

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STYLES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: AN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE BASED ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

Panbo Li*

Department of Educational Administration, International College, Rattana Bundit University,
Bangkok, 10240, Thailand

*Corresponding Author E-mail: 1633678427@.com

Sarawut Chandeewanta

Department of Educational Administration, International College, Rattana Bundit University,
Bangkok, 10240, Thailand

Sompop Jermkhuntod

Department of Educational Administration, International College, Rattana Bundit University,
Bangkok, 10240, Thailand

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the deepening implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy and the shift in educational development toward connotation construction and quality improvement, the classroom—as the basic unit of school organization—and teachers’ classroom management styles have become critical factors influencing students’ academic engagement. This study moves beyond isolated examinations of specific teaching behaviors and, from an integrated “educational leadership” perspective, systematically investigates the mechanisms by which elementary school teachers’ classroom management styles influence their perceptions of class-level students’ academic engagement. Drawing on an integrated framework of social cognitive theory, transformational leadership theory, and self-determination theory, this study employs a quantitative research paradigm and conducts a census of all in-service teachers at a public elementary school in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China. Using self-developed scales—the Teacher Classroom Management Style Scale (comprising three dimensions: democratic-supportive, rule-controlled, and permissive-detached) and the Classroom Student Academic Engagement Assessment Scale—78 valid paired responses were collected. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, and analysis of variance. Key findings include: (1) Democratic-supportive management style showed a strong positive correlation with class-level academic engagement ($r=.68, p<.01$), emerging as the strongest predictor of high academic engagement; (2) Rule-controlled style exhibited a weak but significant negative correlation with academic engagement ($r=-.22, p<.05$), suggesting that reliance solely on external control has limited effectiveness in promoting deep engagement; (3) Permissive-detached style demonstrated a moderate negative correlation with academic engagement ($r=-.45, p<.01$), confirming it as a clear risk factor undermining academic engagement; (4) Teachers with 6-15 years of experience (mid-career backbone teachers) scored highest on democratic-supportive style; homeroom teachers rated their class’s academic engagement significantly higher than non-homeroom teachers. This study confirms that teachers’ classroom management styles are critical process variables influencing students’ academic engagement, with the democratic-supportive style demonstrating exceptional efficacy. These findings suggest that, in the context of the “Double Reduction” policy, school administrators should elevate the development of teachers’ “classroom leadership”—particularly democratic, supportive, and

empowering leadership behaviors—to a strategic position equal to subject teaching competency. By establishing data-driven management diagnostic systems and designing targeted professional development programs, schools can systematically facilitate teachers' transformation into “transformational classroom leaders,” thereby improving macro-level educational quality through optimizing micro-level management practices.

Keywords: Classroom management styles, Academic engagement, Elementary school teachers, Educational leadership, Democratic support, Correlational study

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the global focus of educational development has undergone a profound transformation from “input-driven” to “process- and efficacy-oriented” paradigms. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its report *Education 2030: The Future of Education and Skills*, explicitly states that the core competitiveness of future education systems will no longer depend on the abundance of resource reserves, but rather on their capacity to cultivate learners' advanced competencies in coping with uncertainty, solving complex problems, engaging in critical thinking, and collaborating innovatively (OECD, 2018). This paradigm shift requires education systems worldwide to focus their attention on the “black box” where education actually occurs—the classroom.

Within the Chinese context, the issuance of the *Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students* (hereinafter referred to as the “Double Reduction” policy) in July 2021 marks China's basic education ecosystem's entry into the deep-water zone of systemic restructuring and structural optimization. The underlying logic of this policy extends far beyond simple “reduction”; its strategic intent lies in systematically reshaping and structurally optimizing the basic education ecology (Yu, 2021). By regulating the off-campus training market and strengthening schools' role as the primary 育人阵地, the policy aims to compel schools to return to the essence of education and comprehensively improve the quality of in-school instruction. In this context, whether schools can achieve genuine “quality and efficiency improvement” through optimizing micro-management processes and stimulating students' intrinsic motivation has become critical to evaluating the policy's success.

The classroom serves as the “cell” of school organization—the core arena where educational philosophies translate into concrete actions and educational goals materialize. Teachers' roles extend far beyond “knowledge transmitters”; they essentially act as managers and leaders of this learning community (Louis et al., 2010). Teachers' classroom management styles—the relatively stable, comprehensive tendencies manifested in their daily educational practices to create classroom environments, guide student behavior, and establish interpersonal relationships, integrating their personal educational philosophies, emotional attitudes, behavioral strategies, and relational patterns—constitute the most direct and pervasive “organizational climate” in students' school lives. Simultaneously, student academic engagement, as a multidimensional construct integrating behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, has been extensively validated as a key predictor of students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and sustained learning motivation, serving as a “barometer” reflecting the quality of school educational processes and internal effectiveness (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Although existing research has separately confirmed the positive effects of teacher support behaviors, positive teacher-student relationships, and classroom environments on individual student engagement, several research gaps persist: First, insufficient conceptual integration. Most studies examine isolated teacher behaviors or broad constructs such as “teacher-student relationship quality,” lacking systematic investigation from an integrated, trait-like “leadership style” perspective. Second, weak mechanism exploration. Empirical testing of how management styles influence academic engagement—particularly examining basic psychological needs from self-determination theory as core psychological mechanisms—remains scarce in domestic research. Third, level mismatch. Numerous studies measure students’ individual perceptions of teacher behaviors and individual student engagement, while few assess teachers’ self-perceived management styles and relate them to their evaluations of class-level engagement—a logic more aligned with organizational management evaluation paradigms.

Addressing these gaps, this study adopts an integrated educational management perspective situated within the contemporary context of the deepening “Double Reduction” policy and high-quality educational development, aiming to answer the following core research question: How do elementary school teachers’ different classroom management styles influence their perceived class-level student academic engagement.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the overall characteristics of elementary school teachers’ classroom management styles (democratic-supportive, rule-controlled, and permissive-detached) and their distribution across demographic variables;
2. To investigate the correlations and predictive effects between the three dimensions of teachers’ classroom management styles and class-level student academic engagement;
3. To provide evidence-based decision-making references for school administrators to optimize teacher development and enhance teachers’ classroom leadership.

Conceptual Framework

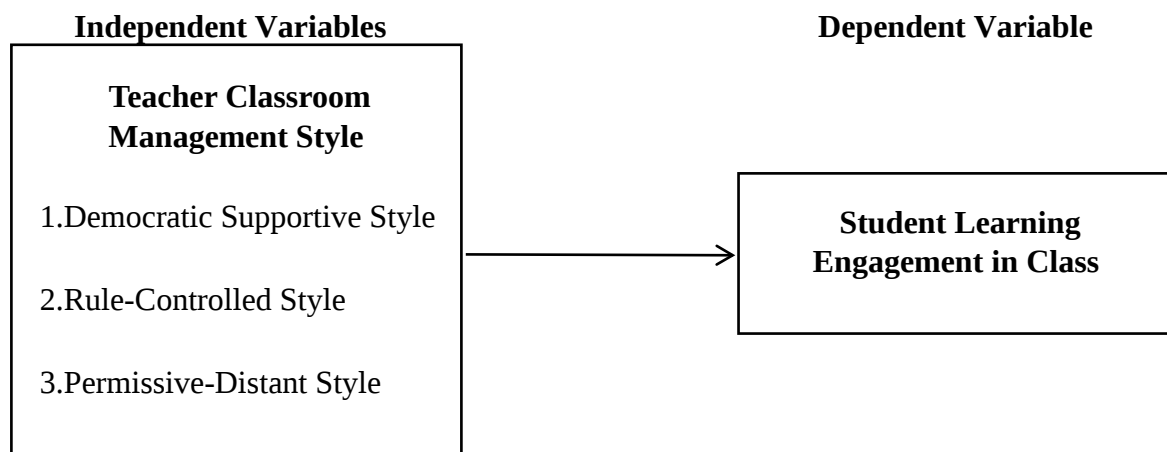


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Diagram

Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and relevant literature, this study proposes the following testable hypotheses:

H₁: Teachers' classroom management styles significantly predict their perceived class-level student academic engagement, with different styles exhibiting differential directions and strengths of effects.

H₂: Teachers with different background characteristics exhibit significant differences in their classroom management styles.

H₃: Teachers' evaluations of class-level academic engagement are influenced by their own role characteristics. It is hypothesized that homeroom teachers, due to greater emotional investment and responsibility for their classes, tend to evaluate their class's academic engagement more positively.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm and Design

This study is grounded in the positivist research paradigm and primarily employs quantitative research methods. The research design adopts a non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational survey design, conducting observations and measurements in naturally occurring educational settings, collecting data at a single time point, aiming to reveal correlational relationships between variables while providing inferential evidence regarding possible causal directions based on robust theoretical logic.

Population and Sample

The target population of this study comprised all in-service teachers undertaking classroom teaching or management responsibilities at XX Elementary School in Kunming City, Yunnan Province. This school was selected based on the following principles: (1) Typicality principle: This medium-sized public elementary school in Kunming exhibits 师资 composition (age, professional titles), management level, and student characteristics representative of similar local schools; (2) Accessibility and cooperation principle: The researcher secured full understanding, support, and formal permission from school administration, providing necessary administrative and organizational guarantees for conducting a census of all teachers; (3) Management diagnostic value (action research orientation): Conducting in-depth, comprehensive census research at a single school enabled research findings to be directly fed back to the school, generating a precise diagnostic report on the school's own "classroom leadership" ecology, thereby integrating academic research with practical school management improvement.

This study employed a census approach, surveying all 82 frontline teachers in the target population. Ultimately, 78 valid questionnaires were recovered, yielding a valid response rate of 95.1%. The sample covered all teaching experience categories, professional title levels, homeroom and non-homeroom teachers, and all major subject areas, adequately representing the overall structure of the school's teacher workforce.

Research Instruments

Teacher Classroom Management Style Scale (Self-Developed)

Theoretically grounded in Baumrind's "demand-response" two-dimensional model and informed by descriptions of leader behaviors in classroom climate research (e.g., Patrick

et al., 2011) and transformational/transactional leadership theory, the scale initially comprised three distinct dimensions with five items each, totaling 15 items. A Likert 5-point scale (1 = “completely inconsistent,” 5 = “completely consistent”) was employed. Following pilot testing (N=35) and formal administration, the scale demonstrated good reliability and validity: total scale Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$, dimension α coefficients: democratic-supportive 0.84, rule-controlled 0.81, permissive-detached 0.79. Exploratory factor analysis extracted three factors with eigenvalues >1 , cumulatively explaining 73.5% of variance. Item factor loadings on their assumption dimensions all exceeded 0.60 without significant cross-loadings (<0.40), yielding a factor structure highly consistent with the theoretical three-dimensional conceptualization.

Classroom Student Academic Engagement Assessment Scale (Self-Developed)

Focusing on the behavioral dimension of academic engagement and referencing Fredricks et al.’s (2004) conceptualization of behavioral engagement integrated with common manifestations in Chinese elementary classrooms, eight items were developed to assess class-level behavioral performance in attention, persistence, initiative, and participation. A Likert 5-point scale (1-5) was employed. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$). Exploratory factor analysis extracted one factor with eigenvalue >1 , explaining 66.8% of variance, consistent with its unidimensional design conceptualization.

Expert Validity

Five domain experts (two professors of educational administration, two senior elementary school principals/distinguished teachers with advanced professional titles, and one educational statistics and measurement specialist) were invited to evaluate initial items for content validity index (CVI). Experts rated each item’s relevance to its affiliation dimension (1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, 3 = highly relevant). Following Lynn’s (1986) criteria, items with I-CVI values >0.78 (i.e., rated highly relevant by over four experts) were retained. Based on expert feedback (e.g., ambiguous phrasing, potential ambiguity, misalignment with elementary school realities), item wording was revised and refined. All ultimately retained 15 management style items and 8 academic engagement items achieved I-CVI values ≥ 0.80 , indicating good content validity.

Data Collection Procedures

1. Preliminary preparation and permission: Obtained formal written consent and support from XX Elementary School’s principal and management committee. Before initiating research, school leadership briefly introduced research purpose and significance during a all members faculty meeting, emphasizing anonymity and voluntary participation to alleviate teacher concerns.

2. Questionnaire distribution: An anonymous online questionnaire link and QR code were distributed via the school’s internal work groups (e.g., WeChat work groups, DingTalk groups) using the professional platform “Questionnaire Star.” The questionnaire homepage featured detailed Research Explanation and Informed Consent.

3. Implementation: The online questionnaire remained open for one week. To encourage participation and enhance response rates, the school office issued one gentle reminder midway through the research period, reiterating the research’s value for school development and teacher professional growth, and expressing gratitude for participation.

4. Data recovery and processing: The online platform automatically collected and preliminarily organized data. Following questionnaire closure, the researcher exported raw

data and conducted rigorous cleaning: verifying completion time (excluding extremely short completions), examining patterned responses, confirming absence of missing values (all valid questionnaires in this study contained no missing critical items). Finally, data were fully anonymized (removing IP addresses, submission timestamps, and any potential personal identifiers), generating the final analytical dataset.

This study strictly adhered to social science research ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality principles, and data security.

Data Analysis Strategy

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0, progressing from basic to advanced levels and closely on research hypotheses, with specific strategies as follows:

1. Descriptive statistics: Frequencies and percentages described sample demographic characteristic distributions; means (M), standard deviations (SD), skewness, and kurtosis were calculated for core research variables (three-dimensional management style scores, total academic engagement score) to understand central tendency, dispersion, and distribution shapes, assessing approximate normality assumptions for parametric tests.

2. Reliability and validity testing: Cronbach's α coefficients assessed internal consistency reliability; correlational analyses and Harman's single-factor test evaluated structural validity and common method bias.

3. Core analysis: Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was primarily employed to examine linear relationships between continuous variables—the most direct and appropriate method for addressing core research questions. This included: (a) calculating pairwise correlations among the three dimensions of teacher classroom management style to further validate scale validity (expected negative correlations between democratic-supportive and the other two dimensions); (b) core analysis: calculating Pearson correlation coefficients (r) between scores on the three teacher classroom management style dimensions and class-level student academic engagement total scores. Interpretation followed Cohen's (1988) guidelines: absolute correlation coefficients around .10 = weak, around .30 = moderate, $\geq .50$ = strong. This analysis directly tested Hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c.

4. Supplementary analysis: Independent samples t-tests compared mean differences between two independent groups on continuous variables (e.g., homeroom vs. non-homeroom teachers on management style dimensions and academic engagement evaluations, corresponding to H2b and H3). One-way ANOVA compared mean differences among three or more independent groups on continuous variables (e.g., different teaching experience groups [≤ 5 years, 6-15 years, ≥ 16 years] on management style dimensions, corresponding to H2a). When ANOVA F-tests reached significance ($p < .05$), LSD post-hoc multiple comparisons identified specific groups with significant differences.

All statistical analyses employed two-tailed tests with significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Research Results and Discussion

Sample Composition and Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Descriptive statistics reveal: Democratic-supportive style scored highest ($M=4.15$), significantly above the theoretical median, with relatively small standard deviation (0.58), indicating that this teacher population generally and consistently tend to adopt democratic, supportive management approaches; Rule-controlled style scored slightly above the median

($M=3.40$), suggesting that rule and discipline management still occupy a place in daily practice, though individual differences are somewhat larger ($SD=0.71$); Permissive-detached style scored lowest ($M=1.89$), far below the median, with small standard deviation, indicating that the vast majority of teachers actively fulfill management responsibilities; Class-level academic engagement overall evaluation mean was 3.95, at a relatively high level, indicating that teachers hold generally positive views of their classes' learning behavior states. All variables' absolute skewness and kurtosis values were <1 , indicating approximately normal data distributions satisfying basic assumptions for subsequent parametric tests.

Core Hypothesis Testing: Correlation Analysis of Management Styles and Academic Engagement

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Main Variables ($N=78$)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Democratic-Supportive Style	1			
2. Rule-Controlled Style	-.25*	1		
3. Permissive-Detached Style	-.42**	.18	1	
4. Class-Level Student Academic Engagement	.68**	-.22*	-.45**	1

Note: $p<.05$, $p<.01$ (two-tailed).

This strong association perfectly exemplifies transformational leadership in the educational micro-setting and receives profound motivational explanation through self-determination theory. Democratic-supportive teachers embody transformational leaders in classroom guise—through idealized influence (role modeling, becoming students' admired, respected, and trusted moral and professional exemplars), inspirational motivation (conveying attractive visions, communicating high expectations, demonstrating optimism to motivate student enthusiasm and effort), intellectual stimulation (encouraging questioning, innovation, critical thinking, re-examining assumptions), and individualized consideration (attending to individual students' needs, emotions, and development, acting as mentors and friends). This leadership approach transcends transaction-based management, employing vision, trust, and empowerment rather than power and control. From the self-determination theory perspective, this style's efficacy stems fundamentally from systematically satisfying students' three basic psychological needs: autonomy needs satisfied through teacher-granted choice rights and respect; competence needs nurtured through scaffolded support and positive feedback; relatedness needs realized within warm, secure teacher-student and peer relationships. When these deep psychological needs are met, students experience robust intrinsic motivation—learning not to please teachers or avoid punishment, but arising from curiosity, interest, and self-growth aspirations. This finding aligns consistently with related international and domestic research (Wentzel, 2002; Walker, 2009; Yu & Xin, 2020) and provides a crucial managerial lever for classroom quality and efficiency improvement in the “Double Reduction” context.

This result reveals a classic tension in educational management—the potential conflict between external control and intrinsic motivation. Undeniably, clear, consistent rules and expectations constitute foundations for effective classroom operation, particularly for lower grades or during initial class establishment phases, providing sense of security and predictability. However, when management excessive relies on external monitoring, punishment and rewards, emphasizes unconditional compliance lack of flexibility, negotiation, and reasoned explanation (i.e., sliding toward the “authoritarian” pole), negative effects emerge. According to self-determination theory, this style primarily induces external regulation (learning for rewards) or introjected regulation (learning to avoid guilt). These controlled motivation forms are fragile, prone to diminishing engagement once external pressure disappear or setbacks encountered, and particularly detrimental to deep thinking, creativity, and sustained enthusiasm cognitive and emotional engagement (Assor et al., 2002). Within Chinese educational culture, the traditional notion “strict teachers produce outstanding students” (Stringent training fosters excellent pupils) remains deeply ingrained. This study’s findings remind us to dialectically examine “strictness”: effective “strictness” must integrate with high “support” (i.e., high demand + high response democratic-authoritative style); otherwise, it may alienate into “control” that suppresses student autonomy, creativity, and learning enthusiasm, contradicting contemporary demands for cultivating innovative talent.

From an organizational management perspective, permissive-detached style equates to leader “role absence” or “responsibility avoidance.” This style comprehensively thwarts students’ three basic psychological needs: lack of guidance leads to competence deficits; absence of choice leads to autonomy void; emotional indifference leads to belonging collapse. Within such classroom environments, student collectives readily sink into goal ambiguity, unmotivated “organizational inertia” states, with low class collective efficacy beliefs (“our class can’t do it”). This not only leads to low academic engagement but may also trigger more discipline problems and psychological alienation (Fredricks et al., 2004). School management must highly prioritize this signal, providing timely supportive interventions for teachers exhibiting such tendencies.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Classroom Management Styles by Teaching Experience

Management Style Dimension	Teaching Experience Group	n	Mean (M)	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc (LSD)
Democratic-Supportive	A: ≤5 years	20	3.95	0.62	3.15	.048	B > A
	B: 6-15 years	33	4.28	0.52			
	C: ≥16 years	25	4.10	0.58			
Rule-Controlled	A: ≤5 years	20	3.55	0.75	0.76	.472	n.s.
	B: 6-15 years	33	3.32	0.74			
	C: ≥16 years	25	3.42	0.66			
Permissive-Detached	A: ≤5 years	20	2.02	0.71	0.84	.436	n.s.
	B: 6-15 years	33	1.80	0.62			
	C: ≥16 years	25	1.90	0.65			

This finding aligns with general patterns of teacher professional development. Novice teachers (≤5 years) typically are in “survival concern” stages, focusing on mastering basic classroom control and instructional process, with management styles potentially more rule-

dependent or still exploratory, lacking proficiency in democratic-supportive strategies. Mid-career backbone teachers (6-15 years) have transcended this stage, accumulating sufficient management experience and instructional confidence, are energetic, pursuing pedagogical innovation “mature periods,” possessing greater capability and willingness to practice more complex, humanistic democratic leadership arts. Although expert teacher (≥ 16 years) group means slightly exceeded novice groups, the difference did not reach significance, possibly related to career plateau phenomena, role burnout, or increased administrative responsibilities at this stage. These findings suggest that professional development emphases should differ across developmental stages: for novice teachers, foundational concepts of democracy, respect, and relationship building should be instilled from the outset; for backbone teachers, advanced workshops on “transformational classroom leadership” should be offered, training empowerment communication, student self-management, and other advanced strategies.

Table 3: Comparison of Homeroom and Non-Homeroom Teachers (Independent Samples t-Test)

Variable	Role	n	Mean (M)	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Democratic-Supportive Style	Homeroom	42	4.22	0.54	1.29	.202	0.29
	Non-Homeroom	36	4.07	0.62			
Rule-Controlled Style	Homeroom	42	3.52	0.69	1.74	.086	0.40
	Non-Homeroom	36	3.26	0.72			
Permissive-Detached Style	Homeroom	42	1.82	0.62	-1.14	.258	-0.26
	Non-Homeroom	36	1.97	0.68			
Class Academic Engagement Evaluation	Homeroom	42	4.08	0.66	1.99	.049	0.45
	Non-Homeroom	36	3.80	0.70			

This finding may stem from two sources: first, evaluation perspective differences—homeroom teachers interact more with their classes, possess deeper understanding, and invest greater emotional resources, potentially generating more positive cognitive filters (“my class is better”); second, genuine effect differences—homeroom teachers’ actual managerial authority, time and energy invested, and deep involvement in class cultural construction may genuinely enhance class cohesion and surface order to some degree, thereby influencing their overall evaluations. This finding reminds school administrators to prudently consider potential systematic biases arising from role factors when utilizing teacher evaluation data for management diagnostics or performance assessment; simultaneously, it suggests sufficient recognizing homeroom teachers’ unique contributions and responsibility burdens in class construction.

Research Recommendations

Summary of Research Conclusions

Based on empirical investigation and systematic analysis of 78 teachers at XX Elementary School in Kunming, this study draws the following core conclusions:

1. Current Status Diagnostic Conclusions: Within the sample school, democratic-supportive classroom management style has become the mainstream and highly identifies practical orientation among the teacher population ($M=4.15$), with teachers generally exhibiting very low permissive-detached tendencies ($M=1.89$). Teachers hold generally positive evaluations of their classes’ learning behavior engagement levels ($M=3.95$).

2. Relationship Validation Conclusions: Teachers' classroom management styles constitute key variables influencing their perceived class-level student academic engagement, exhibiting clear and differentiated correlational patterns:

Democratic-supportive style is the strongest facilitative factor for student academic engagement ($r=.68, p<.01$), explaining 46% of variance;

Permissive-detached style is a clear inhibitory factor for student academic engagement ($r=-.45, p<.01$), explaining 20% of variance;

Rule-controlled style shows a weak but significant negative correlation with academic engagement ($r=-.22, p<.05$), suggesting limited benefits from its isolated use for promoting deep engagement.

3. Group Difference Conclusions: Teaching experience significantly influences democratic-supportive style utilization levels, with mid-career backbone teachers (6-15 years) demonstrating the most prominent performance; homeroom teacher role does not entail significant differences in management styles but leads to significantly more optimistic evaluations of class academic engagement, suggesting role-related evaluation bias or genuine responsibility effects.

4. Theoretical Integration Conclusions: This study preliminarily validates the reasonableness of an integrated analytical framework combining educational leadership theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory. Teachers' leadership behaviors (management styles), through shaping classroom psychosocial environments (particularly satisfying/thwarting students' basic psychological needs), influence students' collective behavioral manifestations (academic engagement). This "manager → organizational environment → member performance" pathway provides a powerful management science explanatory model for understanding classroom management effectiveness.

Implications and Recommendations for Educational Management Practice Strategic and Institutional Recommendations for School Administrators:

1. Establish "Classroom Leadership" as a Core Teacher Professional Competency, Incorporate into School Development Planning:

Schools should explicitly position "classroom leadership and management ability" at an equally strategic level with subject teaching competency in official documents, teacher recruitment, evaluation criteria, and professional development systems. Advocate and support teachers' role transformation from "teaching experts" to "holistic education specialists," and paradigm shift from "discipline maintainers" to "transformational classroom leaders."

2. Construct "Data-Driven" Regular Assessment and Feedback Systems for Classroom Management Effectiveness:

Regular census: Conduct anonymous censuses each academic year or semester using simplified management style and classroom climate diagnostic tools, establishing our school teacher classroom leadership norm databases and tracking dynamic changes;

Multi-source evaluation: Integrate structured classroom observations by instructional administrators (focusing on teacher-student interaction patterns, student participation), anonymous student questionnaire feedback (perceived teacher support, classroom autonomy), and teacher self-assessments and reflections to form comprehensive, process-oriented evaluation portraits of teacher classroom management effectiveness;

Developmental feedback: Evaluation results serve primarily for one-on-one developmental conversations between principals/grade leaders and teachers, and seminar

within teaching research groups, helping teachers identify strengths, clarify improvement areas, and formulate personal development plans.

3. Design and Implement Tiered, Targeted “Classroom Leadership” Professional Development Programs:

For novice teachers (≤5 years): Focus on foundational classroom management rules and routines training, while simultaneously instilling concepts of democracy, respect, and relationship building from the outset, avoiding path dependency on “high-pressure control”;

For backbone teachers (6-15 years): Offer advanced “Transformational Classroom Leadership” workshops training empowerment communication, student self-management, class council meetings, personalized motivation and feedback, democratic decision-making, and other advanced strategies, systematizing and theorizing their rich management experiences;

For all teachers: Regularly organize “Classroom Management Case Salons” or “Educational Narrative Sharing Sessions,” encouraging teachers to share successful experiences and solutions to thorny problems, making tacit knowledge explicit and school-based, fostering learning community atmospheres;

For teachers exhibiting permissive tendencies: Establish “Classroom Management Diagnosis and Support” green channels, providing peer coaching and follow-up support from experienced homeroom teachers or instructional administrators.

4. Optimize School Organizational Culture, Empower Teachers to Practice

Democratic-Supportive Leadership: School leadership should themselves pioneer servant and distributed leadership styles, trusting teachers and granting them appropriate autonomy in classroom management and instructional innovation. Establish support systems that provide teachers with necessary resources (time, assistants, training opportunities, psychological support), reduce non-instructional burdens, and create safe, supportive organizational atmospheres where teachers dare to innovate, enjoy exploration, and are unafraid of making mistakes. Only when schools lead teachers with democratic support can teachers lead students with democratic support.

Action Recommendations for Individual Teacher Professional Development:

1. Deepen Role Cognition, Proactively Cultivate “Leader” Consciousness:

Teachers should consciously transform from “I am assigned to manage a class” to “I am the leader of this learning community.” Actively reflect on how their leadership behaviors can enhance team (class) effectiveness, cohesion, and each member’s growth, regarding leadership as professional competency equally important as teaching ability.

2. Conduct Self-Reflection and Deliberate Practice on Management Styles:

Teachers can utilize this study’s dimensional descriptions for self-examination, identifying their dominant styles and impacts on students. Consciously increase democratic-supportive behaviors in daily work: for example, attempt one empowering question daily (“How do you think this problem could be solved?”); organize one brief class council meeting weekly; provide empathy and understanding before criticism or correction; collaboratively discuss and formulate rules with students while explaining their underlying educational values.

3. Establish Learning-Centered Evaluation Perspectives:

When assessing class conditions, teachers should consciously transcend superficial indicators such as “whether discipline is easy to manage” or “whether homework is submitted on time,” focusing more on indicators reflecting deep engagement and learning quality—whether students enjoy the

learning process, whether they dare to raise questions, whether peer collaboration is effective, how persistently they face difficulties—achieving evaluation paradigm transformation from “order-centered” to “learning-centered.”

Research Limitations and Future Directions

Research Limitations:

1. Causal limitations of cross-sectional design: Although causal directions were inferred based on mature theories, cross-sectional data cannot confirm causality nor rule out reverse causality (high-engagement classes prompt teachers more democratic) or third-variable explanations (e.g., teacher personality traits, burnout, school culture).

2. Common method bias: Both independent and dependent variables derived from teacher self-reports. Although Harman’s single-factor test indicated no severe problem (first factor explained 31.2% variance), social desirability (teachers may tend to report more “correct” styles) and common rater effects may still have somewhat inflated variable correlations.

3. Sample specificity and measurement focus: Conclusions based on a single school census require caution in generalizability. Additionally, this study primarily measured the behavioral dimension of academic engagement, failing to comprehensively capture emotional and cognitive engagement dimensions, providing incomplete depiction of the academic engagement construct.

4. Indirect mechanism validation: This study proposed mediation mechanisms centered on basic psychological needs but did not conduct direct empirical measurement and testing, leaving mechanism explanations at theoretical deduction levels.

Future Research Directions:

1. Longitudinal tracking and experimental research: Future research could employ longitudinal designs examining how changes in teacher management styles predict subsequent changes in student engagement, or conduct randomized controlled experiments providing systematic democratic-supportive leadership training to experimental group teachers, testing causal effects on students’ multidimensional academic engagement and long-term academic achievement.

2. Multi-method, multi-source data integration: Combine teacher reports, student reports (perceived teacher support, basic psychological need satisfaction), parent reports, objective classroom video observation coding, and school-recorded objective academic data for triangulation, obtaining more robust and comprehensive conclusions.

3. In-depth mediation and moderation mechanism exploration: Future research could directly measure variables such as classroom climate, student basic psychological need satisfaction, collective efficacy, and teacher-student relationship quality, empirically testing their mediating roles between management styles and academic engagement. Additionally, explore moderating effects of factors such as school culture, principal leadership style, student age/grade level, family socioeconomic status, and subject characteristics.

4. Cross-cultural comparison and indigenous concept construction: Conduct cross-cultural comparisons of classroom leadership between Chinese and Western educational settings, exploring practice forms and mechanisms of indigenous educational wisdom such as “strictness tempered with kindness” (integrating strictness with kindness) in contemporary classroom contexts. Develop “Classroom Leadership Enhancement School-Based Toolkits” suitable for Chinese primary and secondary schools, including diagnostic instruments,

training curricula, case resources, and action guides, facilitating transformation of academic research findings into large-scale, normalizayion educational practice.

5. Mixed methods research: Building on quantitative research, incorporate qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations to deeply understand democratic-supportive teachers' strategy formation pathways, practical wisdom, and challenges encountered, revealing micro-dynamic characteristics of teacher-student interactions in high-engagement classrooms.

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