



Exploring the Influence of Principals' Leadership Styles on Burnout among K-12 Public School Educators in South Texas

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between principals' leadership styles and dimensions of burnout among K-12 public school educators in South Texas. A total of 268 participants were recruited from K-12 schools using a snowball convenience sampling method. Participants completed three surveys: a demographic survey, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS). The MLQ assessed three facets of leadership style—Transformational, Transactional, and Passive Avoidant—while the MBI-GS measured burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the data. The results revealed a significant relationship between perceived principals' leadership styles and teachers' burnout among K-12 public school educators in South Texas. Specifically, Transformational Leadership emerged as a strong predictor for Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. Conversely, Transactional Leadership exhibited a negative relationship with Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. These findings provide valuable insights into the role of principals' leadership styles in mitigating or exacerbating burnout among K-12 educators, highlighting the importance of fostering Transformational leadership behaviors in educational leadership practices.

Keywords: Full Range Leadership; Burnout; Public School Educators; South Texas

1 Introduction

This study focuses on the Full Range Model of Leadership by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio. The Full Range Leadership model focuses on three styles of Leadership: Transformational, Transactional, and Passive Avoidant Leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Since its development, there have been countless amounts of studies exploring this leadership style. However, few studies have examined leadership styles concerning Burnout in South Texas educators.

Organizations today are evolving and have caused a need for leaders to involve followers in day-to-day activities to provide a vision to inspire and motivate others (Freidman, 2005). A leader's approach can influence a follower's willingness to apply more effort, job satisfaction, and productivity (Burns 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). The teacher workforce is affected by teacher burnout (Chang, 2009). The ensuing teacher shortage has not only resulted in a staffing issue in schools, but also high turnover rates have been lowering the quality of instruction in the classrooms (Chang, 2009).

The literature regarding Leadership and Burnout consistently finds a significant negative effect between Transformational Leadership and Burnout (Harms et al., 2017; Bass et al., 2016; Tafvelin et al., 2019; Broome et al., 2009).

According to literature on Burnout, several of the control variables in this study influence teacher Burnout. Research on Gender and

Burnout had mixed results (Purvanova & Muros, 2010; Aguayo et al., 2017; Yorulmaz & Altinkurt, 2018). In a meta-analysis conducted women had higher overall Burnout (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). While other meta-analyses revealed females experienced lower levels of Emotional Exhaustion than males and males had higher levels of Depersonalization and reduced Personal Accomplishment than females (Aguayo et al., 2017; Yorulmaz & Altinkurt, 2018).

Purvanova and Muros (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on 409 effect sizes from 183 studies that examined differences in Burnout and Gender. The effect size showed women had higher overall burnout than men ($k = 26$, $N = 9,563$, $d = .18$, $p < .01$). Results revealed that women experienced slightly more levels of Emotional Exhaustion than men ($k = 199$, $N = 77,656$, $d = .10$, $p < .01$), while men experience somewhat more Depersonalization than women ($k = 184$, $N = 70,431$, $d = -.19$, $p < .01$).

Aguayo et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between Burnout and Gender. The study revealed that females experienced lower levels of Emotional Exhaustion than males ($k = 31$, $N = 19,655$, $d = -.03$). It was also discovered that males had higher levels of Depersonalization ($k = 25$, $N = 19,655$, $d = .03$) and reduced Personal Accomplishment ($k = 21$, $N = 19,655$, $d = .01$) than females.

Yorulmaz and Altinkurt (2018) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between Burnout and Gender. The study revealed females experienced higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion than

males ($k = 100, N = 29,094, d = .068$). Males had higher levels of Depersonalization ($k = 99, N = 28,481, d = -.074$) and reduced Personal Accomplishment than females ($k = 98, N = 28,337, d = -.016$).

Research has found mixed results between Age and Burnout (Brewer & Shapard, 2004; Aguayo et al., 2017; Brewer & Shapard, 2004; Aguayo et al., 2017). With one meta-analysis stating that older individuals rated less on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and more on reduced Personal Accomplishment (Aguayo et al., 2017). Research has found a negative correlation between Tenure and Burnout (Brewer & Shapard, 2004). Brewer and Shapard meta-analyzed 20 studies to examine the relationship between experience in a field and Burnout. The research found a significant negative correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and participant's Tenure ($k = 20, N = 3,941, \rho = -.09, r = -.05, p < .05$). Research has found no significant results when it came to Educational Attainment and Burnout (Lee & Ji, 2018). Lee and Ji conducted a cross-sectional study in which they administered the *Professional Quality of Life Scale* to assess Burnout in 165 participants. Twenty-one (12.7%) of the participants had earned a diploma, 138 (83.6%) had earned a bachelor's degree, and 6 (3.6%) had earned a master's degree. The results of the study revealed that Burnout did not significantly differ according to Educational Attainment.

2 Methods

The participants sampled in the study included K-12 public school educators in South Texas. Teachers were asked to rate their principal's leadership style, and self-rate their levels of Burnout. The data collected consisted of a convenience sample. An online survey was distributed through personal and professional networks via social media and Outlook email. The participants were provided a survey link, which included a demographic questionnaire, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x)* and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS)*. Individuals who were between 20 to 80 years of age, working among K-12 public schools were eligible to participate. A consent form was prompted at the beginning of the survey asking the participant for their consent to participate in the study. This study utilized data collected from 268 participants who completed Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (*MLQ-5x*), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (*MBI-GS*). Participants also reported their Gender, Age, Tenure, and Educational Attainment.

The *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5x (MLQ-5x)* was administered to measure the levels of Transformational, Transactional, and Passive Avoidant Leadership in the respondent. The *MLQ* is a psychological inventory consisting of 36 items pertaining to leadership styles. The *Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS)* was administered to measure levels of three dimensions of Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.

All data collected for this study was transported into SPSS version 26. A multiple regression analysis was used to find whether independent variables: Transformational, Transactional, or Passive Avoidant Leadership predicted Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment, beyond the impact of the control variables.

Null Hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between Leadership Style (Transformational, Transactional and Passive Avoidant Leadership) and Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion) as perceived by the teacher when controlling for Gender, Age, Tenure, and Educational Attainment.

H₀₂: There is no relationship between Leadership Style (Transformational, Transactional and Passive Avoidant Leadership) and Burnout (Depersonalization) as perceived by the teacher when controlling for Gender, Age, Tenure, and Educational Attainment.

H₀₃: There is no relationship Leadership Style (Transformational, Transactional and Passive Avoidant Leadership) and Burnout (Personal Accomplishment) as perceived by the teacher when controlling for Gender, Age, Tenure, and Educational Attainment.

3 Results

The correlation coefficients between the independent and dependent variables used in this study are represented in the correlation matrix illustrated below in Table 1. Findings for the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* for the subscales of the Full Range Leadership Model. Intercorrelations were found between Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership ($r = .735, p < .01$). Transformational Leadership and Passive Avoidant Leadership ($r = -.445, p < .01$). Transactional and Passive Avoidant ($r = -.145, p < .05$).

Findings between the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Transformational) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Personal Accomplishment) ($r = .342, p < .01$). Findings between the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Transformational) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Depersonalization) ($r = -.582, p < .01$). Findings were also found between the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Transformational) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Emotional Exhaustion) ($r = .515, p < .01$). Findings between the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Transactional) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Personal Accomplishment) ($r = .164, p < .01$), Depersonalization had a correlation ($r = -.303, p < .01$), and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = -.333, p < .01$). Findings between the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Passive Avoidant) and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Personal Accomplishment) ($r = -.243, p < .01$), Depersonalization correlation ($r = .452, p < .01$), and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = .282, p < .01$).

Findings for the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* among the subscales of burnout had intercorrelations between Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization ($r = .745, p < .01$). Emotional Exhaustion was also correlated with Personal Accomplishment ($r = -.232, p < .01$). Depersonalization was correlated with Personal Accomplishment ($r = -.315, p < .01$).

Age had a strong positive correlation with Tenure ($r = .657, p < .01$). Age had a weak negative correlation with Depersonalization ($r = -.158, p < .01$), and a weak negative correlation with Emotional Exhaustion ($r = -.172, p < .01$).

3.1 Table 1 Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Reliability

| Leadership Style | MLQ-5x | García, 2024 |
|------------------|--------|--------------|
| Transformational | .94 | .97 |
| Transactional | .62 | .72 |
| Passive Avoidant | .78 | .89 |

3.2 Table 2 Maslach Burnout Inventory Reliability

| Burnout | MBI | García, 2024 |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------|
| Emotional Exhaustion | .90 | .96 |
| Depersonalization | .76 | .91 |
| Personal Accomplishment | .76 | .86 |

Table 3 provides the Pearson product-moment correlation to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variables (subscales of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), the dependent variables (subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory), and the control variables (demographic variables). Correlation coefficients ranged from +1 to -1, where a value closer to +1 or -1 indicated a stronger relationship, while values closer to 0 indicated a weaker relationship.

3.3 Table 3 Correlation Matrix of Continuous Variables

| | Tenure | Age | TF | TR | Passive | EE | D | Personal |
|------------------------------------|--------|-----|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| Tenure | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Age | .657** | 1 | | | | | | |
| Transformational (TF) | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Transactional (TR) | | | .735** | 1 | | | | |
| Passive Avoidant (Passive) | | | -.445** | -.145* | 1 | | | |
| Emotional Exhaustion (EE) | | | -.172** | -.515** | -.333** | .282** | 1 | |
| Depersonalization (D) | | | -.158** | -.582** | -.303** | .452** | .745** | 1 |
| Personal Accomplishment (Personal) | | | .342** | .164** | -.243** | -.232** | -.315** | 1 |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)
 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Weak | Moderate | Strong |
| .00 - .29 | .30 - .49 | .50 + |

Table 4 provides the results for multiple regressions run for the Burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.

3.4 Table 4 Summary of Results

| Variable | Emotional Exhaustion | Depersonalization | Personal Accomplishment |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| Age | $R^2 = .029$ $\beta = -.174$ | $R^2 = .025$ $\beta = -.170$ | |
| Gender | | | |
| Tenure | | | |
| Education | | | |
| Transformational | $\Delta R^2 = .266$ $\beta = -.516$ $r_p = -.524$ | $\Delta R^2 = .340$ $\beta = -.646$ $r_p = -.448$ | $R^2 = .117$ $\beta = .481$ |
| Transactional | | $\Delta R^2 = .018$ $\beta = .205$ $r_p = .173$ | $\Delta R^2 = .017$ $\beta = -.189$ $r_p = -.137$ |
| Passive Avoidant | | $\Delta R^2 = .047$ $\beta = .196$ $r_p = .217$ | |

These are significant predictors of Burnout. Age was a significant predictor of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. With regards to the independent variables: Transformational Leadership was found to be a predictor for all three facets of Burnout. Transactional Leadership was found to be a predictor for Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. Passive Avoidant was found to be a predictor for Depersonalization.

4 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of principal's leadership styles on the teachers' perception of their Burnout. The implications from the results of this study indicate that the principals' level of Transformational Leadership may influence the teachers' level of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. Principals may benefit from knowing that Transformational Leadership behaviors may impact teacher Burnout. In addition, it is implied that the principals' level of Transformational, Transactional, and Passive Avoidant leadership may influence the teachers' level of Depersonalization. Furthermore, it is implied that the principals' level of

Transformational and Transactional leadership may influence the teachers' level of Personal Accomplishment.

The demographic variable of Age was a significant predictor of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization; Gender, Tenure, and Educational Attainment was not a significant predictor of Burnout but rather principals' Leadership style was a strong predictor.

5 Limitations

However, this study did not come without limitations. In reviewing the descriptive statistics, the subscale Passive Avoidant had a floor effect and the subscales of Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment) all had ceiling effects, which may have underestimated their correlations. In addition, this study used a sample of convenience which included an online survey that was distributed through the researcher's personal and professional networks via social media and Outlook email. While a sample of convenience allows the researcher to generalize findings the results may not be generalized to the broader population. Furthermore, geographic location was an additional limitation of this study. The geographic location was limited to South Texas, specifically the Rio Grande Valley's K-12 public schools. While the data represents the sample, it is not a true reflection of all teachers or all school systems. Lastly, this study focused on how teachers perceived the Leadership styles of their principals and their self-rated Burnout; principals' self-ratings were not included.

6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers may wish to expand this study to include the Texas Education Agency to obtain a more comprehensive and accurate depiction of teachers who are employed in the state of Texas. This recommendation will allow the researcher to generalize findings to the population of teachers in Texas and get a larger sample size. An extension of this study is to include private schools to examine teachers who educate students with different socioeconomic backgrounds. This will allow the researcher to see if there is a difference between principals' Leadership styles and teachers' self-rated Burnout in private schools versus public schools. Researchers may also consider using teachers who are testing subjects and are assessed with the STAAR or AP exams. This will allow the researcher to see if there are different perceptions of their principals' Leadership styles and their self-rated Burnout versus teachers whose course subjects are not assessed by state exams.

7 Implications and Key Take Aways

The findings suggest several implications on leadership styles and practices. When it came to Transformational Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion. Principals perceived to demonstrate Transformational Leadership behaviors may ease teachers' Emotional Exhaustion by promoting the use of motivation, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation. Principals who understand the importance of Transformational Leadership reducing feelings of Emotional Exhaustion are more likely to foster a supportive and motivating work environment. Perceived Leadership styles and Depersonalization resulted in Transformational Leadership decreasing Depersonalization; however Transactional Leadership and Passive Avoidant

Leadership increased Depersonalization. Principals should emphasize the use of Transformational Leadership to alleviate feelings of detachment and impersonal responses among teachers. Perceived Leadership styles and Personal Accomplishment resulted in Transformational Leadership increasing teachers' sense of Personal Accomplishment, whereas Transactional Leadership decreased teachers' sense of Personal Accomplishment. Principals should utilize Transformational behaviors such as motivating, coaching, and mentoring to increase teachers' sense of achievement in their work, while Transactional Leadership may potentially have adverse effects on teachers' sense of Personal Accomplishment. When it came to Age the results revealed that older teachers reported lower levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. Principals should acknowledge older teacher's years of experience and have them mentor and collaborate with younger teachers to potentially decrease levels of Burnout.

Key Take Aways

- Principals' Leadership styles had a role in how teachers experienced Burnout
- Teachers' experience of Burnout may be reduced by developing principal's Transformational Leadership skills
- Gender, Tenure, and Educational Attainment were not significant predictors of Burnout

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