styles never used in relatively top-performing secondary schools. In summarising this result, the grand mean of PBLs reveal \bar{X} = 2.42, SD = .322 validating it was used often in schools. Based on this, one can disclose that principals of relatively top-performing secondary schools have better practices of using blended leadership styles though the uses of laissez-faire leadership styles among the components of PBLs was limited.

The results of level 2 schools for PBLs revealed for Transformational Style of the Leadership $\bar{X}=1.53$, $SD=.190$, Transactional Style of the Leadership $\bar{X}=1.54$, $SD=.245$, laissez-faire leadership styles $\bar{X}=3.48$, $SD=.353$, and instructional leadership model $\bar{X}=1.31$, $SD=.246$ confirm that the laissez-faire styles of leadership was among frequently used. But transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership styles are used once in a while in low-performing sampled secondary schools of Gedeo Zone. Likewise, the grand mean of PBLs as a summary reveal $\bar{X}=1.96$, $SD=.258$ validating it was used sometimes in schools.

This supports the conclusion that, despite the high practices of laissez-faire leadership styles among PBLs components, principals of low-performing secondary schools tend to adopt blended leadership styles less frequently. In addition to principals' exhibited leadership styles, the Gedeo Zone education department's sampled secondary schools' academic performance for Grade 12 students was also analysed for both top-performing and low-performing secondary schools as an outcome of leadership practices. According to the data, level 3 SS-1 schools had an average promotion rate of 79.2%, level 3 SS-2 schools had a rate of 71.9 %, level 3 SS-3 school had a rate of 61.8 %, and level 3 SS-4 schools had an average promotion rate of 58.7% on the national leaving exam over the course of the past 10 academic years (from 2012 to 2021). However, throughout the same ten academic years at low-performing secondary schools, the percentages of Grade 12 students that were promoted were as follows: Level 2 SS-11: 37%; Level 2 SS-12: 29%; Level 2 SS-17: 31.6 %; and Level 2 SS-18: 32% respectively.

Over the past decade, top-performing secondary schools in Gedeo Zone consistently send a significant number of students to universities. The principals' blended leadership style in these schools correlates with improved academic outcomes, as indicated by regression analysis in Table 8.

5.5 Supervisors' perception of the leadership styles practised by secondary school principals.

This section presents qualitative results on sampled supervisor's perceptions on principals leadership styles practiced in secondary schools of Gedeo Zone. Thus, three supervisors from top performing schools were involved and the codes were given for them; it includes KII- Super level 3-1, KII- super level 3-2, and KII- Super level 3,3 respectively from four schools. Also, four supervisors from low performing secondary schools were given the code name called KII-Super level 2-11, KII-Super level 2-13, KII-Super level 2-15, and KII-Super level 2-17 accordingly. So, qualitative data analysis concerning supervisors' perceptions on the leadership styles practiced by secondary school principals were conducted using those codes as well.

The results from the qualitative data clearly reveal that, principals at secondary schools who perform well do not use a single leadership style. KII-teacher level 3-11 asserted, however, that they were using a variety of leadership styles, which he explained as follows:

The best secondary school principals have a solid habit of planning together, consistently monitoring instruction, inspiring or encouraging the instructors and students, evaluating the performances jointly, and comprehending the opportunities and gaps in the school that need to be addressed. They also get input from the staff and stakeholders regarding the administration, librarians, pedagogy centres, teaching and learning processes, and teachers. As a result, the principals are effective thanks to the input of various stakeholders. Finally, they address or take measure on the inefficiency and problems within schools (5.8.2).

These qualitative results consolidate that top-performing secondary school principals have been utilising a variety of leadership styles. The implementation of collaborative planning and regular monitoring of the teaching and learning process are signs.

Supervisors go further on this, saying that high-performing secondary schools seem to adopt democratic leadership, also referred to as participative leadership, as one of their preferred leadership styles. For instance, KII- Super level 3-12 explained that:

Leadership styles of schools are differing from schools to school based on their experience and education level. For the best of my knowledge, democratic leadership style, which means participative leadership, is among exercised style of leadership.

Likewise, the supervisor observed that top-performing secondary schools had adopted laissez-faire leadership practices by disregarding the degree of employee devotion and expertise. KII-Super level 3-13 responded to this by elucidating as follows:

As a supervisor, I had been observing the leadership styles that school principals had been employing. Therefore, they frequently utilised a laissez-faire leadership style rather than context-specific situational leadership. I am aware that this leadership style is used when a team member is capable and dedicated to their work; in such cases, there is no need for close supervision or immediate decision-making. The leaders anticipated leaving employee responsibility to others. But sometimes in our institutions, the principals don't rigorously follow the actions of the teachers (see par.5.8.2).

Another supervisor's perspective was that teachers and other school stakeholders collaborated with school principals of top-performing secondary schools on important topics such as the planning, execution, and evaluation of educational activities. This acknowledges that principals have a goal setting and stakeholder-communication process that reflects transformational leadership. With reference to this, KII-super level 3-12 states that:

As to my experience, stakeholder participation is required for major school programmes; the government is not the only party that needs to be involved. Whereas not all principals takes the effort to increase stakeholder participation to the same degree. Some of these include community participation from the planning stage through implementation and evaluation. I know at top performing schools they seek the participation of the community in planning, implementation, and evaluation. However, the majority of schools do not routinely involve teachers in decision-making except in committee work and staff meeting time (par.5.8.2).

On other scenario, cluster supervisors believed that principals at low-performing secondary schools had been using an undemocratic and non-participative style of leadership. In summary, KII-Super-level 2-13 clarified that:

My observation is school principals have been practising similar and consistent undemocratic leadership. Supervisors support is there, but principal's leadership practices are not change-oriented. Undemocratic leadership means kind of leadership styles principals have been executing by low participation of the students, teachers and all stakeholders (see par.5.8.3).

Moreover, an additional participant endorses the idea that some principals of secondary schools utilised transactional leadership dimensions, like active management by exception. They attempt to maintain control over the teachers, and students by implementing attendance policies and taking appropriate action. Regarding this, KII-Super-level 2-14 stated the following:

Our school principals and vice-principals seek to control school teachers and students. They perceive their major responsibility is controlling the attendance of teachers. They are expected to supervise instruction, provide short and relevant training for teachers on identified school gaps, and should inspire teachers. Should devise strategies to fulfil inputs by mobilising school community and different stake holders (see par.5.8.3).

There is evidence in the literature that shows low institutional performance is caused by non-participative leadership approaches. Therefore, autocratic leadership, also known as authoritarian leadership, is a leadership style marked by individual control over all choices and minimal input from group members (Katorina, 2021).

Supervisors believe that, although principals possess the theoretical knowledge required to

carry out instructional leadership, they are not actually doing so. Variables associated to commitment are the reason of this. Regarding this, KII-Super-level 2-17 supplied the following data:

Our school principals are not properly using instructional leadership; they know theory of instructional leadership but, they fail to implement it in its actual practices. According to my perception, failures to implement the instructional leadership are the low commitment of teachers and school principals (see par.5.8.3).

6. Discussion

This study conducted in secondary schools within the Gedeo Zone reveals that top-performing school principals exhibit superior practices of transformational, instructional, and transactional leadership styles compared to their counterparts in low-performing schools (Emmanuel & Valley, 2022). The qualitative data highlights the effective implementation of transformational leadership among principals in top-performing schools, as they embody idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Sosik & Don, 2010). This leadership approach fosters a positive school culture, enhances motivation among teachers and students, and contributes to improved school performance. Additionally, transactional leadership styles, such as contingent reward, are frequently employed by principals in high-performing schools to emphasize accountability and satisfaction when goals are met (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Moreover, principals in top-performing schools demonstrate superior practices in instructional leadership, focusing on defining common objectives, monitoring teaching-learning processes, and promoting professional growth throughout the school (Park, Cooc, & Lee, 2023; Meyer et al., 2023). This instructional leadership model aligns with Hallinger and Murphy's (2013) perspectives, emphasizing the importance of outlining the school's mission, directing the teaching-learning process, and maintaining a supportive learning environment.

In contrast, principals in low-performing schools predominantly exhibit transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles, with limited engagement in transformational and instructional leadership practices (Sosik & Jung, 2010). These deficiencies contribute to organizational dysfunction, dissatisfaction among stakeholders, and hindered student outcomes. The absence of effective instructional and transformational leadership practices undermines schools' ability to succeed (Townsend, 2019).

Principals in high-performing schools effectively employ a blend of transformational, instructional, and transactional leadership, fostering a positive school culture and driving academic achievement. In contrast, principals in low-performing schools exhibit inadequate leadership practices, hindering organizational effectiveness and student outcomes. Addressing these deficiencies and adopting a proactive and engaged leadership approach are essential steps toward improving school performance and creating positive learning environments.

7. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate leadership practices in top and low performing secondary schools, analysing the extent of full range and instructional leadership. The primary research question addressed the understanding of leadership practices in top-performing secondary schools in the Gedeo Zone, Ethiopia. Results indicate disparities between top and low-performing schools, with top-performing principals demonstrating stronger utilization of transformational, instructional, and transactional styles. However, there's room for fuller implementation. Notably, differing perceptions exist among principals regarding their leadership styles, with top-performing schools leaning towards transformational leadership. The study underscores the importance of transformational and instructional leadership in fostering shared visions and academic achievement. Conversely, limited use of these styles in low-performing schools correlates with lower satisfaction and institutional

performance. The research advocates for a blended leadership approach, tailored to diverse school contexts, to improve academic outcomes and overall school performance.

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