# Leadership Orientations of Secondary School Principals in Assam: A Comparative Study

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## Abstract

*Effective school leadership is fundamental to institutional performance, organizational climate, and professional collaboration. The leadership orientations adopted by school principals significantly shapes decision-making processes, staff motivation, and overall school effectiveness. The present study investigates the leadership orientations of secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati region of Assam, India. It further examines whether leadership practices differ with respect to school management type, gender, and institutional location. A quantitative descriptive design was employed. The sample comprised 30 principals drawn through disproportionate stratified sampling from provincialized and private secondary schools affiliated with the Assam State Board of Secondary Education. The sample ensured representation from urban and rural schools and included both male and female principals. Leadership orientations was assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), administered on a five-point scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. Results indicate that principals generally demonstrate moderate levels across leadership dimensions. Significant differences were observed between principals of provincialized and private institutions as well as between urban and rural schools. However, leadership orientations did not vary significantly by gender. The findings highlight the influence of institutional context on leadership practices in secondary education and provide implications for leadership development initiatives in Assam.*

**Keywords-***Leadership Orientations, Secondary Education, Provincialized and Private schools, Urban and Rural schools, Assam*

## Introduction

Education is a continuous developmental process in which schools function as primary agents of social and intellectual transformation. Within this institutional framework, the leadership exercised by school principals plays a decisive role in shaping organizational climate, professional collaboration and academic outcomes. Effective leadership fosters shared vision, trust and coordinated action, thereby enhancing

institutional performance (Klein et al., 2013; Mbua, 2023). Leadership is broadly understood as the capacity to influence and guide individuals toward collective goals while sustaining motivation and commitment (Okeke et al., 2023; Azubuike, 2024; Ajmi, 2024). In educational settings, this influence extends beyond administrative control to the creation of environments that promote teacher engagement, student achievement and sustained school improvement.

Theoretical perspectives on leadership have evolved from traditional models such as trait, behavioural and contingency theories to contemporary approaches emphasizing transformational, transactional and participatory orientations (Northouse, 2007; Bass, 1995). In schools, these orientations manifest in distinct leadership patterns. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and idealized influence (Bass, 1995; Munir & Khalil, 2016). Transactional leadership relies on structured supervision, contingent rewards, and performance monitoring (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Democratic leadership encourages shared decision-making, whereas authoritarian and laissez-faire approaches reflect varying degrees of control and delegation (Achimugu & Obaka, 2019; Oguche, 2024). Each orientation carries specific implications for teacher morale, accountability, and institutional culture.

Empirical studies consistently affirm the relationship between leadership orientation and school effectiveness. Administrative competence, supervisory skills, and participatory practices have been positively associated with institutional performance (Akomolafe, 2012; Babatunde, 2014; Ogundele et al., 2015). Research employing the MLQ framework highlights the importance of incorporating teacher perceptions when evaluating leadership effectiveness (Munir & Khalil, 2016). Comparative investigations across contexts report that transformational and democratic orientations are frequently linked to improved school climate, teacher commitment and student outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Rasheed et al., 2021; Mbua, 2023; Osagie, 2024). Conversely, laissez-faire leadership is often found to have limited impact, while transactional or even authoritarian approaches may yield context-dependent results (Parveen et al., 2022; Ekpemogu et al., 2023; Almonawer et al., 2023). Recent evidence further suggests that transformational leadership remains prominent among contemporary school leaders and contributes to innovation and collaborative growth (Saima et al., 2025).

Although international scholarship on school leadership is extensive, localized comparative studies within the Indian secondary education context remain limited. In Assam, secondary schools operate under diverse management structures and function across urban and rural settings, potentially shaping principals' leadership orientations. Understanding how leadership patterns vary across these contextual dimensions is essential for informed policy and professional development. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the leadership orientations of secondary school principals in Assam and explores differences across management type, gender and school location. By situating leadership within its institutional and socio-geographical context, the

study seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on educational leadership and its role in strengthening secondary education.

## Statement of the Problem

The present study seeks to examine the leadership orientations of secondary school principals in Assam and to determine whether significant differences exist based on selected organizational and demographic variables. By adopting a comparative perspective, the study aims to generate context-specific insights into leadership practices in secondary education.

Accordingly, the study is titled "***Leadership Orientation of Secondary School Principals in Assam: A Comparative Study***".

## Significance of the Study

Secondary education constitutes a critical phase in the educational continuum, preparing learners for higher studies, employment and responsible citizenship. The effectiveness of this stage depends not only on curriculum and infrastructure but also on the quality of school leadership. Principals, as institutional heads, play a decisive role in shaping organizational climate, strengthening instructional processes and fostering collaborative professional cultures. Their leadership orientations influence teacher commitment, student engagement and overall school performance.

In Assam, secondary schools operate under diverse management structures and socio-geographical contexts. Recent trends indicate a steady growth of private secondary institutions, particularly in the Greater Guwahati region, accompanied by public perceptions regarding differences in administrative efficiency and leadership effectiveness. Such developments make it essential to examine leadership orientations across management types and contextual settings. By comparatively analyzing leadership orientations of principals in provincialized and private secondary schools and examining variations across gender and locality, the present study contributes empirical evidence to the discourse on educational leadership in Assam. The findings are expected to inform policy formulation, leadership preparation programs and professional development initiatives aimed at strengthening secondary school administration.

## Objectives of the Study

The present study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the leadership orientations of principals working in secondary schools in the Greater Guwahati region of Assam.
- To compare the leadership orientations of principals serving in provincialized and private secondary schools.
- To determine whether leadership orientations differ significantly with respect to the gender of principals.
- To analyze differences in principals' leadership orientations based on the locality of the school (urban and rural).

## Hypotheses of the Study

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses:

- **$H_{01}$**: There is no significant difference in leadership orientations between principals of provincialized and private secondary schools.
- **$H_{02}$:** There is no significant difference in leadership orientations of secondary school principals with respect to gender.
- **$H_{03}$:** There is no significant difference in leadership orientations of secondary school principals based on school locality

## Research Method

The study employed a descriptive survey design to obtain data consistent with the stated objectives.

## Population and Sample

The population comprised principals of provincialized and private secondary schools affiliated with the Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA) within the Greater Guwahati region. Using disproportionate stratified random sampling, 30 principals were selected to ensure representation across key variables. The sample included 15 principals from provincialized schools and 15 from private schools. In terms of gender, 17 respondents were male and 13 were female. With respect to locality, 15 schools were urban and 15 were rural. A disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure meaningful comparison across key subgroups. The population of provincialized and private secondary schools in the Greater Guwahati area is unequal; therefore, proportional sampling would have resulted in underrepresentation of one group. To address this limitation and enhance comparative validity, an equal number of principals (15 provincialized and 15 private) were deliberately selected. Similar stratification was applied for gender and school location to ensure balanced representation. This approach improved analytical clarity and strengthened the internal validity of the study.

## Tools Used

The study employed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ–5X) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). The instrument consists of 45 items designed to measure transformational, transactional, and non-transformational (laissez-faire) leadership orientations. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The MLQ is widely used in educational leadership research and has demonstrated high reliability and construct validity. A pilot study was conducted to ensure clarity and suitability of the instrument in the local context.

## Administration of the Instrument

Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire. The investigator

personally contacted each principal, explained the purpose of the study, and provided instructions for completing the instrument. Respondents were given adequate time to respond, and confidentiality was assured.

## Statistical Techniques

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including:

- Percentage (%)
- Mean (M)
- Standard Deviation (SD)
- Independent samples t-test

## Results

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the objectives of the study. The responses were organized, classified, and statistically analyzed to obtain meaningful insights into the leadership orientations of secondary school principals.

**Table-1**
**Descriptive Statistics of Principals' Leadership Orientations as perceived by Leader**

| Sr. No. | Principals' Leadership Orientations | N | Min. | Max. | Mean | S.D. |
|---------|-------------------------------------|-----|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. | Leadership Orientations (Composite Score) | 30 | 84 | 131 | 108.2 | 12.45 |
| 2. | Transformational Leadership | 30 | 57 | 79 | 69.54 | 8.63 |
| 3. | Transactional Leadership | 30 | 32 | 49 | 42.31 | 5.43 |
| 4. | Non-Transformational Leadership | 30 | 0 | 8 | 2.7 | 2.6 |

## Interpretation

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of principals' leadership orientations based on composite and dimensional scores. The mean composite leadership score of 108.2 (SD = 12.45) indicates that, overall, principals demonstrated a moderate level of leadership effectiveness. Among the leadership dimensions, transformational leadership recorded the highest mean score (M = 69.54, SD = 8.63), suggesting that principals more frequently practiced behaviours such as inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Transactional leadership showed a comparatively lower mean score (M = 42.31, SD = 5.43), indicating moderate reliance on contingent rewards and supervisory mechanisms. Non-transformational

(laissez-faire) leadership recorded the lowest mean (M = 2.7, SD = 2.6), reflecting minimal use of passive or avoidant leadership practices. Overall, the results suggest a stronger inclination toward transformational leadership than transactional or non-transformational orientations.

**Table-2**
**Percentage Distribution of Principals' Leadership Orientations from Leader perspective**

| Range of Scores | Level | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| P80 and above | Excellent | 2 | 6.7% |
| P66 – P79 | Good | 8 | 26.7% |
| P35 – P65 | Average | 12 | 40% |
| P21 – P34 | Poor | 4 | 13.3% |
| P20 and below | Very Poor | 4 | 13.3% |

## Interpretation

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of principals' leadership orientations across five performance categories based on composite scores. The analysis reveals that a small proportion of principals (6.7%) demonstrated an excellent level of leadership orientation, while 26.7% were categorized as good. The largest segment (40%) fell within the average category, indicating a moderate level of leadership effectiveness among most respondents. Additionally, 13.3% of principals were classified as poor and an equal proportion (13.3%) as very poor in their leadership orientation. Overall, the distribution suggests that although a minority of principals exhibit high leadership effectiveness, the majority function at a moderate level, with a notable proportion requiring improvement in leadership practices and professional development to achieve higher effectiveness

**Table-3**
**Percentage Distribution of Different Dimensions of Principals' Leadership Orientations from Leader Perspective**

| Range of Scores | Level | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Excellent | 3 | 10% |
| | Good | 6 | 20% |
| Transformational | Average | 14 | 46.6% |
| | Poor | 4 | 13.4% |
| | Very Poor | 3 | 10% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transactional | Excellent | - | 0% |
| | Good | 5 | 16.7% |
| | Average | 13 | 43.3% |
| | Poor | 8 | 26.7% |
| | Very Poor | 4 | 13.3% |
| Non-Transactional | Excellent | - | 0% |
| | Good | 3 | 10% |
| | Average | 9 | 30% |
| | Poor | 13 | 43.3% |
| | Very Poor | 5 | 16.7% |

## Interpretation

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of principals leadership orientations across levels of performance for each leadership dimension. For transformational leadership, 10% of principals were rated excellent, 20% good, and nearly half (46.6%) average. Smaller proportions fell into the poor (13.4%) and very poor (10%) categories. This indicates that transformational practices are present but are demonstrated at a moderate level by most principals. In the case of transactional leadership, none of the principals reached the excellent category. While 16.7% were rated good and 43.3% average, a substantial proportion were categorized as poor (26.7%) and very poor (13.3%). This suggests moderate reliance on structured supervision and reward-based management, though effectiveness varies. For non-transactional (passive/avoidant) leadership, no principal achieved an excellent rating. Only 10% were classified as good and 30% as average, whereas the majority were rated poor (43.3%) and a substantial portion were categorised as very poor (16.7%). This pattern indicates that passive leadership behaviours are generally minimal Overall, the distribution across dimensions suggests a predominance of transformational orientations at a moderate level, limited strength in transactional practices, and minimal presence of passive leadership tendencies.

**Table-4**
**Comparison of Leadership Orientations Between Provincialized and Private School Principals**

| Sample Group | Sample Size (N) | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Provincialized | 15 | 109.45 | 11.41 | 2.23 (S) |
| Private | 15 | 115.88 | 8.69 | |

**Interpretation**

Table 4 presents a comparison of leadership orientations between principals of provincialized and private secondary schools. The mean leadership orientations score for private school principals (M = 115.88, SD = 8.69) was higher than that of provincialized school principals (M = 109.45, SD = 11.41). The obtained t-value (2.23) exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance (df = 28), indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. This result suggests that principals of private secondary schools demonstrate comparatively stronger or more effective leadership orientations than those serving in provincialized schools.

**Table-5**
**Comparison of Leadership Orientations by Gender**

| Sample Group | Sample Size (N) | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 17 | 109.66 | 12.33 | 1.92 (NS) |
| Female | 13 | 117.45 | 8.26 | |

**Interpretation**

Table 5 compares leadership orientations of secondary school principals based on gender. Female principals obtained a higher mean score (M = 117.45, SD = 8.26) than their male counterparts (M = 109.66, SD = 12.33). However, the calculated t-value (1.92) does not exceed the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance (df = 28) indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. This finding suggests that leadership orientations do not differ meaningfully between male and female principals implying that gender is not a determining factor in leadership orientation within the study context.

**Table-6**
**Comparison of Leadership Orientations by Location**

| Sample Group | Sample Size (N) | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 15 | 111.00 | 12.24 | 2.47 (S) |
| Rural | 15 | 114.20 | 8.25 | |

**Interpretation**

Table 6 presents the comparison of leadership orientations of principals based on school location. Principals serving in rural schools recorded a higher mean score (M = 114.20, SD = 8.25) than those in urban schools (M = 111.00, SD = 12.24). The calculated t-value (2.47) exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance (df = 28)   indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. This finding suggests that leadership orientations vary by geographical context with rural school principals demonstrating comparatively stronger leadership orientation than their urban counterparts.

## Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that principals demonstrated a moderate overall level of leadership orientations with transformational leadership emerging as the most prominent dimension. This predominance aligns with research highlighting transformational practices as key drivers of school improvement, teacher commitment, and positive institutional climate (Ibrahim et al.,, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2021; Mbua, 2023; Osagie, 2024; Saima et al., 2025). The comparatively lower presence of transactional leadership suggests moderate reliance on supervisory and reward-based mechanisms, while the minimal expression of non-transformational (laissez-faire) behaviours indicates that passive leadership tendencies are not characteristic of the principals studied. This pattern supports earlier findings that laissez-faire leadership has limited effectiveness in educational settings (Ekpemogu et al., 2023).

The distribution of leadership levels further shows that most principals function within an average effectiveness range with relatively few demonstrating highly effective leadership. This supports the view that leadership effectiveness is closely tied to administrative competence, supervisory skills, and participatory practices (Akomolafe, 2012; Babatunde, 2014; Ogundele et al., 2015). It also underscores the need for professional development initiatives that strengthen leadership capacity. Significant differences were observed between provincialized and private school principals with private school leaders demonstrating stronger leadership orientation. This may reflect differences in institutional autonomy, accountability structures and performance expectations. Similar context-dependent leadership variations have been noted in comparative studies of educational institutions (Almonawer et al., 2023; Parveen et al., 2022). In contrast, gender did not significantly influence leadership orientations indicating that leadership orientation is not determined by gender but by professional competence and contextual engagement. A significant difference was also found based on school location, with rural principals demonstrating comparatively stronger leadership orientation than urban counterparts. This may reflect contextual demands that require rural school leaders to adopt more adaptive and participatory leadership approaches to address resource constraints and community expectations.

## Conclusion

Leadership orientation is a critical determinant of school effectiveness which helps in shaping school climate, strengthening teacher commitment and improving student outcomes. The findings indicate that secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati region demonstrate a moderate overall level of leadership orientation, with transformational leadership emerging as the dominant and most effective approach. Transactional practices were applied at a moderate level, while non-transformational tendencies were minimal. Although a small proportion of principals exhibited high leadership effectiveness, a considerable number functioned

within average to lower performance ranges, particularly in transactional and passive dimensions. A significant difference was observed between school management types with private school principals demonstrating stronger leadership orientations than their provincialized counterparts, possibly reflecting differences in accountability structures and organizational expectations. Gender did not significantly influence leadership orientations suggesting that leadership effectiveness is independent of sex. However, school location emerged as a significant factor with rural principals displaying comparatively stronger leadership characteristics, potentially due to closer community interaction and greater contextual responsiveness. Overall, the study underscores the need for context-sensitive leadership development initiatives that strengthen transformational competencies. Coordinated efforts among policymakers, educational authorities, and professional training institutions are essential to build leadership capacity and sustain school improvement across diverse institutional settings. Emphasizing transformational and participatory practices in leadership development programmes can enhance both academic and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings, several measures are suggested to strengthen leadership orientations among secondary school principals in the Greater Guwahati area. The selection and appointment process should give priority to candidates with formal leadership training, administrative competence and relevant professional experience. Emphasis should be placed on ethical conduct, professional integrity and the development of constructive relationships with teaching and non-teaching staff. Principals should promote systematic planning, effective organization of academic and co-curricular activities and participatory decision-making practices to enhance institutional functioning.

Continuous professional development is essential for strengthening leadership capacity. Regular in-service training, leadership workshops, seminars, and refresher courses should be institutionalized to foster transformational leadership competencies. Mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding exemplary leadership practices may further motivate principals to sustain high standards of performance. Future research may extend this work by examining principals' administrative and managerial functions across different educational levels including supervision, financial management and organizational climate.

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