

The impact of paternalistic leadership on work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China

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Abstract: This quantitative study examines the impact of paternalistic leadership (PL) on work engagement (WE) among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China. Data were collected via the WJX platform, with 404 valid responses analyzed using SPSS and. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess whether paternalistic leadership (PL) comprising authoritarian leadership (AL), moral leadership (ML), and benevolent leadership (BL) significantly predicts work engagement (WE). The results indicate that paternalistic leadership does not exert a direct significant effect on work engagement. However, the possibility of indirect effects through mediating or moderating variables remains open for future investigation. These findings contribute to the literature on educational leadership and suggest the need for further research incorporating additional variables to elucidate the nuanced relationship between paternalistic leadership (PL) and teacher work engagement (WE). The study offers practical implications for school administrators and policymakers seeking to enhance teacher motivation and performance in educational settings.

Keywords: Paternalistic Leadership, Work Engagement, Calligraphy Teachers, Primary Education, Quantitative Research

1. Introduction

In a primary school in Hebei Province, China, a calligraphy teacher carefully guides her students' hands as they practice the ancient art form recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Despite her dedication to preserving this cultural treasure, she struggles with limited institutional support and professional development opportunities, raising important questions about how to sustain engagement among those responsible for transmitting this cultural legacy. This tension between cultural preservation and professional sustainability lies at the heart of calligraphy education in modern China.

Primary school calligraphy teachers have a heavy workload, including teaching, research, administration, and other duties. Teaching tasks encompass classroom teaching, after-school tutoring, exams, and similar responsibilities (Cheng, 2020). Research tasks involve curriculum research, teaching research, and related activities. Administrative duties encompass classroom teacher work, school management, and similar responsibilities. These heavy tasks result in increased work pressure for primary school calligraphy teachers (Asher, 2006).

Research on calligraphy education has primarily focused on instructional techniques and cultural significance rather than the professional experiences of teachers themselves (Li, 2020; Qian & Fang, 2007). While the Chinese government has strongly promoted calligraphy education as cultural heritage (Li, 2020), less attention has been paid to the factors that sustain teachers' engagement in this specialized field. Studies on teacher engagement more broadly have identified leadership styles, supervisory support, and knowledge sharing as critical factors (Deng et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2022), but these relationships remain unexplored in the unique context of calligraphy instruction.

This study addresses this problem by examining the relationships between paternalistic leadership styles and work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in elementary schools in Hebei, China. Through a quantitative method approach surveys with 404 calligraphy teachers, we develop and test hypotheses about how these organizational factors interact to influence teacher engagement. Our findings contribute to both educational leadership theory and cultural heritage preservation by offering practical insights for enhancing the professional environment of those responsible for transmitting this important cultural tradition to future generations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Paternalistic leadership

Leadership is a concept of power that has the potential to influence and help groups of individuals achieve goals. Paternalistic leadership derived from Max Weber's conception of legitimate authority, is a managerial approach where leaders exhibit authority while also displaying concern for the well-being of their subordinates. This leadership style combines authoritarianism, benevolence, and ethics, emphasizing absolute control, personal care for subordinates, and the pursuit of moral virtue by leaders. While paternalistic leadership has been widely utilized in non-Western business cultures, particularly in regions like East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, its perception in Western management literature is increasingly hostile.

Despite variations in cultural interpretations, recent research generally defines paternalistic leadership as a style that blends discipline and authority with benevolence. It has been associated with increased employee satisfaction, job performance, and organizational outcomes. In educational settings, such as China's essential education environment, paternalistic leadership is prevalent, emphasizing care, protection, and guidance for employees or students while expecting respect and obedience in return. This management style fosters close relationships and effective communication channels, enhancing trust and understanding between leaders and subordinates.

2.2 Benevolent leadership

Empirical research corroborates the salutary effects of moral leadership within educational settings, with schools helmed by moral leaders evincing superior academic outcomes, enhanced student behaviour, and a conducive learning environment (Godbless, 2021; Ho & Le, 2023). Through their exemplification of positive behaviors, promotion of collaborative teamwork, and adept management of negative behaviors, moral leaders fortify teacher-student bonds and provide students with enriching educational experiences.

Building upon this theoretical scaffold, contemporary scholars such as Wang and Liu (2019) and Ouyang (2021) have explicated core characteristics and principles of ethical leadership. These include the leader's moral character, self-discipline, and selfless behaviour, which serve as guiding principles shaping behaviour and decision-making processes within the leadership domain. Furthermore, Ciulla & Ciulla (2020) contribute nuanced insights by defining moral leadership as the embodiment of high virtue, self-discipline, and selflessness, emphasizing the imperative of leaders to exemplify integrity, fulfil obligations, and abstain from exploiting others.

2.3 Authoritarian leadership

Authoritarian leadership in education can have significant implications for school management, organizational dynamics, and teacher engagement. While it may uphold discipline and order, authoritarian leadership may also stifle teachers' creativity, autonomy, and motivation, ultimately hindering educational progress and vitality. In contrast, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing within educational institutions promotes innovation, collaboration, and organizational learning, enhancing teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Proactive leadership and strategic interventions are essential for overcoming barriers to knowledge sharing and cultivating a supportive environment conducive to collaboration and continuous improvement in education. In conclusion, authoritarian leadership in education can have significant implications for school management, organizational dynamics, and teacher engagement. While it may uphold discipline and order, authoritarian leadership may also stifle teachers' creativity, autonomy, and motivation,

ultimately hindering educational progress and vitality. In contrast, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing within educational institutions promoted innovation, collaboration, and organizational learning, enhancing teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Proactive leadership and strategic interventions are essential for overcoming barriers to knowledge sharing and cultivating a supportive environment conducive to collaboration and continuous improvement in education.

Authoritarian leadership refers to a hierarchical leadership style characterized by centralized decision-making, strict control over subordinates, and an emphasis on unquestioning obedience to authority. Rooted in paternalistic leadership theory (Farh & Cheng, 2000), this style combines dominance and authority with an implicit expectation of loyalty from followers. Unlike transactional or transformational leadership, authoritarian leaders prioritize efficiency and discipline over collaborative input, often employing top-down directives, punitive measures for noncompliance, and limited delegation of responsibilities. While traditionally associated with industrial or military contexts, authoritarian leadership persists in educational systems—particularly in cultures with high power distance (Hofstede, 1983) where hierarchical structures and Confucian values emphasizing respect for authority remain influential.

2.4 Moral Leadership

The present study is grounded in the exploration of moral leadership within educational contexts, aiming to comprehensively understand its profound impact on organizational dynamics, particularly within schools. Drawing upon the seminal definitions provided by Hackett and Wang (2012), moral leadership is conceptually delineated as a set of qualities exhibited by leaders, encompassing high virtue, self-discipline, and selfless behaviour. These leaders are not merely organizational guides but also serve as moral exemplars, exerting significant influence on the moral development and behaviour of organizational members (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

2.5 Work Engagement

Yu (2021) provides insight into the concept of work engagement, defining it as a state characterized by vigour, dedication, and immersion in one's work. The author suggests that employment and personal resources are primary predictors of work engagement, especially in the face of high work demands. Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate innovation, productivity, and willingness to go above and beyond in their roles.

In line with Yu's argument, recent studies conducted by Knight, Patterson, and Dawson (2017) highlight the negative consequences of low work engagement, including decreased well-being and work performance. Recognizing the importance of evaluating, boosting, and sustaining work engagement, organizations are increasingly interested in implementing interventions to address this issue. However, synthesizing evidence on effective interventions remains a challenge.

3. Hypothesis development

Paternalistic leadership, deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy, reflects a hierarchical system emphasizing morality, kindness, and authority deference (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Aycan, 2006). While previous research predominantly explored transactional, transformational, and servant leadership's impact on work engagement, paternalistic leadership, characterized by authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral leadership, offers a distinct perspective (Cheng, Chou, & Farh, 2004; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006). Understanding knowledge sharing, often examined through personal beliefs and institutional structures, is crucial, with theories like social network theory and the theory of reasoned action shedding light on its dynamics. The advent of social media has revolutionized knowledge sharing, offering seamless virtual interactions. Meanwhile, work engagement, defined as vigour, dedication, and absorption, is essential for educational success, fostering positive energy and resilience among employees (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Previous studies on the work engagement of calligraphy teachers have primarily focused on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of their teaching work. Additionally, they have examined various factors influencing the work engagement of calligraphy teachers, such as educational policies, school environment, social support, and the impact of benevolent leadership on work engagement, providing valuable insights into effective leadership practices for calligraphy teachers (Eldor & Shoshani, 2016). These studies offer valuable guidance for education policymakers and school administrators seeking to support and motivate calligraphy teachers to enhance educational outcomes.

Discussions in China have centred on supporting calligraphy teachers working in primary schools in Hebei. Firstly, it is proposed that benevolent leadership be utilized within an interactive calligraphic guidance system to evaluate

written characters using image processing and fuzzy inference methods: teachers with good intentions grade students' written work and actively guide pupils to improve it in class (Karakas et al., 2013). Karakas et al. (2013) assert that benevolent leaders demonstrate sincere and wholehearted acts at work that benefit those around them. To further promote and advance the growth of Chinese calligraphy, in-service calligraphy teachers in primary schools in Hebei must also make substantial investments and have access to adequate resources across various disciplines. The assessment of the smoothness of strokes in Chinese calligraphic characters (local features) and character structure relies on benevolent leadership, which is crucial. Leadership, as Yukl (2008) highlights, is one of the most critical aspects of the organizational setting as it significantly influences an organisation's success.

The present study is grounded in the exploration of moral leadership within educational contexts, aiming to comprehensively understand its profound impact on organizational dynamics, particularly within schools. Drawing upon the seminal definitions provided by Hackett and Wang (2012), moral leadership is conceptually delineated as a set of qualities exhibited by leaders, encompassing high virtue, self-discipline, and selfless behaviour. These leaders are not merely organizational guides but also serve as moral exemplars, exerting significant influence on the moral development and behaviour of organizational members (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

Within the educational milieu, moral leadership interfaces with various facets of school management and leadership. Educational leaders, notably principals, are entrusted with the responsibility of embodying moral leadership principles and fostering a supportive organizational climate grounded in values of integrity, authenticity, and a judicious balance between justice and compassion. This milieu communicates a compelling message about the leader's underlying beliefs and values, thereby shaping the ethos, culture, and communal fabric of the educational institution.

In the context of Western leadership, benevolent and ethical leadership positively impact subordinates' identification and gratitude but have no significant impact on reactions. Ethical leadership induces obedience through selfless behaviour, while authoritarian leadership does not. Benevolent leadership has the most significant impact on subordinates' gratitude and reward, indicating a gradual shift away from authoritarian elements in leadership perceptions.

H1: Benevolent leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

H2: Moral leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

H3: Authoritarian leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Data collection procedure

This study is based on a predetermined research model and data obtained only from research samples that meet the requirements of 404 respondents. The questionnaire was done through WJX APP, with a time-lagged method because the questionnaire was distributed threefold.

The questionnaire was distributed and collected through the WJX APP, with survey links disseminated via social media platforms including WeChat, SMS, and QQ. This research has obtained the necessary approvals from the school administration and was conducted outside regular teaching hours to avoid disrupting educators' work schedules. The study participants are teachers working in selected primary schools, with the sample comprising all calligraphy teachers in the Hebei province of China. Utilizing Paternalistic leadership (PL) and Work Engagement (WE) frameworks, this study aims to explore factors influencing calligraphy teachers' work engagement. A quantitative research method was employed to achieve this objective, with the research design encompassing systematic procedures for data collection, measurement, and analysis.

This investigation has obtained written informed consent form from the school management, representing institutional-level participation in accordance with organizational policy. To make the procedure more accessible, the researcher creates a consent form that includes information about the research, a request for involvement, and a place to sign. To make the procedure more accessible, the researcher creates a consent form that includes information about the research, a request for involvement, and a place to sign. As a result, consent forms are signed by participants who are willing to participate in the study and are interested (Hardicre, 2014). Each of the 404 participants in the current study electronically

signed a consent form and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The participants were given the freedom to leave the study at any time they felt uncomfortable with the procedure because the permission form was not legally enforceable.

4.2 Measurement

In this study, the dimensions of Paternalistic Leadership are delineated into three distinct categories: Benevolent Leadership, Moral/Ethical Leadership, and Authoritarian Leadership. This classification system was introduced by Cheng, B., Chou, L., Wu, T., Huang, M., & Farh, J. i (2004) research publication. Each category plays a unique role in understanding the multifaceted nature of Paternalistic Leadership, providing a comprehensive framework for analysis. The Benevolent Leadership dimension encompasses 11 items that gauge the extent of a leader's concern for employees' work and life. This scale exhibits a high degree of reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.94. This figure demonstrates the measurement tool's internal consistency and stability.

The Moral/Ethical Leadership dimension comprises a total of 22 observation items, divided into four sub-dimensions: prudence, resilience, temperance, and fairness. These items address the moral and ethical behavior and decision-making of leaders. The reliability of this scale, indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, reflects its stability and accuracy across various contexts.

The Authoritarian Leadership dimension includes 11 observation items. These items encompass the leader's absolute authority and control over subordinates, as well as the expectation of unconditional obedience from them. The reliability coefficient of this scale is 0.89, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

In the study, the assessment of Work Engagement is facilitated through a scale developed by Schaufeli, W. B., Martínez, I. M., Pinto, A. M., Salanova, M., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). This scale is composed of 12 items designed to measure various aspects of work engagement. The reliability of the questionnaire, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94, demonstrates very high internal consistency. This high level of reliability suggests that the measurement outcomes can be trusted to reflect the construct of Work Engagement accurately.

4.3 Data analysis techniques

The first step in the data analysis process was to organize the acquired data into groups based on numerous variables. The information on the variables was then entered into the SPSS program. First, age and gender statistics were examined to determine the characteristics of the sample that was used. Second, two steps of analysis were performed on the research-related data. The descriptive features were established in the initial stage, and the results showed the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the data for revealing the distribution of the relevant data (Meloun & Militk, 2011). A regression analysis was used in the second stage to determine the inferential statistics. The purpose of inferential statistics was to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Meloun & Militk, 2011).

This study employs a sample size of 404 in-service calligraphy teachers from selected primary schools in Hebei, China. Prior to the main study, a pilot test was conducted with a subset of 50 participants (10% of the main sample) to assess the reliability and validity of the research instruments. The pilot test allowed for the evaluation of internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Crucially, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to examine the construct validity and determine the appropriate factor structure of the measurement items. The EFA procedure employed principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Items were retained if they had factor loadings greater than 0.50 on their primary factor and cross-loadings less than 0.40 on other factors. This process helped identify and remove items that did not load cleanly onto their intended constructs, ensuring that the final measurement scales were unidimensional and conceptually clear. Based on the EFA results, items that did not meet these criteria were either revised or eliminated to improve the overall validity of the instruments. The refined scales resulting from this process were then used in the main study. The main sample size of 404 was chosen to ensure adequate statistical power and representativeness of the population under study. This sample size aligns with Cohen's (1992) recommendations for detecting medium effect sizes in multiple regression analyses and Hair et al.'s (2010) guidance for structural equation modeling. The sample of 404 participants allows for robust statistical analyses while accounting for potential non-responses or incomplete data, providing a solid foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions about the relationships between paternalistic leadership and work engagement among calligraphy teachers in Chinese primary schools.

The research will use various computations to establish the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. As a result, a 5% significance level will be used in determining the Spearman correlation coefficient. Further,

standard deviation and coefficient of variation will be computed as part of descriptive statistics to describe the data obtained.

Sample Size Determination The final sample size was determined using power analysis, ensuring that the selected sample provides statistically reliable results for hypothesis testing (Mujere, 2016). The study aimed for a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, resulting in a sample of 404 teachers drawn from urban and suburban/county-level schools.

The reliability analysis of this study indicates a robust methodological approach to ensure measurement consistency and validity. The sample size of 404 participants provides a solid foundation for the structural equation modeling and factor analysis conducted. The factor loadings for all items across the four constructs are reported to be above 0.60, with many exceeding 0.80, suggesting strong internal consistency within each construct. The researchers employed a rigorous item refinement process, starting with 107 items and refining them to 58 through exploratory factor analysis. This process has likely enhanced the overall reliability of the measures. The six extracted factors account for a total cumulative variance of 67.3%, which is considered acceptable in social science research. Multiple methods were used to ensure reliability, including single item analysis, correlation coefficient method, extreme group method, and corrected item total correlation. This multi-faceted approach strengthens confidence in the reliability of the measures.

The study utilized the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) and Bartlett test for sphericity to determine the appropriateness of factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.88 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, while the significant Bartlett's test confirms the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Principal component analysis with oblique rotation was employed, specifying the extraction of seven factors. The item communalities ranged from 0.320 to 0.890, indicating moderate to good reliability of individual items.

We followed Wang et al.'s (2022) method to conduct single item analysis, utilizing the correlation coefficient, extreme group method, and corrected item total correlation (CITC). In the coefficient method, items with coefficients 0.4 and $p > 0.05$, indicating weak correlation with the total scale score, were excluded. For the extreme group method, items were removed if independent sample t-tests in the high (highest 27%) and low (lowest 27%) subgroups showed non-significant differences ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, a significant increase in Cronbach's alpha coefficient after item 126 deletion in the CITC method indicated lower internal relevance, leading to the item's removal.

5.0 Results and discussion

5.1 Discussion

In this study, a total of 404 volunteers from various companies participated (Male: $N=126$; Female: $N=278$). Among these participants, 105 were married, while 173 were single. The volunteers were from different subject, with the following distribution: 50 individuals from the Calligraphy, 88 from the Arts, 13 from Sports Education, 9 from Chinese Language Education, 9 from Chinese Language, 4 from Others.

This diverse sample provides a broad perspective on the research topic, encompassing various demographics, marital statuses, departmental affiliations, and industry backgrounds, which may contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the study's findings. The SEM results do not show a direct path between paternalistic leadership (PL) and work engagement (WE).

Ho1: Benevolent leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

Ho2: Moral leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

Ho3: Authoritarian leadership does not significantly impact work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China.

The findings of this study reveal that benevolent leadership, moral leadership, and authoritarian leadership do not exhibit a statistically significant impact on work engagement among in-service calligraphy teachers in selected primary schools in Hebei, China. This suggests that traditional leadership frameworks derived from paternalistic or Confucian-oriented models may not sufficiently explain work engagement dynamics in this specific educational context. The lack of significant influence could be attributed to several factors, including the unique professional autonomy of calligraphy teachers, the intrinsically motivating nature of artistic disciplines, or potential moderating variables such as institutional support and job resources.

These results challenge conventional assumptions about the direct effects of leadership styles on teacher engagement, particularly in specialized subjects like calligraphy, where intrinsic motivation and cultural reverence for the discipline may outweigh leadership influences. Future research should explore alternative mediators or contextual factors that might better predict work engagement in this niche teaching population.

Several important limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. First, the differential effects of the three PL dimensions suggest that treating paternalistic leadership as a unified construct might mask important nuances in how different leadership aspects influence workplace outcomes. Second, the unexpected negative relationship between moral leadership and knowledge sharing warrants further investigation, as it may reflect either measurement issues or meaningful contextual factors not captured in the current model. Third, the relatively weak effect of benevolent leadership might indicate the presence of unmeasured moderating variables or context-specific factors affecting its impact.

However, our study was limited in its ability to assess the direct effects of paternalistic leadership and supervisor support on work engagement due to the lack of direct path information. This limitation highlights a gap in our understanding of how these leadership factors directly influence work engagement in this specific educational context. Future research should aim to include these direct paths to provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationships between leadership factors and work engagement among calligraphy teachers.

6.0 Contribution

6.1 Reevaluate Leadership Training Programs

Given the nonsignificant impact of benevolent, moral, and authoritarian leadership, school administrators and policymakers in Hebei should reconsider one-size-fits-all leadership training. Instead, professional development programs could focus on distributed leadership or collaborative empowerment strategies that align with the artistic and autonomous nature of calligraphy instruction.

6.2 Enhancing Intrinsic Motivational Support

The limited influence of extrinsic leadership factors underscores the necessity to reorient institutional strategies toward cultivating intrinsic motivation among calligraphy teachers. Drawing from self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive intrinsic motivation, schools should prioritize mechanisms that amplify teachers' sense of purpose and creative fulfillment. First, curriculum designers and school administrators could decentralize pedagogical decision-making by granting calligraphy teachers greater autonomy in artistic expression and curriculum innovation. For instance, allowing teachers to integrate local cultural heritage into lesson plans may enhance their professional identity and engagement. Second, institutional recognition of calligraphy's cultural significance should extend beyond symbolic gestures. Schools could establish annual interdisciplinary exhibitions or collaborative projects with local museums, enabling teachers to showcase their students' work as contributions to cultural preservation. Such initiatives not only validate teachers' expertise but also align their work with broader societal values, fostering a deeper sense of meaning a critical antecedent of sustained engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

6.3 Context-Specific Leadership Adaptations

The nonsignificant impact of traditional leadership styles suggests a misalignment between hierarchical leadership models and the unique demands of niche artistic disciplines. To address this, school leaders should adopt adaptive leadership frameworks that reconcile institutional goals with the creative autonomy of calligraphy teachers. This involves transitioning from rigid, top-down supervision to flexible, expertise-driven collaboration. For example, principals might implement "artistic mentorship circles" where calligraphy teachers lead peer-driven workshops on traditional ink techniques or digital calligraphy tools, thereby positioning them as pedagogical innovators rather than passive subordinates. Concurrently, bureaucratic constraints—such as standardized performance metrics ill-suited to art education—should be recalibrated. Schools could pilot qualitative assessment models that prioritize student creativity, cultural appreciation, and skill progression over quantitative outputs. Such reforms resonate with the principles of distributed leadership, which emphasize role-specific empowerment and resource allocation (Spillane et al., 2004) and may better sustain engagement in specialized teaching contexts.

6.4 Policy Advocacy for Art Education

Systemic barriers to calligraphy teachers' engagement cannot be resolved through school-level interventions alone. Provincial and national policymakers must institutionalize structural reforms to elevate the status of art education. This includes revising the National Curriculum Standards to allocate proportionate instructional time and resources to calligraphy, ensuring parity with core subjects like mathematics and language. Additionally, funding mechanisms should be restructured to address chronic resource gaps, for instance, through grants for digital calligraphy tools (e.g., pressure-sensitive tablets) or subsidies for field trips to cultural heritage sites. Professional recognition could also be enhanced by

establishing provincial-level certifications or awards for excellence in calligraphy pedagogy, mirroring initiatives in STEM fields. These measures would not only legitimize calligraphy as a discipline but also mitigate attrition risks by aligning teachers' career trajectories with tangible institutional and societal rewards.

7.0 Future Research Directions

To contextualize these findings, future studies should adopt a multilevel analytical lens to disentangle the interplay between leadership, cultural norms, and institutional structures. Quantitative researchers could employ hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to examine how school-level variables (e.g., resource allocation, principal autonomy) moderate the leadership-engagement relationship. Qualitatively, ethnographic studies may uncover tacit cultural dynamics—such as Confucian values emphasizing self-cultivation—that buffer against leadership deficiencies in calligraphy education. Comparative studies across regions (e.g., Hebei vs. Guangdong) or subjects (e.g., calligraphy vs. music) would further elucidate whether these findings reflect subject-specific peculiarities or broader trends in art education. Additionally, longitudinal designs tracking teachers' engagement amid policy reforms (e.g., China's 2022 Art Education Modernization Plan) could yield insights into the temporal efficacy of systemic interventions.

7.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to leadership literature by challenging the universality of paternalistic leadership models in non-Western contexts, particularly in specialized artistic domains where intrinsic and cultural forces may supersede managerial influences. Practically, it provides a roadmap for culturally attuned leadership and policy recalibration in China's art education sector, advocating for solutions that harmonize institutional objectives with the ontological values of artistic disciplines.

7.2 Limitations and suggestions

The methodology used was successful in answering the study questions. However, it had certain drawbacks. First off, the quantitative approach solely uses quantifiable data and does not offer any justifications for the respondents' viewpoints. As a result, the research findings will not be as insightful as they may have been had a mixed strategy been applied. The opinions of the respondents' matter, and there should be a vivid explanation as to why they have made a specific decision. However, the questionnaires provide little room for explanation and are only interested in the number of respondents who give answers. This leads to more assumptions about comprehending the data collected without having the respondents explain it.

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