

Why Principal Positive Leadership Is Important: It's Mediating Effect on the Relation between the School Context and Student Academic Achievement

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Abstract: “Deficit remediation” as an educational governance paradigm has given rise to many problems, whereas principal positive leadership under the “strengths development” paradigm has the potential to give new impetus to school development. Based on large-scale survey data within a provincial region, this study investigates how the school context and principal positive leadership impact student academic achievement using structural equation models. Research findings show that principal positive leadership as a structural latent variable has positive impacts on student academic performance and significantly mediates the effects of the school context on student academic results; and that the patterns of the impacts of principal positive leadership differ according to the variations of the school's autonomy in operation.

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THE study analyzes the significance of principal positive leadership for school effectiveness in the context of Chinese education and systematically examines the relationships between the school context, principal positive leadership, and student academic achievement. It aims to delve into the roles of principal positive leadership to provide evidence and direction for policy making in modernizing school management systems and activating school vitality, as well as valuable insights into how to promote high-quality development of education and student academic progress.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis one (H1): The school context is positively related to student academic performance. Sub-hypotheses of H1 include:

H1a: The school location is positively related to student academic achievement.

H1b: The student family background is positively related to student academic performance.

H1c: The school's institutional advantages positively impact student academic achievement.

Hypothesis two (H2): The school context is positively related to principal positive leadership. Sub-hypotheses of H2 include:

H2a: The school location is positively related to principal positive leadership.

H2b: The student family background is positively related to principal positive leadership.

H2c: The school's institutional advantages positively affect principal positive leadership.

Hypothesis three (H3): Principal positive leadership positively impacts student academic achievement.

Hypothesis Four (H4): Principal positive leadership mediates the relation between the school context and student academic performance. Sub-hypotheses of H4 include:

H4a: Principal positive leadership mediates the relation between the school location and student academic results.

H4b: Principal positive leadership mediates the relation between the student family background and student academic performance.

H4c: Principal positive leadership mediates the relation between the school's autonomy in operation and student academic achievement.

Research Methodology

Analytical Models

Structural equation models were created to analyze the effects of principal positive leadership on the relation between the school context and student academic performance and examine its paths. Student academic achievement serves as the dependent variable, used to measure the effectiveness of school leadership. The independent variable is the school context, including the school location, student family background, and school's autonomy in operation. The intervening variable is principal positive leadership, measured by data generated with the principal positive leadership scale.

Data Sources

This study is empirical research based on the data from 2020's monitoring of academic quality of compulsory education students in Jiangsu Province. The project adopted two-phase stratified random sampling. A total of 1,666 schools were included in the sample with 512 from northern Jiangsu, 311 from central Jiangsu, and 843 from southern Jiangsu; with 1,521 being public schools and 145 private schools; and with 979 being urban schools, 539 township schools, and 148 rural schools. The diversity and distribution of the schools sampled are representative of the overall situation of schools in Jiangsu Province.

Measurement Tools

The principal positive leadership scale in use is adapted from Cameron's positive leadership scale (Cameron, 2013) in combination of the actual circumstances of Chinese schools. The basic structure of the adaptation remains consistent with that of the original to include four dimensions: creating a positive atmosphere, developing positive relationships, reaching positive communication, and constructing positive purpose. Items related to principal leadership behavior, such as "principals," "teachers," "students," "schools," "teacher-student relationships," and "understanding of the significance of school education for the national development" are added to Cameron's scale, which was originally developed to measure positive leadership in businesses.

Conclusions

Research findings show that the school context significantly impacts the effects of principal positive leadership on student academic achievement. The three forms of school context, namely, the school location, student family background, and school's autonomy in operation, all potentially affect student academic progress via principal positive leadership. Nevertheless, there are differences in their impacting paths for the relation between principal positive leadership and student academic performance; the school's autonomy in operation in various forms plays differential roles in the influencing pattern.

Conclusions can be drawn as follows: (i) Principal positive leadership is a construct consisting of high-order factors that pose significantly positive effects on student academic achievement; (ii) The school context is positively related to principal positive leadership; (iii) Principal positive leadership significantly mediates the effect of the school context on student academic performance; (iv) The school's autonomy in operation in various dimensions impacts principal positive leadership and student academic results via varying paths.

References

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