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Relationship Between Leadership Styles and Teacher Job Satisfaction After COVID-19

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
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2025

Abstract

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by

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MS, Virginia State University, 2018

BS, Washington Adventist University, 2010

Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The educational sector in the United States experienced substantial workforce changes during the Great Resignation, a period following the COVID-19 pandemic when many employees left their jobs. In response, school leaders were encouraged to understand the relationship between their leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction. This quantitative correlational study used Job Satisfaction Theory as its theoretical framework to examine the relationship between three leadership styles—transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (passive-avoidant)—and teacher job satisfaction in the post-pandemic context. Eighty-two teachers participated by completing the Job Satisfaction Survey and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Results from the multiple linear regression analysis were statistically significant, F (3, 79) = 7.860, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .237, indicating a good model fit. Notably, transformational (t = 1.847, p = 0.069, β = .2.66), transactional (t = .456, p = 0.650, β = .092) and laissez-faire (t = 1.927, p = 0.058, β = .200) were not statistically significant predictors of teacher job satisfaction. A key recommendation for school administrators and educational policymakers was to adopt a flexible leadership approach rather than committing exclusively to a single style. The implications for positive social change included the potential for school leaders to adjust leadership strategies in ways that reduce teacher job dissatisfaction and enhance retention, thereby improving educational stability.

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Dedication

This doctoral project is dedicated to everyone who supported me throughout this process and for my students who have greatness inside but need a little push.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

In 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Great Resignation occurred, during which a significant number of people in the United States quit their jobs due to job dissatisfaction, rising costs of living, and wage freezes (Batiste, 2024; Josifidis & Supic, 2023; Plessis & Altintas, 2024; Robertson, 2021). This phenomenon affected numerous of business industries, including education.

Background of the Problem

The general business problem that prompted me to review the literature was the mass exodus of teachers from the education profession around 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic. I aimed to explore relationships between leadership styles—specifically transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire—and employee job satisfaction, as well as transactional, transformational, and laissez faire leadership as well as teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19. According to Azeem et al. (2020), job dissatisfaction, triggered by disengagement of employees in work settings, led to feelings of withdrawal. Robertson (2024) suggested that proactive implementation by organizational leaders reduced and eventually eliminated job dissatisfaction. Examining the relationship helped predict teacher job satisfaction.

There was a gap in literature regarding the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction after the COVID-19 pandemic. I used employee job satisfaction as the dependent variable and leadership styles (transactional, transformational, and laissez faire leadership) as the independent variables to examine, explain, and predict teacher job satisfaction following the pandemic. Therefore, this

project aimed to fill this gap in the literature concerning the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem was that some school board members and administrators did not understand the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction. For this project, my objective was to identify whether transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles were effective predictors of teacher job satisfaction following the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously mentioned, most literature concerning leadership and employee job satisfaction had not address this topic. Findings from the project were expected to provide information about leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction, which could be used in future studies to improve leadership practices, address employee turnover concerns, and identify other retention issues.

The purpose of this quantitative correlational project was to examine the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. I used a quantitative methodology and an anonymous survey design via the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Transactional, transformational, and laissez faire leadership were independent variables and teacher job satisfaction was the dependent variable. This project included teachers from the eastern region of the United States who taught between 2019 and 2024.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this project was teachers who taught between 2019 and 2024 and were located in the Eastern region of the United States. The sampling method was random probabilistic, a technique commonly used in quantitative studies. According to Zelčāne and Pipere (2023) sample sizes in qualitative research tends to be small to support the depth of case studies, with saturation as the essential criterion for determining sample size. The sample size for this quantitative correlational project was greater than 50, based on the multiple regression used for this project. Specifically, multiple regression via G*Power suggested a sample size is 77 when there were three predictors, a confidence of 95%, and a 5% margin of error. Lastly, once participants were found eligible for the project, they were given access to the JSS and MLQ through a shareable link.

Nature of the Project

Data collection sources for this project were the JSS and MLQ. According to Nickel (2020) the MLQ was used to measure transactional (contingent reward, active management by expectations, passive management exceptions), transformational (idealized influence of attributes and behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), and laissez-faire leadership (laissez-faire characteristics and behaviors). Nickel (2020) also noted the JSS measured supervision, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication. I used these surveys to examine positive and significant correlations

between leadership styles and job satisfaction characteristics. Lastly, the research design for this project was a multiple regression.

Research Question

In this project, I used the following research question:

RQ: Was there a relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19?

Hypotheses

H_0: There was no relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez faire and teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19.

H_a: There was a relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was the job satisfaction theory, which was created by Edwin Locke in 1976. It was used to address differences between what people wanted in jobs and what they experienced (Houffman-Miller, 2021). Key concepts of the job satisfaction theory included engagement, appreciation, motivation, and reward (Nickel, 2020). The theory was expanded upon by Frederick Herzberg, who developed the Two-Factor Hygiene-Motivation Theory. I used the job satisfaction theory to examine the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID.

Operational Definitions

In this project, I used the following terms:

Laissez-Faire Leadership: Avoidance-based leadership style characterized by withdrawing and retreating from leadership responsibilities, passivity, and adverse outcomes in which leaders avoided making decisions (Khan et al., 2024).

Transactional Leadership: A *l*eadership style that consisted of three constructs: contingent reward, active management by expectations, and passive management exceptions (Kuo & Tsai, 2023). This type of leadership compelled employees to perform their best and achieve their objectives through rewards and penalties for performance (Goktas, 2021).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership style consisted of five constructs: idealized influence of attributes, idealized influence of behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Nickel, 2020). It was used to inspire employees to achieve remarkable performance rather than punish them for lack of achievement (Kuo & Tsai, 2023).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

There are several assumptions, limitations, and delimitations concerning the relationship between transactional, transformational, laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. First, assumptions were unverified facts that were considered true. Next, limitations were areas of weakness associated with the project. Lastly, delimitations were boundaries of the project.

Assumptions

For this project, I had three assumptions. First, I assumed transformational leadership predicted teacher job satisfaction, since it motivated and inspired employees.

However, the MLQ later showed that transactional leadership was a better indicator of teacher job satisfaction based on the parameters of the project. Next, I assumed the JSS and MLQ were suitable data collection tools since they had been used other projects. Both instruments proved to be appropriate tools of measurement for this project. Lastly, I assumed the JSS would not be an acceptable data collection tool because it was typically used in psychological projects. However, the JSS turned out to be ideal for my project, as it was unbiased in collecting job satisfaction data. These were the three assumptions I had for my project.

Limitations

There were three limitations for this project. The first limitation was that participants were unable to complete the survey due to factors beyond my control. For example, the ad redirected potential participants to a social media messenger instead of the survey site. The second limitation was that participants were hesitant to take the anonymous survey because their email addresses were collected for follow-up. Once this statement was removed from the flyer, more people participated. The third limitation was a lack of participation when the initial flyer stated that the survey would take thirty minutes. As a result, the flyer was revised to say the study would take five to ten minutes, which increase participation. These were the three limitations of the project.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study set clear boundaries for its scope. According to Walden (2023), delimitations defined the limits intentionally established by the researcher. First, participants were limited to teachers who taught in the eastern region of

the United States between 2019 and 2024. Next, the study aimed to attain a minimum sample size of 77 participants, as determined by a power analysis using G*Power. Finally, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) were used exclusively as the data collection instruments.

Significance of the Project

This project addressed a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between transactional, transformational, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. In addition, findings from this project were expected to be used in future studies and business practices to support school leaders in broadening their leadership approaches, particularly those who were overly focused on a single leadership style. Lastly, this project contributed to positive social change and addressing how school leaders adjusted their leadership style to reduce teacher job dissatisfaction and increase teacher retention.

Contribution to Business Practice

This project contributed to business practice by addressing the gap in literature about leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction. By addressing this gap, leaders reflected on their personal leadership and management experiences in order to synthesize lessons and create applications for future practice. Instead of being overly focused on a single leadership style, leaders were encouraged to embrace a variety of approaches. As a result, school leaders adapted their leadership style according to the years of experience of their staff.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this project led to positive social change by encouraging school leaders to adapt their leadership style for reduce teacher job dissatisfaction and increase employee retention. These findings improved relationships between organizational leaders and employees. Ultimately, they led to organizational improvements that increased teacher job satisfaction and strengthening employee retention efforts.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This literature review included a critical analysis and synthesis of the theoretical framework. First, critical theory and characteristics of the job satisfaction theory were examined as the foundation of the project. Next, I synthesize literature on employee and teacher job satisfaction. Then, I identify byproducts of general and teacher-specific job dissatisfaction such as burnout, turnover, and employee shortage, before addressing employee retention. In addition, I described theorists and characteristics of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership in relation to employee and teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19. Lastly, I examined the JSS and MLQ as tools of measurement.

I used the following databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Source, ProQuest, and Business Source Complete. I used the following keywords: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, the Great Resignation, employee job satisfaction, teacher job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, teacher job dissatisfaction, employee shortage, job shortage, teacher shortage, leadership styles, employee turnover, voluntary teacher turnover, employee

retention efforts, teacher retention efforts, leadership styles in schools, and teachers leaving the profession. All sources were peer-reviewed journal articles in addition to books. I began with critical theorists and characteristics of the job satisfaction theory.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Total number of references	Total number of references 5 or less years	% of references that are 5 or less years	Number of references that are peer-reviewed	% of peer-reviewed references
60	59	98	49	82

Theoretical Framework

The job satisfaction theory was first introduced by Edwin Locke in 1976 and was described as the difference between what a person wanted in a job and what that person experienced (Houffman-Miller, 2021). Hemsworth et al. (2024) agreed, noting that the job satisfaction theory had a substantial influence on individual and organizational performance. They reagard the job satisfaction theory as a central determinant in driving organizational performance and fostering a more committed and proactive workforce, which significantly improved organizational efficiency (Hemsworth et al., 2024; Jannat et al., 2020; Tran & Smith, 2020). Although described as a fundamental concept in organizational psychology research, Hemsworth et al. (2024) connected job satisfaction to organizational outcomes and used it as a guide creating specific strategies and interventions for organizational success.

Later the Job Satisfaction Theory was expanded upon by Ihensekien & Joel (2023) to include the development of Herzberg's Two-Factor Hygiene-Motivation

Theory, which reflected job satisfaction as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Specifically, motivators represented intrinsic motivation associated with the job, while hygiene factors represented extrinsic factors related to the job context (Tran & Smith, 2020; Hemsworth et al., 2024). Tran and Smith (2020) pointed out that motivated employees were engaged with and invested in their jobs because their hearts were in it, which also improves organizational outcomes. Moreover, Tran and Smith (2020) suggested that intrinsic motivators were more critical than hygiene factors when considering employee retention and job satisfaction. For example, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction existed on a dual continuum, where attractive factors (motivators) affected the degree of job satisfaction, while detracting factors (hygiene) affected the degree of dissatisfaction (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024; Tran & Smith, 2020). Thus, employee job satisfaction was likely to be swayed equally by what a person wanted in a job and by what they experienced during their employment.

Next, the Job Satisfaction Theory was applied to the teaching profession following the COVID-19 pandemic to identify additional characteristics of job satisfaction specific to the post-COVID teaching experience. These characteristics included trust, feelings toward the teaching profession, and teachers' appraisal of their work environment. Lastly, a case study provided an observation of how school leaders proactively addressed these concerns.

Job Satisfaction Theory Applied to Teaching After COVID-19

When applied to the teaching profession after COVID-19, the Job Satisfaction Theory focused on trust as a determining factor that led to teacher job satisfaction.

Specifically, job satisfaction was described as general feelings that established and maintained mutual relationships among employees (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024; Tran & Smith, 2020). This sentiment was illustrated among teachers with higher interpersonal relationships, who were more satisfied with their jobs, which fostered workplace cooperation and trust among supervisors and teachers (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024). In addition, trust was reflected in connections between teachers and school leaders who shared previous experiences within the work environment and later reported a positive association between teacher trust and job satisfaction (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024). Such trust revolutionized how job satisfaction was perceived.

Teacher job satisfaction after COVID was also described as a teachers' affective appraisal of their work environment in terms of the academic success of the institution (e.g., student achievement, creativity, educational innovation, etc.), the quality of teachers' working life (e.g., psychological well-being, low burnout), and the organization's retention intention (Borrego et al., 2023; Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024). For example, when a teacher was satisfied with their job it resulted in teacher empowerment which lowered stress levels and highlighted the emergence of strategies for coping with job demands, preventing the onset of stress, and promoting job satisfaction (Borrego et al., 2023; Lundmark et al., 2022; Tran and Smith, 2020). Such appraisals of the teacher work environment later identified teachers' need for support throughout their careers (Tran and Smith, 2020). Ideally, consistent support from school leaders prevented good teachers from leaving the teaching profession while also creating a framework for school

leaders and policymakers to later develop individualized solutions that accounted for teachers' total employee experience (Tran & Smith, 2020).

Lastly, Tran and Smith (2020) found that when the Job Satisfaction Theory was applied to the teaching profession after COVID, school leaders could better differentiate the needs of teachers at different stages of their careers. They suggested that intentionally designed employee support systems would ultimately serve as an organizational talent management strategy (Tran & Smith, 2020). For example, according to Tran and Smith (2020) and Sarkhosh and Alinasab (2024), when school leaders supported teachers at differnet stages of their career, their actions helped reduce employee turnover. Such efforts also created opportunities for school leaders and policymakers to urgently address teacher retention issues and reduce teacher job dissatisfaction (Tran & Smith, 2020).

Next, an examination of job dissatisfaction, burnout, turnover, and employee shortage in business —and the equivalent examples in the education industry—was presented. Job dissatisfaction was introduced first to establish the lens through which the project was viewed. Burnout, turnover, and employee shortage were addressed afterward as consequences of job dissatisfaction, before examining how employee job satisfaction was measured.

Job Dissatisfaction Characteristics

Job dissatisfaction was common in every field of business, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, and consisted of byproducts like burnout, turnover, and employee shortage. According to Jannat et al., (2020), job dissatisfaction was an unpleasant or negative emotion that resulted from different personal and work environment factors

(e.g., discontent with one's pay, working hours, job insecurity, and problematic relationships with colleagues). Such negative emotions made it difficult for organizations to effectively implement employee rewards and recognition that considerably improved employee job satisfaction and reduced voluntary employee turnover because this initiative lacked buy-in (Hemsworth et al., 2024; Jannat et al., 2020). However, Jannat et al., (2020) used the Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory and noted that the opposite of job satisfaction was not job dissatisfaction but rather "no satisfaction," and therefore job dissatisfaction resulted from unacceptable and unpleasant extrinsic hygiene factors (e.g., company policies, supervision, the relationship with the boss, work conditions, salary, and the relationship with peers). With this in mind, Jannat et al. (2020) concluded that employee job dissatisfaction, employees' perception of their organization, and feelings of being underappreciated could be countered with a balance of incentives and buy-in.

Employee job dissatisfaction also caused work disengagement. According to Azeem et al., (2020), job dissatisfaction triggered work disengagement, which created feelings of withdrawal and defensiveness. These feelings reduced employees' sense of connection within the work environment and negatively impacted their performance. For example, Azeem et al., (2020) noted that job dissatisfaction stemmed from employees' psychological experiences, particularly negative emotions related to poor interpersonal relationships and unmeet performance expectations. As a result, disengaged employees no longer viewed their work as meaningful (Azeem et al., 2020). This reduced overall

investment in their work and eventually caused many to leave in search of more meaningful work.

In addition, Wang et al. (2020) agreed that employee job dissatisfaction was an unpleasant or a negative emotional state that often motivated individuals to leave their jobs. For instance, Wang et al. (2020) noted that dissatisfied individuals internalized perceived of themselves and perceived themselves as unsuccessful in their careers when there is a discrepancy between the career outcomes they had expected and those that they achieved. This negative internalization led Wang et al. (2020) to conclude that mental discrepancies in employee performance outcomes increased feelings of anxiety, frustration, and even anger which, if not remedied, led to social and emotional job dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Similarly, teacher job dissatisfaction was described as a reflection of stressful and depressive working conditions (Hemsworth et al., 2024; Jannat et al., 2020; Redding & Nguyen, 2024) which caused an increase in the number of teachers leaving their jobs (Nguyen & Kremer, 2022). Specifically, Barnes (2024) found that 30% of new teachers resigned within the first three years in the profession, and 50% resigned after the first five years. Additionally, Robertson (2024) discovered that approximately 1.9 million teachers evaluated their working conditions, provided feedback to school leaders, and weighed pros and cons before quitting. Robertson (2024) later concluded that although school leaders were aware of teachers' turnover intentions, they remained unsure of the appropriate leadership actions to implement (Hemsworth et al., 2024; Jannat et al., 2020;

Robertson,2024), which contributed to increased teacher turnover following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ultimately, job dissatisfaction reflected a multi-level, dysfunctional work environment that made remaining with an organization less desirable. This dissatisfaction produced emotionally driven byproducts, which were discuessed in the following sections. These byproducts of employee job satisfaction included burnout, turnover, and staffing shortages.

Employee Burnout

Employee burnout following the COVID-19 pandemic impacted various business industries in different ways. According to Milovanovic & Cvjetkovic (2024), employee burnout was considered a serious issue in modern organizations and had significant impacts on both employees and organizational leaders. Like job dissatisfaction, burnout was linked to unhealthy organizational environments. Milovanovic and Cvjetkovic (2024), along with Redding & Nguyen (2024), noted that burnout was associated with information overload, high work demands, and frequent multitasking, which often caused stress, exhaustion, and fatigue in employees. This stress led Milovanovic & Cvjetkovic (2024) to conclude that employees struggled with decision-making on the job, ultimately reducing organizational effectiveness.

Similarly, Gabriel & Aguinis (2022) found that employee burnout reflected poor social-emotional conditions within the organizational environment, whihc resulted in chronic work-related stress. This chronic stress caused employees to feel emotionally drained and detached from work, leading to decreased performance, inhibited creativity

and innovation, increased workplace accidents, absenteeism, and physical or mental illnesses (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Milovanovic & Cvjetkovic, 2024). Additionally, Gabriel & Aguinis (2022) found that employee burnout was associated with a lack of achievement, negative feelings toward work, and a 79% increased likelihood of developing coronary heart disease. Based on these findings, Gabriel & Aguinis (2022) concluded that physical and emotional illness—including gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension, cold and flu episodes, sleep disturbances, and depression—were manifestations of employee burnout.

Likewise, Hegazy et al. (2023) established that employee burnout was a state of emotional and physical exhaustion that caused employees to feel extremely tired. This tiredness led employees to work less effectively and efficiently, resulting in an organizational phenomenon known as workplace burnout (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Hegazy et al. (2023). Hegazy et al. (2023), identified workplace burnout as a collective feeling among staff caused by work overload, pressure to meet deadlines, and stress from avoiding intolerance for work errors, which triggered higher employee turnover and poor employee performance. As a result, they determined that unaddressed employee burnout reduced job commitment and increased employee turnover (Hegazy et al., 2023).

In parallel, teacher burnout post-COVID consisted of feelings of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that could not be resolved simply by switching teaching positions (Borrego et al., 2023; Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Lundmark et al., 2022; Tran and Smith, 2020; Nguyen & Kremer, 2022). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced symptoms of burnout symptoms primarily related to workload; however,

after the 2020-2021 school year, teachers reported chronic stress, reduced well-being, and a decreased desire to remain in the education profession (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; McLean et al., 2023). Much of this stress was attributed to 18 months of navigating feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness in response to sudden and unexpected challenges associated with remote instruction and, in some cases, hybrid instruction (McLean et al., 2023). Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2024) observed that teacher burnout was also triggered by student behavior and lack of administrative support. Students displayed physical and verbal aggression, noncompliance, and poor interpersonal relationships, which contributed to some of the most stressful factors that led to teacher burnout (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Taylor et al., 2024). Subsequently, Taylor et al. (2024) concluded that school leaders missed the opportunity to reduce teacher burnout, which eventually led to employee turnover.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover following the COVID-19 pandemic reflected a lack of employee engagement. Rakatu et al. (2022) found that companies with a high level of employee engagement were, on average, 21% more profitable. Engaged employees were not only enthusiastic about their work but also felt a strong connection to the company and were motivated to contribute to its success within a positive business culture. Additionally, Rakatu et al. (2022) identified employee motivation, dedication, and positive group morale as key factors that fostered employees' devotion to their job, leading to improved performance. Consequently, the lack of employee engagement contributed to a negative workplace culture, diminished employee motivation, and acted

as a catalyst for turnover, which, in turn, led to decreased job performance as mental health concerns escalated (Rakatu et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2024).

In addition, Haines et al. (2024) linked employee turnover to work engagement. According to Haines et al. (2024), work engagement was the foundation of the employee-organization relationship and was associated with high organizational commitment and performance. Without work engagement, higher employee turnover rate resulted in reduced organizational performance and overall work engagement (Haines et al., 2024; Rakatu et al., 2022). This led Haines et al. (2024) to conclude that employee turnover was higher when fewer work engagement options, such as flextime, telecommuting, and overall flexibility, were available.

Another factor to consider in employee turnover, besides workplace engagement, was a lack of fun in the workplace. According to Tetteh et al. (2022), incorporating fun into the workplace could strategically help engage employees and reduce their intentions to quit. For example, integrating fun in the workplace created a positive emotion among employees, which increased their likelihood for engagement and decreased likelihood of developing an attitude toward quitting in the long term (Haines et al., 2024; Tetteh et al. (2022). In the end, Tetteh et al. (2022) concluded that fun in the workplace increased manager support and co-worker socialization, while also reducing employee turnover.

Teacher turnover, however, was reduced by employee engagement, particularly through meaningful work and motivation. Van (2024) suggested that teachers found their profession as meaningful despite the complex system of goals within school organization, making teacher motivation a key driver for school-wide organizational success. However,

when teachers felt dissatisfied due to a lack of meaningful work and motivation, they sought new jobs as a remedy for such dissatisfaction (Haines et al., 2024; Tetteh et al., 2022: Van, 2024). Based on this evidence, it can be concluded that because school leaders did not recognize the positive relationship between meaningful work and teacher motivation as a factor that reduced teacher turnover, they eventually experienced employee shortages (Van, 2024).

Employee Shortage

Employee shortage following the COVID-19 pandemic, although a common in business industries across the globe, was also a byproduct of job dissatisfaction. According to Thor & Siegfried (2021), employee shortages were linked to job dissatisfaction factors such as low salary, physical and mental stress, and heavy workloads. In addition, it was found that employee shortages made it difficult for businesses to attract and retain skilled personnel, as many front-line jobs became increasingly unattractive (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024; Thor & Siegfried, 2021; Tran & Smith, 2020). Thor & Siegfried (2021) concluded that the employee shortage reflected an unsatisfying work-life balance among front-line workers, specifically when labor demands increased while salaries remained statgnent.

In addition, employee shortages were considered a continuation of employee turnover, despite efforts to improve employee retention. For example, Szajna & Kostrzewski (2022) found that while employee shortage had been noticeable since 2010, the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine exacerbated the issue, increasing shortage in many countries worldwide. Specifically, during times of pandemic and war, employee

shortages were linked to high turnover, as turnover often triggered further shortages (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024; Szajna & Kostrzewski, 2022; Thor & Siegfried, 2021; Tran & Smith, 2020). Szajna & Kostrzewski (2022) concluded that the cycle of employee turn and shortages would persist as long as an increase in job openings were filled with unskilled workers who eventually resigned.

A final point to consider regarding employee shortages was the imbalance between supply and demand of staff. Li et al. (2021) defined this imbalance as a lack of workers (supply), which created a surplus of job openings (demand). Specifically, individuals struggling financially left traditional nine-to-five jobs for roles with lower skill requirements and fewer entry barriers, offering flexibility, autonomy, and higher earning potential (Li et al., 2021; Szajna & Kostrzewski, 2022). This wave of resignations fueled surges of employee shortages, which Li et al. (2021) concluded disrupted long-standing industries and contributed to the rise of sharing-based platforms such as Uber and Airbnb.

Similarly, the teacher shortage post-COVID was linked to an imbalance between supply and demand of teachers (Marín Blanco et al., 2023). On one hand, new teachers struggled to bridge the gap between their practical experiences in schools and the theoretical knowledge from their teacher preparation courses. On the other hand, veteran teachers focused more on their motivation to continue teaching and remain in the profession (Jacobsen et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021, Marín Blanco et al., 2023). Furthermore, teacher shortages were also driven by an alienation within the profession, as both new and veteran teachers faced negative media coverage about school issues, increased

administrative burden, longer teaching hours, heightened work-related stress, and growing health problems among teachers (Borrego et al., 2023; Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Lundmark et al., 2022; Marín Blanco et al., 2023; Tran and Smith, 2020). These factors led Marín Blanco et al. (2023) to conclude that teacher shortages would persist as long as school leaders struggled to recruit new teachers, failed to convince former teachers to return, and were unable to retain current teachers.

Lastly, teacher shortage was linked to a lack of effective recruitment and retention efforts. Specifically, the shortage was associated with poor recruitment and retention, particularly in less attractive rural areas due to factors such as geographical remoteness, inadequate transport infrastructure, limited access to social support and health services, and, in some cases, lower economic growth (Jiang & Yip; 2024; Tran and Smith, 2020). Although compensatory theory suggested that financial incentives, such as salary bonuses, subsidized housing, and travel allowances, had shown promising results in attracting newly graduated teachers to rural schools, Jiang & Yip (2024) concluded that school leaders failed to consider how current teachers were inadequately compensated, which created the initial staffing shortage.

Measuring Employee Job Satisfaction Using the JSS

Employee job satisfaction was measured using the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), created by Paul Spector to assess job satisfaction on a scale ranging from dissatisfied to satisfied. The scale evaluated various factors, including pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, the nature of work, and communication (Nickel, 2020; Jacobsen et al., 2023; Van Den Berg et al., 2023).

According to Van Den Berg et al. (2023), the JSS consisted of 36 questions using a 6-point Likert scale, with scores categorized into nine areas. The nine categories included salary, promotion opportunities, opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, relationships and communication with other dietitians/nutritionists', acceptance by other healthcare professionals as a member of the multidisciplinary team (MDT), communication with the MDT, the work environment, finding the work rewarding, and the nature of the work (Van Den Berg et al. (2023). The role of the JSS in this project was to identify elements of teacher job satisfaction related to transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership post-COVID.

Next, an examination of leadership styles commonly used in business was conducted. First, each leadership style was identified by the theorists along with its key characteristics. Then, each theory was expanded upon through studies conducted in business. Finally, the MLQ was discussed as an instrument for measuring leadership styles.

Leadership Styles

The most widely discussed and referenced leadership styles in business were transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership. The following provides an examination of each leadership style, including their key theorists and defining characteristics.

Transactional Leadership

The transactional leadership theory, originally introduced by James McGregor Burns in the 1970s and later expanded upon by Bernard Bass in 1985 (Flynn, 2021),

described an employer-employee relationship in which subordinates were rewarded for their performance. This leadership style was considered more effective for self-motivated individuals who thrived in a structured environment (Flynn, 2021; Goktas, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). According to Goktas (2021), transactional leaders motivated their followers to perform their best and achieve goals through a system of rewards and penalties. Goktas (2021) also observed that rewards encouraged employees to work efficiently and reinforced their sense of deserving the recognition. Penalties, on the other hand, were used as corrective measures, allowing leaders to step in and support employees in meeting performance expectations (Goktas, 2021). These practices reflected an exchange-oriented approach to leadership, which was further explored in a study by Alavi et al. (2022).

In addition, transactional leadership emphasized exchange-oriented behaviors. Alavi et al. (2022) noted that the foundation of the employer-employee exchange was based on employees being rewarded for meeting predefined goals while avoiding reprimand for poor performance or undesired behaviors. Transactional leadership was also found to be effective in times of crisis, as it provided clearly articulated expectations that helped reduce uncertainty and maintain organizational performance (Alavi et al., 2022; Gaktos, 2021). Alavi et al. (2022) concluded that transactional leadership was essential during crises due to its structured approach and clear guidance. These findings contributed to further development of the reward-and-punishment system central to transactional leadership.

Lastly, Stenmark (2024) agreed that transactional leadership focused on employees completing tasks and being rewarded or punished accordingly. Specifically, Stenmark noted that transactional leadership emphasized specific, concrete, day-to-day behaviors, consistent with the practical nature of employees (Alavi et al., 2022; Goktas, 2021; Stenmark, 2024). For example, Stenmark (2024) pointed out that transactional leaders monitored whether employees were completing their tasks, watched them closely for mistakes, rewarded only those who worked hard, and punished those who failed to meet expectations. These actions led Stenmark (2024) to conclude that transactional leaders were more concerned with task outcomes, rewards, and punishments than with building relationships with employees.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory, originally introduced by James McGregor Burns in the 1970s and later expanded by Bernard Bass in 1985 (Flynn, 2021), described an employer-employee relationship in which subordinates were motivated to achieve high levels of performance. Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership was best suited for organizations with outdated practices in need of change. For example, it significantly improved employee motivation by promoting problem-solving among staff, who drew from their experiences to develop innovative solutions (Flynn, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). Most importantly, Kuo and Tsai (2023) concluded that transformational leaders often inspired employees to achieve unexpected or remarkable goals, which in turn boosted organizational performance.

Transformational leadership was also relationship-oriented. Alavi et al. (2022) noted that its relationship-oriented nature focused on employee development, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, while emphasizing a long-term vision and shared values. For example, during times of crisis, transformational leaders demonstrated charisma, which fostered organizational trust and positively impacted performance (Alavi et al., 2022; Flynn, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). Moreover, Alavi et al. (2022) concluded that employees were more receptive to transformational leaders during crises and expressed greater appreciation for leaders who supported them by fostering a positive, relationship-oriented culture that promoted a dynamic work environment.

Lastly, Stenmark (2024) found that transformational leadership helped employees reach their full potential. For example, when transformational leaders were attentive to their employees and focused on aspirational goals for organizational success, they became strong role models (Alavi et al., 2022; Flynn, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023; Stenmark, 2024). Stenmark (2024) described such leaders as those who motivated their staff by communicating high expectations and encouraging creativity in how employees approached their tasks. Finally, Stenmark (2024) concluded that transformational leadership was ideal for supporting employees in achieving their full potential.

Laissez-faire Leadership

The laissez-faire leadership theory, originally developed by Kurt Lewin in the late 1930s and later expanded by Bernard Bass in 1985, was described as the absence of leadership or involvement (Flynn, 2021). According to Khan et al. (2024), laissez-faire leadership was an avoidance-based style characterized by withdrawing from leadership

responsibilities. Specifically, when leaders experienced negative situations, they withdrew from employees to avoid uncomfortable interactions (Flynn, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). Additionally, Khan et al. (2024) described laissez-faire leadership as passive, with leaders avoiding decision-making or hesitating to fulfill their duties toward subordinates. Khan et al. (2024) concluded that these behaviors led to adverse outcomes, such as decreased work engagement and subordinates perceiving their leaders as having a negative impact on the work environment.

Laissez-faire leadership also reflected excessive trust between the employer and the employee. Elgoibar et al. (2024) found that laissez-faire leaders placed too much trust in employees when they faced situations requiring problem solving. Historically, laissez-faire leadership had been labeled as ineffective due to its association with leadership absenteeism and the lack of information or feedback provided to employees during important decision-making processes (Elgoibar et al., 2024; Flynn, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). However, Elgoibar et al. (2024) discovered that laissez-faire leadership relied on trust as a foundation for information-sharing and collaboration in problem-solving, even though it did not involve offering direct feedback. Thus, Elgoibar et al. (2024) concluded that laissez-faire leadership aimed to establish trust between employer and employee rather than to create separation.

Lastly, laissez-faire leadership proved useful in organizations staffed with employees who worked successfully independently, despite previous studies suggesting otherwise. Laissez-faire leaders were typically known for providing minimal supervision (Elgoibar et al., 2024; Flynn, 2021; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024; Khan et al., 2024).

However, Hundie and Habtewold (2024) found that this leadership style was most effective in organizations where employees worked autonomously and made most decisions themselves. For example, laissez-faire leadership was highly effective in settings like research centers, where many intellectuals carried out their work independently without close monitoring (Flynn, 2021; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024). Hundie and Habtewold (2024) concluded that laissez-faire leadership increased employees' likelihood of high performance due to its autonomy-supportive nature, which fostered a sense of self-determination among employees capable of completing tasks without supervision.

Measuring Leadership Styles Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was introduced in 1990 by Bass and Avolio as a quantitative tool to assess transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Muhammad et al., 2020; Nickel, 2020; Yohannes & Wasonga, 2023). By 1999, Bass, Avolio, and Jung noted that the MLQ had been used in over 300 research studies, including master's theses and doctoral dissertations, across various groups, establishing it as a reliable instrument for measuring a broad range of leadership qualities (Muhammad et al., 2020). According to Goktas (2021), the MLQ divided leadership into three main styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. It measured four key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The MLQ also assessed follower perceptions of leaders' behaviors within the Full Range Leadership model, making it applicable across cultures and contexts, particularly in capturing subordinate

responses (Muhammad et al., 2020; Nickel, 2020; Yohannes & Wasonga, 2023). In this project, the MLQ's role was to measure leadership in relation to teacher job satisfaction, based on leadership performance, characteristics, and behaviors following COVID-19 (Nickel, 2020).

Next, was a reflection on leadership styles and their impact on job satisfaction. First, the effects of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership on job satisfaction were examined. Finally, the relationship between these leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction was explored.

Leadership Styles and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership and employee job satisfaction was complex and multifaceted. The following reviewed each leadership style, assessed their connections to job satisfaction, and identified similarities relevant to the teaching profession.

Leadership Style Review

Below was a review of leadership styles and their essential characteristics, aimed at understanding the impact of each style on employee job satisfaction and teacher job satisfaction.

Table 2

Leadership Styles and Characteristics

Leadership Styles	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Laissez Faire Leadership
Characteristics	-contingent reward - active management by expectations -passive management exceptions	-idealized influence of attribute and behavior - inspirational motivation - intellectual stimulation -individualized consideration	-laissez-faire characteristics and behaviors

Transactional Leadership, Employee Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Job Satisfaction

The impact of transactional leadership on employee job satisfaction was most evident in well-established industries. Azura et al. (2023) observed that transactional leadership positively influenced organizations that did not require rapid change, resulting in most employees feeling satisfied with fulfilling their contractual roles. They also noted that transactional leadership significantly affected employees' intention to remain with an organization (Azura et al., 2023; Flynn, 2021; Goktas, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). For example, Azura et al. (2023) suggested that employees were more likely to stay if they believed the organization valued their contributions. Specifically, when transactional leaders implemented a fair and transparent reward system, it strengthened the relationship between employees and the organization (Azura et al., 2023; Flynn, 2021; Goktas, 2021; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). Thus, Azura et al. (2023) concluded that the reciprocal process central to transactional leadership enhanced employees' quality of work in well-

established organizations by providing both financial and non-financial rewards to those who met or exceeded performance expectations.

In addition, the impact of transactional leadership on employee job satisfaction was leader-centric. Jacobsen et al. (2023) noted that transactional leadership enabled managers to motivate employees through rewards. Specifically, transactional leaders used contingent rewards to align employees' self-interest with organizational goals (Azura et al., 2023; Flynn, 2021; Goktas, 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2023; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). Jacobsen et al. (2023) found that this alignment fostered positive relationships, leading to higher employee job satisfaction. Furthermore, they concluded that the positive leader-centric effects of transactional leadership on job satisfaction persisted as long as leaders maintained a moderate span of control over their employees.

Following COVID, transactional leadership was recommended for school administrators to improve overall teacher satisfaction in virtual school settings. For example, Muhammad et al. (2020) found that teachers who perceived a positive relationship with their principal's transactional leadership—characterized by rewards and management—reported higher job satisfaction. Furthermore, when transactional leadership focused on a structured approach to rewarding and recognizing performance, leadership effectiveness improved (Azura et al., 2023; Flynn, 2021; Goktas, 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2023; Kuo & Tsai, 2023; Panagopoulos et al., 2024). Specifically, Panagopoulos et al. (2024) confirmed Muhammad et al.'s findings by identifying a significant, moderate positive correlation between transactional leadership and teacher job satisfaction. They concluded that when transactional leaders emphasized active and

engaging leadership, teachers were less likely to consider job satisfaction alone as a reason to leave their positions.

Transformational Leadership, Employee Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Job Satisfaction

The impact of transformational leadership on employee job satisfaction was closely linked to work-life balance. George and Sreedharan (2023) suggested that transformational leadership positively influenced job satisfaction by fostering this balance. When transformational leaders maintained strong relationships with employees and supported them in both professional and personal matters, employee performance improved, and work-life balance was promoted (Alavi et al., 2022; Flynn, 2021; George & Sreedharan, 2023; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). George and Sreedharan (2023) concluded that transformational leaders who helped employees manage their work responsibilities also facilitated harmony between their career obligations, family commitments, and personal pursuits.

In addition, the impact of transformational leadership on employee job satisfaction was leader-centric. Jacobsen et al. (2023) noted that transformational leadership enabled managers to motivate employees by communicating a compelling company vision. They defined transformational leaders as those who developed, shared, and sustained a vision that encouraged employees to transcend self-interest and achieve organizational goals. Several studies found a positive relationship between employee-perceived transformational leadership and job satisfaction, showing that employees were influenced by managers who demonstrated individualized consideration, inspirational

motivation, and idealized influence tailored to the specific goals and interests of each follower (Alavi et al., 2022; Flynn, 2021; George & Sreedharan, 2023; Jacobsen et al., 2023; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). Based on these findings, Jacobsen et al. (2023) concluded that transformational leadership was leader-centric because it fostered close relationships between managers and employees, allowing employees to voice concerns through intellectual stimulation without reducing job satisfaction or organizational performance.

Lastly, Panagopoulos et al. (2024) described the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID as both inspirational and motivational. They found that teachers achieved higher levels of performance and success when leaders provided individualized attention to their unique needs, which contributed to a more positive school environment. The study also emphasized the importance of school leaders offering continuous learning and professional development opportunities to foster a supportive school climate—one that positively impacted teacher job satisfaction (Alavi et al., 2022; Flynn, 2021; George & Sreedharan, 2023; Jacobsen et al., 2023; Kuo & Tsai, 2023; Panagopoulos et al., 2024). In conclusion, Panagopoulos et al. (2024) concluded that transformational leadership positively correlated with teacher job satisfaction by focusing on inspiration and motivation, rather than on external factors such as job security, scheduling, or salary.

Laissez-faire Leadership, Employee Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Job Satisfaction

The effects of laissez-faire leadership on employee job satisfaction were described as positive for employee well-being during periods of organizational change, according to Lundmark et al. (2022). For example, laissez-faire leadership enhanced well-being by

allowing employees greater autonomy, respect, and a sense of competence in specific situations (Elgoibar et al., 2024; Flynn, 2021; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024; Khan et al., 2024; Lundmark et al., 2022). Although Lundmark et al. (2022) acknowledged that laissez-faire leadership was often perceived as non-involvement or a lack of responsiveness—especially when employees needed support—they concluded, after further investigation, that it contributed to positive outcomes in organizations undergoing change. Specifically, they found that during transitional periods, this leadership style helped maintain employee well-being and supported consistency in organizational performance.

Lastly, the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction after COVID-19 showed mixed results. On one hand, Panagopoulos et al. (2024) reported that laissez-faire leadership was negatively correlated with all dimensions of job satisfaction when school leaders demonstrated low engagement, which reduced teacher motivation and overall satisfaction. Similarly, teachers who perceived their principals as disengaged—essentially "doing nothing"—reported lower levels of job satisfaction (Elgoibar et al., 2024; Flynn, 2021; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024; Khan et al., 2024; Lundmark et al., 2022). On the other hand, Mahmoud et al. (2023) found that laissez-faire leadership positively impacted teacher engagement in well-established schools, contributing to a more favorable work environment. They concluded that this leadership style gave teachers the freedom to complete their tasks independently, offered support and training as needed, and fostered trust by allowing mistakes without excessive interference.

Transition

Section 1 addressed the background and problem statement, purpose of the project, target population, sampling method, nature of the project, research question, hypotheses, theoretical framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, significance, contribution to business, implications for social change, and the academic literature review. Section 2, however, introduced the project further by expanding on the purpose, the researcher's role, the participants, and the research method and design.

Section 2: The Project

This section presented the project in detail. It began with an expanded purpose statement, followed by a description of the researcher's role. Next, it discussed the participants and the selection process. Then, it provided a detailed explanation of the research method and design, including the population, sampling, and ethical considerations. Finally, it concluded with an in-depth discussion of data collection and instrument validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational project was to examine the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction following COVID-19. Key components of the project included a quantitative methodology and an anonymous survey design utilizing the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The independent variables were transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership, while teacher job satisfaction served as the dependent variable. The study focused on teachers in central Virginia as the specific population. The core business problem addressed was that school board members and administrators lacked understanding of how these leadership styles influenced teacher job satisfaction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The objective of this project was to identify whether transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles were effective in predicting measures of teacher job satisfaction following the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously noted, most

literature concerning leadership and employee job satisfaction did not address the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from the project provided correlations between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction, which could be used in future studies to address leadership practices, employee turnover concerns, and other retention issues.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the project was to avoid any inadvertent bias that could have affected the findings and compromised the project's validity (DeSilva, 2021). Additionally, I was required to remain objective, neutral, and practical throughout the research process (Folmar, 2020), despite any familiarity I had with the topic, participants, or research area (Walden, 2023). Specifically, I refrained from influencing or leading participants when they completed the JSS and MLQ surveys, ensuring their responses were unbiased. Ideally, my responsibility was to synthesize the collected data as evidence of the relationships examined in this quantitative study (Kurniasari et al., 2023), while adhering to ethical guidelines outlined in the Belmont Report (Walden, 2023).

Participants

Participants were individuals who willingly took part in the project and met the criteria established for the study (Van, 2020). This section provided a description of the participants based on the population and sampling methods discussed in Section 1.

First, participants were selected based on the project's population to ensure reliability and validity (Van, 2020). For example, teachers employed between 2019 and

2021 were chosen to examine the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership and teacher job satisfaction following COVID-19, as this timeframe corresponded with the pandemic period. Next, teachers were selected from the Eastern Region of the United States, with consent obtained from their school leaders, to create a random sample and reduce bias among participants. Additionally, the number of participants was determined using G*Power to ensure an adequate and consistent sample size. Lastly, I established and maintained communication with participants via email to ensure consistency throughout the project.

Next was a discussion of the research method and design. First, the research method was discussed, including the use of the JSS and the MLQ as instruments of measurement. Lastly, a multiple regression research design was explained as the approach used for this project.

Research Method and Design

In this section, there was a discussion of the research method and design. First, the research method section expanded on the Nature of the Project from Section 1 by providing more details about the quantitative correlational approach and the use of the JSS and MLQ as measurement instruments. Lastly, the design section further elaborated on the Nature of the Project from Section 1 by explaining the rationale for using multiple regression statistical analysis to examine the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID.

Research Method

The nature of this project was quantitative correlational, utilizing the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) as measurement instruments to examine the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. According to Nickel (2020), the MLQ measured constructs of transactional leadership (contingent reward, active management by exception, passive management by exception), transformational leadership (idealized influence—both attributes and behaviors—inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), and laissez-faire leadership (characteristics and behaviors associated with non-leadership). Additionally, Nickel (2020) noted that the JSS measured constructs such as supervision, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication. This approach was well suited for the project because the analysis revealed significant positive correlations between leadership styles and aspects of job satisfaction (Erer & Savaş, 2024).

A quantitative method with a correlational design was chosen for this project because it allowed me to examine the relationships between variables and predict research outcomes (Roso & Zaini, 2024). Additionally, I preferred a quantitative method over a mixed-methods design due to my limited experience. It was important to note that mixed methods combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore phenomena in greater depth, often in exploratory studies (Mariani & Baggio, 2020). Lastly, a quantitative method was selected instead of a qualitative approach because this project

relied on established measurement instruments rather than participant observation or unstructured, face-to-face interviews (Aylan & Çetin Gürkan, 2021).

Research Design

The specific research design for this project was multiple regression because it allowed for the analysis of more than one independent variable, unlike a t-test. For example, Erer and Savaş (2024) used multiple regression to examine leader-member exchange as the predictor variable, job satisfaction as the moderating variable, and workplace happiness as the dependent variable. Similarly, Mahmoud et al. (2023) employed multiple regression to identify transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership as predictor variables and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Additionally, Androulakis et al. (2023) used multiple regression to assess the relationship between task complexity and operational risks in their quantitative correlational study. According to Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2016), correlation was a statistical tool used to determine the degree of association between measurable variables. Finally, DeSilva (2021) noted that a correlational design was more appropriate for this study since experimental designs involved comparing groups, and quasi-experimental designs required a control group. Therefore, I concluded that multiple regression was the most suitable design for the quantitative correlational nature of this project.

Population and Sampling

In quantitative research, the population referred to the complete group of individuals who possessed the characteristics relevant to the study, while sampling described the process used to select participants from that population (Van, 2020). The

population section outlined the criteria for participant inclusion, and the sampling section explained the methods used to select those participants.

Population

The target population for this project consisted of teachers who taught between 2019 and 2021 and were located in the Eastern region of the United States. This region included the following states: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. This population was broad enough to allow for the creation of a random sample, which was discussed in the next section.

Sampling

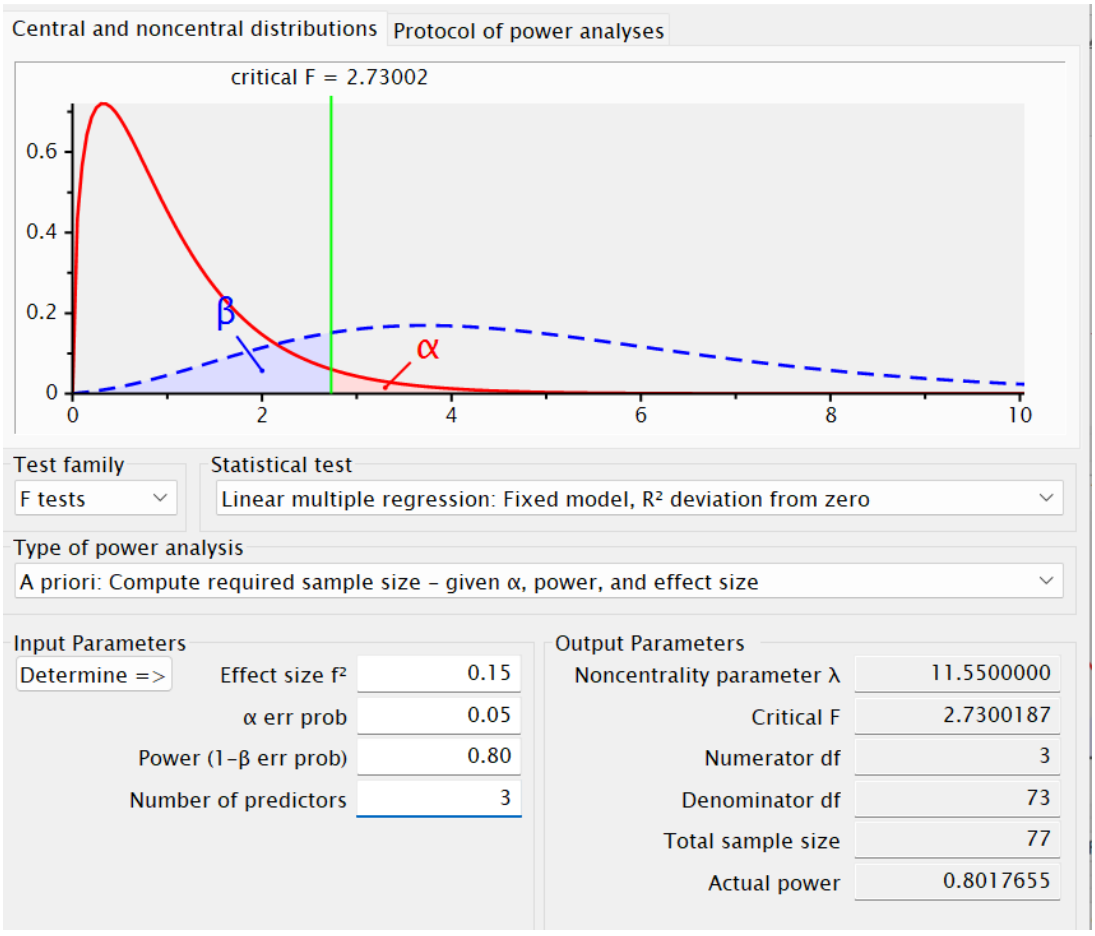
The sampling method for this project was probabilistic sampling, specifically simple random sampling, which was commonly used in quantitative studies (Rakib et al., 2024). Zelčāne and Pipere (2023) noted that qualitative research typically employed small sample sizes focused on achieving saturation. However, for this quantitative correlational study, the sample size was set to exceed 50 participants to ensure the validity and reliability of the multiple regression analysis (Akinlotan, 2024; Erer & Savaş, 2024; Nguyen & Kremer, 202X; Redding & Nguyen, 2024). Specifically, using G*Power for a linear regression with three predictors—transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership—and setting an alpha level of 0.05 with 80% power, the required sample size was calculated to be 77, balancing

feasibility and risk. The following equation was used to calculate the G*Power sample size: $F = 1-R^2 / [(n-k-1)R^2/k]$

Finally, multiple regression analysis and correlation techniques were employed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable (teacher job satisfaction) and the independent variables (transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership) (Oyefeso, 2017).

Figure 1

*G*Power Analysis and Chart*



Ethical Research

Ethical research ensured the safety and rights of participants throughout the project. To comply with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements (IRB #12-12-24-1125356), the project followed five key steps. First, I completed Form A, which detailed data sources and partner sites (Carter, 2023; DeSilva, 2021; Folmar, 2020; Oyefeso, 2017; Van, 2020; Walden, 2023). Second, I received feedback from the IRB to address ethical challenges related to partner organization documentation before beginning the project. Third, the proposal approval was documented and updated as necessary to reflect any changes made during the proposal defense. Fourth, the IRB approved the final procedures and documents before the project commenced. Additionally, all participants voluntarily consented and were informed that they could withdraw at any time, as there were no incentives for participation. Fifth, the data were securely stored for five years to protect the confidentiality of participants and organizations.

In summary, the primary goal of ethical research was to ensure an informed consent process that clearly communicated the project's parameters to all parties involved.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used to examine the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID were the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS; Appendix B) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Appendix D). This section described the purpose of each instrument, their intended populations, scales, scoring processes, time

required for completion, psychometric properties related to reliability and validity, and how I obtained access to each instrument.

The JSS, created by Paul Spector, was designed to assess job satisfaction on a scale from dissatisfaction to satisfaction across several factors: pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication (Nickel, 2020). The JSS consisted of 36 questions scored on a 6-point Likert scale and covered nine categories, including salary, promotion opportunities, opportunities for skill development, relationships, and communication (Van Den Berg et al., 2023). The intended population for the JSS was required to align with the industry relevant to the project. For example, Aliu and Agbetokun (2020) used the JSS to study job satisfaction among customers and hotel staff in the Nigerian service industry. Furthermore, the JSS had been used across multiple disciplines with clearly defined constructs, consistently producing reliable and valid results (Carter, 2023). Finally, I obtained access to the JSS through the Statistics Solutions website and later distributed it to participants via Survey Monkey.

The MLQ was a quantitative measurement instrument first introduced in 1990 by Bass and Avolio (Muhammad et al., 2020) to assess constructs of transactional leadership (contingent reward, active management by exception, passive management by exception), transformational leadership (idealized influence—both attributes and behaviors—inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), and laissez-faire leadership (characteristics and behaviors) (Nickel, 2020). Similar to the study by Oyefeso (2017), the MLQ took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The

target population aligned with the project topic, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze managerial and non-managerial perceptions of leadership styles and job satisfaction. Lastly, I obtained access to the MLQ through the online platform Mind Garden, and the survey was later distributed to participants via Survey Monkey.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique was an anonymous survey. Specifically, participants accessed the JSS and the MLQ through a shareable link via Google Forms. Once participants completed the survey, the data were stored on Google Forms until the majority of surveys were completed. Upon completion, the data from the JSS and the MLQ were transferred to SPSS, where a multiple regression analysis was performed.

Lastly, data collection methods had both advantages and disadvantages (Walden, 2023). For example, while emailing the survey link was quick and efficient, the email sometimes ended up in recipients' junk or spam folders, causing them to miss the opportunity to participate (Carter, 2023; DeSilva, 2021; Oyefeso, 2017; Van, 2020). Therefore, I found it helpful to remind participants to check their spam or junk folders if they could not locate the email.

Data Analysis

The statistical test that was used to address the research question was multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression and correlation analyses were appropriate for examining the relationship between the dependent variable and multiple independent variables (Oyefeso, 2017). Specifically, the analysis assessed whether there was a statistically significant predictive relationship between transactional leadership,

transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction following the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike a t-test, which is designed to analyze the effect of a single independent variable, multiple regression allowed for the simultaneous examination of several predictors. This made it well-suited for the study, which involved three independent variables: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership (Mahmoud et al., 2023). Additionally, if any data were missing or incomplete, the dataset was re-evaluated and cleaned accordingly. Assumptions related to the regression analysis were also tested to ensure validity, prevent bias or violations, and support accurate interpretation of the results using tools such as G*Power.

Project Validity

Validity in research referred to the extent to which findings accurately reflected the truth. However, internal validity was less relevant in observational studies, such as the correlational design used in this project (Walden, 2023). For instance, Carter (2023) identified common threats to internal validity—such as history, maturation, statistical regression, experimental mortality, and selection-maturation interaction—that future researchers could consider to minimize the risk of data distortion. Carter (2023) also noted that external validity tended to be low when variables were narrowly defined and easily measured, as this could limit generalizability. Finally, validity in this project was intended to serve as a safeguard against unintentional bias on my part, which could have affected the integrity of the findings (DeSilva, 2021).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 discussed the project in terms of the research method, research design, ethics, validity, data collection, and data analysis. In contrast, Section 3 presented the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for future research, and my personal reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

This quantitative correlational project (IRB #12-12-24-1125356) examined the relationship between three leadership styles—transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (passive avoidant)—and teacher job satisfaction following the COVID-19 pandemic. The independent variables were the three leadership styles, and the dependent variable was job satisfaction. Survey data were collected from 82 teachers who were employed between 2019 and 2024 in the Eastern Region of the United States. After screening the responses for missing data, two participants were removed, resulting in a final sample of 80. The following sections discussed applications for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for future research, and a concluding reflection.

Presentation of Findings

In this section, I discussed the assessment of key regression assumptions: outliers, normality, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals. These assumptions were necessary to determine whether the collected data appropriately fit the regression model. Once the assumptions were evaluated and met, I presented the results of both descriptive and inferential statistics. SPSS was used as the statistical analysis tool to test the data. Following the presentation of statistical results, I provided a summary of the analysis and its connection to the theoretical framework. Additionally, I discussed applications for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and suggestions for future research. Finally, I reflected on my doctoral journey and concluded the project with a brief summary.

Testing Assumptions

Before conducting the regression analysis, the necessary assumptions were tested to ensure the data fit the regression model. Below, I evaluated the required assumptions: outliers, normality, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals.

Outliers, Normality, Linearity, Homoscedasticity, and Independence of Residuals

To ensure the data fit the regression model, the assumptions of outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals were evaluated. After examining the scatterplot of standardized residuals (Figure 2) and the normal P-P plot of regression standardized residuals (Figure 3), I determined that no significant outliers were present, the data exhibited homoscedasticity, and the regression met assumptions. Table 3, on the other hand provided the model summary and R^2.

Figure 2

Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals

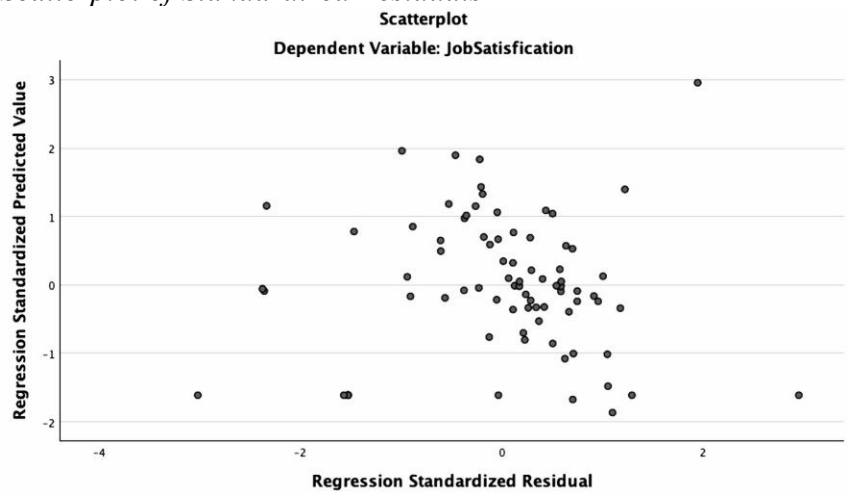


Figure 3

Normal Probability P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals

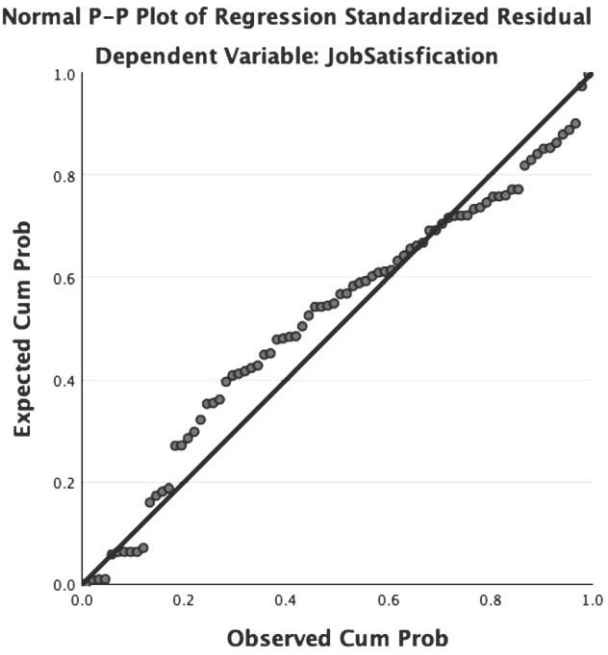


Table 3

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.487[a]	.237	.207	.67043

Descriptive Statistics

Out of the 82 fully completed surveys, two were removed, leaving a total of 80 surveys used in the project. Among these participants, approximately 76.3% identified as female, 23.8% as male, and none preferred not to disclose their gender. Table 4 presented

the participants' gender distribution, Table 6 provided descriptive statistics for the variables in this study.

Table 4

Results of Participants' Gender

	N	%
Female	61	76.3%
Male	19	23.8%
Preferred not to disclose	0	0%

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Job Satisfaction	3.616	.7527	80
Transactional Leadership	2.1	.7301	80
Transformational Leadership	2.2719	.9349	80
Laissez-Faire (Passive Avoidant) Leadership	1.7547	.9585	80

Inferential Results

For the multiple regression analysis, an alpha error probability of .05 was used to examine the effectiveness of transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire (passive avoidant) leadership in predicting teacher job satisfaction. The independent (predictor) variables were transactional leadership, transformational

leadership, and laissez-faire leadership, while the dependent variable was job satisfaction. The null hypothesis stated that there was no statistically significant predictive relationship between these leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. The alternative hypothesis stated that there was a statistically significant predictive relationship.

Overall, the multiple linear regression analysis was statistically significant, $F(3, 79) = 7.860$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .237. This indicated that approximately 23.7% of the variance in job satisfaction was explained by the three leadership styles, representing a moderate effect size. Table 6 presented the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which tested whether the overall regression model was statistically significant. In addition, Table 7 displayed the regression coefficients, which showed the relationship between each predictor and the outcome variable while holding the other predictors constant.

Table 6

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.599	3	3.533	7.860	<.001[b]
	Residual	34.160	76	.449		
	Total	44.758	79			

Table 7

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized coefficients B	SE	Standardized coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.467	.248		9.933	<.001
	TF	.266	.144	.331	1.847	.069
	TA	.092	.202	.089	.456	.650
	LF	.200	.104	.254	1.927	.058

Analysis Summary

This quantitative correlational project aimed to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. I used the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to collect data, and multiple linear regression to analyze the results. The multiple linear regression analysis was statistically significant, F (3, 79) = 7.860, p < .001, with an R^2 of .237. Specifically, transformational (t = 1.847, p = 0.069, β = .2.66); transactional (t = .456, p = 0.650, β = .092) or laissez-faire (t = 1.927, p = 0.058, β = .200) were not statistically significant predictors. These results led to the rejection of the alternative hypothesis and acceptance of the null hypothesis, indicating that none of the leadership styles had a significant relationship with job satisfaction. The following section discussed the theoretical implications of these findings.

Theoretical Findings

The theoretical framework that grounded this project was the Job Satisfaction Theory, first introduced by Edwin Locke in 1967 (Houffman-Miller, 2021). Although traditionally applied in psychology research, Hemsworth et al. (2024) found a connection between job satisfaction and organizational outcomes. Based on the findings of this quantitative correlational study, transactional leadership significantly predicted job satisfaction. This outcome aligned with Hemsworth et al. (2024), who noted that the Job Satisfaction Theory fostered a more committed and proactive workforce, leading to improved organizational efficiency. Furthermore, when teachers were satisfied with their jobs, they experienced a sense of empowerment and reduced stress, which were key components of job satisfaction (Borrego et al., 2023; Lundmark et al., 2022; Tran & Smith, 2020). In summary, the findings suggested that school leaders should be mindful of their leadership style to create an environment conducive to teacher job satisfaction. The next section discussed applications to professional practice.

Application to Professional Practice

The findings of this quantitative correlational project examined the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. These findings were relevant for improving organizational practices, as they suggested leaders should have adapted their leadership styles flexibly rather than adhering strictly to a single approach. Specifically, organizational leaders used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) framework to adjust the degree to which they applied each leadership style depending on the staff or situation they faced.

For example, Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory was applied to the three leadership styles in relation to teachers' years of experience to illustrate which style might have been most effective at different stages of a teacher's career. It was important to note that motivators represented intrinsic factors related to the job itself, while hygiene factors referred to extrinsic factors related to the work environment (Tran & Smith, 2020; Hemsworth et al., 2024). In summary, Herzberg's theory was used to identify leadership styles that were most appropriate based on a teacher's experience, offering a practical guide for professional practice.

During the first three years of teaching, new teachers faced a steep learning curve due to the gap between their limited practical experience in schools and the theoretical knowledge gained from teacher preparation courses (Jacobsen et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021; Marín Blanco et al., 2023). These teachers were motivated by aspects they enjoyed about their job, such as signing bonuses, mentorship programs, "New Teacher of the Year" awards, compensation for covering classes, and the work itself. At the same time, they were influenced by hygiene factors like job security, interpersonal relationships, salary, and working conditions. Given this, school leaders adopted a more transactional leadership style with teachers who had three or fewer years of experience, as transactional leaders actively managed expectations (Nickel, 2020; Kuo & Tsai, 2023). This approach empowered new teachers by guiding them toward success in their duties and responsibilities.

Teachers with more than four years of experience either found the profession fulfilling and sought professional growth beyond the classroom or found it unfulfilling

and considered pivoting by changing careers or schools. Jacobsen et al. (2023), Li et al. (2021), and Marín Blanco et al. (2023) found that veteran teachers tended to focus on whether to continue teaching or leave the profession. Therefore, fulfilled and unfulfilled veteran teachers were led differently. First, different motivators were considered for these groups. Fulfilled veteran teachers sought professional growth by pursuing roles beyond the classroom, such as reading specialist, testing coordinator, or administrator. Unfulfilled veteran teachers sought growth by switching careers or trying a different grade level. Second, hygiene factors influencing their perspectives were considered. Fulfilled teachers were motivated by relationships with students, parents, and coworkers, as well as job security, salary, and tenure status. Unfulfilled teachers valued summers and weekends off, hard-to-staff bonuses, job security, salary, work conditions, and considered switching schools or leaving the profession. Finally, leadership styles best suited for each group were considered. Fulfilled teachers benefited from transformational leaders who developed and shared a vision that encouraged employees to transcend self-interest and achieve organizational goals (Jacobsen et al., 2023). In contrast, unfulfilled teachers responded better to laissez-faire leaders who built trust rather than created distance, allowing teachers to work independently without close monitoring to foster self-determination (Elgoibar et al., 2024; Flynn, 2021; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024). Understanding these distinctions helped school leaders better meet the needs of veteran teachers.

Overall, applying the findings of this project to professional practice could have helped organizational leaders adapt their leadership styles to align with the MLQ

framework—adjusting the degree to which they used each style based on staff experience or situational needs, rather than rigidly adhering to a single leadership approach. Tran and Smith (2020) emphasized that motivated employees were more engaged and invested in their work because they cared deeply about it, which in turn improved organizational outcomes. In summary, school leaders would have benefited from flexibly adapting their leadership styles according to the MLQ to enhance employee retention and job satisfaction.

Implications for Social Change

This project had the potential to foster positive social change by helping school leaders adapt their leadership philosophies, reduce employee dissatisfaction, and increase employee retention. First, school leaders followed the MLQ framework by adjusting their use of leadership styles according to staff needs and situational demands, rather than relying on a single leadership approach. From this project, I concluded that many school leaders missed opportunities to reduce teacher job dissatisfaction (Taylor et al., 2024) and failed to implement effective retention strategies. This was critical given the post-COVID phenomenon known as The Great Resignation, during which many U.S. workers quit their jobs due to dissatisfaction, characterized by feelings of withdrawal (Batiste, 2024; Josifidis & Supic, 2023; Plessis & Altintas, 2024; Robertson, 2021; Azeem et al., 2020).

Second, school leaders could have used these findings proactively to reduce—and potentially eliminate—job dissatisfaction (Robertson, 2024). Job dissatisfaction often led to disengagement, burnout, turnover, and staffing shortages. It stemmed from various personal and workplace factors, such as dissatisfaction with pay, work hours, job

insecurity, and difficult relationships with colleagues. These challenges made it hard for organizations to implement effective rewards and recognition programs that improved job satisfaction and reduced voluntary turnover (Hemsworth et al., 2024; Jannat et al., 2020).

Finally, this project could have positively impacted social change by improving employee retention. Tran and Smith (2020) argued that school leaders should have tailored their approaches to meet teachers' needs at different career stages, providing an opportunity to address retention issues urgently. To this end, school leaders fostered co-creation of the educational environment—from the classroom to the school board level. Teachers co-created the learning environment by implementing age-appropriate engagement strategies that boosted student participation and reduced burnout. Administrators co-created the school environment by actively gathering and acting on teacher feedback.

In summary, the findings of this project guided school leaders to adapt their leadership philosophy, reduce employee dissatisfaction, and improve retention, thereby promoting positive social change.

Next, I discussed recommendations for action.

Recommendations for Action

This project was designed to examine the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job satisfaction after COVID. Several simple yet effective methods were used to disseminate the findings, including publishing a book, presenting at conferences, and applying the

results to my professional journey. First, publishing a book was an excellent way to share the project's insights, as it could serve as a foundation for related audiobooks and podcasts, and vice versa. For example, in 2023, I created the New Teacher Boot Camp podcast to help new teachers navigate their first year by sharing lessons learned from my own experiences. Later, I planned to develop a book and workbook based on the podcast notes, providing new teachers with a practical, step-by-step physical guide. Second, presenting at conferences was another effective method for dissemination. For instance, in June 2023, I presented at the TeacherCon conference, hosted by the county's gifted program, discussing the effects of student engagement on classroom management. Similarly, I used the findings from this project to present at administrative conferences, sharing ideas about adopting a multi-dimensional leadership approach to co-create learning environments and empower staff. Finally, I applied the findings to my own professional journey. Specifically, I applied for a Dean of Students position—an entry-level leadership role in education. If selected, I planned to use the project's findings during the upcoming school year to guide my leadership with flexibility and adaptability.

In summary, there were many effective ways to disseminate the information from this project, but I focused primarily on publishing a book, presenting at conferences, and applying the findings in my professional career.

The next section presented recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for Further Research

This project was designed to examine the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and teacher job

satisfaction after COVID. The results showed that transactional leadership was the only leadership style positively related to teacher job satisfaction.

Several limitations were encountered during the project. First, some participants submitted incomplete surveys. Fortunately, the Google Form had been set up to require responses before moving to the next section, which ensured completion of the JSS and MLQ instruments. Second, the project did not reach the ideal minimum of 200 participants to ensure a 5% alpha error of probability. However, G*Power analysis indicated a minimum sample size of 77 was sufficient, given the three independent variables, to maintain 80% power and a 5% alpha of error probability. Third, providing too much information about the project initially risked influencing participants' responses. To address this, a simple flyer (Appendix E) with neutral phrases such as "Participants Needed" and "Participation Includes" was used, avoiding mention of collecting email addresses for follow-ups. Finally, some participants hesitated to complete the anonymous survey and questionnaire for reasons beyond my control. Early in the data collection period (January 13–30), the flyer's initial wording, which referenced "collecting email addresses for follow-up" and "20–30 minutes to complete the survey," discouraged participation. Once this language was removed, participation increased from fewer than 40 to 82 respondents. Overall, the anticipated limitations were addressed effectively as the project progressed.

Considering these points, the following recommendations for further research could have improved business practices based on this project: What other business principles had been overlooked since COVID? If another pandemic had occurred, would

existing business industries have adapted, or would it have created opportunities for new innovative start-ups similar to Uber, Airbnb, and DoorDash? Were there additional leadership styles that could have been included to enhance this study? This project offered a strong foundation for future research, but it was important that future studies continued to build on fundamental business concepts and straightforward statistical analyses before exploring more complex topics.

Next, I provided a reflection on my doctoral journey.

Reflections

Now that this project had ended and concluded my DBA Doctoral journey, I reflected on my experience throughout the DBA Doctoral Project process, uncovered preconceived ideas, examined the possible effects I had on the participants and the situation, and acknowledged changes in my thinking after I had completed the project.

First, I reflected on my experience throughout the DBA Doctoral Project process and summarized it in three words: humbling, transformative, and empowering. The process humbled me by pushing me to advocate for myself. In the Spring Semester of 2024, I struggled to complete the prospectus. Every submission was rejected with minimal useful feedback, which left me frustrated and close to quitting. However, my mentor reminded me that the power to change my situation was in my hands. I had to be bold, advocate for myself, and communicate my frustration—something that was difficult for me since I usually avoided conflict. After requesting a change of chair, I successfully completed the prospectus, passed the oral defense, and continued working on my project over the next ten months. The process was also transformative because it encouraged me

to advocate for myself at work. I had gone above and beyond to help others until I realized I was burning out. Feeling exhausted, I learned it was okay to say "no" and that setting professional boundaries did not mean hurting others' feelings. Finally, the DBA Doctoral Project experience empowered me to pursue the visions laid on my heart. Years ago, I had started a clothing line to empower teachers, but it failed due to my lack of experience. This time, I felt empowered to plan strategically and work methodically to make it successful. In short, the DBA Doctoral Project experience was humbling, transformative, and empowering, preparing me for the next phase of my professional journey.

Second, I held three preconceived ideas throughout that entire experience. The first was that earning a doctoral degree would be easy because I had earned a 4.0 GPA in my Master's program in Sport Management. However, my mentor reminded me that only about 2% of the population held a doctoral degree, which convinced me that that journey would be difficult but achievable. The completion of my doctoral project proved this true. The second preconceived idea was that the doctoral journey was nothing more than academic hazing, especially after my prospectus had been rejected several times. In reality, earning a doctorate involved much more than academic challenges—it required enduring mental and emotional fatigue and sacrificing social events and personal time to complete the work. The third and final preconceived idea was that I deserved to be Dr. Johnson simply because I had worked hard all my life to prove my worth and capabilities. However, I learned that "to whom much is given, much is required." Becoming Dr. Johnson was about embracing the journey, not just reaching the destination—a fact that

was often overlooked. In summary, these were the three main preconceived ideas I held throughout that experience.

Third, I examined the possible effects I had on the participants. At the start of the project, I was unaware of how my actions might have influenced participation until I realized that simply mirroring successful studies was not enough. For example, I posted a Facebook ad to recruit participants but later learned that collecting emails, stating the survey length, and incorrectly setting up the ad had affected participant response. While collecting emails worked well in qualitative research to follow up with interviewees, it likely discouraged participants in my quantitative study due to the contradiction between promising anonymity and requesting emails. Additionally, stating the survey would take 30 minutes likely deterred participants, but when I revised this to 5–10 minutes, participation increased. Finally, the ad's setup itself had been flawed: I had mistakenly selected "Send to Messenger" instead of "Learn More" in Facebook Ad Manager. This caused potential participants to wait for a message that never arrived, whereas "Learn More" directed users to the survey landing page. These three oversights likely impacted participant engagement.

Finally, I acknowledged three significant changes in my thinking after completing the project: 1) Some progress was better than no progress, 2) Everything was earned, and 3) Nothing was impossible. The mindset of "some progress is better than no progress" kept me encouraged throughout the process by teaching me to celebrate small victories. There were many moments when I felt my best efforts weren't good enough, which stalled my progress and growth. However, once I began celebrating small

achievements—like completing a subsection—I realized that any progress, no matter how small, was valuable. The second mindset, "everything is earned," helped me push through moments of mental and emotional exhaustion. On the day I considered quitting, I reminded myself that earning a doctorate involved more than academic performance—it required perseverance through fatigue and challenges. My mentor shared that only about 2% of the population held a doctorate, and while I never verified this statistic, this idea inspired me to keep going. Lastly, the mindset of "nothing is impossible" emerged toward the end of my journey. As Paul Brandt said, "Don't tell me the sky's the limit when there are footprints on the moon." His point was clear: if something had been achieved once, it could be achieved again. While the process was not easy, it was certainly possible. These shifts in mindset helped me persevere to the finish line, and for that, I was truly grateful.

Conclusion

This quantitative correlational project examined the relationship between transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (passive-avoidant) leadership styles following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicated that transactional leadership was a significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction. Based on the data analysis, it was recommended that school leaders and policymakers adopt multiple leadership styles rather than rely on a single approach. Specifically, they were advised to adjust their use of each leadership style, as suggested by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). In conclusion, organizations were encouraged to develop interventions targeting teacher job satisfaction, which could also improve employee retention.

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Appendix A: Permission to Use Job Satisfaction Survey

The JSS is provided at no cost for noncommercial educational and research purposes (https://paulspector.com/assessments/pauls-no-cost-assessments/job-satisfaction-survey-jss/job-satisfaction-self-assessment/)

Appendix B: Link to JSS

JSS (Self Assessment): https://paulspector.com/?cff-form=8

Appendix C: Letter Requesting Permission to Use the MLQ

MindGames.com: Contact Us Section

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Willona Johnson, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I write today seeking permission to use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire in my project: Leadership Styles for Teacher Job Satisfaction after COVID. My chair and second committee member for this project are Dr. Irene Williams and Dr. Ify Diala, both faculty at Walden University, Doctorate of Business Administration Department.

For the project I require permission to distribute the MLQ through a shareable link, a review only copy of the MLQ that will be placed in Appendix D, and permission to use two sample questions (e.g. As a leader....; The person I am rating....) to help secure adequate participants for the population and sample size of this project.

I agree to:
-Use the MLQ for noncommercial, educational, research purposes only
-Share my findings with MINDGAMES.com with the understanding that participants are anonymous and the results are intended to add validity and update norms.

Lastly, if you require additional information that will aid in your decision to grant me permission to use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, please let me know.

In Gratitude,

Willona Johnson

Appendix D: MLQ

Permission Letter

mind garden

www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The license holder has permission to administer the complete instrument in their research, however, only three sample items from this instrument as specified below may be included in the research write-up, thesis, or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument form may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.

Sample Items:
As a leader ….

I talk optimistically about the future.
I spend time teaching and coaching.
I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating….

Talks optimistically about the future.
Spends time teaching and coaching.
Avoids making decisions

Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

Appendix E: Project Recruitment Flyer

Appendix F: Histogram from Multiple Regression