

The Relationship Between Empowering Leadership and Teachers' Innovation Behavior Among Teachers in International Schools of Beijing City, China

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Abstract: In the context of Beijing's international schools, the rapid evolution of global educational standards and technological integration prompts a reevaluation of traditional leadership and teaching strategies. This study examines the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovation behaviors, amidst growing demands for pedagogical excellence and adaptability. The research objectives are to analyze this relationship, assess the mediating roles of professional development and psychological capital, and understand their combined impact on innovation. Employing a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 500 teachers across various international curricula in Beijing, utilizing structured questionnaires and statistical analyses to validate relationships among the variables. Findings indicate that empowering leadership significantly enhances teachers' innovative behavior directly and through the mediating effects of professional development and psychological capital. The study contributes to educational management by demonstrating the critical role of supportive leadership in fostering innovation and highlighting how psychological resilience and ongoing professional growth underpin sustainable teaching innovations. These insights are pivotal for international schools striving to enhance educational outcomes and adapt to global standards.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership, Professional Development, Psychological Capital, Teachers' Innovation Behavior

1. Introduction

The landscape of global education is currently undergoing transformative shifts driven by rapid technological innovations, cultural integrations, and an increasing emphasis on critical thinking and creativity. These shifts are vividly reflected within Chinese international schools, which serve as microcosms of broader global trends. These institutions are responding to the dual pressures of local educational demands stemming from China's economic growth and the necessity to align with international educational standards. This backdrop necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of traditional teaching methods and leadership approaches to accommodate these changes (Abulibdeh et al., 2024).

In recent years, the focus within these schools has shifted towards an empowering leadership style that prioritizes personal development support, delegated power, and participative decision-making (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Dağlı &

Kalkan, 2021). This style fosters a nurturing environment that encourages teachers to expand their capabilities and actively participate in the school's decision-making processes, thereby promoting a dynamic and engaged teaching workforce. Concurrently, professional development is being redefined to encompass social, pedagogic, personal, and professional competencies, addressing the multifaceted needs of educators in an international context (Smith & Gillespie, 2023).

Moreover, the concept of psychological capital has become crucial in these settings, emphasizing confidence, hope, resilience, and optimism among teachers, which are essential for navigating the complexities and pressures of international educational environments (Freire et al., 2020). Teachers' innovative behaviors, including idea exploration, generation, promotion, and realization, are increasingly recognized as benchmarks for educational excellence, driving the need for supportive leadership and comprehensive professional development frameworks (Li & Eryong, 2021).

This evolving educational landscape underscores the critical interconnections between empowering leadership, professional development, and psychological capital in fostering an innovative teaching ethos. As Chinese international schools strive to adapt to global educational trends, the understanding and application of these interconnected elements become pivotal in shaping a future where innovation and excellence in teaching are not merely aspirational but achievable realities.

Despite the progressive shifts towards empowering leadership in Chinese international schools, significant challenges impede its effective implementation. A primary issue is the cultural clash between traditional Chinese educational values, which emphasize respect for authority and memorization, and Western pedagogical principles that value creativity and critical questioning (Chu, 2022; Zhang, 2022). This dichotomy often results in confusion and resistance among teachers, undermining the empowerment process and stifling innovation.

Communication barriers further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in environments where staff and leadership come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, making it difficult to effectively convey expectations and innovations (Lu, 2022). Additionally, there is often a misalignment between the professional development opportunities provided and the actual needs of the teachers or the strategic direction of the schools, which can leave teachers feeling ill-equipped to embrace innovative approaches (Wu & Koh, 2022).

The balance between autonomy and accountability is another critical area of concern. The high pressure for academic excellence sometimes leads school leaders to micromanage, retracting the autonomy they had granted, which not only stifles innovation but also erodes trust between teachers and leaders (Butler, 2022; Cazary, 2023). Furthermore, the cultural context of these schools often exhibits a low tolerance for failure, which conflicts with the trial-and-error nature of innovation, creating a significant psychological barrier to experimenting with new teaching methods (Johnson, 2022).

In the realm of professional development, several problems persist that hinder the ability of teachers to foster innovation in their practices. There is often a lack of alignment between the training provided and the schools' educational goals, with many programs either too generic or narrowly focused on one educational philosophy (Woods & Kong, 2020). Additionally, insufficient attention is given to cultural competency training, which is critical in multicultural and multilingual settings, and there is a significant gap in training for the integration of new educational technologies (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Hu et al., 2021).

Moreover, the traditional methods of delivering professional development, such as workshops and seminars, do not always suit the dynamic schedules of teachers, and a one-size-fits-all approach often fails to meet the diverse needs of the teaching staff (Yang, 2021; Yuan & Gao, 2023). The lack of collaborative learning opportunities and effective evaluation mechanisms further compounds these issues, preventing the continuous improvement of these programs and thus, the innovation capabilities of teachers (Ying & Wright, 2023).

Compounding these challenges is the development and nurturing of psychological capital among teachers, which is crucial in fostering an environment conducive to innovation. Systemic pressures, professional isolation, inconsistent support systems, and limited recognition of innovative efforts significantly impact teachers' psychological resilience,

efficacy, and optimism (Mansilla & Wilson, 2020; Shi et al., 2020).

In summary, the effective implementation of empowering leadership in Chinese International Schools faces significant obstacles including cultural and linguistic barriers, mismatches in professional development, and a delicate balance between autonomy and accountability. These challenges, coupled with a cultural resistance to risk and failure, significantly hinder the fostering of innovation among teachers. Addressing these interconnected challenges is crucial for enhancing leadership approaches, professional development programs, and support systems within these institutions, thereby empowering teachers to innovate more freely and effectively, improving educational outcomes for students, and contributing to the broader field of educational management and leadership.

Considering research background and problems mentioned above, the study sets forth the following research objectives:

- (1) To analyze the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior among teachers in international schools of Beijing city, China.
- (2) To examine the mediating effect of professional development in the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior among teachers in international schools of Beijing city, China.
- (3) To examine the mediating effect of psychological capital in the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior among teachers in international schools of Beijing city, China.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Empowering Leadership and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

This section aims to explore the intricate relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior in educational settings.

Empowering leadership, a pivotal concept explored by Widodo & Gunawan (2021), Nong et al. (2022), and Supriyanto et al. (2023), is unanimously recognized for its positive influence on teachers' innovative behavior within educational settings. Widodo & Gunawan (2021) emphasize the role of school leaders in creating an environment that fosters autonomy and provides substantial support and resources, markedly enhancing teachers' willingness to integrate new technological tools in their pedagogy. This nurturing approach not only promotes a modern and interactive teaching experience but also cultivates a continuous learning and adaptation mindset among educators. In a similar vein, Nong et al. (2022) elucidate that empowering practices such as acknowledging teachers' achievements and fostering professional growth significantly boost teachers' intrinsic motivation. This heightened motivation is identified as a key driver for educators to adopt novel and creative teaching methods, thereby enriching the learning environment. Furthermore, Supriyanto et al. (2023) contribute to the discourse by underscoring the importance of trust, encouragement of risk-taking, and autonomy support in developing a culture of experimentation among teachers. This culture is deemed essential for educational innovation as it permits educators to explore new methods and technologies without the fear of failure or criticism, ultimately leading to more effective and engaging student learning experiences. While each study highlights different facets of empowering leadership and its impact, they collectively underscore the critical role of supportive leadership in fostering an innovative and adaptive educational atmosphere. These studies reveal a shared understanding that a leadership style characterized by empowerment and support is fundamental in motivating teachers to pursue innovation in their teaching practices, thus enhancing the overall quality of education.

2.2 Studies on Empowering Leadership and Professional Development

This section aims to explore the intricate relationship between empowering leadership and professional development within the educational sector.

Empowering leadership is universally acclaimed for its significant positive impact on professional development within the educational sector, as evidenced by the collective research of Quines & Ogal (2023), Limon (2022), and Nong et al. (2022). Quines & Ogal (2023) highlight how such leadership enhances teachers' professional growth by boosting their intrinsic motivation through support and encouragement, thus fostering a conducive environment for self-directed learning and innovation in pedagogical practices. This form of leadership not only promotes a dynamic and innovative educational landscape but also empowers teachers with the autonomy and confidence to explore new methodologies, benefiting students' learning experiences. In parallel, Limon (2022) underscores the crucial role empowering leadership plays in encouraging teachers to pursue specialized certifications and advanced degrees. The supportive environment created by these leaders significantly influences teachers' decisions to further their education, enriching their expertise and contributing to the overall quality of education. This leadership style acts as a catalyst for nurturing educators' potential, facilitating a culture of continuous learning and excellence within the educational community. Moreover, Nong et al. (2022) observe that under empowering leadership, teachers are more likely to engage in cross-disciplinary professional development, stepping out of their comfort zones to integrate various disciplines into their teaching practices. This not only enriches instructional methods but also improves classroom management strategies, creating more holistic and engaging learning experiences for students. These perspectives reveal a comprehensive understanding of how empowering leadership serves as a pivotal element in cultivating an educational setting that values continuous improvement, collaboration, and excellence.

2.3 Studies on Professional Development and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

This section aims to elucidate the intricate relationship between professional development and teachers' innovative behavior, highlighting how targeted growth opportunities can significantly enhance educators' abilities to adopt and implement novel teaching methodologies.

Scholars have increasingly acknowledged the significance of professional development in enhancing teachers' innovative behavior, each contributing distinct perspectives that collectively enrich our understanding of this relationship. Smith & Gillespie (2023) emphasizes the role of sustained, targeted professional learning opportunities in equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement innovative teaching strategies, suggesting that such development is crucial for fostering a culture of innovation within educational settings. In contrast, Johnson (2020) focuses on the collaborative dimensions of professional development, arguing that peer interactions and shared learning experiences are key to stimulating creativity and innovation among teachers. This perspective is echoed by Lee (2019), who, however, points out the importance of contextual factors, such as school leadership and support structures, in maximizing the impact of professional development on teachers' propensity to adopt innovative practices. While Brown (2018) critiques the effectiveness of one-size-fits-all professional development programs, advocating for personalized, needs-based approaches to truly ignite innovative teaching behavior, Patel (2022) brings a different critique to the table by questioning the sustainability of innovations spawned from short-term professional development interventions, urging for ongoing support and reflection mechanisms to ensure lasting change. These scholarly contributions illuminate the multifaceted ways in which professional development can influence teachers' innovative behavior.

2.4 Studies on Empowering Leadership and Psychological Capital

The interplay between empowering leadership and the enhancement of psychological capital within educational settings forms the cornerstone of this section.

Sudibjo & Widiastuti (2021) and Sriyono (2021) provide perspectives on the significant impact of empowering

leadership in educational settings, regarding its role in enhancing the psychological resilience and capital of educators. Sudibjo & Widiastuti (2021) highlight how leadership empowerment fortifies educators' psychological resilience by fostering self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. This empowerment enables teachers to manage stress and maintain a positive outlook despite the challenges inherent in their profession. Similarly, Sriyono (2021) emphasizes the pivotal role of empowering leadership in promoting a growth mindset among teachers, thereby further enriching their psychological capital. By encouraging innovation, risk-taking, and learning from failures, empowering leaders facilitate a cultural shift among educators towards embracing potential development and improvement. These shifts are critical for creating an educational ecosystem where continuous skill and competency enhancement is highly motivated. Edosomwan & Nwanzu (2021) extend this discourse by exploring how empowering leadership fosters a sense of belonging among teachers, which in turn positively affects their psychological capital. They argue that inclusivity, recognition, and support from leadership not only cultivate a strong communal fabric within educational institutions but also significantly uplift the psychological well-being and professional fulfillment of teachers. These studies collectively underscore that when school leaders actively foster an environment of empowerment, it not only aids educators in navigating the stressors of their profession with greater agility but also instills in them a robust psychological framework, crucial for managing stress effectively and maintaining a positive outlook in the face of educational challenges.

2.5 Studies on Psychological Capital and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

This section aims to unravel the intricate relationship between psychological capital and its profound impact on teachers' innovative behavior.

The synthesis of findings from Gustari & Widodo (2022), Chen et al. (2022), and Ng et al. (2022) reveals a cohesive argument concerning the impact of psychological capital on teachers' innovative behavior within educational settings. Gustari & Widodo (2022) pinpoint optimism as a critical facet of psychological capital, suggesting that it significantly shapes teachers' willingness to embrace and implement new educational technologies. Their research underscores that optimistic teachers are more likely to engage with and integrate advanced pedagogical tools, enhancing student learning experiences and propelling the education sector towards modern methodologies. In parallel, Chen et al. (2022) broadened the discussion by examining the collective influence of psychological capital components, including optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy, on cultivating an innovative culture in schools. They argue that teachers endowed with a strong psychological foundation are pivotal in fostering an environment ripe for innovation, thereby facilitating the adoption of novel teaching practices, and instilling a culture of continual enhancement among educators. Further, Ng et al. (2022) hone in on hope as a determinant of innovative behavior, positing that a hopeful outlook and goal-oriented determination encourage teachers to pursue and persist in innovative endeavors despite challenges, thus contributing significantly to the evolution of educational practices. These perspectives collectively affirm that psychological capital is not merely beneficial but essential in cultivating innovative behavior among teachers, underscoring its role as a foundational asset in the advancement of educational practices and the fostering of a progressive educational environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the effects of empowering leadership, professional development, and psychological capital on teachers' innovative behavior in Chinese international schools. Quantitative methods are appropriate for this investigation as they provide a systematic framework for collecting and analyzing data, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships among variables. This approach is supported by Chatterjee &

Bhattacharjee (2020) and Purwanto (2021), who highlight the utility of quantitative analysis in educational research for uncovering causal connections and influencing policy decisions. A large sample size and stratified random sampling are utilized to ensure the generalizability of the findings across different educational contexts, as recommended by Humble (2020).

3.2 Research Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study consists of teachers employed in the 131 international schools in Beijing, which collectively house over 5,238 educators. These schools offer a unique blend of Eastern and Western educational philosophies, making them ideal for studying the impacts of various leadership and development strategies on innovative teaching practices. A sample size of 500 teachers has been determined to be statistically significant for generalization and practical for detailed analysis. This sample is chosen through a two-stage stratified random sampling technique, ensuring a balanced representation of the diverse educational settings within Beijing, which includes various curricular systems like the International Baccalaureate and American or British educational frameworks.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The sampling strategy involves a two-stage stratified random sampling method. Initially, schools are categorized based on factors such as curriculum type and teacher population size. From these categories, 20 schools are randomly selected to participate in the study. Within each chosen school, teachers are then randomly selected to achieve the desired sample size of 500. This method ensures a comprehensive representation of the varied teaching environments and reduces potential sampling biases, thus enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's outcomes.

3.4 Research Instrument

The primary tool for data collection is a structured questionnaire, divided into sections that collect demographic information and assess the latent variables of empowering leadership, professional development, psychological capital, and innovative behavior. The questionnaire uses a Likert-9 scale for responses, which helps quantify subjective judgments into measurable data. The questionnaire's design is based on rigorous validation processes, including expert reviews and pilot testing, to ensure its relevance and accuracy in capturing the constructs of interest as outlined by Agnew et al. (2019) and Özdemir (2019).

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is performed using several statistical techniques to ensure a robust examination of the relationships among the study variables. Descriptive analysis via SPSS provides an initial understanding of the data distribution and central tendencies. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is then applied to validate the measurement model of the latent variables, followed by Path Analysis to explore the structural relationships between them.

4. Major Findings and Discussion

After conducting SEM path analysis, the study has verified the relationship between empowering leadership (EL), professional development (PD), psychological capital (PC), and teachers' innovative behavior (TIB) in international schools in Beijing. SEM path analysis results with path coefficients are presented in figure 1.

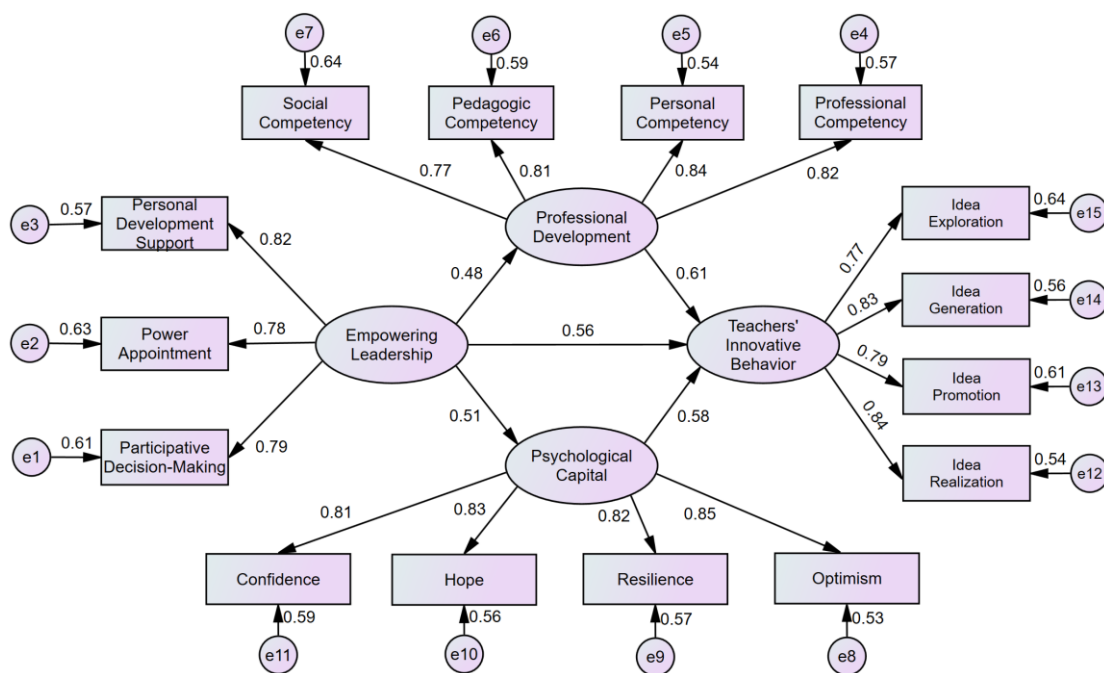


Figure 1: SEM path analysis results

In order to examine the mediating effect of professional development and psychological capital, the study employs bootstrap method with analysis results presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Mediating effect of professional development and psychological capital

| Standard effect | Path | Effect coefficient | 95% confidence interval | | S.E. | P-value | Results |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|---------|------------------|
| | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Total effect | EL-->TIB | 0.856 | 0.807 | 0.905 | 0.025 | *** | Mediating effect |
| Direct effect | EL-->TIB | 0.563 | 0.520 | 0.606 | 0.022 | *** | |
| Indirect effect | EL-->PD--> TIB | 0.293 | 0.256 | 0.330 | 0.019 | *** | |
| Total effect | EL-->TIB | 0.860 | 0.809 | 0.911 | 0.026 | *** | Mediating effect |
| Direct effect | EL-->TIB | 0.563 | 0.520 | 0.606 | 0.022 | *** | |
| Indirect effect | EL-->PC--> TIB | 0.297 | 0.258 | 0.336 | 0.020 | *** | |

The study summarized the SEM path analysis and mediating effect analysis results into the following main research findings.

4.1 Empowering Leadership and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

The data analysis reveals that empowering leadership significantly influences teachers' innovative behavior. This finding aligns with the studies of Widodo & Gunawan (2021) and Nong et al. (2022), which emphasize the role of empowering leadership in fostering an environment conducive to innovation. In the context of Beijing's international schools, leaders who delegate authority, support professional growth, and involve teachers in decision-making processes enable educators to experiment with new teaching methods and technologies. Such an environment not only encourages creativity but also instills a sense of ownership and responsibility among teachers, thereby enhancing their willingness to innovate.

4.2 Empowering Leadership and Professional Development

The study further finds that empowering leadership positively affects professional development among teachers.

This is consistent with the findings of Quines & Ogal (2023) and Limon (2022), which highlight that supportive leadership fosters a culture of continuous learning. Empowering leaders in Beijing's international schools provide the necessary resources and opportunities for teachers to pursue further education and specialized training. This, in turn, enriches their pedagogical skills and knowledge, enabling them to adopt and implement innovative teaching practices. The supportive and encouraging environment created by these leaders also boosts teachers' intrinsic motivation to engage in professional growth activities.

4.3 Professional Development and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

Professional development is shown to have a significant positive impact on teachers' innovative behavior. This finding is supported by Smith (2021) and Johnson (2020), who argue that targeted professional learning opportunities equip teachers with the skills needed to implement innovative strategies. In Beijing's international schools, professional development programs that focus on collaborative learning, integration of new technologies, and contextualized training enable teachers to develop and apply creative teaching methods. The collaborative aspect of these programs, where teachers share experiences and learn from each other, further stimulates innovation and creativity in the classroom.

4.4 Empowering Leadership and Psychological Capital

The research indicates that empowering leadership enhances psychological capital among teachers. This corroborates the findings of Sudibjo & Widiastuti (2021) and Sriyono (2021), which suggest that empowering leadership fosters self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. In the context of Beijing's international schools, leaders who provide support, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth help teachers build a strong psychological foundation. This psychological capital, characterized by confidence, hope, and resilience, enables teachers to navigate the challenges of their profession more effectively and maintain a positive outlook, which is crucial for sustaining innovative behavior.

4.5 Psychological Capital and Teachers' Innovative Behavior

The study also finds a positive relationship between psychological capital and teachers' innovative behavior. This is in line with the research by Gustari & Widodo (2022) and Chen et al. (2022), which highlight the importance of psychological capital in fostering a culture of innovation. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience are more likely to experiment with new teaching methods and technologies. In Beijing's international schools, such psychological attributes empower teachers to take risks, embrace failures as learning opportunities, and persist in their innovative endeavors, thereby contributing to a more dynamic and effective educational environment.

4.6 Mediating Role of Professional Development

Professional development is found to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior. This mediating effect suggests that empowering leadership indirectly influences innovative behavior through its impact on professional development. This finding aligns with the studies by Smith (2021) and Patel (2022), which emphasize the importance of continuous professional growth for fostering innovation. In Beijing's international schools, leaders who prioritize professional development create a pathway for teachers to acquire new skills and knowledge, which in turn enhances their capacity for innovation. The structured and ongoing nature of these development programs ensures that teachers are continually equipped to implement and sustain innovative practices.

4.7 Mediating Role of Psychological Capital

Psychological capital also mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' innovative behavior. This finding is supported by the research of Chen et al. (2022) and Ng et al. (2022), which highlight the role of psychological capital in driving innovative behavior. In the context of Beijing's international schools, empowering leaders

who build teachers' psychological capital indirectly foster innovation. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience are better prepared to embrace new challenges and persist in their innovative efforts. This psychological resilience is particularly important in educational settings where the trial-and-error nature of innovation requires a strong mental framework to navigate setbacks and continue pursuing creative solutions.

5. Conclusion

The study conducted among international schools in Beijing reveals a significant interplay between empowering leadership, professional development, and psychological capital in fostering teachers' innovative behavior. Empowering leadership has been shown to not only enhance the professional development opportunities available to teachers but also to boost their psychological capital, thereby nurturing a conducive environment for innovation. This research underscores that when leaders delegate authority, support professional growth, and foster a culture that values creativity and resilience, teachers are more likely to embrace and implement innovative teaching practices. The mediating roles of professional development and psychological capital are pivotal, as they bridge the influence of empowering leadership on teachers' ability to innovate effectively. Consequently, for schools aiming to enhance educational outcomes and adapt to global educational standards, it is crucial to foster an empowering leadership style, invest in contextual and ongoing professional development, and support the psychological well-being of educators. This holistic approach will not only prepare teachers to face the challenges of a rapidly evolving educational landscape but also equip them to lead the charge in educational innovation, thereby contributing significantly to the field of educational management and leadership.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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