



Principals' self-perception of their transformational leadership practices and its effects on Student academic performance in Sidama Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The study examined principals' transformational leadership practices and how they can affect student academic performance in Ethiopia's Sidama region. It employed a convergent parallel mixed research design. The quantitative part of the study used a modified MLQ-based questionnaire, while the qualitative phase used an open-ended semi-structured interview. The study's dependent variable was student academic performance, while the independent variable was principals' transformational leadership practices. The study targeted 95 public secondary schools in Ethiopia's Sidama region. The study used an appropriate sample approach and included 91 principals from 24 public secondary schools. In the qualitative phase, ten principals took part. An analysis of the gathered data was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study's findings demonstrated that principals comprehend and practice transformational leadership. Furthermore, the study showed that the principal's transformational leadership techniques significantly and favorably affect students' academic performance, with an overall correlation value of $r = .827$ ($p < .01$).

The results of the linear multiple regression showed that 69.9% of the variation in the student's academic performance could be explained by modifications in the principal's transformational leadership approach. Furthermore, the study showed that principals in high-performing schools more frequently exhibit transformational leadership behaviors than in low-performing ones.

Key Terms: Leadership, Transformational leadership, School leadership, School principal, Student academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for a country to develop politically, socially, and economically. According to the World Economic Forum (2016), education is acquiring skills that increase production. This means that skilled and educated workers are crucial for completing complicated activities and satisfying changing demands for productivity and output. According to Woessman (2015), education is the primary factor influencing economic growth. Smith (2021) elucidated the positive correlation between human capital development and economic growth. Kautz, Heckman, JDiris, Weel, and Borghans (2014) clarified the significance of education in influencing people's lives and fostering social cohesion. For this reason, education is a vital component of human life. According to Hanushek and Woessmann (2015), OECD (2018), and the World Bank (2018), the quality of a country's educational system influences its technical and economic advancement.



Considering the value of education, it is also clear that quality should be upheld and improved. Maintaining the quality of education requires competent school leadership. School leadership and administration primarily determine student learning and educational quality. The attributes of school leadership positively impact teachers' commitment, which enhances student learning. Quin, Deris, Bischoff, and Johnson (2015) suggest that principals of high-achieving schools demonstrate a greater degree of transformational leadership attributes than their counterparts in lower-performing schools. Based on how well school principals lead, there is a glaring disparity in students' learning results between schools (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). The work of Leithwood (1994) also indicated that principal leadership affects student achievement. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) argued that school leadership through successful practice influences the school learning environment in general and student academic outcomes in particular. In schools with more effective leadership, students score higher on the national exam (MOE, 2021). According to Anastasiou and Garametsi (2021), school leadership significantly impacts a school's effectiveness. Similar arguments were made by Ibrahim (2021) and Harris, Jones, Adams, and Cheah (2019), who claimed that distinct academic performance variations exist among students depending on the leadership styles examined and that effective school leadership can alter students' academic outcomes.

In Ethiopia, school leadership is currently facing a critical issue: the quality of education. Regarding the students' academic performance, the education community is challenging the school leadership (MOE, 2021). Ethiopia uses the National Learning Assessment, or NLA, to assess the quality of education provided (ETP, 1994). According to a 2021 national assessment by the National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA), just 47% of students in grade 12 nationwide received a minimum passing score (MOE, 2021). Only 25% met the qualifications to attend a government university (MOE, 2021). In the study area, in 2021, only 19% of students obtained the required score to be admitted to university, down from just 29% in 2020 (BOE, 2021). This demonstrates the sporadic drop in both academic achievement and the quality of education. These factors motivated the researcher to investigate how the transformational leadership style of school principals affects student outcomes and academic performance.

2. Research question and objectives

Main Research Question: This study's primary research question is: **What are the principals' transformational leadership practices and their effect on the student's academic performance in the Sidama region of Ethiopia?**

The research objective: **The study's main objective was to determine how the principal's transformational leadership practices impacted student academic achievement in the Sidama region of Ethiopia.**

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. The concept of leadership

Diverse scholars and writers have attempted to define leadership, leading to various conceptualizations. Stodgill (1974) argued that there are many concepts when different authors define leadership. Additionally, Gill (2006) contended that various people understand leadership differently, indicating that it is one of the world's most observed and least understood phenomena. In addition, Burns (1978) explained the diversity and intricacy of perspectives on leadership, pointing out that it is one of the world's most observed and little comprehended phenomena.

According to Bass (1999), leadership is the development process in which an individual gains qualities that inspire others to accomplish organizational goals. Leadership is also defined by Kouzes and Posner (2006) as an interpersonal relationship that arises from the interactions of persons who choose to follow and those who wish to lead. Yukl (2010, 2013) defined leadership in terms of influence as convincing subordinates to achieve established organizational goals. Northouse (2016) emphasized leadership as an influence in which a leader persuades people to achieve common organizational objectives.

Based on the perspectives above, it can be concluded that leadership is a social process involving influence. Being a leader is more than just having authority or control over others. Nonetheless, the capacity to inspire, motivate, and recognize people's unique abilities and inventiveness is what defines leadership (Northouse, 2018). Leadership needs to achieve specific organizational goals (Yukl, 2012; Northouse, 2018). It requires connections with people involved in the system's interaction process (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Yukl (2012) and Northouse (2018) contend that achieving organizational objectives necessitates leadership.

3.2 Transformational Leadership

In 1978, Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership in analyzing political leaders. According to Burns, transformational leadership occurs "*when one or more individuals interact with others in a way that elevates one another to higher moral and motivational standards*" (p. 20). As stated by Burns, the primary objective of transformational leadership is to inspire and encourage individuals to take the initiative to accomplish organizational goals and move beyond themselves. By leveraging these drivers, executives can achieve organizational objectives and instill a sense of pride in the company's success in their workforce.

Burns' theory of transformative leadership was broadened and reinterpreted by Bass (1985, 1990) to encompass organizational leadership. According to Bass, a leader pushes people to surpass their initial goals. According to Bass, people get more motivated when they understand the significance of goals and how they might be achieved. Bass suggested that leaders inspire subordinates to put the group or organization's needs ahead of their own. Bass (1985) also asserts that transformational leaders achieve extraordinary organizational performance by inspiring their subordinates with an inspiring future vision and ensuring their goals align with the organization's objectives. According to Bush (2018) and Northouse (2016), transformational leaders go above and beyond what is required to achieve more critical organizational goals.

According to Bass (1999), transformational leaders are charismatic individuals who offer their followers intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. Northouse (2016) supported Bass's perspective by suggesting that transformational leadership is a style that employs intellectual stimulation, individualized concern, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation to encourage followers to act with compassion. The study used these transformational leadership factors to investigate the principal's influence in preserving student academic achievement in Ethiopia's Sidama region.

An idealized influence is a leader demonstrating exemplary behavior that causes followers to identify with them (Northouse, 2016). Leaders with idealized influence exhibit honesty, moral dedication to their followers, and selflessness (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Barling, Christie, & Hopton, 2011). Additionally, Shrestha (2020) contended that transformational leaders with idealized influence demonstrate high moral standards and sound ethical conduct when interacting with their subordinates.

Inspirational motivation demonstrates leaders' ability to influence their followers with an enticing and inspiring vision. It describes how leaders interact with staff members to inspire them to reach high standards and establish a commitment to realizing the group's common goal (Northouse, 2007; Shrestha, 2020). Many academics contend that inspirational leaders motivate their followers to go above and beyond what they had previously thought possible (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Barling et al., 2011). Transformational leaders who exhibit inspirational motivation maximize their followers'



performance. They establish challenging but attainable goals, support and encourage their followers through difficult times, and inspire confidence in their skills.

Intellectual stimulation demonstrates how much leaders ask for their followers' thoughts, challenge assumptions, and take measured risks. In addition, it fosters creativity and intellect in problem-solving (Shrestha, 2020). This quality, according to Bass and Riggio, aids leaders in encouraging and promoting creativity and innovation in their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Furthermore, it is said that transformational leaders who inspire their people to find solutions on their own stimulate their minds (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Barling et al., 2011). Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou (2011) state that intellectually stimulating behavior creates an atmosphere where followers are free thinkers and actively involved in the group. Nonetheless, leaders who encourage intellectual stimulation also assist their followers in coming up with original and imaginative fixes for issues (Bass, 1999; Bass, 2000; Dartey-Baah, 2015).

Individualized consideration or attention refers to how a leader attends to each follower's needs, serves as a coach or mentor, and hears out their issues (Gill, 2006). Bass (1990) believes that individual concern gives particular attention to marginalized people by attending to their followers' needs, providing guidance, and exemplifying acts of kindness and empathy. An individualized consideration leader carefully considers every follower, viewing them as unique individuals in their personal and professional spheres. By acting as mentors, coaches, and allies, these leaders assist their colleagues in promoting organizational success (Bass, 1999; Bass, 2000; Dartey-Baah, 2015).

3.3 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In his paper on the importance of educational leadership in achieving educational goals, Enwereuzo (2022) defines school leadership as enlisting and directing the skills of teachers, students, and parents to achieve common educational goals. School leadership differs from school administration and management, concerned with control and oversight. According to Enwereuzo (2022), school leadership is how principals monitor and organize staff and student activities to achieve academic goals. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) conducted an empirical review of effective school leadership and discovered that almost all significant school leaders use the same core leadership strategies, such as creating a vision and setting goals, understanding and fostering human development, restructuring the organization, and overseeing the teaching and learning program. Leithwood (2005) also described school leadership as having two primary functions: setting directions and exercising influence. Principals that use transformational leadership styles are more effective in school reform, according to various research (Leithwood & Jantiz, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2007; Shahrill, 2014; Quin et al., 2015; Sun & Leithwood, 2017; Wang et al., 2016). Leithwood (1994) established the transformational model of school leadership, building on the work of Burns (1978), Bass (1985), and Bass and Avolio (1994). He emphasized that to navigate the twenty-first century's difficulties successfully, school principals must possess the Four I's of transformational leadership, as articulated by Bass and Avolio (1994). Setting directions, developing people, redesigning organizations, and improving the instructional program are the four domains of successful school leadership that influence teaching and learning outcomes, according to Leithwood and his associates' synthesis of prior research based on qualitative and quantitative data analysis (Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & McCullough, 2016). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004:57) emphasized the role of school leadership in boosting student learning outcomes by stating, "Of all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school, classroom instruction is second only to leadership." Similarly, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argued that leadership is vital for effectiveness and a changing school environment. Comprehensive research also found that school principals' leadership styles significantly impact school atmosphere and culture, improving student academic achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Shatzer et al., 2014; Anderson, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2017).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design and approach

This study employed a mixed-method research technique, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Hafsa (2019) and George (2021, 2022), this method integrates qualitative and quantitative components to address the study issue.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of public secondary school principals. The study's target population was 95 school principals from these secondary schools in the Sidama region.

4.2.1 Sample and sampling procedures for Phase 1: The quantitative phase

Every principal and vice principal in every selected school was the target.

4.2.2 Sample and sampling procedures for Phase 2: The qualitative phase

In phase two, ten principals from ten secondary schools were interviewed. The principals participating in the study were selected based on each school's academic performance.

4.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

4.3.1 Instrumentation and data collection in Phase 1: The quantitative phase

The Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), created by Bass (1985) and improved by Bass and Avolio (2000), was utilized in the quantitative phase to evaluate the transformational leadership practices of principals. For the study, the researcher changed the MLQ and added new details. Descriptive statements were used in the questionnaire to describe leadership styles. A Likert scale with one representing the least descriptive statement and five representing the most described was used to ask respondents to rate the descriptive statements.

Information about the student's academic performance was obtained from the Education Bureau of the Sidama Region. The students' four years of secondary school academic achievement were collected and categorized for further investigation based on the national exam results. Principals were asked to rate the student's academic performance based on the total scores out of 700, which were categorized as below 200, 400-499, 300-399, 200-299, and 500-700. The academic performance for the four years (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) was assessed. A scale of 1 to 5 was used to rate the average, which was collected for further correlational analysis.

4.3.2 Instrumentation and data collection in Phase 2: The qualitative phase

Throughout the qualitative phase, selected principals were asked structured and semi-structured open-ended interview questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The participants were selected based on academic achievement from ten secondary schools. The researcher could transcribe and code data from individual interview sessions using an audio tape recorder for data analysis.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

The researcher employed Cronbach's Alpha to assess the instrument's internal consistency. According to George and Malley (2019), a Cronbach Alpha score greater than 0.7 denotes the credibility of the test items. Based on the investigated variables (IF, IM, IS, and IC), a reliability test was conducted. The following tables present the results.

Table 1. Reliability test of the data of 91 respondents/principals, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=48)

(P=principals, IF=idealized influence, IM=inspirational motivation, IS=intellectual stimulation, IC= individualized consideration)

Independent and Dependent Variables		Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Leveled as to George and Mallery
PIF		0.907	11	Very Good
PIM		0.830	13	Good
PIS		0.859	12	Good
PIC		0.863	12	Good
Overall		0.938	48	Very Good

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The validity of the research data is required to assess the quality of the research. The consistency and accuracy of a measure are shown by the data's validity, according to Middleton (2019). One of the standard methods for assessing validity is its convergence validity. According to Jain and Chetty (2021, 2022), convergent validity is the extent to which the variables under investigation are connected. Using the Kaiser-Varimax rotation approach, factor loading was transformed into the most straightforward interpretation pattern (Kaiser, 1958). A factor analysis loading value of 0.5 and higher is widely accepted as indicating the presence of a meaningful construct between variables (Ahmad, 2016; Hair, Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2021). The results are shown in the following tables.

Table 2: Convergent Validity for the Principals' component based on loading factors (using SPSS) and AVE on constructs from the standardized estimate (using AMOS), Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

V	factor loads
PIF	0.811
PIM	0.571
PIS	0.809
PIC	0.935
SAP2	0.897

Source: Authors' calculation, 2024. Extraction Method: Principal component analysis Varimax Rotation with Kaiser normalization, Sidama region, Ethiopia.

The factor analysis results mentioned above showed a positive relationship between the variables. They asserted that the methodology gauges principals' intent to employ transformational leadership to impact students' academic performance appropriately.



5. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis is the process of utilizing an appropriate statistical method to summarize, describe, and evaluate the collected data. According to Kelley (2022), data analysis is the process of "*cleaning, changing, processing raw data, and extracting actionable information.*" SPSS 25 and MS were utilized for quantitative data analysis throughout the quantitative phase. The Likert scale was used to score questions with a closed end. By employing frequencies, percentages, means, and weighted means to analyze the data, the researcher validated the transformational leadership practices of the school principals and their impact on the student's academic attainment in the study region.

5.1.1 Questionnaires Return Rate

All 91 principals who participated in the study completed and returned the questionnaire, resulting in a 100% return rate.

5.1.2. Biographic data information

Ninety-one principals and vice principals completed and returned the questionnaire. Out of all the respondents, 76 (83.5%) were men, and 15 (16.5%) were female. The respondent principals' age distribution shows that 59.3% are between the ages of 30 and 39, 25.3% are between the ages of 40 and 49, 5.5% are under 30, and 9.9% are over 50.

An analysis of the principals' educational backgrounds revealed that 36.3% had a master's degree, while the majority, 63.7%, had a bachelor's degree. With 53.8% having 16 or more years and 31.9% having 11–15 years, most respondent principals had at least ten (10) years of experience. Comparatively, 2.2% of the principals had experience spanning 1 to 5 years, while 12.1% had experience spanning 6 to 10 years.

5.2 Perception of principals about their transformational leadership practices

The researcher set out to determine how much principals understood about and practiced transformational leadership. To this end, the four components of transformational leadership— independent variables in the study—were used as a basis for principals to rate their transformational leadership practices. The transformational leadership component and the principals' responses to each element were examined using mean and standard deviation. The outcomes were contrasted with the student's academic standing using correlational analysis.

5.2.1 Principals idealized influence understanding and practices

Principals were asked to agree on how often they practice idealized behavior to influence students' academic performance based on the Likert scale of 1-5 (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always). The results are presented below.

Table 3: Response of the principals to the idealized influence, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
As a principal, I instill pride in others for being associated with me/create an environment that makes subordinates feel good	91	3.25	1.131
I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group	91	3.53	1.026
I act in ways that build others' respect for me	91	3.56	1.195
I display a sense of power and confidence.	91	3.49	1.205
I talk about my most important values and beliefs.	91	3.55	1.003
I specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.	91	3.37	1.082
I consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.	91	3.44	1.077
I emphasize the importance of having a collective sense of mission	91	3.45	1.176
I lead by acting as a role model for staff and students	91	3.23	1.146
I am always concerned about school staff and students	91	3.02	1.145
Show respect for staff	91	3.22	1.114
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.37	0.80

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The principals' perspectives on idealized influence practices agreed, resulting in an average mean score of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 0.80. The principals reached a consensus that went above and beyond the mean value on several items, including acting in ways that build the respect of others for him, talking about the most important values and beliefs about himself, and going beyond self-interest for the good of the group were the items that strongly agreed with the mean values 3.56, 3.55, and 3.53, respectively. The idealized influence of the principals is thought to be able to foster a cooperative atmosphere among stakeholders. A substantial correlation has been found by Riffe, Lacy, Watson, and Fico (2019) between teacher job satisfaction and principals' idealized influence approaches, which in turn enhances student academic achievement. The above findings are supported by Osagie and Momoh (2016), who agreed that the principals' idealized influence practices often influence students' educational outcomes.

5.2.2 Principals' Inspirational Motivation Practices

It is thought that transformational leadership's aspects of inspirational motivation allow principals to motivate teachers and students to improve academic performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2016; Shrestha, 2020). Principals were asked to rate their inspirational motivation practices of 13 items of inspirational motivation practices.

Table 4: Response of the principals to the component of inspirational motivation, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I talk enthusiastically/passionately about what needs to be accomplished.	91	3.43	1.045
I articulate a compelling vision for the future.	91	3.49	1.099
I express confidence that the goals will be achieved.	91	3.55	1.046
I talk optimistically about the future.	91	3.22	1.227
I use a different mechanism to communicate vision.	91	3.21	1.140
I always discuss the most important values and beliefs.	91	3.15	1.074

Articulates and communicates the vision of the school to the followers	91	3.30	1.016
Set high-level goals for student academic success	91	3.52	1.037
Express confidence that the goals will be achieved	91	3.24	1.186
Create an exciting image of what is essential to consider	91	3.63	1.040
It helps the followers feel appreciated	91	3.16	1.176
Hold high expectations for student learning outcomes	91	3.04	1.021
Encourages teachers' participation in decision-making about school improvement	91	3.34	1.128
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.34	.647

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

According to the above table, the principals agreed on inspirational motivation approaches with an overall mean of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 0.647. Based on the table above, the principals strongly agreed on several items above mean values, including creating an exciting image (mean value: 3.63), building confidence in school goals (mean value: 3.55), setting high-level academic targets (mean value: 3.52), articulating a compelling vision (mean value: 3.49), and engaging in enthusiastic discussions (mean value: 3.43). The principal's perceived inspirational motivation rate was comparable with the findings of Osagie and Momoh (2016), who found that principals use inspirational motivation frequently, with a mean value of 3.27. The findings also support leadership theories asserting that leaders inspire and encourage their followers to improve organizational performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2016).

5.2.3 Intellectual stimulation practices of principals (IS)

The principals were asked to rate how frequently they practiced the twelve items under intellectual stimulation. The findings are shown in the table below.

Table 5: Perception of principals about intellectual stimulation practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.	91	3.49	1.089
I seek different perspectives when solving problems.	91	3.53	1.058
I get others to look at problems from many different angles	91	3.15	1.182
I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments	91	3.21	1.049
I always seek different opinions from individuals in solving problems	91	3.24	1.015
I let teachers look at problems from different angles	91	3.35	1.015
Encourages out-box thinking	91	3.54	1.068
Stimulates ideas from teachers to challenge the status quo	91	3.18	1.198
Values ideas from teachers	91	3.68	.987
Encourages critical thinking and innovation	91	3.47	1.058
Develops ideas for teachers' professional development	91	3.45	1.098
Encourage teachers to set new ways to improve student's learning outcome	91	3.55	.834
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.40	.663

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

There was consensus among the principals about the practices of intellectual stimulation, resulting in an average mean score of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.663. On several items, the principals came to a consensus that exceeded the mean value, such as valuing teacher ideas (mean value: 3.68), fostering innovative thinking (mean value: 3.55), looking for diverse perspectives for problem-solving (mean value: 3.49), re-evaluating critical assumptions (mean value: 3.47), and fostering ideas for teachers' professional development (mean value: 3.45). The outcome above closely resembles the research conducted by Osagie and Momoh (2016), which found that the principal's intellectual stimulation practice had a mean value of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.22 on the Likert scale.

5.2.4 Individualized Consideration Practices of Principals (IC)

Principals were asked to score 12 items under individual consideration, indicating how often they agreed or disagreed with them. The table below displays the findings.

Table 6: Principals individualized consideration practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I spend time teaching and coaching	91	3.14	1.039
I treat others as individuals rather than just a member of a group	91	3.15	1.219
I consider an individual to have different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others	91	3.63	1.018
I help others to develop their strengths	91	3.51	1.109
Appreciate the performance of individuals	91	3.35	1.109
Understand the needs of the staff and assist them accordingly	91	3.47	.899
Provide individuals with different needs and aspirations	91	3.20	1.147
Emphasize and discuss the needs, abilities, and aspirations of followers	91	3.45	1.036
Come along with teachers and students	91	3.52	1.205
Give attention to different needs of teachers towards school goal accomplishments	91	3.49	1.251
Regularly provides the resources needed for teacher professional development	91	3.55	1.057
Encourages teachers' individual professional development	91	3.14	1.039
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.38	.64600

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The principals agreed on their perceptions of individualized consideration processes, with a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of .646. Principals agreed that many items exceeded the average mean value, such as considering the different needs of individuals (mean value: 3.63), providing the resources needed for teacher professional development (mean value: 3.55), escorting teachers and students (mean value: 3.52), helping others capitalize on their strengths (mean value: 3.51), attending to the different needs of teachers (mean value: 3.49), and having conversations about the goals of others (mean value: 3.45). The findings of the principal individual consideration are supported by the findings of Osagie and Momoh (2016), Gyansah (2020), and Musyoki (2022).

5.3 Transformational leadership practices of principals and student academic performance as self-perceived

The study employed Pearson's correlation coefficient to evaluate the level of relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient, whose value varies typically from -1 to 1, can be used to determine the relationship between the two data sets (Turney, 2024). A correlation is said to be negative if it is below zero and positive if it is above zero. The following tables display the test results.

Table 7: Pearson’s correlation matrix analysis, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Correlations		PIF	PIM	PIS	PIC	PTL	SAP
PIF	Pearson Correlation	1	.251*	.514**	.735**	.818**	.706**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91
PIM	Pearson Correlation	.251*	1	.294**	.465**	.598**	.499**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017		.005	.000	.000	.000
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91
PIS	Pearson Correlation	.514**	.294**	1	.773**	.810**	.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005		.000	.000	.000
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91
PIC	Pearson Correlation	.735**	.465**	.773**	1	.938**	.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91
PTL	Pearson Correlation	.818**	.598**	.810**	.938**	1	.827**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91
SAP2	Pearson Correlation	.706**	.499**	.632**	.760**	.827**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91

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

**. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant and positive relationships between the independent variables (transformational leadership components) and the dependent variable (students' academic performance). The correlation values ranged from $r = .251$ ($p < .05$) to $r = .938$ ($p < .01$) for transformational leadership factors.

The principals' idealized influence was positively correlated with all other categories, and it was more positively correlated with transformational leadership practices in general ($r = .818$, $p < .01$). In addition, there was a significant positive correlation ($r = .706$, $p < .01$) between it and students' academic achievement. The principals' inspirational motivation was positively correlated with every other element and significantly positively correlated ($r = .499$, $p < .01$) with students' academic achievement. The principals' intellectual stimulation factor demonstrated strong positive correlations with all factors, as well as a positive and strong correlation with the overall transformational leadership practices ($r = .810$, $p < .01$) and the academic performance of students ($r = .632$, $p < .01$). Individualized consideration, on the other hand, was the factor that had the most substantial positive relationship with overall transformational leadership practices ($r = .938$, $p < .01$) and the most substantial positive relationship with students' academic performance ($r = .760$, $p < .01$).

In conclusion, Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis showed a strong relationship between the dependent variable (students' academic achievement) and the independent variables (transformational leadership components). The results demonstrated a positive relationship between student academic achievement and principals' transformational leadership, with an overall correlation value of $r = .827$ ($p < .01$).

Other research findings corroborate the conclusions above. According to research findings released by Ebete and Ejims (2020) using a descriptive survey, transformational leadership by principals facilitated high productivity, enhanced student accomplishment, and realistic school goals. The results of Gyansah

(2020), Osagie and Momoh (2016), and Musyoki (2022) all showed that principals' transformational leadership practices had a favorable and significant impact on students' academic achievement. According to the linear multiple regression results, changes in the principal's transformational leadership practices can account for 69.9% of the variation in students' academic performance. This suggests that principals play a significant role in influencing their students' academic outcomes.

Table 8: Linear Multiple Regression Model (Model of Fitness) for the principal component, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.836 ^a	.699	.682	.35592
a. Predictors: (constant), PIC, PIM, PIF, PIS				
b. Dependent Variable: Dependent SAP2				

Source: Model output, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The ANOVA analysis for the principal component is presented in the table below.

Table 9: ANOVA analysis for the principal component, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	25.056	5	5.011	39.557	.000 ^b
	Residual	10.768	85	.127		
	Total	35.824	90			
a. Dependent variable: SAP2						
b. Predictors: (constant), PTL, PIM, PIS, PIC, PIF						

Source: Model output, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The model's overall significance, as determined by the ANOVA analysis in the above table, is 0.000, meaning it is statistically significant at the selected significance level (e.g., 0.05). Moreover, the F ratio of 39.557 is greater than 1, indicating that the data fit the model well.

5.4 Transformational Leadership Practices of Principals in High- and Low-performing Schools

Five (5) schools from the higher-performing group and five (5) from the lower-performing group were selected to determine the extent of the disparity. The mean value and standard deviation were used to identify the transformational leadership practices of the school principals based on their self-perception. The responses of twenty (20) principals from five (5) better-performing schools were analyzed using SPSS 25. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 10: Response of better-performing school principals to their transformational leadership practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=20)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIF	20	3.7910	.56346
PIM	20	3.7685	.53157
PIS	20	3.8740	.55876
PIC	20	3.9455	.49618
PTL	20	3.8645	.42037
Valid N (listwise)	20		

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

In the table above, the principals of the best-performing schools exhibit more robust transformational leadership practices compared to the overall survey results. Their perceptions have a higher average mean of 3.86 (standard deviation = 0.42), surpassing the overall survey mean of 3.38 (standard deviation = 0.55).

5.5 Response of the Principals of the lower performing schools

The principals of five schools with lower student academic performance responses were examined to determine how they implement transformational leadership practices in their schools. The table below shows the analysis and presentation of responses from twenty-one principals.

Table 11: Response of low-performing school principals to their transformational leadership practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=21)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIF	21	2.8790	.75126
PIM	21	2.8638	.72964
PIS	21	2.8933	.70716
PIC	21	2.8133	.49443
PTL	21	2.8571	.53242
Valid N (listwise)	21		

Source: Computed from survey data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

The table above shows that, with an overall mean value of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 0.53, principals of underperforming schools indicated lower levels of transformational leadership practice. This mean value is substantially less than the 3.86 mean value reported by the school's principal with the best performance.

5.6 Qualitative data analysis and presentation

Based on the educational achievements of the students, the researcher selected ten (10) schools for the qualitative phase. From these schools, ten (10) principals were chosen. Principals were asked how much they understand transformational leadership and how often they practice it. All the principals in the interview responded that they practice transformational leadership behavior in their respective schools. Regarding idealized influence, principals responded that they try to behave in a way that influences teachers and other school stakeholders. The better-performing school principals presented detailed activities under idealized influence behavior. On the other hand, principals from lower-performing schools discussed their idealized influence roles in general.

Principals were asked to discuss their understanding and practice of inspirational motivation. All principals who participated in the interview expressed their knowledge and practices of transformational leadership in various ways. Principals of better-performing schools discussed the inspirational motivation behavior of transformational leadership in more detail than principals of lower-performing schools. When reviewing their methods of intellectual stimulation, school principals agreed that they focus on engaging teachers in innovative activities that enhance students' academic progress through intellectual stimulation. When it comes to individual consideration, the majority of principals interviewed said that they use different degrees of individualized considerate behaviors to satisfy the demands of each teacher.

5.7 Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis produced similar results. The qualitative data further illuminated principals' understanding of transformational leadership approaches. A quantitative and qualitative data review shows that principals' leadership styles positively impact students' academic achievement and the school environment. The study's results and presentation demonstrated a robust positive correlation between principals' leadership styles and their students' academic achievement.

6. Discussion of the study's findings

The study's findings were discussed using the objectives derived from the research questions and the study's primary goal. The study's main research question was: What are the principals' transformational leadership practices and their effect on the student's academic performance in the Sidama region of Ethiopia?

6.1 Findings regarding the first research objective: To determine the principals' self-perception and understanding of transformational leadership practices.

The study's first objective was to determine the perceptions of the principals' transformational leadership practice and its effect on students' academic performance in the Sidama region of Ethiopia. To accomplish this, the researcher administered survey questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews with principals. The research findings for this objective were organized according to the transformational leadership components.

To investigate the principal's perception and comprehension of transformational leadership's idealized influence behavior practices in his school, 11 items were discussed via questionnaires and interviews. The study's results, which had an aggregate mean value of 3.37 with a standard deviation of 0.80, showed that principals practiced idealized influence behavior of transformational leadership. On the other hand, qualitative data analysis from principal interviews revealed that principals' practices idealized influence of transformational leadership behaviors in their schools. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative data presentation and analysis indicated that the principal practices idealized influence transformational leadership behavior in varying ranges.

Thirteen inspirational motivation practices were provided to the principals to understand their views and comprehension of inspirational motivation. The study's results, which had an aggregate mean value of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 0.647, showed that principals engage in inspirational motivation behavior. Similarly, qualitative data analysis of principal interviews demonstrated that principals engage in inspirational motivation activities in their schools. Principals' quantitative and qualitative data presentation and analysis revealed that they practice inspirational motivation behavior in secondary schools around the Sidama region to varied degrees.

Based on a 12-item Likert scale, principals were asked to rate how well they understood and applied the transformational leadership behavior of intellectual stimulation in their respective schools. They all agreed that they did so, with an overall mean score of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.663. Most of

the principals interviewed also agreed that they practice intellectual stimulation behaviors often. Hence, quantitative and qualitative data analysis from principals' perceptions indicated that school principals practice intellectual stimulation behavior of transformational leadership in various ranges.

The principals replied to 12 questions about individual consideration behaviors and agreed that they practice them, with an overall mean value of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.646. The interview with principals also revealed that principals practice individual considerate behavior from school to school. School principals exhibit a spectrum of individualized considerate transformational leadership behaviors, as demonstrated by the quantitative and qualitative data analysis derived from principals' perceptions.

6.2 Findings regarding the second research objective: To determine the potential effects of school principals' transformational leadership style on students' academic performance

The study's second objective was to determine any potential impacts principals' transformational leadership practices would have on students' academic achievement. To determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, the study employed Pearson's correlation coefficient. According to Pearson's correlation analysis of principals' self-perceptions, the relationship between student academic performance and the principal's transformational leadership practices was strongly and favorably correlated with an overall correlation value of $r = .827$ ($p < .01$).

6.3 Findings regarding the third objective: To determine whether principal leadership styles in high-performing and low-performing schools differ significantly from one another

The study's results based on principals' judgments of a better-performing school in student academic achievement revealed that principals conduct transformational leadership behavior at schools with a higher average mean value than other schools. However, compared to better-performing schools, principals from lower-performing schools reported using transformational leadership less frequently in the study.

7. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

7.1. Contribution to Knowledge

The transformational leadership theories or models of Burns (1978), Bass (1985), and Leithwood Kenneth (1990) served as the study's fundamental theoretical foundations. The study's findings revealed a vital and beneficial association between students' academic progress and principals' transformational leadership techniques. This study verifies and adds to the theories of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), who argue that transformational leadership is essential to improving organizational performance. The study also found that students' academic attainment improves when principals exercise transformational leadership. It also expanded on past theories and practices by demonstrating how principals improve their students' academic performance. The study also found that the principals of the highest-performing schools used transformational leadership more frequently than those of the lowest-performing schools. This finding also contributed to current theory and practice, revealing a significant difference in leadership practices based on academic success between schools. Based on the findings, the researcher created a model believed to enhance student academic performance through transformational leadership.

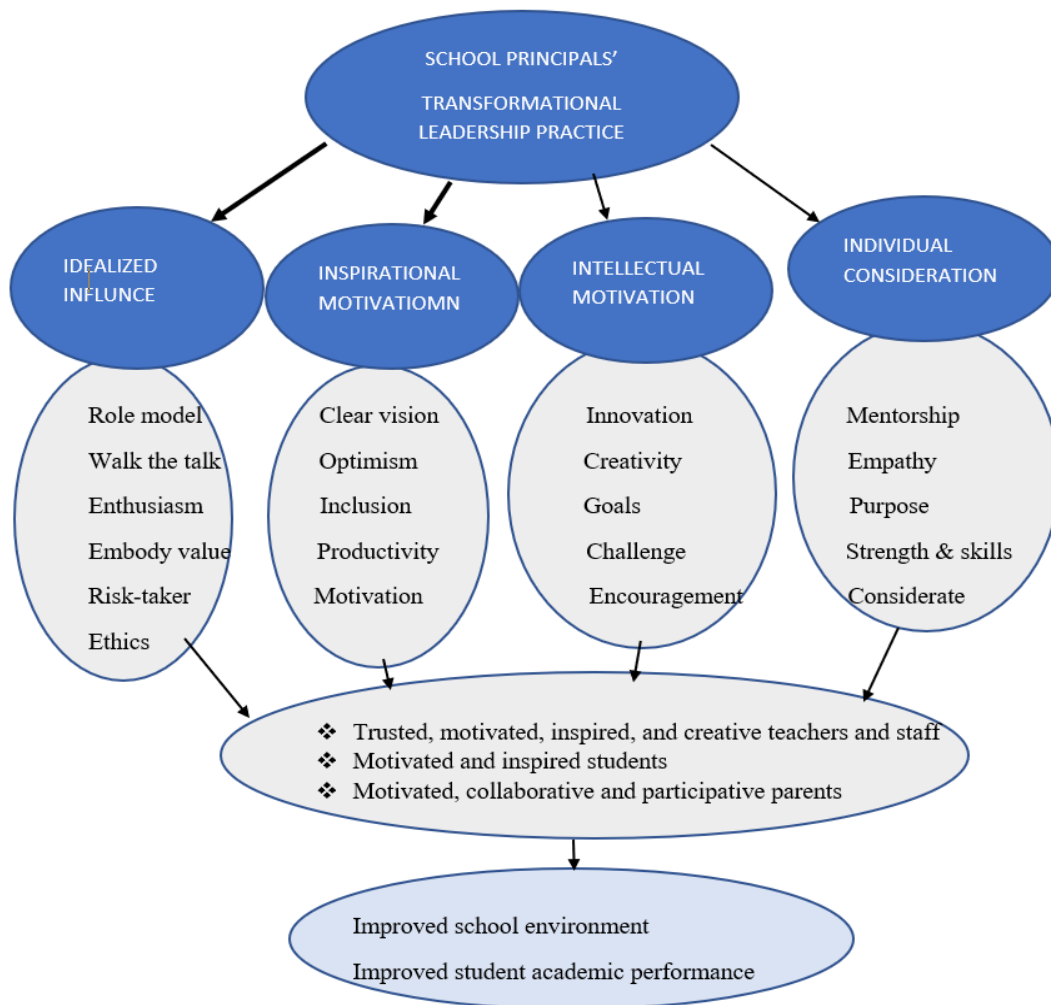


Figure 6.1. The Model construct for improved student academic performance (the researcher)

7.2. Contribution to Practice

According to the study, school principals who practice transformational leadership have the potential to improve both the overall school climate and their students' academic achievement. Principals' transformational leadership behavior inspires and motivates teachers and students, allowing them to work hard to achieve school goals. The findings also enable principals to demonstrate their dedication to the school's educational objectives.

7.3. Contribution to policy formulation

The study's results have various applications in developing and applying policies. The study area's school system's primary issue is the students' subpar academic achievement. The public is questioning the execution of education policy. In particular, parents are looking into how well school leadership improves students' academic achievement. Policymakers must understand that a school principal's leadership style can alter the learning environment and student's academic achievement. The study results show a strong link between the academic achievement of the students and the principal's transformational leadership style. Given these results, policymakers must ensure that schools recruit and train principals to use transformational leadership strategies. The study's findings also

emphasize how important it is that universities and the Ministry of Education set up a transformational leadership development program for principals of schools.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

8.1 The literature review states that transformational leadership is a strategy leaders use to motivate a team to achieve organizational objectives. According to the study, transformational leaders can impact their followers by modeling these behaviors.

8.2 Transformational leadership behaviors can improve students' academic achievement. Therefore, to address students' declining levels of academic accomplishment, school principals should implement these transformational leadership strategies.

8.3 The study revealed a significant positive correlation between the student's academic success and the principal's application of transformational leadership techniques. Accordingly, the study suggests that it is critical to acknowledge the principals and assist them in implementing transformational leadership to improve the area's students' declining academic performance.

8.4 The study's findings also showed a noteworthy distinction between the high- and low-achieving schools in the study area's principal leadership styles. To improve student accomplishment in the classroom, the regional education bureau should regularly provide principals with transformational leadership training and support activities.

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