

A Study on Principals' Leadership Style in Secondary Schools of Greater Guwahati Area in Assam, India

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ABSTRACT In any organisational setting, a leader must be capable of managing diverse human personalities, often with differing or conflicting interests. The present study explores the leadership styles of principals in secondary schools located within the Greater Guwahati area of Assam, India. The primary objective is to examine the nature of principals' leadership styles and to identify any significant differences based on the type of school management (provincialised or private), gender of the principal, and the geographical location of the school (urban or rural). A total of 20 secondary schools were selected using a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique, comprising 10 provincialised and 10 private institutions. A statistically significant difference was identified in the leadership styles of principals based on the type of school management and in contrast, a significant variation in leadership style was found between principals of urban and rural schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth and continues throughout life, with schools serving as pivotal institutions for shaping individuals, communities, and societies. The effectiveness of a school is closely linked to the leadership of its principal, whose role in fostering a collaborative climate is pivotal in facilitating the realisation of organisational goals (Klein et al. 2013; Mbua 2023). Leadership, in its essence, is the process of influencing, guiding, and motivating individuals toward the attainment of shared objectives. It involves not only the guidance and coordination of activities but also the cultivation of trust, inspiration and vision among stakeholders (Okeke et al. 2023; Azubuike 2024; Ajmi 2024). In educational contexts, leadership extends beyond administrative management to include creating a school environment that enhances teacher productivity, student motivation, and overall institutional effectiveness. Leadership has been conceptualised through various theoretical perspectives, broadly categorised into traditional and contemporary approaches. Traditional perspectives include the Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Group Theory, Behavioural Theory, and Situational or Contingency theory, which emphasise inherent qualities, learned behaviours, and contextual adaptability. Contem-

porary perspectives include charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, and humanistic leadership, which focus on vision, inspiration, and individualised support (Northouse 2007; Bass 1995). Within the school context, leadership styles such as authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional exhibit distinct decision-making patterns and stakeholder engagement levels (Achimugu and Obaka 2019; Oguche et al. 2024). Authoritarian leadership prioritises control, direction, and rapid decision-making, often relying on authority, reward, and punishment. Democratic leadership emphasises participatory decision-making, fostering creativity, commitment, and shared ownership. Laissez-faire leadership delegates authority, allowing autonomy but risking reduced accountability. Transformational leadership promotes innovation, critical thinking, and professional growth through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass 1995; Munir and Khalil 2016). Transactional leadership, in contrast, is grounded in structured exchanges, contingent rewards, and active performance monitoring, while passive-avoidant leadership is characterised by minimal engagement and weak outcomes (Avolio et al. 1999).

In secondary schools, the principal serves as both the chief instructional leader and the

strategic administrator, responsible for policy implementation, resource management, staff development, and the creation of a conducive learning environment. Effective leadership in this setting requires balancing organisational demands with the personal and professional growth of staff, motivating students, and aligning school activities with broader educational goals. Several empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that principals' leadership styles significantly influence school culture, teacher performance, student achievement, and overall institutional success. Therefore, understanding and applying appropriate leadership theories and styles is essential for achieving educational excellence in both government and private institutions.

Akomolafe (2012) defined administrative effectiveness as the attainment of institutional objectives through competent decision-making, delegation, and motivational leadership. Such effectiveness fosters a conducive environment for both teaching and learning. Babatunde (2014) further emphasised a significant positive relationship between principals' managerial and supervisory competencies and their overall administrative success. Similarly, Ogundele et al. (2015) found that supervisory, organisational, and communication skills were strongly associated with principals' administrative performance. Munir and Khalil (2016), employing the MLQ-5X Rater Form developed by Bass and Avolio, highlighted the importance of incorporating teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviour into the design of professional development programs for school leaders. Their findings underscored the value of teacher feedback in evaluating leadership effectiveness. Gogoi (2018) examined leadership effectiveness among principals in general degree colleges of Assam and found leadership performance to be slightly above average, with no substantial differences between principals of provincialised and non-provincialised institutions. Ibrahim et al. (2020) reinforced the value of both transformational and transactional leadership styles in improving school climate and teacher commitment in Malaysian secondary schools, while indicating that laissez-faire leadership had a more limited impact. Noureen et al. (2020) asserted that leadership behaviour exerts a considerable influence on school improvement, shaping both leader behaviour and

institutional development. They concluded that visionary leadership practices were particularly effective in fostering a positive school environment. Mbonu and Azuji (2021) observed a modest yet positive correlation between distributed leadership and teacher commitment in Anambra State, Nigeria. Rashid et al. (2021) identified democratic leadership as the most frequently practiced leadership style among secondary school principals, noting its positive association with student academic outcomes. Interestingly, their findings also indicated that in certain contexts, authoritarian leadership could enhance student performance. Ekpemogu et al. (2023) studied principals in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and found that the laissez-faire leadership style was rarely employed and had little impact on teacher productivity. In contrast, transactional leadership had a significant positive influence on teacher performance. Parveen et al. (2022) reported that autocratic leadership had a strong positive impact on teacher performance, whereas laissez-faire leadership was largely ineffective. They concluded that a context-specific combination of leadership styles might yield better results. Almonawer et al. (2023) found that transactional leadership was predominant in Kuwaiti schools, reflecting institutional hierarchies. Nonetheless, the study suggested that transitioning towards transformational leadership could enhance motivation and shared vision among staff. Ekpemogu et al. (2023) studied principals in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and found that the laissez-faire leadership style was rarely employed and had little impact on teacher productivity. In contrast, transactional leadership exerted a substantial constructive impact on teacher performance. Mbua (2023) highlighted that principals who implemented instructional, transformational, and participatory leadership styles fostered trust, respect, and improved overall school performance. Osagie (2024) also supported this view, finding that democratic and adaptive leadership positively influenced teacher attitudes and job satisfaction in Nigeria through inclusive decision-making processes. Ajmi (2024) documented that primary school principals in his study demonstrated moderate educational leadership, with high ratings for ethical leadership traits, although decision-making skills were less evi-

dent. Azubuike (2024) emphasised that democratic leadership significantly improved teacher performance in public secondary schools and noted the motivational impact of inclusive leadership practices. Saima et al. (2025) found that transformational leadership was prevalent among 21st century secondary school leaders. Their findings illustrated how such leadership styles promote a positive school climate, creativity, shared goals, and professional growth. Marked by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, and idealised influence, transformational leadership emerged as a powerful catalyst for institutional progress.

Collectively, these studies underscore that leadership style is a key determinant of school success. Leadership approaches such as transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire each offer distinct pathways to influencing institutional effectiveness, staff motivation, and student achievement. The findings further support the notion that context-specific leadership, particularly one rooted in transformational values, can significantly enhance the academic and administrative functioning of secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Considering the critical role of leadership in determining the effectiveness and success of secondary education, the present study has been undertaken to explore the leadership styles exhibited by principals in secondary schools. Specifically, the research aims to investigate how principals exercise their leadership roles in the context of varying school management types and gender differences. Accordingly, the study is titled, *Leadership Style of Principals of Secondary Schools in Assam, India*.

Significance of the Study

Secondary education serves as a vital stage in the overall educational framework, as it equips learners to function effectively in an increasingly complex and dynamic society. It plays a crucial role in nurturing students' intellectual abilities, interests, aptitudes, and character, thereby preparing them for higher education and respon-

sible citizenship. The effectiveness of secondary schools, however, is greatly influenced by the quality of leadership demonstrated by school principals, who serve as the cornerstone of educational administration. Leadership, as a core element of educational institutions, has a transformative role in shaping the organisational climate and motivating all stakeholders to work collaboratively toward the achievement of institutional goals.

Leaders have a profound influence on educational outcomes and institutional development. Their personal vision, management approach, and decision-making style are instrumental in fostering an environment that supports efficient functioning. In this regard, the school principal, as the institutional leader, applies various leadership competencies to guide, manage, and coordinate school activities in alignment with the broader aims of secondary education.

Moreover, field observations in the Greater Guwahati area have indicated a rapid, and often unregulated, expansion of private secondary schools. A growing number of parents opt for these institutions, influenced by the widespread perception that private school principals are more proactive, efficient, and effective in school management. Against this backdrop, the present study intends to explore the leadership roles of principals in both provincialised and private secondary schools. It further aims to examine whether significant differences exist in their leadership styles based on the type of school management, gender and locality.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the leadership styles of principals in secondary schools located in the Greater Guwahati area of Assam.
2. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the leadership styles of principals between provincialised and private secondary schools.
3. To assess whether the leadership styles of secondary school principals differ significantly based on gender.
4. To explore whether there is a significant difference in the leadership styles of sec-

ondary school principals with respect to the locality (urban or rural) of the school.

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses:

- ♦ H_{01} : There is no significant difference in the leadership styles of principals between provincialised and private secondary schools.
- ♦ H_{02} : There is no significant difference in the leadership styles of secondary school principals based on gender.
- ♦ H_{03} : There is no significant difference in the leadership styles of secondary school principals based on the locality (urban or rural)

Research Method

The present study adopted a descriptive survey method to gather data aligned with the stated research objectives.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all provincialised and private secondary schools affiliated with the State Board of Assam (SEBA) within the Greater Guwahati area. A total of 20 secondary school principals were selected through a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique. The sample was stratified into two categories based on the type of school management, comprising 10 principals from provincialised schools and 10 from private schools. In terms of gender representation, the sample included 12 male and 8 female principals. Again in terms of locality, the sample included 10 urban schools and 10 rural schools. Thus, the selected sample ensured representation across management types, gender and locality.

Tools Used

To assess the leadership styles of secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati area, a structured questionnaire comprising 40 items was employed. The items were categorised under three leadership dimensions of trans-

actional, transformational and non-transactional leadership. The questionnaire was adapted from the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X)*, revised by Bass and Avolio (1996) specifically using the leader form. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale to measure the extent to which each item reflected the principal's leadership behaviour and allows participants to indicate their responses on a continuum from never (0) to always (4).

Administration of the Tools

The researchers personally met with the principals of the 20 provincialised and private secondary schools to collect data. Instructions for completing the questionnaire were explained individually to each respondent. Sufficient time was provided for answering the questions, and confidentiality of their responses was assured.

Statistical Techniques Used

The following statistical techniques were adopted for data analysis:

1. Percentage (%)
2. Mean (M)
3. Standard Deviation (SD)
4. t-test

RESULTS

The data were analysed and interpreted based on the stated objectives of the research. The collected data were systematically classified, tabulated, and analysed using appropriate statistical techniques and mathematical formulas to derive meaningful insights and support the research findings.

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that mean scores of Composite Principals' Leadership Style is 106.7 and SD is 11.25. Among the dimensions of the Principals' Leadership style, the mean score of each dimension varied. The mean score of Transformational Leadership is 66.95 and SD is 7.57. Again the mean score and SD of Transactional Leadership is 37.45 and 4.5. The mean score and SD of Non-transactional Leadership is 2.3 and 2.8.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of principals' leadership style as perceived by leader

S. No.	Principals' leadership style	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
1.	Leadership style(Composite Score)	20	82	125	106.7	11.25
2.	Transformational leadership	20	51	80	66.95	7.57
3.	Transactional leadership	20	29	46	37.45	4.50
4.	Non-transformational leadership	20	0	9	2.3	2.8

Interpretation

Table 2 represents the distribution of Principals' Leadership Style as perceived by leaders across five categories of Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, and Very Poor. The analysis indicates that 5 percent of principals exhibited an excellent leadership style, 25 percent demonstrated good leadership, 40 percent fell into the average category, while 15 percent each were categorised as poor and very poor in their leadership style.

Interpretation

From Table 3, it is seen that for transformational leadership, 5 percent of principals were in

the excellent category, 20 percent were good, 50 percent were average, 15 percent were poor, and 10 percent were very poor. Regarding transactional leadership, no principal was rated as excellent, 15 percent were good, 45 percent were average, 30 percent were poor, and 10 percent were very poor. Similarly, for non-transactional leadership, none achieved an excellent rating, as 5 percent were good, 35 percent were average, 45 percent were poor, and 15 percent were very poor.

Interpretation

From Table 4, it has been observed that the calculated *t*-value of 2.30 exceeds the critical *t*-value at the 0.05 level of significance (*df* = 18). This indicates a statistically significant differ-

Table 2: Percentage distribution of principals' leadership style from leader perspective

Range of scores	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
P80 and above	Excellent	1	5
P66-P79	Good	5	25
P35-P65	Average	8	40
P21-P34	Poor	3	15
P20 and below	Very poor	3	15

Table 3: Percentage distribution of different dimensions of principals' leadership style from leader perspective

Dimension	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Transformational	Excellent	1	5
	Good	4	20
	Average	10	50
	Poor	3	15
	Very poor	2	10
Transactional	Excellent	-	0
	Good	3	15
	Average	9	45
	Poor	6	30
	Very poor	2	10
Non-transactional	Excellent	-	0
	Good	1	5
	Average	7	35
	Poor	9	45
	Very poor	3	15

Table 4: Comparison of leadership styles between provincialised and private school principals

<i>Sample group</i>	<i>Sample size (N)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Provincialised	10	105.29	12.71	2.30 (S)
Private	10	118.66	7.89	

ence in leadership styles between principals of provincialised and private secondary schools. Private school principals demonstrated a higher mean score, suggesting a relatively more effective or distinct leadership style compared to their counterparts in provincialized schools.

Interpretation

From Table 5, it has been observed that the obtained *t*-value of 1.80 does not exceed the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance (*df* = 18). Therefore, the result is not statistically significant, indicating no meaningful difference in leadership styles between male and female secondary school principals in the study area.

Interpretation

From Table 6, it has been observed that the computed *t*-value of 2.58 surpasses the critical value at the 0.05 significance level (*df* = 18), indicating a statistically significant difference in leadership styles based on school location. Principals of rural schools exhibited higher mean leadership scores compared to their urban counterparts, suggesting notable contextual differences in leadership practices across geographical settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reaffirm the pivotal role of principals' leadership styles in shaping

the academic climate, organisational culture, and overall effectiveness of secondary schools in the Greater Guwahati area. Consistent with earlier research (Akomolafe 2012; Babatunde 2014; Ogundele et al. 2015), the present analysis underscores that effective leadership is not merely an administrative function but a multifaceted process involving decision-making, supervision, communication, and motivation. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, emerges as a determinant of both teacher commitment and student performance.

Transformational leadership continues to dominate as a critical style in educational institutions, aligning with the conclusions of Munir and Khalil (2016) and Saima et al. (2025), who emphasised its potential to foster innovation, professional growth, and a positive school climate. The emphasis on inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration makes this approach particularly relevant in contexts where teacher motivation and institutional development are pressing concerns. However, the tendency of many principals to cluster around average levels of transformational practice, as echoed in the works of Gogoi (2018) and Ajmi (2024), raises important questions regarding leadership training and professional development. This suggests that while principals are aware of transformational practices, their application remains inconsistent and in need of targeted reinforcement.

Table 5: Comparison of leadership styles by gender

<i>Sample group</i>	<i>Sample size (N)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Male	12	103.54	11.63	1.80 (NS)
Female	8	112.57	8.26	

Table 6: Comparison of leadership styles by location

<i>Sample group</i>	<i>Sample size (N)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Urban	10	101.00	11.56	2.58 (S)
Rural	10	112.40	7.83	

Transactional leadership also emerged as significant, reinforcing findings by Parveen et al. (2022) and Almonawer et al. (2023), who observed that task-oriented practices, such as monitoring, rewards, and corrective supervision, retain their importance in maintaining discipline and performance. Yet, an overreliance on transactional approaches may hinder innovation and collaboration. Similarly, the limited role of laissez-faire leadership, as noted in the studies of Ekpemogu et al. (2023), suggests that non-interventionist practices fail to contribute meaningfully to school improvement and may even undermine teacher productivity.

The comparative insights from this study indicate that private school principals tend to exhibit more effective leadership practices than their provincialised counterparts. This pattern resonates with international evidence (Ibrahim et al. 2020; Mbua 2023) suggesting that institutional context, resource availability, and accountability structures strongly shape leadership performance. Furthermore, location-based differences, with rural principals showing relatively higher leadership effectiveness, highlight the contextual influences on leadership behaviour.

Gender-based comparisons, however, reveal no meaningful differences, corroborating the findings of Rashid et al. (2021) and Osagie (2024), which indicate that leadership effectiveness is more dependent on professional competence and institutional culture than on gender. This challenges earlier assumptions of inherent gendered differences in leadership and underscores the universality of effective leadership traits across male and female principals.

Critically, the literature demonstrates that no single leadership style can be regarded as universally effective. Rather, the effectiveness of leadership depends on a context-specific blend of transformational, transactional, and democratic practices (Noureen et al. 2020; Azubuike 2024). This study reinforces this perspective by illustrating that while transformational leadership remains the most influential, transactional strategies provide structure and accountability, and democratic approaches foster inclusivity and teacher engagement. The evidence, therefore, points to the need for professional development programs that equip principals with adaptive leadership capacities, enabling them to tailor their

practices to the demands of their institutional environment.

In sum, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership by highlighting that while transformational leadership is central to driving progress, its inconsistent implementation, particularly in provincialised schools, signals an urgent need for capacity-building initiatives. Leadership development programs focusing on context-sensitive, participatory, and adaptive approaches could enhance principals' effectiveness, thereby strengthening institutional performance. These findings resonate with global trends in educational leadership research and underscore the necessity of preparing school leaders to meet the dynamic challenges of contemporary secondary education.

CONCLUSION

Effective leadership is central to the success of educational institutions, as it directly influences school climate, teacher motivation, and student outcomes. A true leader inspires institutional members to strive toward shared goals while fostering a supportive and positive work environment. This study investigated that the overall leadership style of secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati area is moderate, with transformational leadership being more dominant and effective than transactional or non-transactional approaches. The data indicated that while a small proportion of principals demonstrated excellent leadership, a significant number exhibited average to poor performance, especially in transactional and non-transactional dimensions. Private school principals showed significantly higher leadership effectiveness compared to their provincialised counterparts, highlighting potential differences in organisational structure, accountability, or stakeholder expectations. However, gender did not significantly influence leadership styles. In contrast, school location emerged as a significant factor, with rural principals exhibiting stronger leadership characteristics than their urban peers, possibly due to localised community engagement and administrative autonomy. The findings underscore the need for context-specific leadership development programs focusing on transformational practices. A collaborative effort in-

volving policymakers, educators, and training institutions is essential to build leadership capacity and foster educational excellence across all school types and locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made to enhance the leadership effectiveness of secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati area. The selection of principals should prioritise candidates with proven leadership training, administrative competence, and relevant professional experience. Emphasis must be placed on upholding ethical standards, fostering professional integrity, and cultivating strong interpersonal relationships with teaching and non-teaching staff. Effective planning, organisation of academic and co-curricular activities, and participatory decision-making are essential. Regular in-service training, professional development programs, seminars, and refresher courses should be institutionalised to build leadership capacity. Additionally, recognising and rewarding outstanding leadership practices can serve as a motivating factor for sustained excellence.

Future research may focus on examining principals' administrative and managerial roles across different levels of education, including aspects such as supervision, financial management, and organisational climate. Studies may also explore the impact of leadership styles on variables such as school discipline, student academic achievement, teacher effectiveness, institutional work culture, record management, and overall school performance. These areas offer significant potential for expanding the understanding of effective educational leadership.

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