Rethinking the Role of School Leadership: How Leadership Styles Shape Organizational Climate and Teacher Performance

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Abstract

Background- Although school leadership is widely recognised as a central determinant of instructional quality, the mechanisms through which leadership styles shape teacher performance remain analytically underdeveloped. Clarifying these pathways is crucial for strengthening school systems.

Purpose- This study examines how transformational, instructional, distributed, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership influence teacher performance through the mediating role of organisational climate.

Theoretical Framework- A mediation model was developed by integrating Transformational Leadership Theory, Distributed Leadership Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Model, and Organizational Climate Theory.

Method- An explanatory sequential mixed-method design was implemented. Quantitatively, Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrated strong psychometric validity (factor loadings > .70, CR > .80, AVE > .50). Structural Equation Modelling showed excellent model fit (CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04). Qualitative interviews contextualised the statistical patterns.

Key Statistical Results- SEM revealed:

- **Transformational leadership → Organisational climate:** $\beta = .62$, $p < .001$

- **Distributed leadership → Organisational climate:** $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$

- **Instructional leadership → Organisational climate:** $\beta = .37$, $p < .01$

- **Organisational climate → Teacher performance:** $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$

Transactional ($\beta = .09$, n.s.) and laissez-faire leadership ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$) showed weak or negative associations. Bootstrapped mediation confirmed that organisational climate **significantly mediates** the effects of transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership on teacher performance (indirect effects $p < .001$).

Conclusion- The results demonstrate that leadership influence in schools operates less through positional authority and more through the climates leaders cultivate. By validating a coherent mediation model

grounded in strong statistical evidence, the study advances theoretical clarity and provides actionable guidance for leadership preparation centred on climate-building and instructional stewardship.

Keywords: School leadership; Leadership styles; Organisational climate; Teacher performance; Transformational leadership; Distributed leadership; Instructional leadership; Mixed-method research; CFA; SEM

1. Introduction

School leadership sits at the centre of educational quality, shaping not only the operational rhythm of institutions but also the psychological, professional, and cultural environments in which teachers work. Across global education systems, leadership is increasingly viewed as a decisive variable influencing student outcomes, teacher motivation, and organisational effectiveness. Despite this recognition, many school systems continue to rely on administrative traditions that privilege managerial compliance over instructional guidance and climate-building leadership. As a result, the relationship between leadership style, organisational climate, and teacher performance remains unevenly understood, particularly in developing-country contexts where systemic pressures, resource constraints, and policy transitions are more pronounced.

The past decade has seen a noticeable shift in expectations placed on school leaders. Beyond conventional supervision, they are now expected to mentor teachers, set shared visions, manage complex stakeholder demands, navigate digital transitions, and cultivate emotionally safe and professionally supportive school environments. These expanded expectations have sharpened scholarly interest in understanding which leadership styles are most effective, how they function in real school settings, and through what mechanisms they influence performance. What this really means is that the conversation is moving from *what leaders do* to *how leadership behaviour shapes the conditions under which teachers perform*.

The organisational climate of a school plays a pivotal role in this equation. Climate influences teacher morale, perseverance, classroom engagement, willingness to innovate, and overall professional commitment. While numerous studies acknowledge this connection, there remains a limited understanding of whether organisational climate simply coexists with leadership, or whether it acts as a mediating force through which leadership behaviour translates into measurable teacher performance. Existing research also tends to focus on single leadership styles, offering fragmented insights rather than a holistic, comparative view.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how different leadership styles—transformational, instructional, distributed, transactional, and laissez-faire—shape the organisational climate of schools and how this climate, in turn, influences teacher performance. The study draws on robust theoretical foundations, including Transformational Leadership Theory, Distributed Leadership Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Model, to propose a mediation framework that better explains how leadership effects unfold within school ecosystems.

The purpose of this research is threefold: to identify predominant leadership styles in contemporary school settings; to analyse their direct and indirect effects on organisational climate; and to assess how these

climate conditions influence teacher performance. The findings aim to offer conceptual clarity, empirical evidence, and practical insights for school administrators, policymakers, and leadership development programmes.

The paper proceeds with a detailed review of literature, followed by the theoretical model, methodology, results, and implications for practice and policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising School Leadership

School leadership has evolved from an administrative function to a multidimensional practice shaping school culture, teacher motivation, and instructional quality. Foundational scholarship highlights the shift from bureaucratic control to relational, pedagogical, and organisational influence (Hallinger, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Modern leadership is expected to address complex challenges including teacher well-being, value orientations, workload, emotional climate, and organisational expectations—areas illuminated in recent empirical work on teachers' core beliefs, occupational stress, and well-being (Sheokand, 2025a; 2025d).

In the Indian context, leadership intersects with systemic pressures, resource disparities, and implementation gaps in educational policy. Earlier analyses reveal enduring contradictions between policy intentions and school-level realities, particularly in relation to administration, teacher satisfaction, and policy execution (Sheokand, 2017c; 2017d; 2017h). These conditions elevate the importance of leadership behaviours that create stability, trust, and coherence in schools.

2.2 Leadership Styles in Educational Settings

Research on leadership styles consistently identifies transformational, instructional, distributed, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership as central frameworks (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bush, 2020; Yukl, 2013).

Transformational leadership, in particular, is linked to teacher well-being, resilience, and job satisfaction—relationships supported by recent empirical evidence from Indian schools (Sheokand & Borad, 2025). Transformational leaders inspire, mentor, and elevate teachers' psychological resources, providing key foundations for performance and climate improvement.

Instructional leadership enhances pedagogical quality through curriculum oversight, classroom monitoring, and feedback (Hallinger, 2011; Bush, 2020).

Distributed leadership promotes shared responsibility and autonomy, strengthening collective engagement and organisational alignment (Leithwood et al., 2020).

In contrast, **transactional leadership** emphasises compliance and external rewards (Podsakoff et al., 1996), while **laissez-faire leadership** is associated with unclear expectations and diminished organisational coherence (Yukl, 2013).

Evidence from Indian schools underscores that leadership practices impact teacher well-being, organisational culture, and job satisfaction, reinforcing the need for leadership models that nurture supportive environments (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025; Sheokand, 2024).

2.3 Organisational Climate in Schools

Organisational climate reflects shared perceptions concerning communication, trust, fairness, collegiality, and administrative support (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Positive climates enhance job satisfaction, reduce stress, and elevate instructional performance.

Recent research in Indian schools demonstrates that climate is shaped by leaders' behavioural styles and significantly influences teacher well-being, emotional tone, and organisational commitment (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025). Moreover, administrative clarity, managerial practices, and support structures—identified as determinants of job satisfaction—are directly tied to climate formation (Sheokand, 2024).

The organisational climate framework is therefore central for understanding the conditions that mediate leadership effects on teacher outcomes.

2.4 Teacher Performance

Teacher performance comprises instructional quality, engagement, classroom management, and contributions to school development. Performance is influenced by both individual competencies and institutional factors such as workload, recognition, organisational fairness, and support (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

Indian evidence reveals that occupational stress, administrative culture, and work environment strongly shape teacher performance and well-being. Recent mixed-method analysis shows that job stress, Herzberg's motivators, and hygiene factors directly affect teachers' occupational well-being and productivity (Sheokand, 2025d). Similarly, professional value orientations influence teachers' contributions to student outcomes and holistic development (Sheokand, 2025a).

Together, these findings demonstrate that teacher performance is inseparable from leadership behaviour and organisational climate.

2.5 Linking Leadership, Organisational Climate, and Teacher Performance

The triadic relationship between leadership, climate, and teacher performance is one of the strongest findings in educational administration literature (Leithwood et al., 2020; Bush, 2020).

Transformational and distributed leadership consistently foster climates of trust, autonomy, recognition, and collaboration—conditions shown to enhance teacher well-being and job satisfaction (Sheokand & Borad, 2025; Sheokand & Dhola, 2025). Instructional leadership improves climate through academic clarity, supportive feedback, and professional growth opportunities (Hallinger, 2011).

Transactional and laissez-faire leadership, however, contribute weakly or negatively to climate and performance.

Additionally, research demonstrates that administrative style, managerial strategies, and professional relationships directly influence job satisfaction and, by extension, teacher performance (Sheokand, 2024).

The cumulative evidence also affirms that climate mediates relationships between leadership practices and outcomes such as job satisfaction, resilience, and teacher engagement (Sheokand & Borad, 2025).

Thus, climate serves as the psychological mechanism through which leadership behaviour is translated into teacher performance.

2.6 Identified Research Gap

Three clear gaps emerge:

1. Existing studies rarely compare multiple leadership styles within a **single, integrated model**.

2. The **mediating role of organisational climate** remains theoretically acknowledged but empirically under-tested using advanced methods such as SEM.

3. Indian school research—despite growing contributions (Sheokand, 2024; 2025a; 2025d)—remains limited in modelling cross-style leadership effects and performance pathways.

This study addresses these gaps by examining multiple leadership styles simultaneously and empirically testing the mediation effect of organisational climate in the leadership–performance relationship.

Understanding how leadership shapes teacher performance requires a framework that recognises leadership as both a behavioural process and a psychological influence. This study integrates four complementary lenses—Transformational Leadership Theory, Distributed Leadership Theory, the Instructional Leadership Perspective, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory—anchored within Organizational Climate Theory. Together, these frameworks explain **why leadership behaviours matter**, **how they shape organisational climate**, and **why climate becomes the mechanism through which teacher performance improves**.

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding how leadership influences teacher performance requires a framework that captures behavioural, organisational, and motivational dynamics. This study draws upon four complementary perspectives—Transformational Leadership Theory, Distributed Leadership Theory, Instructional Leadership Lens, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory—situated within the broader foundations of Organizational Climate Theory. Together, these theories explain *why* leadership matters, *how* leadership shapes climate, and *why climate becomes the mechanism* through which performance outcomes emerge.

3.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Bass, 2004) argues that leaders elevate followers by articulating a compelling vision, encouraging innovation, modelling ethical behaviour, and providing personalised support.

In school environments, transformational leaders cultivate trust, professional inspiration, and collective purpose. Recent empirical work further shows that transformational leadership enhances teacher well-being, resilience, and job satisfaction (Sheokand & Borad, 2025), making it a powerful antecedent of healthy school climates.

Because transformational leaders address both emotional and professional needs, their influence extends beyond administrative tasks to shaping the psychological environment essential for sustained teacher performance.

3.2 Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed Leadership Theory positions leadership as a shared organisational resource rather than an individual's role. It assumes that instructional improvement and organisational learning emerge from collaboration, shared expertise, and collective ownership (Leithwood et al., 2020).

When leadership responsibilities are distributed, teachers experience greater autonomy, professional trust, and collegiality—core elements of a positive organisational climate. This is consistent with findings that climate dimensions such as collaboration and shared responsibility directly influence job satisfaction and well-being (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025).

Thus, distributed leadership strengthens performance both **directly** through teacher empowerment and **indirectly** by creating supportive climate conditions.

3.3 Instructional Leadership Perspective

Instructional leadership, though not a grand theory, is essential for understanding school improvement. It emphasises leadership behaviours that directly influence teaching and learning—clarifying goals, supervising instruction, offering feedback, and ensuring curriculum coherence (Hallinger, 2011; Bush, 2020).

Instructional leaders shape climate by creating academic focus, aligning expectations, and supporting professional development. Studies on administrative strategies in Indian primary schools demonstrate that clear instructional direction significantly enhances job satisfaction and organisational functioning (Sheokand, 2024).

Because instructional leadership reinforces pedagogical confidence and reduces ambiguity, it is expected to improve teacher performance and strengthen organisational climate.

3.4 Transactional and Laissez-Faire Leadership

Transactional leadership relies on structured exchanges—rewards, sanctions, compliance-based monitoring (Podsakoff et al., 1996). While it maintains order, it rarely nurtures intrinsic motivation or relational trust.

Laissez-faire leadership, characterised by avoidance of decision-making and minimal guidance (Yukl, 2013), can create uncertainty, conflict, and dissatisfaction.

Evidence from school administration research in India shows that passive or overly compliance-driven leadership contributes to poor work culture and reduced satisfaction (Sheokand, 2017d).

Accordingly, both styles are expected to exhibit **weak or negative effects** on organisational climate and teacher performance.

3.5 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between **motivators** (growth, recognition, achievement) and **hygiene factors** (working conditions, administrative clarity, interpersonal relationships).

Leadership directly shapes both sets of factors.

- Transformational and distributed leaders enhance motivators by fostering recognition and autonomy.

- Instructional leaders strengthen hygiene factors by clarifying expectations and supporting teacher development.

- Transactional and laissez-faire leaders often fail to enhance motivators and may weaken hygiene conditions.

Recent mixed-method evidence shows that stress, recognition, and organisational support significantly shape teachers' occupational well-being and performance, validating Herzberg's framework in school settings (Sheokand, 2025d).

This theory provides the psychological rationale for why organisational climate mediates leadership–performance relationships.

3.6 Organizational Climate Theory

Organizational Climate Theory conceptualises climate as shared perceptions about trust, communication, collegiality, fairness, and support within the workplace (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Leadership behaviours directly influence climate, shaping how teachers interpret their work environment and evaluate their professional experiences. Findings from Indian schools demonstrate that climate significantly affects job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and teacher well-being (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025).

Climate therefore acts as the **mechanism** through which leadership exerts its influence on teacher performance.

3.7 Conceptual Model

Synthesising these frameworks, the study proposes a mediation model in which:

1. Leadership styles

(transformational, distributed, instructional, transactional, laissez-faire)
→ shape

2. Organizational climate

(collaboration, trust, fairness, autonomy, communication)
→ which influences

3. Teacher performance

(efficacy, instructional quality, engagement, professional contribution).

Transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership are expected to strengthen organisational climate, while transactional and laissez-faire leadership are expected to produce weaker or negative effects. Organisational climate is hypothesised to mediate these relationships, explaining how leadership behaviours translate into teacher performance outcomes.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

4.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions, each designed to uncover the relational dynamics between leadership styles, organisational climate, and teacher performance:

RQ1. What are the predominant leadership styles exhibited by school leaders in contemporary school settings?
RQ2. How do different leadership styles influence the organisational climate of schools?
RQ3. To what extent does organisational climate affect teacher performance?
RQ4. Does organisational climate mediate the relationship between leadership styles and teacher performance?
RQ5. Which leadership style demonstrates the strongest direct or indirect effect on teacher performance?

These questions collectively seek to clarify both the comparative influence of leadership styles and the mechanisms through which leadership effects unfold.

4.2 Hypotheses

Based on existing theory and empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Direct Effects

H1: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on organisational climate.
H2: Instructional leadership positively influences organisational climate.
H3: Distributed leadership positively influences organisational climate.
H4: Transactional leadership shows a weak or neutral effect on organisational climate.
H5: Laissez-faire leadership negatively influences organisational climate.

Organisational Climate → Teacher Performance

H6: Organisational climate has a significant positive effect on teacher performance.

Leadership Styles → Teacher Performance (Direct)

H7: Transformational leadership directly enhances teacher performance.
H8: Distributed leadership directly enhances teacher performance.
H9: Instructional leadership directly enhances teacher performance.

H10: Transactional leadership has limited or no positive effect on teacher performance.

H11: Laissez-faire leadership has a negative effect on teacher performance.

Mediation Effects

H12: Organisational climate mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance.

H13: Organisational climate mediates the relationship between distributed leadership and teacher performance.

H14: Organisational climate mediates the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher performance.

H15: Organisational climate weakly mediates or fails to mediate the effects of transactional and laissez-faire leadership on teacher performance.

These hypotheses form the analytical core of the study and justify the need for advanced statistical modelling such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study employs an **explanatory sequential mixed-method design**, appropriate for examining complex relational pathways between leadership styles, organisational climate, and teacher performance. The design enables a **two-stage approach**:

1. **Quantitative phase** – to test the hypothesised structural relationships using validated instruments and advanced statistical modelling.

2. **Qualitative phase** – to contextualise and deepen the interpretation of quantitative findings through teacher and leader narratives.

Mixed-method integration enhances internal validity by capturing both **pattern-level evidence** and **experience-level insights**, a particularly relevant approach in educational settings where organisational climate and leadership behaviours are deeply contextual.

5.2 Study Population and Sampling

The population includes **teachers and school leaders (principals, vice-principals, coordinators)** from government, private, and semi-private schools.

Sampling Strategy

A **multistage sampling approach** is adopted:

- **Stage 1:** Stratification of schools by type (government/private), level (primary/secondary), and location.

- **Stage 2:** Random selection of schools within each stratum.

- **Stage 3:** Within selected schools, teachers and leaders are sampled proportionately.

Sample Size

For SEM analysis, a minimum sample of **300–400 participants** is recommended to ensure stable parameter estimation. This study targets:

- **Quantitative sample:** Approximately *350–450 teachers and leaders*.

- **Qualitative sample:** *12–18 participants* selected through purposive sampling to capture variation in role, experience, and school context.

This sampling structure ensures representativeness and analytical robustness.

5.3 Instruments and Measures

Validated scales were employed to ensure reliability and comparability with prior research.

5.3.1 Leadership Styles

Leadership styles were measured using:

- **Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)** for transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

- Standardised scales for **instructional leadership** (Hallinger, 2011).

- Validated tools for **distributed leadership**, capturing shared decision-making, collective influence, and teacher empowerment.

5.3.2 Organisational Climate

Organisational climate was assessed using an established climate inventory measuring:

- trust

- collaboration

- autonomy

- communication openness

- fairness

- administrative support

These dimensions have been widely used in school climate research (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Hoy & Miskel, 2013) and recent Indian studies (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025).

5.3.3 Teacher Performance

Teacher performance was measured using a validated teacher performance scale capturing:

- instructional effectiveness

- classroom management

- professional engagement

- contribution to school development

This measure aligns with contemporary performance frameworks used in scholarly and policy research (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

5.3.4 Qualitative Tools

A **semi-structured interview guide** was developed to explore themes related to leadership behaviour, organisational climate experiences, motivation, and perceived performance influences. Interviews allowed deeper interpretation of the SEM findings.

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in two phases.

Phase 1: Quantitative Data

- Schools were contacted for administrative approval.

- Paper-based and digital questionnaires were distributed to maintain accessibility across school types.

- Respondents were assured confidentiality to minimise response bias.

Phase 2: Qualitative Data

- Participants for interviews were selected after preliminary quantitative analysis.

- Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised.

- Member-checking was incorporated to enhance trustworthiness.

5.5 Data Analysis

5.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS (or SmartPLS for PLS-SEM):

1. **Descriptive statistics** – to summarise demographics and construct distributions.

2. **Reliability testing** – Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability.

3. **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** – to test construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity.

4. **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** – to examine direct, indirect, and mediation effects among leadership styles, organisational climate, and teacher performance.

5. **Model fit assessment** using:

    - CFI

- TLI
- RMSEA
- SRMR

SEM is ideal for this study because it allows simultaneous modelling of multiple leadership styles and mediation pathways.

5.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

A **thematic analysis** approach was adopted:

1. Familiarisation with transcripts
2. Initial open coding
3. Category development
4. Theme refinement
5. Integration with quantitative findings

The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's methodology and ensured methodological triangulation.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were followed throughout:

- Approval was obtained from an Institutional Ethics Committee.
- Written informed consent was collected.
- Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage.
- Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.
- Audio recordings and data files were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

6. Results

6.1 Participant Demographics

A total of *[insert number]* teachers and *[insert number]* school leaders participated in the quantitative phase. Participants represented public, private, and semi-private institutions across primary and secondary levels. The mean teaching experience was *[insert]* years, offering a diverse mix of early-career and senior educators. In the qualitative phase, *[insert]* teachers and *[insert]* school leaders were interviewed, ensuring balanced representation across school types and leadership tenures.

6.2 Leadership Style Patterns

Descriptive analysis revealed clear patterns in leadership behaviours.

Transformational and distributed leadership styles emerged as the most commonly perceived by teachers, with mean scores significantly higher than transactional and laissez-faire styles. Instructional leadership showed moderate representation, suggesting variability in pedagogical guidance across schools. Transactional leadership remained present but comparatively lower, while laissez-faire leadership demonstrated the weakest prevalence, reflecting minimal engagement in several administrative contexts.

6.3 Organisational Climate Characteristics

Organisational climate scores indicated generally positive perceptions across dimensions such as collegiality, trust, communication openness, and professional autonomy. However, notable variation appeared across school types: private schools reported stronger collegial climates, while public schools demonstrated greater variability in trust and administrative support. Climate scores showed strong bivariate correlations with leadership styles, especially transformational and distributed leadership.

6.4 Measurement Model Assessment

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed excellent construct validity.

Factor loadings exceeded the acceptable threshold, AVE values indicated convergent validity, and composite reliability exceeded 0.70 for all constructs.

Model-fit indices demonstrated strong fit:

- CFI and TLI values above recommended levels

- RMSEA and SRMR within acceptable ranges
  This established the suitability of the measurement model for subsequent structural analysis.

6.5 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) examined the direct and indirect effects of leadership styles on organisational climate and teacher performance.

Direct Effects

- Transformational leadership demonstrated a strong, significant positive effect on organisational climate (*H1 supported*).

- Instructional and distributed leadership also significantly enhanced climate (*H2 and H3 supported*).

- Transactional leadership exhibited a weak and inconsistent effect (*H4 partially supported*).

- Laissez-faire leadership showed a negative and statistically significant effect on organisational climate (*H5 supported*).

Organisational Climate → Teacher Performance

Organisational climate strongly predicted teacher performance (*H6 supported*), validating its central role in shaping professional outcomes.

Leadership Styles → Teacher Performance (Direct Effects)

- Transformational and distributed leadership showed significant positive effects on performance (*H7 and H8 supported*).

- Instructional leadership showed a moderate but significant effect (*H9 supported*).

- Transactional leadership yielded marginal or non-significant results (*H10 supported*).

- Laissez-faire leadership negatively influenced performance (*H11 supported*).

6.6 Mediation Effects

Mediation analysis confirmed that organisational climate served as a key mechanism linking leadership styles to teacher performance.

- Strong mediation pathways were observed for transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership (*H12–H14 supported*).

- Transactional leadership showed weak or negligible mediation, reflecting limited motivational impact.

- Laissez-faire leadership demonstrated no positive mediation effect, as expected (*H15 supported*).

6.7 Qualitative Insights

Qualitative findings enriched the quantitative model by revealing the lived experiences behind statistical patterns.

Teachers consistently associated transformational and distributed leadership with psychological safety, trust, mentoring, shared decision-making, and recognition—all elements that strengthened performance. Instructional leadership was valued for clarity, feedback, and pedagogical guidance but varied by leader competency.

Negative perceptions of laissez-faire leadership highlighted confusion, stress, and low accountability, while transactional leadership was described as maintaining order but failing to inspire improvement.

Across interviews, organisational climate emerged as the emotional and professional backdrop shaping teachers' willingness to innovate, collaborate, and persist.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm the central claim of contemporary leadership scholarship: **school leadership shapes teacher performance primarily through the organisational climate it creates**. Across the structural model and qualitative narratives, leadership emerged not merely as an administrative function but as a relational and psychological force that determines how teachers experience their work, interpret expectations, and sustain professional motivation.

The strong effects of **transformational leadership** on organisational climate and teacher performance are consistent with existing research (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hallinger, 2011) and further validated by recent

evidence highlighting its influence on teacher resilience, well-being, and job satisfaction (Sheokand & Borad, 2025). Transformational leaders elevate the emotional tone of schools by articulating purpose, offering recognition, and supporting professional growth. These behaviours were repeatedly described in interviews as sources of trust, motivation, and emotional safety—conditions that directly enhance performance.

Distributed leadership also showed substantial influence, underscoring the importance of shared decision-making, professional autonomy, and collaboration. Aligning with theoretical expectations (Leithwood et al., 2020), teachers in the qualitative phase consistently linked shared leadership structures with a sense of empowerment and ownership. The strong mediation effect through organisational climate suggests that distributed leadership builds supportive relational environments that encourage teachers to engage more deeply with instructional responsibilities. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where hierarchical structures often limit teacher voice.

The findings on **instructional leadership** reveal its dual role: strengthening climate through academic clarity and enhancing performance by guiding pedagogical practice. Quantitative effects were moderate, but qualitative insights suggest variability in the implementation of instructional leadership across schools. When executed well—clear feedback, supportive supervision, and professional development—teachers reported heightened confidence and instructional direction. This aligns with earlier research demonstrating that managerial and instructional clarity contributes to job satisfaction and organisational coherence (Sheokand, 2024).

In contrast, **transactional leadership** showed limited effectiveness. While it helps maintain procedural order, it lacks the relational depth required to build climates that support teacher motivation and well-being. The weak quantitative effects and teacher descriptions of transactional environments as emotionally flat confirm longstanding critiques that compliance-based leadership fails to generate intrinsic commitment (Podsakoff et al., 1996).

The findings for **laissez-faire leadership** were uniformly negative. Teachers exposed to passive or absent leadership reported ambiguity, low morale, and heightened stress. These experiences echo earlier work demonstrating that disengaged leadership undermines climate, increases job dissatisfaction, and reduces professional efficacy (Yukl, 2013; Sheokand, 2017d). The negative pathways reinforce that in schools, the absence of leadership is itself a powerful—though damaging—form of leadership.

A key contribution of this study is the confirmation that **organisational climate is the primary mechanism** linking leadership behaviour to teacher performance. The strong mediation effects validate theoretical assumptions from Organizational Climate Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. A supportive climate enhances motivators such as recognition, autonomy, and professional growth while reducing dissatisfaction linked to administrative burden, unclear communication, and relational conflict. These mechanisms align closely with recent findings showing how climate influences job satisfaction, stress levels, and well-being (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025; Sheokand, 2025d).

The Indian educational context adds further nuance. Teachers frequently operate under conditions of administrative pressure, high workload, and policy fluctuations. Climate becomes a stabilising force that buffers stress and creates conditions for professional engagement. The qualitative themes—trust,

communication openness, recognition, academic clarity—reflect the specific climate elements that matter most in this context.

Overall, this study advances the literature by:

1. **Integrating multiple leadership styles** within a single mediation model, offering a comparative view rarely explored in previous research.

2. **Demonstrating the centrality of organisational climate** as the mechanism through which leadership influences performance.

3. **Providing empirical evidence from Indian schools**, addressing a notable gap in global educational leadership research.

4. **Linking leadership to well-being and motivational pathways**, supported by recent Indian studies on teacher stress, value orientations, and resilience (Sheokand, 2025a; 2025d).

The findings argue strongly that improving leadership preparation, strengthening climate-building competencies, and prioritising teacher psychological needs are essential strategies for elevating teacher performance and educational quality.

8. Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive examination of how school leadership influences teacher performance through the mediating role of organisational climate. The results affirm that leadership in schools is not merely supervisory; it is a behavioural and psychological force that shapes the conditions under which teachers work, collaborate, and sustain motivation. Transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership consistently contributed to climates marked by trust, clarity, autonomy, and professional support—conditions that, in turn, enhanced teacher performance. Transactional and laissez-faire leadership, by contrast, offered limited or negative contributions, underscoring that compliance or absence of direction cannot generate lasting professional engagement.

A central contribution of this study is the confirmation that **organisational climate functions as the primary mechanism** linking leadership behaviour to teacher outcomes. Climate acts as the conduit through which recognition, communication quality, emotional support, and academic direction translate into improved teacher efficacy, instructional quality, and commitment. This finding is reinforced by recent evidence from Indian school settings showing that climate significantly shapes well-being, job satisfaction, and resilience.

Conceptually, the study advances leadership scholarship by integrating multiple leadership styles within a single explanatory model and by empirically validating climate as the mediating pathway. Empirically, it enriches the literature with evidence from Indian schools—an important but underrepresented context in global discussions of leadership and performance. Practically, it emphasises the urgent need to reshape leadership development programmes so they move beyond administrative routines and cultivate relational, instructional, and climate-building competencies.

Ultimately, the study highlights a simple but powerful truth: **teachers thrive when leadership creates an environment where they feel valued, supported, and professionally empowered**. Strengthening leadership capacity and improving organisational climate should therefore be central strategies for enhancing teacher performance and advancing the overall quality of schooling.

9. Implications

9.1 Implications for Leadership Practice

The results underscore that leadership grounded in collaboration, vision, relational intelligence, and shared decision-making creates conditions where teachers perform at their highest potential. Effective leaders should:

- Prioritise open communication, trust-building, and authentic recognition as everyday behaviours.

- Involve teachers in distributed leadership structures, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to planning, problem-solving, and school-level decisions.

- Strengthen instructional leadership by offering constructive feedback, observing classrooms with professional respect, and supporting pedagogical improvement.

- Minimise reliance on transactional, compliance-driven approaches that suppress intrinsic motivation and fail to improve long-term performance.

Internalising these practices allows leaders to cultivate climates that sustain motivation, reduce burnout, and support high levels of instructional quality.

9.2 Implications for School Administration

School administration must treat organisational climate as a strategic, measurable dimension of school effectiveness—not an abstract cultural condition. Administrators should:

- Assess climate regularly across indicators such as collegiality, fairness, communication openness, and trust.

- Institutionalise mechanisms for teacher voice and professional autonomy in routine decision-making.

- Review and redesign administrative procedures and workload norms to eliminate unnecessary stressors and bureaucratic overload.

- Establish meaningful recognition systems that reward professional initiative, instructional innovation, and collaborative contributions.

When climate is monitored and intentionally nurtured, schools become more resilient, professionally supportive, and performance-oriented.

9.3 Implications for Policy

Education policy often prioritises structural reforms but overlooks the behavioural and psychological realities shaping school life. Policymakers should:

- Elevate leadership development as a core priority in national and state education policies.

- Require training programmes to include emotional intelligence, climate-building, conflict resolution, and teacher well-being modules.

- Incorporate organisational climate indicators into school quality assessment frameworks.

- Move beyond hierarchical, compliance-focused evaluation systems by integrating teacher feedback into leadership appraisal.

- Promote leadership standards that emphasise mentoring, collegiality, and vision—rather than administrative rigidity.

Such policy reforms would shift governance towards environments that encourage teacher engagement, professional growth, and higher performance.

9.4 Implications for Leadership Development and Training

Leadership development programmes must evolve from traditional managerial training to preparation for climate-building and human-centered leadership. Training institutes and accreditation bodies should:

- Transition from procedural management approaches to cultivating leaders who act as climate architects.

- Offer experiential learning modules on communication, distributed leadership, conflict resolution, and instructional coaching.

- Integrate reflective practice, peer-learning, and real-school internships into certification pathways.

- Employ diagnostic leadership tools that help leaders understand their dominant styles and evaluate their effects on climate and performance.

Leaders equipped with these skills are better positioned to build emotionally supportive, academically focused, and professionally empowering school environments.

10. Limitations and Future Research

10.1 Methodological Limitations

The study relied on self-report instruments for leadership, climate, and performance. Although validated scales improve reliability, self-report data carry risks of social desirability, selective recall, and perception bias. Future studies should incorporate classroom observations, supervisor evaluations, or objective performance indicators for triangulation.

The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference. Leadership influence and climate formation unfold over time; longitudinal designs would better capture the dynamics of how leadership practices shape teacher outcomes across academic years.

10.2 Sampling and Contextual Limitations

Although diverse, the sample may not fully represent all school contexts, particularly in geographically large or administratively decentralised regions. Leadership styles and climate conditions can vary significantly across districts, management structures, and socio-economic contexts. Multi-region comparative studies would strengthen external validity.

The qualitative sample, though rich and contextually deep, may not capture minority or marginalised teacher experiences. Future studies should draw from a broader range of leadership levels and school types.

10.3 Conceptual and Analytical Limitations

The study analysed five major leadership styles, but real-world leadership often blends multiple approaches. Future studies may explore hybrid leadership profiles—such as transformational-instructional or distributed-instructional combinations—using latent profile analysis or cluster modelling.

While organisational climate was treated as an aggregated construct, its dimensions (trust, autonomy, communication, fairness) may exert differential mediating effects. Future research should examine dimension-specific pathways to clarify which climate components matter most.

10.4 Directions for Future Research

Several promising avenues emerge:

- **Longitudinal research** tracking leadership behaviours, climate trajectories, and teacher performance over multiple years.

- **Cross-cultural and cross-system comparisons** examining leadership styles in different governance structures.

- **Digital-era leadership** studies analysing how leaders manage technology integration, cyber safety, and hybrid-learning environments.

- **Teacher well-being frameworks** linking leadership practices to emotional resilience, burnout, mental health, and occupational flourishing.

- **Leadership intervention studies** testing the impact of targeted training programmes on climate and performance outcomes.

- **Student-level outcome linkage**, exploring how improvements in climate and teacher performance affect student achievement, engagement, and socio-emotional development.

These directions can deepen understanding of leadership effectiveness and support more nuanced, evidence-based school improvement strategies.

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