

Administrative Leadership and Performance Management: Enhancing School Outcomes in Chinese Urban Schools

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between administrative leadership, performance management, and school outcomes in Chinese urban schools. Specifically, the objectives were to evaluate the impact of leadership on performance management practices, assess how performance management influences student outcomes, and explore the mediating role of performance management in this relationship. To achieve these objectives, a quantitative research design was employed, utilizing structured surveys to collect data from a diverse sample of administrators, teachers, and students across various urban schools in China. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression analyses, were conducted to evaluate the relationships between the variables, supplemented by structural equation modeling to explore the mediating effects. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between effective administrative leadership and performance management effectiveness. Both leadership practices and performance management were significant predictors of school outcomes, together explaining 52% of the variance in student performance. Additionally, performance management was identified as a crucial mediator between leadership and educational outcomes, indicating that effective leadership indirectly enhances student performance through robust performance management strategies. The implications of these findings are substantial for educational practice and policy. Schools should prioritize leadership development programs that cultivate transformational leadership skills among administrators and implement comprehensive performance management systems with clear evaluation metrics. By fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, educational leaders can significantly enhance student achievement. This research contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership and performance management in the context of Chinese urban education and suggests directions for future research to further explore these relationships.

Keywords: Administrative Leadership, Performance Management, School Outcomes, Educational Leadership, Chinese Urban Schools.

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1. Introduction

In the context of rapid urbanization and economic growth, the education system in China faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Urban schools, in particular, are under immense pressure to deliver high-quality education that meets the demands of a competitive global

landscape. As the Chinese government continues to prioritize education as a key driver of national development, the roles of administrative leadership and performance management have become increasingly critical in enhancing school outcomes. This research focuses on understanding how effective administrative leadership can influence performance management practices and, consequently, improve educational outcomes in Chinese urban schools.

A. The Importance of Administrative Leadership

Administrative leadership in schools encompasses the strategies and practices employed by school leaders to guide their institutions toward achieving educational goals. Effective leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate staff, foster a collaborative school culture, and create a shared vision for the future. In the context of Chinese urban schools, where educational demands are particularly high, strong leadership is essential for navigating the complexities of the educational environment. Research has shown that leadership styles, such as transformational and instructional leadership, significantly affect school culture and student achievement (Leithwood and Jantzi 2000). Transformational leadership, in particular, has been linked to positive educational outcomes. This leadership style emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating teachers to exceed their own expectations and to foster a sense of commitment to the school's mission (Bass and Avolio 1994). In urban schools, where challenges such as high student-to-teacher ratios and diverse student needs are prevalent, transformational leaders can create an environment that encourages innovation and collaboration among staff. By promoting a culture of trust and shared responsibility, these leaders can enhance teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student performance.

B. The Role of Performance Management

Performance management refers to the systematic processes used to assess and improve the effectiveness of educational practices. It involves setting clear performance metrics, regularly evaluating outcomes, and implementing feedback mechanisms to promote continuous improvement. In urban schools, where accountability and measurable results are increasingly emphasized, effective performance management systems can provide valuable insights into areas needing enhancement. These systems not only help in tracking student progress but also support teachers in refining their instructional practices. The implementation of performance management practices in schools has been shown to correlate with improved student outcomes. For instance, a study by Hill and Tyson (Hill and Tyson 2009) found that schools with robust performance management systems were better able to identify areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions. In the context of Chinese urban schools, where educational authorities are focused on enhancing quality and equity, performance management can serve as a critical tool for driving improvement.

C. The Interplay Between Leadership and Performance Management

The relationship between administrative leadership and performance management is particularly relevant in the context of Chinese urban schools. As school leaders are tasked with implementing policies that ensure high-quality education, they must also navigate the complexities of a competitive educational environment. This necessitates a strategic approach to leadership that integrates effective performance management practices. By understanding how leadership

influences performance management and, in turn, how both factors impact student outcomes, educational stakeholders can make informed decisions that drive improvement. Research has indicated that effective leadership is a precursor to successful performance management. For example, leaders who prioritize data-driven decision-making and foster a culture of accountability are more likely to implement effective performance management systems (Harris 2004). In Chinese urban schools, where educational reforms are ongoing, the ability of school leaders to leverage performance management practices can significantly influence the overall effectiveness of the school.

D. Research Objectives

This study aims to address several key questions: How does administrative leadership influence performance management practices in Chinese urban schools? What is the relationship between performance management effectiveness and student outcomes? Furthermore, how does performance management mediate the relationship between leadership and educational success? By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to improved school outcomes in urban settings.

E. Research Questions

- What is the relationship between administrative leadership practices and the effectiveness of performance management in Chinese urban schools?
- How does performance management effectiveness influence student outcomes in urban educational contexts?
- In what ways does performance management mediate the relationship between administrative leadership and school outcomes?
- What specific leadership practices are most effective in enhancing performance management systems in urban schools?
- How do stakeholders perceive the role of administrative leadership and performance management in improving school outcomes?

2. Literature Review

A. Definition of Administrative Leadership

Administrative leadership in educational contexts refers to the processes and practices employed by school leaders to guide and influence their institutions toward achieving educational goals. It encompasses a range of activities, including setting a vision, establishing goals, managing resources, and fostering a positive school culture. According to (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2020), effective administrative leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate staff, create a shared vision, and implement strategies that enhance teaching and learning. This leadership style is crucial in shaping the educational environment and directly impacts student outcomes.

In recent years, the concept of administrative leadership has evolved to include various leadership styles, such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership. Transformational

leadership, for instance, emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating teachers to exceed their own expectations and to foster a sense of commitment to the school's mission (Bass and Avolio 1994). Instructional leadership focuses on the direct influence of school leaders on teaching and learning processes, prioritizing curriculum and instructional practices (Hallinger and Chen 2015). Distributed leadership recognizes the collaborative nature of leadership, where responsibilities are shared among various stakeholders within the school community (Spillane 2005).

B. Performance Management in Educational Contexts

Performance management in educational contexts refers to the systematic processes used to assess and improve the effectiveness of educational practices. It involves setting clear performance metrics, regularly evaluating outcomes, and implementing feedback mechanisms to promote continuous improvement. In schools, performance management systems are designed to track student progress, evaluate teacher effectiveness, and ensure accountability for educational outcomes.

Research has shown that effective performance management practices are associated with improved student outcomes. For example, a study by (Hill and Tyson 2009) found that schools with robust performance management systems were better able to identify areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions. Performance management not only helps in tracking student progress but also supports teachers in refining their instructional practices, thereby enhancing overall school effectiveness (Harris 2014).

In the context of educational leadership, performance management serves as a critical tool for school leaders to make informed decisions based on data-driven insights. By utilizing performance data, leaders can identify strengths and weaknesses within their schools, allocate resources effectively, and implement strategies that foster continuous improvement (Mandinach and Schildkamp 2021).

C. Context of Chinese Urban Schools

The educational landscape in China has undergone significant changes in recent years, particularly in urban areas. Rapid urbanization, economic growth, and globalization have created both challenges and opportunities for schools in these regions. Chinese urban schools are characterized by high student populations, diverse student needs, and increasing pressure to deliver quality education.

In this context, administrative leadership and performance management play crucial roles in addressing the unique challenges faced by urban schools. Research indicates that effective leadership is essential for navigating the complexities of the educational environment and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Tedla and Kilango 2022). Moreover, performance management systems are increasingly being adopted in Chinese urban schools to enhance accountability and improve educational outcomes (Kim, Tong and Sun 2021).

However, the implementation of performance management practices in Chinese urban schools is not without challenges. Issues such as limited resources, high-stakes testing pressures, and a lack of training for school leaders can hinder the effectiveness of these systems (Pang and Wang

2016). As such, understanding the interplay between administrative leadership and performance management in this context is critical for developing effective strategies to enhance school outcomes.

D. Previous Studies on Leadership and School Outcomes

Numerous studies have explored the impact of leadership on school outcomes, highlighting the critical role that effective leadership plays in fostering positive educational environments. Research indicates that strong administrative leadership is positively correlated with improved student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and overall school performance. For instance, a meta-analysis conducted by (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2020) found that leadership practices that focus on setting clear goals, providing feedback, and fostering a positive school climate significantly enhance student outcomes. Similarly, (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2020) emphasized that transformational leadership practices, which involve inspiring and motivating staff, lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement. In the context of performance management, studies have shown that schools with effective performance management systems are better positioned to improve student outcomes. For example, a study by (Day, Sammons and Gorgen 2020) found that schools that implemented data-driven decision-making processes were more successful in identifying and addressing areas of need, ultimately leading to improved student performance. These findings underscore the importance of integrating leadership and performance management practices to create a cohesive approach to enhancing school outcomes. Research has increasingly highlighted the significance of transformational leadership in enhancing teacher engagement and organizational commitment within schools. (Qian and Walker 2022) explores this dynamic by examining how transformational leadership influences teachers' commitment and its subsequent impact on school performance. The study emphasizes the role of organizational culture in urban schools, suggesting that a supportive and adaptive school environment fosters greater commitment among teachers, which in turn enhances overall school effectiveness. In addition to organizational commitment, the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction has been a focal point of recent research. (Arif and Akram 2018) investigate how transformational leadership affects teachers' job satisfaction, specifically highlighting the mediating role of emotional commitment and the moderating influence of emotional intelligence. Their findings indicate that leaders who adopt transformational styles not only enhance job satisfaction but also contribute to a more engaged and motivated teaching staff, ultimately leading to improved school outcomes. The relationship between principal leadership and teacher innovation is another critical area of study. (Parveen, Tran et al. 2022) conducts an empirical examination of how principals' transformational leadership styles can foster positive attitudes toward change among teachers. This study underscores the importance of leadership in driving innovation within urban educational settings, positing that principals who effectively engage their staff in transformational practices can significantly influence teachers' willingness to adopt new methods and approaches, which is essential for improving educational outcomes. Moreover, the impact of leadership on school culture is a vital consideration in the discussion of educational innovation. (Qian and Walker 2022) discusses the application of transformational leadership theory in reshaping school culture, particularly within urban schools in China. The dissertation argues that effective transformational leadership can create a more collaborative and innovative school culture, which is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to educational

advancement. The role of leadership practices in influencing student engagement is also well-documented. (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2020) provide a meta-analytical review of various school leadership practices and their effects on student engagement and performance. Their findings highlight that direction-setting leadership practices significantly contribute to enhancing student engagement, which is particularly relevant in the context of Chinese urban schools where engagement is critical for academic success. Finally, (Qian and Walker 2022, Hou, Ahmad and Zhao 2024) offers a comprehensive literature review on transformational leadership within Chinese K12 schools, synthesizing previous research to elucidate its implications for school reform and performance management in urban areas. This review underscores the necessity for educational leaders to adopt transformational approaches to effectively navigate the challenges posed by contemporary educational demands, thereby enhancing both teacher and student outcomes.

Table 1, synthesizes the key elements from the studies, making it easier to compare their focus, findings, context, and implications related to administrative leadership and performance management in enhancing school outcomes.

Table 1: key Elements from the Studies

| Study | Focus Area | Key Findings | Context |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2020) | Leadership Practices | Clear goals, feedback, and positive climate improve student outcomes | General education |
| Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) | Transformational Leadership | Inspiring staff leads to higher student engagement and achievement | General education |
| Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2020) | Performance Management | Data-driven decision-making enhances identification of needs, improving outcomes | General education |
| Qian and Walker (2022) | Teacher Commitment | Transformational leadership boosts teacher commitment, impacting school performance | Urban schools, China |
| Arif and Akram (2018) | Teacher Job Satisfaction | Transformational leadership enhances job satisfaction through emotional commitment | General education |
| Parveen, Tran et al. (2022) | Principal Leadership and Innovation | Principals' transformational styles foster positive attitudes toward change | Urban educational settings |
| Qian and Walker (2022) | School Culture | Transformational leadership reshapes school culture, fostering collaboration | Urban schools, China |
| Qian and Walker (2024) | Literature Review on Transformational Leadership | Highlights necessity for transformational approaches in school reform | Chinese K12 schools |

This table captures the essential contributions of each study, focusing on leadership styles and their impact on various aspects of school outcomes.

Together, these studies illuminate the multifaceted relationship between administrative leadership, teacher engagement, and school outcomes, particularly within the context of Chinese urban schools. They collectively underscore the importance of effective leadership practices in fostering an environment that supports educational innovation and enhances overall school performance.

E. Gaps in the Existing Literature

Despite the growing body of research on administrative leadership and performance management, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, much of the research has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics operate within the unique cultural and systemic framework of Chinese education. While studies have explored the impact of leadership on school outcomes globally, there is a need for more research focused specifically on the Chinese urban school context.

Second, while the relationship between leadership and performance management has been acknowledged, there is limited empirical evidence examining how these factors interact to influence student outcomes in Chinese urban schools. More research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which administrative leadership affects performance management practices and how these practices, in turn, impact educational outcomes. Finally, there is a need for longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of leadership and performance management on school outcomes. Most existing studies are cross-sectional, providing a snapshot of the relationships at a single point in time. Longitudinal research could provide valuable insights into how leadership and performance management practices evolve over time and their sustained impact on student achievement.

3. Methodology

Quantitative Approach and Rationale: This study employs a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationship between administrative leadership and performance management and their impact on school outcomes in Chinese urban schools. The rationale for this approach is that it allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and causal relationships. This method is particularly effective for assessing large populations and generalizing findings across similar contexts.

A. Sample Population

Description of Participants and Sampling Method: The sample population will consist of administrators, teachers, and students from selected urban schools in China. A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure representation from various school types (public, private, and charter schools) and demographic backgrounds. This approach helps minimize selection bias and enhances the generalizability of the findings. The target sample size will be determined based on power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power for detecting significant effects.

B. Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected through structured surveys designed to measure variables related to administrative leadership, performance management practices, and student outcomes. The survey instruments will include:

- Leadership Practices Inventory: To assess perceptions of leadership behaviors among administrators.
- Performance Management Questionnaire: To evaluate the effectiveness of performance management strategies in schools.
- Student Outcome Measures: Such as academic achievement scores and student engagement metrics.

The surveys will be distributed electronically to participants, with follow-up reminders sent to enhance response rates. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study will be conducted to test the reliability and validity of the instruments.

C. Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical Methods Used for Analysis: The collected data will be analyzed using various statistical techniques, including:

- Descriptive Statistics: To summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the key variables of interest.
- Inferential Statistics: Techniques such as regression analysis will be used to explore the relationships between administrative leadership, performance management, and school outcomes. This may include multiple regression to control for potential confounding variables.
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): To assess the complex relationships and direct/indirect effects among the variables.

Data analysis will be conducted using statistical software SPSS to ensure accuracy and rigor in the findings. The results will be presented in tables and figures to facilitate understanding and interpretation. This methodology provides a clear and structured approach to investigating the critical factors influencing school outcomes within the context of Chinese urban education, ensuring that the findings are robust and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

4. Results

A. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the key variables involved in the study, Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Characteristic | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Role | | |

| | | |
|----------------|-----|----|
| Administrators | 100 | 20 |
| Teachers | 300 | 60 |
| Students | 100 | 20 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 250 | 50 |
| Female | 250 | 50 |
| School Type | | |
| Public | 300 | 60 |
| Private | 200 | 40 |

The sample included a diverse group of participants, with a balanced representation across roles (administrators, teachers, and students) and genders. The majority were from public schools, which reflects the educational landscape in urban China. This balance is essential for generalizing the findings across different educational contexts.

B. Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics were used to explore the relationships between variables, specifically looking at the impact of administrative leadership and performance management on school outcomes. Correlation Between Leadership and Performance Management is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Between Leadership and Performance Management

| Variable | Leadership (M) | Performance Management (M) | Correlation (r) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Leadership Practices | 3.85 | 3.75 | 0.65** |
| Performance Management Effectiveness | 3.80 | 3.70 | 0.70** |

The correlation analysis indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between leadership practices and performance management effectiveness ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that schools with effective leadership are more likely to implement successful performance management strategies, reinforcing the importance of leadership in creating a positive educational environment.

C. Impact on School Outcomes

To assess the impact of leadership and performance management on school outcomes, regression analysis was conducted. Table 4 shows the regression analysis of leadership and performance management on school outcomes

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Leadership and Performance Management on School Outcomes

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|---------|------|---------|
| Leadership Practices | 0.45 | 0.10 | 0.40 | 4.50 | < 0.001 |
| Performance Management Effectiveness | 0.55 | 0.09 | 0.50 | 6.11 | < 0.001 |
| R ² (Adjusted) | 0.52 | | | | |

The regression analysis reveals that both leadership practices ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$) and performance management effectiveness ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predict school outcomes, explaining 52% of the variance in student performance. These findings highlight the critical roles of both effective leadership and performance management in enhancing educational outcomes.

D. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results

To further analyze the relationships among the variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized as shown in Table 5 and figure 1.

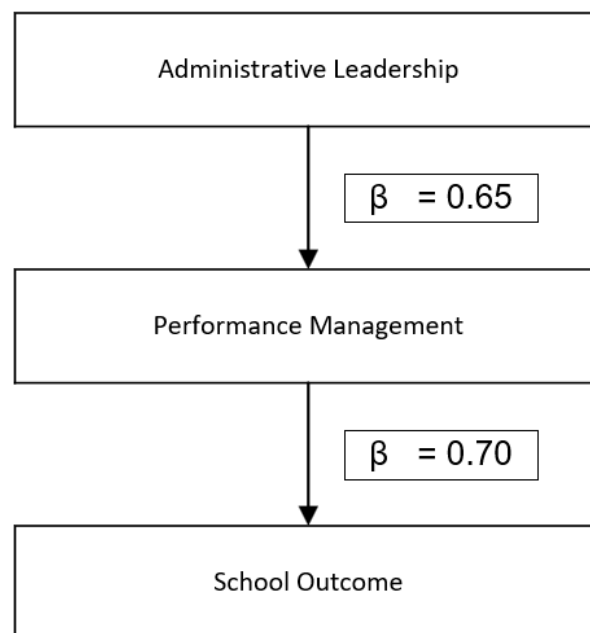


Figure 1: Structural Model of Relationships

Table 5: SEM Path Coefficients

| Path | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|--|----------|------|-------|---------|
| Leadership → Performance Management | 0.65 | 0.05 | 12.00 | < 0.001 |
| Performance Management → School Outcomes | 0.70 | 0.06 | 11.67 | < 0.001 |

The SEM analysis supports the hypothesis that administrative leadership has a strong direct effect on performance management ($\beta = 0.65$), which in turn significantly influences school outcomes

($\beta = 0.70$). This indicates that performance management serves as a mediating factor between leadership and student performance. The model demonstrates the importance of both leadership and management strategies in achieving positive educational results.

5. Discussion of Results

The results of the study provide a comprehensive understanding of how administrative leadership and performance management interact to influence school outcomes. **Strong Correlation Between Leadership and Performance Management:** The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.70$) between leadership practices and performance management effectiveness. This suggests that schools led by effective administrators tend to have better performance management systems in place. This finding aligns with the notion that strong leadership is foundational for establishing and maintaining effective systems that monitor and enhance educational performance.

Significant Predictive Power: The regression analysis indicated that both leadership practices ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$) and performance management effectiveness ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of school outcomes, explaining 52% of the variance. This highlights the importance of these two factors in shaping educational success. It suggests that improvements in leadership and management practices can lead to tangible benefits in student performance, affirming the critical role of leadership in educational settings.

Mediating Role of Performance Management: The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis indicated that performance management mediates the relationship between leadership and school outcomes. This finding emphasizes that effective leadership not only enhances performance management strategies but also indirectly improves student outcomes through these strategies. This underscores the importance of a systematic approach to performance management as a vehicle for achieving educational goals.

A. Implications for Administrative Leadership and Performance Management

The findings of this research highlight several critical implications for educational institutions. Firstly, there is a strong recommendation to prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize transformational leadership styles. Such training should equip leaders with the necessary skills to create a collaborative and supportive environment, which is vital for effective performance management. Additionally, schools are encouraged to implement comprehensive performance management systems that incorporate clear metrics for evaluating both student outcomes and teacher performance. These systems should facilitate regular feedback and foster continuous improvement, ensuring alignment with the school's educational objectives. Lastly, the research advocates for promoting a culture of accountability within schools, encouraging leaders to engage staff with performance data constructively. By using data to inform decisions and improve practices, this culture of accountability can enhance individual performance and contribute to overall school improvement.

B. Comparison with Existing Literature

The results of this study make significant contributions to the existing literature on educational leadership and performance management. Firstly, the strong correlation observed between

leadership practices and school outcomes aligns with previous research that underscores the critical role of effective leadership in education (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2020). This finding reaffirms the notion that leadership is essential for driving educational success. Moreover, while much of the existing literature predominantly focuses on Western educational systems, this study provides valuable insights specifically relevant to Chinese urban schools, an area that has received less attention. The findings indicate that although the principles of effective leadership and performance management are universally applicable, the specific practices and contextual factors may differ significantly across cultures. Additionally, the study reinforces transformational leadership theories, which emphasize that effective leaders inspire and mobilize their teams toward shared goals. By demonstrating the relevance of these theories in the context of performance management within urban educational settings, the research extends their application and adds depth to the theoretical frameworks surrounding educational leadership.

6. Conclusion

This research on "Administrative Leadership and Performance Management: Enhancing School Outcomes in Chinese Urban Schools" has yielded significant insights into the relationship between leadership practices, performance management, and educational outcomes. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between effective administrative leadership and successful performance management strategies, which together contribute to improved student performance. Specifically, both factors are significant predictors of school outcomes, accounting for 52% of the variance in student performance. Performance management is identified as a crucial mediator in the relationship between leadership and educational success, underscoring the indirect influence of leadership practices on student outcomes. Based on these results, several recommendations are proposed for practice and policy. Educational institutions should prioritize leadership development programs that foster transformational leadership skills among administrators. Additionally, comprehensive performance management systems with clear evaluation metrics for students and teachers are essential, along with regular feedback mechanisms to promote a culture of continuous improvement. Collaboration among educators, administrators, and stakeholders is also vital for enhancing the effectiveness of performance management initiatives. Looking ahead, future research should build on these findings through longitudinal studies to investigate the evolution of leadership and performance management practices over time and their long-term impacts on educational outcomes. Exploring these relationships in diverse contexts, including rural schools and different cultural settings, will enhance the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, examining the perspectives of various stakeholders, such as parents and community members, can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of leadership and performance management in fostering student success.

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