

THE INFLUENCING FACTORS OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT MEIHUA MIDDLE SCHOOL THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP THEORY

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Received: May, 2, 2024; **Revised:** May, 2, 2024; **Accepted:** October, 7, 2024

Abstract

The objectives of this study were: 1) to examine the relationship between equitable resource distribution and student performance, 2) to examine the relationship between inclusive curriculum and teaching practices and student performance, and 3) to examine the relationship between a positive school climate and culture and student performance. The study focusing on measuring variables related to Social Justice Leadership Theory within the context of Meihua Middle School. Out of the 800 surveys distributed at Meihua Middle School, 700 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 87.5%. After excluding 50 surveys due to missing data or inconsistencies, 650 surveys, accounting for 92.86% of the returned surveys, were deemed valid and suitable for analysis.

The research found that there was a positive correlation between equitable resource distribution and student performance, inclusive curriculum and teaching practices were positively associated with student performance and a positive school climate and culture, characterized by support, respect, and inclusivity, were significantly related to higher student performance. And in response to these findings, Middle School proposed academic performance improved strategic measures included strengthening equitable resource distribution, enhancing inclusivity in curriculum and teaching, fostering a

positive school climate, and establishing mechanisms for continuous monitoring and feedback. Social Justice Leadership Theory (SJLT) can address these issues by promoting inclusivity, equitable resource distribution, and support for marginalized students, ultimately fostering improved student performance and engagement. These recommendations were tailored to the school's specific context and needs, grounded in empirical evidence from the study.

Keywords: Social Justice; Equity in Education; Student Performance

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of Chinese middle school education, there was a notable shift towards integrating Social Justice Leadership Theory (SJLT) to enhance student outcomes. This approach, which contrasted with the traditional emphasis on standardized testing and academic excellence, aimed to address broader educational disparities linked to socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic differences (Green, 2020). SJLT's focus was on creating inclusive, equitable environments that catered to all students, particularly those from marginalized communities. Applying SJLT in Chinese middle schools, such as Meihua Middle School, was seen to balance academic rigor with educational equity, potentially leading to improved student engagement, lower dropout rates, and a more inclusive climate (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). This shift aligned with China's broader educational reforms, emphasizing holistic student development and "education for all" (Wang, 2021). Moreover, SJLT advocated for leadership that promoted diversity, inclusivity, and equity, which in turn can enhance student performance and engagement (Robinson & Acosta, 2020). Researches suggested that when students felt supported and valued in their educational environment, their academic and personal growth flourished (Kim & Taylor, 2017).

Research Problems at Meihua Middle School, the current educational leadership model has revealed significant challenges in advocacy and equity, affecting student success. The lack of advocacy for marginalized and underrepresented groups was a key issue, with these students facing inadequate support for their socio-economic, linguistic, or learning challenges, leading to lower academic achievement and engagement (Chen & Zhao, 2018). The school faced equity concerns regarding the distribution of resources and access to

opportunities. The leadership has not effectively tackled the disparities in access to educational resources, extracurricular activities, and advanced learning programs, resulting in a widening achievement gap and a sense of disengagement among students who feel marginalized (Li & Wang, 2019). These issues highlighted the urgent need for a shift towards a more inclusive and equitable approach in the school's leadership and management practices.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between equitable resource distribution and student performance.
2. To examine the relationship between inclusive curriculum and teaching practices and student performance.
3. To examine the relationship between a positive school climate and culture and student performance.

Literature Reviews

Advocacy and Equity in Educational Leadership: In the context of Meihua Middle School and similar educational settings, the role of advocacy and equity in educational leadership was pivotal. Advocacy in education referred to the actions and policies that leaders took to promote and defend the rights and interests of all students, particularly those from marginalized or underserved groups. Equity, on the other hand, involved ensuring fair and just access to educational opportunities, resources, and support for all students, regardless of their background. The relationship between advocacy, equity, and student outcomes was increasingly recognized in educational research, particularly within the Chinese context. Studies by Zhang and Liu (2018) in Chinese schools have highlighted the positive impact of advocacy and equitable practices on student engagement and achievement. These practices were shown to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that catered to the diverse needs of students, leading to improved academic and social outcomes.

However, there were noted gaps and areas of insufficient research in this field. Wang and Chen (2019) pointed out that the majority of studies on educational leadership in China have focused on administrative efficiency and

academic performance, with less attention given to the social justice aspects of leadership. This indicated a significant research gap in understanding how advocacy and equity in leadership directly impacted students in Chinese educational settings. Additionally, international literature added a broader perspective to this topic. Research by Johnson and Smith (2020) in the United States has shown similar trends, where schools with strong advocacy and equitable practices demonstrated better student performance and higher levels of student satisfaction. This suggested that these principles were universally applicable and beneficial across different educational systems.

However, there was a lack of comprehensive research that integrated the Chinese educational context with these broader findings. As Luo and Gao (2017) argued, there was a need for more studies that specifically examined how Chinese educational leaders can adapt and implement advocacy and equity strategies in a way that resonated with the local cultural and social norms. While the importance of advocacy and equity in educational leadership was recognized, there was a clear need for more in-depth research in this area, particularly in the Chinese context.

Social Justice: In the realm of education, social justice was a critical concept that intersected with various aspects of school life, including leadership, policy-making, curriculum design, and student engagement. The principle of social justice in education advocated for fairness, equality, and inclusivity in all educational practices and policies (Miller & Martin, 2020). This section of the literature review focused on the theoretical underpinnings of social justice in education and its practical implications, especially in relation to educational leadership. Social justice in education was grounded in the belief that every student deserved an equal opportunity to succeed, irrespective of their background or circumstances (Miller & Martin, 2020). This encompassed access to high-quality education, resources, and support systems. Educational leaders who embraced social justice work towards dismantling barriers that impeded equity in education, such as systemic bias, inequality in resource allocation, and discriminatory practices (Harris & Jones, 2019). This involved recognizing and valuing the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and integrating this diversity into the educational content and pedagogy (Thompson & Davis, 2018). Such practices have been shown to enhance student engagement and achievement, particularly among marginalized student groups.

Furthermore, social justice-oriented leadership extended beyond the confines of the school and involved advocating for broader societal changes that impacted education. This included influencing policy decisions and community engagement to address wider social and economic inequalities that affected students' educational experiences (Gonzalez & Rodriguez, 2020). The implementation of social justice principles in education, particularly through leadership, has shown promising results in improving student outcomes. Schools that prioritized social justice tended to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, which in turn enhanced student well-being and academic performance (Williams & Sanchez, 2021).

Equity in Education: Equity in education was a fundamental principle that underpinned the quest for fairness and inclusivity in educational settings. This section of the literature review explored the concept of equity in education, its significance, and the various dimensions through which it manifested in schools like Meihua Middle School. The concept of educational equity involved ensuring that every student has accessed to the resources, opportunities, and support they needed to succeed academically and personally. This included equitable distribution of resources such as funding, qualified teachers, and learning materials, as well as accessing to supportive services like counseling and tutoring (Clark & Ramirez, 2020). Equity also encompassed the provision of a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogies that recognized and respect the diverse backgrounds of students (Wilson & Andrews, 2019). Research has shown that when schools prioritized equity, the outcomes were significant. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds tended to show improvements in academic achievement, and there was often a reduction in the achievement gap between different student groups (Taylor & Tyler, 2018).

Moreover, educational equity was not just a concern for individual schools but was also a matter of broader policy and systemic change. Policies that promoted equity in education included equitable funding models, inclusive education laws, and affirmative action in school admissions (Martin & Alvarez, 2019). Such policies aimed to level the playing field and ensure that all students, regardless of their background, had a fair chance at educational success. The pursuit of equity in education was essential for creating a just and inclusive learning environment.

Student Performance: The concept of student performance encompassed a wide range of academic and behavioral outcomes, reflecting the diverse aspects of a student's school experience. Academic achievement, often measured through grades, test scores, and graduation rates, was a primary indicator of student performance. Research has consistently highlighted the impact of school leadership and the learning environment on these achievement metrics (Anderson & Harris, 2020). Leaders who created supportive, inclusive, and challenging academic environments tended to see higher levels of student achievement in their schools. Beyond academic results, student performance also included engagement, motivation, and socio-emotional well-being. Factors such as teacher-student relationships, classroom climate, and the inclusivity of the school culture played significant roles in these areas (Baker & Richards, 2021).

When students have equitable access to resources and opportunities, and when their cultural and individual needs were met, they were more likely to excel academically and personally (Lee & Smith, 2019). This was particularly relevant in diverse educational settings like Meihua Middle School, where equity issues can significantly impact student outcomes. Moreover, the broader socio-economic context cannot be overlooked when considering student performance. Issues such as poverty, family background, and community resources contributed to the complexities of achieving educational success for all students (Green & Martin, 2018).

Research Methodology

A quantitative approach has been adopted with structured questionnaire as a tool for data collection applying using a mix of Likert scale, multiple-choice, and ranking questions. It was conducted with 800 respondents and 92.86% were valid for analyses in Meihua Middle School. In analyses, descriptive statistics were means, SD, frequency including correlation analysis and regression to treat school climate and culture, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive curriculum and teaching.

Results

The following table presented the results of the Pearson's correlation analysis conducted to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. This analysis determined the strength and direction of the relationships between equitable resource distribution, inclusive curriculum and teaching practices, and student performance.

Table 4.2 Correlation Analysis Data

Variables	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	Significance (p-value)
Equitable Resource Distribution & Student Performance	0.62	< 0.01
Inclusive Curriculum and Teaching & Student Performance	0.68	< 0.01

The correlation analysis between Equitable Resource Distribution and Student Performance revealed a moderately strong positive relationship, with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.62. This meant that as the perceived equity in resource distribution increased, there was a tendency for student performance to improve. The significance level, indicated by a p-value of less than 0.01, underscored the statistical significance of this relationship. This outcome supported Hypothesis 1, which posited higher levels of perceived equity in resource distribution were associated with better student performance. In essence, the data provided robust evidence that equitable resource allocation played a vital role in positively impacting student performance at Meihua Middle School. Similarly, the analysis of Inclusive Curriculum and Teaching Practices and Student Performance demonstrated a strong positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.68. This implied that as the inclusivity of curriculum and teaching practices increased, there was a significant tendency for student performance to also improve. The p-value of less than 0.01 further established the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding aligned with Hypothesis 2, indicating that more inclusive curriculum and teaching practices were linked to higher student performance. It underscored the importance of fostering inclusivity in education as it directly contributes to enhanced student outcomes.

In summary, the correlation results provided substantial empirical support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. The data clearly indicated that both equitable resource distribution and inclusive curriculum and teaching practices were positively associated with student performance at Meihua Middle School. These findings emphasized the critical role of these aspects of educational leadership in improving and enhancing the overall academic achievement and well-being of students within the school. The table below presented the results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to test Hypothesis 3, which concerned the impact of school climate and culture on student performance. This analysis assessed how well school climate and culture predicted student performance while controlling for other variables.

Table 4.3 Regression Analysis

Predictor Variables	t-Value	Significance (p-value)	Standardized Coefficients
School Climate and Culture	5.62	< 0.01	0.54
Equitable Resource Distribution	2.08	0.04	0.20
Inclusive Curriculum and Teaching	1.57	0.12	0.15

The regression analysis results provided valuable insights into the impact of different factors on student performance at Meihua Middle School. Hypothesis 3 posited that a positive school climate and culture, characterized by support, respect, and inclusivity, were significantly related to higher student performance, and the findings strongly supported this hypothesis.

Firstly, School Climate and Culture exhibited a substantial influence on student performance, with a standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.54, indicating a moderately strong positive effect. The statistical significance of this relationship, supported by a low p-value and a high t-value of 5.62, underscored its significance in predicting academic outcomes.

Equitable Resource Distribution, though statistically significant with a Beta value of 0.20, had a smaller yet meaningful impact on student performance compared to school climate and culture. The p-value of 0.04 confirmed the statistical significance of this relationship, even though its effect size was somewhat smaller than that of school climate and culture. Inclusive Curriculum and Teaching Practices also showed a positive but less pronounced effect on

student performance, with a Beta of 0.15. However, the p-value of 0.12 suggested that this relationship was not statistically significant in the model, indicating that the effect of inclusive curriculum and teaching on student performance was not reliably demonstrated in the data.

These findings provided robust support for Hypothesis 3, emphasizing the critical role of a positive school climate and culture characterized by support, respect, and inclusivity in enhancing student performance at Meihua Middle School. While equitable resource distribution and inclusive curriculum and teaching practices also contributed positively, the influence of school climate and culture stood out as the most significant predictor of academic achievement. Therefore, fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment was paramount for improving academic outcomes for students.

Discussions

In response to these findings, strategic measures are proposed to enhance student academic performance. These recommendations include strengthening equitable resource distribution, enhancing inclusivity in curriculum and teaching, fostering a positive school climate, and establishing mechanisms for continuous monitoring and feedback. These measures are thoughtfully tailored to address the specific needs and context of Meihua Middle School, informed by the empirical evidence gathered through the study.

To better understand the implications of these study's results, future research could delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which social justice leadership practices impact student outcomes. This study highlights the positive correlations and provided foundational recommendations; however, more detailed qualitative research could reveal the nuanced ways in which these leadership practices are experienced by students and teachers. In-depth interviews, focus groups, and case studies at Meihua Middle School and similar educational institutions would enrich the understanding of how educational leadership styles directly affect the day-to-day educational environment and student experiences.

Further research is needed to determine the long-term effects of the implemented measures on student performance. While this study provides a snapshot through a cross-sectional approach, longitudinal studies tracking the progress over several years would offer valuable insights into the sustainability and long-term impact of the recommended changes. Such studies could assess the evolution of school climate, resource distribution, and curriculum inclusivity over time, and their lasting effects on student achievement and engagement.

To overcome the methodological limitations of this study, future research could employ a mixed-methods approach. While the quantitative methods use here offer a broad overview of the relationships between leadership practices and student outcomes, qualitative methods would provide a richer, more detailed understanding. By combining surveys with qualitative interviews or observational studies, future research could achieve a more comprehensive view, capturing not only the statistical relationships but also the personal experiences and perspectives of students and educators.

Additionally, comparative studies involving multiple schools with different leadership styles could help to contextualize the findings of this research. Such comparative analyses would allow for a broader evaluation of how different leadership models in varied educational settings impact student performance. This would not only validate the findings from Meihua Middle School but also provide a wider perspective on the role of educational leadership in diverse educational contexts.

New Knowledges

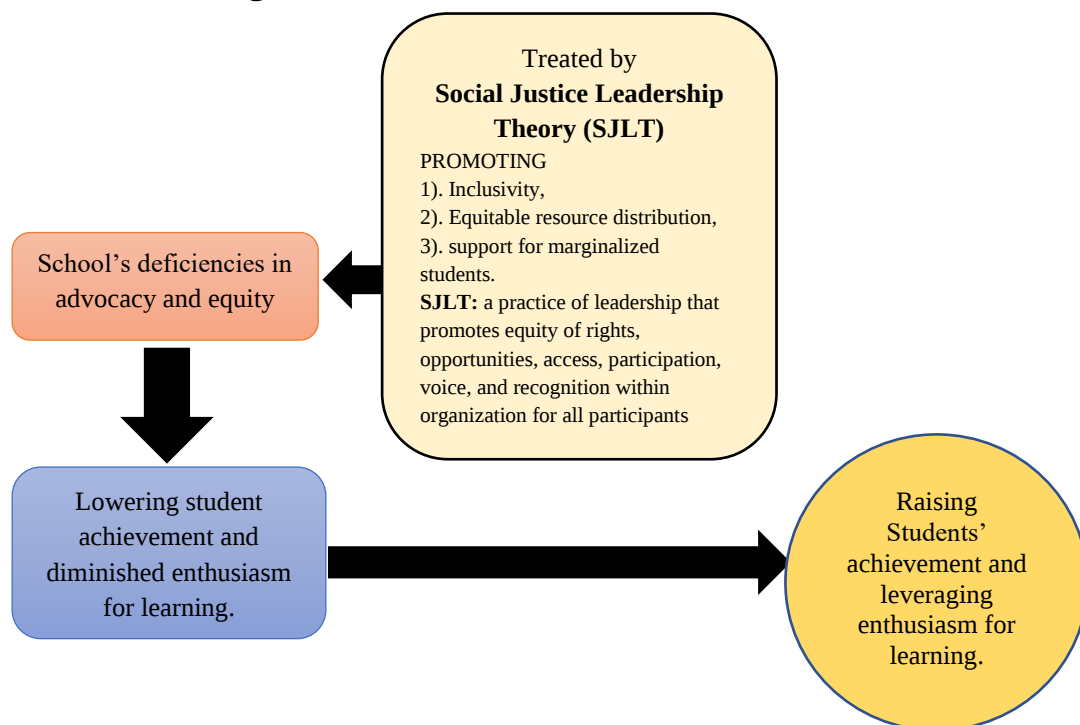


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of The Influencing Factors of Student Performance at Meihua Middle School Through the Lens of Social Justice Leadership Theory

Conclusions

Based on the comprehensive findings from Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, it is evident that specific areas within the educational environment at Meihua Middle School can be strategically targeted to enhance student academic performance. The proposed measures are not only practical and achievable but also directly address the identified factors influencing student outcomes.

In conclusion, these strategic measures aim to comprehensively address the key factors influencing student performance at Meihua Middle School. The overarching goal is to create an educational environment characterized by equity, inclusivity, and support, ultimately fostering academic success for all students. These interventions are not only rooted in the statistical findings of the

study but also align with best practices in educational leadership and pedagogy. By implementing these targeted actions, Meihua Middle School can expect tangible improvements in student academic performance and overall school effectiveness.

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