

Investigating the Impact of Leadership Styles on Educational Management Practices in Johor Bahru, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is pivotal in influencing educational management practices, especially in intricate and diverse educational systems like Malaysia. This study examines how transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles affect educational management in Malaysia, focusing on strategic planning, resource management, staff development, the promotion of student-centered approaches, and the fostering of communication and collaboration. A mixed-methods research approach was employed to obtain comprehensive, and contextually rich insights. Structured questionnaires gathered quantitative data from 156 secondary school teachers in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with 15 teachers added to the depth and richness of quantitative findings. The analysis seamlessly integrated descriptive and inferential statistics with a thematic examination of the qualitative data. The findings show that transformational leadership has the strongest and most consistent positive effect on educational management, particularly in encouraging inclusive decision-making, efficient use of resources, motivating staff, and creating supportive learning environments. Servant leadership was found to significantly improve relational dimensions of management, such as trust, collaboration, and student-centered practices. Conversely, transactional leadership exhibited a more restricted and contextually contingent effect, predominantly linked to compliance-oriented management results. This study sheds light on leadership effectiveness in Malaysian secondary schools, highlighting the importance of adaptable, values-based leadership approaches. The findings offer practical guidance for policymakers, leadership training groups, and school administrators looking to improve management practices and boost institutional performance in line with national education reform goals.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Educational Management Practices, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has long been recognized as a crucial element in creating effective and sustainable schools. These days, school leaders do much more than handle administrative tasks as they're strategic thinkers, instructional coaches, and change-makers who can tackle complex organizational and social challenges. Their leadership guides the vision, drives policy, shapes the school's culture, and plays a major role in keeping the whole system running smoothly. According to Nair et al. (2024) school principals should exhibit effective leadership style by helping teachers to be effective educators.

Global studies show that the leadership style of educational leaders greatly influences how smoothly organizations operate, how well staff perform, and how successful students become. The way leaders make decisions, handle resources, support growth, and address challenges shapes the entire organization. With growing demands for accountability and quality, strong and effective leadership is now a top priority for both policymakers and professionals in the education sector.

Education is central to driving national growth and fostering unity in Malaysia. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025) points to strong leadership as a key factor in transforming the system, stressing the importance of capable leaders who can turn policy goals into practical, impactful actions within institutions. Malaysian educational leaders operate within a highly structured and centralized system while simultaneously being expected to demonstrate flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness to local school contexts. These conflicting demands exert considerable pressure on leadership efficacy and educational management practices.

In Malaysian educational institutions, leadership often combines various styles rather than adhering to a single approach. Transformational leadership brings vision, inspiration, and sparks organizational change; transactional leadership keeps things structured, enforces rules, and monitors performance; while servant leadership focuses on ethics, teamwork, and caring for the well-being of staff. Each style can influence how effective educational management is in different ways, but there's still little research showing how strongly these styles predict management success in the Malaysian context.

This study explores how various leadership styles affect the management of educational institutions in Malaysia. Using a quantitative approach, it aims to offer clear evidence on how transformational, transactional, and servant leadership play a role in achieving effective management. The results could be valuable for enhancing leadership training, guiding policy decisions, and supporting strategies based on solid evidence.

Problem Statement

Efficient and effective educational management is all about setting clear goals, putting policies into practice, and enhancing the overall learning experience. Good leadership means creating smart strategies, making the best use of resources, supporting staff growth, putting students first, and keeping communication open and clear. (Kin & Kareem, 2019). Unfortunately, many schools face challenges like poor management, uneven leadership, and inconsistent policy enforcement.

In the Malaysian education system, leadership development has been prioritized through various initiatives and training programs. Ahmad Johari et al. (2023) stressed that the style of leadership has a positive impact on the schools. However there's still a lack of clear evidence on which leadership styles best predict how effective educational management can be. Most research in Malaysia has looked at simple links between leadership and things like job satisfaction, motivation, or organizational commitment. While these factors matter, they don't fully reflect how well leadership supports the essential functions of managing education.

In Malaysia, leadership research has mostly focused on transformational leadership, while transactional and servant leadership styles have received much less attention. Zooming in too much can overlook the complexity of Malaysian educational institutions, where admin work, following policies, and building relationships all play a role. This can cause leaders to lean on practice without solid evidence that they actually boost management effectiveness.

Without clear evidence linking certain leadership styles to effective educational management, leadership development programs risk being too generic and failing to address actual needs. Policymakers and practitioners require empirical guidance to support leadership practices that enhance institutional performance and align national educational reform goals. This study looks into how various leadership styles influence the effectiveness of managing educational institutions in Malaysia.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What leadership styles are practiced by educational leaders in secondary schools?
2. Is there a significant relationship between leadership styles and educational management effectiveness?

3. To what extent do leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and servant leadership) predict educational management effectiveness?
4. How do teachers perceive the influence of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles on educational management effectiveness?

This study is noteworthy for several reasons. On the theoretical side, it broadens leadership research by framing leadership styles as indicators of educational management effectiveness, rather than focusing solely on attitudes. On the practical side, it offers valuable, data-driven insights into how leadership functions in Malaysian educational institutions. The findings offer practical guidance for leadership development programs, policymaking, and efforts to strengthen institutions. By connecting leadership theory with real-world management practices, this study supports the growth of effective educational leadership in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well established that leadership in educational organizations is a key factor that largely dictates the effectiveness of schools, organizational culture, and quality of management practices. Modern education is becoming more sophisticated, and school administrators need to shift past the old hierarchical leadership model towards a more collaborative and distributed one. The recent scholarship highlights the increased importance of the leadership practices implemented at various levels of school management, such as principals, senior leadership teams, and middle leadership teams (Bento, 2023; Tindall-Ford and Lipscombe, 2025). This change is an indication of a realization that leadership is not the role of the principal only, but a shared organizational role which influences the nature of teaching, staff cooperation, and organizational betterment.

Simultaneously, transformational, transactional, servant, and values-based leadership in educational management practices and organizational performance (Agullana, 2026). These leadership styles are often associated with teacher motivation, professional commitment, quality of decisions, and school performance (Algohani & Mydin, 2022). Although there is a rising pool of research conducted within the international scene, there is a scarcity of empirical studies that have specifically investigated the Malaysian educational setting, and specifically the role of middle leadership teams. Thus, the focus of this literature review is on two main grounds, including theories of leadership in education and previous research on leadership styles and educational management practices, with a specific focus on secondary school administrators at all levels of leadership.

Theories Related to the Study

There has been an emergence in the analysis of leadership in educational organizations based on leadership styles, as opposed to formal roles or positions. According to recent scholarship, leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, are significant in determining management practices, professional relationships, and results within various schools' leadership levels, including the middle leadership teams (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Huber and Pruitt, 2024).

Heads of department and subject coordinators are in a central role between top management and teaching personnel, so their leadership styles are highly important in bringing vision to practice in schools (Zadok and Benoliel, 2023; Bryant and Walker, 2024). This paper has reviewed the three most applicable leadership styles to the current study and implications of these styles to the middle leadership team in learning institutions, as outlined in the following subsections.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The transformational theory of leadership focuses on how leaders can inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate followers with the view of accomplishing common objectives. Huber and Pruitt (2024) state that transformational leadership in schools encourages teacher commitment, professional development, and organizational change. Li (2024) and Nair et al. (2021) go further to clarify that transformational leadership

fosters innovation due to the promotion of reflective practice and shared responsibility among school administrators.

This theory is relevant in a learning context as shown by empirical evidence. The findings of Ahmad Johari et al. (2023) indicate that the style of leadership plays a significant role in the institutional performance of Malaysian learning institutions and, thus, transformational practices can contribute to the organizational performance to a higher degree. Nevertheless, researchers, like Bento (2023), criticize transformational leadership, pointing out that it puts much emphasis on senior leadership, which does not necessarily acknowledge the role of middle-level leadership teams. This weakness implies that the transformational theory should be expanded to collectivistic leadership practices in schools.

Transactional Leadership Theory

Structured roles, contingent rewards, monitoring, and corrective actions are all traits of transactional leadership that strive to ensure organizational stability and performance (Studies in Educational Evaluation, 2025). In the education institution, transactional leadership applies especially in the case of middle leaders who are tasked with the responsibility of enforcing policies, routine management, staff performance, and adherence to institutional standards.

According to recent studies, transactional leadership continues to provide a substantial predictor of administrative efficiency and teacher self-efficacy when implemented correctly and along with transformational practices (Studies in Educational Evaluation, 2025). Transactional leadership has been identified to complement the efficiency and accountability of organizations in the context of higher education and schools and is especially beneficial in the middle-management tier, where operational leadership is necessary (Hieng et al., 2024).

Although relevant, transactional leadership has been sidelined in educational leadership studies, which usually show a preference for inspirational leadership paradigms. This exclusion of the middle leadership team restricts the knowledge of balancing the transactional aspects of leadership with less transactional and more relational and developmental leadership styles in middle leadership teams. The research consequently requires more research into how middle leaders can exercise transactional leadership in their day-to-day school management.

Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leadership focuses on ethical accountability, empowerment, empathy, and service to others first before assuming power (Al-Azad et al., 2024). Servant leadership is consistent with the relational and mentoring functions that middle leaders tend to play in educational organizations and are supposed to support the professional development and well-being of teachers.

According to recent research, servant leadership has a positive impact on organizational trust, teamwork, and school culture (Hadijah, 2024). Servant leadership has been observed in the Malaysian educational environment to improve interpersonal relationships and a conducive working environment in the educational institutions (Al-Azad et al., 2024). These are important attributes, especially to middle leadership teams whose roles are between leadership expectations and classroom realities.

Despite this, servant leadership has not been fully investigated as it applies to the middle leadership team, where most researchers have focused on senior leaders or institutional leadership in general. This discrepancy indicates that there is a need to conduct specific research on the application of the principles of servant leadership by middle leaders and the way it can be used to manage educational institutions effectively.

Table 1: Leadership Theories and Key Limitations

Theory	Key Scholars (Recent Sources)	Core Focus	Relevance to School Administrators	Key Limitations Identified
Transformational Leadership Theory	Huber & Pruitt (2024); Alzoraiki et al. (2024); Zadok & Benoliel (2023); Li (2024)	Inspiring, motivating, and intellectually stimulating followers through vision and shared goals	Encourages teacher commitment, professional growth, innovation, and collaborative practices among middle leadership teams	Frequently conceptualized as principal-centric; limited empirical focus on transformational leadership enacted collectively by middle leadership teams
Transactional Leadership Theory	Studies in Educational Evaluation (2025); Hieng et al. (2024); Hadijah (2024)	Emphasis on structure, role clarity, contingent rewards, monitoring, and performance management	Supports administrative efficiency, policy implementation, accountability, and routine management roles commonly performed by middle leaders	Often perceived as restrictive or managerial; underexplored in combination with relational leadership styles in school middle leadership contexts
Servant Leadership Theory	Al-Azad et al. (2024); Hadijah (2024); Ahmad et al. (2025)	Prioritising service, ethical responsibility, empowerment, and follower development	Aligns strongly with middle leaders' mentoring, support, and relationship-building roles within departments and teams	Limited empirical research on servant leadership among middle leadership teams, particularly in Asian and Malaysian educational settings
Distributed Leadership Theory (Supporting Framework)	Bento (2023); Fourie & Naidoo (2022); Ling et al. (2023); Ting et al. (2024)	Leadership as a collective organizational practice shared across leadership levels	Provides a structural lens to understand how leadership styles are enacted collaboratively by principals, senior leaders, and middle leadership teams	May result in role ambiguity, workload pressure, and unclear authority boundaries for middle leaders without strong organizational support

Previous Studies Related to Leadership Styles and Middle Leadership Teams

Recent empirical research has suggested that leadership styles have a high impact on educational management practice, teacher performance, and organizational performance. The studies have shown that transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles have different impacts on school operations based on the level of leadership and the situational context of organizations (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Hadijah, 2024).

Although the research on the role of middle leadership teams as a key driver of the practices of instruction and professional learning culture is still seen as emerging, numerous studies indicate that middle leadership teams significantly influence the instructional patterns and teacher development cultures. As noted by Zadok and Benoliel (2023) and Bryant and Walker (2024), middle leaders, when they engage in transformational leadership, stimulate greater collaboration and professional growth among their department in terms of working collectively. On the same note, transactional leadership has been found to pursue good administration and role definition within middle levels of management (Hieng et al., 2024).

Impact of Leadership Styles on School Administration Effectiveness

Several studies have found a direct correlation between the school management practices and its leadership styles. In a survey undertaken by HRMARS (2024) among administrators of Malaysian primary schools, it was discovered that management effectiveness was also significantly predicted by leadership styles, especially in the decision-making process, internal communication, coordination between the staff, and planning in the organization. This observation confirms the fact that the style of leadership is a very important factor in determining the functioning of administrative systems in schools. Equally, Rodriguez et al. (2024) provided results that indicated that leadership styles of middle managers in higher education institutions had a large impact on the quality of governance, efficiency in administration, and accountability of the institutions. These conclusions support the argument that leadership performance cannot be limited to the leadership of the principal and is spread across various levels of school administration (Huber and Pruitt, 2024).

Moreover, Ahmad Johari et al. (2023) revealed that the style of leadership has a positive impact on the organizational performance in the Malaysian educational organizations, which implies that leadership styles have an influence not only on the management processes within the organization, but also on the institutional performance, in general. Altogether, these studies imply that the styles of leadership have structural and cultural implications in educational management.

Middle Leadership Teams

Middle leadership teams are emerging as important instruments of school improvement in the recent literature. According to Highfield (2025), middle leaders have a central role in the development of professional learning cultures, collaborating with teachers, mentoring teachers, and being the instructional development leaders. Equally, as Musa et al. (2024) discovered, instructional leadership of middle leaders plays a key role in relation to the learning organization development, especially among teachers and their impact on the professional dialogue and pedagogical practices.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the scoping review conducted by Bento (2023) demonstrates the fact that middle leadership is still not developed theoretically. Most empirical studies still tend to give the principals more privilege, and the middle leaders become the peripheral players in leadership systems. Fourie and Naidoo (2022) share this worry, asserting that as the models of distributed leadership continue assigning tasks to the middle-level leaders, their experiences and challenges are under researched in literature. Such an imbalance implies that there is a need to conduct more studies that place middle leadership teams at the center of the research.

Organizational Culture, Leadership and Commitment

In addition to management effectiveness, new research shows the role of leadership style in organizational commitment and school culture. According to Ting et al. (2024), distributed leadership has a positive influence on the organizational commitment of middle leaders, which indicates that shared leadership practices may enable the development of a more significant emotional attachment and professional responsibility. On the same note, Ahmad et al. (2025) also established that values-based leadership enhances organizational cohesion, trust, and professional relationships in schools. Tindall-Ford and Lipscombe (2025) also revealed that middle leaders' emotional intelligence improves interpersonal relations and teamwork, which leads to better organizational climates. Such results show that leadership practices influence administrative forms, as well as the relational and cultural aspects of learning institutions.

Regardless of the growing number of studies, a number of weaknesses still exist. Numerous studies are overly dependent on the quantitative survey design, which restricts the comprehension of the leadership experiences and contextual intricacies (Fourier & Naadoo, 2022). It is also not filled with studies on Malaysia-specific exploration of middle leadership teams (Musa et al., 2024). Moreover, it is commonly said that middle leaders can be seen as a secondary actor, but not a main research object (Bento, 2023). These restrictions demonstrate the necessity of more critical, contextually based, and theoretically informed studies of educational practices when it comes to leadership.

Research Gap

Regardless of the accumulation of literature on education leadership styles, a number of gaps are critical. First, most research on transformational, transactional, and servant leadership remains on principals and senior administrators, and there is little empirical research on middle leadership teams (Zadok and Benoliel, 2023; Bryant and Walker, 2024). This has led to the under-theorization and underrepresentation of the leadership practices of middle leaders.

Second, despite the widespread investigation into leadership styles as individual characteristics, there is a lack of studies that investigate the functionality of the leadership styles within the context of middle leadership teams as the constituents of school management systems (Studies in Educational Evaluation, 2025). Third, servant leadership is a comparatively under-studied servant leadership concept in educational leadership literature, especially in Asian and Malaysian studies, although it is closely intertwined with the relational and supportive functions of the middle leader (Al-Azad et al., 2024). These gaps indicate a clear need for research that examines how transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles are enacted by middle leadership teams, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practice in educational management.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design grounded in a pragmatic research paradigm. The pragmatic approach was selected for its capacity to incorporate quantitative and qualitative techniques, thereby facilitating the examination of complex educational leadership challenges through the application of objective measurements and subjective interpretations. This methodology was effective in examining the relationship between leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, and educational management practices in Malaysian educational institutions.

The study was conducted in two phases. The quantitative phase was the principal segment of the study. It employed standardized survey methods to investigate contemporary relationships and the comparative influence of various leadership styles on management practices. The subsequent qualitative phase sought to clarify, augment, and contextualize the quantitative findings through in-depth interviews and case studies. The findings from both phases were synthesized during the interpretation phase through triangulation, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of leadership across secondary school environments. This technique facilitated methodological complementarity by integrating statistical generalizability with contextual depth, which is essential in Malaysia's education system.

Populations, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study is about 500 teachers from 5 secondary schools in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. In the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling method was used to ensure teachers from secondary schools in Johor Bahru are represented in the study. The sample for the quantitative study was 156 teachers from 5 secondary schools in Johor Bahru. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the qualitative research. In total, 15 teachers were chosen for the semi-structured interview.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the quantitative data. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale that went from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. To analyze quantitative data, Excel software was used.

Qualitative Instruments

Semi-structured interviews served as the qualitative tool to investigate educational teachers’ perceptions regarding the impact of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles on the efficacy of educational management. The interview guide concentrated on leaders’ leadership practices, decision-making processes, organisational culture, problems faced in implementing various leadership styles, and their perceived efficacy in managing educational institutions. The data were evaluated by thematic analysis, supplemented by cross-case analysis to discern commonalities and divergences among cases.

Pilot Test, Validity, and Reliability

Before the primary data collection, a pilot study was conducted among 30 secondary school teachers to assess the reliability and validity of the instruments. assess the clarity, relevance, and feasibility of the instruments and procedures. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) were used to estimate internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. The value of the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.81, which indicates that the questionnaire is reliable and can be used for the actual study. In addition, two experts validated the items in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questions in terms of face validity, content validity, and construct validity.

Ethical Issues

This study adhered to ethical standards approved by the relevant university ethics’ committee and complied with national research guidelines. Schools’ permission was obtained before data collection. All participants received clear information regarding the study’s purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained through the use of coded identifiers and secure data storage. Cultural sensitivity was observed throughout the research process by respecting institutional protocols, language preferences, and hierarchical relationships within educational settings.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

RQ1: What leadership styles are practiced by educational leaders in secondary schools?

As shown in Table 3, transformational leadership recorded the highest mean score ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.52$), followed by servant leadership ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.56$), while transactional leadership demonstrated a moderate level of practice ($M=3.61$, $SD=0.63$).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Transformational Leadership	4.21	0.52	High
Servant Leadership	4.05	0.56	High
Transactional Leadership	3.61	0.63	Moderate

These findings indicate that educational managers predominantly adopt transformational and servant leadership approaches, emphasizing vision, motivation, ethical values and rational support, while transactional leadership is utilized primarily for structured and administrative functions.

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between leadership styles and educational management effectiveness?

Table 4: Correlation Between Leadership Styles and Educational Management Effectiveness

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership	-			
2. Servant Leadership	.68	-		
3. Transactional Leadership	.42	.39	-	
4. Management Effectiveness	.74	.66	.48	-

Note: $p < .001$

To address Question 2, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between leadership styles and educational management effectiveness. As presented in Table 4, all three leadership styles exhibited a statistically significant positive relationship with educational management effectiveness. Transformational leadership demonstrated the strongest correlation ($r=0.74$, $p < .001$), followed by servant leadership ($r=.68$, $p < .001$), while transactional leadership showed a weaker but still significant association ($r=.42$, $p < .001$).

Table 4: Correlation Between Leadership Styles and Educational Management Effectiveness

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership	-			
2. Servant Leadership	.68	-		
3. Transactional Leadership	.42	.39	-	
4. Management Effectiveness	.74	.66	.48	-

Note: $p < .001$

The results confirm that leadership styles are significantly associated with the effectiveness of educational management practices, particularly in strategic planning, staff development, communication, and student-centered approaches.

RQ3: Do leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and servant leadership) predict educational management effectiveness?

Table 5: Regression Analysis Predicting Educational Management Effectiveness

Predictor	β	t	Sig.
Transformational Leadership	.48	6.12	$< .001$

Servant Leadership	.32	4.05	< .001
Transactional Leadership	.14	1.98	< .001

**Note: $p < .001$

To address Research Question 3, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive influence of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles on educational management effectiveness. The findings indicate that transformational leadership is the strongest predictor of educational management effectiveness ($t=6.12$, $p < .001$, $\beta=.48$); followed by servant leadership ($t=4.05$, $p < .001$, $\beta=.32$). Transactional leadership ($t=1.98$, $p < .001$, $\beta=.14$) demonstrated a weaker but statistically significant predictive influence, suggesting its relevance primarily in operational and compliance-oriented management tasks.

Qualitative Findings

RQ4: How do teachers perceive the influence of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles on educational management effectiveness?

Table 6: Qualitative Themes on Leadership Influence on Educational Management Effectiveness

Theme	Leadership Style(s) Reflected	Key Aspects from Interviews	Influence on Educational Management Effectiveness
Strategic and participative direction	Transformational	Vision setting, decision making, innovation leadership	Guides institutional goals, supports change and encourages shared decision making
Relational trust and institutional culture	Servant	Empathy, staff support, organizational culture	Strengthens trust, collaboration and positive institutional culture
Operational control and perceived effectiveness	Transactional	Policy implementation, monitoring, procedural effectiveness	Ensure consistency, accountability and effective routine management

Themes on Leadership Influence on Educational Management Effectiveness are presented in Table 6. Participants perceived educational management effectiveness as the result of integrated leadership approach rather than the use of a single leadership. Transformational leadership was commonly associated with providing vision, strategic direction and motivation particularly in guiding academic initiatives and institutional change. Leaders who communicated clear goals and encouraged shared decision-making were perceived as more effective.

Servant leadership was viewed as influential in building trust, collaboration and staff commitment. Participants emphasized that leaders who demonstrated empathy, supported professional development and prioritized staff well-being contributed positively to organizational harmony and sustained performance.

Transactional leadership was perceived as necessary for ensuring structure, consistency and accountability. While less associated with inspiration, it was regarded as important for maintaining routine operations, enforcing policies and supporting administrative efficiency. Overall, participants perceived that educational management effectiveness is strengthened when these leadership styles are applied in a complementary manner with each style fulfilling a distinct but interconnected role.

The qualitative findings indicate that teachers perceive effective educational management as the outcome of a balanced and integrated leadership approach, where transformational, servant and transactional leadership styles collectively contribute to institutional effectiveness.

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates strong convergence across data sources; transformational leadership consistently emerged as the most influential leadership style in enhancing management effectiveness. Servant leadership complemented transformational practices by strengthening relational and ethical dimensions of leadership. Transactional leadership played a supportive role by ensuring structure, accountability, and compliance within higher education institutions.

The qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results, indicating that educational leaders typically employ a blended leadership approach that combines transformational, servant and transactional leadership to provide direction, ethical support and organizational accountability. Overall, the findings indicate that educational management effectiveness in secondary schools is best achieved through an integrated leadership model that balances vision, values and organizational control, reflecting the complex, policy-driven nature of the Malaysian education system.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed that transformational leadership excels in promoting the effectiveness of educational management in Malaysian higher education institutions. Among the leadership styles examined, transformational leadership has the strongest relationship with the effectiveness of educational management. In other words, this type of leadership is highly popular and effective in influencing the effectiveness of educational management. This finding was matched with some previous research which revealed that transformational leadership can be useful in enhancing the effectiveness of management, defining goals, and boosting staff motivation and commitment (Hadijah, 2024). However, other research revealed that there is no consensus on the effectiveness of transformational leadership in promoting the effectiveness of educational management in all situations, as it also depends on the school culture (Nahiyah Al-Azad et al., 2024). Therefore, the study supports the argument that transformational leadership is central to the effectiveness of educational management but should not be considered the only model applicable to all educational settings.

This study clearly indicates that servant leadership was also considered a style that affects management effectiveness in a positive way, as indicated by the high mean value of the variable in the study, as well as the correlation with management effectiveness. However, the level of influence of this style was also lower than that of transformational leadership. The results indicate that servant leadership is of crucial importance in establishing trust, improving communication, and providing a positive work environment, which indirectly affects management effectiveness. This is consistent with the conducted research which indicated that work motivation and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between the leadership style and the organization's effectiveness (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). However, some researchers only consider motivation and satisfaction as the final outcome of the leadership style, as indicated in the study on the transactional leadership style in higher education: a systematic literature review. This implies that servant leadership has an impact on the human aspect, even when it is not a direct impact on management effectiveness.

In addition, the research also suggests that the transactional leadership style had a moderate level of practice and a weaker predictive effect compared to the other two leadership styles. However, it does not leave a lasting impact on the growth of the organization. This is also evident from the research that found that the transactional leadership style is effective in the administration and control of tasks within an organization. However, the same research found that the transactional leadership style is not effective in the promotion of innovation and organizational growth. As a result, the transactional leadership style is seen as a complementary tool rather than a core aspect that improves the effectiveness of educational management.

Furthermore, the Research finding on qualitative themes on leadership influence on educational management effectiveness indicate that the use of a single leadership style is not adequate to improve the effectiveness of educational management. A combination of transformational leadership, servant leadership, and transactional leadership is more effective. Transformational leadership is the core aspect that improves the effectiveness of educational management, while the other two leadership styles are complementary depending on the context. This is also evident from the research on the role of the middle management layer that connects the policy and teaching levels within an educational organization. However, the research is still limited as it lacks empirical evidence in the context.

Finally, the research emphasizes that effectiveness of the different leadership styles is also impacted by organizational context, where the management structure and education policies play important roles. This reflects that the application of leadership theories in a higher education context should not be rigid. Several studies have recognized the presence of structural constraints in the effectiveness of the various leadership styles, but none have attempted to examine the underlying mechanisms of the structural constraints (Hamzah et al., 2024; Tindall Ford & Lipscombe, 2025). Therefore, this study contributes to the provision of empirical evidence on the role of the context in enhancing or constraining the effectiveness of the different leadership styles.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles on educational management in Malaysian secondary schools. The findings show that a leader's style has a big impact on strategic planning, managing resources, developing staff, focusing on students, and improving communication and teamwork.

Transformational leadership played a big role in setting a clear vision, boosting staff skills, and encouraging student-focused practices. At the same time, transactional leadership kept things stable, ensured accountability, and handled resources well - crucial in Malaysia's highly centralized education system. Servant leadership fostered teamwork, trust, staff well-being, and closer community ties, aligning nicely with the country's cultural and educational values. The study builds on all three leadership styles, showing that the most effective educational leaders blend and adapt different approaches rather than relying on just one. The findings highlight the importance of adaptable, context-sensitive leadership development in improving educational management.

Although the study provides significant insights, there are several limitations in this study. The research primarily concentrated on secondary schools in Johor Bahru. As such, the finding cannot be generalized to all secondary schools in Malaysia. The quantitative section was reliant on self-reported data, which may not accurately reflect actual leadership practices and may be influenced by response bias. Plus, the qualitative phase included only a small group of participants, which may have limited the range of perspectives gathered. Using a mixed-methods approach boosted the credibility of the findings, but the tight timeline may make it hard to fully blend the quantitative and qualitative data. A qualitative study with more interviews or observations could add greater depth and richness to future research.

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