

A Study on the Relationship Between Authoritative Leadership Style and Work Engagement Among the Teaching Staff of S College in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China

Yajie Liu^{1*} and Yaran Yang²

¹ Master of Educational Administration, Stamford International University, Thailand

² Lecturer, Stamford International University, Thailand

*Corresponding author: liuyajie185@163.com

Abstract: Taking full-time teachers of Communication University of Nanjing as research subjects, this study explores the internal correlation between paternalistic leadership and teachers' work engagement based on the school-running practice of private universities. By adopting literature review, questionnaire survey and empirical analysis, it investigates the current situation of paternalistic leadership in the university from three dimensions: morality, benevolence and authority, analyzes differences under different demographic characteristics, and verifies their correlation and predictive relationship. The results show that the overall level of teachers' perceived paternalistic leadership is above average, with higher recognition of moral and benevolent leadership. Teachers' work engagement is generally favorable, especially in emotional dedication and professional dedication. All dimensions of paternalistic leadership are significantly positively correlated with work engagement, among which moral and benevolent leadership can positively predict work engagement. This study provides empirical support and practical reference for optimizing teacher management, improving teachers' professional well-being and promoting the connotative development of the university.

Keywords: Parental-style leadership job involvement Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province.

1. Introduction

As China's higher education enters a new phase of universalization and high-quality development, private universities have become an indispensable component of the higher education system. By 2024, the number of private regular universities nationwide had continued to grow, playing a vital role in cultivating applied talents and supporting local economic and cultural development (Ministry of Education, 2024). Private universities specializing in media and science disciplines—focusing on core fields such as journalism and communication, film and television arts, digital media, and design arts—are characterized by strong practical orientation, close industry alignment, and distinct cultural attributes, making them a key source of talent for China's cultural and creative industries.

Applying leadership principles to the field of education, teachers, as pivotal guides in students' growth, exert a direct influence on the formation of students' behavioral habits, thinking patterns, and values through their leadership styles (Robinson et al., 2008). Comparative studies of educational practices domestically and internationally reveal that foreign teachers tend to favor authoritative or democratic leadership styles, whereas China's teachers predominantly employ paternalistic leadership (Han Xueliang, Zhang Jinge, Yang Ziwei, 2024). This study posits that the root causes of this disparity warrant in-depth analysis from the perspectives of the definitions, characteristics, and cultural adaptability of three distinct leadership styles.

Authoritative leadership centers on the teacher, emphasizing the authority of rules and their mandatory enforcement. Teachers establish

clear regulations and behavioral guidelines, demanding unconditional student compliance, and implement reward and punishment mechanisms to ensure rule adherence (Wu Ye, Zhang Bojian, 2021). This approach features centralized decision-making, strict supervision, and efficient execution, offering significant advantages in managing classroom discipline and group activities by rapidly establishing order and enhancing efficiency (Fan Zhaoxia, 2021). For instance, during emergency evacuation drills, authoritative teachers can ensure swift student action through clear instructions, preventing chaos. However, excessive reliance on authority may lead students to passively accept directives, stifling critical thinking and autonomous development. Students enduring prolonged high-pressure environments may develop resistance, adversely affecting teacher-student relationships and learning motivation.

Democratic leadership is premised on equality between teachers and students, emphasizing students' rights to participate and make decisions. Teachers encourage students to express their views through methods such as organizing discussions and soliciting feedback, enabling them to jointly establish class rules or activity plans. This approach is characterized by equal communication between teachers and students, collaborative decision-making on issues, and creating space for innovation and free expression, thereby fostering students' sense of responsibility, teamwork skills, and innovative thinking (Liu Yuzhao, Fan Peihua, 2022). For example, in building class culture, democratic teachers guide students to discuss class rules and determine the final plan through voting. However, the decision-making process may be time-consuming due to differing opinions and prone to inefficiency in emergencies. Moreover, without adequate guidance from teachers, democratic discussions may degenerate into disorderly debates (Li Honglin, 2019).

Parental leadership integrates the first two leadership styles, where teachers combine authoritative and caring qualities in both teaching tasks and student management—acting as both

rule-makers and emotional supporters (Ai Yueyue et al., 2023). Unlike other leadership styles, parental leadership employed by teachers offers unique advantages. First, emotional connection enhances rule internalization; students comply with rules proactively out of trust in their teacher rather than passively, as teachers provide personalized guidance to help students understand the moral implications behind the rules (Bedi, 2020). Second, it enables flexible adaptation to complex situations, allowing teachers to dynamically adjust management strategies based on students' individual characteristics—for example, employing differentiated approaches tailored to varying levels of self-discipline (Cai Yonghong et al., 2024). Third, it aligns closely with traditional Chinese educational values, reducing resistance during implementation and fostering acceptance among students, parents, and society at large; teachers further strengthen collaboration between home and school through the "home-school co-education" model (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Fourth, it promotes students' holistic development through moral exemplification: teachers shape students' values through ethical leadership, cultivate their social-emotional skills via benevolent leadership, and help establish rule awareness through authoritative leadership—all working synergistically to advance students' comprehensive growth (Liu Shiyong, Liu Zhixing, & Li Jiaoyan, 2018).

Work engagement refers to the positive, focused, and dedicated attitudes and behaviors exhibited by individuals in their professional roles. In the education sector, teachers' level of work engagement directly impacts their teaching effectiveness and career development (Qu Zhengwei, 2024). In recent years, increasing academic research has focused on exploring the intrinsic relationship between teachers' paternalistic leadership styles and their work engagement levels. Studies by scholars indicate that students perceive teachers' paternalistic leadership primarily through manifestations such as profound care, full respect, high trust, and strong support toward students (Cai Yonghong, Qu

Yun, & Tang Runjia, 2024). When students perceive teachers exhibiting a leadership style that combines kindness, moral integrity, and authority, they develop a stronger sense of identification with the school's culture and values, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy and sense of belonging. Consequently, students become more motivated to study diligently and strive to bring honor to their institution. Meanwhile, teachers, through positive feedback from students regarding paternalistic leadership, deepen their passion for their profession, strengthen their sense of professional identity and mission, and consequently improve their level of work engagement (Luo Xiang, 2022).

Nanjing University of Media and Communications in Jiangsu Province, as a representative undergraduate institution of media and science in the province, specializes in media and arts disciplines, cultivating all-media, applied, and interdisciplinary media professionals nationwide. Despite the rapid development of universities, faculty development remains a core challenge. Existing research indicates that university teachers generally face issues such as heavy workloads, insufficient career security, limited career advancement opportunities, and weak organizational belonging, which directly affect their work enthusiasm and professional commitment. With the continuous deepening of educational reforms, universities are constantly innovating their faculty management and incentive approaches. Parental leadership, as a leadership style with China-specific characteristics, warrants in-depth investigation for its application in faculty management at Hengxing University and its impact on work engagement. Accordingly, this study focuses on exploring the intrinsic relationship between teachers' parental leadership and their work engagement, using Nanjing University of Media and Communications as the empirical case study. Through an in-depth analysis of the specific practices and outcomes of parental leadership in student management at the university, this study aims to reveal the practical effectiveness of parental leadership and provide valuable insights

for educators. (Liu Xianjun, 2021; Zhang Wei, 2022).

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the current status of paternalistic leadership among faculty members at Nanjing Media University in Jiangsu Province, China.
2. Understand the current status of work dedication among faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province.
3. Analyze the differences in paternalistic leadership among teachers at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China under various demographic variables (gender, age, professional title, educational background, and teaching discipline).
4. Analyze the differences in work commitment among teachers at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, China, under various demographic variables (gender, age, professional title, educational background, and teaching discipline).
5. Determine the correlation between paternalistic leadership and work engagement among faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province.

Literature Review

social exchange theory

Social Exchange Theory was put forward by sociologist Homans in 1958, who integrated economic exchange ideas, behavioral psychology reinforcement rules and anthropological reciprocity principles to interpret motivational logic behind individual social interaction. Emerson supplemented and deepened the theory in 1976 by defining social exchange as obligation-generating interactive processes. Later scholars including Blau further revised and extended its scope: Blau expanded theoretical analysis from individual to group and societal levels, while Thibaut & Kelley's minimax principle underpinned the theory's rational actor assumption.

Social Exchange Theory was proposed by Homans (1958), combining economic exchange, behavioral psychology reinforcement and anthropological reciprocity to explain individuals' social interaction motives. Emerson (1976) enriched the theory by defining social exchange as obligation-driven interaction processes. Blau and other scholars further improved and extended its application: Blau expanded the theoretical analysis from individual to group and societal levels, and Thibaut & Kelley's minimax principle laid a foundation for its rational actor assumption.

The theory has four core principles. Resource exchange includes material assets and non-material resources such as emotion, information and status, which Foa & Foa classified into six types. In reward-cost mechanism, individuals gain rewards while paying time and energy costs, and their perceived reward-cost difference affects exchange choices. Reciprocity is a universal moral norm with multiple forms of expression. The rational actor assumption holds that individuals rationally balance gains and costs to maximize benefits, consistent with Thibaut & Kelley's viewpoint.

A Study on the Differences in Authoritarian Leadership Across Various Demographic Backgrounds

Li Hongmei (2018) discovered gender differences in paternalistic leadership: females scored higher on benevolent and moral leadership, with no gender gap in authoritarian leadership. Postgraduate teachers scored higher in authoritarian leadership, while education level exerted little effect on the other two dimensions. Teachers with over five years of work experience had higher benevolent and moral leadership, and marital status showed no significant influence.

Zhao Xiaoyu (2024) also confirmed demographic discrepancies. Male teachers scored higher in authoritarian but lower in moral leadership; teachers with lower education and shorter teaching experience showed inferior moral and benevolent leadership, and senior professional title teachers obtained higher moral leadership

scores.

Other scholars further supported such demographic variations. Highly educated teachers are less accepting of authoritarian leadership (Chen Lijuan, 2020). Senior teachers and those with higher titles perform better in benevolent and moral leadership (Zhou Yuting, 2022). Wu Xue (2023) found gender and tenure differences in partial dimensions, whereas Sun Hao (2023) held an opposite view that gender has no obvious impact on all three dimensions.

The essence of work investment

Cooper (1992) initiated the concept of work engagement, referring to individuals' full physical, cognitive and emotional devotion to work roles, and defined disengagement as self-withdrawal from work duties (Lin et al., 2024). The two concepts interpret how work contexts shape employees' self-expression and avoidance behaviors.

From a positive psychology perspective, Bakker et al. (2003) defined work engagement as a positive state of vigor, dedication and absorption, and established its measurement based on MBI reverse scoring.

Van der Broeck et al. (2014) argued this model fails to fit teachers' professional traits such as teacher-student relationships. They redefined teacher work engagement as a positive state including professional dedication, interpersonal interaction and colleague collaboration.

Hart et al. (2017) viewed work engagement as deep psychological identification with work value, which is closely associated with job performance and external work behaviors (Wang & Li, 2019).

Academically, work engagement is widely recognized as a multidimensional active professional state affecting individual performance and organizational effectiveness (Li, 2024). Scholars have different research emphases, yet Hart's theoretical framework is deemed the most appropriate for this study.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed convenience sampling, selecting 310 faculty members from Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province as the research subjects. With a total of 1,600 faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, the extraction of 310 samples was deemed appropriate according to the sample size criteria outlined in Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) Morgan Table. Based on this, 310 questionnaires were distributed in the study. After organizing and screening the collected data and eliminating invalid responses, 305 valid questionnaires were ultimately obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 98.39%.

3. Results

Descriptive Statistical Analysis of the Current Level of Parental Leadership Among Faculty at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province. This study employs descriptive statistical methods to conduct a statistical analysis of the current level of parental leadership among faculty at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province, China. As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score for parental leadership is 3.57, with the mean scores across all dimensions ranging from 3.50 to 3.72. Overall, the parental leadership among faculty at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province, China, is at a high level.

Table. 1: The Current Level of Authoritarian Leadership Among Faculty Members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province (N=305)

dimension	M	SD	analyse
Leadership Based on Virtue	3.50	.710	secondary
Kind Leadership	3.52	.726	average
Authoritarian leadership	3.72	.725	average
Parental-style leadership	3.57	.669	average

1) Descriptive Statistical Analysis of

the Current Level of Faculty Work Engagement at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province. This study employs descriptive statistical methods to analyze the current level of faculty work engagement at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province. As shown in Table 4.3, the overall average level of faculty work engagement at the university is 3.67, with average values across all dimensions ranging from 3.51 to 3.82. Overall, faculty work engagement at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province remains at a high level.

Table. 2: The Current Level of Teacher Engagement at Nanjing University of Media and Communications, Jiangsu Province (N=305)

dimension	M	SD	analyse
Physical Investment	3.51	.710	average
Emotional Investment	3.82	.445	average
Cognitive Investment	3.68	.445	average
job involvement	3.67	.403	average

2) This study employed the independent samples t-test for statistical analysis of gender differences in paternalistic leadership among faculty parents at Nanjing Media College in China's Jiangsu Province. The gender difference in paternalistic leadership was statistically significant ($t = -2.852$, $p < 0.01$), with female faculty members showing significantly higher mean scores than their male counterparts. Among the dimensions, gender differences were significant for moral leadership ($t = -2.791$, $p < 0.01$) and benevolent leadership ($t = -3.187$, $p < 0.01$); however, the gender difference in authoritarian leadership did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$).

In conclusion, there are significant gender differences in paternalistic leadership among faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province, with female faculty exhibiting significantly higher levels of paternalistic leadership than their male

counterparts.

3) This study employed the independent samples t-test for statistical analysis of gender differences in teachers' work engagement at Nanjing Media College in China's Jiangsu Province. The gender differences in teachers' work engagement were statistically significant ($t = -3.254$, $p < 0.01$), with female teachers showing significantly higher mean values than male teachers. Across all dimensions, gender differences were significant for physical engagement ($t = -2.575$, $p < 0.05$), emotional engagement ($t = -2.879$, $p < 0.01$), and cognitive engagement ($t = -2.615$, $p < 0.01$).

In conclusion, there is a significant gender disparity in work engagement among faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province, with female teachers demonstrating significantly higher levels of work engagement than their male counterparts.

4) This study employed one-way ANOVA for statistical analysis of age-related differences in paternalistic leadership among faculty members at Nanjing Media College in China's Jiangsu Province. The age-related differences in paternalistic leadership were statistically significant ($F=4.241$, $p < 0.01$), with the mean scores of faculty aged 31–40 significantly higher than those of those aged 30 and below or 51 and above. Among the dimensions, significant age-related differences were observed for ethical leadership ($F=5.705$, $p < 0.01$) and benevolent leadership ($F=5.576$, $p < 0.01$); however, the age-related difference for authoritarian leadership was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

In conclusion, there are significant differences in the age-related levels of paternalistic leadership among faculty members at Nanjing Media University in China's Jiangsu Province: teachers aged 31–40 exhibit significantly higher paternalistic leadership than those aged 30 and below or 51 and above.

5) This study employed one-way ANOVA for statistical analysis to examine differences in teachers' work engagement age at Nanjing Media

College in China's Jiangsu Province. The differences in teachers' work engagement age were statistically significant ($F=3.454$, $p < 0.05$), with the mean values for teachers aged 41–50 and those aged 51 and above significantly higher than those for teachers aged 30 and below. Across all dimensions, age-related differences were significant for physical engagement ($F=2.683$, $p < 0.05$), emotional engagement ($F=3.211$, $p < 0.05$), and cognitive engagement ($F=3.219$, $p < 0.05$).

In conclusion, there is a significant age-related disparity in work engagement among faculty members at Nanjing University of Media and Communications in China's Jiangsu Province: those aged 41–50 and 51 and above demonstrate significantly higher work engagement levels compared to their counterparts aged 30 and below.

4. Discussion

Faculty at Nanjing Media College exhibit a moderately high overall level of paternalistic leadership, consistent with Liu & Zhou (2024). All three dimensions—moral, benevolent, and authoritarian leadership—score above the theoretical median, jointly elevating the overall level through distinct mechanisms.

With a mean score of 3.50, moral leadership reflects teachers' high moral standards and impartial conduct. By adhering to academic ethics and fair management, teachers build trust and professional authority, set moral examples, and gain students' recognition, boosting overall paternalistic leadership (Zhang & Wang, 2011).

Benevolent leadership averages 3.52, showing teachers' consistent care and emotional support for students. Personalized guidance and humane concern strengthen teacher–student bonds, enhance students' satisfaction and belonging, and consolidate the emotional basis of paternalistic leadership (Zheng & Zhou, 2003).

Authoritarian leadership scores 3.72, demonstrating teachers' effective regulation and goal management. Standardized discipline and academic norms maintain teaching order, cultivate

students' self-discipline, and balance rigor with flexibility to stabilize teaching environments and foster students' comprehensive development.

Given the positive correlation between paternalistic leadership and faculty work engagement at Nanjing Media College, a three-dimensional leadership enhancement program is proposed to boost teacher engagement and form a virtuous cycle of improved leadership, work engagement and job performance.

First, moral leadership cultivates teachers' professional identity. Ethical training and integrity education guide teachers to uphold professional virtues, motivating active engagement in teaching innovation, student mentoring and academic research to enhance physical and cognitive work investment.

Second, benevolent leadership alleviates teacher burnout. Institutional support including flexible work arrangements and psychological services meets teachers' developmental and life needs, strengthens their organizational belonging and emotional commitment, and promotes proactive work participation.

Third, authoritarian leadership standardizes teaching practices. Standardized teaching rules and goal-oriented performance management clarify job requirements, stabilizing teachers' cognitive focus and driving continuous optimization of teaching and research quality.

The synergistic three-dimensional leadership optimization fosters teachers' professional identity, emotional attachment and standardized work behavior. It serves as a sustainable organizational strategy to build a high-engagement, high-performance faculty team.

References

Anita S. (2016). Is it time to do away with the Annual Performance Appraisal System? *Human Resource Management International Digest* (3),7-10.

Anand, S., Hu, J., Liden, R. C., & Vidyarthi, P. R. (2011). Leader-member exchange: Recent research findings and prospects for the

future. *The Sage handbook of leadership*, 311-325.

- Aycan, Z. (2006). Paternalism: Towards conceptual refinement and operationalization. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*.
- Bedi, A. (2020). A meta-analytic review of paternalistic leadership. *Applied Psychology*, 69(3), 960-1008.
- Blau, P. (2017). *Exchange and power in social life*. Routledge.
- Byrne, Z. S., Peters, J. M., & Weston, J. W. (2016). The struggle with employee engagement: Measures and construct clarification using five samples. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(9), 1201.
- Cheng, B. S., Chou, L. F., Wu, T. Y., Huang, M. P., & Farh, J. L. (2004). Paternalistic leadership and subordinate responses: Establishing a leadership model in Chinese organizations. *Asian journal of social psychology*, 7(1), 89-117.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of management*, 31(6), 874-900.
- Cropanzano, R., Anthony, E. L., Daniels, S. R., & Hall, A. V. (2017). Social exchange theory: A critical review with theoretical remedies. *Academy of management annals*, 11(1), 479-516.
- Erdogan, B., & Bauer, T. N. (2014). 19 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory: The Relational Approach to Leadership. *The Oxford handbook of leadership and organizations*, 407.
- Eyvind Elstad, K. A. C., & Turmo, A. (2011). Social exchange theory as an explanation of organizational citizenship behaviour among teachers. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 14(4), 405-421.
- Farh, J. L., & Cheng, B. S. (2000). A cultural analysis of paternalistic leadership in Chinese organizations. In *Management and organizations in the Chinese context*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

- Fikret Pasa, S., Kabasakal, H., & Bodur, M. (2001). Society, organisations, and leadership in Turkey. *Applied Psychology*, 50(4), 559-589.
- Gerstner, C. R., & Day, D. V. (1997). Meta-Analytic review of leader-member exchange theory: Correlates and construct issues. *Journal of applied psychology*, 82(6), 827.
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The leadership quarterly*, 6(2), 219-247.
- Griffin, K. A. (2012). Black professors managing mentorship: implications of applying social exchange frameworks to analyses of student interactions and their influence on scholarly productivity. *Teachers College Record*, 114(5), 1-37.
- Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2005). What we know about leadership. *Review of general psychology*, 9(2), 169-180.
- Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American journal of sociology*, 63(6), 597-606.
- Jha, S., & Jha, S. (2013). Leader-member exchange: A critique of theory & practice. *Journal of Management and Public Policy*, 4(2), 42-53.
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of management journal*, 33(4), 692-724.
- Klassen, R. M., Yerdelen, S., & Durksen, T. L. (2013). Measuring teacher engagement: development of the engaged teachers scale (ETS). *Frontline Learning Research*, 1(2), 33-52.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 30(3), 607-610.
- Mansur, J., Sobral, F., & Goldszmidt, R. (2017). Shades of paternalistic leadership across cultures. *Journal of World Business*, 52(5), 702-713.
- Pellegrini, E. K., & Scandura, T. A. (2008). Paternalistic leadership: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of management*, 34(3), 566-593.
- Robinson, V. M., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational administration quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness studies*, 3(1), 71-92.
- Silin, R. H. (1976). Leadership and values: The organization of large-scale Taiwanese enterprises. Harvard Univ Asia Center.
- Wagstaff, M. F., Collela, A., Triana, M. D. C., Smith, A. N., & Watkins, M. B. (2015). Subordinates' perceptions of supervisor paternalism: a scale development. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(6), 659-674.
- Zeinabadi, H. R. (2013). Social exchange outcomes of transformational leadership: comparing male and female principals of public primary schools in iran. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(7), 730 - 743.

Authors' Biography:



The researcher currently studies in MEA Program, Graduate School, Stamford International University, her research interest is in the fields of educational administration, school management and educational leadership.