

HEADS' LEADERSHIP STYLES AND TEACHERS' STRESS MANAGEMENT AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17003889>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
29 May, 2025	09 July, 2025	09 August, 2025	30 August, 2025

ABSTRACT

the teaching staff and emotion management in relation to the mediating effect of emotion intelligence. Three hundred and ninety-six secondary school teachers of District Gujrat were sampled using standardized questionnaires. Results of the correlation and regression analysis showed that both transactional and transformational leadership styles had a significant positive impact on stress management by teachers. Transformational leadership and emotional intelligence were also important predictors, which confirms the importance of conducive leadership and personal qualities in alleviating stress. In addition, there was partial mediation of transformational leadership and stress management by emotional intelligence implying that emotional intelligence will also mediate this association. Emotional intelligence, under transactional leadership, had a more complex, negative mediating effect which shows that the transactional style of leadership lessens the use of personal emotional management since it is highly structured and reward oriented. The results highlight the importance of cultivating both beneficial leadership behaviours and the emotional intelligence of teachers, to enhance stress coping abilities.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Stress Management, Mediation, Secondary School Teachers

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is one of the most challenging careers, which demand not only knowledge on the subject, but also requires extreme emotional and psychological stability. The secondary level teachers also tend to work under heavy demands, classroom management, administrative forces, and societal expectations all adding up to an increased stress level (Kyriacou, 2023). Stress leads to adverse consequences on the well-being of a teacher, quality of instruction, and the learning of students in the long-term when it is not mitigated. It is thus important to research and identify the factors that affect how teachers manage their stress.

The leadership of schools is instrumental in creating experiences affecting the teachers professionally. Transformational and transactional styles of

leadership are the most-researched approaches to leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The findings of the research in the years 2023 suggest that motivation, job satisfaction, and low levels of burnout by teachers are strongly linked to transformational leadership in the light of its concern about the vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support (Sun et al., 2023). The latter one is contingent rewards, monitoring and corrective actions, whereas the transactional leadership is based on them. On the one hand, it promotes accountability and short-term performance, but on the other hand, it might not have a direct impact on fostering resilience in teachers and/or reducing stress (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Besides leadership, the ability to handle stress is dependent on the internal psychological resources of teachers especially emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence (defined as the capacity of identifying, grasping, and managing emotions in oneself and others) allows teachers to succinctly respond to the professional demands. These teachers with stronger EI will be able to keep healthy relationships, control stress reactions, and prevent burnout as well (Li and Zhang, 2024).

There is also an emerging body of evidence that demonstrates EI might be a mediator between leadership and teacher well-being. Transformational leaders are able to persuade care, empathetic and supportive environment that can encourage the EI capability generation in teachers and eventually enhance resilience in teachers when they handle stress (Zhou et al., 2022). In their turn, transactional leadership and its emphasis on rules and performance are likely to make a less positive contribution to the development of an EI and, thus, stress management (Cote, 2014).

Although the importance of leadership and stress management in education has become a focus of attention, few of the studies have been conducted with this very concern on the mediating role of emotional intelligence of teachers in this correlation specifically in the secondary schools. This study will fill this gap as it will examine the relationship between transformational and transactional styles of leadership and their impact on stress levels of the teachers mediated through emotional intelligence.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching profession at the secondary school level has been characterized by trauma: a product of academic pressure, classroom demands, administrative demands and accountability pressures. Chronic stress has an impact on teaching and learning outcomes in terms of achieving mental health and effective instruction among teachers. The amount of leadership styles impacts on the ability of teachers to cope with stress, but it is not apparent how the transformational and transactional leadership contributes to stress management. Emotional intelligence can also be necessary in enabling teachers to manage their feelings as well as handling the challenges; however, the mediating role of emotional intelligence between styles of leadership management of stress has not been fully explored. This elongation reveals the necessity to analyze the interaction between leadership practices

and emotional intelligence regarding their impact on stress management among teachers on secondary school levels.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership style of heads and teachers' stress management at the secondary level.
2. To examine the relationship between transactional leadership style of heads and teachers' stress management at the secondary level.
3. To explore the mediating role of teachers' emotional intelligence in the relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' stress management.
4. To explore the mediating role of teachers' emotional intelligence in the relationship between transactional leadership and teachers' stress management.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between heads' transformational leadership style and teachers' stress management at the secondary level?
2. What is the relationship between heads' transactional leadership style and teachers' stress management at the secondary level?
3. Does teachers' emotional intelligence mediate the relationship between heads' transformational leadership style and teachers' stress management?
4. Does teachers' emotional intelligence mediate the relationship between heads' transactional leadership style and teachers' stress management?

Literature Review

School leadership is one of the essential elements of the teacher performance, organizational atmosphere, and student performance. The transformational and transactional forms of leadership are also among the best-known and most widely studied of all leadership forms, which is why they are also important concepts in the context of education (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership is a place of inspiration, intellectual stimulus, individualized consideration and idealized influence. At school level, transformational leaders focus on isolating the teachers by communicating visions, engendering trust and triggering creativity in them (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In contrast, transactional leadership is based on the reward and punishment mechanisms, non-

disclosure of tasks to others, and the observance of the set rules (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). The disadvantage of transactional heads in schools is that they hold people accountable and drive performance, but do not pay sufficient attention to the psychological or emotional needs of teachers (Tian et al., 2022).

The study shows that, as a style, both are applicable in school functioning only that transformational leadership is mostly effective in minimizing the stress levels in school and supporting well-being among teachers (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Careers in teaching are also known to be among the most stressful careers especially in the secondary schools where teachers are expected to combat the ever-growing accountability, student needs and burden due to administration. A lot of stress is also associated with burnout, absenteeism, decreased teaching effectiveness, and low student achievement (Greenier et al., 2021).

Previous research has demonstrated that school leadership is an important factor in influencing the experience of teachers with stress. Supportive leadership helps to decrease stress levels through provision of emotional support, professional development and collaboration. In comparison, there is a possibility of heightened stresses due to entrenched transactional strategies in situations where accountability matters outweigh teacher agency (Aydin et al., 2013).

In their book, Salovey and Sluyter (1997) refer to EI as one of the abilities to recognize, see and control emotions in other individuals and oneself. EI is an essential tool in classroom management, personal relationships with others, and personal stress to the teachers.

Studies show that more EI teachers are less stressed, more satisfied with their jobs, and tend to better-adapt to cope with stress (Hou et al., 2025). EI helps a teacher control emotional response, act resilient in challenging classroom environments and to build positive classrooms (Cote, 2014).

As of recent research, leaderships styles have not only had direct impact on teacher stresses but also indirectly directly through the emotional intelligence of the teachers. Transformational leaders will establish better trust, autonomy, and professional development, which could increase EI among teachers, who will become more capable of coping with stress (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017). When EI develops under transactional leadership, on the other hand, the inevitability of

close supervision and outside gratification can provide insufficient grounds to develop EI and, consequently, the protection against stress induced by the leadership (Zhang et al., 2023).

Although there is theoretical connection between EI and leadership and between EI and teacher stress, there is a dearth of empirical studies that explore the mediatory relationship between leadership, EI and stress in teachers. The major gap in the literature is that little research has examined a direct relationship between leadership and stress or EI and stress in the learning environment (Li et al., 2023).

Research Methodology

The research design used was the correlational research design which was a quantitative research study. Such a design is good in studying the connections between the leadership styles (transformational, transactional), teachers stress management, and the moderating influence of the teacher's emotional intelligence. The research study sample included secondary school teachers under the public sector in the District Gujrat of province Punjab. A representative sample of 450 teachers was selected through random sampling.

Instrumentation

The research used three home-grown questionnaires; which were developed by referring to the applicable theoretical dissemination and validated tools to guarantee the synchronization to the focus areas of the study. Leadership Styles Scale (LSS): LSS was designed, based on MLQ-5X, developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). It used a 2-dimensional measure of heads leadership behaviors in the management of secondary schools consisting of transformational and transactional scales. Teacher Stress Management Scale (TSMS): This is a self-administered scale that was built upon the literature on occupational stress and stress management in teaching. It measured how much teachers use low, moderate, and high stress management strategies when coping with pressures at the workplace. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS): The instrument was developed based on the Wong and Law (2002) Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) and it was used to measure the emotional intelligence of teachers. Each of these three tools consisted of a five-point Likert format. Validity of the content was guaranteed by expert review, and a pilot study has been done before the data was collected. Reliability analysis showed results that

were satisfactory, with Cronbach alpha values of all the three instruments higher than the recommended 0.70 alpha.

Data Analysis

Data analyzed by use of SPSS The following analysis was used: Descriptive statistics: Mean, standard

deviation, frequencies and percentages, Pearson correlation: To test relationship between variables and Multiple regression analysis: To test predictive value of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on stress management.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Between Transformational Leadership and Teachers' Stress Management (N = 396)

Variable	M	SD	R	p
Transformational Leadership	3.10	0.38	—	—
Stress Management	3.34	0.50	.71**	.000

The descriptive statistics indicated that heads transformational leadership was rated as a moderate level ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.38$) whereas stress management among teachers was lacking any leanings towards the extremes ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.50$). The result in the correlation analysis shows that there is a strong, positive, and significant relationship between transformational leadership and stress management among the teachers, $r = .71$, $p < .001$. This implies that teachers in the secondary schools are prone to adopt good stress management behaviors in the event heads of secondary schools

engage in transformational leadership behaviors, like inspiring a shared vision, teacher motivation and professional development. As practical recommendations, these findings imply that transformational leadership can be valuable in mitigating the psychological health of teachers. Principals who offer their encouragement, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention, can contribute to teachers who can better handle the demands made on them in terms of workload, classroom control, and professional demands.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Transactional Leadership and Teachers' Stress Management (N = 396)

Variable	M	SD	R	p-value
Transactional Leadership	3.20	0.59	—	—
Stress Management	3.34	0.50	.953**	.000

As presented in Table 2, there is a high positive correlation between transactional leadership and stress management of teachers, $r = .953$, $p < .001$. This relationship implies that the higher the level of transactional leadership style by heads, the greater the performance of stress management among the teachers. The high value of the correlation coefficient (near 1.0) indicates that a linear relationship can be applied meaning that transactional leadership is a huge determinant in the prediction of the stress management among teachers. Transactional leadership and stress

management means scores also confirm this trend as teachers reported that they were of appreciable degree of both transactional leadership ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.59$) and stress management ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.50$). Combined, these results suggest that the transactional leadership style, whereby the heads of the schools have defined expectations, rewards, and corrective measures, would create a better coping method in teachers in dealing with the stress in their profession.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of Transformational Leadership and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Teachers' Stress Management (N = 396)

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p
Transformational Leadership	0.562	0.080	.430	6.99	.000
Emotional Intelligence	0.312	0.057	.335	5.46	.000

Model Summary: $R = .733$, $R^2 = .537$, Adjusted $R^2 = .535$, $F(2, 393) = 227.82$, $p < .001$

The regression results indicated that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence were significant predictors of stress management among teachers, $F(2, 393) = 227.82$, $p < .001$ and with the combined variance entertained 53.7 percent of the variance, $F(393) = .537$. Transformational leadership showed itself as the better predictor ($\beta = .430$, $p = .000$) and this shows that when teachers practiced supportive and visionary leaders, they were able to manage stress

significantly. Emotional intelligence also produced a significant positive effect ($\beta = .335$, $p = .000$), and indicated that teachers who have a higher emotional regulation and interpersonal skills are also better placed to handle stressors. All in all, these results indicate that the personal emotional competencies of the teachers are significant but leadership in transformation does support development of effective stress management in teachers to a somewhat larger extent.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Transactional Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Predicting Stress Management (N = 396)

Predictor	B	SE B	B	t	p
Transactional Leadership	0.921	0.020	1.089	46.026	.000
Emotional Intelligence	-0.159	0.022	-0.171	-7.245	.000

Model Summary: $R = .958$, $R^2 = .919$, Adjusted $R^2 = .918$, $F(2, 393) = 2214.88$, $p < .001$

The results of the regression revealed that transactional leadership and emotional intelligence contributed to a significantly vigorous estimate of stress management among teachers, explaining nearly 91.9 percent of the variability ($R^2 = .919$, Adj $R^2 = .918$) and ($F(2, 393) = 2214.88$, $p < .001$). Transitional leadership became the most potent predictor ($\beta = 1.089$, $p < .001$), which means that planned, rule-based, and reward-oriented leadership are the most effective in helping teachers to withstand the strain of stress at work. On the other hand, and surprisingly, the EI failed to play any positive role in combination with highly directive transactional leadership ($\beta = -0.171$, $p < .001$), indicating that during this type of merger, higher EI may make teachers choose alternative ways to cope with stress, such as increased awareness to be able to

identify stressors, perceive them negatively, or apply less leadership-oriented coping styles. The inverse relationship is not to diminish the significance of emotional intelligence but rather underlines its subtle nature in the presence of leadership structures which already form a central role as stress management determinants. Together these results demonstrate that although both variables have important impacts on the stress management process, transactional leadership far and above describes the coping capabilities of the teachers with a moderate but intricate moderating effect of emotional intelligence.

Conclusions

The results illustrate that not only transformational but also transactional leadership competence helps teachers deal with stress considerably, yet in different extents and ways. Transformational

leadership style that is unique to inspirational, motivational and personalized assistance was loosely aligned with the stress management performance of teachers, as well as emotional intelligence which contributed to more than 50 percent of the variance in coping skills jointly. Transactional leadership correlations excelled all others, reporting a strong relationship with stress management (>90%), and being the strongest predictor of teachers coping capacity when combined with emotional intelligence. Indicatively, emotional intelligence emerged to be a positive factor with transformational leadership but a negative factor with transactional leadership, which implies that self-sufficient teachers with high emotional quotient may deal effectively when leadership is highly authoritarian. Comprehensively, these findings affirm that, although transactional leadership and transformational leadership play vital roles, transactional leadership has the most direct effect on how teachers manage stress, whereas transformational leadership, as well as emotional intelligence, have supplementary and more subtle effects in enhancing the psychological resilience of teachers.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that, whereas transformational leadership style is relevant to stress management of teachers it works through one mechanism whereas transactional leadership style works in other mechanism. Leading by example, creating a vision, giving motivation and personal support has also been recurrently related to the well-being of the teachers due to the contribution of transformational leadership to favorable school climates and the decrease in work stress among the occupational parameters (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Khan et al., 2021). Transformational leaders help teachers develop resilience and healthier coping strategies by inspiring trust, empowering the professional development, and encouraging them to develop. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, which is based on formulation of expectations, enough rewarded and correction, proved to be a powerful predictor of how the teacher copes with stress. This observation is consistent with findings elsewhere that transactional styles may be more helpful to teachers in offering them structure and continuity, which in turn eliminate the uncertainty and stress among teachers in challenging school environments

(Podsakoff et al., 1990; Al Khajeh, 2018). Interestingly, it was also found out that EI interacts in different ways between leadership styles. Although emotional intelligence tends to increase the ability of teachers in self-regulation and adapting to adversities (Mayer et al., 2016), its impact in a context of transactional leadership is more complicated, taking on the complexion of deploying self-regulation and leadership-based coping options simultaneously. All in all, these findings can indicate that both of these leadership styles when combined with the use of emotional intelligence can lead to a positive psychological well-being of teachers because, on the one hand, transformational leadership boosts intrinsic motivation and long-term resilience of the teachers and, on the other hand, transactional leadership assures them of order and stability in their every-day professional activity.

Recommendations

School heads have to be educated on practices of transformational leadership, like motivating teachers, supporting professional growth, and offering individualized support because these are the practices that will decrease stress and support teachers' well-being. Considering that transactional leadership ensures structure and ensure clear expectations, nevertheless, they should be combined with other approaches (transformational ones) so that teachers could also feel a sense of stability and inspiration in their professional work. Professional development sessions and workshops will focus on building emotional intelligence in teachers to enable them to cope with their emotional life; control their emotions, become resilient and develop healthy coping mechanisms against workplace stress. To ensure that teachers can flourish, regardless of the leadership style, educational policymakers and administrators should develop conducive systems (like mentorship, peer learning, and stress management initiatives) that allow teachers to feel empowered.

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