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Investigating the role of the principal's individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation in shaping the academic performance of students in the secondary schools of Sidama Region, Ethiopia

Dukamo Dessie Dalkie¹, RJ (Nico) Botha²

¹PhD student in Education Management, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, ²Professor in Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

dde94932@gmail.com

Abstract. The study sought to investigate the principal's perceptions and actions regarding individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation and their implications for students' academic progress. The study was guided by the following research question: How do school principals' transformational leadership strategies improve students' academic progress in Ethiopia's Sidama region? The study used a convergent parallel mixed research design. The data collection strategy was sound, with a modified questionnaire based on the MLQ used in the quantitative phase and an open-ended semi-structured interview in the qualitative phase. The study's dependent variable was student academic performance, while the independent variable was transformational leadership's individualized consideration (IC) and intellectual stimulation (IS) behaviors. The study's target participants were 95 principals and 5956 teachers. The survey used an appropriate sample approach, with 362 teachers and 91 principals from 24 public secondary schools. The qualitative phase involved ten principals and twenty teachers. The acquired data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that principals comprehend and practice transformational leadership behaviors. The study also revealed that the principal's individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation practices significantly impacted students' academic progress. The principal's self-assessment was $r = .760$ ($p < .01$), whereas the teachers' perception was $r = .583$ ($p < .01$).

Keywords. Leadership, Transformational leadership, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, School principal, Education quality, Student academic performance

1. Introduction

Effective school leadership is crucial to preserving the quality of education. School administration and leadership largely determine student learning and the quality of education. The qualities of school leadership have a positive effect on teachers' dedication, which benefits students' learning outcomes. According to Quin, Deris, Bischoff, and Johnson's (2015) argument, principals at high-performing schools exhibit more transformational leadership qualities than those at lower-performing schools. Bush (2008) argued that school leadership

could motivate staff members to realize the school's mission. In the same way, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) contended that solid leadership is essential to an evolving school environment. Successful school principals, according to Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, GU, Brown, and Ahtaridou (2011), are also considered to be able to decide the course of the school while creating a conducive learning environment and establishing the school's vision based on stakeholders' expectations.

Leadership and management significantly influence student learning and educational quality in schools. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004:57) state that of all the school-related factors that affect what students learn in the classroom, school leadership is second to classroom instruction. This emphasizes the significance of school leadership as a critical factor influencing student learning and helps schools provide a clear and consistent learning direction to improve student learning outcomes. According to Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), school leadership affects every other facet of education, including fostering a changing culture, encouraging staff growth, promoting teachers, and working with outside partners to obtain and distribute resources consistently. Numerous studies have shown that school leadership is the most widely acknowledged factor in students' effectiveness and academic accomplishment. School leadership qualities positively impact teacher dedication, which has an excellent trickle-down effect on student performance. Quin et al. (2015) presented a similar case, stating that principals in high-performing schools typically exhibit transformational leadership qualities compared to those in lower-performing schools.

These studies underline that a critical element influencing education quality and school improvement is the efficacy and competency of school principals as leaders. Based on past experiences, the researcher concurs with the scholars' assessment that all other elements influencing student learning outcomes are influenced by good school leadership. Based on the leadership quality school leaders provide, there is not just an apparent difference but a significant disparity in students' learning outcomes across schools (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). In schools with more effective leadership, students score higher on the national exam (MOE, 2021). Anastasiou and Garametsi (2021) assert that strong school leadership is essential to a school's success and substantially impacts its effectiveness. Similar arguments were made by Ibrahim (2021) and Harris, Jones, Adams, and Cheah (2019), who claimed that distinct academic performance variations do not just exist; they are shaped by the leadership styles examined, and good school leadership not only has the power to modify students' academic results but also acts as a catalyst for change.

The quality of education is currently a crucial concern for Ethiopian educational leaders. Concerning the students' academic performance, the education community challenges the school administration (MOE, 2021). The National Learning Assessment, or NLA, is used in Ethiopia to evaluate the quality of education (ETP, 1994). Students in grades 4 through 8 and 12 of secondary education utilize this system. A national assessment conducted in 2020 by the National Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA) revealed that just 37.71% of Ethiopian fourth-grade children showed literacy above the primary level. Only 35 percent of Grade 8 students met the basic literacy requirements during the same period. Just 47% of grade 12 students nationwide scored a minimum passing score in 2021 (MOE, 2021). Merely 25% met the requirements to enroll in a government university (MOE, 2021). In the study area, just 45% of grade 12 students who took the 2019 university entrance exam scored a mark high enough to gain admission to the university. Amazingly, in 2020, just 29% of students received the necessary score to be admitted to university; by 2021, this percentage had dropped to 19%

(BOE, 2021). This illustrates how the quality of education and students' academic achievement decline occasionally.

The theoretical and practical research on the effectiveness of school leadership and its relationship to student outcomes served as the study's cornerstone. According to numerous studies (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Finnigan, 2012; Quin et al., 2015; Anderson, 2017), school leadership may be a significant factor in guaranteeing the quality of education. Furthermore, according to some scholars, transformational leadership can enhance an organization's performance and results (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). These factors inspired the researcher to investigate how the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals affect student outcomes and academic attainment. According to Northouse (2016), transformational leadership includes idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation behaviors. According to Bass & Riggio (2006), intellectual stimulation entails a leader who regularly exemplifies creative and inventive problem-solving orientations, inspires creativity and innovation in others, and pushes subordinates to challenge tasks, reframe issues, and approach them from a new perspective. Conversely, individualized consideration describes the extent to which the leader caters to the specific needs of each follower, serves as a coach or mentor to them, and pays attention to their issues (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

2. Research question and objectives

Main Research Question: The main research question for this study could consequently be phrased as follows: **What is the principal's transformational leadership role in improving students' academic performance in the Sidama region of Ethiopia?**

The research objective: **The main objective of this study was to determine how the principal's transformational leadership behavior of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration impacted student academic achievement in the Sidama region of Ethiopia.**

3. Literature review

3.1. The concept of leadership

Various authors and scholars have offered various concepts regarding leadership. As there are almost as many definitions of leadership as people have tried to define it, Stodgill (1974) argued that different writers' definitions of leadership contain diverse notions. Burns (1978:2) also explained the variety and complexity of viewpoints on leadership, saying, "*Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.*" Gill (2006) further contended that diverse individuals understand leadership differently.

Bass (1999) defined leadership as the process of personal development during which a person acquires specific attributes. According to Bass, leadership can motivate others to achieve organizational objectives by exhibiting these qualities. Kouzes and Posner (2006) also describe leadership as an interpersonal interaction. According to the writers, leadership results from interactions between individuals who want to lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Yukl (2010) defined leadership in terms of influence as persuading subordinates to pursue predetermined organizational objectives. Yukl (2013) also maintained that the capacity to influence subordinates to work towards shared objectives is a crucial component of leadership. Northouse (1997:3) defined leadership as "*a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.*" Furthermore,

Northouse reiterated leadership as an influence in his subsequent writings, in which a leader influences others to accomplish shared organizational objectives (Northouse, 2016).

Based on the perspectives above, it can be concluded that leadership is a social process involving influence. Being a leader is more than just having authority or control over others. Nonetheless, the capacity to inspire, motivate, and recognize people's unique abilities and inventiveness is what defines leadership (Northouse, 2018). According to Yukl (2012) and Northouse (2018), leadership is a dynamic process engaging individuals in a particular interaction context rather than being bestowed upon people based on their unique qualities or knowledge. Leadership is necessary to achieve organizational goals (Yukl, 2012; Northouse, 2018). According to Kouzes and Posner (2006), it necessitates specific connections with people involved in the system's interaction process. To inspire followers to work towards the vision and mission, leaders must communicate their vision and mission clearly and concisely. The subordinate can get motivated to achieve organizational goals due to this constructive relationship.

3.2. Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his book "Leadership Concepts." Before Burns' thorough explanation, James Downton used the term "leadership" in 1973. In his first publication, Burns' transformational leadership theory was applied to examine political leaders. As a result, Burns linked followership to the role of leadership (Northouse, 1997). Burns defines transformational leadership as follows: "*One or more individuals interact with others in a way that inspires and elevates one another to higher moral standards*" (p. 20). According to Burns' theories, transformational leadership is all about inspiring and motivating others to lead so that they can transcend themselves and accomplish organizational objectives. Through these motivations, leaders are said to be able to instill a feeling of ownership in the company and accomplish company objectives.

Bernard Bass (1990) further developed and explained the idea of transformational leadership, according to Nickerson (2021). Bass, therefore, advances the following claims: (i) people are inspired to follow; (ii) someone with a strong sense of purpose and vision has the potential to do great things; and (iii) approaching tasks with vigor and excitement is the best method of accomplishing them. According to transformational leadership, employees must be inspired and motivated to give their all. Wen, Ho, Kelana, Othman, and Syed (2019) claim that transformational leaders develop and embrace a company vision that encourages individuals to be their best selves while displaying an honest and open viewpoint.

Bass (1985, 1990) expanded and reinterpreted Burns' concept of transformative leadership to include organizational leadership. Bass believes a leader challenges followers to go beyond their initial goals. He argued that individuals become more motivated when they are more aware of the importance of outcomes and the methods for achieving them. Bass continued by saying that leaders motivate followers to prioritize the demands of the group or organization over their own. Moreover, transformational leaders are believed to attain exceptional organizational performance by motivating their subordinates with a stimulating future vision and ensuring that their aims coincide with the organization's objectives, according to Bass (1985).

Griffin (2013) expounded on transformational leadership as a style characterized by leaders surpassing expectations by inspiring and encouraging subordinates. According to several studies (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988; Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006), transformational leadership fosters followers' growth and performance beyond expectations. Furthermore, Bush

(2018) and Northouse (2016) argued that transformational leaders go above and beyond what is expected to accomplish more significant organizational goals.

According to Bass (1999), transformational leaders are charismatic individuals who provide their followers with intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. Transformative leadership, according to Northouse (2016), is a strategy that uses idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual concern, and inspiring motivation to inspire followers to act compassionately. These are the main components of transformational leadership. The study examined the principal's role in maintaining student academic performance in the Sidama region of Ethiopia by using individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation as crucial variables among these transformational leadership components.

Individualized consideration refers to a leader's ability to meet each follower's needs, serve as a coach or mentor, and be aware of their issues and worries (Gill, 2006). It refers to the understanding of each follower's distinct demands, according to Bass (1985), Bass & Riggio (2006), and Barling, Christie, and Hopton (2011). According to Bass, individual concern provides ignored members with specific attention (Bass, 1990). As per Bass, an attentive leader meets the needs of their followers, guides them, and demonstrates actions that are kind and understanding. A thoughtful leader knows followers have varying expectations for growth and success. According to Barling et al. (2011), encouraging actions empowers followers to realize their potential and improve their skills. A leader treats each follower with great attention, treating them as distinct persons in their personal and professional lives. These leaders support their colleagues in fostering organizational success by serving as mentors, coaches, and allies (Bass, 1999; Bass, 2000; Dartey-Baah, 2015).

Kouzes and Posner emphasized the need to consider each person's potential, saying that "*leaders enable others to act by giving it away, rather than by hoarding the power they have*" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 21). Transformational leaders model individual consideration behaviors that enable people to take the initiative and motivate others to follow through. They establish settings where individuals are optimistic about their work and how it advances society. Individualized considerate behavior shows how leaders engage with followers through mentoring, coaching, teaching, and listening (Essuman, 2019). Essuman went on to say that considerate behavior on an individual basis enables leaders to meet the needs of their followers for improved performance and development. It shows that leaders are aware of the individual requirements of their followers (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders train, coach, and encourage those who follow them to promote organizational advancement. They treat every follower as unique, personally and professionally (Bass, 2000; Dartey-Baah, 2015). These leaders demonstrate thoughtful, unique leadership conduct.

Teachers and other followers in the school are developed by school principals who exhibit the transformative leadership behavior of individual consideration. School principals who exhibit this behavior highlight the need for teachers to improve individually (Sun & Leithwood, 2017). Building a human connection gives teachers a sense of acceptance and inspires them to put forth their best effort for the school's success. School principals can foster an atmosphere where teachers and other staff members feel good about their profession and how it benefits the community by modeling individualized consideration behavior. Furthermore, school leaders who exhibit individualized, considerate behavior enable teachers to unleash their abilities by offering opportunities for professional growth (Bass, 1999; Dartey-Baah, 2015). Recognized educators can better identify each student's unique requirements and abilities, promoting original thinking and creative learning.

Intellectual stimulation gauges how much a leader queries followers about their thoughts, challenges assumptions, and takes calculated risks. Additionally, it fosters creativity and intelligence when addressing problems (Shrestha, 2020). This attribute, according to Bass and Riggio, aids leaders in encouraging and fostering creativity and innovation in their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Furthermore, it is claimed that transformational leaders who inspire their people to find solutions on their own stimulate their minds (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Barling et al., 2011). The leader facilitates knowledge within an intellectually stimulating environment. In order to foster the development of critical thinking skills in their employees, transformational leaders help them frame problems, provide resources for further study, and let them draw their own conclusions. In order to allow followers to think of old problems in new ways, Bass claimed that intellectual stimulation is essential for nurturing and releasing followers' creativity (Bass, 1990). Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou (2011) state that intellectually stimulating behavior creates an atmosphere where followers are free thinkers and actively involved in the group. Strong faith in others and expecting their best are also necessary for heart encouragement (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Nonetheless, leaders who encourage intellectual stimulation also assist their followers in developing novel and creative solutions for problems (Bass, 1999; Bass, 2000; Dartey-Baah, 2015). Northouse (2007) asserts that creative thinking is fostered in followers of transformational leaders who exhibit intellectually stimulating behaviors. Cherry (2019, 2020) also contended that transformative leaders must foster innovation and challenge the current quo. Four requirements were outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2002) for leaders looking for chances to question accepted procedures. These four essential talents are taking the initiative, making challenges relevant, developing and innovating, and looking outside oneself for new thoughts. Rethinking issues and coming up with answers are made possible by intellectual stimulation (Essuman, 2019). Engaging followers in problem-solving within the organization is a hallmark of transformational leadership with intellectually stimulating behavior. Leaders who exhibit the intellectually stimulating behavior of transformational leadership are unconventional thinkers who question the current quo to provide valuable answers to problems facing their organizations. Followers who engage in intellectually stimulating behavior can perform better and search for more efficient ways to complete tasks (Essuman, 2019).

Principals can encourage teachers' creativity toward school development by providing intellectual stimulation. Teachers are dedicated to their work when principals support their teachers' independence of thought and creativity. Teachers can then seek to improve students' learning results by releasing their creative energy. Teachers' creativity and expertise can be stimulated by school principals who model the intellectual stimulation behavior of transformational leadership, which will improve student learning outcomes. Principals like these can motivate teachers to create better ways to improve learning environments and student performance (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Barling et al., 2011). The primary challenge schools face in the study area is the low performance of students' academic results as measured by national test scores. According to Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), school principals can inspire and support teachers in achieving school goals because they have a crucial role in influencing students' academic growth. It is feasible to guarantee and motivate students to work hard and creatively when teachers are inspired and supported to be open, creative, and constantly developing (Sun & Leithwood, 2017).

4. Research methodology

4.1 Research design and approach

A mixed-method research strategy, which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, was used for this study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Hafsa (2019) and George (2021), this method addresses the study topic by integrating qualitative and quantitative components.

4.2. Population and Sampling

5.1 Study population

Teachers and principals of public secondary schools made up the study population. The study's target populations were the 5956 teachers and 95 school principals from these secondary schools in the Sidama region.

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

According to the Regional Education Bureau, the Sidama region has 95 public secondary schools, employing 5956 teachers. Using a purposive sample approach, 24 (25%) of the 95 regional public secondary schools (grades 9–12) were chosen. Every principal and vice principal in every school was the target. Teachers from the selected schools were chosen using proportional and basic random sampling methods.

The sample size of the study population of teachers was selected based on the statistical formula derived from www.surveymonkey.com as;

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p) / e^2}{1 + (z^2 \times p(1-p) / e^2 \times N)}$$

Where;

N = population size

e = Margin of error (percentage in decimal form); accepted error margin = 5%

z = z-score = 1.96, (for desired confidence level 95%, z- score is 1.96)

p standard deviation based on population proportion of expected prevalence, normally 50% or .5

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{\frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}}{1 + \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2 \times 5956}} = 362.$$

As a result, 362 teachers were selected as study subjects using simple and proportional random approaches that took gender into account.

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

In phase two, 10 principals and 20 teachers (a total of 30 participants) were interviewed. The participants were chosen from ten secondary schools based on their academic achievement. The participants were carefully chosen, taking into account the duration they spent at the school.

4.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

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

To assess principals' transformational leadership practices, the quantitative phase used the Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), developed by Bass (1985) and refined by Bass and Avolio (2000). The researcher modified the MLQ for the study and included additional information. The questionnaire described leadership styles using descriptive statements. Respondents were asked to rate the descriptive statements on a Likert scale from one to five, with one being the least descriptive and five being the most descriptive.

Data on student academic performance were gathered from the Sidama Region Education Bureau. Based on the national test, the student's four-year academic performance in secondary school was collected and categorized for future investigation. Principals and teachers were asked to grade students' academic performance based on the number of scores. The national high school test has a 700-point scoring system based on seven (7) natural science courses. Likewise, students studying social sciences take six (6) 600-point subjects. As a result, the student's grades were categorized as 500-700, 400-499, 300-399, 200-299, and below 200. The rates were provided for the categorized intervals. As a result, 5 are allocated for the interval between 500 and 700, 4 for the 400–499, 3 for the 300–399, 2 for the 200–299, and 1 for points below 200. The student's academic achievement was categorized and evaluated using the number of students who scored points in each category. The four-year academic performance (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) was taken. For additional correlational analysis, the average was collected and scored on a scale of 1 to 5.

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

Taherdoost (2021) defines qualitative data as nominal and descriptive non-numeric data expressed in words or sentences. According to Taherdoost (2021), qualitative data addresses "why and how" questions in research studies and expresses respondents' feelings, perceptions, and emotions concerning the factors under consideration.

In the qualitative phase, structured and semi-structured open-ended interview questions were administered to selected principals and teachers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the selected respondents to clarify the quantitative data. This phase included interviews with ten principals and twenty instructors, for a total of thirty participants. The participants were chosen from ten secondary schools based on their academic achievement. The researcher could transcribe and code data from individual interview sessions throughout data analysis using an audio tape recorder.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

The researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to test the instrument's internal consistency. According to George and Malley (2019), a Cronbach Alpha value of more than 0.7 indicates that the test items are credible. The reliability test was based on the variables under inquiry (IS and IC). The findings are shown in the following tables.

Table 1. Reliability test of data from 350 respondents/teachers, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=50)

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

Independent and Dependent Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Leveled as to George and Mallery
TIS	0.854	13	Good
TIC	0.891	11	Good
Overall	0.87	44	Good

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

Table 2. Reliability test of the data of 91 respondents/principals, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=48)

Independent and Dependent Variables		Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Leveled as to George and Mallery
PIS		0.859	12	Good
PIC		0.863	12	Good
Overall		0.89	44	Good

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

The validity of research data is critical in establishing the quality of the study. Middleton (2019) states that data validity reflects a measure's consistency and accuracy. The convergence validity of a notion is frequently used to determine its validity. Convergent validity is the degree to which the variables under inquiry are intercorrelated (Jain and Chetty, 2021, 2022). Factor loading was converted into the most straightforward interpretation pattern using the Kaiser-Varimax rotation method (Kaiser, 1958). It is generally acknowledged that a significant construct between variables is shown by a factor analysis loading value of 0.5 and above (Ahmad, 2016; Hair, Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2021). The following tables display the findings.

Table 3: Convergent Validity for the Principals' component based on loading factors (using SPSS) and AVE on constructs from the standardized estimate (using AMOS), Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

V	factor loads
PIS	0.809
PIC	0.935
SAP2	0.897

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

Table 4: Convergent Validity for the teacher component based on loading factors (using SPSS) and AVE on constructs from Standardized estimate (using AMOS), Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

V	Factor loads
TIS	0.701
TIC	0.765
SAP1	0.881

Source: Authors' calculation, 2024. Extraction Method: Teachers Component Analysis Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization, Sidama region, Ethiopia.

The findings of the above factor analysis demonstrated a favorable relationship between the variables. They claimed that the approach measures the principals' intention to use transformational leadership to affect students' academic achievement properly.

5. Data analysis and presentation

5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis involves summarizing, describing, and evaluating the data collected using an appropriate statistical method. Kelley (2022) defined data analysis as "*cleaning, changing, processing raw data, and extracting actionable information.*" In the quantitative phase, SPSS 25 and MS were used for quantitative data analysis. Closed-ended questions were rated using the Likert scale. The researcher validated the transformational leadership practices of the school principals and their effect on the student's academic accomplishment in the study area by analyzing the data using frequencies, percentages, means, and weighted means.

5.1.1 Questionnaires Return Rate

All 91 principals who took part in the survey filled out and returned the questionnaire, yielding a 100% return rate. Three hundred sixty-two questionnaires were sent to teachers; 350 were completed and returned, yielding a 96.67% response rate.

5.1.2. Biographic data information

A total of 91 principals and vice principals filled out and returned the questionnaire. Among the total responders, 76 (83.5%) were male, while 15 (16.5%) were female principals. According to the age distribution of respondent principals, 59.3% are between 30 and 39 years old, 25.3% are 40-49 years old, 5.5% are under 30, and 9.9% are over 50 years old.

According to an analysis of the principals' academic qualifications, the majority, 63.7%, held a bachelor's degree, while 36.3% held a master's degree. Most respondent principals had at least ten (10) years of experience, with 53.8% having 16 or more years and 31.9% having 11-15 years. In comparison, 12.1% of the principals had 6-10 years of overall experience, compared to only 2.2% who had 1-5 years.

According to descriptive statistics on the teachers' biographic data, 86% of respondents were male, with only 13.4% being female teachers. Most of the respondent teachers were between the ages of 30 and 40. Of the teachers who responded, 45.4% were between 40 and 49. Teachers under 30 constituted a sizable proportion, accounting for 27.1%. Within the population inquired, 17.1% of teachers were between 40 and 49, with 10.3% being 50 or older.

The analysis of teachers' academic qualifications revealed that most of them, 224 (64%), held bachelor's degrees. Additionally, 34.6% had Master's degrees. Notably, only 1.4 percent had diploma-level degrees, making them unable to teach in secondary schools. 37.1% of the respondent teachers had at least 16 years of experience. As a result, 26.6% had 11-15 years of experience, while 24.9% had 6-10 years. Furthermore, 11.4% (40 teachers) reported having one to five years of experience.

Table 5.14 Academic performance of students, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

School code	500-700 (5)	400-499 (4)	300-399 (3)	200-299 (2)	199 and below (1)
01	1	8	169	206	387
02	4	32	122	126	160
03	0	2	12	81	168
04	0	0	2	46	129
05	0	2	32	143	324
06	0	5	51	77	214
07	0	1	94	231	298

08	2	16	56	116	373
09	0	0	2	32	250
10	3	26	116	162	176
11	1	7	88	88	509
12	12	195	705	493	447
13	1	15	136	283	345
14	1	16	47	76	119
15	0	16	196	241	482
16	3	25	148	150	478
17	0	6	46	89	214
18	1	26	30	86	360
19	0	3	36	79	104
20	0	0	0	19	136
21	1	9	66	67	146
22	0	10	172	186	81
23	1	22	58	55	392
24	4	53	182	203	348
Total	35	495	2565	3335	6640

Source: Secondary data from Regional Education Bureau, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

5.2. Perception of principals about their intellectual stimulation and individual considerate practices

5.2.1. Intellectual stimulation practices of principals (IS)

The principals completed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always) to indicate how often they practiced each of the 12 intellectual stimulation factors. The table that follows displays the outcomes.

Table 5.19: Perception of principals about intellectual stimulation practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.	91	3.49	1.089
I seek different perspectives when solving problems.	91	3.53	1.058
I get others to look at problems from many different angles	91	3.15	1.182
I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments	91	3.21	1.049
I always seek different opinions from individuals in solving problems	91	3.24	1.015

I let teachers look at problems from different angles	91	3.35	1.015
Encourages out-box thinking	91	3.54	1.068
Stimulates ideas from teachers to challenge the status quo	91	3.18	1.198
Values ideas from teachers	91	3.68	.987
Encourages critical thinking and innovation	91	3.47	1.058
Develops ideas for teachers' professional development	91	3.45	1.098
Encourage teachers to set new ways to improve student's learning outcome	91	3.55	.834
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.40	.663

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

The principals agreed on their perceptions of intellectual stimulation practices, yielding an average mean of 3.40 with a standard deviation of 0.663. The principals reached a consensus that went above and beyond the mean value on several items, including valuing teacher ideas (mean value: 3.68), fostering innovative thinking (mean value: 3.55), looking for diverse perspectives for problem-solving (mean value: 3.49), re-evaluating critical assumptions (mean value: 3.47), and fostering ideas for teachers' professional development (mean value: 3.45). This suggested that principals have prioritized motivating teachers to use critical thinking and creativity to enhance students' academic performance.

5.2.2. Individualized Consideration Practices of Principals (IC)

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

Table 5.20: Principals individualized consideration practices, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I spend time teaching and coaching	91	3.14	1.039
I treat others as individuals rather than just a member of a group	91	3.15	1.219
I consider an individual to have different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others	91	3.63	1.018
I help others to develop their strengths	91	3.51	1.109
Appreciate the performance of individuals	91	3.35	1.109
Understand the needs of the staff and assist them accordingly	91	3.47	.899
Provide individuals with different needs and aspirations	91	3.20	1.147
Emphasize and discuss the needs, abilities, and aspirations of followers	91	3.45	1.036
Come along with teachers and students	91	3.52	1.205

Give attention to different needs of teachers towards school goal accomplishments	91	3.49	1.251
Regularly provides the resources needed for teacher professional development	91	3.55	1.057
Encourages teachers' individual professional development	91	3.14	1.039
Valid N (listwise)	91	3.38	.64600

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

The principals agreed on their perceptions of individualized consideration practices with a mean value of 3.38 and a standard deviation of .646. Principals concurred that many items, including taking into account the various needs of individuals (mean value: 3.63), offering the resources required for teacher professional development (mean value: 3.55), accompanying teachers and students (mean value: 3.52), assisting others to build on their strengths (mean value: 3.51), paying attention to the various needs of teachers (mean value: 3.49), and engaging in discussions about others' goals (mean value: 3.45), exceeded the average mean value.

5.3. Perception of teachers about principal's intellectual stimulation and individual considerate practices

5.3.1. *Teacher response to the intellectual stimulation practice of the principal.*

Teachers were asked to express their agreement about how often school principals practice intellectual stimulation behaviors. The response was based on the Likert scale of 1-5. The results are presented below.

Table 5.23: Teacher response to the principal's intellectual stimulation practice, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=350)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stimulates ideas and creativity from teachers.	350	3.59	1.025
Encourages teachers to be innovative and creative.	350	3.65	1.068
Stimulates teachers to think about what they are doing for students' academic success.	350	3.66	1.052
Encourages me to try new practices consistent with my interests	350	3.26	1.174
Stimulates new ideas relevant to student academic performance	350	3.45	1.090
They urge staff to be imaginative and creative.	350	3.48	1.135
Supports critical thinking that guides effective teaching and learning	350	3.50	1.157
Injects the appropriate enthusiasm and energy to execute teaching and learning activities well.	350	3.55	1.050
Entertains different opinions when solving problems related to teaching and learning	350	3.56	1.066
Design new techniques for looking at how to complete academic assignments that will enhance student performance	350	3.60	1.074

Encourage teachers and students to look at academic challenges from many different angles and work to challenge the problems	350	3.37	1.175
Has the capacity to solve the problems	350	3.46	1.124
Challenges status quo	350	3.59	.958
Valid N (listwise)	350	3.50	0.671

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

With an overall mean value of 3.50 and a standard deviation of 0.6713, teachers concurred that principals in their schools engage in intellectual stimulation behaviors of transformational leadership. Teachers rated above the overall mean value for items like injecting the appropriate enthusiasm and energy into teaching and learning activities (mean value: 3.55), entertaining different opinions when solving problems related to teaching and learning (mean value: 3.56), challenging the status quo (mean value: 3.59), stimulating ideas and creativity from teachers (mean value: 3.59), and designing new techniques to enhance student performance in academic assignments.

5.3.2 Teacher response to the practice of individualized consideration of the principal

Teachers were asked to indicate how often their principal demonstrates the individualized consideration behavior of transformational leadership. The table below displays the findings.

Table 5.24: Teacher response to the individualized consideration practice of the principal, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=350)

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Always appreciate teachers and other staff for their successful work	350	3.51	1.112
Pay attention to teachers' needs and assist them accordingly	350	3.66	.979
Listens to teachers' concern	350	3.70	1.091
Creates new opportunities for teachers	350	3.57	1.155
Mentor teachers to improve personal and professional growth	350	3.65	1.031
Coaches and advises teachers and students on academic issues	350	3.56	1.024
Understand that each teacher and student has different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.	350	3.69	1.064
Appreciate the performance of individual teachers	350	3.70	1.080
Encourages my professional development	350	3.39	1.135
Provides moral support by making me feel appreciated for my contribution to the school	350	3.32	1.082
Encourages me to pursue my own goals for professional learning.	350	3.25	1.186
Valid N (listwise)	350	3.53	0.6048

Source: Computed from Survey Data, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024

Teachers agreed with the principals' individualized consideration practices, with a mean score of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.6048. On items like coaching and advising teachers and students on academic issues, providing new opportunities for teachers, mentoring teachers to

improve their personal and professional growth, understanding that each teacher and student has different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others, appreciating individual teachers' performance, and listening to teachers' concerns, teachers had responded with their agreement above the overall mean value.

5.4. Principals' intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration practices, and student academic performance as self-perceived.

The study employed Pearson's correlation coefficient to evaluate the level of relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The test results are presented in the following tables.

Table 5.26: Pearson's correlation matrix analysis, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=91)

		Correlations		
		PIC	PIS	SAP2
PIC	Pearson Correlation	1	.773**	.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	91	91	91
PIS	Pearson Correlation	.773**	1	.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	91	91	91
SAP2	Pearson Correlation	.760**	.632**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	91	91	91

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

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

According to Pearson's correlation analysis, the dependent variables (students' academic performance) and the independent variables (transformational leadership components) have substantial positive correlations. Academic achievement of students was positively correlated with the principals' intellectual stimulation factor ($r = .632, p < .01$). Principals' individualized consideration was positively and significantly correlated with students' academic success ($r = .760, p < .01$).

5.5. Teachers' Perceptions of the Principal's Individualised Consideration Practices and Intellectual Stimulation and the Academic Performance of the Students

The study examined whether the principal's transformational leadership practices are related to student academic performance as perceived by teachers. It used Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the degree of association between the independent and dependent variables. The tables below display the test results.

Table 5.28: Pearson’s correlation matrix analysis for teachers’ response, Sidama region, Ethiopia, 2024 (N=350)

		Correlations		
		TIS	TIC	SAP
TIS	Pearson Correlation	1	.352**	.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	350	350	350
TIC	Pearson Correlation	.352**	1	.583**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	350	350	350
SAP	Pearson Correlation	.554**	.583**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	350	350	350

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

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

Based on the teacher's replies in the table, Pearson's correlation analysis results showed a positive relationship between students' academic achievement and the independent variables (intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration). The teacher replies showed a positive correlation ($r = .554$, $p < .01$) between students' academic achievement and intellectual stimulation. Individualized consideration also showed a strong positive correlation ($r = .583$, $p < .01$) with students' academic success.

5.6 Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation

The researcher selected ten (10) schools for the qualitative phase based on each school's students' academic performance. Ten (10) principals and twenty (20) teachers were selected from these schools. Principals were asked how well they understood transformational leadership and how frequently they practiced it. All of the principals interviewed said they implement transformational leadership in their schools. The interview with principals regarding their practice of intellectual stimulation revealed that principals use intellectual stimulation behaviors to promote and stimulate teachers' creativity in improving student academic achievement. Similarly, principals expressed their practice of individualized consideration to identify and support the different needs of teachers and other stakeholders.

On the other hand, the interview discussion with teachers demonstrated that principals engage in transformational leadership behaviors using various methods. Most of the teachers interviewed agreed that principals practice intellectual stimulation, which stimulates teachers to look at creative activities that change students' academic performance. Similarly, most interviewed teachers explained that principals execute individualized considerate behaviors to varied degrees to meet each teacher's needs.

5.7 Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data

Data analysis and presentation from both quantitative and qualitative sets revealed that principals practice transformational leadership, with different factors depending on the study

area. Most principals acknowledged that they frequently use transformational leadership in their schools. Examining the teacher's reaction aligned with the principal's reasoning about transformational leadership approaches. Data analysis from both sets demonstrated a strong awareness of transformational leadership practice in the study area's schools. A quantitative and qualitative data study revealed that principals' leadership positively influenced students' academic performance and school climate. The study data analysis and presentation revealed a strong and significant relationship between students' academic progress and principals' leadership approaches.

6. Discussing the findings from the study

The study's findings were discussed using the objectives derived from the research questions and the study's primary goal.

6.1 Findings on principals' and teachers' perceptions of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration and its impact on student academic achievement.

Quantitative and qualitative data presentation and analysis of principals' and teachers' perceptions revealed that principals engage in intellectual stimulation and individualized considerate transformational leadership behaviors at varied levels.

6.2 Findings regarding the possible impact of school principals' intellectual stimulation and individualized considerate behaviors on student academic achievement.

Pearson's correlation analysis of the dependent variable (students' academic performance) and the independent variables (transformational leadership components) revealed a positive correlation between students' academic achievement and the principals' intellectual stimulation factor ($r = .632$, $p < .01$). Similarly, principals' individualized consideration was favorably and strongly connected with students' academic progress ($r = .760$, $p < .01$).

7. Contribution of the study

7.1. Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributed to the body of knowledge on transformational leadership by investigating the role of school principals' transformational leadership techniques in improving students' learning outcomes. The study revealed a strong and favorable correlation between student academic achievement and principals' transformational leadership practices. This supports and strengthens Burns' (1978) and Bass' (1985) ideas that transformational leadership is essential for improving organizational performance. The study also found that the more school principals are transformational, the higher the students' academic success. Additionally, it enhanced pre-existing theories and procedures by demonstrating the degree to which school principals enhance the academic performance of their students.

7.2. Contribution to Practice

The study's findings suggested that principals could improve students' academic achievement by engaging in intellectual stimulation and individualized considerate behaviors. Principals' transformational leadership behavior inspires and motivates teachers and students, allowing them to work hard to achieve school goals.

7.3. Contribution to policy formulation

The study's results have various applications in developing and applying policies. The study area's school system's primary issue is the students' subpar academic achievement. Policymakers must understand that a school principal's leadership style can alter the learning environment and student's academic achievement. The research findings indicate a significant

correlation between the principal's transformational leadership practice and the student's academic success. In light of these findings, policymakers must ensure that schools adopt transformational leadership techniques by recruiting and preparing school principals. The study's conclusions also highlight the necessity for the Ministry of Education and Universities to establish a transformational leadership training program for school principals.

8. Recommendations from the study

- 8.1 The literature review indicated that transformational leadership is a method by which leaders motivate a group of individuals to achieve organizational goals. According to the study, transformational leaders can impact their followers by employing intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration behaviors of transformational leadership. In addition, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are effective leadership behaviors for improving student academic success. As a result, school principals should use these transformational leadership behaviors to address the declining state of student academic achievement.
- 8.2 The study revealed a substantial positive correlation between the principal's transformational leadership behaviors practice and students' academic performance. Consequently, the study suggests that to improve the declining academic performance of students in the area, it is necessary to be aware of the principals and encourage them to exercise transformational leadership.
- 8.3 The study's findings also showed a noteworthy distinction in principal leadership styles between high- and low-achieving schools in the study area. The regional education bureau should regularly train and recruit principals in transformational leadership practices. The regional education bureau should promote transformational leadership practices in schools to improve student academic performance.

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