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EFFECTIVENESS, LEADERSHIP STYLE AND GENDER OF SECONDARY EDUCATION SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN ATHENS, GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this work was to investigate the effectiveness of school leaders in relation to gender and leadership style of secondary education principals. A sample (n=163) of secondary education public school teachers in the inner district of Athens, Greece was used. Men outnumbered women in leadership positions in the school district but female principals outnumbered male principals in schools with 200-250 students. Women were underrepresented in school leadership positions in larger schools. The issue of school conflicts varied according to school size; schools with more students had a higher frequency of conflicts than smaller schools. Leadership style did not vary with gender but varied according to the size of the school unit. Principals in small school units (<200 students) more frequently exhibited a laissez-faire leadership style whereas transformational and transactional leadership styles prevailed in larger school units. The frequency of school conflicts varied with the principals' gender and school size. Male principals were frequently in schools with >250 students. High scores for transformational and transactional leadership traits were inversely correlated with the frequency of school conflict. Transformational and transactional leadership styles were positively correlated to effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction as outcomes of leadership, whereas a laissez-faire leadership style correlated negatively with these leadership outcomes.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the effectiveness of school leaders in relation to gender and leadership style of secondary education principals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Similar to other parts of the world, women have been underrepresented in leadership positions in Greece for centuries (Anastasiou, Filippidis, & Stergiou, 2015; Brinia, 2012; Kotzaivazoglou, Hatzithomas, & Tsichla, 2018). Research from all over the world indicates the existence of gender differences that affect male and female stereotypic roles and leadership style that can then have an indirect effect on how men and women may behave and seek a desired outcome (Cushman, 2008; Karen, Baril, & Watson, 1993). Gender inequality and underrepresentation are common social issues depicted in the extensive sector of public employment (Rubery, 2015). The same scenario can be seen in schools with women frequently underrepresented at higher levels of educational management positions. For example, gender bias in selecting managers may have severe consequences on the equal opportunities and gender equality status of several EU countries including Greece (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2011; Anastasiou et al., 2015; Anastasiou & Siassiakos, 2014). The gender gap between men and women may stem from

gender stereotypes (Kalaitzi, Cheung, Hiligsmann, Babich, & Czabanowska, 2019; Kotzaivazoglou et al., 2018; Meng & Baker, 2018) and women are underrepresented in the leadership of several professional sectors including school leadership in Greece (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2011; Anastasiou et al., 2015).

School leaders face significant challenges in school management. Successful school leaders rely on a variety of skills, personality traits, and experiences to do their job, inspire, lead, and competently meet the demands of a rapidly evolving society and school. They also communicate with teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders while managing conflicts in their school units (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Whitehead, Andretzke, & Binali, 2018). Gender theories on why gender may influence leadership behaviour provide some evidence suggesting that women may have different behavioural traits, communication skills, and exhibit increased level of concern for the others (Scheifele, Ehrke, Viladot, Van Laar, & Steffens, 2020). For example, compared to men, female leaders may be more capable of communicating and handling conflicts at work (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2018). Women can also apply transformational leadership behaviour, adapt their priorities, and inspire, and lead changes in their organizations (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018; Thibault, Gulseren, & Kelloway, 2019).

Similarly, female school leaders may outperform men when they use a transactional and laissez-faire approach to successful leadership in their school. Nevertheless, versus male leaders, female leaders may exhibit lower esteem and experience negative emotions and aspirations due to stereotypes, cultural issues, and prejudgments (Ndebele, 2019). Male leaders on the other hand may frequently exhibit laissez-faire leadership behaviour and hand-off tasks to less senior member of the staff with questionable outcomes in terms of productivity and quality of the results (Harris & Trnavčevič, 2020; Hentschel, Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2018; Kroukamp, 2015).

Women may also outperform men in conflict management. For example, contrary to male principals who are expected to fulfil the stereotypic dominative male leader behaviour (Wang, Chiang, Tsai, Lin, & Cheng, 2013) female leaders may exhibit concern for the others, cooperative attitudes, and good communication skills to facilitate successful conflict resolution in their school units (Zeinabadi, 2013).

The aim of this work was to investigate the effectiveness of school leaders in relation to gender and leadership style of secondary education principals. We deconvolute the role of gender versus style in leadership.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was performed in secondary education public schools in the inner city of Athens, Greece. There were 1591 teachers serving the inner city schools of the region (n=1591) during the study period. Data were collected by sending an online survey to all secondary education teachers in schools located in the school district of inner Athens city. Within one week, 163 completed questionnaires were collected corresponding to a return rate of 54.33%. This number accounted for 10.24 % of the total number of teachers serving in the area of the present work.

The first part of the questionnaires contained general questions related to demographic parameters. Furthermore, teachers were asked to express their views on the leadership style of their school principals as well as the sources, the type(s), and severity of conflict in their school unit. The perceptions of teachers for the leadership style and conflict management style of their school principal were surveyed using previously used questionnaires adopted and validated for use in Greece.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X-Short) of Bass et al. [REF] as adapted into the Greek language by Magoulianitis [REF] was used to assess the transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership behaviour of school principals using a five-point scale (0 = never; 1 = rarely; 2 = sometimes, 3 = often; 4 = frequently). The questionnaire had 36 questions to asses: (i) transformational (inspirational motivation, idealized influence (behaviours), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration); (ii) transactional (contingent reward, management-by-exception and management-by-exception passive) and (ii) laissez-faire leadership style which is used as a non-leadership contrast to transformational and transactional

leadership approaches. The MLQ 5X-Short has three outcome criteria: followers' extra effort, the effectiveness of leader's behaviour, and followers' satisfaction with their leader. These are included in the MLQ 5X-Short.

The frequency, severity, sources, and types of school conflict were surveyed using questionnaires previously used in relevant research in Greek schools and reported to provide satisfactory internal consistency reliability (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Saiti, 2015). Data were analysed with SPSS (version 14.01), and normality tests (Shapiro Wilk test) confirmed if data were normally distributed. Significant differences were evaluated using Mann-Whitney or Kruskal-Wallis tests. Spearman correlation analysis was used to investigate the correlation between the parameters.

3. RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the teachers who participated in the present work are presented in Table 1. Most of the teachers were aged 45-55 years and had between 20-30 years teaching experience; most of them served between 1-10 years in their current school unit.

The descriptive statistics and Cronbach's reliability for the subsets of facets for leadership traits of MLQ are presented in Table 2. The rating of school principals ranged between 2.70 and 3.23 for the transformational leadership style and between 2.36 and 2.57 for the transactional leadership style. These were higher scores than the Laissez-faire leadership.

The perceived leadership style of male and female principals is presented in Table 3. There was no significant difference influence of gender on the leadership style (Mann-Whitney test).

Leadership style correlated well with leadership outcomes. High scores for transformational and transactional leadership style were positively correlated to effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction as outcomes of leadership whereas high scores for laissez-faire leadership style correlated negatively with these leadership outcomes Table 4.

Spearman correlation analysis of the data indicated that the frequency of school conflicts varied with gender and school size. The presence of male principals correlated with the frequency of the conflict and the size of the school unit. High scores for transformational and transactional leadership traits was inversely correlated with the frequency of school conflict. On the contrary, high scores on laissez-faire leadership traits correlated positively with the frequency of school conflicts Table 5.

The gender of school principals varied according to the size of the school unit Figure 1. Female principals were present proportionally to the ratio of male/female teachers up to a school size of 200 students. In larger school units, the ratio of male/female principals was significantly larger from the expected ratio of male/female teachers ($X2$, $P<0.01$) and women were underrepresented in school leadership positions in large schools Figure 1.

The issue of school conflicts varied according to school size. Schools with more students exhibited a higher frequency of conflicts compared to smaller schools, and this trend could not be explained solely on the increase in the number of students Figure 2.

Table-1. Demographic characteristics of the teachers.

(n=163) who participated in the current survey

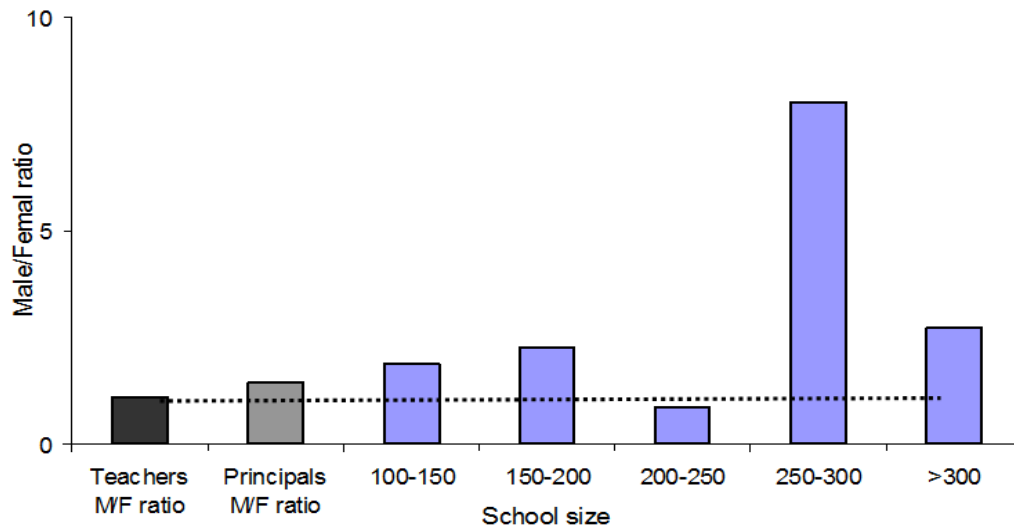| Characteristic	N	Percentage %
Age Group		
≤35	20	12.26
35-45	44	26.99
45-55	73	44.79
>55	26	15.95
Gender		
♀	111	68.10
♂	52	31.90

Figure-1. Ratio of male/female school principals in different school size units of the sample (blue bars), principals in the sample (grey bar) and in the general population of teachers (black bar). The ratio was significantly different from the expected in schools above 250-300 students (X2, P<0.01). The dotted line represents a ratio=1.

Table-2. Scores of MLQ factors for teachers' perceptions about leadership characteristics of their school principals. Significant differences (Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests, P<0.05) between the scores of different leadership characteristics are indicated with at least one different letter.

Leadership characteristics		Mean	Cronbach's α
Transformational characteristics	Idealized influence (attributed)	3.15 ±0.14a	0.78
	Idealized influence (behaviour)	3.23±0.61a	0.76
	Inspirational motivation	2.99±0.17a	0.78
	Intellectual stimulation	2.83±0.13a	0.77
	Individualized consideration	2.70±0.25a	0.74
Transactional characteristics	Contingent reward	2.83±0.41a	0.74
	Management-by-exception (active)	2.36±0.10a	0.69
	Management-by-exception (passive)	2.57±0.38bc	0.79
	Laissez-faire leadership	2.54±0.33c	0.71

Table-3. Perceived leadership style of male and female principals.

Leadership style	Male	Female	Mann -Whitney test	Z	P
Transformational	86.93	74.76	2723.00	-1.62	0.11
Transactional	82.48	81.29	3154.00	-0.159	0.87
Laissez-faire	83.66	79.55	3039.00	-0.55	0.58

Table-4. Spearman correlation coefficient between different leadership styles and outcomes (extra effort, effectiveness and satisfaction). An asterisk indicates significant (P<0.001) Spearman's correlation between the variables.

	Outcomes		
Leadership style	Effectiveness	Extra Effort	Satisfaction
Transformational Leadership	rs =0.78*	rs =0.86*	rs =0.72*
Transactional	rs =0.58*	rs =0.71*	rs =0.47*
Laisse-faire	rs =-0.67*	rs =-0.58*	rs =-0.65*

Table-5. Parameters affecting school conflict frequencies.

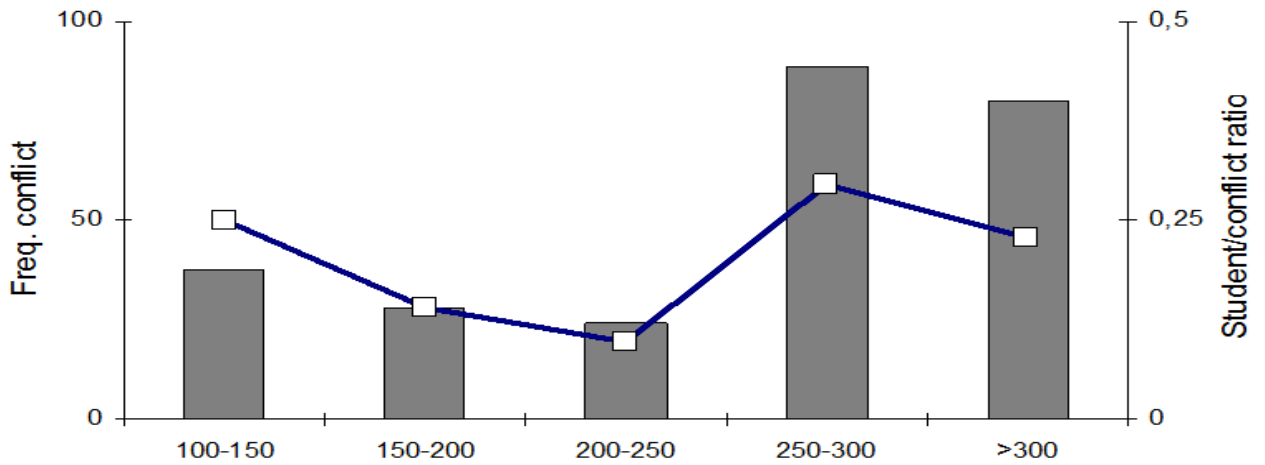|	Frequency of Conflicts	Increase/decrease
School size	rs =0.331 **(P<0.001)	Increase
Gender of Principals	X2 =15.83** (P<0.001)	Increase ♂>♂
Leadership traits		
Transf rmational	rs =-0.10 (NS, P=0.22)	Decrease
Transactional	rs =-0.7 (NS, P=0.37(	Decrease
Laissez-faire	rs =0.19 *(P<0.012)	Increase

Figure-2. School size (number of students) and frequency of conflicts. The vertical bars indicate the frequency of conflicts. The line represents the ratio: school conflict/school size.
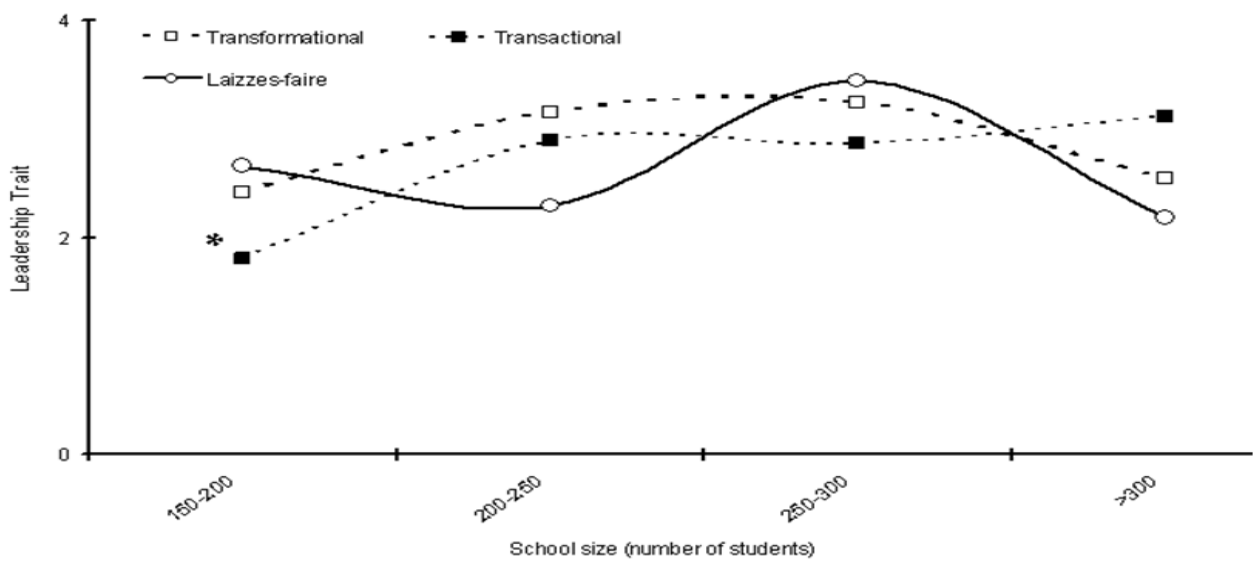
Figure-3. School size and score of leadership traits. The asterisk indicates a significant difference (Kruskal –Wallis, P<0.05) only in the small schools (150-200 students) between small schools which exhibited transformational or transactional leadership styles and the small schools with a laissez-faire leadership styles.
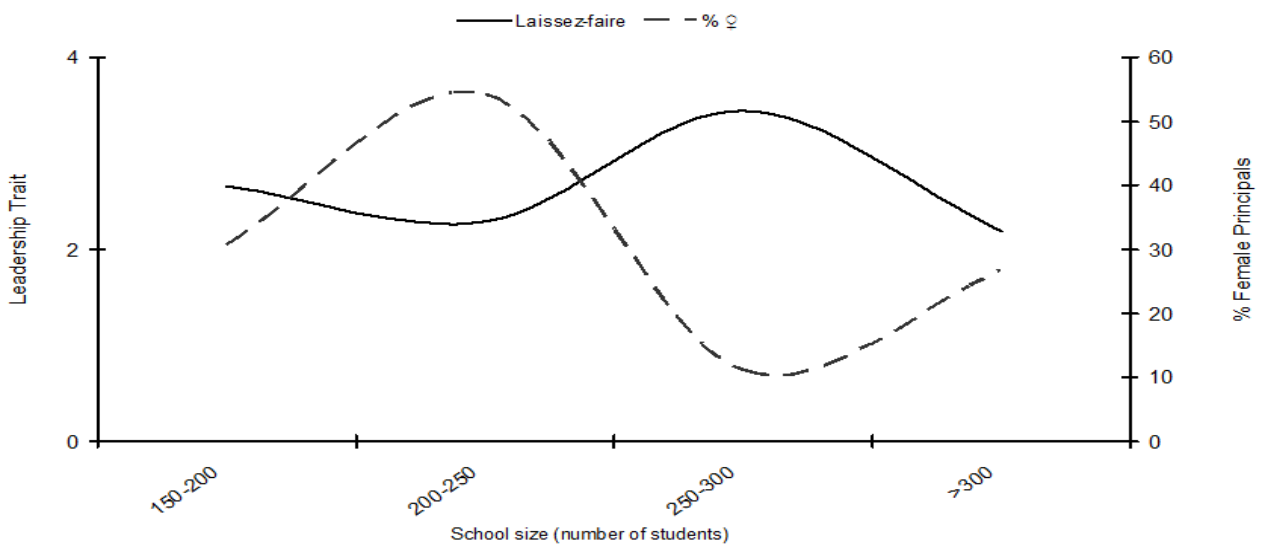
Figure-4. Frequency of conflicts, score of laissez-faire leadership style traits and percent of female principals in different school-size groups.

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Leadership style varied according to the size of the school unit. Principals in small school units (size group 150-200 students) more frequently exhibited a laissez-faire leadership style. In larger schools, a transformational and transactional leadership style prevailed Figure 3. In schools with more than 150 students, the presence of female school leaders and the prevalence of a laissez-faire leadership style varied inversely to each other; this was exhibited in both small and large school size with small school exhibiting lower frequency of school conflict and larger size schools exhibiting higher frequency of school conflicts Figure 4.

4. DISCUSSION

Our results reflect a significant problem in terms of women in school leadership positions in Greece. Nearly 60% of the schools principals were male, and this cannot be explained by the gender ratio of teachers in Athens or the gender ratio in the general population. The low presence of women in leadership positions is a chronic and significant equal opportunities issue in Greece and in other counties (Anastasiou & Siassiakos, 2014). Several contributing factors have been established in the relevant literature indicating that the existence of a variety of barriers which result in women be underrepresented in managerial positions including school leadership (Ballenger, 2010; Coleman, 2005; Edwards & Lyons, 1994). For example, gender, culture politics, and stereotypes can be blamed for the low presence of female leaders in schools and other professional sectors. For centuries, men are more likely to rise in leadership positions in Greece and other countries (Anastasiou & Siassiakos, 2014; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003).

A small effect of gender on leadership traits has been reported in some cases (Eagly et al., 2003; Harris & Trnavčevič, 2020; Hentschel et al., 2018) but the results of the present work do not support a gender effect on leadership style of female school principals. There was no significant difference in the perceived leadership traits of transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership style of school principals in this sample. It is possible that a small effect of gender on leadership trait could not be identified due to the small sample of principals used in the present work.

While no gender bias in leadership style was seen here, men were more likely to lead large schools. Leadership style varied only in the very small schools with a lower score of laissez-faire leadership traits in small schools. School size may affect leadership style (Coleman, 2005; Scheifele et al., 2020) and this can explain the results observed in the present work.

Men were more likely to lead large schools, but women were equally present in the rest of school sizes. This gender bias may reflect gender stereotypes of leadership traits. For example, male leaders are frequently expected to exhibit a "male" attitude that many people value in managing a large group of people (Kushell & Newton, 2016; Snaebjornsson, Edvardsson, Zydziunaite, & Vaiman, 2015).

Leadership outcomes may vary according to the leadership traits exhibited under particular situations (Asumta, Supriyanto, Ismiyanti, & Hartiningsih, 2016; Deveshwar & Aneja, 2014). For example, leadership traits can affect the productivity and willingness of employees for their engagement and their satisfaction by their leaders (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2020; Sayadi, 2016; Zareen, Razzaq, & Mujtaba, 2015). This potential effect of leadership traits on leadership outcomes was observed here. Transformational and transactional leadership traits correlated with increased leadership outcomes (willingness, extra effort, satisfaction) as perceived by teachers. On the contrary, a high score on laissez-faire leadership traits correlated negatively (effectiveness, r=-0.67; extra effort, r=-0.58; satisfaction, r=-0.65) with leadership outcomes. These results are in agreement with results which reported superior leadership outcome of laissez-faire leadership compared to transformational and transactional leadership style (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007; Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2014).

Conflict management is another critical issue when it comes to effective school leadership (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). The results indicate that school conflict varies with school size (r=0.331, P<0.001). Larger schools exhibit an increased frequency of conflicts. This could not be explained by the ratio of conflict to student or

to number. Larger schools were more likely to have a male principal and so men were more likely to be present in school with increased conflict issues. Some evidence of a possible gender difference on leadership effectiveness can be seen in the schools which exhibited laissez-faire leadership. A laissez-faire leadership style may result in poor conflict management effectiveness (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Gray & Williams, 2012). In the present study, female principals exhibited improved conflict management ($X2=15.83$, $P<0.001$) outcomes. The reasons for this may include a range of traits that could not be seen in the analysis of the present sample due to the limitations of the small size. A range of parameters such as personality traits, age, experience, and school culture may vary. This range of parameters may have a small but significant effect that could not be seen in a small sample of this work. A larger sample of schools and school principals is required to investigate the significance of various school parameters and perspectives of the work and leadership environment (Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, & Marx, 2015) in schools.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our results indicate that women are underrepresented in the leadership of secondary education schools in Greece and that leadership styles can affect leadership outcomes. There is no evidence to suggest that women were less able and less effective as school leaders. Leadership traits were the most significant parameters affecting the leadership outcomes of school principals. School leaders should explore this option as a tool to improve their leadership skills and style. Leadership style and leadership outcomes are crucial parameters for optimal human resources management and educational outcomes in schools.

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